



NORWEGIAN
REFUGEE COUNCIL



Right to Wellbeing 2025 Initiative Summative Evaluation

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Introduction

The Norwegian Refugee Council's Better Learning Programme (BLP) is an evidence-informed, classroom-based non-specialised psychosocial support (PSS) approach designed to help children and youth affected by conflict and displacement regain their wellbeing and readiness to learn. BLP mobilises teachers, caregivers and trained facilitators to deliver the BLP to children and young people through three core components: BLP-1 (universal classroom-based PSS), BLP-2 (small-group or classroom support that strengthens executive functioning and study skills), and BLP-3 (specialised PSS for children showing symptoms of chronic traumatic stress). The programme has also been adapted for adolescents and young adults through BLP Youth, and for staff/teachers/caregivers through self-care and peer-support modules (known as BLP-T).

Under the Right to Wellbeing 2025 (RtW25) initiative, NRC sought to institutionalise BLP1 and BLP2 across its Education Core Competency globally, embedding non-specialised PSS through the BLP into NRC's education strategy, systems, and structures at global level, and improving the capacities, quality and consistency of BLP across country offices (COs). This has been supported through:

- The Global BLP Unit (GBU) which provides strategic and operational support to COs to implement BLP within ongoing education programming. The GBU focusses on equipping COs with high-quality implementation tools and frameworks to sustain BLP integration across diverse education programmes.
- Targeted capacity development support through Regional PSS Managers, who since June 2025 are part of the GBU, and whose roles are to support BLP capacity building and orientation/dissemination initiatives with COs in their region. Regional PSS Managers also monitor the quality of BLP programming in their region, provide technical guidance and support in relation to BLP implementation, support contextualisation processes, improve COs capacities to report on BLP-related MEL indicators, and provide inputs into BLP communications and advocacy initiatives.
- Improved country level expertise by increasing the numbers of BLP Master Trainers (MTs) and Champions across NRC's country offices. The expectation is that these MTs and Champions support and strengthen quality of BLP implementation at the country level through the delivery of trainings and workshops to other education staff, identify elements of 'best practice' emerging from the COs, shape the guidance and tools of the BLP, and collaborate and engage with local authorities and partners around the BLP as needed.
- Establishment of BLP communities of practice (CoPs) to enable frontline staff implementing the BLP to exchange ideas and expertise with each other, and understand some of the issues, challenges and opportunities around BLP implementation and contextualisation.

1.2 Evaluation Objectives

This summative evaluation examined the extent to which BLP has been effectively institutionalised across NRC's Education Core Competency under RtW25, and what has enabled or constrained that process. Specific objectives were to: (1) assess organisational systems, tools and strategies for integrating PSS/BLP; (2) appraise country and regional capacities and support models (e.g., BLP Master Trainers, Regional PSS Managers) for quality implementation and contextualisation; (3) review MEL practices and evidence use; (4) identify lessons and actionable recommendations for sustaining integration of BLP/non-specialised PSS inside NRC and for the planned transition to NRC's Together for Wellbeing 2030 (TfW30) initiative.

1.3 Methodology

A realist, mixed-methods design was applied to understand not only what changed but how and why in differing contexts. Data collection (May–Aug 2025) utilised a structured review of 80+ documents and toolkits, a global survey of COs implementing the BLP, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions with global, regional and country staff and external partners, and completion of two in-depth country case studies (with Venezuela and Ethiopia COs). Following this period of data collection, a validation workshop was held with a range of stakeholders across global, regional and country offices. As part of the analysis process, data was triangulated using survey, interview and documentary evidence. Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups were coded deductively/inductively, while survey data were analysed descriptively. Some of the key limitations of this evaluation are the uneven coverage by region of COs responding to the survey, particularly when there are varying levels of maturity of BLP adoption across the regions. Additionally, all data was remotely collected, limiting the capacity of the evaluation team to independently observe/verify BLP as implemented in COs. Many new elements were introduced and/or reviewed through RtW25, and are only now being finalised, particularly components such as BLP Youth, BLP-T, and new MEL guidance. This limits the ability of the evaluation to discern to what extent some of these newer components will be institutionalised within NRC.

1.4 Key Findings

- Country-level capacities to implement BLP-1 have markedly improved during RtW25. COs report high confidence in core BLP/PSS concepts, independent facilitation of BLP-1 and use of the BLP Guidance Kit. Confidence remains lower for BLP-2/3 and youth programming, reflecting the later-stage adoption of these components, as well as the fact that they may not be relevant for all COs. The strong gains in capacity are attributed to tailored capacity building led by Regional PSS Managers and the BLP Master Trainer (MT) model, plus streamlined resources (e.g., revised Guidance Kit, Capacity Development Package, Monitoring Toolkits) produced by the GBU.
- The MT model and the technical support provided through Regional PSS Managers has been a ‘high cost but high reward’ exercise: highly effective for ensuring quality implementation and contextual integration of the BLP, but vulnerable to staff turnover (particularly for MTs in some regions) and reliant on continued resourcing. COs value the localised, responsive support from Regional PSS Managers/MTs, with global roles providing technical and research legitimacy.
- BLP tools developed by the GBU are widely valued and increasingly usable but do not substitute or replace the need for phased orientation, mentoring and targeted support. Additionally, the GBU has played an important role in providing legitimacy, standard-setting and external advocacy for COs, particularly in the early phases of BLP adoption.
- Contextualisation of BLP activities and approaches, including translations, cultural adaptations, pacing/integration guidance, alternative forms of delivery have proven essential for ensuring the acceptability and fidelity of BLP to the context. Alongside this, the establishment of CoPs have helped share pragmatic solutions across COs to specific challenges around implementation.
- BLP has become NRC’s default vehicle for integrating non-specialised PSS into COs education programming and strategies. Uptake is fastest where PSS is already well-understood and valued by ministries and communities; elsewhere it requires stronger advocacy and accompaniment.
- In many COs’ today, BLP is embedded across programme modalities¹ but variation still exists by the context and the maturity of BLP implementation within a country programme. Demand from partners and governments for BLP trainings is high, strengthening NRC’s visibility externally as a leader in non-specialised PSS delivery and programming.
- MEL processes have evolved substantially under RtW25 through the crafting of Monitoring Toolkits, alignment with education TOCs and introduction of a mandatory wellbeing outcome into

¹ This includes in formal education, non-formal education (NFE), Accelerated Education Programmes (AEPs), and First Line Education Response (FLER) and Youth Education and Training.

them. Yet COs report confusion and uneven uptake—especially on use and interpretation of outcome monitoring data collected through the Student Learning in Emergencies Checklist (SLEC), as well as translating and using BLP MEL data for programme learning. Over-reliance on SLEC, limited joint analysis between MEL and education teams, and thin classroom implementation data constrain learning. Positive examples from some COs show the value of combining SLEC, as an outcome-focussed tool, with qualitative approaches and collaborative analysis. Understanding the impact of the new Monitoring Toolkits will require future reflection and assessment.

- Sustainability of the BLP remains fragile without an explicit exit strategy and continued reliance on project funding for specialised roles (namely technical positions in the GBU, Regional PSS Managers, and MT roles in COs).

1.5 Conclusions

RtW25 has helped to embed a mindset across NRC that supporting children’s wellbeing is integral to the core competency’s goal of improving the provision of quality education, with BLP the principal mechanism for operationalising this. At present, institutionalisation is strongest for BLP-1. Most COs can implement it independently and contextualise materials and integrate it into CO education strategies and proposals. At a global level, wellbeing outcomes are now reflected in global TOCs, and BLP-1 is embedded across most education response programmes. However, institutionalisation remains partial for BLP 2/3 and youth and MEL practices for BLP are not yet consistently enabling learning.

One of the key lessons learned from RtW25 is that BLP has been an important catalyst for institutionalising a mindset by scaling an evidence-based and easy-to-implement practice. BLP’s rapid expansion prior to and throughout RtW25 has been enabled by growing global interest and attention to the importance of non-specialised PSS and social emotional learning (SEL) within education responses, strong and committed support from donors, and long-standing research partnerships. NRC leveraged these opportunities and introduced a practice that could be easily scaled across a range of education responses. This process has led to COs understanding the importance and relevance of non-specialised PSS within their education responses and led to them being key advocates for promoting the right to well-being for all children and young people affected by displacement. While this has enhanced coherence and quality of implementation, it also carries the risk that the BLP may be seen as the sole model for promoting children’s and youth’s well-being, rather than as NRC’s flagship approach within a broader framework of complementary interventions.

1.6 Key recommendations

Develop an exit strategy and transition plan from RtW 2025, that includes at the global level:

1. Maintaining lean technical enablement functions (Head of PSS, Regional PSS Managers, MEL support) which is focused on three priorities: (1) scaling of BLP-2 in COs where relevant; (2) strengthening practical use of Monitoring Toolkits beyond SLEC; and (3) targeted accompaniment to low-capacity COs where BLP is still less advanced.
2. Mainstreaming PSS expertise into ongoing technical functions and demands in the education core competency. This means redefining the role of MTs and Regional PSS Managers as Teacher Professional Development (TPD) leads with PSS expertise and shifting the role of the global BLP Unit Manager to a Global Advisor with PSS specialisation.
3. Identifying how best to sustain regional Communities of Practice for BLP
4. Providing simpler guidance to COs on when/how other BLP components (BLP-2/3, BLP-Y, BLP-T) apply across responses and how to manage contextualisation processes with oversight and approvals from the global team.
5. Further assessing how as part of the Together for Wellbeing 2030 initiative, NRC can best capitalise, within its capacities, the success and value of the BLP with external partners—be it through a process of scaling the BLP externally and/or by seeking to promote the

institutionalisation of non-specialised PSS within education in emergencies responses and education systems.

At the country office level:

1. Continuing to embed relevant BLP components within all relevant education responses and proposals, but budgeting for additional technical support from global and regional colleagues as needed (including pooled regional support for capacity development expertise).
2. Further contextualising the BLP within their programmes with the inputs of teachers, caregivers, community leaders and educational authorities, but in line with global guidance and processes.
3. Strengthening MEL practices within BLP towards a learning-orientation by pairing the use of SLEC with qualitative tools (FGDs, classroom observation, etc), conduct joint analysis of data collected with MEL and education teams, and use findings to further adapt and contextualise programming.
4. Considering whether and how to progress implementation/integration of BLP-2 into their education programming, where appropriate, and realistically assess whether or if BLP-3 is an appropriate or feasible response. Depending on which facets of children's and youth well-being are critical for the CO's strategy, other, complementary approaches beyond BLP may also need to be explored and utilised.

2 Acknowledgements

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3 List of abbreviations and acronyms

AAR	After Action Review
BLP	Better Learning Programme
BLP Y	BLP Youth
CEERO	Central and Eastern European Regional Office
CO	Country Office
CoP	Community of Practice
CWA	Central and West Africa
ESA	East and South Africa
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FLER	First Line Education Response
GBU	Global BLP Unit
KAP	Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
KII	Key Informant Interview
LARO	Latin America Regional Office
MHPSS	Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning
MENA	Middle East and North Africa Region
MT	Master Trainer
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
RtW25	Right to Wellbeing 2025
PSS	Psychosocial Support
SEL	Social Emotional Learning
UiT	The Arctic University of Norway
TfW30	Together for Wellbeing 2030
TOC	Theory of Change
TPD	Teacher Professional Development

4 Introduction

4.1 The Better Learning Programme

BLP is NRC's flagship classroom-based psychosocial support (PSS) intervention to support children's recovery from traumatic events experienced during conflict or displacement, and to create conditions for improved learning. It is a multi-faceted approach that mobilises a child's support network of caregivers, teachers and counsellors and aims to restore a sense of normality and hope.²

The BLP consists of three main components:

- BLP-1 is a general, classroom-based PSS approach for all children.³ Participants learn techniques to self-regulate, including relaxation exercises to help improve focus in the classroom.
 - BLP-2 is delivered either as a small-group intervention or a classroom-based approach to support resilience amongst children who need additional psychosocial and academic support.⁴ Participants focus on executive functioning skills including study skills to help improve capacity to focus and study.
- BLP-3 is a specialised PSS approach that addresses trauma-induced nightmares of children with symptoms of chronic traumatic stress.⁵ Participants learn how to self-regulate their stress and regain control over post-traumatic stress symptoms, including reducing the impact of the stress on their daily lives.

