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# Fact Sheet: Children's Relief Bethlehem and Caritas Baby Hospital

Based on figures from 2022

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## 1 Organization (Mission and Vision)

### 1.1 Children's Relief Bethlehem

Children's Relief Bethlehem is a non-profit association based in Lucerne. Its guiding principle is deep respect for the dignity of all human beings. For this reason, the Association focuses on supporting individuals who live in precarious social conditions.

The Association operates Caritas Baby Hospital (CBH) in Bethlehem, the only hospital in the West Bank that is specialized in pediatric medicine.

Depending on its financial resources, Children's Relief Bethlehem also helps fund other projects in the region (Occupied Palestinian Territory: West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem) and in Israel. In certain justified cases, projects in other countries may also be considered.

The following principles shape the activities at Children's Relief Bethlehem:

- Support is provided to poor and marginalized people, regardless of origin or religion.
- Collaboration with local partners is based on mutual trust and aims to strengthen the partners' ability to operate independently.
- Work at Children's Relief Bethlehem helps bring about a lasting improvement in the social situation and health of children, adolescents, and their families.

Children's Relief Bethlehem is certified by the Zewo Foundation, which awards its quality seal to non-profit organizations (NPOs) that fulfill all 21 Zewo standards. Because Zewo regularly assesses and monitors its certified NPOs, benefactors can rest assured that their donations are in good hands.

## **1.2 Caritas Baby Hospital**

Caritas Baby Hospital is the only hospital in the West Bank specialized exclusively in pediatric medicine. It delivers high quality medical care to babies, children, and adolescents up to 18 years of age, irrespective of their social background or religion.

In 2022, 3,770 children were hospitalized and 43,586 were treated on an outpatient basis (total number of treatments: 47,356).

Operational management of the hospital is entirely in local (Palestinian) hands, while overall responsibility for Caritas Baby Hospital rests with the Association Children's Relief Bethlehem. Management at Caritas Baby Hospital and the responsible officers at Children's Relief Bethlehem discuss all important strategic issues as equal partners. Caritas Baby Hospital reports to Children's Relief Bethlehem on the amount and substance of all income and spending (revenue and expenditures).

## **1.3 Donations**

The hospital relies on donations to meet its obligations and save the lives of children. Most donations stem from individuals, foundations, cities/communes and cantons, as well as church communities and parishes. In Switzerland, the work of Children's Relief Bethlehem is also supported by the Swiss Bishops' Conference, on whose recommendation the midnight Mass Christmas collection for Children's Relief Bethlehem has been conducted in Catholic parishes since 1964.

## **1.4 Relationship to Caritas**

In operational and financial matters, Children's Relief Bethlehem works independently and receives no financial support from the Caritas associations in Germany or Switzerland. Caritas Baby Hospital also receives no financial support from the Caritas associations. However, there are close historical ties between Children's Relief Bethlehem and Caritas Switzerland as well as the German Caritas Association due to the activities of Father Schnydrig (see section 2). Both

Caritas associations were founding members of the Association Children's Relief Bethlehem and are also represented on the Association Board.

## 2 History

The origins of Caritas Baby Hospital and Children's Relief Bethlehem date back to the events of 1948. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinian families were displaced and living in abject poverty in refugee camps following the establishment of the State of Israel and the subsequent "War of Independence" (term in the Israeli narrative), or "Nakba" (term in the Palestinian narrative and Arabic for disaster).

Hedwig Vetter, an employee of Caritas Switzerland, traveled to Palestine in 1949, where she was confronted with the misery of the Palestinian population. To provide relief, she and Palestinian physician Dr. Antoine Dabdoub decided to set up a drop-in center to offer emergency medical care to mothers of young children. They rented space in Bethlehem's old city for the center. This was the beginning of a successful endeavor that later led to the foundation of Caritas Baby Hospital.

