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Content

RED NOSES is the largest healthcare clowning organisation in the world. Founded in Austria in 1994, RED NOSES is a non-profit foundation on a mission to share the power of laughter through the art of clowning.

Today, RED NOSES organisations operate in Austria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Jordan, Lithuania, Palestine, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Across these numerous locations, RED NOSES healthcare clowns work together with vulnerable audiences such as children in hospitals, older adults living in care homes and dementia units and people in rehabilitation centres.

In 2013, RED NOSES International developed a Humanitarian Response Programme called

Emergency Smile. This Programme is a holistic intervention which aims to promote emotional wellbeing, greater social inclusion, and address the psychosocial needs of vulnerable people in crisis settings. Emergency Smile allows RED NOSES to go beyond the borders of its eleven organisations by sending specially trained healthcare clowns to areas of crisis, in cooperation with international and local aid organisations already working on the ground.

Art and humour have the potential to support the development of compassionate, person-centred care for all, and RED NOSES is on a mission to share the restorative power of laughter with those who need it most.

The power of art and humour in a turbulent world

As multiple crises continue to unfold throughout the world, it is evident that humour, joy and human connection are needed now more than ever. The turmoil of recent years has triggered a global mental health crisis. Evidence suggests that art and humour are vital tools when it comes to strengthening human resilience in the face of stress and trauma.

Art can—and should—exist in places of crisis and hardship. It should be present in the most unexpected areas of our lives. Art goes beyond medical treatment and survival. It makes us human.

For over 30 years, RED NOSES has been working in the healthcare sector with professionally trained artists in Europe and beyond. Thanks to more than 560 hours of rigorous training and over 100 hospital visits throughout several years of preparation, RED NOSES artists develop a vast range of skills—such as music, performance, acrobatics and improvisation—as well as specific tools for working in delicate environments like the healthcare sector.

At the same time, RED NOSES collaborates closely with institutions and partner organisations to co-create interventions that have a positive impact on the wellbeing of the people we encounter. Once people's basic needs are met through the support of aid organisations on the ground, our Emergency Smile Programme provides psychosocial support to those deeply affected by crisis and fosters moments of connection and happiness.

As the largest healthcare clown organisation in the world, RED NOSES also strives to be a reliable partner in the humanitarian aid sector. We will continue working tirelessly to improve the mental and emotional wellbeing of people living in crisis settings—wherever we are needed.

Natalie Porias
RED NOSES International CEO





More than 500 RED NOSES healthcare clown visits reach hundreds of children in hospitals, coma units and rehabilitation wards every day.

Healthcare clowns and the art of clowning

RED NOSES programmes focus on the scientifically proven health benefits of art and humour as complementary measures in healthcare interventions. They also support the conviction that every child has a fundamental right to leisure and play, as stated in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

Healthcare clowns contribute to the empowerment and mental health improvement of vulnerable groups. They are professionally trained to support, encourage and connect with people by recognising their needs, acknowledging their presence and engaging with them on an individual level.

Through the safe space created by playful and emotionally honest encounters with clowns, children and adults often feel empowered and safe to express difficult or unpleasant emotions. Clowning also encourages flexibility and creative problem-solving. People from all backgrounds can relate to and connect with the clown—a light-hearted and emotional character who constantly faces challenges of all kinds. The clown's ability to turn failures into personal victories and to communicate through a simple smile are among their most valuable gifts.

One of the main characteristics of the art of clowning—and of artistic interventions in general—is its capacity to bypass linguistic, cultural and cognitive barriers.

In humanitarian contexts, where words cannot fully capture the complexities and realities of conflict and displacement, the arts offer alternative means of expression. Art allows children to explore memories and emotions in a safe space—one where they can move freely and feel in control, giving them a sense of agency and empowerment.

According to multiple researches, artistic interventions have been shown not only to mitigate the post-traumatic stress of children experiencing displacement, but also to encourage post-traumatic growth by improving self-worth, increasing resilience and promoting group bonding.

If you would like to learn more about the work of RED NOSES and our programmes, please visit www.rednoses.org.



Active since
2013



Countries of operation:
18+



Team members:
35+



Number of missions:
Over 70



Number of partners:
Over 50

Emergency
Smile
at a glance

Where we have been



1. Belarus
2. Bosnia
3. Bulgaria
4. Cameroon
5. Georgia
6. Greece
7. Italy
8. Kirgizstan
9. Kosovo
10. Moldova
11. Morocco
12. Mozambique
13. Serbia
14. Sierra Leone
15. South Sudan
16. Türkiye
17. Ukraine
18. Egypt

Over the years, RED NOSES has worked in over eighteen countries, improving the mental health and psychosocial wellbeing of countless individuals.

