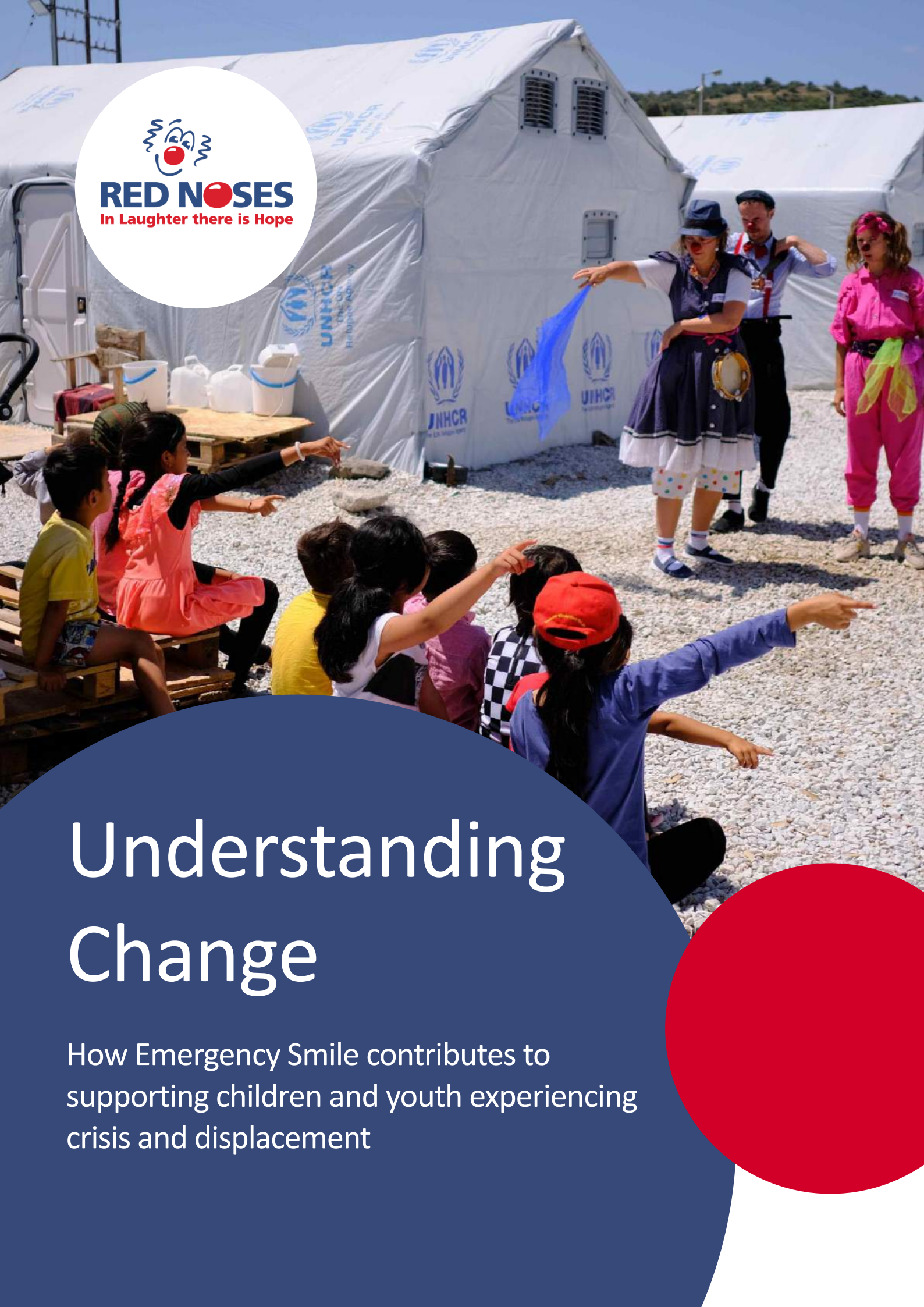




**RED NOSES**  
In Laughter there is Hope



# Understanding Change

How Emergency Smile contributes to supporting children and youth experiencing crisis and displacement

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# Executive Summary

RED NOSES International has four programmes: Healthcare programme, Older Citizens programme, Disability Inclusion programme, and Crisis Response programme. The Crisis Response Programme, also known as Emergency Smile, offers artistic and playful experiences for children and youth experiencing displacement, together with their supporting systems.

In 2021 - 2022, the Emergency Smile programme integrated a developmental evaluation approach into its activities. As part of this approach, team members worked together to develop a deeper and shared understanding of the impact of the clowning activities. Together, they determined five domains of change that the programme expects for children and youth:

- I. Access to arts and self-expression
- II. Wellbeing
- III. Play and learning new skills
- IV. Confidence and new perspectives
- V. Connection and inclusion

These categories are mostly represented in the RED NOSES Framework of Change, which aims to present the outcomes of clowning on target groups (see Annex 2). But the Framework does not provide specific examples of what these changes look like in different programmes.

This report presents stories collected during the evaluation about how the Emergency Smile programme has contributed to positive changes in each of these domains. It also suggests which specific outcomes from the whole Framework were determined to be most relevant to the Emergency Smile team members.

The outcomes presented in this report can help the Emergency Smile team to deliver more effective, inclusive, and joyful missions. They are tools for clown artists, children, and aid workers to reflect on what happened during an activity. They can inspire questions and new insights.

Familiarity with the outcomes can also be helpful in programming a mission – deciding what activities to do, how, and with whom. After a mission, the outcomes can be used to check whether goals have been met, and promote transparency and accountability by sharing results with partners.

Finally, the outcomes should inform communication about the kinds of change expected from the Emergency Smile programme. They provide depth and specificity to broader claims about the effectiveness of Emergency Smile, such as that offered by the Framework of Change.



# Background

## The Emergency Smile programme

By the end of 2021 at least 89.3 million people worldwide were forced to leave their home due to violent conflict, natural hazard, human right violations or persecution<sup>1</sup>. More than one third of these migrants were children and roughly 6.6 million displaced people lived in camps and provisional shelters<sup>2</sup>.

People experiencing crisis and displacement are exposed to many stressors, such as exposure to conflict and violence, lack of livelihood and opportunities, and limited access to services for their basic needs, including education. They must cope with difficult living conditions, uncertainties, financial constraints, and social isolation<sup>3</sup>. These experiences have a negative impact on the mental health of people who had to leave their home behind. There is a high prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, psychosocial problems, and depression as well as an increased risk of suicide<sup>4</sup>. Yet people who experienced crisis and have been forced to flee their homes have few possibilities to receive adequate psychosocial support.