In 1952, Caritas Switzerland sent Father Ernst Schnydrig, from the Canton of Valais, Switzerland, to Bethlehem to assess the situation of Palestinian refugees on site and learn more about Hedwig Vetter's work. He was shocked by the widespread poverty – at the birthplace of Jesus – and began supporting the activities of Hedwig Vetter and Antoine Dabdoub. In 1953, they were able to rent a few beds in a local hospital to treat ill children. This is regarded as the birth of the Caritas Baby Hospital and the start of an exceptionally successful collaboration between the local population and dedicated individuals from Switzerland and Germany.

After returning to Europe, Father Schnydrig began working at the German Caritas Association, where he campaigned to secure financial support in Switzerland and Germany for Caritas Baby Hospital. In 1963, he founded the non-profit association Children's Relief Bethlehem based in Lucerne.

## 3 Caritas Baby Hospital Today

In 1953, that the first children received treatment in the sublet beds of a pediatric ward. Since then, the pediatric medical care offered has steadily improved, been modernized, and expanded.

In April 1978, Caritas Baby Hospital opened its own hospital building. To this day, the hospital has continued to develop, in alignment with global medical standards.

Caritas Baby Hospital in the West Bank is financed and operated by Children's Relief Bethlehem in Lucerne. The treatment concept involves mothers in their children's recovery processes, and the hospital offers extensive social services. In 2022, 47,356 children and babies were hospitalized or treated at the outpatient clinic. All children receive help, regardless of their social background or religion.

The Bishop of Basel (currently Felix Gmür) and the Archbishop Freiburg in Breisgau (currently Stephan Burger) are Protectors at Caritas Baby Hospital.

News and more information about the current situation in Bethlehem is available on our homepage: <http://www.kinderhilfe-bethlehem.ch/en>.

### **3.1 Regions Served**

Today, the cities of Bethlehem, Beit Sahour, and Beit Jala form a single urban area. In 2022, the population of Bethlehem numbered more than 60,000 inhabitants (including the surrounding communities, source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics PCBS, 2022). Most children treated at Caritas Baby Hospital are from the southern West Bank, the region surrounding Bethlehem and Hebron. According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, around one million people live in the districts of Bethlehem and Hebron, 400,000 of whom are children and adolescents under 18 years of age (source: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics PCBS, 2022).

The southern West Bank in particular has been impacted by the expansion of Israeli settlements; the Palestinian population's freedom of movement has been restricted, thus limiting their potential to develop, and the lack of viable economic prospects has resulted in widespread poverty.

### **3.2 Common Diseases**

Infections and gastroenteritis as well as respiratory diseases are some of the most common illnesses. Diseases of the central nervous system, neonatal sepsis, and neonatal jaundice are also widespread. In addition, genetic disorders such as cystic fibrosis as well as other metabolic and neurological diseases are relatively frequent.

### **3.3 Management of Caritas Baby Hospital**

All persons in management roles at Caritas Baby Hospital are from the region: the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Medical Director, the Director of Finances, the Director of Operations, and the Nursing Director are from Palestine. The CEO of Caritas Baby Hospital reports to the Managing Director of Children's Relief Bethlehem.

Caritas Baby Hospital is one of the most important employers in the region. The hospital employs approximately 250 people, of whom roughly two-thirds are women.

## **4 Medical Services at Caritas Baby Hospital**

Caritas Baby Hospital provides medical care to sick children both on an inpatient and outpatient basis. It offers comprehensive services in pediatric medicine and specializes in three areas: neurology, pulmonology, and intensive care. These specializations are in high demand and are continually further developed.

### **4.1 Outpatient Treatment**

The following services are offered on an outpatient basis:

#### **Outpatient Clinic**

Most patients are treated at the hospital's Outpatient Department. Parents can bring their sick children to a consultation without an appointment. In 2022, 43,586 children were treated on an outpatient basis; in keeping with the global trend, sick children receive outpatient treatment whenever possible instead of being hospitalized. The Outpatient Department is particularly child-friendly – the walls are painted in bright colors, and the furnishings have been selected with children in mind.