On every mission, the Emergency Smile team has the privilege of working alongside people from diverse cultures and backgrounds.



How we work

In a typical Emergency Smile mission, three to four healthcare clowns and one Head of Mission connect with various audiences through a variety of formats such as workshops, parades and shows. The first part of the mission is dedicated to preparation, during which the mission team rehearses, reflects and gets to know each other on a deep level. Both the number of team members and the length of the mission can vary according to the needs of the people they will be supporting and the specific context.

Circus Smile Workshops

Circus Smile is a circus workshop for children that takes place over several consecutive days. The workshop usually concludes with a final show attended by caregivers and aid workers, where children take the lead. By working with the clown artists, the children learn various circus skills such as juggling, acrobatics, magic tricks, dancing and much more.

By working with small groups, the artists are able to create special connections with each child participating in the workshop. Consequently, the children

shift their focus from a difficult situation to learning something new. In a context where so little is within their control, they discover what it feels like to direct their own learning and creativity—sparking agency, confidence and hope.

Furthermore, thanks to the involvement of aid workers and, where possible, family members, relationships between all participants are improved—leaving behind much more than just a newly learnt skill.



If your organisation works with an audience we have not reached yet, or if you're running activities where clowning could add value, let us know! We would love to explore ways our clown artists can collaborate with you.

Co-creation potential!



Shows

Every mission is unique. Therefore, each team embarking on a new mission creates a special show tailored to the specific needs of the group they will encounter. The uniqueness of the shows also stems from the different characters of the clowns and the relationships the artists build throughout the mission. The clown's character constantly faces personal challenges and failures, making them relatable to almost everyone. Through the show, the audience gets to meet the clown artists and discover some of the props and skills they may later encounter during the Circus Smile Workshops.

In a playful way, our artists introduce topics that can be included in further mental health and psychosocial support activities, either run by us or by other organisations active in the field. The show creates a space for joy and laughter and helps the audience reconnect with their emotions and with each other.

The clowns, like all human beings, do their best to do everything perfectly. However, like everyone else, they sometimes fail, and in the show they give us the opportunity to laugh at failure while still striving to get things right. The higher the aim for perfection, the greater the fall—and the funnier it becomes.

Musical Parades

Clowns rarely go unnoticed, but with the addition of music, they become a magnet of joy for everyone in their path. During Musical Parades, the team plays music on the move, gathering people as they go. Every parade looks different depending on the situation. Parades can be very short, with the sole intention of gathering people for a clown show. Alternatively, they can cover a long distance, with small performances taking place along the way.

They also visit people in a variety of settings, adapting their activities to ensure that individuals with disabilities, as well as infants and older people with reduced mobility, can take part. This approach reflects our commitment to reaching everyone and enables intimate and personalised interactions with the artists.

The music, laughter and voices of everyone singing along spread happiness to every corner, changing the whole atmosphere.

Humour Relief Workshops

Healthcare clowns are artists who have been professionally trained to work in sensitive environments. Clown artists can play an important role in helping aid workers manage stress and process the challenging situations they may face daily.

The Humour Relief Workshop is designed for aid workers, medical staff and volunteers working in humanitarian contexts. Humour Relief Workshops can also be organised for other adult groups such as parents, women or unaccompanied men.

Participants are provided with knowledge on how humour can create powerful emotional connections between people, enhance and stimulate social interactions and reduce stress and anxiety, thereby fostering a better professional environment. The workshop also focuses on using humour as a tool to improve working relationships.

Before each workshop, a questionnaire is shared so the artists can adapt the exercises to the specific needs of the participants. By the end of the workshop, participants should have learned new coping strategies for stress and feel energised and more connected to their fellow team members.

Over the years, RED NOSES has provided more than 100 Humour Relief Workshops to the vast majority of local and international organisations it has worked with, including, among others, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the International Red Cross and Red Crescent (IFRC), Light for the World, Save the Children and UNHCR.