People facing displacement also have limited access to artistic and playful experiences. The lack of opportunities to experience art and play is not a frivolous problem. The arts have been shown to

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<sup>1</sup> UNHCR: <https://www.unhcr.org/globaltrends> (13.11.2023)

<sup>2</sup> UNHCR: <https://www.unhcr.org/shelter.html> (13.11.2023)

<sup>3</sup> WHO: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/mental-health-and-forced-displacement> (13.11.2023)

<sup>4</sup> WHO: <https://iris.who.int/handle/10665/342285> (13.11.2023)

have a measurable impact on mental health, well-being, and resilience, and can be considered an important form of psychosocial support<sup>5</sup>. Access to art and play is also a human right.<sup>6</sup>

RED NOSES International's Emergency Smile programme co-creates artistic and playful experiences with people who have experienced crisis and displacement with the aim of contributing to an enhanced psychosocial health, emotional wellbeing, resilience and inclusion. The programme invites people affected by crisis and displacement to engage in artistic and playful experiences with the aim of supporting their psychosocial health, emotional wellbeing, resilience and inclusion. In addition to local Emergency Smile activities led by RED NOSES country offices, the RED NOSES international office coordinates "Emergency Smile International". Emergency Smile International brings together a team of clown artists and a head of mission from different RED NOSES offices, who go on a "mission" to a site of crisis. A mission usually lasts three to four weeks.

The primary audience of Emergency Smile are children and youth who have experienced crisis and displacement. The expanded audience of the programme are children's systems of support (caregivers, community members and humanitarian aid workers). Inclusion is the foundation of the programme, with a dedicated focus on children and youth who not only bear the profound impact of the crisis but also frequently experience heightened disadvantages within its context. This is specially prevalent among children with disabilities, unaccompanied and separated minors, and girls. In 2021, the Emergency Smile programme focussed more strongly on youth. Many young people with experiences of displacement are unaccompanied or separated minors. They are a group experiencing multiple, intersecting vulnerabilities as they encounter the strains of migration and asylum seeking without parental guidance and protection.

## Evaluation approach

RED NOSES International is committed to integrating evaluation and learning into all of its programmatic work. During 2021 - 2022, the Emergency Smile International team integrated a developmental evaluation approach into its activities. Developmental evaluation is a method well-suited to programmes that are attempting to innovate their response to dynamic crisis situations, such as Emergency Smile. Unlike a traditional evaluation, in which an external evaluator measures activities against a predetermined set of objectives, developmental evaluation requires the entire team to get involved in reflecting and co-creating a shared understanding of the programme's goals. The team then works together



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<sup>5</sup> WHO: <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/329834/9789289054553-eng.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=3> (13.11.2023)

<sup>6</sup> "Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits." — Article 27, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948)

to measure and reflect on the extent to which the programme is meeting these goals, and to adjust their activities accordingly<sup>7</sup>.

For the developmental evaluation of Emergency Smile, an evaluator from the RED NOSES International Research and Learning Department worked closely with the team, including the International Artistic Director, the Emergency Smile International programme manager, participating clown artists and heads of mission. Together, they explored impact evaluation questions that reflect different expected domains of change and outcomes for the following groups:

1. Children and youth experiencing crisis and displacement
2. Aid workers, caregivers, community multipliers, partners
3. Emergency Smile teams (clown artists, heads of missions, support teams)

While the team explored the impact of Emergency Smile on all groups, this report will focus on the outcomes identified for children and youth.

# Emergency Smile activities

## Emergency Smile international missions in 2021 & 2022

The outcomes presented in this report are based on the developmental evaluation conducted from December 2020 until March 2022. During this time, 12 missions took place. For the first half of 2021, due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was only possible to provide online missions. Online missions were conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Starting in the second half of 2021, it became possible to conduct in-person missions again. In-person missions were implemented in Greece, Ukraine, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and South Sudan. Online missions continued to be implemented as well, and were conducted in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Greece.



## The Emergency Smile portfolio

An international mission comprises a range of formats that can be adapted to different environments and needs, and that allows for different forms of participation.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.betterevaluation.org/methods-approaches/approaches/developmental-evaluation> (13.11.2023)

## Musical Clown Parade

Parades are interactive, moving clown performances involving music, call and response, collective games, dance, and improvisation. The clowns prepare games, take their instruments, and walk through the rows of containers/houses in rhythm.

## Clown Shows

Every team creates a half-hour show that is played to audiences of different ages and backgrounds. The programme team has collected a set of topics that create connections with the living realities of the audiences and inspire collective reflection through clowning and play. Some of the topics include: identity, being on a journey, finding a direction, home, reorienting ourselves, feeling welcomed, navigating conflicts, understanding each other, developing confidence, supporting each other, sisterhood, our dreams, and saying goodbye.

## Circus Smile

Circus Smile is a workshop for children and youth that takes place over a few days, usually four to five days. Depending on the situation and the processes of the group, there may be a final performance where children and clowns perform for their families, aid workers, and the whole community. The clowns introduce the children to different forms of play: juggling with scarves, balls and rings, plate twirling, acrobatics, ribbon choreography, music, and dance. The participants are also invited to teach and show the clowns other skills, creating a dynamic exchange.

## Intensive Smile

Intensive Smile involves clowns accompanying children before, during, and/or after medical procedures. In Emergency Smile, this format was implemented during vaccination campaigns of Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières).


## Humour Relief Workshop

The Humour Relief Workshop is a format designed for aid workers, medical staff, caregivers, and volunteers working in crisis settings. The participants are provided with insights on how humour and play can create a powerful emotional connection between people, enhancing and stimulating social interactions, reducing stress and anxiety, and fostering a better working environment. The workshops last one to three hours and include games, awareness exercises, communication exercises, and explanations of the importance of humour in crisis situations. The workshops also focus on humour as a tool to work with programme participants and reflect on its impact in daily life.



