World Vision
الرؤية العالمية

WORLD FOOD DAY 2025 - ADVOCACY AND EVIDENCE BRIEF

ADOLESCENTS, HUNGER, AND CONFLICT: VOICES AND KEY FIGURES ACROSS LEBANON

INTRODUCTION

Lebanon's adolescents are growing up in a time when access to food feels uncertain. The fluctuation in food prices, scarcity in job opportunities, and dwindling assistance have added to the burdens faced by young people today (WFP 2025; World Bank 2025; WFP 2024/2025). World Vision's Price Shocks 2025 report shows that high food prices continue to outpace families' ability to afford a basic basket, especially in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. Through this study, young people shared what hunger does to their body, how it weighs on their minds, and the difficult choices they make when there is not enough or no food on the table.

This brief shares preliminary results on how adolescents experience and cope with hunger amid ongoing conflict and a decline in humanitarian assistance. The aim of this brief is to translate the insights from young people into actionable recommendations for World Food Day 2025, actions that protect health and dignity, and reduce the need for harmful coping mechanisms.

- **402 surveys** with adolescents (10-19), which provided a snapshot of hunger's frequency, duration, and impact, and what support reaches or misses them.
- **14 focus group discussions** and **33 key informant interviews**, which added depth: the sounds, pauses, and trade-offs behind the numbers.

This brief projects the voices of adolescents and provides a clear picture of the hunger they experience, what it looks like on a day-to-day basis, and its impact on their lives. It also shows how conflict and shrinking aid aggravate the pressure on adolescents and their families, and heighten concerns about food.

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EXECUTIVE SNAPSHOT

- Hunger is prolonged and pervasive. Around a quarter of surveyed adolescents experienced hunger for more than a month, with the majority reporting clear physical (tiredness/dizziness) and mental health (stress/anxiety) effects.
- Coping is often harmful or hollow. Many adolescents endure hunger without support; common strategies include skipping meals and reducing the quality of their diet. A minority report risky practices (stealing, unsafe work, exchanging belongings) when deprivation becomes chronic.
- Conflict and aid cuts compound each other. Most respondents say conflict/insecurity makes it harder to access food, while many report programmes being stopped or reduced, leaving longer gaps with little or no help.
- What adolescents say they need most: predictable cash support to reduce worry about food, jobs/livelihoods for parents, and school meals as a safety net where feasible (echoing World Vision's child-led research in Lebanon, where children school meals help them learn, attend, and belong, and called for better quality and portions).

World Food Day call: Protect adolescents from hunger and harm by stabilizing assistance, scaling up school feeding, and boosting family livelihoods, while safeguarding against negative coping mechanisms (such as child labor, early marriage, and exploitation).

1 in 4 surveyed adolescents experienced hunger for more than a month in conflict-affected areas of Lebanon.