In addition to this, NRC has adapted content from BLP-1 and BLP-2 into BLP Youth (BLP-Y), to ensure that the BLP is relevant to adolescent and young adult populations. Two Self-Care packages were designed: 1) Self-Care Module included in the Capacity Development Package and 2) most recently the Better Learning Programme for Teachers: Self-Care and Support to Frontliners (BLP-T) to ensure that staff and teachers implementing BLP have peer support and self-care mechanisms for their own well-being.⁶

4.2 The path to institutionalisation

BLP has a long history within NRC. It began as an intervention in Uganda in 2006 and was later piloted in Gaza in 2012 to address children dealing with repeated nightmares in collaboration with the Arctic University of Norway (now UiT). Much of the subsequent design, expansion, refinement and evidence gathering for BLP was done in Palestine in the years that followed.⁷

In 2019, and through the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regional office (previously MERO), NRC commenced a process of internally institutionalising the BLP across other Country Offices (COs) in the region, many of whom had already started to implement BLP in some shape or form in years prior. A MENA multidisciplinary Regional BLP Unit was set up with the aim of ensuring all COs in the region had practices, systems and capacities in place to continue to deliver the BLP with quality and impact. This multidisciplinary team included experts in various fields, including education, PSS, Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL), research, advocacy and communications. This set up,

² Norwegian Refugee Council. (n.d.). *Guidance Kit: Guidance and Tools for BLP Implementation*.

³ Norwegian Refugee Council. (2019). *BLP-1-English-Supporting Students' Recovery in Emergencies*. UiT, the Arctic University of Norway, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oslo, Norway.

⁴ Norwegian Refugee Council. (2022). *BLP-2: Improving Study Skills in Emergencies*. UiT, the Arctic University of Norway, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oslo, Norway.

⁵ Norwegian Refugee Council. (2017). *BLP-3: Fighting Nightmares and Sleeping Problems*. UiT, the Arctic University of Norway, Norwegian Refugee Council, Oslo, Norway.

⁶ This is being replaced at present by the Better Learning Programme for Teachers: Self-Care and Support to Frontliners (BLP-T).

⁷ See <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/evaluations/nrc-blp-palestine-full-report.pdf>.

along with strong engagement with UiT as a technical and research partner enabled COs in the region to:

- Support the adaptation, integration of the BLP into new contexts, and expand access to the BLP
- Further contextualise, revise and adapt BLP guidance and materials to suit the needs and demands of specific contexts and education providers in the region
- Use data, research and evidence to create a culture of learning, reflection and improvement of the BLP.⁸

This period was also characterised by growing demand and interest from outside the region to improve and/or commence implementation of the BLP within other COs. This reflected increased demand for mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) programming because of COVID-19, and growing recognition across the education in emergencies community of the importance of social emotional learning (SEL) and PSS in education responses.

In Palestine and later the MENA region, the BLP was able to be successfully scaled because it: (1) responded to more than one need; (2) was evidence based and backed and as part of this had a culture and commitment to continuous learning and evidence generation; (3) was easy for internal and external stakeholders to understand and engage with in terms of the premise of the programme, as well as how it could be implemented and contextualised to the specific educational settings; and (4) had a strong level of ownership internally, and with partners and funders, for scaling and institutionalising⁹ Many of these same factors are ones why BLP has been able to be easily scaled across multiple regions and country offices under the RtW 2025.

In 2022, a new Global Education Strategy was released, which specified that the BLP be integrated across all education programmes by 2025.¹⁰ To support this, a global BLP unit (GBU) was established, who was to support the RtW25 initiative through the simplified theory of change presented in Figure 1.

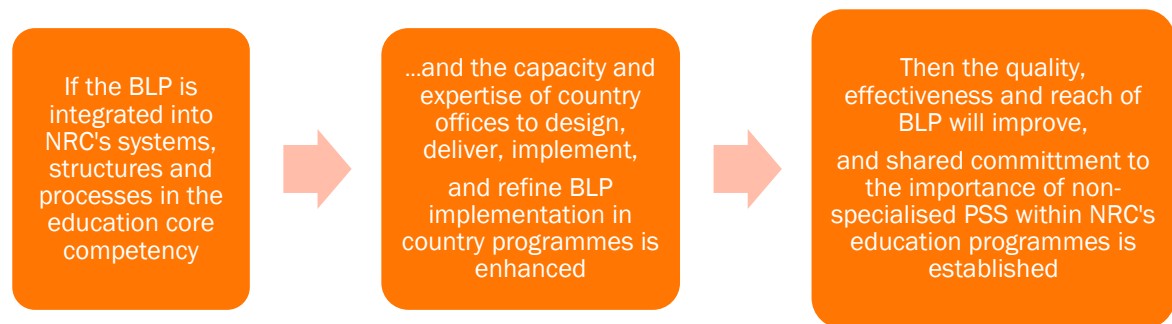


Figure 1: Simplified theory of change for the Right to Wellbeing 2025 initiative

4.3 The Right to Wellbeing 2025 Initiative

A summary of the key outcomes and outputs of the RtW25 are outlined below.

⁸ Wonderlab (2023) Reflections and Introspections: A Review of NRC's Better Learning Programme over the Past Decade. Norwegian Refugee Council, Oslo, Norway.

⁹ See footnote 8.

¹⁰ See <https://www.nrc.no/globalassets/pdf/strategies/education-strategy-2022-2025/nrc-education-global-development-strategy-2022-2025.pdf>.

Impact	NRC has institutionalized the BLP in their Education Core Competency globally			
Relevant outcomes	Outcome 1: NRC COs have a greater capacity to implement BLP in line with the BLP Guidance Kit standards and best practices.		Outcome 2: By end of 2025, NRC will have systems and capacities in place as foundation for a strong PSS in education programme.	
Outputs	BLP technical units established within NRC to rollout the BLP Guidance Kit, revise BLP 2 and BLP3 Manuals, for targeted COs and provide technical support.	Capacity building provided to targeted COs Education Teams through trainings using the BLP Capacity Building Package.	Increased numbers of Master Trainers certified.	BLP Community of Practice built and strengthened.

Figure 2: Simplified logic model for RtW 2025

More detail about each of the outputs is specified below.

4.3.1 Improving technical support

The GBU was established to ensure the harmonisation and quality control of BLP implementation. The GBU provides strategic and operational support to COs to implement BLP within ongoing education programming. The GBU ensures that country offices are equipped not only with high-quality implementation tools but also with the capacity and frameworks to sustain BLP integration across diverse education programmes. The GBU has produced a suite of resources, including the BLP Guidance Kit, Capacity Development Package, and Monitoring Toolkits. Importantly, all of these resources have undergone revisions in 2024-2025 in order to update or simplify. Some of the main resources which the GBU has produced and/or revised in the past three years are noted below.

The **BLP Guidance Kit** is the foundational implementation resource that offers comprehensive, step-by-step guidance to roll out the BLP across NRC contexts. It includes four core guides covering programme design, operational planning, team training, and quality monitoring. Accompanied by training manuals, inclusion checklists, policy links, and global case studies, the kit ensures alignment with NRC's education strategy and PSS commitments. The guidance is adaptable for various implementation models—remote, in-person, or partner-led—enabling flexibility based on operational needs and education response settings.

The **PSS & BLP Capacity Development Package**, equips NRC staff, teachers, and education partners with the skills and knowledge needed to implement BLP with quality and confidence. This package is structured as three progressive phases—building foundational PSS knowledge (Phase 1), fostering supportive learning environments (Phase 2), and developing leadership through Master Trainers (Phase 3). The package promotes continuous professional development, emphasizes staff well-being, and supports integration with other NRC and global training initiatives. It features detailed facilitator guides, competency frameworks, and self-guided reflection materials.

The **BLP Monitoring, Research (MR) Toolkit** enables country offices to collect data and assess the outcomes of BLP implementation. The toolkit was developed collaboratively with regional (MENA) partners and the UIT. For example, the BLP1 MR Toolkit includes tools for teacher and student feedback, standardized surveys, focus group discussion templates, and the Student Learning in Emergency Checklist (SLEC), which measures key indicators like safety, self-regulation, and academic functioning. All toolkits are being updated for 2025, reflecting inputs from COs, Master Trainers, regional PSS managers, and the head of the PSS unit.

In addition to the above core packages, the following tools were rolled out during RtW2025:

- BLP Inclusivity Guidance
- Condensed BLP for FLER response
- BLP-T Guidance
- BLP Glossary
- *How to use Miskit* for teachers
- Trauma Sensitive Reporting Field Guide
- Contextualisation Guidelines
- BLP Pacing and Integration Guidance (currently under review at time of evaluation)

The RtW25 initiative has supported translation and contextualisation of these resources into multiple languages and settings. An important innovation led by the GBU has been further development, piloting and refinement of the BLP App. The App is intended to support community-based PSS interventions, with caregivers, parents and teachers to support children's well-being.

4.3.2 Capacity building support

Additionally, under RtW25, four regional hubs were established. The BLP regional hubs are comprised of a regional PSS Manager working in close coordination with the Regional Education Adviser, the GBU, country level Education Specialists and Programme Development Specialists, and with CO Master Trainers (MTs) and Champions.¹¹ The regional PSS Manager is responsible for oversight of BLP quality and capacity building in the region. Key tasks as part of their role include supporting BLP capacity building and orientation/dissemination initiatives with COs, monitoring the quality of BLP programming in their region, providing technical guidance and support in relation to BLP implementation, supporting contextualisation processes, supporting COs in their BLP MEL systems and to report on BLP-related indicators, and providing inputs into BLP communications and advocacy initiatives.

Under RtW25, the total number of COs implementing all components of BLP grew. Table 1 below include this information, updated for mid-2025.

Table 1: Countries implementing BLP by mid-2025

Programme	Count
BLP-1	35
BLP-2	9
BLP-3	3
BLP Youth	~8 ¹²

4.3.3 Growing country office expertise

A key focus of the regional hubs has been to establish and grow a pool of Master Trainers and BLP Champions, ideally in each CO. Master Trainers are individuals who have experience and expertise in BLP implementation for at least one year. They then undergo a capacity building process, consisting of several stages, and then receive a certificate by the GBU/RO defining the type of expertise they hold and the categories of interventions they can support. The aim is then for these Masters Trainers to support and strengthen quality of BLP implementation at the country level through the delivery of trainings and workshops to other education staff, identify elements of 'best practice' emerging from

¹¹ At present there are three full time PSS managers and one part-time/consultant covering NRC regions globally; these include MENA regional office, Central and West Africa Regional Office (CWARO), East and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO), Latin America Regional Office (LARO), and Eurasia.

¹² This number is approximate due to confirming the number of countries that had received training versus were actually implementing BLP Youth at the time of the evaluation.

the COs, shape the guidance and tools of the BLP, and collaborate and engage with local authorities around the BLP as needed.

BLP Champions are other stakeholders, partners or NRC education staff with extensive experience in BLP but who are not certified as Master Trainers.

Table 2: Master Trainers Status, mid-2025

Master Trainer Status	Region					Total
	MENA	CWA	ESA	ARO	LARO	
Certified Master Trainers	13	11	14	7	8	53
Left NRC or moved to different position	16	2	1	2	3	24
					Total:	77 MTs trained

In addition to the Master Trainer model, NRC and the Arctic University of Norway built an online Education in Emergencies (EiE)/PSS course that can be attended by NRC staff, with certification offered. Content development began in 2019 and was ready for piloting in 2022. This has offered further opportunity for the capacity development of country office staff.

