

# THE UNSEEN CRISIS

Childhoods shaped by conflict and poverty in the West Bank

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report is a public-facing version of a technical multisectoral needs assessment prepared by World Vision Jerusalem – West Bank – Gaza (JWG).

We are grateful for the dedicated time, input and contributions from our colleagues. Special thanks to: World Vision JWG staff, Tata Mikeladze, Lyndsay Hockin, Mathieu Andre, Micah Branaman, Kate Shaw, Ghida Krisht and Hana Rabadi.

Data analysis: Mathieu Andre  
Author: Karla Harvey  
Content editor: Micah Branaman  
Design: Karla Harvey  
Proofreader: Kate Shaw

Cover photograph: A Palestinian boy harvests his family's olive grove. © World Vision  
Back cover photograph: A Palestinian man from Tubas, West Bank shows the fresh produce from the field. © World Vision

© WORLD VISION INTERNATIONAL 2025

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form, except for brief excerpts in reviews, without prior permission of the publisher.

World Vision is a humanitarian relief, development and advocacy organisation dedicated to working with children, families, and their communities to reach their full potential by tackling the root causes of poverty and injustice. We work with the world's most vulnerable people from all backgrounds, even in the most dangerous places, and serve all people, regardless of religion, race, ethnicity, or gender.

World Vision has been operating in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) since 1975. Since then, the organisation has developed one of the most extensive community-based presences amongst organisations operating in the West Bank, with 90 dedicated staff and more than 300 volunteers. Since October 2023, World Vision has implemented an emergency response across the whole of the West Bank focusing on protection, food security, mental health, access to health care and access to safe education. Over the last 18 months, more than 480,000 people benefited from our humanitarian programmes.

## CHILD AND ADULT SAFEGUARDING

World Vision ensured the safe and ethical participation of girls, boys and women, adhering to World Vision's Safeguarding policy and protocols on data collection and World Vision's Code of Conduct. Data collectors were trained on how to conduct interviews in an ethical and safe manner. Children and women were oriented on the possibility of withdrawing from the interview process at any moment.

For further information about this publication please contact:

Kristen Phelps, National Director  
World Vision JWG  
Email: kristen\_phelps@wvi.org

Mathieu Andre  
Advocacy and Communications Manager, World Vision JWG  
Email: mathieu\_andre@wvi.org

# CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>A CHILDHOOD SHAPED BY CONFLICT AND POVERTY</b>	<b>9</b>
A livelihood crisis	9
Families in crisis	10
Families can no longer afford food	11
Barriers to health care and education	15
Endangered childhoods	17
Mental health deterioration	19
<b>WORLD VISION'S RESPONSE</b>	<b>20</b>
Standing with children and families in crisis	20
<b>RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>24</b>

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the escalation of violence in October 2023, the situation in the West Bank has become increasingly dire. Life for children and their families has grown precarious. As families struggle to survive amid rising poverty and shrinking livelihoods, children are being pushed into hunger, missing out on education, and experiencing growing levels of anxiety and trauma.

**Nearly two-thirds of households (64%) have lost income**, forcing many to make painful decisions just to get by. **Poverty has surged**, with the number of families living below the minimum standard of living skyrocketing from **21% to 74%** in just over a year. This rapid deterioration is not just a statistic; it means parents skipping meals so their children can eat, and children being sent to work instead of school.

**Food insecurity is one of the most pressing concerns; 78% of household are now buying less food**, and many can no longer afford nutritious meals. **70% of children report frequently skipping meals, and almost half said they had done so more than 10 times in a single month**. In areas like Hebron, the situation is even more extreme, with **68% of children regularly going without food**. Families are simply running out of options.

The strain doesn't stop there. **One in five children have gone without health care or medication**, often because their families cannot afford the cost. The situation is compounded by cuts to public services and limited access to clinics, especially in rural areas. Meanwhile, education is slipping further out of reach. Many schools have been disrupted by violence, and **9% of children have dropped out altogether**, often because families need them to work or cannot afford school expenses.

Behind the numbers are young lives shaped by fear and uncertainty. **More than a quarter of families (27%) report seeing behavioural changes in their children, while almost 10% say their child's mental health has worsened**. Children are becoming withdrawn, anxious, or aggressive, and showing signs of deep emotional distress. Yet mental health support is almost non-existent, with very few communities reporting access to psychosocial services.

**The evidence is clear:** children in the West Bank are enduring a crisis that threatens their health, education, and futures. The world must not look away. Urgent action is needed to protect their rights, restore their hope, and ensure they have the chance to grow up safe, nourished, and supported.



# INTRODUCTION

Communities in the West Bank are enduring a deepening crisis. Daily life has become increasingly difficult due to a sharp rise in violence, severe restrictions on movement, and the sudden loss of access to work. For families already living on the edge, these shocks have had devastating consequences uprooting livelihoods, disrupting education, and placing immense strain on mental health and well-being.

In response to the worsening situation, World Vision undertook a broad listening exercise to better understand how families in the West Bank are coping and what support they need most. By engaging with parents, children, community leaders, and volunteers across a wide area, we aimed to capture the real-life impact of the crisis on people's everyday lives.

What we heard was heartbreaking, but not without hope. The assessment revealed a dramatic rise in urgent needs, children struggling to stay in school, caregivers unable to provide food or basic necessities, and entire communities facing growing levels of distress. Yet, amid the hardship, there is also resilience. Families are doing all they can to protect their children and support one another.

This report shares their voices and experiences. It is a call to action to stand with these communities, respond to their needs, and invest in their future.





## CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

Since April 2022, increasing military operations in the West Bank have led to a significant escalation in violence. After the attacks of October 2023, the situation worsened considerably with a level of casualties and destruction to civilian infrastructure unseen since the early 2000s. Severe movement restrictions were imposed, and 180,000 work permits for Palestinians in the area and its settlements were cancelled.