"I eat a spoonful of oil to feel full

Male, 10-13, Baalbek

METHODOLOGY: WHO WE SPOKE TO AND HOW

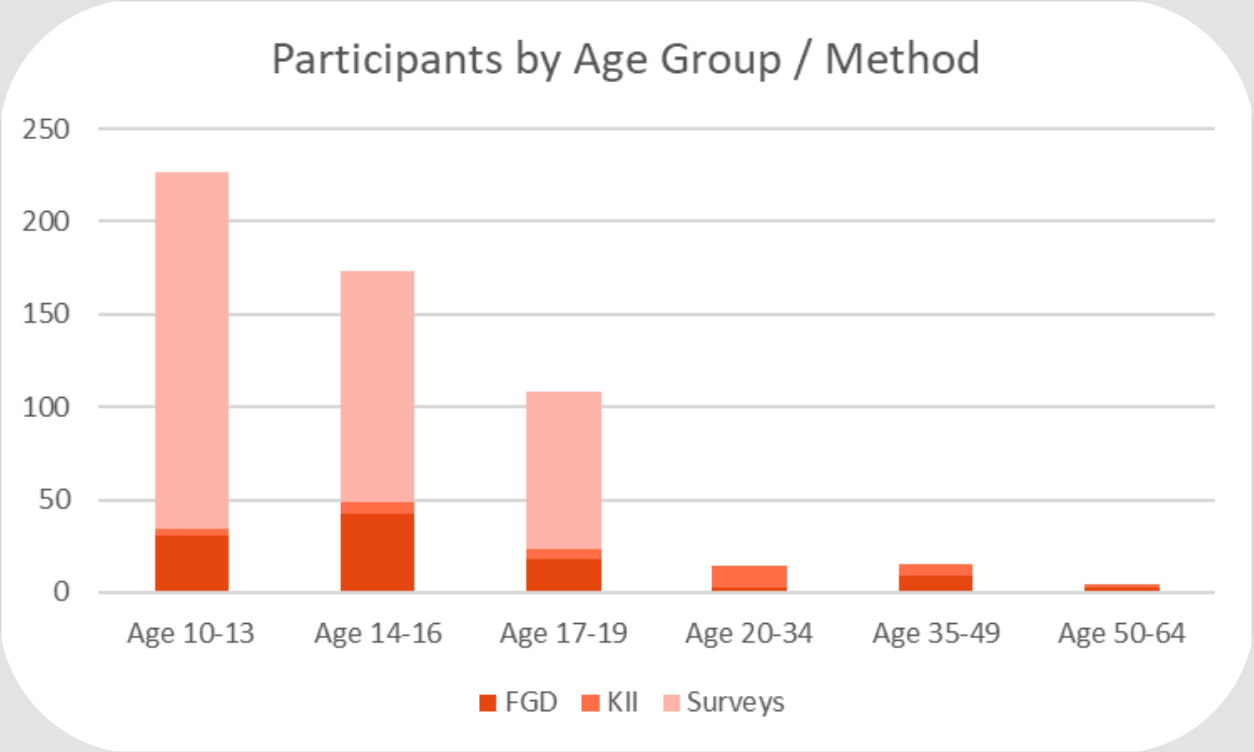
Adolescents aged 10-19 years old were targeted following the following the categorization used by the World Health Organization, which defines adolescence as the phase of life from ages 10 to 19 (WHO, 2025). The sample covered six districts which were impacted by conflict: Akkar, Baalbek-Hermel, Beirut/Mount Lebanon, Hasbaya, Zahle, and Sidon. Three nationalities were included in the sample: Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian. Eligibility criteria consisted of the following experiences over the past year:

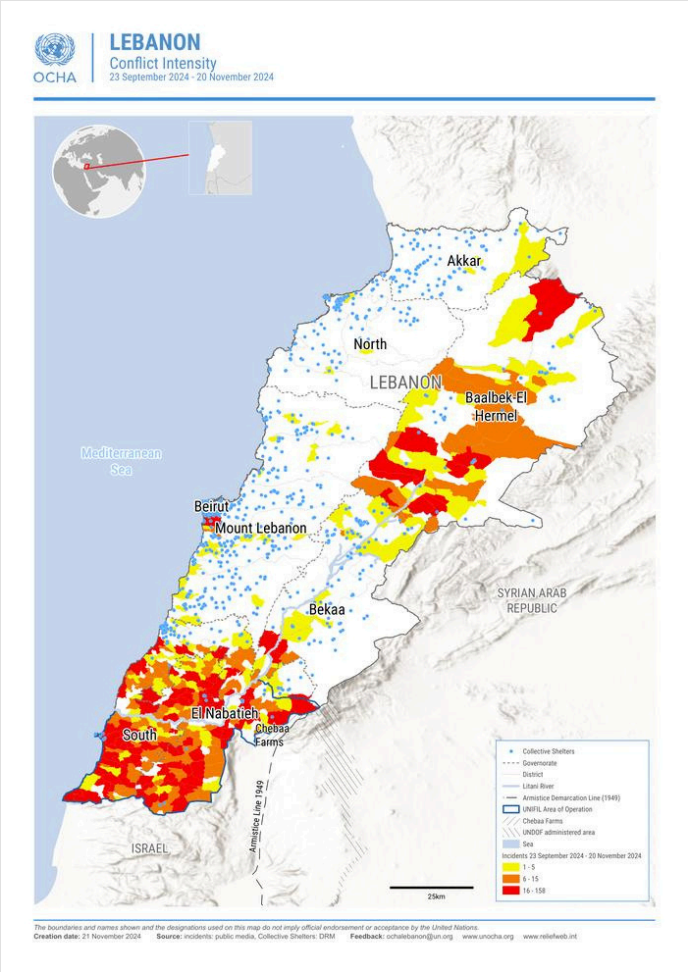
(1) experienced hunger
(2) affected by conflict
(3) received humanitarian assistance