Table 3: EiE/PSS course participation

Year	Registered	Certified
2021	21	14
2022	27	14
2023	36	18
2024	30	19
2025	40	20

4.3.4

Building a community of practice

Establishment of regional and global communities of practice (CoPs), comprised of the GBU, regional PSS Managers, Master Trainers, BLP Champions and Regional Education Advisors was done to keep those involved in BLP informed, engaged and motivated, and to ensure consistency and harmonisation across COs. The intention of these CoPs is for either regions (at global CoP) or COs (at regional CoP) to give voice to frontline staff implementing the BLP to share a case study, research or implementation example; this can either be a success or a challenge they are facing. The intent is for those implementing BLP to exchange ideas and expertise and to provide a vehicle for regional and global colleagues to also understand some of the issues and challenges around implementation faced by COs. In 2025, it was decided that the Global CoPs would move to regional, linguistic CoPs to foster more engagement.

4.4 Background to the evaluation

The objective of this summative evaluation of the RtW25 initiative is to explore the extent to which the BLP has been effectively institutionalized within NRC’s education core competency. Institutionalization of BLP is understood, in this evaluation, as whether BLP has been integrated effectively into the education core competency strategy, processes, systems and tools, and subsequently shaped the work of regional and country offices.¹³ Additionally, the evaluation aims to document lessons learned and provide actionable recommendations regarding the continuation/conclusion and sustainability of the institutionalization process, at a time where NRC is undergoing significant organizational change due to more limited resourcing (human and financial).

¹³ Here it is important to note that what is being institutionalized (BLP) or non-specialised PSS is itself a question which this evaluation explores. The Terms of Reference for this evaluation specified BLP/non-specialised PSS , however, as will be later explored conflating these two together is problematic.

As the RtW25 initiative concludes, NRC is also poised to launch a new initiative, Together for Wellbeing 2030 (TfW30), to encourage other partners to use and adapt the BLP within their own activities. How this transition is managed is a consideration, but not primary focus, of this summative evaluation.

5 Methodology

5.1 Approach to Evaluation

This evaluation applied a realist, mixed-methods design, combining qualitative and quantitative data to understand the institutionalisation of the BLP within NRC's Education Core Competency under the RtW25 initiative. A realist framing was particularly suited to examining not only *what* results were achieved, but also *how* and *why* these were shaped by different contexts.

The design emphasised learning and utility for NRC as it transitions to Together for Wellbeing 2030. Accordingly, the evaluation prioritised triangulation across methods and co-validation with stakeholders at global, regional, and country levels.

5.2 Data Collection Methods

Data collection and review for this evaluation took place from May-August 2025. All primary data was collected between June and August. The table below provides a summary of all data and data sources that were a part of this evaluation. Each of these methods is presented in brief below.

Table 4: Summary of methods and data collected as part of evaluation

Method	Scope and Participants	Coverage / Numbers
Document Review	Included: Programme documents; strategy and Theory of Change documents; MEL frameworks, guidance, and tools; capacity assessments including the 2022 and 2023 surveys; AARs; prior research, evaluations, and scoping papers; BLP resources and toolkits	80+ documents
Global Survey	Respondents included Education Specialists (with team input) in NRC COs implementing BLP	26 responses covering 25 COs plus Syria regional office in 6 regional offices (MENA, CWA, ESA, ARO, LARO, CEERO ¹⁴)
Key Informant Interviews (KIs) & Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)	Participants included: Global BLP Unit staff (n=3), Global Education team (6), other NRC global staff (2), Regional PSS Managers (3), Regional Education Advisors (5), CO staff including Master Trainers (21), external actors (3 donors/researchers)	43 participants
Country Case Studies	Two COs selected to reflect geographic and capacity variation: Included KIs/FGDs with Head of Programmes (2), Area Manager (1), Education staff (10) Specialists, Programme Deve & MEL staff (1), Master Trainers and champions (6)	2 in-depth case studies (18 participants total ¹⁵)
Validation Workshop	Evaluation reference group, global education team members, and CO representatives	1 workshop (17 participants from global, regional and CO levels)

¹⁴ While the CEERO region is no longer distinct at NRC, we do differentiate here because the office was active during the majority of the RtW25 period.

¹⁵ This total number of participants reflects that in Venezuela both of the Education Project Coordinators were also Master Trainers so are represented twice in the counts in the table's center column.

Document Review

A structured review of more than 80 documents was undertaken, including:

- NRC's RtW25 programme documentation and theory of change.
- Global BLP Survey Needs Assessments (2022 and 2023)
- Four After-Action Reviews (Sudan, Niger, Ukraine, Bangladesh).
- Guidance and training materials (including BLP Guidance Kit, MEL Toolkit, Capacity Development Package).
- Global and regional strategy documents and prior evaluations.

Global Survey

A Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices (KAP) and needs analysis survey was administered to all NRC Country Offices implementing BLP. Twenty-six responses were received, representing 25 countries plus the Syria Regional Office across six regions.¹⁶ Table 5 below shows responding countries by region, as well as response rates per region. Based on outreach to 33 COs for participation, the response rate was 79%. The survey collected both quantitative and qualitative data on integration, capacity, institutionalisation processes, and future support needs.

Table 5: Responding countries and response rates by region

Region	Responding countries	
MENA	Lebanon, Jordan, Yemen, Syria Country Office, Syria Regional Office, Palestine, Iraq, Libya	100%
CWA	DRC, Burkina Faso, Nigeria	38%
ESA	Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia	86%
ARO	Afghanistan, Iran, Bangladesh, Myanmar	100%
LARO	Colombia, Honduras, Venezuela	50%
CEERO	Ukraine, Moldova	67%

Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions

Semi-structured KIIs were conducted with stakeholders at global, regional, and country office levels. At the global level, we conducted KIIs with all members of the GBU, with three members of the Global Education Team, Youth Advisor, two Global Roving Education Advisors, and a Foundations Coordinator. At the regional level, we conducted one FGD with the Regional PSS Managers (n=3), one FGD with the Regional Education Advisors (n=3), one KII with an additional Regional Education Advisor, and one KII with a former Regional Education Advisor with significant experience contributing to the RtW25 activities. At the country level, we conducted KIIs (n=9) or FGDs (n=1) with education staff persons, which included Education Specialists, Programme Development Managers, Education Officers, and Master Trainers. This included 21 participants from 12 COs (Afghanistan, NCA, Syria, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Ukraine, Kenya, Myanmar, Iran, Niger, Mali, DRC).¹⁷ We additionally conducted three KIIs with external actors: the research partner at the Arctic University of Norway, and representatives from two donors (Porticus and Luxemburg.)

A full list of stakeholders consulted is included as Annex 3.

Country Case Studies

Two country case studies in Venezuela and Ethiopia were conducted to provide in-depth perspectives on institutionalisation processes in contrasting contexts. Each case study combined KIIs, FGDs, and document review with CO staff (Heads of Programme, Education Specialists, Programme Development Managers, Education Officers, Area Manager, MEL Manager, and Master Trainers). The

¹⁶ Six countries submitted more than one survey response. For each of these, we selected to use the responses from the Education Specialist only.

¹⁷ Many interviews involved more than one participant. Still, since we had designed the data collection event to be a KII, we have still counted these as interviews. We had proposed conducting two FGDs with Master Trainers: one in English and one in French. Ultimately, scheduling difficulties prompted us to pivot to three independent KIIs with MTs in English, and a single French speaking MT FGD.

selection criteria for case studies is available as Annex 2 and the participant list for each case study are available in Annex 3.

The case study data was used in the overall evaluation analysis and was additionally used to create two short case studies which can be found in Annex 4.

5.3 Data Analysis, Triangulation and Validation

Data was analysed using thematic analysis in line with the Key Evaluation Questions. All findings presented in this report were triangulated amongst the multiple data sources noted below.

Survey data were analysed descriptively in Qualtrics; findings from the survey are included throughout in order to highlight information most relevant to the KEQs. Due to the number of respondents (n=26) across five regions, it was not possible to elaborate on regional trends or differences.

Qualitative data were coded in Excel using both deductive (based on the evaluation matrix) and inductive categories. Similar to the survey responses, there were some limitations on comparisons based on the number of KIIs per region (or other categories of potential comparison). Findings were triangulated across surveys, KIIs/FGDs, and document review. Case study data was analysed independently to inform the case study reports (Annex 4) as well as part of the wider evaluation analysis.

A validation workshop was held with a selection of stakeholders who were involved in the evaluation, including members of the evaluation steering committee, reference group, global education team members, and country office representatives to share and discuss preliminary findings, as well as key reflections and sense-making.

5.4 Ethical Considerations

All participants gave informed consent, with confidentiality assured. Data collection was conducted remotely via Zoom or Teams in English, French, or Spanish, with bilingual research assistants supporting where required. Recordings and transcripts were anonymised and securely stored on a secure cloud platform only accessible by evaluation team members. All data will be deleted upon completion of the evaluation.

5.5 Limitations

As with all organisational evaluations of this scale, several methodological and contextual limitations must be noted. These do not invalidate the findings but rather frame their interpretation and the scope of conclusions that can reasonably be drawn.

Case study and sampling scope

The evaluation included two country case studies (Venezuela and Ethiopia), selected to illustrate variation in context and capacity. While these provide valuable, nuanced insights, they offer only a glimpse of the diversity of experiences across NRC's 30+ country offices. Additionally, while at least six individuals were interviewed for each study, these interviews were remote and without site visits which often offer more nuanced understanding of programme implementation and contextual dynamics. Data from case study countries was triangulated with country-level documents, as well as with global and regional data sources.

Survey coverage and regional comparisons

The global survey achieved a strong response rate (79%) with 26 responses across six regions, but regional representation was uneven. Three regions (CWA, LARO, CEERO) had three or fewer respondents, making disaggregated analysis or comparison across regions statistically unreliable. Response rate by region is included in Table 5 above. Consequently, survey findings are interpreted

at the aggregate level rather than by region. In addition, while the non-responding country offices were not entirely concentrated in one region (though largely in CWA), they do represent offices at varying stages of BLP implementation and capacity development; their absence may influence the overall balance of reported achievements and needs.

Differences in maturity of BLP implementation

BLP originated in the MENA region more than a decade ago and has a far longer and deeper history of implementation there than in other regions where it was only introduced in 2021. As such, the evidence base reflects a spectrum of maturity—from well-established, embedded practices in MENA to early-stage adoption elsewhere. Survey and interview data capture some of this variation, but not all differences attributable to duration and depth of implementation could be fully disentangled. Consequently, aggregate findings may overrepresent the experience of more mature contexts, particularly where capacity, institutionalisation, and partnerships are already well developed.

Interview data and comparative analysis

A total of 61 stakeholders participated in qualitative data collection, including 43 individuals from global, regional, and country levels and 18 participants across the two country case studies (Ethiopia and Venezuela). While this represents strong diversity across levels and geographies, the small number of respondents per region limited the potential for robust regional comparisons or systematic differentiation between levels of institutionalisation. The evaluation therefore focuses on cross-cutting themes rather than regional trends.

Remote data collection

All primary data collection—surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions—was conducted remotely through online platforms. This approach enabled wide geographic and linguistic coverage despite time and resource constraints but limited opportunities for more nuanced, iterative dialogue. In several cases, multiple staff contributed to a single remote interview, which helped capture team perspectives but reduced the depth of probing possible with individual follow-up. The absence of in-person engagement or field visits also meant that subtle dynamics—such as team collaboration or implementation decision-making—could not be directly observed.

Component-level differentiation

While the evaluation considered all BLP components, most data and discussion relate primarily to BLP-1, which is the most widely implemented and well-understood component globally. Differences between BLP-1, BLP-2, BLP-3, BLP-Youth, and BLP-T were not fully unpacked, and evidence on the latter components is thinner. Findings about overall institutionalisation therefore reflect BLP-1 most strongly, with more limited evidence on newer or more specialised components.