#### **Specialized Outpatient Consultations**

In addition to neurology and pulmonology, consultations are offered in several pediatric specializations, including cardiology, orthopedics, and metabolic diseases. Consultations are offered on a regular basis, ensuring that young patients with certain, often chronic illnesses receive long-term care from a medical specialist.

### **Daycare Unit**

The Daycare Unit is set up for children whose outpatient treatments or medical examinations require more time (up to six hours). Short-term treatments like oxygen therapy and fever monitoring are frequently conducted in the Daycare Unit.

### **Pediatric Observation Unit**

In the Pediatric Observation Unit, which opened in early 2020, children are placed under observation for up to 24 hours; sick children remain for medical monitoring and receive simple treatments (infusions, for example). If the child's health improves, he or she can be discharged quickly; if the child's condition worsens, he or she is admitted to one of the pediatric wards. With its four beds, the Observation Unit meets an important need in the Outpatient Department, with which it is directly connected.

## **4.2 Hospitalizations**

At Caritas Baby Hospital, there are 70 beds for inpatient care of hospitalized children:

- 9 beds in the Intensive Care Unit (ICU) (4 in PICU "Pediatric Intensive Care Unit" and 5 in NICU "Neonatal Intensive Care Unit"). The demand for intensive pediatric care is very high in the West Bank, and the supply is much too limited.
- 39 beds in two medical wards (Ward A, Ward B)
- 22 beds for newborns (Neonatal Ward)

In 2022, 3,770 children were hospitalized and received treatment.

## **4.3 Mothers' Residency Department**

Respect for children and their families, regardless of their social background, is a key feature at Caritas Baby Hospital, as is the hospital's holistic approach to medical care. Parents of sick children are systematically included in treatment pathways. Mothers of hospitalized children are permitted to stay overnight in special accommodations, enabling them to remain close to their children – which promotes both the children's sense of wellbeing and supports healing.

While staying at the hospital, the women also receive information and advice on issues such as hygiene, hereditary diseases, and nutrition, and they have access to psychological counseling. In addition, Caritas Baby Hospital encourages the mothers get to know each other and share their experiences. This helps strengthen the women's role in their families, and their new knowledge benefits their other children as well as their general environments.

## **4.4 Physiotherapy**

One of the specialized services offered at Caritas Baby Hospital is early childhood physiotherapy for infants up to the age of three, a treatment that is rarely provided in the West Bank. Early childhood physiotherapy can bring great benefits and have a positive effect on a child's later development, especially in patients with neurological and muscular problems. In addition to traditional physiotherapy, Caritas Baby Hospital also offers occupational therapy, pulmonary physiotherapy, and speech therapy. All complementary medical treatments are coordinated with the medical team.

## **4.5 Social Services**

Numerous social services have been created to support children and their families. Medical and nursing staff consult with social workers when this is believed to be in the best interest of the patient. The social workers are responsible for assessing a family's financial situation and, if

needed, paying regular house calls. They also conduct counseling sessions and advise families of children with chronic or serious diseases.

## **5 Regional Significance of Caritas Baby Hospital**

Caritas Baby Hospital cooperates closely with the Ministry of Health of the Palestinian Authority and maintains regular ties with other hospitals in the West Bank. Founded as a purely charitable organization, today Caritas Baby Hospital is a cornerstone in the Palestinian healthcare system and it plays a key role in developing and strengthening medical care at the local level.

Through its continuous efforts to further expand its services, Caritas Baby Hospital sets standards for medical and nursing care in the region. The hospital regularly organizes professional development courses for employees. The close ties it cultivates with other hospitals in the region (further education courses, sharing experiences, knowledge exchange) also foster a spirit of solidarity and promotes regional stability.

### **5.1 Major Local Employer**

As a major employer and as a place of continuing education, Caritas Baby Hospital also offers young Palestinians prospects for a viable future in their homeland. Hospital employees have good working conditions, receive fair salaries, and benefit from regular continuing education courses. In addition, Caritas Baby Hospital brings major benefits to the local economy; medication, food and commodities are purchased locally whenever possible.