The study employed a mixed-methods approach that combined quantitative data from surveys (402) with qualitative data from focus group discussions (14) and key informant interviews (33) to capture both the scale and the texture of adolescent hunger. The questionnaire includes the duration and impact of hunger, coping strategies, support received, and perceptions of conflict and assistance trends. To understand the stories behind the statistics, 14 focus group discussions and 33 key informant interviews were held with adolescents and non-adolescents (parents, caregivers, teachers, community leaders, and practitioners).

Participant lists across areas were obtained from WVL operations. Participants were contacted over the phone to complete the survey. Informed consent and assent, where applicable, were taken prior to survey completion. Surveys guided the recruitment of participants for FGDs and KIIs across areas.

Descriptive analysis were implemented to showcase the prevalence of the aforementioned factors across areas. Thematic analysis was used to complement quantitative findings.





Lebanon: Conflict Intensity, 23 September 2024 - 20 November 2024 | OCHA

Areas covered by the study

KEY FINDINGS

THE EXPERIENCE OF HUNGER

In interviews and group discussions, adolescents describe hunger as persistent and wearing. Many recount stretches that last weeks and sometimes longer, punctuated by short periods of relief. The first effects are physical: tiredness, weakness, and dizziness, followed by the mental toll of constant worry about the next meal. Other effects included quietness, irritability, and declining concentration; some youths withdraw from friends or skip school when there isn't enough to eat.

- **Duration**: Hunger often persists. A sizable share (24.1%) experienced more than one month of hunger; others (37.6%) reported episodes lasting from one week to one month or shorter.
- **Health impact**: 76.6% agree and 13.2% strongly agree that hunger makes them feel tired/weak/dizzy.
- **Psychosocial impact:** 83.1% agree and 6.7% strongly agree that worrying about having enough food makes them anxious/stressed/unhappy.

Hunger also reshapes how young people relate to those around them. At home, scarcity creates tension over food sharing, with siblings competing for portions and adolescents taking on adult roles, working informally or caring for younger children, which squeezes time for schoolwork, play, and rest. Many describe withdrawing from friends out of shame or to avoid situations where food is shared but unavailable at home. In neighborhoods, we notice borrowing and unpaid debts, resentment, and stigma grow, especially toward refugee or minority families.

- **Social / Developmental Impacts**: Qualitative coding from FGDs and KIIs recorded 181 segments on family conflict and problems at home, echoing the survey finding that around 22% of adolescents reported having arguments linked to food scarcity at home.

> *My weight before the war was 55 kg. Now I weigh 41 kg. My friend needs a monthly medical check-up due to iron deficiency and chronic anemia (thalassemia). Her family is unable to treat her.*
>
> Female, 14-16, Lebanese, Akkar

HOW ADOLESCENTS COPE

Qualitative analysis reports that families respond first by stretching food: cutting portion sizes, skipping meals, and buying cheaper, less preferred foods. Many adolescents say they simply endure hunger when nothing else is possible. Formal help is rarely the first stop in times of need; instead, young people often rely on parents and neighbors, who themselves have limited resources. Only 6.2% said they would ask a relative or a friend for food or money.