The ongoing economic crisis has taken a serious toll on families, particularly children. By October 2024, the West Bank's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) had fallen by 22%,<sup>1</sup> and unemployment reached 35%.<sup>2</sup> Alongside job losses and fewer opportunities for work, real wages plummeted by 35%. The number of people living in multidimensional poverty nearly tripled, affecting 30%<sup>3</sup> of the population. In just 14 months, the Human Development Index for the West Bank decreased by 6%,<sup>4</sup> representing a loss of 16 years of progress.

This deepening crisis has placed immense strain on families. The most pressing concern has been food insecurity, which has rapidly spread. A survey by the Food and Agriculture Organization in May 2024 highlighted the severity of the situation, showing that food insecurity is becoming increasingly widespread and alarming.<sup>5</sup> The effects are being felt by children and their families, who face growing challenges in meeting their basic needs.

To understand the rapidly evolving context in the West Bank, World Vision carried out a series of surveys with 2,511 individuals between November 2024 and January 2025. However, since that data was collected, the situation has significantly worsened, particularly in the northern governorates. Key developments include an escalation in violence, especially in Jenin, Tulkarem, and Tubas, which has resulted in the deaths of 99 Palestinians, including 17 children. Over 40,000 people have been displaced, and more than 100 schools have been disrupted, affecting children's access to education. Roads, electricity, and water networks have been severely damaged, cutting off many communities from essential services, and further exacerbating the hardship faced by families. The introduction of new checkpoints and roadblocks has also further impeded humanitarian access, making it harder to deliver support to those in need.

**The situation is dire, and without urgent action, the impact on children and their families will continue to worsen. The international community must act swiftly to address these challenges and protect the future of the children in the West Bank.**

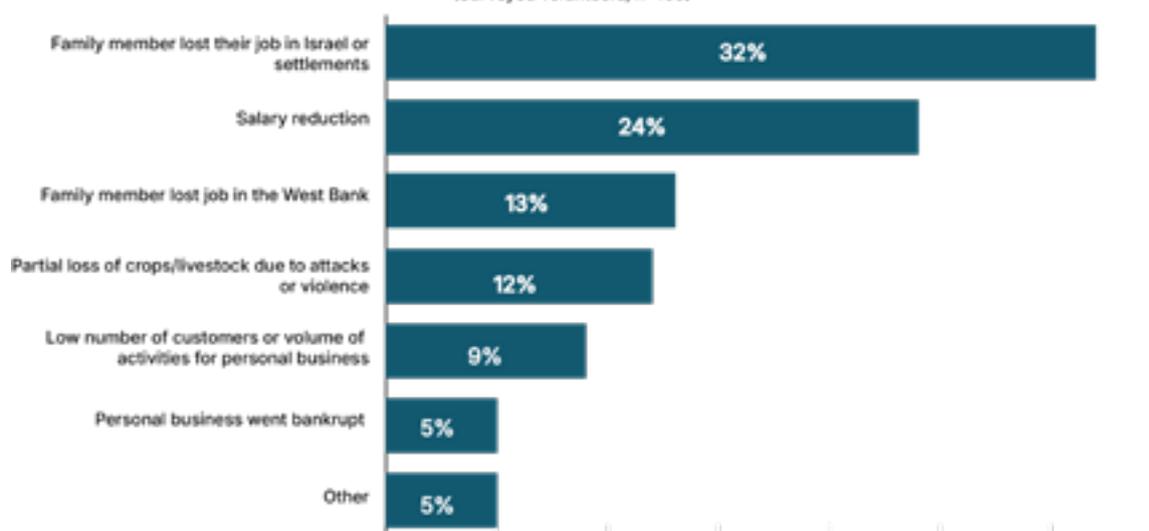


# A CHILDHOOD SHAPED BY CONFLICT AND POVERTY

## A livelihood crisis

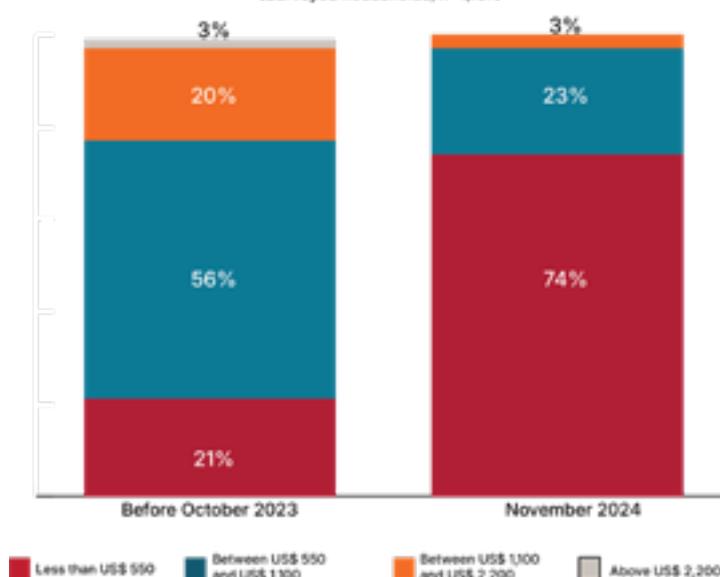
The West Bank is currently experiencing a severe economic downturn that is deeply affecting families, particularly children. Since October 2023, a staggering two-thirds (64%) of households have reported a reduction in income. World Vision volunteers told us that in their families this was mainly due to job losses, salary cuts, or the knock-on effects of the crisis on their own businesses.

Figure 1. Reasons for decreased income  
(Surveyed volunteers, n=105)



As a result, the proportion of families earning below the Minimum Expenditure Basket has surged from 21% to 74%,<sup>6</sup> indicating a dramatic increase in poverty levels.