Artistic interventions in healthcare context

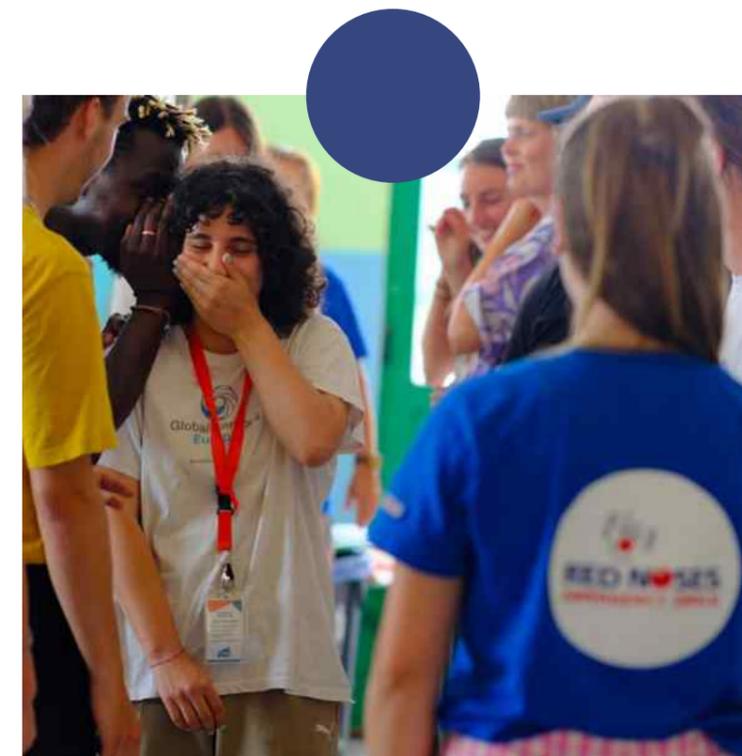
The Emergency Smile team is composed of approximately 35 healthcare clowns from various international locations. These artists work nationally with children in hospitals during complex medical inter-

ventions, as well as in rehabilitation centres and cancer wards.

In the context of Emergency Smile missions, RED NOSES professional clowns have had the opportunity to support different humanitarian organisations during medical interventions. For example, RED NOSES has accompanied Doctors Without Borders (MSF) during their vaccination campaigns and in their clinics, as well as other healthcare workers in medical facilities at reception centres.

Community celebration

Clowning can contribute to collective wellbeing across the community. Therefore, when planning our work, we aim to include as many members of the community as possible, whether through specific workshops or as audience members at the shows. The Emergency Smile team has also been involved in a number of community celebrations. Moments like these offer a rare opportunity for community celebration in humanitarian contexts. Being able to share joy together amid hardship is deeply powerful and plays an essential role in supporting the emotional wellbeing of the whole community. It is always an honour for our team to be part of them.





Who we reach

Children and youth

Children and young people living in emergency contexts face disrupted routines, uncertainty and limited opportunities to play or express themselves. RED NOSES healthcare clowns create a safe artistic space where they can reconnect with their emotions and actively engage in creative activities.

Among the groups reached by Emergency Smile missions are **unaccompanied minors**, defined by UNHCR as children under eighteen who are separated from both parents or from their previous legal or primary caregiver. Frequently navigating complex asylum procedures, language barriers and continual resettlement, they are a particularly vulnerable group who require sensitive, tailored psychosocial support. Through creative workshops

and interactive circus skills, clown artists offer these young people moments of human connection and a sense of agency in a context where so much is outside their control.

Emergency Smile missions also work with **children with disabilities**, who often face additional barriers to participation in humanitarian settings. RED NOSES healthcare clowns are trained to work according to the specific needs of each child, ensuring that every activity is accessible, inclusive and adapted to support varied communication styles, sensory needs or mobility challenges. The focus is on enabling all children to take part confidently and safely, fostering an environment where children can explore, express themselves and fully participate in shared creative moments.

Adults and communities

Crises affect entire communities, placing adults under immense strain as they navigate disrupted livelihoods, insecurity and the responsibility of caring for family members.

Emergency Smile missions create uplifting shared moments that allow people of all ages to reconnect and experience a renewed sense of community. These encounters help build social cohesion and strengthen supportive networks.

Through humour and artistic expression, the missions foster inclusive spaces where collective celebration can flourish, even in challenging environments.

Humanitarian aid workers

Humanitarian professionals face significant psychological pressure as they support highly vulnerable populations in rapidly changing, high-stress environments. Long working hours, exposure to traumatic stories and limited resources can lead to emotional exhaustion and reduced wellbeing. Emergency Smile adopts a holistic approach that also addresses the needs of these frontline workers. Through tailored workshops, RED NOSES clown artists share practical tools on the use of humour, mindful communication and creative engagement. These sessions provide aid workers with opportunities to decompress, strengthen team dynamics and discover new ways to connect with the people they work with.