# Methods

## Integrated developmental evaluation



The outcomes presented in this report were identified as part of an integrated developmental evaluation from 2021 to 2022. In this approach, the evaluator supports the development of a process to integrate evaluation, in the sense of co-reflective practice, within the day-to-day delivery of the programme. In a successful developmental evaluation, the whole programme team develops skills to evaluate their own work. The developmental evaluation of Emergency Smile consisted of three main components: integration of an evaluator into programming activities; learning labs; and traditional data collection tools.

- A lead evaluator was integrated into the Emergency Smile International programme team and participated in all programming activities, such as auditions, trainings, and debriefing sessions with clown artists.
- The lead evaluator guided the management and artistic team members in learning labs, focusing on lessons learned during the missions. The labs included art-informed methods and photo-voice techniques.
- The lead evaluator used traditional data collection tools to inspire learning and support the development of the compass. Desk research, involving institutional reports as well as academic literature, was followed by qualitative investigation based on expert and key stakeholder interviews, systematic participant observations, and group discussions. Quantitative questionnaires of aid workers were also collected.

## Participants

The evaluation included participation from a broad range of stakeholders: children, youth, community volunteers, caregivers, aid workers, clown artists, heads of mission, partners, key informants from RED NOSES International, and other Emergency Smile International team members.

The methods used to include their perspectives and experiences included systematic observation of 15 online mission sessions and 1 live mission, interviews, questionnaires, collective “feedback rounds”, and a community gathering/focus group.

## Data analysis

The Emergency Smile programme team used different methods to process the collected data into main learnings, which formed the basis of the conclusions. The data were cleaned, reviewed and analysed by the evaluator to identify key themes, patterns, contradictions, relationships and explanations. The evaluation of collected data was based on content coding and meaning analysis.



## Constraints

In the context of working in crisis settings, there are linguistic and cultural barriers. Due to the mobility of the population, long-term impact was difficult to assess.

## The Emergency Smile Compass

One of the main objectives of the evaluation process was to develop a deeper and shared understanding of the impact of the clowning activities. To achieve this, an orientation and assessment tool called the Emergency Smile Impact Compass was created by the programme team, with the guidance of the evaluator. Together, the programme team discussed and analyzed the programme's theories of change. Through this process, specific areas of impact were defined.

The Emergency Smile Compass lists the expected domains of change, or outcomes, for the following groups:

1. Children and youth experiencing crisis and displacement
2. Aid workers, caregivers, community multipliers, partners
3. ES Teams (Clown artists, Heads of Missions, Support Team)



This report will discuss only the outcomes for children and youth.

In developing the compass, the management and artistic team members worked together to dive more deeply into the broad categories available in the RED NOSES Framework of Change. They identified five main outcomes that are most relevant to Emergency Smile:

- I. Access to arts and self-expression
- II. Wellbeing
- III. Play and learning new skills
- IV. Confidence and new perspectives
- V. Connection and inclusion

Within each of these outcomes, the team worked to discover specific behaviours that indicate goals being met, or missed. To that end, the compass includes questions for each outcome that team members used to guide their reflection (see Annex 1). Using these outcomes and the accompanying questions was transformative for the team members in their work, because it helped them develop a vocabulary to notice and talk about change. Programme teams used this new vocabulary to analyse the contexts they were in, identify opportunities to meet new needs, and increase their impact.

It's important to note that the compass shows many points and possible directions of analysis of impact. This report introduces all the outcomes from the compass that were developed for children and youth. When the compass was used as a practical tool, however, team members were invited to choose one or two outcomes that they wanted to focus on.

# The outcomes of Emergency Smile

## Expected outcomes for children and youth

The Emergency Smile International team agreed that the programme aims to contribute to five domains of change for children and youth.

- I. Access to arts and self-expression
- II. Wellbeing
- III. Play and learning new skills
- IV. Confidence and new perspectives
- V. Connection and inclusion

Each domain includes several sub-categories, which are presented in this report. The Emergency Smile Compass also provides guiding questions, provided in Annex 1 to this report. These questions can be used to gather information on specific indicators, as well as to inspire reflection and discussion.

This report presents stories collected during the evaluation about how the programme has contributed to positive changes in each of these five domains. The stories are shared here to help clarify the nature of the desired outcomes.



# I. Access to the arts and self-expression

The Emergency Smile programme aims to increase access, reach and participation of children and youth experiencing displacement.

## Responsiveness: Go where the kids are, go where their communities are

The mobility of the Emergency Smile programme, i.e., the strategy to go where the audiences in disadvantaged situations are, is a key aspect of its impact. Due to the mobility of the programme, children who live in areas where they have significantly limited access to a wider range of artistic practices can be reached.

A RED NOSES head of mission shares this story from Ukraine, during the visit of the clowns to Stanysia:

*“For the first time, in cooperation with SOS Children’s Villages we visited children and their families in Stanysia Luhanska, a town that is only a few kilometres away from the border to the conflict zone. ... In Stanysia the signs of war are still everywhere - holes from shooting, destroyed buildings. It was something special to have a group of clowns there.*



*What touched me most was to see the people coming to the show in the big theatre hall. They were all dressed so pretty, waiting in excitement for the show of the clowns. Most of the children have never seen clowns before and hardly attended cultural activities, because the families cannot afford it.”*

*RED NOSES Head of Mission in Stanysia – Ukraine Mission*

## Identifying and overcoming barriers

Gaining access to reception centres is one of the main challenges for reaching the audiences. Once inside a centre, other access barriers need to be detected and addressed. Emergency Smile teams do not just encounter organizational barriers. There are also social barriers that prevent the target audience in centres from participating.


The Emergency Smile teams are working on increasing their awareness of what prevents or discourages children and young people from fully participating in Emergency Smile activities. They have begun a process of identifying, understanding and breaking down the barriers to participation.

For example, in one center, the Black community was not participating in RED NOSES activities. The RED NOSES team created a parade to go to them and invite and bring them to the Circus

Smile workshops. Without proactive attention, they would not attend. The environment in the camp includes discrimination and stereotyping between the children, and these dynamics affect how safe or welcome children feel during RED NOSES activities.

Barriers related to gender and disability have been a special focus for the programme; they are presented in the section below.

The Emergency Smile Team is proactive in searching for contact with potential audiences all around the camps and engaging with them. The parades are the main format for reaching this outcome.