Figure 2. Household income  
(Surveyed households, n=1,167)



## Families in crisis

This sharp drop in income is making it harder for families to afford even the basics. Almost every household (96%) said they're struggling to cover essential needs like food, health care, and education. This is nearly a ten-fold increase compared to before October 2023.

To cope, more than half of families have had to take tough decisions to get by. One of the most worrying signs is the rise in child labour. The number of families sending at least one child to work jumped from 1.5% to 7%. This shows how serious the situation has become – and how children are paying the highest price.

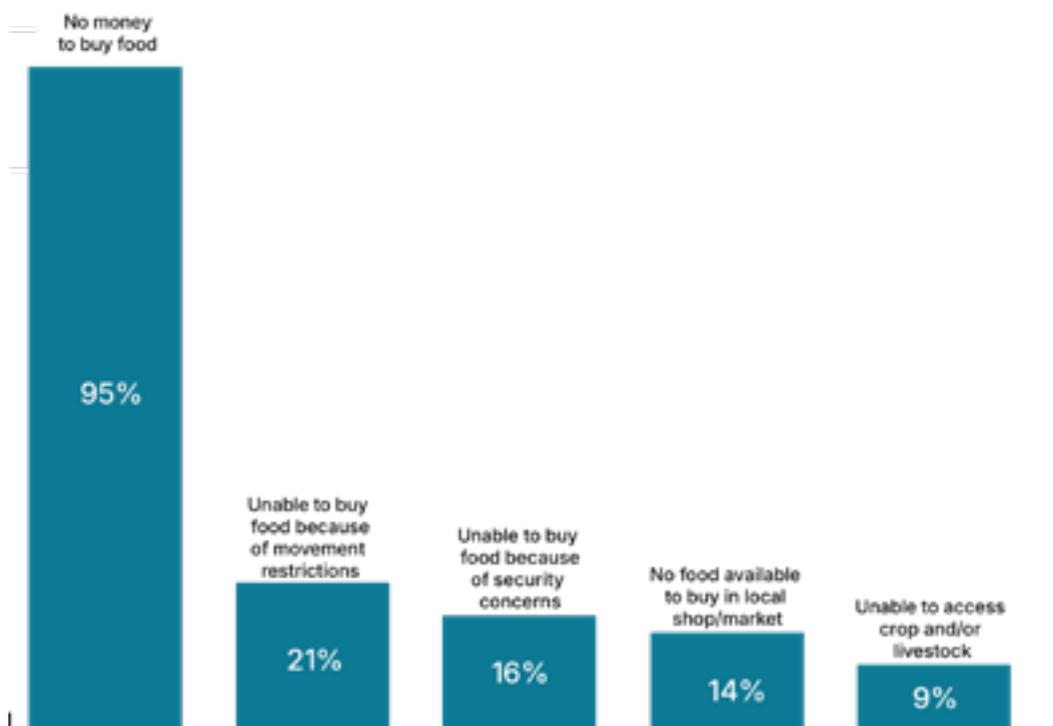
<b>Figure 3. Coping strategies</b> Surveyed households (n=1,167)	<b>Nov 2024</b>	<b>2022 (OCHA)<sup>7</sup></b>
<b>Stress strategies</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>11%</b>
Spend savings	20%	16%
Borrow food or money or rely on help from friends/family to cover food needs	17%	12%
Rely on casual labour by adults.	15%	–
Limit/avoid purchases for children's school needs (e.g. notebooks, pens, online requirements, book)	11%	–
Buy on credit or take an informal or formal loan (i.e. bank/financial institutions)	1%	9%
<b>Crisis strategies</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>23%</b>
Reduce expenses on health care (including medicines)	18%	13%
Reduce expenses on education	16%	13%
Sell household assets/goods	13%	3%
Have children take over household chores (including agriculture) to free up other members to work	5%	–
Sell productive assets or means of transport (e.g. sewing machine, wheelbarrow, bicycle, car)	3%	1%
Move to another area where there are more work opportunities	2%	–
<b>Emergency strategies</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>5%</b>
Send at least one child to work	7%	1.5%
Send one or more household members to eat or live elsewhere	2%	0.6%
Have at least one adult household member engaged in illegal work in settlements or in the area (e.g. construction and agriculture)	2%	–
Beg (i.e. ask strangers for money/food) and/or scavenge for food	0.5%	0.9%
Sell the house that the household was permanently living in or sell land	0.5%	0.4%
Have children take on illegal work in settlements or in the area	0.5%	–

*Despite relying on severe coping strategies, four out of five families have been forced to buy less food than they could in the past. As a result, one in five children is now frequently skipping meals or going hungry simply because there isn't enough food at home. This daily struggle is having a serious impact on children's health and overall well-being*

## Families can no longer afford food

The decline in household incomes has had a direct and devastating impact on food security. The majority of households (78%) report purchasing less food compared to what they could afford before October 2023. This has led to a significant reduction in dietary diversity, with meat now consumed only twice a week, down from four times, and a cutback in the consumption of dairy, vegetables, and carbohydrates. The most affected areas include Hebron, Bethlehem, Jericho, and Tubas, where large families, as well as households with members who are elderly, disabled, or pregnant, are struggling the most.

**Figure 4. Reasons for not enough food**  
(Surveyed volunteers, n=105)



World Vision volunteers reported that when they did not have enough food at home, it was mainly due to the lack of money; however, movement restrictions, security concerns, and food availability/accessibility were also concerns.

