



# CHILD PLAY-BASED ASSESSMENT TOOL

**Bulgaria Red Cross**

**CASE STUDY**





Photo description: Child participating in Bulgaria Red Cross pilot project  
Photo credit: Bulgaria Red Cross

## Background

Sesame Workshop and IFRC have formed a strategic partnership to create content and programs focused on the safety, early education, and mental health of children aged 4-8 years.

Bulgarian Red Cross Youth tested the play-based assessment as part of a global pilot in October 2024.

Financial and technical support was provided from the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) as part of PGI programming with displaced people from Ukraine now living in Bulgaria.

## Who was Supported and How

The Bulgarian Red Cross Youth piloted the play-based assessment activities with 50 children from Plovdiv kindergarten and 10 of their caregivers. In order to prepare for the pilot implementation a dedicated training around how to apply the tool in kindergarten settings was organized. A total of 44 youth Red Cross volunteers took part in this training.

After the completion of the training, the activities were implemented with over 50 children; the results were recorded for a total of 36 children.



Photo description: Child participating in Bulgaria Red Cross pilot project  
Photo credit: Bulgaria Red Cross

## Successes

There were a number of successes that resulted from the pilot. In particular:

- Kindergarten teachers were well organized for the pilot activities and were involved in the planning. For example, they prepared print-out material provided by Sesame Workshop and decorated with Sesame Street themes the rooms where the piloting would occur. The teachers appreciated the activities and the tool, as well as the youth volunteers participation and the youth-led workshop.
- Children enjoyed the warm-up games as well as the feelings check-in exercise. The volunteers created a safe space that allowed children to be open and to freely express both positive and negative emotions.

## Challenges and Difficulties

In addition to successes, the project also experienced some challenges. Key challenges included:

- The parents questionnaire was filled by 10 caregivers. Key observations include:
  - caregivers preferred not to answer some of the questions, such as around their income/resources.
  - some questions were not considered very relevant to Bulgarian context; for instance, access to clean drinking water, heating, transportation, mobile phone, internet.
  - the lower number of caregivers participating in the survey may have been due to their reluctance to reveal information, also due to caregivers being busy or because they were not familiar/used to participating in such activities.
- In terms of activities with children, the animal dance game, was mostly understood by the children, however, children quickly lost interest in the activity.

## Lessons Learned

The piloting built on existing capacities and experience working with young children from within the Bulgaria Red Cross. As such, the piloting was more easily built into existing areas of work.

In addition, for data collection the tools and training that was provided for the youth volunteers allowed for more effective data collection and management.

Youth volunteers shared that having specialized training and preparation support is essential when implementing new and innovative tools.

In terms of specific tools:

- Warm-up games as well as the Feelings Check-in exercise were very well prepared and explained in the toolkit. These activities were observed as the most interesting for the children;
- The purpose of the Animal Dance was not entirely clear for the children and this resulted in some of them quickly losing interest; and
- The questions in the parents' questionnaire should be adapted to the local context.



# CHILD PLAY-BASED ASSESSMENT TOOL

Lithuania Red Cross

CASE STUDY





Photo description: Children participating in pilot project  
Photo credit: Lithuania Red Cross

## Background

Sesame Workshop and IFRC have formed a strategic partnership to create content and programs focused on the safety, early education, and mental health of children ages 4-8 years.

Recognizing gaps in understanding and assessing young children's mental health, they have developed a play-based assessment tool for use in humanitarian and non-humanitarian situations.

Lithuanian Red Cross (LRC), tested the Play Based Assessment (PBA) as part of a global pilot between June-July 2024.

Financial and technical support was provided from the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) as part of programming with displaced people from Ukraine now living in Lithuania.

## Who was Supported and How

The team who conducted the PBA was comprised of a psychologist working with Ukrainian children and families, LRC PGI focal point, and a LRC Kaunas branch specialist working with Ukrainian families. In other words, they were well capacitated and skilled to use this tool.