*“Our main way to reach as many people as possible in the camp was to do parades. We played music and went around the camp to reach every door and say hello to everyone. We took time to interact, listen, and play with everyone. I must admit that we really took care about this, we did it three or four times, or even more, just to be sure that we went in every door, and in every place in the camp.”*

*RED NOSES Clown Artist – Greece Mainland Mission*

There is still room for the programme to continue identifying barriers that could be more difficult to see or acknowledge, for example those related to culture, religion, and crisis. The programme should continue to explore how clowning intersects with these barriers. Further diversity and awareness preparation would be needed for the RED NOSES teams going in the field to tackle these concerns.

## Gender and disability

Living in a crisis setting can exacerbate existing inequalities, including those based on gender and age. The evaluation showed that women and girls are in a particularly vulnerable situation. Young girls in mainland Greece talked about their situation in the camps and how they are highly disadvantaged in accessing education and other activities.



*“I am so happy that the clowns are here with us. I want my grandmother to meet you. I live with her here. My parents are in Iran. As a girl, I do not want to think about boys. I want to study and learn and I don't have that possibility so often. I am happy that I could learn something new with you today.”*

*Young girl in Nea Kavala Camp – Greece Mainland Mission*

The programme focuses on creating specific strategies to facilitate access to RED NOSES activities for women and girls. In the Greece Mainland Mission, after some difficulties engaging girls, the team realised that they could often not participate because of being in charge of taking care of young children, since there is no kindergarten in the camp. As a result, the team found a strategy to allow women and girls to participate in a Humour Relief Workshop: they organised parallel activities for their children. The clowns divided themselves into two groups. One group worked with the women and girls and the other one worked with their children. This strategy provided access to playful activities to woman and girls who are often prevented from participating in any activity because of taking care of younger children.

Finding an optimal strategy is not easy. It requires a deep understanding of the women and girls' context. In the Lesvos and Samos Mission, clowns reported that girls were playing beautifully with the ribbons, but when it was time for the show, they all decided not to perform. It was not clear for the clowns why they were discouraged from participating. As this example highlights, there is room for further improvement in detecting invisible barriers for girls, women, and persons with transgender and/or other diverse gender identities.

Another group that was assessed as being in a disadvantaged situation in terms of accessing artistic and educational activities were children with disabilities living in the camps. In many cases children with disabilities face significant forms of discrimination and exclusion.<sup>8</sup>

One of the main outcomes the programme aims to achieve is the inclusion of children with disabilities. Through the Emergency Smile activities, children with disabilities have new opportunities to engage in humorous play, express themselves, and interact with others. The activities also showed contributions towards improvements to their relationships with peers and aid workers. Finally, they have opportunities to feel proud of themselves.



A clown artist describes a transformation that took place in Juba, South Sudan.

*"I saw big changes in the children with disabilities that participated in our activities... From the first day to the last day. I think everyone could see a big difference. On Day 1 they were somewhere in the crowd, or in corners of the audience. Separated. Silent. More observing than participating. And after working with them, on the last day, they were on the stage, happy and proud of themselves. It was so great to watch."*

*RED NOSES Clown Artist – Juba, South Sudan Mission*

In the Nea Kavala Camp in Greece, the father of a child who participated in the Circus Smile workshop for children with disabilities reported how his son with disabilities felt included and celebrated in his skills and how happy he was. He explained that this was something that normally did not happen, since other kids usually excluded his child from their play in the camp because of being different. He reported that his son was frequently being bullied.

<sup>8</sup> UNHCR: <https://www.unhcr.org/persons-disabilities> (14.11.2023)



## Diverse environments

In different crisis settings, Emergency Smile encounters children and youth of all cultures, backgrounds, and identities. The programme has implemented specific strategies to engage with diverse audiences. For example, the shows consist of relatable, archetypal images that have the potential of resonating with the most diverse audiences.

Clowning does not depend on language. However, clowns sometimes include some basic words that can be easily understood in all contexts. When clowns use languages present in the audiences, that has shown to bring them extra joy. An example of a best practice was found in the Lesvos and Samos Mission in which the clowns performed a show using six languages (Farsi, Kurdish, Arabic, Portuguese, French, and English). This linguistic range was reached through the diversity of the RED NOSES clown team and the support of community volunteers who accompanied the clowns for many days and deeply engaged in the work.

The fact that the Emergency Smile teams are created considering diverse linguistic, cultural and artistic skills has proven to be an asset when working in highly diverse environments. Further efforts need to be done to continue increasing the focus on diversity when holding auditions and selecting teams for each specific mission. Diversity and transculturality awareness trainings would be needed to increase the capacity of the teams to represent diverse experiences that might be relevant for the audiences.

## Partnerships

Supporting local artistic and cultural initiatives has been a successful strategy in some of the missions. For example, in the Nea Kavala Camp, the Emergency Smile Team supported a local cultural initiative implemented with youth by an NGO. While the youth painted a mural in one of the walls of the camp, the clowns offered activities to the younger children.

## II. Wellbeing

The programme aims to contribute to the wellbeing of children by helping them reconnect with themselves and their bodies; relieving stress; and providing opportunities to express joy, laughter, and other emotions.

### Body awareness, energy, and balance

The physicality, posture and general expression of children change before, during, and after RED NOSES activities. Especially activities related to acrobatics and physical playful challenges contribute to increasing body awareness and coordination. Systematic observation conducted by the lead evaluator confirmed these changes.

A teacher reported significant physical changes in the children directly after participating in the Emergency Smile activities and in general during the days the clowns were in the camp.

*“The children were very happy. They could give some feedback orally. They said they really liked it but mainly I saw how their body postures changed. After the activities, they appeared confident and proud.”*

*Educator and Psychologist in the IOM Non-Formal Education Space - Greece Mainland Mission*



This Educator, who is in charge of further developing social competences in the children and has been closely working with them for a long period of time on a daily basis, reported changes in their body expression. He noticed that the children changed from a very self-contained and sometimes sad expression into having a confident posture.

### Express emotions with a focus on joy

One of the greatest impacts of Emergency Smile on the primary audiences is the creation of moments of joy and laughter.