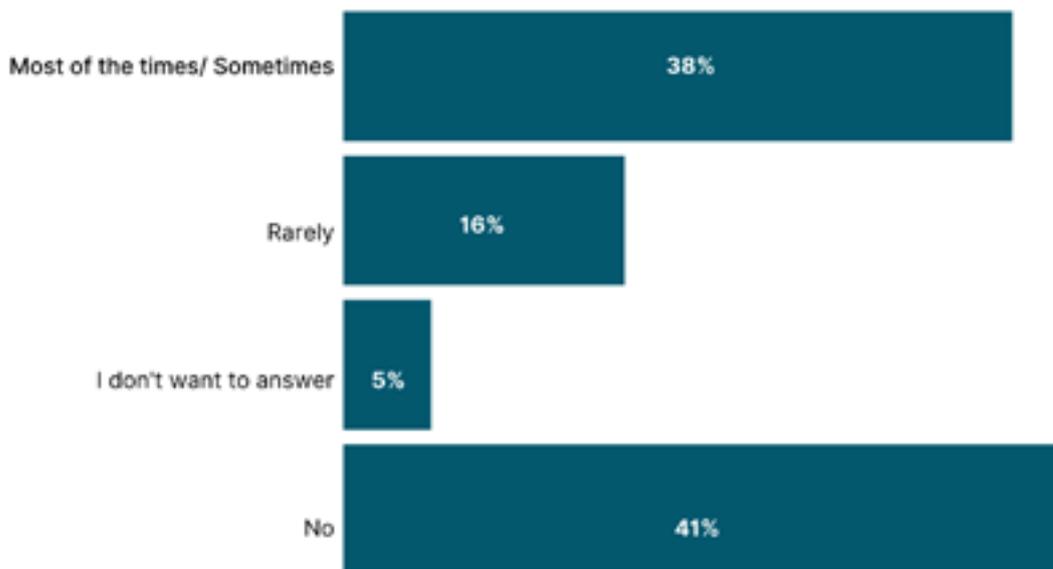
“

*In our community, many families struggle daily with food shortages and lack of clean water.*

*Ameer, 16 years old*

Children are experiencing the effects more intensely than other household members. According to the survey, 70% of children interviewed reported frequently skipping meals because their families could not afford enough food. Nearly half of the children said they had missed meals more than 10 times or had to eat smaller portions due to food shortages. When asked whether they had felt hungry but did not eat because there was not enough food at home, 38% of children responded “Yes, most of the time” or “Sometimes.”

Figure 5. I was hungry but I couldn't eat because it wasn't enough food at home  
(Surveyed children, n=1, 174)



The situation is even worse in Hebron, where 68% of the children regularly go without meals, either most days or sometimes. The scarcity of food and the resulting hunger are driving families to adopt increasingly harmful coping strategies, including sending children to work to help cover food costs (see Figure 3).

Figure 6. Children reporting they had to skip a meal in Nov 2024 because their family did not have enough money to buy food  
(Surveyed children, n=1,167)

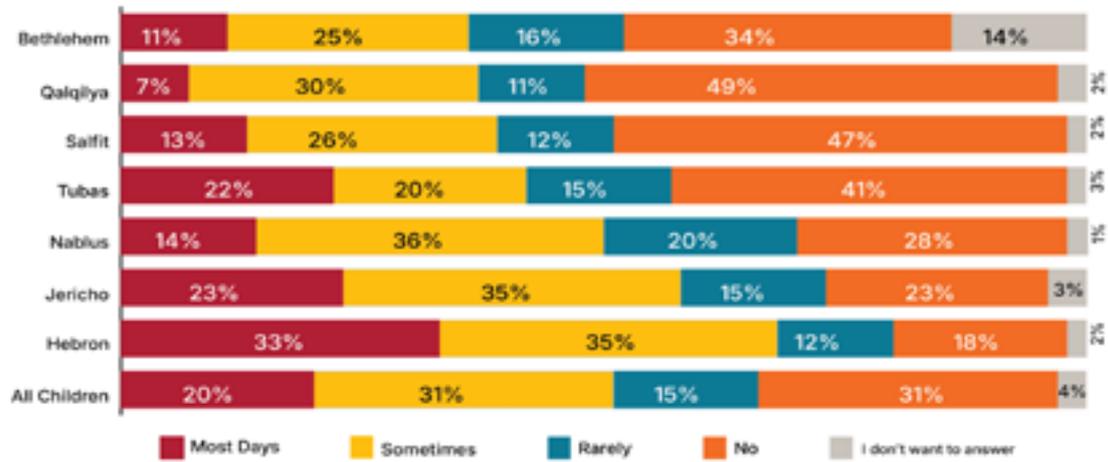
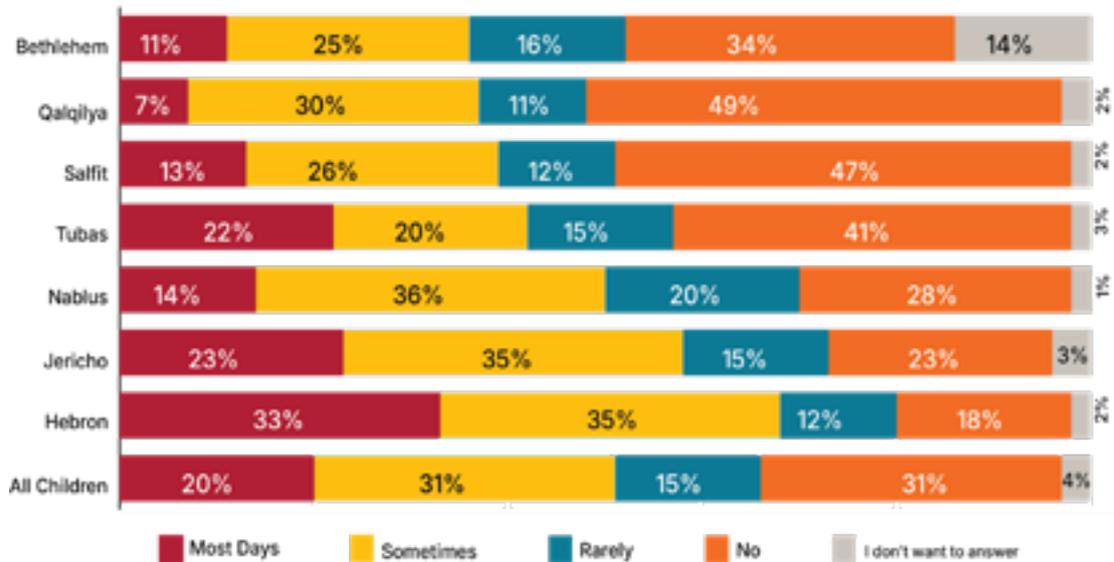


Figure 7. Households with children having to skip meals  
(Surveyed households, n=1,167)



When asked “Were you hungry but didn’t eat because your family didn’t have enough to eat?” more than a third (38%) of children said, “Yes, most of the time” or “Sometimes”.