Work in the field

Lesvos: building trust through continuity and care

Emergency Smile has been active on Lesvos since 2018, originally working inside Moria camp before its destruction by fire in 2020. In the years since, the team has continued supporting displaced communities on the island, adapting to changing access conditions. Since October 2022, activities have centred around the Paréa Community Centre—an inclusive space that welcomes both camp residents and other displaced people living on Lesvos.

This shift has enabled deeper, more consistent engagement with the local community. Through regular visits, the Emergency Smile team has become a trusted presence. Local organisations now actively collaborate with the team, and children and families benefit from the ongoing support. As Head of Mission Craig Russell notes, *'When we are in the same place repeatedly, we can build a stronger connection with the people... We get to know the context and the partners better. All this knowledge helps our work.'*

The team has worked extensively with unaccompanied minors (UAMs), aged seven to eighteen—one of the most vulnerable groups. These children often face immense psychological strain, including symp-

toms of depression, substance use and the trauma of experiencing displacement without parental care. Their sense of identity and safety is further challenged by repeated uprooting and unstable living conditions.

The clowns serve as positive role models, helping children feel seen, safe and empowered. Through play and skill-building, they gain confidence and can ultimately be children again. Aid workers are also invited to participate in sessions, strengthening bonds with the children and fostering a more supportive environment.

Türkiye: supporting communities after the earthquake

In February 2023, a powerful earthquake struck near the Türkiye-Syria border, leaving behind widespread destruction and immense emotional trauma. Thousands of families were displaced, having lost their homes, loved ones and sense of security. In response to this humanitarian crisis, Emergency Smile launched an emergency response mission in Türkiye, followed by multiple regular missions over the following years. These visits allowed the teams to reach more isolated communities, which have limited access to other forms of psychosocial support.

The team operated in Hatay, one of the most heavily impacted areas. Even more than two years after the disaster, visible destruction and hazardous levels of dust and debris persist, especially affecting those with respiratory vulnerabilities. Despite these ongoing challenges, our missions in Türkiye focus on bringing relief and emotional recovery to children, youth and families through artistic and playful interactions.

Bulgaria: reaching displaced children on the EU's eastern frontier

Bulgaria has become a critical point of arrival for displaced people from the Middle East, Africa and Ukraine. As a country on the external border of the European Union, it faces complex migration challenges. In recent years, the number of unaccompanied minors has increased significantly, with many children as young as eight navigating their new reality alone.

At the beginning of 2025 Emergency Smile conducted a scouting mission in Bulgaria, beginning in Sofia at the Voenna Rampa Registration and Reception Centre (RRC), home to twenty unaccompanied minors. Working in partnership with IOM, the team engaged children in the Safe Zone through artistic activities designed to build trust. The feedback was incredibly positive—staff noted they had never seen the children smile so much.

The mission continued to Harmanli, near the Turkish border, where Bulgaria's largest reception centre is located. Together with Medical Volunteers International, the team led workshops and shows that inspired connection and emotional expression among children of diverse backgrounds. In the Safe Zone, where over sixty unaccompanied minors live, the workshops encouraged peer interaction and strengthened community spirit.

The team also visited displaced families in Plovdiv, Varna and Burgas to reach more children through partners like Open Doors, the Council for Refugee Women, and the Bulgarian Red Cross. The mission had a visible impact—children became more engaged and emotionally open, and some even surprised their parents with newfound communication and confidence.



Lesvos, Paréa Community Centre

'The amount of connection you created will feed me for the rest of the year. When I saw you work with the kids, I felt hope for their future.'
Officer from Terre des Hommes



Türkiye, Hatay



Bulgaria

'The Sunday that you came to us, we were all happy. The children enjoyed it, interacted with you and learned so many tricks! We thank you for the pleasant day you gave on Sunday to the unaccompanied minors, and to all of us! Happiness, hope and optimism filled our hearts again! Thanks for everything!'

María, social worker from the Iliaktida's unaccompanied minors house in Lesvos, Greece.

Our impact



'The RED NOSES artists have brought so much joy and laughter into the camp the past seven weeks. During Circus Smile I saw kids gain confidence and feel empowered through the skills they were learning. I got to see kids that have been robbed of their childhood have a chance to just be kids again. They could let go of their worries and fears and just play. The clowns have made a lasting impact on the children of Mavrovouni Camp'.