*“I had never seen the kids laughing so much, being that happy and engaged, and that they have never really had someone there just for them. I realized, how important this was, and how much this was missed. I think that, especially in humanitarian context, it is easy to forget that all this is as important as providing for material needs, and sometimes even more important. I will never forget the expression of the kids and of the parents seeing them so happy.”*

*Refugees for Refugees Coordinator - Lesvos and Samos Greece Mission*



*"I really liked the workshop. I am happy. I really liked that I could enjoy again after a long time."*

*Young girl at the Circus Smile Workshop for Youth in the Nea Kavala Camp - Greece  
Mainland Mission*

The clown shows are the format that focus most directly on exploring emotions. Clown shows aim to evoke diverse emotions from the participants and invite them to explore new imaginative and affective pathways. During the clown shows, emotional reactions and laughter can generate an observable sense of transformation. The audience begins to relax. They engage in common dialogue to discuss the show and the problems it poses and their points of views about them. Children and youth talked in interviews about feeling inspired, uplifted and empowered by the live performances.

## Feel present, engaged, and calmer

Emergency Smile activities aim to support stress relief and self-regulation. Clowns use specific exercises to teach the children how to balance their energy, relax, and decompress when they are feeling stressed.

In Greece, the clowns created a breathing routine that they modelled with the children as a ritual for relaxing, grounding, and relieving stress especially when they were having conflicts between each other.



*"I will never forget how kids reacted to our breathing routines. We show them how we could react to stress. We suggested it to them when they were experiencing a conflict: They said "teacher! He punched me! What can I do?" - and we showed them – first you breathe, then you think, then you do something. It was also funny sometimes, when boys who were "playing" fighting started to breathe with us when we came to separate them."*

*RED NOSES Clown Artist - Greece Mainland Mission*

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, aid workers reported that they observed higher than usual levels of focus and engagement in unaccompanied minors. Interactions with the clowns often create calming and soothing aesthetic opportunities for the children.

Children and youth experiencing crisis and displacement change their focus from stressors and transform related emotions as a result of participating in the Emergency Smile activities. Children who are concerned with conflict-related contents can reconnect with positive emotions.

For example, in Ukraine, a number of children would frequently play with toy guns and bring them to the workshops and shows. Clown artists observed how children progressively became less interested in these toy guns, which were very dominant in children's attention at the beginning of the interaction, up to the point that they would totally forget about them. The more they engaged in the playful interactions proposed by the clowns, the less they focused on the toy guns. The clown artists also reported how children could change impulses related to conflict into interactions based on connection and constructive play.



# III. Play and learning new skills

Emergency Smile aims to enrich opportunities for children and youth experiencing crisis and displacement to play, activate their imaginations, and participate in individual and collective learning processes. The teams implement a wide range of opportunities to engage children in artistic play, aiming to counteract the restricted stimulation and unsupportive conditions often prevalent in crisis environments.

The variety of artistic formats in Emergency Smile allows participants with different learning, play styles, and needs to find their unique ways of participating. The clowns use humour, music, rhythmic exercises, storytelling, magic, and fortune telling, puppetry, dance, drawing and imagery, acrobatics and physical challenges, sensory play, juggling, coordination exercises, circus-inspired acts, guided imagery, costuming, and set design, among other artistic media. As play facilitators, they lead one-on-one clown interactions, small group work focused on specific skills, and collective play with large groups.

Caregivers and aid workers report higher levels of engagement of children in play during RED NOSES missions, as well as higher levels of diversity in play.

## Activate imagination and creativity

Emergency Smile activities contribute to children’s activation of their imagination and creativity. Clown artists inspire children to explore metaphorical sensorial images, create fantastic worlds, and play with unconventional humorous responses to common problems. The shows and parades are highly visual with colourful and acoustic elements that invite the audience to dream and dive in fantastic journeys.



*“The clowns make me happy. I am having so much fun. They make me dream.”*

*Child in the Nea Kavala Camp – Greece Mainland Mission*

Since clowning is based in the connection with the audiences, there are multiple possibilities for audience interaction and co-creation of imaginary scenes and playful moments.



## Recover motivation to play

Clown artists do not only lead children in play, they also encourage children to develop their own ability to play. Children increased their engagement in imaginative and creative play as a result of participating in Emergency Smile activities. Many of the children were seen playing the games they had learned from the clowns during different moments of the day in the organisations and camps. In the context of Emergency Smile activities, some children recover their motivation to engage in imaginative play.

*“My daughter started drawing and singing again. She had not done this since a long time.”*

*Father of two children who participated in Circus Smile – Greece Mainland Mission*

Feedback from teachers, parents, and children suggests that those who took part in Emergency Smile activities show increased motivation and involvement in imaginative and creative play even when the clowns are not present in the camps. Since this change in the ability to play is sustained after the activities end, this outcome may be part of the mission’s long-term impact.

## Learn new skills

Emergency Smile activities promote positive dispositions towards learning in children and youth through play. Children can improve their skills, their confidence in their abilities, and their motivation for learning and achieving goals.

Humorous play can expand children’s thinking and enhance their desire to know and to learn. In the frame of the different Emergency Smile activities, children engage in processes of individual and collective learning through play.

The Emergency Smile programme contributes to developing a growth mindset by creating playful activities in which the concept of learning is reflected, expanded, and experienced in new ways.

*“With the clowns they learn many things. They learn to practise something and when it doesn’t work, they learn to try harder and harder in order to improve. Kids and minors also learn that we don’t have to be perfect to have fun.”*

*Aid Worker - Bosnia and Herzegovina Mission*

In the context of the Circus Smile activities, children may experience the connection between focus, efforts, and improvements. They also have the chance to come up with solutions that bring them closer to their goals, activating creativity and problem-solving skills. This makes children and youth less likely to give up. They recover more quickly from failure and accept mistakes as an important part of learning.



## IV. Confidence and new perspectives

Through Emergency Smile, children and youth develop new skills and, as a result, increase their confidence. Especially in the context of the Circus Smile format, children and youth get opportunities to try new challenges, reaching a sense of accomplishment and contributing to a feeling of increased self-esteem.

### New perspectives

In many of the camps where Emergency Smile implements activities, youth report having a lot of free time, not knowing what to do and consequently feeling depressed. Youth experiencing displacement often do not have access to formal education. Also, during the pandemic, they did not have any option of engaging in online learning activities.

*“Here in the camp, you feel that you have no future perspectives.”*

*Community volunteer in Nea Kavala Camp  
- Greece Mainland Mission*

Missions can have an impact on youth by supporting the development of skills and contributing to youth experiencing hope.