*I can see everyday how difficult economic conditions impact families' ability to secure basic needs.*  
Nersyan, 16 years old

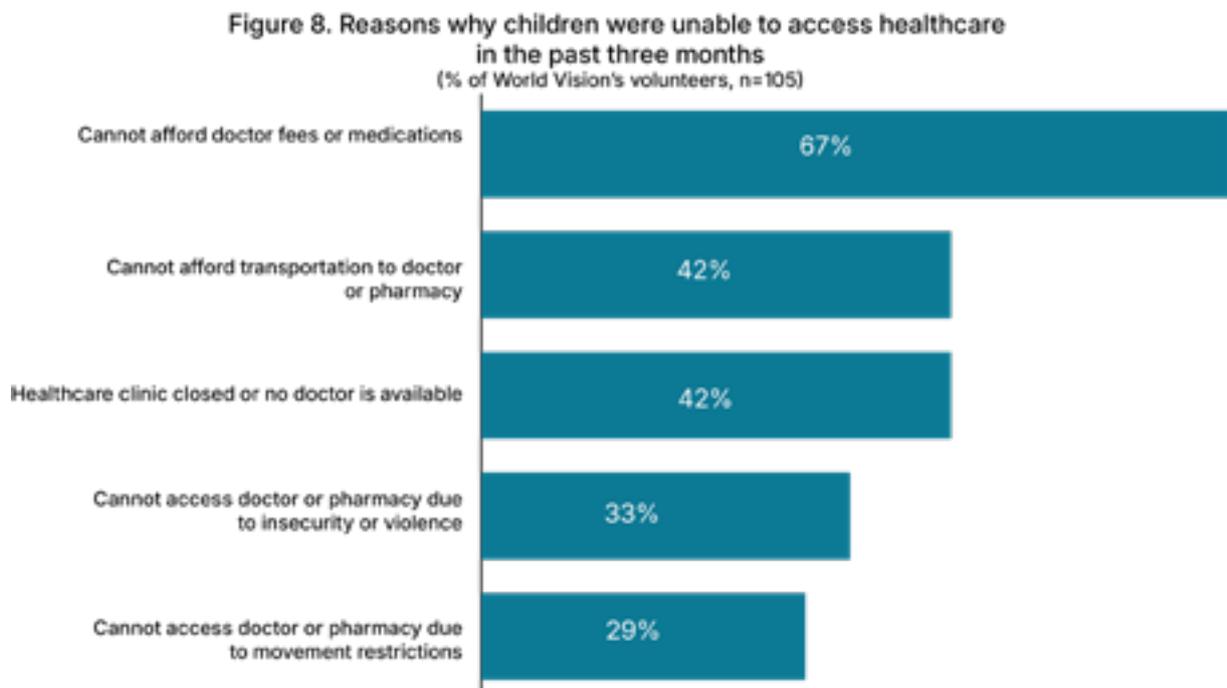




## Barriers to health care and education

The ongoing crisis is also severely limiting access to Palestinian children’s essential health care and education. Families are being forced to make difficult decisions; 20% of World Vision’s volunteers reported that their children have gone without health care or medicines when needed, primarily due to financial constraints. For 60% of these families, the lack of financial resources is the main barrier.

**The household survey further illustrates the severity of the situation, with 11% of families indicating they are entirely unable to cover health-care costs.** To cope, they have been forced to make difficult decisions; 18% of households have had to reduce health-care expenses, including essential medicines, to manage their limited resources.



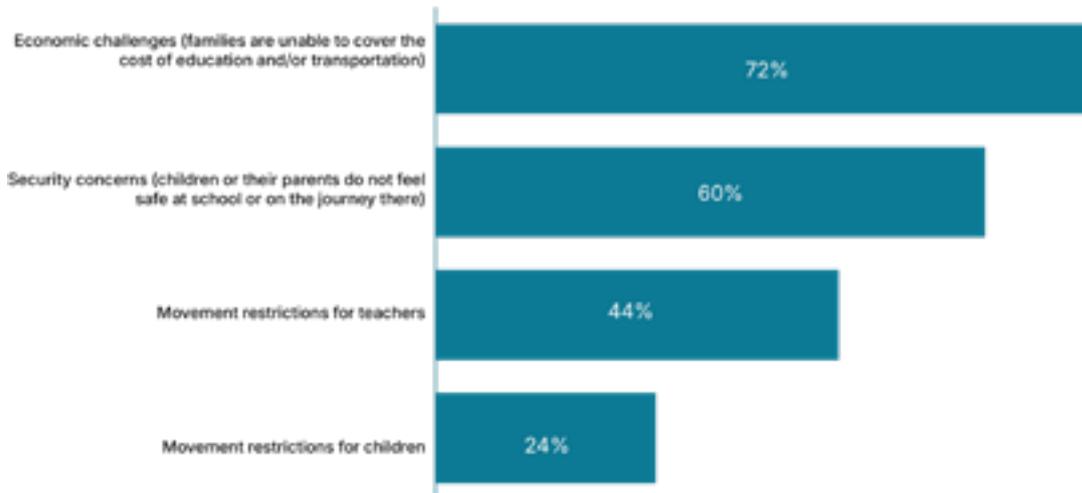
The lack of resources is compounded by the financial struggles of the Palestinian Authority, which has led to significant cuts in public health-care services, further reducing access for families in need.