The tool was used with Ukrainian refugee children (4-8 years old) and their caregivers living in the Kaunas region of Lithuania. The participants in the assessment were mixed groups of males and females.

The first group of child participants were from a LRC summer camp led by the Kaunas branch.

Parents/caregivers were informed about the assessment prior to the summer camp, and they had to provide permission for their children to participate in the PBA or not.

The second group of children was organized through an open registration. Registration was sent out through media channels and shared in community meetings at the Red Cross branch office.

Premises for the PBA were agreed based on accessibility for children and parents. The premises of the Kaunas branch were used for the interviews and the assessment.

Consents and assents were collected for the PBA, interviews, and photos from the assessment.

Both adults and children had a possibility to disagree to participate.

Parents/ caregivers had the opportunity to stay in the room and observe their children or wait in another room.

## Successes

- 26 children participated and over 20 adult parents / caregivers.
- The assessment was seamlessly merged with existing LRC activities with children. Specifically, a summer camp for children.
- The Kauna branch has significant experience on programming with children. The preexisting relationships with the community allowed for easier participation of children and adults into the pilot.
- A psychologist led the assessment. This provided opportunities for parents to understand greater insights about their children. In fact, a number of the participating parents arranged for follow-up sessions with the psychologist in order to strengthen aspects they want to improve within their families.

## Challenges and Difficulties

- In the experience and understanding of LRC, it is common for 4-year-olds to play for 40 - 50 minutes before losing concentration, whereas older children can play for a little longer. The pilot, however, lasted more than 60 minutes, which made it difficult for some children to concentrate.
- It was a challenge for children to draw a puppet in 15 minutes, some kept trying again and again, so they were very worried about not keeping up with the others who drew faster than them.
- For some children the dance exercise with animals was not clear. In particular, because the dance was repeated many times without visual material to help them memorize the dances, children became tired. They did not understand why they needed to learn to do certain actions in a more reversed way than other animals, e.g. a chicken needs to turn into another animal.

## Lessons Learned

- Because of children's cognitive development, it can be harder for young children to orient themselves in time, their bodies can react in a certain way to the passage of time - they want to eat, sleep, etc. at certain times of the day. It is therefore important that parents help ensure child participants are well rested and have eaten before joining into the assessment.

- Naming emotions before and after the dance activity is very useful and engaging for all children. Children learn to express emotions about themselves, thus fulfilling their needs for communication, affection and attachment.
- The first pilot group had many child participants, as such, it was challenging to document the results. It is important to keep the size of the group not too large.
- It is essential to remind parents that they have an opportunity to observe but they should avoid commenting on their children's process.





# CHILD PLAY-BASED ASSESSMENT TOOL

**Nepal Red Cross**

**CASE STUDY**





Photo description: Volunteer facilitating activity with children as part of pilot project  
Photo credit: Nepal Red Cross

## Background

Sesame Workshop and IFRC have formed a strategic partnership to create content and programs focused on the safety, early education, and mental health of children aged 4-8 years.

Recognizing gaps in understanding and assessing young children's mental health, they have developed a play-based assessment tool for use in humanitarian and non-humanitarian situations. Thus, Nepal Red Cross Society (NRCS), tested the assessment tool, between May-June 2024, with the financial and technical support from the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) in the emergency context of remote three districts which were affected by the Karnali Earthquake.

The team who conducted this play-based assessment (PBA) was comprised of public health professionals and those who had previous experience working with children in emergencies. In other words, they were well capacitated and skilled to use this tool.

## Who was Supported and How

The tool was used with 12 children in disaster affected districts of the Karnali earthquake. The participants in the assessment were a mixed group of males and females and represented diverse backgrounds. Moreover, 12 caregivers/parents were also interviewed as part of the assessment.

The following approaches were applied during the play-based assessment:

1. All the parents/caregivers were informed at least one day prior to seek their permission to have their children participate.
2. Premises for the assessment were agreed based on accessibility for children and parents / caregivers. The premises were a Nepal Red Cross District Chapter, a school and a community center.