*“When I participated in the workshop, I felt happy, I experienced fun, and I learnt new things. That gave me hope.”*

*Young Girl in Nea Kavala Camp  
- Greece Mainland Mission*

Another example of how the programme contributed to new perspectives was found during the vaccination campaigns in the Lesvos and Samos Mission. The clowning activity not only helped the children cope with this difficult situation, but also helped them to give new meaning to the experience, seeing it as an achievement of courage and strength. The clowns also supported the caregivers to experience calm and encouraged the community to applaud the children as they came away from the vaccination room, to show them recognition for their courage. Children changed their posture and general expression from feeling stressed to feeling proud of themselves and strong. The lower status of the clown raised the status of the children during the vaccination, creating a subtle experience of empowerment.



## Self-esteem and empowerment

Achievements are crucial for children and youth experiencing displacement. The Emergency Smile activities have a significant impact in helping children and youth exercise the cycle of achievements in a positive way. For example, in the Bosnia and Herzegovina Mission, a girl cried because she couldn't do an exercise with a prop during Circus Smile, so the clown continued working with her after the workshop.

*"Finally, she made it! She could succeed! And for us, it was a huge moment. It was so important for her to learn that if you persist, if you continue to do something, and you're not giving up, it can work."*

*RED NOSES Clown Artist at Borici Camp – Bosnia and Herzegovina Mission*

Another way in which the programme contributes to increasing confidence is by creating the opportunity for children and youth to perform in front of their peers, families, caregivers, and the whole community. The children and youth feel proud of themselves while showing their skills and what they have learnt. Children take the leading role in co-created shows and presentations. This work allows children and unaccompanied minors to become protagonists and show themselves in a new way. They have an opportunity to be seen for their abilities and achievements, after working hard to learn something new. This has an impact on their self-esteem and a new experience in relationship to their identities.

## V. Connection and community

### Empathetic connections

Many children experiencing displacement deeply long for human contact, warmth, and affection. In the Nea Kavala Camp in Greece, it was observed that as soon as the teams entered the camps, without previously knowing each other, children immediately hugged the members of the team, took their hands and did not want to separate from them in the whole time they are in the facilities. That was also the case in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the children often asked to be hugged and lifted up by the clowns.

In some of the institutions where the programme implemented activities in Ukraine, the clown artists observed that the interactions between aid workers and children often showed less signs of warmth and closeness. Children were surprised by the way the clowns were interacting with them.

Clowns are not authority figures. They create a horizontal, empathetic relationship with children.





*You treat children differently because you try to play and be like them, to experience what they feel! And they can feel that!*

*Community Member observing Circus Smile activities in Nea Kavala Camp – Greece  
Mainland Mission*

There are stories of children who had great difficulties connecting with others but who surprisingly were able to connect with the clowns, making an important change in their ways of interacting.



*“The smallest boy of the group, who turned five years old the day we arrived, was in the beginning like in a bubble – not present with his mind and not talking to us. After two to three days (of our work) he changed; he started to listen and even participated in the show. He was engaged and present and also talked with us each day more and more.”*

*RED NOSES Head of Mission in Lysychansk – Ukraine Mission*

## Saying goodbye

Populations affected by crises often experience major ruptures and losses in their physical and social environments. Having to flee a place and often moving from one place to another generates a high degree of fragmentation in families and communities. Unfortunately, this was the case for many children and youth who have interacted with the Emergency Smile programme in the different missions. In many cases, some family members have had to flee to another location abruptly to protect their lives. These abrupt situations have forced the separation of children from their parents or caregivers. In other very sad cases, children have lost their primary caregivers. Especially in Ukraine, the clowns worked with many children who had no parents, had been abandoned, or were at risk of losing parental care.

The evaluation process reflected on the possible negative outcomes that could emerge if children developed very deep connections with the clowns who would only be there with them for a short time. Across the mission it was observed how children who experienced a lot of challenging situations and losses might feel anxious and out of balance when they experience an ending moment in play and interactions. That is why the teams worked very intentionally to develop special rituals to support children in reconnecting with the community and feeling contained and calm when experiencing moments that might trigger feelings of loss. In the context of the Lesvos and Samos Mission in Greece, the Emergency Smile Team created a “Bye Bye Ritual” to help children develop their emotional regulatory capacities when facing ends.

*“When parading through the camp we gather a lot of kids and adults around us. We walked and sang together, and we created a lot of uplifting energy.*



*The big question was: How do we end this moment?*

*So, I got an idea. At the end we all came really close together and we squatted. I continued playing the ukulele and sang more calmly and at low volume. I sang something and they were repeating it. I included a lot of calm sounds like: “Psssssst & Ohhhhhhh-Ahhhhh-Ehhhhh....” and by doing so, the whole atmosphere became light and calm. At one moment*

*one of the clowns started to wave and say: "Bye, bye!" I then started to sing: "Bye Bye!" & "Bye Bye Wendy!" and the kids would repeat after me.*

*We would do that for each clown and I was the last one to leave. I was singing and playing while walking away from them, waving from time to time. The view was really incredible! They were still just squatting and waving and singing goodbye to me. After we all left they just went their own way.*

*Incredible! It was a really good way to end the show or the parade."*

*RED NOSES Clown Artist – Lesvos and Samos Greece Mission*

In conversation with the RED NOSES artists, a psychologist in the field expressed how important this ritual had been for the children, since in many cases they had to flee abruptly, and they never had the opportunity to say goodbye and process the related emotions.

The Emergency Smile team is reflecting on the need to work more intensively on facilitating the bond between children and caregivers, generating a more focused activity in the children's relationship with their environment. The team should keep collaborating with aid workers to explore and redefine connection.

## Inclusion and breaking stereotypes

Emergency Smile activities can contribute to questioning stereotypical ideas. During the Clown Shows and the Circus Smile format, audiences react to subverted gender expectations and the deconstruction of stereotypes. An interesting example was when female clowns acted as the basis for the acrobatics, literally lifting up other clowns. The reactions and comments from the children and the general public showed how this act allowed the audience to reflect on perceptions of what women can be or do.

The parade is also an optimal format to support the feeling of belonging of children with disabilities and to allow them to be seen and acknowledged as active protagonists in the arts.



## Belonging and collective strength

Emergency Smile activities encourage connections between children, caregivers, and aid workers. The programme thus aims to contribute to reducing isolation.



*“At the beginning sometimes [the children] were not so willing to work together and then I saw them going together, speaking with each other. It worked.”*

*Teacher in the IOM Non-Formal Education Space – Greece Mainland Mission*

An example of the facilitation of the connection between children and youth and their social environments was found in the context of the Juba, South Sudan Mission.