Education has also been deeply affected, with school attendance and retention rates significantly declining. Village councils have reported that 37% of communities are experiencing lower school attendance, largely due to economic hardships and security concerns. Additionally, fears for children’s safety while commuting to and from school are further discouraging attendance.

*I constantly experience anxiety and fear when I think about one of my children needing urgent medical care – and not being able to reach a medical centre.*  
Nisreen, mother of 6

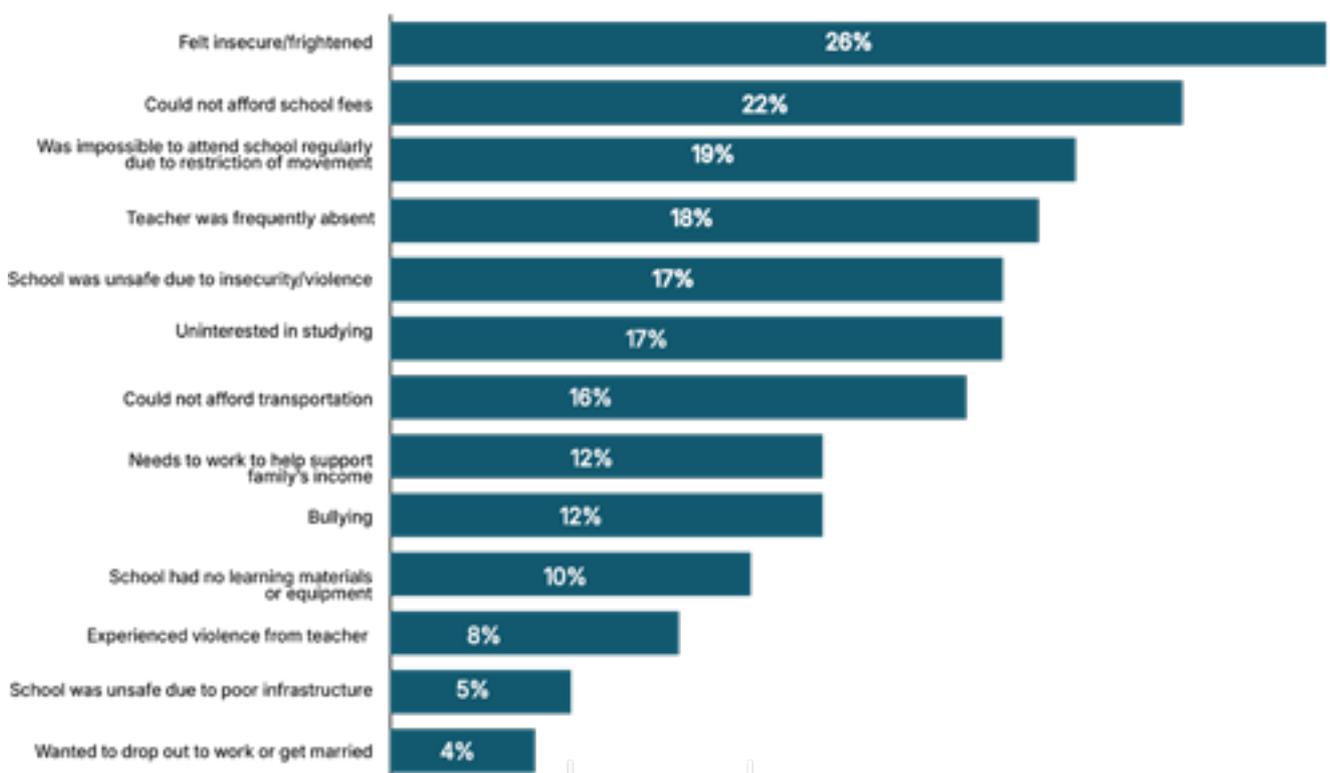


**Figure 9. Reasons children could not attend school**  
(Surveyed Village Council members, n=65)



This concerning trend is compounded by a rise in school dropouts, with 9% of households reporting that their children have left school altogether. The primary drivers of this increase are the loss of livelihoods and growing insecurity, as confirmed by World Vision volunteers (see Figure 10).

**Figure 10. My child drop out of school last year because**  
(Surveyed volunteers, n=105)



These intersecting challenges are creating a cycle of disrupted education, where children from the most affected communities are at risk of falling behind.