3. Consents and assents were collected for the play-based assessment, interviews, and for taking and using photos.

## Successes

- The PBA was considered a successful, child-friendly tool to use with children ages 4-8 years in each of the three districts where piloting occurred.
- A key reason for the piloting success was the teamwork approach applied by the NRC.
- The partnership between NRC and the Canadian Red Cross in Nepal added value for its successful implementation through helping to facilitate the process, providing support, and working in a unified way.
- A key role in the PBA is the notetaker / enumerators. These volunteers need to be keen observers to provide accurate scores. In addition, the facilitator needs to have patience to help children clearly understand the instructions.
- A few songs at the start of the PBA were replaced with local songs from the region. This made children more comfortable to engage in the PBA.

## Challenges and Difficulties

- The PBA was easily understandable to the enumerators who were assessing the children and interviewing the caregivers/parents.
- Children participating in PBA enjoyed the assessment process. However, contextualization is necessary for adoption of the tool in different settings. Factors around geographic context, local culture, and socio-economic status of families should all be considered, etc. As a concrete example, NRC replaced the songs in the PBA with local songs and this made children more comfortable.
- The time given to draw puppets (15 minutes) in section two of the PBA was a challenge for children. It would be better to have at least 20 minutes.
- In section 5 of the PBA, it would help children engage more if the animals used reflect local animals rather than ones they are less familiar with.

## Lessons Learned

- The different geographical settings (urban / rural) in Nepal creates discrepancies around access to school, exposure to social awareness information, supplies and materials. Thus, the PBA needs to make space to contextualize (e.g., locally songs, naming local animals).
- The tool will benefit from considering the varying backgrounds of children who participate. For example, differences in age (e.g., 4-year olds compared to 8-year olds) and socio-economic status (e.g., children from higher income families compared to those living in poverty). By addressing these factors, the PBA tool can be better tailored to meet the unique needs of children in different environments. This customization will help to ensure that the tool is relevant and effective across diverse settings, enhancing its ability to support the safety and well-being of children.

- The tool is effective in highlighting how children's moods can change based on the scenarios they are asked to consider.
- The facilitator and enumerators must be well trained before carrying out the PBA.
- It is best when the facilitator and enumerators participate in each activity and do every activity themselves. This helps make children comfortable.
- When parents / caregivers are present, children tend to focus on them, seeking their responses and being guided on how to answer or behave. To generate genuine responses from children, it is better to conduct the assessment separately from their parents / caregivers.
- Providing children with encouragement and appreciation from time-to-time helped them open-up and more actively participate in the PBA.
- To be effective and allow careful observation, group sizes should be small (4-6 children per small group). Larger groups make it difficult to observe and enumerate responses.
- In section 7 of the PBA, when children respond differently in terms of how their puppets feel compared to how children replied about their own feelings in section 3, the reason for the difference can be explored more clearly.
- In the Parent / Caregiver's Survey:
  - Question number 8 should have the option for more than 8 family members.
  - Question number 27 should include access to television and radio.
  - Question number 19- [If yes to Q13] a question on the parent / caregiver's highest level of education could be added.
  - A question can be added on how frequently a child gets sick to describe their physical health because caregivers seem confused by the existing question asking about physical health.
  - Also, a question can be included on children's relationship with their siblings or other family members.
  - It can also help to add a question on whether the child is known to have experienced violence, abuse, or bullying.



# CHILD PLAY-BASED ASSESSMENT TOOL

**Pakistan Red Crescent**

**CASE STUDY**





Photo description: Pakistan Red Crescent and IFRC volunteers and staff supporting pilot project  
Photo credit: Pakistan Red Crescent and IFRC

## Background

Sesame Workshop and IFRC have formed a strategic partnership to create content and programs focused on the safety, early education, and mental health of children aged 4-8. Recognizing gaps in understanding and assessing young children's mental health, they have developed a play-based assessment (PBA) tool for use in humanitarian and non-humanitarian situations.