### **5.2 Training and Further Education Strengthen Local Healthcare System**

Caritas Baby Hospital is accredited by the Palestinian Authority as a teaching hospital where medical students can specialize in pediatrics. The residency program lasts a total of four years, and future pediatricians can complete two-and-a-half years of the requirement at Caritas Baby Hospital. The program is based on the curriculum set out by the Palestinian Medical Association and the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

Caritas Baby Hospital works with Bethlehem University and offers nursing students opportunities for internships.

The hospital has its own Center for Continuing Education (CCE), which offers professional development courses for Caritas Baby Hospital staff as well as for external participants.

Lastly, specialized pediatricians from Germany, Switzerland, and Italy visit Caritas Baby Hospital regularly for extended periods of time with the aim of transferring knowledge to the local staff.

### **5.3 Quality Standards**

In 2019, the World Health Organization (WHO) renewed the Patient Safety Friendly Hospital Initiative certificate awarded to Caritas Baby Hospital. Caritas Baby Hospital is the only West Bank hospital to have attained three of four healthcare levels. The hospital is also a pioneer in infection control and combating antibiotic resistance, and it regularly shares knowledge and experience with other hospitals in the region.

## **6 Location**

Caritas Baby Hospital is located in Bethlehem, in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, approximately 200 meters behind the wall that Israel constructed between Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Palestinians need a permit from the Israeli security forces to pass through the checkpoint when traveling in the direction of Jerusalem. The realities of the occupation limit the

mobility and economic prospects of people living in the West Bank. In the southern West Bank, the numerous, continually expanding Israeli settlements greatly restrict the Palestinian population in their freedom of movement and their potential to develop. Due to roadblocks and checkpoints, hospital patients and employees are sometimes forced to take roundabout routes to Caritas Baby Hospital.

Certain specialized medical treatments are unavailable in the West Bank (e.g. complex heart surgery). In such cases, Caritas Baby Hospital works with Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem or with Israeli hospitals. In medical collaborations, the well-being of the patient is the main concern.

## 7 Financing

Roughly two-thirds of the funding needed to operate Caritas Baby Hospital stems from donations, with the other third coming from locally generated income. Most donations are from Switzerland, Germany, Italy, and Austria. In addition, fundraising activities are conducted in Bethlehem, as tourist groups make donations when they are visiting Caritas Baby Hospital.

Approximately one-third of all income is generated locally and stems from the following sources:

### 1. Treatment fees

At the hospital, patients – or rather, their parents – are required to pay a deductible fee that, however, does not cover costs. Patients whose families are unable to pay the fee receive medical care free of charge after the hospital's in-house social services team has carefully assessed the situation.

### 2. Performance contracts

Performance contracts have been concluded with various local partners – for example, with the Ministry of Health of the Palestinian Authority or with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). These institutions assume part of the costs for treating children they have referred to Caritas Baby Hospital.

In 2022, the operating costs at the children's hospital in Bethlehem amounted to CHF 10.61 million (for salaries, medications, infrastructure, maintenance, depreciation, etc.). Details are available in the Auditor's Report on the Association's website (<https://www.kinderhilfe-bethlehem.ch/infomaterial/downloads>).

At the end of every year, the annual, locally maintained accounts of Caritas Baby Hospital are merged and consolidated with those of the Association Children's Relief Bethlehem. The Association maintains reserves in order to secure regular operations at the hospital, ensure that local staff receive their salary, and cover costs for medications. The reserves cushion shortfalls and fluctuations in income; they are listed in the balance sheet with the assets of Children's Relief Bethlehem.

## 8 Links with Further Information on the Palestinian Healthcare System

<http://www.ochaopt.org/>

UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

<https://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/507/default.aspx>

Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics

<http://www.moh.ps>

Palestinian Ministry of Health

<https://www.emro.who.int/countries/opt/index.html>

World Health Organization WHO (Palestine)

<https://www.icrc.org/en/where-we-work/middle-east/israel-and-occupied-territories>

International Committee of the Red Cross

<https://www.palestinercs.org/>

Palestinian Red Crescent