As deprivation drags on, a small but worrying set of coping strategies appears: taking food without permission, begging, traveling to unsafe areas in search of work or donations, or exchanging belongings for food. Some participants also point to child labor, early marriage, and substance use emerging as last resort responses in some contexts.

- **Enduring hunger** (doing nothing) is common (59%) when options run out.
- **Dietary downgrading** is widespread: skipping meals (39%) and eating cheaper/less preferred foods (33%).
- **Low reliance on formal aid at the point of need;** very few report turning to NGOs (2.7%), teachers (0.2%), or friends/neighbours (2%) for direct help when hungry. Families (parents) remain the primary source of support (96.8%), but household resources are often constrained.
- **In discussions, a minority of adolescents reported dangerous coping when hunger is prolonged**: taking food without permission, begging, venturing into unsafe areas, or exchanging belongings for food. Isolated mentions of substance use, violence, and early marriage as survival strategies appear in some locations.
- **Participants mentioned the following to better cope with hunger:** Cash support for families (87.8%), job training for adolescents (20.1%), support for parents to earn money or find jobs (44.8%).

Adaptive (problem-focused) coping:

> *We went to the fields and brought edible plants like cucumbers, parsley, and others. We also collected dry wood, lit it, and cooked because gas was very expensive.*
>
> Male, Adolescent, Akkar

> *Some also express themselves through drawing or writing, which helps them manage anxiety and irritability without resorting to harmful behaviors.*
>
> Female, Non-Adolescent, Lebanese, Zahle

Maladaptive coping:

> *Some children were even exposed to cases of sexual harassment in exchange for small amounts of money.*
>
> Female, Non-Adolescent, Sidon

> *We were forced to steal eggs, vegetables, and canned food from shops. We ate raw, uncooked canned food.*
>
> Female, Adolescent, Akkar

EXTERNAL SUPPORT IS INCONSISTENT AND THINNING

Participants report a mix of in-kind food, cash, and e-cards over the past year. They mention that help comes for a while, then stops. Families cannot plan meals or budgets because support is inconsistent. Where school snacks are available, adolescents appreciate them but say they rarely meet more than a small portion of their daily needs.

- **Assistance types**: Participants report in-kind food (51.2%), cash (33.6%), and some food aid e-cards (10.4%) in the last year.
- **Program contraction**: A majority (63%) report that programs they benefited from were stopped or reduced.
- **School meals**: Only 1.2% reported receiving school meals, and 22.9% mentioned that school meals would help them better cope with hunger.
- **Barriers and bias**: Qualitative accounts highlight favouritism (“wasta”) and sectarian discrimination in aid access in some areas.

> *At school, they gave us light meals and sometimes a bottle of oil. But in the village, they didn’t give us anything because we’re Syrian. My maternal grandparents’ family used to help with food, but we didn’t visit them often because they lived far away*
>
> Female,10-13, Syrian, Baalbek

> *There is a significant bias in the distribution of financial and food support. Individuals with religious affiliations, connections to specific political parties, or ties to particular members of the municipality often receive aid, even if they do not require it. Meanwhile, many genuinely needy families are left without any support due to their lack of connections.*
>
> Female, Non-Adolescent, Lebanese, Sidon

63% report programs stopped/reduced”

CONFLICT AND AID DECLINE → LESS FOOD, MORE WORRY

Adolescents consistently link conflict with fewer safe opportunities to access affordable food, parents lose jobs, markets close early, and transport becomes risky. At the same time, when assistance is reduced or paused, families face longer stretches without a buffer. Young people are unequivocal that predictable cash eases worry about food and helps families choose what they need most.

- Adolescents overwhelmingly (94.5%) report that conflict/insecurity makes it harder for their families to get enough food.
- Nearly all (98.3%) agree that cash assistance reduces worry about food.