In June and July 2024, the Pakistan Red Crescent Society (PRCS) tested the PBA for the first time with financial and technical support from the Canadian Red Cross (CRC) in the emergency context of two remote districts affected by the 2022 floods and one urban location in Islamabad, where the PRCS engaged with Afghan refugee children.

The team conducting the PBA comprised IFRC and PRCS professional staff experienced in flood recovery and working with children in emergencies along with experienced volunteers. In other words, they were well-capacitated and skilled in using the PBA.

A one-day detailed orientation was organized for 18 volunteers (9 men and 9 women) at three locations. The sessions covered data collection tools, warm-up activities, animal dance, and methods to engage children in the activities and roles and responsibilities for different functions of the team (e.g. facilitator and enumerators).

## Who was Supported and How

The PBA was used with children in two remote flood-affected districts, Larkana and Dadu of Sindh province, and one area of Islamabad Capital Territory (ICT). The participants were children ages 4-8 years, including both boys and girls from diverse castes, social and economic backgrounds, ethnicities, and both rural and urban areas. Caregivers/parents of the children were also interviewed following the assessment format.

The following approaches were used for this assessment:

1. For the implementation of the pilot project, PRCS coordinated with district branch management and the Youth and Volunteering department to nominate volunteers for orientation and further engagement in field activities.
2. All parents/caregivers were informed a day prior about their and their children's participation through community focal persons.
3. Premises for the assessment were agreed upon based on accessibility for children and parents, utilizing community centers and schools for interviews.
4. Considering the high temperatures (45 to 50 degrees Celsius) in these districts, proper sitting arrangements, provision of drinking water, and electricity were ensured before starting the activities.
5. Parents/caregivers were briefed about the purpose of the engagement with children, and consents and assents were collected for the assessment, interview, and photos.
6. A group of 4 children, along with one male and one female volunteer enumerator and facilitator, participated in exercises including warm-ups, feeling check-ins, puppet drawing, and animal dances.
7. At the end, enumerators and children received participation certificates and refreshments, and sessions concluded with a vote of thanks to the parents, community focal persons, and children.

## Successes

The pilot project was successfully completed within the given timelines. The online orientation provided by the Sesame and IFRC Geneva and also by PRCS staff at the national level for the local districts were very helpful in organizing all the activities in the field.

Another important step was the translation of the guidance for facilitators into the local language, which helped volunteers quickly understand the instructions.

The design of the PBA was excellent and easily manageable for the age group of 4-8 years, contributing to the success of the pilot project. All three districts where this assessment was conducted reflected the successful use of the PBA.

Teamwork in conducting the assessment was the major reason for its success. The note-taker / enumerators participating in the assessment needed to be keen observers to provide accurate scores, while the facilitator needed to have patience to help children understand the instructions. Additionally, the guidance and support from the PRCS added significant value to the successful implementation.

The warm-up activities and songs at the beginning were translated into the local languages of each region, making the children more comfortable and engaged in the PBA.

This tool was understandable to the enumerators who assessed the children and interviewed the caregivers/parents.

Additionally, the children participating in the PBA enjoyed the assessment process.

## Challenges and Difficulties

- The piloting in ICT with Afghan refugee children, took a lot of time. In ICT, PRCS had a partnership with an local, external stakeholder, PAGE organization, which works on girls' education. The involvement of a partner added value and yet also meant several additional steps and delays.
- At some stages, enumerators and facilitators felt shy while doing animal dances during orientation, and the same happened in the field. To address this, PRCS repeated the animal dances during orientation and in the field to make the enumerators and facilitators comfortable participating in the PBA.
- Despite clear communication with communities in districts Dadu and Larkana, many parents requested to involve their children in the activity, but PRCS had to refuse due to the predetermined targets already being set.
- During the puppet drawing activity, some of the children ages 4-6 years were unwilling or seemed less confident to draw anything. PRCS volunteers encouraged and helped them to draw something of their interest.