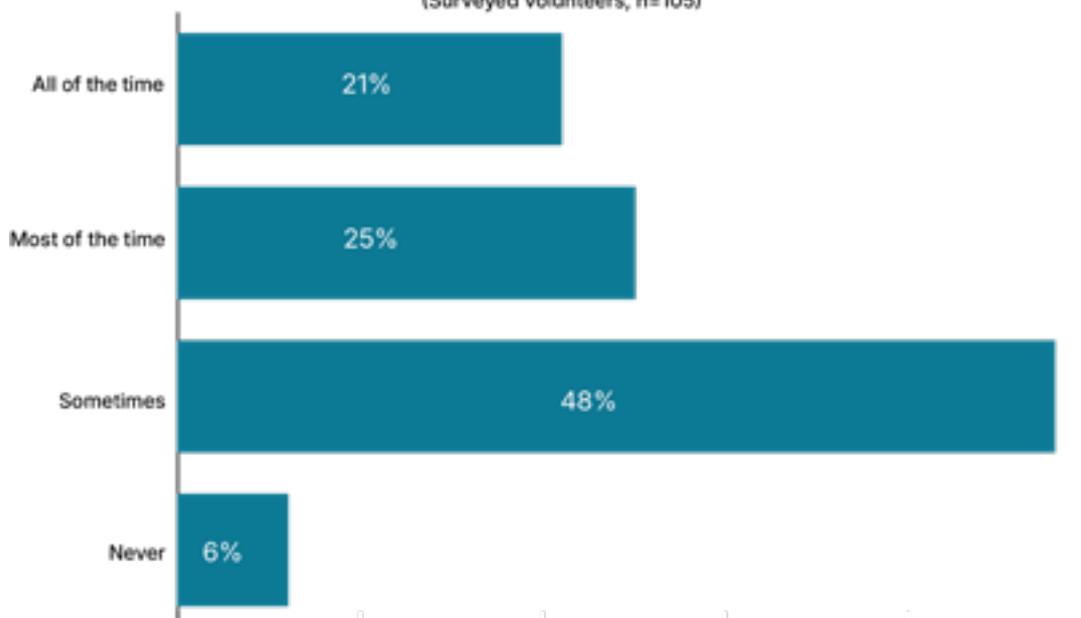


## Endangered childhoods

The ongoing violence in the West Bank has put children at severe risk. More than nine out of 10 volunteers surveyed told World Vision that they felt unsafe at home or in their village at some point during the last month (see Figure 11). Additionally, one in 12 households (8%) reported that a child in their household had been directly harmed during the previous few months before they were surveyed, while 16% stated that their children had witnessed violence.

This widespread hostility is not only harmful to children's well-being and security in the immediate term but is also contributing to long-term trauma. Moreover, the inability to access emergency services, due to movement restrictions and checkpoint delays, leaves families without the support they need in times of crisis.

Figure 11. Frequency of feeling unsafe at home and/or in village during month surveyed (Surveyed volunteers, n=105)



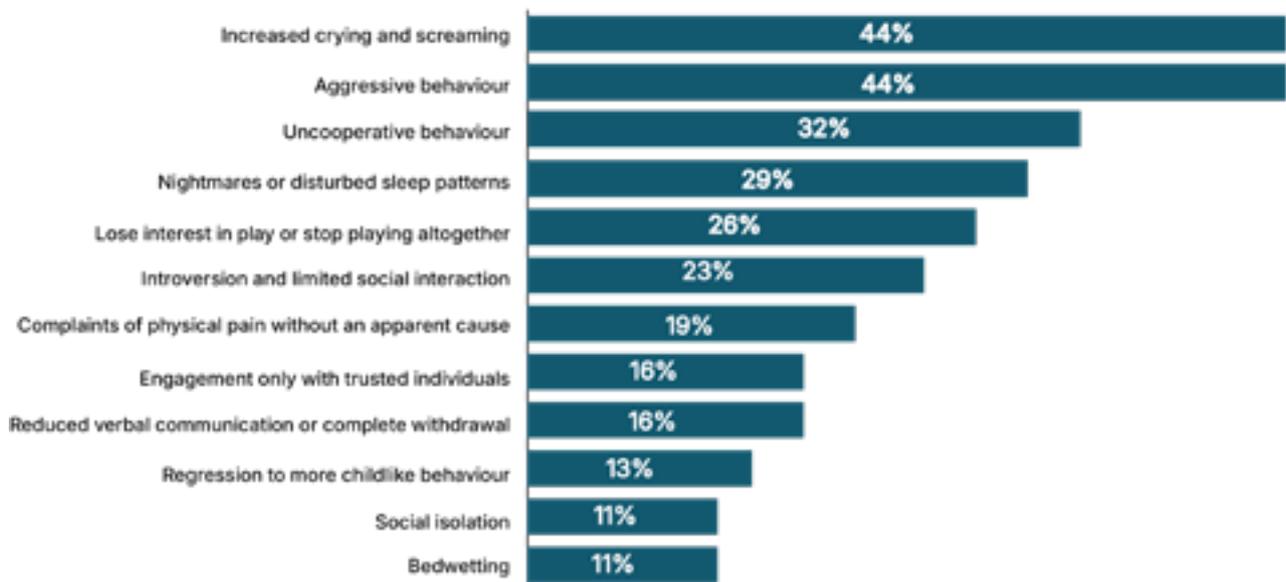
The effects of violence extend beyond physical harm, with reports of increased child labour as families face growing economic pressure (see figure 3). In some cases, children as young as 7 are reportedly being sent to work in unsafe conditions, including in settlements. This is not only an exploitation of child labour but also a violation of children's rights, further exacerbating their vulnerabilities.



# Mental health deterioration

The crisis is also taking a significant toll on the mental health of children and families. Many children are experiencing behavioural changes, such as aggression and withdrawal, while others are struggling with increased anxiety and fear for the future. Nearly 10% of households report a deterioration in their children’s mental health, while a quarter of families (27%) observed behavioural changes. These mental health issues are deeply tied to the stresses of economic hardship, exposure to violence, and the pervasive uncertainty about the future.

Figure 12. New behaviours observed in their children  
(Surveyed volunteers, n=105)



Unfortunately, mental health services remain in short supply, leaving many children and adolescents without the support they urgently need. At the local level, access to these services is extremely limited. **Only 23% of village council members report that mental health and psychosocial support services are available in their communities, and just 17% of World Vision’s volunteers are aware of such services, whether for children or adults, in their villages.** This significant gap leaves many children without the support they need to cope with trauma, putting their wellbeing and future development at serious risk.

*I feel fear and uncertainty as I watch children lose their right to safety, to play, and to learn – things every child deserves.*  
Dalal, 12 years old





# WORLD VISION'S RESPONSE

## Standing with children and families in crisis

In the face of growing hardship, World Vision is taking action to support children and families across the West Bank. From hunger and displacement to mental health and education challenges, the situation has placed immense strain on communities – especially the most vulnerable.

To help meet urgent needs and strengthen long-term resilience, World Vision is delivering an integrated response focused on protection, mental health, education, health care, and food security:



**Protecting communities:** With rising insecurity and weakened traditional safety networks, World Vision is equipping first responders and local volunteers with life-saving tools, emergency training, and protective equipment. These efforts aim to strengthen local response capacity and help keep children safe in their own communities.