Focus and timing of the evaluation

The evaluation provides a point-in-time snapshot of institutionalisation near the conclusion of the RtW25 initiative (mid-2025). This timing coincides with ongoing revisions to NRC's global education strategy and with active changes to MEL systems, youth programming, and the launch of *Together for Wellbeing 2030*. Many processes examined were therefore still underway, and the effects of recent changes—particularly in MEL practices, capacity-building tools, and the BLP Digital Hub—could not yet be observed. Similarly, findings on sustainability and future positioning reflect current intentions and structures rather than confirmed outcomes. Additionally, all interviews—and, thus, included quotes throughout this report—reflect perspectives of individuals as of data collection (Jun-Aug 2025). Upon finalisation of this report in October 2025, there were already some notable changes that had occurred which may mean these perspectives may be updated with new activities and information.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) constraints

MEL emerged as both a central focus and a key limitation. Despite major advances under RtW25, MEL systems remain in transition. Several tools—including the revised Monitoring Toolkits and Student Learning in Emergencies Checklist (SLEC) versions—were only recently introduced, meaning there has been insufficient time for full uptake or testing of their effectiveness. Inconsistent use of tools across country offices, varying familiarity with the SLEC, and uneven collaboration between education and MEL teams limited the ability to generate fully comparable or longitudinal evidence. Many findings on learning and evidence use therefore rely on perceptions during this transitional period, or which may reflect past toolkits and packages. Additionally, the key evaluation questions

did not have a strong focus on MEL, so questionnaires did not include in-depth follow up questions. The focus on MEL emerged organically as a noted challenge and are thus presented as such in the evaluation.

Youth programming and other thematic gaps

While youth programming is included under RtW25, specific investigation of youth programming was not a central focus of data collection. Few interviewees and survey respondents directly represented youth-specific interventions, and interviewees often deferred questions about youth programming as out of their remit. Additionally, BLP Youth was developed in 2022 and first piloted in 2023 in Syria and Bangladesh. It has been NRC's strategy to first focus and build foundations in BLP-1 and BLP-2 before BLP Youth. As such, the evaluation provides limited evidence on BLP-Youth or broader youth-focused MHPSS approaches within education programming. Future work should build in youth-specific questioning (beyond the global level) in order to assure that this perspective is captured in evaluations.

Attribution and complexity of institutionalisation

Institutionalisation is a diffuse and non-linear process influenced by a range of contextual, organisational, and external factors. Given the concurrent global reforms within NRC and the varying stages of BLP adoption, attribution of specific results to RtW25 activities is difficult. The evaluation's realist framing and triangulation across multiple data sources help identify mechanisms and enablers, but causality should not be inferred.

Other data quality considerations

As in many organisational evaluations, most of the data was self-reported by staff involved in programme implementation, which may introduce social desirability bias. Measures such as anonymous survey responses and triangulation with document review and case studies were used to mitigate this. In addition, documentation and reporting quality varied across regions, affecting the consistency of evidence available for review. Finally, interviews were conducted with current NRC staff persons implementing or familiar with BLP; in some locations, BLP understanding and knowledge may have been greater (or lesser) at other points in time due to staff turnover.

6 Findings

Many of the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQS) are interconnected within the data. Due to this, we have chosen to present the findings from the evaluation across four categories, instead of by question. All questions have been mapped onto these four categories and are included at the outset of each of the subsections below. Some questions appear more than once, due to their relevance across categories.

6.1 Capacity Building, Technical Support, and Relevance

This section reports on the following evaluation questions:

- How effective and relevant was the capacity building of regional and country office teams?
- How well do the country offices understand the PSS of children and youth, and how has this changed in the past 2-3 years?
- To what extent have country offices acquired the knowledge and skills needed to implement quality BLP directly and with partners?
- How effective and relevant has the master trainers' model and approach been in supporting quality BLP implementation in country offices?
- What gaps remain to sustain country office capacity to implement the BLP?
- What lessons can be drawn for future capacity building work?
- How has RtW25 balanced the need for coherence, standardisation and consistent quality of BLP implementation with the needs of programme beneficiaries in diverse contexts and with diverse backgrounds?

6.1.1 Country office staff show high levels of competence and confidence in implementing BLP. Understanding of BLP-1 and PSS principles is high, with clear improvements over the last three years in technical and contextualization skills. Confidence to implement other components of BLP is lower.

Across all interviews, the capacity building efforts of the GBU and the regional PSS Managers have led to significant improvements in competence and confidence to implement BLP-1 across most countries. Country level interviews reflect that education specialists feel education teams have notable capacity to independently implement BLP-1 with limited support from GBU or regional staff. This is reflected in the quotes below:

“If we look at the implementation of BLP1, for pure implementation of this I think that the countries where we have trained are now independent... they do need support on contextualization, on MEL, on advocacy. And there is a lot of support needed for start-up in new countries... But pure implementation, the capacity is good.” (Regional level interview)

“The capacity for the education team and the Master Trainers has grown a lot over the years through their [the GBU] support... There is enhanced understanding now of BLP and the direction of BLP within the country office, and there is also a lot of initiative coming from the master trainers and the education team

through the education specialist. With minimal support, the country office should be able to continue.”
(Country level interview)

Survey data confirms this, with 100% of respondents noting a good or excellent understanding of BLP-1 (see Figure 3). When this is compared to earlier survey results this is a notable improvement to responses from the 2022 and 2023 survey when 45% and 73% of CO’s respectively identified having a “good understanding of BLP”.¹⁸

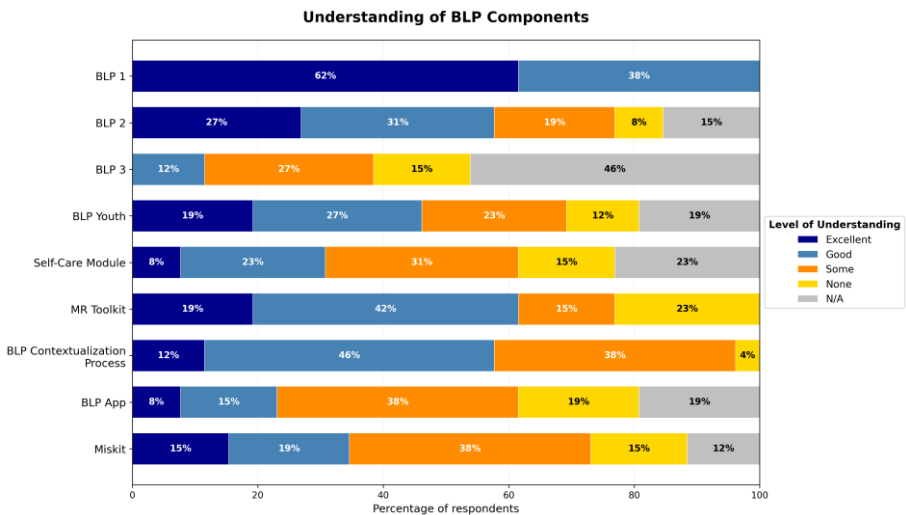


Figure 3: Reported levels of understanding of various BLP components in 26 COs from 2025 survey

COs still identify lower levels of understanding in areas like BLP2, BLP-3, and BLP- Y, along with the Self-Care Module, the BLP App, and Miskit.

This increased capacity means that COs can now facilitate many core BLP activities independently most or all the time (see Figure 4). In terms of increased understanding of PSS and education, 92% of respondents are able to correctly define key MHPSS terminology independently most or all of the time and 65% indicate confidence to advocate for PSS and BLP to external partners and stakeholders most or all of the time.¹⁹

¹⁸ For all survey data presented, it is important to note that each survey (2022, 2023, and 2025) had different response rates, as well as different responding countries. For 2025—which is the survey administered as part of this evaluation—the 78% response rate means that analysis cannot be understood as completely representative. Additionally, for the 2022 and 2023 surveys, questions were asked differently. The 45% and 73% were in regard to a general BLP, not the specific BLP components listed here.

¹⁹ We note that an above shared quote notes need for continued support to do external advocacy work which illustrates the range of views.

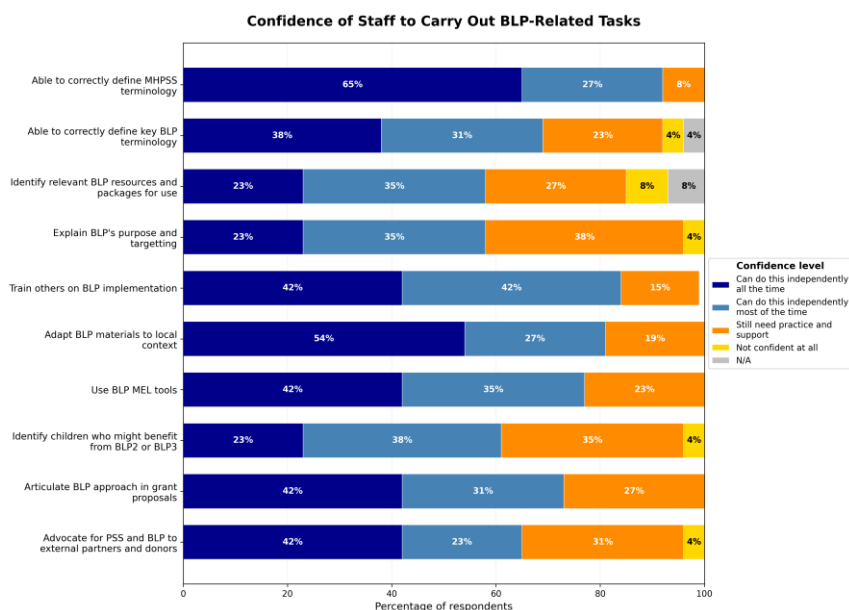


Figure 4: Levels of confidence of COs in different BLP activities from 2025 survey

6.1.2 High investments in capacity building—especially through regional PSS Managers and Master Trainers—have yielded these strong results. Investment in capacity building has been “high cost and high reward”.

There is strong evidence to suggest the ways in which capacity building efforts under RtW25 for CO-level implementation of BLP has been successful. Survey responses suggest how COs now have improved knowledge and skills to implement BLP, compared to three years ago, and interview data emphasises the role of capacity building efforts in these improvements. Most COs report that their capacities on: (1) integrating the BLP into all their education programmes; (2) training and mentoring others on the BLP; (3) technical implementation skills; and (4) understanding of PSS principles has moderately or significantly improved.

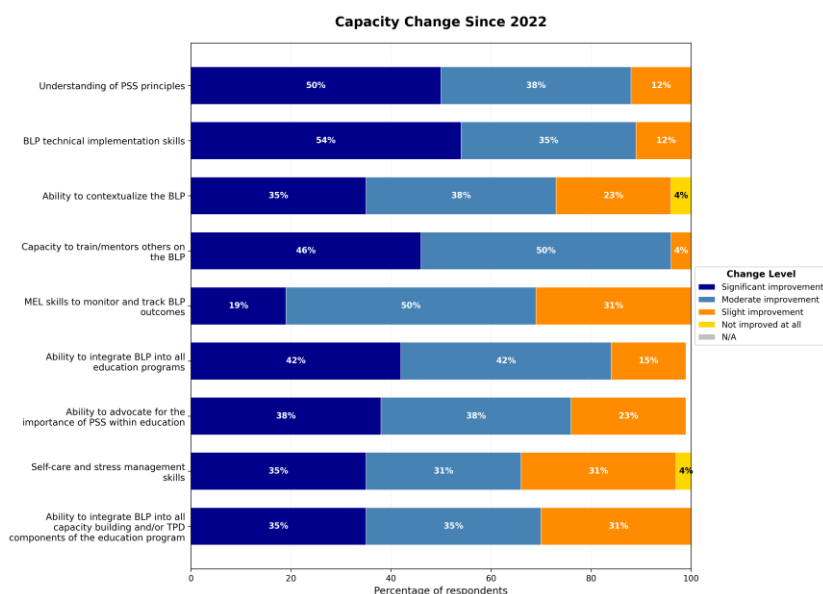


Figure 5: Change in capacity of COs on BLP over last three years

There are differences in such improvement by region. While there are not sufficient responses from all regions to make meaningful comparison, it is notable that for the MENA region—where BLP has been implemented the longest—predictably shows the smallest increase in capacity since 2022. Annex 5 offers comparison of four regions for informational purposes, noting that there are four or fewer responses for ARO, CWA, LARO, and CEERO.

The capacity development approach undertaken under RtW25 has involved several facets, including a structured capacity development package which has been supported and facilitated by either the GBU and/or regional PSS Managers to COs (see box below).