*“We had a special moment after a show for the whole Camp in Juba. We invited the parents, the children and the aid workers to come together and play. It was like a wave. We were singing soft songs, clapping together, and playing with the parachute. And the children were going down the parachute one at a time. It was so beautiful to see them playing together and reconnecting with each other, in a new way, a very soft, playful and present way.”*

*RED NOSES Artistic Director in the Mangateen Camp – South Sudan Mission*

Experiencing reciprocal bonds with peers, caregivers, and other community members helped children cultivate feelings of belonging.

In order to reinforce and create new bonds, children need to solve conflicts between each other. The Clown show in Nea Kavala Camp during the Greece Mainland Mission was inspired by many common conflicts that children experience with peers and explored possible alternatives of action. An analysis of audience reactions in the field indicated that children felt identified by the situations that the clowns were representing. They commented on the actions of the clowns, called out reactions of support (for example, “Yes!”, “No!”, “Do this!”), and discussed the show together.

The Circus Smile Format also acts as a platform for children and youth to exercise ways of working towards common goals. Children have to cooperate to perform exercises together (e.g., when performing acrobatics) and coordinate their efforts to jointly create a final presentation performance.

The programme contributes to the development of shared cultural joyful experiences in the communities visited. This has a positive impact in terms of uplifting those communities and contributing to social cohesion. Celebrating adults and children in the community as active creative agents has been an important contribution of the programme.



*“We enjoyed so much having this time together. We could have a space to enjoy and be together as friends, a space for sharing that we usually don’t have. It reminded me of my life in my homeland, my family.”*

*Mother in the Nea Kavala Camp – Greece Mainland Mission*

The programme has also contributed to creating joyful collective memories in the visited communities all across the missions.

# Conclusion

The developmental evaluation of RED NOSES' Emergency Smile programme has helped to clarify how the programme works to support the emotional and psychosocial well-being of children and youth experiencing crisis and displacement. Five domains of change were identified:


- I. Access to arts and self-expression
- II. Wellbeing
- III. Play and learning new skills
- IV. Confidence and new perspectives
- V. Connection and inclusion

Together, the Emergency Smile International team used these five points as a compass to guide their explorations of how the programme creates impact. Their own experiences, as well as the testimony of aid workers, parents, community members, members of partner institutions and the children and youth themselves, provided specific examples of change in each domain. This report has presented only a small selection of the many stories and anecdotes collected during the evaluation process.

By sharpening their shared understanding of how the Emergency Smile programme can create change, the RED NOSES programming and artistic experts are in a better position to design missions that can respond quickly and intelligently to the unpredictable contexts in which they work. Emergency Smile teams and RED NOSES International more broadly must continue to learn more about how to understand, observe, and evaluate the impact of their work and play.







# ANNEX 1: Emergency Smile Compass

Areas of change for  
children and youth

Natalia Hecht, 2022



# 1. Access to Arts & Self Expression

## Access to the Arts

- Has participation in the programme **increased participants' access to the arts, in the context of crisis and displacement?**
- Prior to engaging in the programme, were participants exposed to similar artistic activities?
- Has **participant's access to (humorous) play increased?**
- To what extent has the programme **contributed to removing or lowering access and engagement barriers?** What types of barriers?
- Have children/youth **enriched their possibilities of actively participating** in art and humorous activities and express themselves through them?
- Have children/youth been **inspired to become co-creators** of the joyful moments more than only observers?

## Self Expression

- Were the children/youth **presented with opportunities to express themselves?**
- Have their **voices been heard?**
- Did they have **opportunities to express their perspectives** through the art and clowning?

# 2. Wellbeing

## Body Awareness, Energy & Balance

- Did children/youth have the **opportunity to connect with their bodies/ become aware of sensations/ relax/ breath/ feel their own inner space?** (Humour starts with the body)
- How did the children/youth appear in their **body posture, muscle tension or tone of the body?**
- How did they move across the session?
- How did their **movement and engagement response change** across the activities? Before the activity, at the beginning, during the activity, after the activity?
- Were the activities intentionally designed to foster **a positive balance of individual and group energy levels?**
- Did children or youth appear to feel overwhelmed-overstimulated- or disengaged? What **approaches (artistic - humorous - interpersonal) were employed to address and alleviate** those feelings?

- What strategies were implemented to **engage children with different paces and energy levels**?
- Were there opportunities to **express unresolved energy** in a contained way and to transform it into focused energy?
- Have the activities **improved the children/youth's environment**? How?

## Expressing Emotions (Focus on JOY)

- Did children/youth **have fun and experience joy**? Was it funny for them?
- Were they moved? How? Why? Which **emotions were elicited** during the different activities?
- Did the children/youth's **mood appear to change during the artistic exchange**?
- Were the children/youth's **negative moods reduced**?
- Did they **learn something new about a range of human emotions**? How to recognise them, express them, observe them?
- Did the clowning interactions **elicited feelings of transcendence, feelings of being uplifted? Levity, feeling light, feeling the magic**?
- Were there **opportunities for relieving obstructive emotions** (including sadness, anger, fear of loss, shame, others)?


## Being Present and Stress Reduction

- Could the children/youth **relax, decompress, feel more calmed** through their participation in the activities?
- Were children/youth presented with **opportunities to connect with the present moment/with the here and now**?
- Were they **able to laugh?/or cry**? How did they appear to feel after? (more relaxed, calm, engaged, enthusiastic)

# 3. Play & Learning New Skills

## Play, Curiosity, Imagination, Creativity

- Were the children/youth provided with **opportunities to explore different forms of play** (humorous play, individual play, free play, sensorial play, collective play, among others)?
- Did children/youth have **opportunities for repeated play involvement (the same activity) as well as engagement in a wide range of play** (whole body as well as sit down)?

- 
- Have the activities **activated their imagination** inspiring them to express or create images?
  - How was **imaginary** used in the session?
  - Did clowning give them multiple **opportunities to be creative**? In which ways?
  - Did the children/youth have **opportunities to explore their creative problem-solving skills**?
  - Did the children/youth have **opportunities to make new connections**, exploring, and transforming the world in ways that were new and brought new meanings?