## Lessons Learned

- The different geographical settings (urban vs. rural) in Pakistan have significant discrepancies in accessing services, including schools, exposure to modern society, play, and supplies. Thus, the PBA needs to be adaptable to the local context (e.g., locally adopted songs, animals used in the tools).
- The tool must consider the varying backgrounds of children while conducting the PBA. Differences in age (e.g., 4-year-olds versus 8-year-olds) and socio-economic status (e.g., financially strong children versus those raised in poverty) should be addressed. By considering these contextual factors, the PBA tool can be better tailored to meet the unique needs of children in different environments. This customization will help ensure that the tool is relevant and effective across diverse settings, enhancing its ability to support the safety, mental health and well-being of children in emergencies.
- This tool helped understand how children's moods can be influenced by different scenarios.
- Based on the observations and experiences, facilitators and enumerators must participate in each activity themselves to make children comfortable.

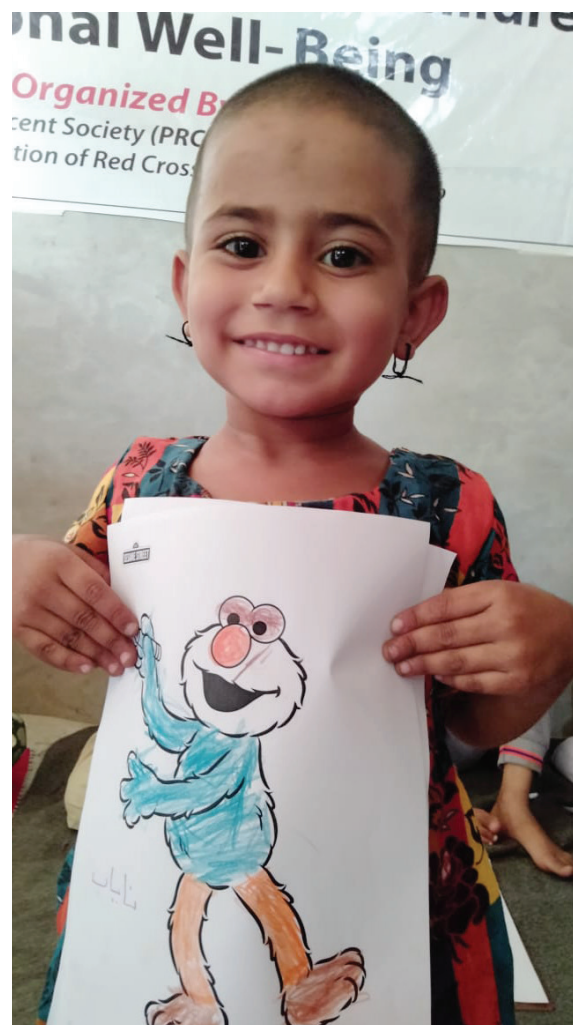


Photo description: Child participating in Pakistan Red Crescent pilot project  
Photo credit: Pakistan Red Crescent and IFRC



- Additionally, facilitators and enumerators engaged in the assessment must be well-trained before carrying out the assessment.
- Encouragement and appreciation given to children helped children open-up more and actively participate in the activities.
- In the tool, "Caregiver's Report of Child's Emotional Well-being":
  - Question number 8 should have an option for more than 8 family members.
  - Questions 18 and 19 were not clear, resulting in the same options being selected for both regarding education level.
  - Question 22: Instead of "clean drinking water," the proper term should be "safe drinking water."
  - Question 23 asks about heating facilities, but in the Pakistan context, where temperatures reach 50 degrees, it should also include options for cooling facilities/electricity/fans, etc.
  - In Section 7, when children respond with different feelings for their puppet compared to the feeling check-in in Section 3, a question can be added on the reason behind the change in children's feelings.
  - Tools can be added to help identify if children have been abused, harassed, etc. Although PRCS understand this needs a lot of expertise while engaging children and communities on such sensitive topics.
  - Questions can be asked about how frequently the child gets sick to better describe their physical health, as caregivers seemed confused when asked about physical health.
  - A question can be asked about the child's relationship with their siblings or other family members.