THE BLP CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PACKAGE

The BLP Capacity Development Package comprises three phases which were designed based on the GBU coaching experience and adapting the Teachers in Crisis and Conflict (TiCC) peer-to-peer coaching package. The three phases are as follows:

1. **Phase 1: Building BLP PSS Foundations** is the first step towards developing knowledge and skills for integrating PSS and SEL principles into classroom practice. This phase builds technical, foundational knowledge, skills and attitudes for PSS instruction. It includes multiple capacity development packages for working, firstly, with the BLP 1, then depending on the context of operation, also the BLP 2 and BLP 3.
2. **Phase 2: Creating a Supportive Learning and PSS Environments** builds technical knowledge, skills and attitudes for establishing and maintaining a supportive environment for PSS delivery. The phase introduces concepts and practices for ensuring that environments in which PSS is delivered offer opportunities for continuous, reflective, professional development and maintain teacher well-being, namely through coaching and classroom-based support methods.
3. **Phase 3: Leadership for PSS Programming** builds on Phases 1 and 2 to develop in-house expertise for PSS and BLP programming, where relevant. This package builds the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed of Master Trainers to ensure leadership in PSS and BLP programming, planning and capacity development.

Feedback from COs, both on the survey and in interviews show that staff consistently emphasise the high quality of trainings, the accessibility of resources and support, and the continued emphasis on staff learning and development offered through BLP’s capacity building approach. Survey results, (see Figure 7), highlight the high levels of usefulness of these trainings by actor providing the support. In interviews, COs also emphasised that in person training and continued personalised support were most useful, with online sessions described as less useful or likely to engage in. This may present a note of caution in terms of how NRC may use the BLP Digital Hub under the Together for Wellbeing 2030 initiative, noting that the intention of the Hub will be mainly as a resource repository.

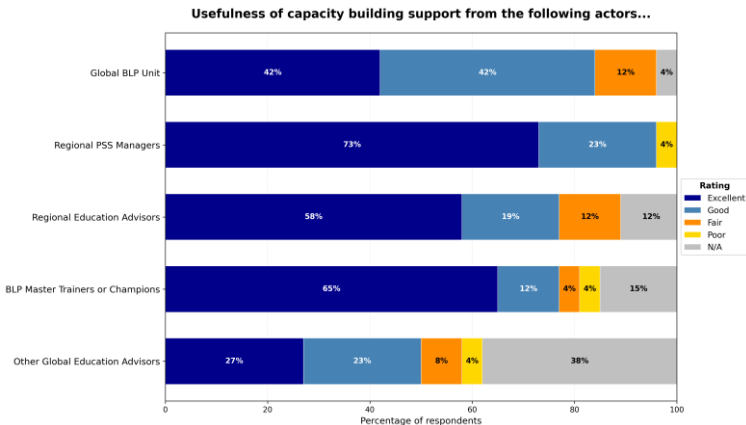


Figure 6: Usefulness of capacity building support under RtW25, as per CO feedback on 2025 survey

These findings—namely the high percentages of COs noting excellent quality of support—suggest the high value of individualised training approaches, over ones that require self-direction and self-learning. The personalised relationships and support the RtW25 initiative provided has been highly valued and important to building capacity—but also has required a high level of engagement and investment from NRC.

“I think, looking at our relationships with the BLP implementers in country, it is a lot about our ‘accompaniment’... I have found that those relationships that we have worked to build with colleagues in country, that is how I know it [implementation] is working. It’s through that close communication about the steps they are taking and me knowing where they are and responding.” (Regional level interview)

Regional interviews emphasise the considerable effort and tailored support that has been provided to COs. The 2025 Bangladesh AAR describes a gradual, capacity-building approach that began with pilot stages and iterative support from regional staff. The multi-phase, tailored approach was notably successful and also illustrates how labour intensive and high investment such efforts are. Similarly, in the 2024 Ukraine AAR, a key identified strength was the structured, phased, and multi-modal capacity building approach—as well as the identified need to repeat initial trainings to assure competence and confidence in subsequent years.

“The capacity building approach in Bangladesh... was not possible before [PSS Managers] was there, closely supporting them...I know that this close support is a little bit unbalanced, if we look at other programs like accelerated education. But we would not have reached the same goals without the support from the GBU.” (Regional level interview)

COs universally emphasised in interviews how well-supported they felt by their respective regional PSS Manager. CO level education specialists, officers, and Master Trainers all described how both formal and informal channels of communication and support from these managers have been instrumental to their increased capacity. They emphasized the strong feelings of trust, collaboration, and growth that resulted from such support, which in turn has helped them more effectively support BLP.

“The regional PSS manager is where I have gotten the most support. She is always available—for problem solving, to review a report, to ask for feedback. It has given me confidence to do my job, and to know that I can do things the right way. We would not have BLP where it is now without that very strong support.” (Country level interview)

At the CO level, interviews show notable enthusiasm for the MT model and its effectiveness in building capacity and sustaining momentum for BLP integration. In Venezuela, an MT micro-project to support teacher learning circles became an important aspect of BLP implementation (see Annex 4: Case Studies for elaboration). Master Trainers across all interviews and FGDs emphasised commitment to growing the capacity of their country teams and feeling proud and enthusiastic about sharing their skillset and finding creative ways to do so to effect positive change in their country offices. Below is one example of this.

“I started at the beginning thinking ‘how much capacity do we have in [PSS basics] before we do this? I took advantage of this new role and the trust of the team, and we started with strengthening the PSS capacity of all education staff. I invited them all, including M&E, just to make sure everyone has the basic understanding first of what BLP is and for... whether it is the project implementers or the specialists so they can best negotiate with stockholders.” (Country level interview)

Such commitment is also reflected in an analysis of post-training surveys.²⁰ 76% of the those surveyed from Iran, Kenya, Moldova, Poland, Sudan, Syria, Uganda, Ukraine and Yemen felt enabled and self-confident in providing capacity building, coaching and advice regarding BLP implementation.

Regional and global interviews reflect a range of perspective on the MT model. The core premise of the MT is to build more localised, and sustainable local capacity to implement and contextualise the

²⁰ This impact study was of workshops completed by the GBU in the period between 2019-2023. It includes work done prior to the start of the RTW 2025 initiative, but is still illustrative of the impacts of the capacity development package on supporting Master Trainers into their roles.

BLP. These MTs then are expected to continue cascading the BLP both within and across country offices. Numerous examples of how this was and has occurred—in contexts as diverse as Somalia and Afghanistan—were provided in CO level interviews. In many instances, these MTs help to ensure consistency and quality of implementation across diverse area offices or regions of the contexts they are working in.

Additionally, the investments in capacity at the regional and country level by training more Master Trainers has also increased confidence in CO capacity to deliver the BLP. Regional staff emphasized that MTs can provide continuity despite staff turnover (especially in COs with multiple MTs) and are a notable boon to integration. Additionally, the amount of interaction with MTs offers opportunity for regional staff to learn more about the contextual details and realities in specific countries. Global interviews show that there is consensus that investment in capacity building efforts through the MT model has yielded clear, positive results.

“In [countries with Master Trainers], we can move into more senior, technical support roles. For example, in Libya, it was the Master Trainers doing most of the training itself... while I was able to develop additional content for parent guides... now my work is focused a lot on enhancing the capacity of the Master Trainers.” (Regional level interview)

Overall, the MT model has been effective but costly. A common issue was that staff—from global office down to CO level—raised concerns about the sustainability of a model which relies on a small group of individuals with highly specialised expertise to continue to scale the BLP in their COs and across NRC.

“It is a very big investment for the Master Trainers, who are very good, and their support has been requested by area offices and by partners...we did lose one of those trainers already, and so now we need more Master Trainers to keep up with these requests. This is a challenge.” (Country Level Interview)

As the above quote indicates, specific risks cited included turnover of MTs (particularly now, considering the significant cuts to staffing that are being made at COs) and the amount of time investment and resourcing that goes into training a MT and enabling them to support other staff on BLP implementation alone. Questions were also raised about whether MTs should be technical officers rather than education officers, given the focus they have on capacity building and support to the rest of the CO education programme more broadly.

6.1.3 BLP tools and resource materials are valued and useable and have evolved over the years with notable feedback from country teams. However, they can still be overwhelming without foundational support and start-up guidance, especially in low-capacity contexts.

Across all levels, there is strong agreement that BLP tools and manuals are widely valued, especially in their more streamlined iterations over the years. According to the survey, 79% of COs were confident in the education teams’ ability to identify useful BLP resources or packages all or most of the time.

COs were also asked about the usefulness of the various tools and resources which have been produced and/or revised by the GBU over the last three years. As the responses indicate: (1) there was a high degree of variability in whether specific resources and tools had been used by the COs; but that (2) when they were used, they were generally rated favourably in terms of utility. The variability in utilisation of these resources is a product of the fact that in many COs, they have only recently been introduced to the BLP and are not yet at a stage of implementing the BLP-2, BLP-3 or BLP-Y, Teachers or in working to institutionalise the BLP with Ministries of Education.

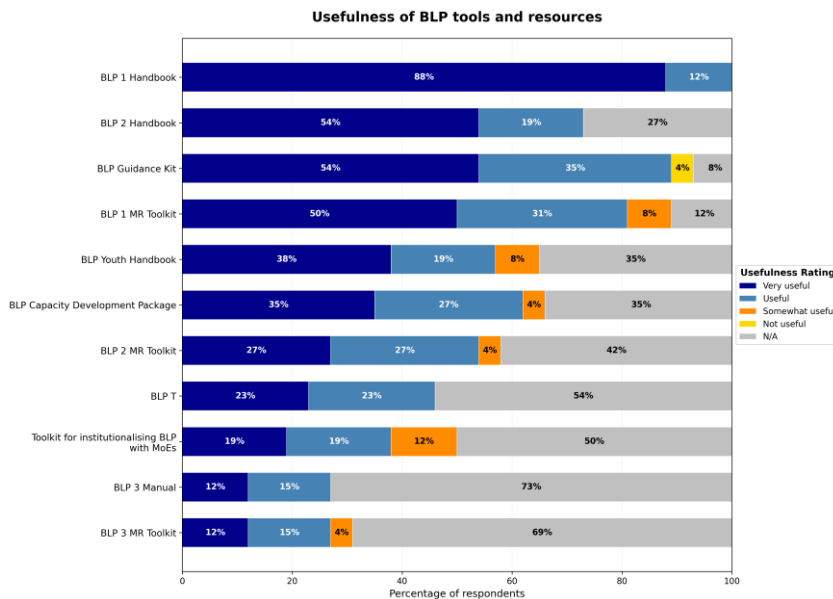


Figure 7: Perception of usefulness of different BLP tools and resources based on 2025 CO survey

The survey results indicate that 100% of COs found the BLP1 Handbook useful (and 90% very useful), which is slightly improved from 93% of surveyed COs indicating this to be the case in the 2022 Global Survey. Over half of COs indicated the youth handbook as useful, which has increased from 30% on the 2022 survey due to additional countries receiving BLP-Y training since its roll out that year. Other tools—like the Capacity Development Package, BLP T and Guidance Kit—are either completely new, significantly modified or consolidated resources from earlier versions.

The fact that these resources have become more usable and relevant over recent years, is a product of the GBU working closely with both country and regional teams to develop, refine and improve on what is available to them on BLP implementation. It is also a product of more COs needing to familiarise themselves and use these resources as they implement and evolve different components of BLP within their programmes.

For instance, the BLP Guidance Kit has been reduced by almost half—from 89 pages to 45 pages. However, the quantity and range of tools can still be overwhelming if introduced without sufficient start-up support, and the GBU continues to develop new guidance as the BLP evolves.²¹ Country offices described situations where facilitators struggled when provided resources or toolkits without sufficient orientation, coaching, or follow-up.

Regional advisors echoed these concerns, noting that especially in lower-capacity contexts, COs need more intensive support at the outset. They underlined that tools should be phased in with step-by-step guidance, otherwise staff can be left confused about sequencing and priorities.