## Ability to experience and use Humour

- Were the children/youth presented with **opportunities to experience humour** and understand its mechanisms?
- Have they **learnt to use humour in a constructive way**? to break down barriers? to challenge stereotypes? Have the humour/playful interactions encouraged them to reflect on stereotypical expectations?

## Learning New Skills

- Have children/youth **learnt new skills** that they will be able to apply in the future?
- Have the children/ youth been able to **experience different forms of communication and enjoyed linguistic diversity** through their participation in the project?
- Have the children/youth been given **opportunities to pursue a common goal** to explore teamwork?

# 4. Confidence & New Perspectives

## New ways of seeing

- Did the children/youth experience **new ways of seeing realities**?
- Have the children/youth received **inspirations on how to deal with obstacles in a new, alternative, humorous way**?
- Were the children/youth inspired on **how to develop a positive/constructive/resilient view on adversity** and inspired on how to transform obstacles or difficult situations?
- Were the children/youth **able to accept and learn to laugh about weaknesses, mistakes, abilities that are not fully developed yet, things that don't work, failures, difficult things**?

- Were the children/youth **empowered by emphasizing the strengths that stem from adversity**?

## Self Esteem & Empowerment

- Did the session provide opportunities for the children to **build their self-esteem**? How?
- Were **positive behaviors and accomplishments (no matter the size), acknowledged** and celebrated?
- Were the children able to **experience a sense of achievement** through the activities?
- Were they **protagonists** of the activities?
- Did they get opportunities to **feel more in control of the situations and more confident to act**?


## 5. Connection & Community

### Connection

- Did the children/youth **experience personalized human connection**, including eye contact? Were they addressed as individuals by their names (Personalising)?
- Was the **engagement during play reciprocal**, founded on **mutual proposal, involvement and co-creation**?
- Were there ample **opportunities for initiating and responding** to verbal, embodied, emotive, and creative interactions?
- Were the children/youth given **opportunities to connect with themselves, their peers, aid workers, caregivers, other community members** and further develop their relationships?
- Did the activities contribute to **fostering connections that strengthened their bonds**? Did they deepen their understanding of each other? Was this a shared first-time experience for them?
- Did participants learn something new from each other or **discover aspects of themselves in a new light**?

### Inclusion / Challenging Stereotypes

- Were the clown artists **listening** to the children/youth? Were they available for them? Were they present, and connected with the moment and the current needs of the children/youth?
- In what ways have the various activities within the project **ensure inclusivity for underrepresented groups**, and how have these activities actively addressed potential barriers to participation?

- 
- Were possible barriers and strategies for participation analyzed together with the aid workers and caregivers? Which **strategies and enablers** have been implemented?
  - Were the children/ youth offered with **diverse ways for expressing themselves and communicating to circumvent the inevitable language barriers**?
  - Has the programme fostered cultural diversity? Have activities **deconstructed stereotypical ideas of culture**?
  - Did the **under-represented groups feel more seen, heard and visible** in their contexts as a result of participating in the programme?
  - Have the clowning interactions contributed in **challenging stereotypes**?
  - Has the programme and its activities **contributed in reducing the isolation of children/youth**? How?
  - Has the programme and its activities contributed in **reducing social inequalities** by supporting access of the less advantaged and/or potential participants?
  - Were the **participants represented** in the topics, in the planning, in the creative process, in the curation, in the documentation, in the dissemination of the artwork? Were there **opportunities for self-representation**?
  - Were the **living realities, fates and personal stories** of the programme's participants **more visible for a larger public** at the end of the project?

## Sense of Belonging and Community/ Collective Strength

- By the conclusion of the mission, did the children/youth feel a **heightened sense of connection to each other, aid workers, clowns, and their communities**?
- How did the activities contribute to **building a sense of community among the children/youth and their immediate surroundings**?
- Were there observable changes in the dynamics of interaction and connection within the **broader community** as a result of the activities?
- Did the mission foster **a lasting impact on community relationships and connections** beyond the immediate context of the activities?

ANNEX 2:  
RED NOSES  
Framework of  
Change



# RED NOSES



## Framework of change

- › Higher emotional well-being
- › Greater social inclusion
- › More supportive environments

- › More positive memories
- › Improved self-image
- › Strengthened ability to cope with difficulties

### Long-term impact

- › Increased use of humour and art
- › More empathetic interactions
- › More efficiency and success in work

### Institutional impact

- › Greater access to humour and art
- › Greater access to empathetic interactions

- › Greater support for access to humour and art
- › Greater support for empathetic interactions

### Systemic impact

- › Improved attention and energy
- › More empathetic interactions
- › More access to humorous play
- › More pleasurable emotions
- › Less painful emotions

- › Focus switched to humorous play
- › Individual attention received
- › Unique talents celebrated

### Immediate impact

Clowns encounter people in need of joy through artistic formats

- › Improved cooperation with people in need
- › Improved cooperation with clowns
- › Improved cooperation with colleagues
- › More pleasurable emotions
- › Less painful emotions

Clowns influence care providers through training and partnerships

- › Greater understanding of the positive impact of humour and art on people in need

RED NOSES transforms systems through advocacy and research

*„People in need of joy are better able to reconnect to themselves, each other and the beauty of all human emotions.“*

RED NOSES  
NURTURES THE  
ART OF  
CLOWNING



Lead Evaluator: Natalia Hecht

Authors: Natalia Hecht, Denise Viktoria Hebesberger, Maggie Roessler, Silvia De Faveri, Chiara Manavella

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RED NOSES is an artistic organisation bringing humour and laughter to people in need of joy.

For 25 years, RED NOSES has been making a difference for patients, families and medical staff in countless health and care facilities in Europe and beyond.

RED NOSES International (RNI) works to support the empowerment of audiences facing significant vulnerabilities, such as children in hospitals, older citizens in care settings, patients in rehabilitation centres, youth with mental and multiple disabilities, crisis affected populations.

The figure of the clown is extremely human and touches people deeply by opening up possibilities of relief and hope in times when it is more difficult/challenging to experience positive emotions.

RNI is based in Vienna, Austria, and is the headquarters for the largest clown doctor group in the world.

**RED NOSES International**

Wattgasse 48, A-1170 Vienna

T: +43 1 318 03 13-66 | F: +43 1 318 03 13-20

E: [smile@rednoses.org](mailto:smile@rednoses.org) | W: [www.rednoses.org](http://www.rednoses.org)