> *Because of the war, my father became unemployed, and our house is still destroyed. We are carrying this burden of the approaching winter. During the war, we went to my aunt's house, but because our families are large, we were ashamed and embarrassed by hunger*
>
> Female,14-16, Lebanese, Akkar

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM ADOLESCENTS: WHAT THEY SAY WOULD HELP

- Predictable cash for families (top preference) to preserve choice, flexibility, and dignity.
- Jobs/livelihoods for parents to secure a stable income.
- School meals/snacks as a reliable safety net, especially where household food is limited.
- Opportunities for adolescents (age-appropriate job training, safe income pathways) and safe spaces/activities to protect against harmful coping.
- Fair and inclusive assistance that reaches remote or marginalized areas and mitigates bias.
- Psychosocial support helps adolescents deal with the traumas caused by conflict and food scarcity.

WORLD VISION'S CALL ON WORLD FOOD DAY

1. Stabilize and scale predictable cash assistance to families with adolescents to address persisting hunger and food security gaps. No child should endure hunger. Prolonged hunger among adolescents in Lebanon is eroding health, learning, and safety.
2. Prioritize high-deprivation districts, and integrate complaints/feedback channels to identify exclusion of certain population groups to ensure assistance is distributed fairly and equally.
3. Strengthen and propose innovative ways for cash assistance and school feeding (such as school meals, kitchens, or voucher systems). Predictable cash reduces food worry and protects choice. School meals facilitate the choice of healthy and nutritious meals, portioned for adolescents, and improve their intake.
4. Protect against negative coping: expand case management, referral to child protection, and MHPSS; embed early marriage and child labor prevention in all food/cash programming; monitor risk proxies (school dropout, work onset, reported insecurity).
5. Support livelihoods program for vulnerable households. Livelihoods and jobs for caregivers are crucial in breaking the cycle of negative coping.
6. Use innovative methods for data usage, such as setting up an indicator measured twice per year to update the status of adolescent and their coping strategies.

> *"Don't let our children be lost to hunger. An adolescent is not a small child you simply feed, nor an adult who can bear everything. At this age they are vulnerable, and each day of hunger steals from their future. If you don't stand by us today, tomorrow may be too late."*
>
> Female, 35-49, Lebanese, Zahle

WORLD VISION'S ENOUGH CAMPAIGN

The ENOUGH global campaign is World Vision's all-of-Partnership call to action to end child hunger and malnutrition. Today, millions of children face extreme hunger and crippling forms of malnutrition, ranging from stunting and wasting to obesity, driven by an unequal food system disrupted by conflict and the climate crisis. We are witnessing a devastating reversal of progress on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with children paying the highest price.

In Lebanon, ENOUGH is both a humanitarian and developmental imperative. With over 80% of the population living in poverty and adolescents increasingly exposed to hunger, the campaign focuses on restoring food dignity through predictable cash transfers, livelihood support for parents, and scaling up school feeding programs as safety nets for the most vulnerable. This aligns closely with the adolescent-focused research behind this brief, which documents how conflict and shrinking aid are reshaping the daily realities of hunger and the coping mechanisms of young people. The evidence reinforces ENOUGH's central conviction: that child hunger is not a natural outcome of crises but a failure of collective responsibility and policy prioritisation.

On World Food Day 2025, World Vision Lebanon stands with the global ENOUGH movement in amplifying the voices of adolescents into concrete advocacy to stabilise assistance, expand school feeding, and strengthen livelihoods. The message is clear: children and adolescents in Lebanon have had enough of hunger. It's time the world acts accordingly.

ENOUGH

PUBLICATION NOTE:

This research is led by Bruno Atieh (World Vision Sr. Advisor, Humanitarian Policy, Advocacy and Partnerships) in collaboration with the World Vision Lebanon team. Data collection and analysis were conducted in tandem with his doctoral dissertation at Arizona State University. This brief forms part of that academic work and may be included in the dissertation while also serving as a World Vision advocacy resource

CHILD AND ADULT SAFEGUARDING

World Vision ensured the safe and ethical participation of girls, boys, men, and women, adhering to World Vision's Safeguarding policy and protocols on storytelling, as well as World Vision's Code of Conduct.

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