Laura Rensberger, Head of Education, Eurorelief, Lesvos, Greece

'I have never seen the kids laughing so much and being that happy and engaged. In a humanitarian context, it is easy to forget that this is as important as providing for material needs, or even more important. Giving the children the chance of being children again is something they all need and deserve'.

Silvia Liberi, Warehouse and Distribution Coordinator at Refugees 4 Refugees, Lesvos, Greece

Research and evaluation



RED NOSES embraces the value of learning and evaluation as a pathway to achieving better results and greater impact. Our evaluation strategy prioritises the immediate integration of insights and the practical use of results. We implement various participatory developmental evaluation processes to continuously support the evolution of our programmes—informing decision-makers, facilitating both individual and collective reflection, identifying areas for improvement and building capacity. This results in a highly professional, excellence-oriented approach.

Emergency Smile is an ever-evolving programme, driven by our commitment to deepening and sustaining long-term impact.

Ongoing assessment offers us the opportunity to understand the outcomes of our interventions in crisis contexts, which are often complex, fluid and sensitive environments.

The RED NOSES Research and Evaluation Department, in collaboration with programme leaders, evaluates every aspect of the work undertaken—from how partnerships are formed, to how interactions with children are facilitated and how processes are structured. Each team member actively contributes to the evaluation process, and it is our goal to further engage participants in this process in the future.

The Emergency Smile Programme is rooted in continuous learning and evidence-based evaluation, all with the overarching aim of improving the well-being of children, their support networks and the communities in which they live.

Emergency Smile Research Project

In Lesvos, Greece, RED NOSES is implementing a dedicated research project alongside the Emergency Smile Programme to deepen understanding of the impact of artistic interventions on people with lived experience of forced migration and on field workers operating in protracted displacement contexts. Implemented over three years (2025–2027), the project is developed in collaboration with the WHO Office for Europe and the Jameel Arts and Health Lab, and is co-funded by Fondation Alta Mane. The project addresses gaps in existing research on the impact of artistic activities in migration settings. Its findings will inform advocacy efforts and support the mainstreaming of artistic interventions for displaced individuals and aid workers working in highly stressful environments.



Creating safe spaces:

The RED NOSES Safeguarding Policy

At RED NOSES, creating and maintaining safe, nurturing environments for children and vulnerable adults is our top priority. We do this by ensuring that all participants in our programmes experience the highest quality of professional clowning, wherever we work.

Children and vulnerable adults in healthcare settings, social institutions or crisis-affected areas face particular risks and are more likely to become victims of violence, abuse or neglect. As an organisation working closely with these groups, RED NOSES is committed to raising awareness of the importance of protecting children and vulnerable adults from harm.

We recognise the fundamental importance of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, ensuring they are shielded from maltreatment or any form of violence that could compromise their health or development. Both within our organisation and in our partnerships, we maintain a zero-tolerance policy towards abuse, exploitation, neglect or any violation of an individual's privacy and rights.

RED NOSES has developed an unwavering safeguarding policy that must be followed by all our staff, international teams and external partners. These guidelines, influenced by two of RED NOSES' seven core values: respect and accountability, aim to minimise the risk of violence and abuse within our organisation's work. To enforce this policy, and personally take care of any question or complaint,

we have a designated Safeguarding Officer who can be reached by phone, email or through our website: www.rednoses.org/what-we-do/safeguarding

RED NOSES is also a member of the Keeping Children Safe (KCS) network. We see this as a valuable platform for learning, exchanging knowledge and staying connected on safeguarding mechanisms. It enables us to remain informed about the latest trends and research, helping us to better protect children, vulnerable individuals and our staff. At RED NOSES, the voices of children and vulnerable adults—regardless of their origin, gender or religion—are always considered when developing measures that affect them. This ensures their protection, dignity, and holistic development remain at the forefront of our work.



Imprint

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RED NOSES
In Laughter there is Hope

RED NOSES is an artistic organisation bringing humour and laughter to people in need of joy. For over 30 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 supports vulnerable audiences, such as children in hospitals, people in carecentres, patients in rehabilitation centres, youth with mental and physical disabilities, displaced individuals and people in crisis affected communities.

The figure of the clown is extremely human and touches individuals deeply by bringing them relief and hope.

RED NOSES International is based in Vienna, Austria, and is the headquarters for the largest healthcare clowning organisation in the world.

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