“There are a lot of resources that come in the BLP pack. At first, it can be too overwhelming to even know where to start. The tools themselves are good, and they are also straightforward to use. But how do you know where to start? This can be too much for teams, and so we benefit a lot from a person saying, ‘review this to start’, or just helping to understand what all the materials are for.” (Country level interview)

Global interviews reinforced this picture, noting that while the BLP resource bank is strong, it was never designed to stand alone. Global staff also acknowledged that NRC may have overestimated how intuitive the tools would be. They stressed that manuals must be “unpacked” with foundational orientation, otherwise they risk being seen as checklists rather than pedagogical supports.

²¹ Examples include new Together for Wellbeing 2030 external and internal guidance, new contextualisation guidance, FLER/Condensed BLP guidance, and an Audio Teaching Assistant to support COs where there are multiple languages within a single classroom. Additionally, several new Master Trainer resources are being developed, as are refinements to MR toolkits.

Additionally, there is significant effort and required resources for translation itself. Hence, while these tools can strengthen credibility and coherence of implementation, they can only do so when grounded with some foundational understanding of BLP principles and supported with mentoring.

6.1.4 Technical support is most valued when more localised—however global support offers continued legitimacy and valuable advocacy support.

There is clear agreement that localised, contextualised technical support is most valuable for day-to-day implementation. Country offices consistently noted the role of regional PSS Managers and Master Trainers as responsive, relevant, and able to adapt guidance to local realities. Survey data shows that when asked to rate quality of technical support, CO staff gave the highest ratings to Master Trainers (3.83) and Regional PSS Managers (3.72), compared to 3.48 for the Global BLP Unit.²²

Country teams described a complementary dynamic: regional and MT support for hands-on implementation, combined with global endorsement for advocacy and recognition. Regional PSS Managers echoed this picture, noting that localised support is consistently preferred because it is closer to the realities of implementation. They described their role as bridging the gap between global guidance and local practice, ensuring tools are adapted and usable in context. At the same time, regional advisors acknowledged that ministries and donors often look for global validation before formally endorsing BLP, meaning the global unit remains important in parallel. Without this dual system, they cautioned, NRC risks either losing legitimacy externally or failing to provide the practical support that enables programmes to succeed. Figure 8, below, shows country office perspective on the utility of the GBU in providing ongoing support, per survey responses.

“There is a lot of legitimacy that comes because of this being an evidence-based global programme. It has helped a lot with the Ministry...and brought a lot of interest to BLP and the work of NRC. We have been able to show that this has been studied, and it works in a lot of places around the world, and also we can adapt it to work here too.” (Country level interview)

Global interviews confirmed this balance, with strong consensus that Regional PSS Manager and MTs provide the most relevant and timely implementation support, while the global unit plays a distinct but complementary role in standard-setting, legitimacy, and external advocacy. Several global staff acknowledged the tension: country teams rely on localised technical people for trust and implementation, but turn to the global unit to secure recognition, visibility, and donor confidence. The implication is that both layers of support are necessary and mutually reinforcing, though careful calibration is required to avoid duplication or perceived distance.

²² These scores were on a 4 point Likert-like scale where 1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, and 4=Excellent.

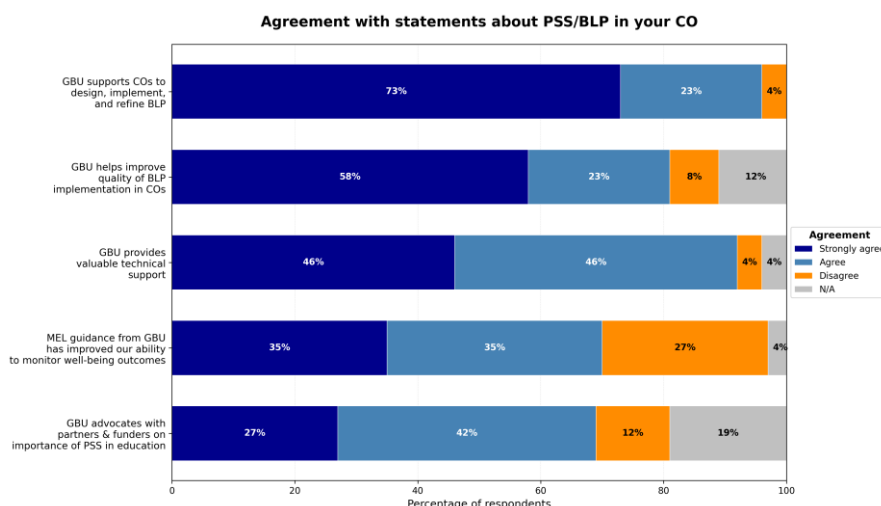


Figure 8: Agreement statements regarding GBU support²³

6.1.5 Tools and resources are most effective when contextualised with local input. In recent years, country teams have improved their understanding of how and why to contextualise BLP with support from regional and global levels.

Across all levels of interview, there is strong agreement that contextualisation has been a decisive factor in making BLP relevant and sustainable. Country offices consistently emphasised that translation and adaptation of manuals, resources, and tools—working closely staff, teachers, and communities—was the most important way to gain acceptance and ensure buy in for BLP amongst teachers, school staff, partner organizations, and local education authorities and actors. Contextualisation processes were also described as central for building government trust and securing ministry approval. Where manuals remained in their original form, teachers and officials often saw them as “foreign” and were reluctant to use them.

“Contextualisation is what keeps BLP ‘alive’ and makes it truly meaningful for the teams. At first, we were not sure how much we could be allowed to change but then saw that the teachers were just making these changes themselves. They were remaking it relevant to the culture and to the children. And they were keeping the major principles. This makes BLP more alive and doable as part of education.” (Country level interview)

Regional Education Advisors and PSS Managers highlighted that contextualisation was not just helpful but essential to integrating BLP into a range of education programming. Regional and global interviews stressed how support for contextualisation has been one of the most frequent requests from COs in the past 2-3 years, and that Regional PSS Managers and the GBU have worked closely with COs to do this. The result is that in the 2025 global survey (See Figure 5), **73% of COs reported moderate or significant improvement in their ability to contextualise BLP.**

COs have benefited from the technical support, as well as the benefit of being part of a community of practice where they can share examples and learn from others about how they have adapted the BLP to the circumstances of their context. One CO noted, for instance how one of the main benefits of the community of practice has been, the peer support and technical exchange such a platform offers, in terms of *“sharing our problems and challenges, and identifying with our other colleagues from other country offices how they have addressed such issues in their own implementation of BLP.”*

²³ As of mid-2025, the Regional PSS Managers were considered as part of the GBU. However, this was not explicitly stated during the survey so responses likely reflect an understanding of the PSS Managers as distinctly *regional* versus the GBU and are thus not part of the GBU designation in this question.

Resultingly, 58% of COs now have an excellent or good understanding of the BLP contextualisation process (see Figure 3). Additionally, the newly developed BLP contextualisation guidance, recently piloted in South Sudan, provides further explicit support for these processes, including both surface level and deeper contextualisation actions and the steps that COs should follow.²⁴

Specific measures which COs have made to contextualise the BLP are noted in Figure 9.

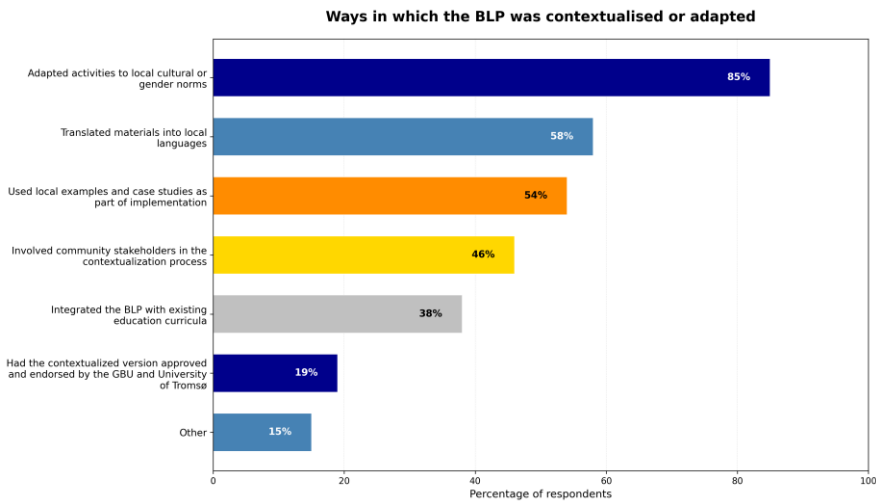


Figure 9: Actions taken by COs to contextualise the BLP

Most COs (85%) have adapted the BLP to local cultural or gender norms. For instance, Afghanistan CO described how it had to remove some of the music that accompanies BLP activities, adapt some of the exercises, and alter/erase some of the pictures in the BLP manuals to respect religious and cultural norms in Taliban-controlled areas of the country (even prior to 2021). This was both needed and necessary for community acceptance and provincial level approvals. In other COs, a range of other measures have been taken to contextualise.

One of the key challenges/tensions of this contextualisation process, however, is balancing the need for local adaptability with that of fidelity to the theoretical and conceptual foundations of BLP. To facilitate such decision-making, COs are supposed to have their contextualised approaches endorsed and approved by the GBU and the Arctic University of Norway. This process was only recently finalised in 2025 after piloting the BLP-1 handbook contextualisation process in South Sudan. To date, the survey results indicate that less than 20% of COs have gone through this official endorsement process, a number that will likely increase with the formalisation of this process. Additionally, there may be some contextualisation activities and processes that are unique to contexts and given restrictions or regulations, such as adapting BLP-1 in Taliban-controlled areas of Afghanistan.

²⁴ See BLP Contextualisation Guidance (2025). The guidance differentiates surface contextualisation (using culturally appropriate words and images to improve accessibility and engagement, for instance) from deeper contextualisation (integrating cultural values, societal norms and local concepts to maximise impact). It stresses the importance of all COs following a structured process for any contextualisation to uphold the BLPs theoretical integrity while ensuring cultural relevance, accessibility and effectiveness. Steps that all COs are expected to follow as part of this include conducting a contextualisation workshop, having any adaptations reviewed by the GBU, seeking UiT approval and then implementing these adaptations with continous monitoring and feedback.

6.2 Effectiveness of integration of BLP and PSS into NRC education programming and core competency

This section explores the following key evaluation questions²⁵:

- To what extent has PSS and BLP been integrated effectively into the education core competency strategy, processes, systems and tools?
- How well do the country offices understand the PSS of children and youth, and how has this changed in the past 2-3 years?

6.2.1 BLP has been a key, and largely effective approach for integrating non-specialized PSS across NRC's education responses and activities.

From the outset of RtW25, there has been strong ownership from COs on the importance of integrating PSS into their education responses. In both the 2023 and 2025 global surveys, country offices expressed overwhelming consensus on the importance of integrating PSS into education programming. In 2023, 93% rated PSS integration as important or very important, and in 2025, 93.1% rated it as very or extremely important. This continuity highlights that, across years, NRC staff consistently view PSS as a core and non-negotiable element of quality education response and that there has been a successful history of internal capacity building and advocacy for PSS in education.

This strong 'ownership' on the importance of MHPSS approaches within education programming is a result of several factors beyond just internal commitment. Firstly, since the mid 2010s, significant advocacy on this messaging had been promoted at the global level by donors like Porticus and USAID, along with implementing partners like NRC, War Child Holland, Save the Children, and IRC. Many of these stakeholders were brought together under the auspices of various INEE working groups.²⁶ These groups helped to produce several guidance notes, advocacy briefs, and associated resources to support implementation of MHPSS responses within education programming. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it became even more clear how supporting children's well-being was a necessity and precursor to learning continuity globally, and this furthered demand for ready to go PSS initiatives like the BLP. Effectively, BLP has been able to leverage off this pre-existing mindset and help to catalyse the integration of PSS across NRC's education programming. NRC has made significant contribution to advocacy for PSS within the EiE space over this time, as well, through such resources as the "PSS in Education – Top 3 Barriers and Opportunities" aimed at MoEs and implementers.