**Providing emergency aid:** As economic conditions worsen and displacement continues, many families can no longer afford basic essentials. World Vision is supporting the most vulnerable with direct assistance, including food vouchers and in-kind distributions, helping them meet day-to-day needs and reduce harmful coping strategies like child labour.



**Supporting mental health:** The emotional toll of the crisis on children is severe. Many are living with anxiety, fear, and uncertainty. To address this, World Vision is delivering mental health and psychosocial support for children, parents, and caregivers—helping families build resilience and reconnect with hope.



**Improving access to health care:** Road closures and insecurity have left many without access to hospitals. Local clinics often lack essential supplies. World Vision is working to strengthen primary health care centres, particularly in rural areas, with a focus on maternal and emergency care.



**Keeping children learning:** Education has been repeatedly disrupted. Many schools operate on limited schedules, while others remain unsafe. World Vision is helping schools prepare for emergencies, improve safety, and offer psychosocial support so children can continue learning in a safe and supportive environment.

Since the beginning of World Vision's response to the escalating violence in the West Bank in October 2023, more than 415,000 people have been supported, including 230,000 children.

*In just over a year, an unprecedented economic crisis has upended the lives of children in the West bank. The speed and scale of this collapse – unfolding with little notice from critical stakeholders – is deeply alarming. The international community must act urgently to address the needs of Palestinian children. An entire generation is at risk.*

*Kristen Phelps, National Director, World Vision West Bank - Jerusalem*





## RECOMMENDATIONS

The humanitarian crisis in the West Bank is worsening, and children and their families are bearing the brunt of it. The situation calls for urgent and coordinated action to prevent further deterioration. It is essential that immediate action is taken to stabilise the economy and ensure continued access to vital services. Without swift action, the long-term effects on the future of this generation are likely to be severe. The international community must prioritise the following to protect children's well-being and their futures.

### Stabilising the West Bank's economy

A stable economy is crucial for families to support themselves, particularly when it comes to providing for children's needs.

- The cancellation of work permits for employment in the settlements has deepened the livelihood crisis. Issuing new work permits on a larger scale could help reduce poverty and create job opportunities, which are crucial for families struggling to meet their basic needs.
- Easing movement restrictions will encourage trade and stimulate the local economy, allowing businesses to thrive and provide jobs for the people of the West Bank. Measures to strengthen international trade and the resilience of the private sector will improve the overall economy, benefiting families and providing opportunities for growth.

## Sustaining essential services

Children and their families depend on essential services such as health care, education, and basic infrastructure.

- Reversing deductions from clearance revenues is critical to maintaining the delivery of essential services, such as health clinics and schools. These funds are vital to keep these essential services running and accessible to the most vulnerable.
- Ensuring enough funding for civil servant salaries, health services, and the procurement of necessary medicines is essential to keep public services functioning and support vulnerable populations.
- The scale of support needed will depend on clearance revenue deductions, so it is important for international actors to collaborate and respond swiftly to ensure services are maintained, based on the evolving context.

## Protecting humanitarian access

Ensuring that humanitarian aid can reach those in need is vital, particularly for children and their families who rely on this support for survival.

- Reviewing and amending the laws that hinder the operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine refugees in the near east (UNRWA) in the occupied Palestinian territories will ensure that essential services, such as health care and education, continue without interruption.
- Ensuring the new registration process for international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is efficient is essential, as not having experienced NGOs able to access communities poses a significant obstacle to vital humanitarian assistance reaching the most vulnerable.

## Expanding tailored humanitarian programmes

The needs of children and their families are urgent and growing, and the international community must scale up support to ensure children have access to life-saving assistance.

- There is a pressing need to expand food assistance, particularly cash and vouchers, to the most affected areas, such as Hebron, Bethlehem, and Jericho. Vulnerable groups, including children, should be prioritised, with special attention given to the risk of child labour and lack of access to health care.
- Expanding support for local clinics, training health personnel, and improving health-care infrastructure is crucial. Vulnerable groups, especially pregnant women and children under 3, must be targeted with financial assistance and health-care services.
- As schools are affected by the ongoing crisis, cash and vouchers should be provided to prevent school dropouts. There should be a concerted effort to invest in emergency preparedness for schools and to develop community-based alternatives to online learning, ensuring that children can continue their education despite the challenges.
- Strengthening the capacity of Civil Defence centres and training volunteers will improve emergency responses, particularly in remote areas. Prepositioning essential supplies, such as firefighting equipment, will ensure communities are better prepared for future emergencies.
- Expanding mental health services, with a focus on children and adolescents, across the West Bank is critical, as having tailored programmes that address the trauma experienced by young people will help protect their mental and emotional well-being.

# REFERENCES

- 1- ILO, A Year of War in Gaza: Impacts on Employment and Livelihoods in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Bulletin No. 5, October 2024, available [here](#).
- 2- Ibid.
- 3- UNDP, Gaza war: Expected socioeconomic impacts on the State of Palestine, October 2024, available [here](#).
- 4- As war in Gaza enters seventh month, 1.74 million more Palestinians will be pushed into poverty across State of Palestine according to United Nations assessment [here](#).
- 5- A Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment, conducted in 2022, offers a comprehensive picture of the situation in the West Bank before the start of the current crisis and offer a good point of comparison. REACH, 2022 Multi-Sectoral Needs Assessment, July 2022, available [here](#).
- 6- The Minimum Expenditure basket for a Palestinian household of five (two adults and three children) was defined by the [West Bank Cash Working Group](#) at US\$578 (2,062 NIS) in March 2023. [The Palestinian Central Bureau for Statistics](#) defined the "deep poverty line" at US\$554 (1,974 NIS) in 2017.
- 7- Findings from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) June 2022 multisectoral needs assessment: [here](#).



World Vision 