NRC's current Global Education Strategy specifies that NRC will, "provide access to basic psychosocial support by integrating our Better Learning Programme across all our education programmes".²⁷ Across all levels of NRC offices, there is broad agreement that BLP is the pathway through which NRC integrates PSS into education programming.

From country to global level interviews, staff reflect that PSS is or should be embedded into education strategy, theories of change, and implementation practices via BLP. In recent years, there has been a shift in BLP being viewed less as an "add on" and more so as an integral part of education programming and future proposals. This is also identified within the survey responses (see Figure 10), where BLP is embedded in almost all COs education strategies and funding opportunities (93%), and is being actively promoted with partners and funders with whom these COs are engaging (83%).

²⁵ As noted in the previous section, some key evaluation questions overlap due to the entwined nature of the content. We have included the key questions addressed in each section at the opening of each finding section even when redundant.

²⁶ See <https://www.porticus.com/en/articles/dynamics-and-dilemmas-within-the-education-in-displacement-ecosystem> and <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/736500?journalCode=cer>

²⁷ See pg 3 of [Global Education Strategy 2022-2025](#)

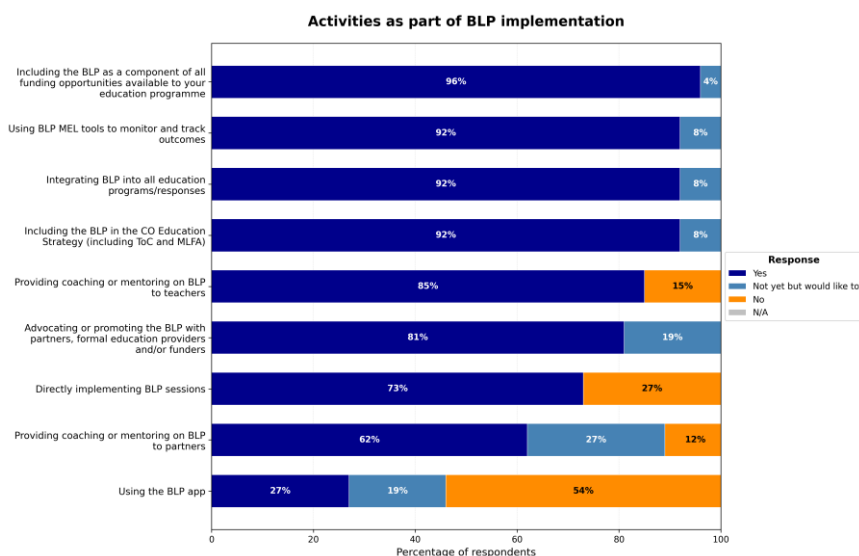


Figure 10: Ways in which COs are institutionalising BLP in their work

It is also reflected in the fact that in 2025 (see Figure 12 below), CO's note strong levels of competence in key dimensions of core BLP knowledge and skills—particularly defining key BLP terminology (61% of CO's can do this all or most of the time), MHPSS terminology (77% of COs can do this all or most of the time), and advocating for PSS/BLP with external donors (73% of COs can do this all or most of the time). These changes are significant when considering that in 2022, only 58% of COs surveyed had intermediate or advanced knowledge of PSS).

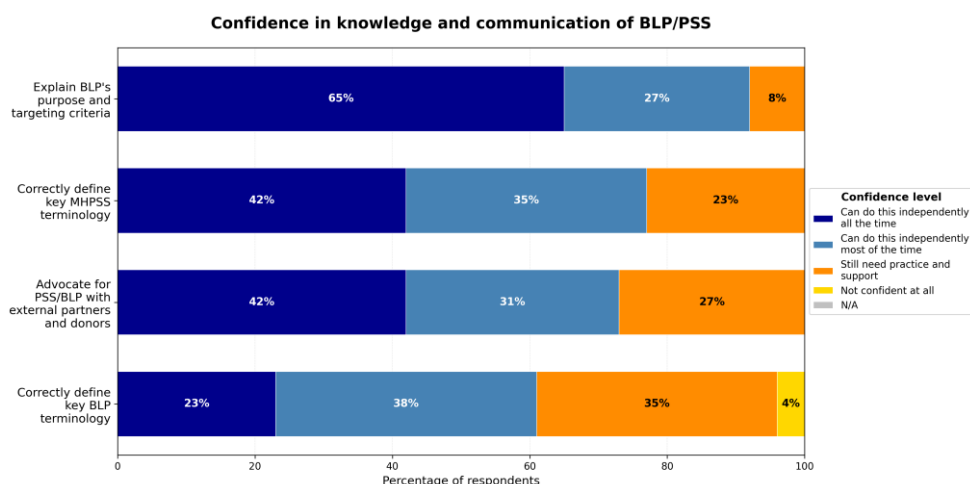


Figure 11: CO confidence in core BLP competencies (according to BLP minimum standards)

Through RTW, BLP has become the “default” or practical mechanism for both talking about and implementing PSS and is demonstrated by the fact that almost all COs are now implementing the BLP1.

This was also a point mentioned across many interviews—specifically how BLP is now an integral element of NRC’s education response in many COs.

“BLP is one of our key strategic elements of our education core competency. The idea is that BLP is an anchor in all of the education programmes, and so we are promoting and advocating for it at the national level (of our country office) but also in the different regions where things are very different. BLP is at the centre.” (Country level interview)

Interviews show that there is broad agreement that BLP has been positioned as NRC’s vehicle for PSS in education. This was noted as both a strength and a risk.

“The BLP is one example of how a structured, evidence-based PSS approach—when anchored within an existing core competency like education—can drive both scale and impact.” (Global level interview)

BLP provides a clear and recognisable structure that has positioned NRC as a leader in scaling PSS within education programming. However, there was simultaneously some reflection that equating PSS only with BLP may create dependency on one programmatic model and narrow how PSS is understood across NRC’s education strategy. Several examples were given of how NRC engages in settings where there are long-standing PSS programmes that have been nationally adopted and used by the Ministry and other partners. In two interviews, examples were offered of COs being unsure how to proceed with BLP as complementary to existing programmes, and not as competition. While it may be the noted intention of NRC to work in a complementary way with PSS programming that is already implemented, it is important to consider that at the CO level it may not be clear how to do so.²⁸

When comparing responses from the 2023 to 2025 surveys, fewer COs were now implementing other PSS/SEL programmes than they were in 2023 (see Figure 12 below). However, a greater percentage COs were noted to be implementing BLP1 in 2025 than they were in 2023 (see Table 1: Countries implementing BLP by mid-2025). This suggests a shift in NRC towards BLP becoming the primary vehicle for non-specialised PSS delivery.

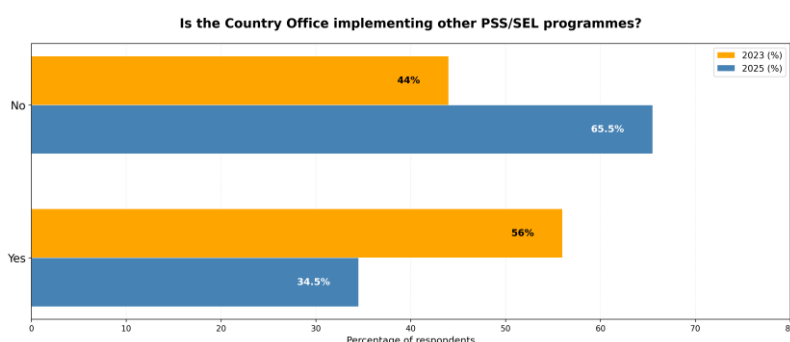


Figure 12: % of countries implementing another PSS/SEL approach²⁹

6.2.2 Integration of BLP is strongest in contexts with an existing PSS mindset. Where this is lacking, BLP adoption is slower and requires more continued support.

All levels of NRC staff interviews reflect that uptake of BLP is fastest where there is already recognition of the importance of psychosocial support and the role of education in providing such support. In such contexts where this buy-in already exists amongst teachers, ministries, and communities, BLP was described as a natural “vehicle” to operationalize existing priorities.

“We do not need to advocate for PSS here...it is already accepted as very important. There is a lot of understanding of the theory, and BLP is a way to put that into practice.... this is what was most helpful

²⁸ This is a point made in the 2018 scoping paper prepared for NRC as it began the BLP institutionalisation process in the MENA region. It notes clearly that institutionalisation needs to work from a strengths-based approach, recognising and building off of what is already there, and working through joint and coordinated approaches where a range of different type of expertise and programming are brought together towards a wider behaviour change goal. See Shah, R. (2018). *Opportunities, considerations and challenges for institutionalising the Better Learning Programme within education systems in the Middle East*.

²⁹ In both surveys, an optional write-in was offered in order to name the other PSS programme. For 2025, this was rarely completed.

for me. I understood the ‘theory’ behind PSS for children, but BLP gave me the skills to do PSS.”
(Country level interview)

Interviewees at both regional and global levels describe faster BLP uptake in countries where PSS was already valued by governments or communities. In those contexts, BLP was received as a practical method for implementing what was already recognized as important. Where the PSS mindset was weaker or absent, integration required more advocacy, contextualization, and intensive accompaniment from Regional PSS Managers (or, prior to that, global capacity building support).

“When you look across multiple countries, the differences are very clear. Where PSS is already a strong foundation of the education system, it is much less effort to integrate BLP. Where it does not, uptake is slow and needs extra investment in terms of time and effort.” (Regional interview)

6.2.3 BLP is now integrated across a range of different education programmes, though how this integration looks varies based on the context of implementation. Importantly, with time and strong capacity building efforts, it is also clear that BLP and/or other PSS can be effectively integrated into all education modalities.

In most COs today, BLP is an integral part of their education responses (see Figure 14 below). Amongst survey respondents, BLP features most prominently as part of formal education programmes (81%) but is also embedded in COs’ long-term NFE (77%), first-line response (65%) and shorter-term NFE programmes (62%). What this survey data does not indicate, however, is whether COs have made an intentional choice to include/exclude BLP from any of these responses—as not all COs will be implementing all of the types of responses noted.

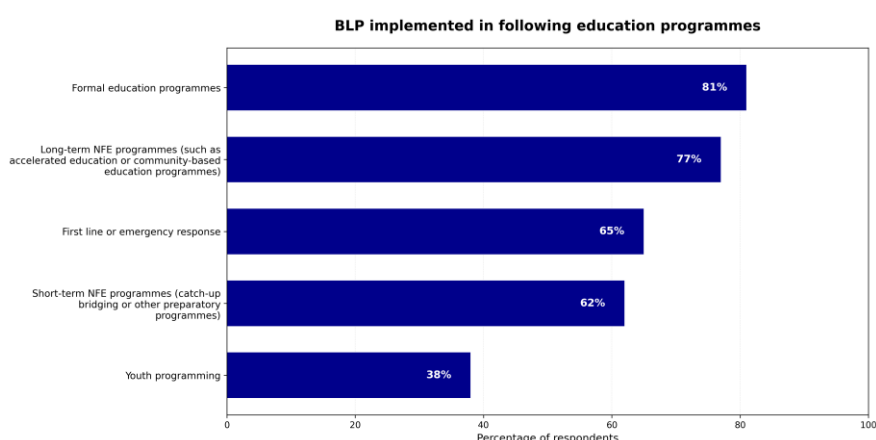


Figure 13: Modalities through which BLP is being implemented in survey respondent COs³⁰

Evaluation data reflects that integration is “fullest” in FLER (largely driven from the global level and by donor priorities) and in formal education (which implies there has already been strong buy-in/approval from national systems). Across country office interviews, however, there were varying descriptions of integration in regard to both AEPs and youth programming.

For example, in Ethiopia education staff described BLP as most fully integrated in FLER, and the biggest challenges to integration existing for AEPs. Education staff hypothesised that this may be because AEPs were already well-established and education teams had experience overseeing their implementation. Thus, integrating a newer element was more complex than in more recent FLER responses, where BLP featured centrally from the beginning. Other CO interviews echoed this

³⁰ It is important to note that not all countries are implementing all types of education programming. Thus, while 100% of FLER-implementing countries are implementing BLP, there are still fewer countries overall delivering BLP through FLER than through Formal Education. This graph represents the raw count of countries implementing BLP through each of these education programmes.

response, noting that for already established and successful AEPs, teachers and NRC staff may view BLP as an “add on” versus an integral component of programming.

“In FLER we always begin with BLP because children are experiencing distress, and it makes sense to all responders. This is not controversial. But in accelerated education, it is harder to integrate because the focus is on catching up academically.” (Country level interview)

Conversely, in Kenya, AEPs were the main entry point for implementing BLP, and through considerable investment and capacity building, have been effectively and successfully integrated. It has also been the catalyst for the BLP’s expansion into formal education settings, integrating it into teacher training through partnerships with the Ministry of Education. This suggests that it is less about the rigidity of curriculum or structure of the response, but rather, the different level of effort that might be required to build capacity and bring staff on board when a modality is already well established.

Similarly, aspects of integration depend on a variety of contextual factors. In many countries where NRC works, there can be long, drawn-out processes of review and permissions from governments. Interviews describe how in some of these countries, there is a long introductory phase of BLP which may slow that integration. However, with the establishment of strong partnerships and advocacy work the endpoint is often strong integration with formal education and amongst partners. In the Ukraine AAR and interview, the process of establishing relationships and building trust—to work in partnership and registering with the MoE in country—took substantial initial time and effort. However, this large initial effort translated to greater CO level ownership, as well as national sustainability of BLP, according to the AAR.³¹

Integration into youth programming also varied notably by context. Country level interviews emphasized that while wellbeing was a central consideration of youth programmes, this was not necessarily accomplished via BLP Youth alone. Instead, youth programming has historically embedded strong participatory approaches, from consultation to design to MEL processes. In this way, BLP becomes a tool for integration of PSS within a variety of programmes that already prioritise a contextualised, holistic approach. Since BLP Youth has only recently begun implementation and integration with all youth programming, it is outside of the scope of this evaluation to consider in-depth the institutionalisation of PSS within youth programming. The below box offers overview of the strategic inclusion of PSS in youth programming to date.

Youth Programming and Wellbeing

BLP Youth was introduced and implemented as an integral part of youth programming, particularly within the Life Skills programmes and other programmes offered under broader youth projects. Its integration is important for several reasons:

Supporting Vulnerable and Marginalized Youth: Many youth are vulnerable, marginalized, or neglected and require psychosocial support (PSS) to improve their overall wellbeing. BLP Youth provides this support in a structured and evidence-informed way.

Enhancing Learning Capacities: Youth often lack adequate study or coping skills. By combining BLP Youth with Life Skills programming, participants can improve their capacities to learn, manage stress, and navigate challenges effectively.

Stress Recognition and Management: The goal of BLP Youth is to help participants recognize and manage stress. The programme provides practical guidance on understanding different aspects of stress and strategies to cope, which is a critical component of PSS.

Contextualized and Integrated Approach: The Youth Package combines and contextualizes BLP-1 and BLP-2 to make the content relevant and applicable to youth participants’ real-life experiences, ensuring a participatory and tailored approach to wellbeing.

³¹ After Action Review Final Report: Education Programme, Ukraine Country Office (May 2024)

6.2.4 There is overall very strong country level buy-in for BLP, both internally to NRC and with partners and Ministries. BLP is widely recognised and in-demand across a variety of contexts globally.

As previous findings demonstrate, there is a high level of buy in and ownership for non-specialised PSS, but specifically for the BLP within NRC. This is due to a strong belief that NRC contributes to a range of important outcomes within NRC's education programming, but also for the systems/contexts they are working in. Across COs, there was agreement that the BLP contributes to improved well-being and learning outcomes for children and youth, as well as enhances teacher well-being and capacity. And importantly, that the BLP is an appropriate intervention for their context.

This view also is shared by many of the partners with whom NRC is working within its COs, and interviews suggest that COs are often receiving requests from ministries, partners, teachers, and others for new/further BLP trainings.

"We are regularly having requests for training in BLP from the Ministry and other partners. NRC is known for this programme, and it means that others come to us when they have questions about PSS, but specifically they want to know what BLP is and how it is done." (Country level interview)

"There is a huge demand from teachers here. Once they get the training, they tell us they want more, and they also tell other schools. The challenge is we cannot meet all the requests." (Country level interview)

Regional education advisors further underlined this point, noting the frequency of requests from country teams and ministries for BLP training and technical support.

"Often when a ministry wants NRC inputs or support, it is directly about BLP...We get more requests for BLP training than any other education component" (Regional interview)

This demand has increased visibility of BLP and reinforced NRC's position as a leader in PSS in education. However, some staff noted that this also risks reinforcing BLP as a separate "brand" rather than as part of NRC's wider education programming. Ministries often associate NRC primarily with the BLP.

As one global level interviewee described, "BLP is one of our strongest brands — governments know NRC for this. The demand is a good thing, but it does make us vulnerable if BLP is sometimes the only thing NRC is known for." (Global interview)

Some, though, saw this demand as evidence of the impact of strong advocacy and fundraising efforts from the GBU, while others worried that the "BLP brand" risks overshadowing NRC's broader education work or capacity to deliver non-specialised PSS programming that is not the BLP.

Additionally, it was noted that because of the significant amount of resourcing, support and technical guidance that was provided to COs to implement BLP, it also fuelled further interest and demand for more from partners.

The more you produce, the more you develop, the more you are out there providing technical support and guidance, the more appetite there is and the greater the buy in ...and the more requests for further support you get. So, it's difficult to know when to stop unless you approach this in a strategic way from the beginning and say I'm starting here, and I want to get there. (Global interview)

This high demand from external stakeholders is also a key driver behind NRC's Together for Wellbeing 2030 Initiative (TfW30). TfW30 aims to respond strategically to the increasing demand for evidence-based, scalable and sustainable PSS approaches. The aim is for NRC support external partners to integrate the core methodology of the BLP into their own education programmes through a white label approach (WLA), but through structured collaboration, licensing agreements and

technical engagement with NRC.³² Given this is the future direction of NRC's work with the BLP—on external scale up of the BLP—one of the key identified capacity-building needs from COs is around how best to approach this external scaling process. Additionally, when COs were asked in an open-ended question what they hope would happen with the BLP in their context in the next 2-3 years, more than 75% of the comments related to some form of external scale up/institutionalisation approach.

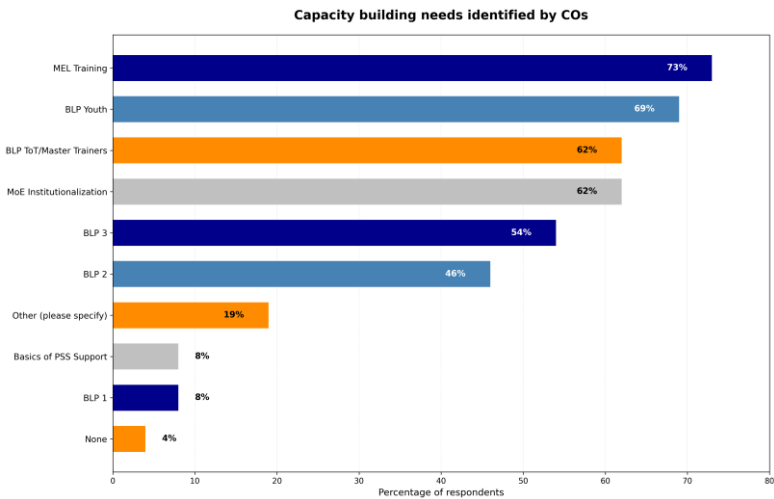


Figure 14: Capacity building needs identified by COs

6.3 Organisational and Programmatic Learning: Supporting quality, learning and advocacy about/within BLP

This section explores the following key evaluation questions:

- What are the processes for integrating learning from monitoring, evaluation, research and evidence activities into the BLP institutionalisation process?
- What role has advocacy and communication work of the GBU served in furthering the goals of internal institutionalisation?
- To what extent has PSS and BLP been integrated effectively into the education core competency strategy, processes, systems and tools?

6.3.1 The development of BLP MEL has been an iterative, multi-year learning process which has come together under RtW25 – transforming early, less-coordinated monitoring tools into a unified system that now anchors institutional learning and programmatic adaptation across NRC's education portfolio.

From its inception, the BLP has sought to demonstrate its contribution to children’s psychosocial wellbeing and academic functioning, yet the systems to monitor and evidence these outcomes evolved gradually over time. Early monitoring and evaluation efforts, beginning around 2018, were largely tool-driven and focused on output level measures. As one global team member noted, *“when I started, the toolkits were all about tools... there were no indicators, because the global theories of change had no BLP component at an outcome level.”*

³² [Together for Wellbeing 2030](#)

This period reflected the programme's expansion phase, when BLP was scaling quickly to new COs but without an official unified logic linking tools, indicators, and programme outcomes for such a global programme.

"When you scale so quickly up to 34 countries, you lose a little bit of control of what you are supposed to be doing, that is inevitable. If it was five countries, I am sure we could have solved the monitoring problems right away." Global level interview

At the start of RtW25, the MEL approach began to consolidate: outputs were gradually aligned with NRC's global education frameworks, and the first concerted effort was made to define outcomes within a coherent theory of change. This foundational work set the stage for a more systematic, organisation-wide approach to MEL — one that culminated in the development of the Monitoring and Research (MR) Toolkits and their subsequent iterations.

Beginning in 2023, the GBU—coordinated by the BLP MEL Specialist position on the GBU, as well as subsequently the Regional PSS Managers—collaborated to identify essential indicators and streamline data tools. Early prototypes were piloted across multiple country offices with the aim of balancing technical rigour with feasibility for CO staff.

"We began by mapping what existed — dozens of spreadsheets, surveys, and narrative templates. The goal wasn't to replace everything overnight, but to create a consistent logic that connects classroom practices to programmatic learning." Global level interview

By 2024, this process included revision of the SLEC to a shorter and simpler tool. In 2025 this culminated in the creation of the Monitoring Toolkits, an integrated package of practical tools and guidance for collecting and interpreting BLP data at multiple levels. Through iterative feedback loops, the toolkit incorporated lessons It established a clear through-line between activity-level monitoring, country-level learning reviews, and global synthesis.

"The Monitoring Toolkit represents a cultural shift — not just a new template, but a shared understanding of what we mean by learning and reflection in the BLP." Global level interview

The 2025 edition of the Monitoring Toolkit consolidated this work, aligning MEL processes with NRC's broader education core competency and indicators. Equally important was the process that underpinned this product: collaborative workshops and cross-country learning exchanges strengthened MEL capacity among regional and country teams, while deepening ownership of monitoring data. Close partnership with collaboration with the Arctic University of Norway assured rigor and technical expertise in all tools and approaches.

"It is a necessary process of getting somewhere with the MEL systems. There is massive feedback from COs, which is a good thing... the MEL processes should be viewed as a long-term learning process." Global level interview

While significant progress has been made, the journey underscored ongoing challenges in embedding MEL as a learning practice rather than a compliance function. Some country teams continue to face capacity and resource constraints that limit regular reflection or analysis of monitoring data. Nevertheless, the evolution of the Monitoring Toolkit demonstrates how iterative learning and co-creation can foster sustainable systems change within a multi-country initiative. As of mid-2025, the updated Monitoring Toolkit for BLP 1 is being rolled out globally; BLP-2 is under development; and BLP-3 is planned. This process will require time to understand their full implications for implementation, learning, and institutional practice.

This evolution provides the foundation for the MEL findings that follow, which examine the challenges described by evaluation participants, reflections on how the Monitoring Toolkit has been adopted, how data is informing programmatic decisions, and how learning is being institutionalised across NRC's education portfolio.

6.3.2 MEL systems for BLP to date have historically been siloed, with separate TOC, tools, and staffing, limiting integration with the education core competency at both global and country levels. While recent efforts under RtW25 aim to rectify this, at the time of this evaluation CO staff still express some confusion and burden with MEL systems.

Global interviews reflect the recognition that MEL for BLP has been historically siloed—while also acknowledging that this was due to many external factors and not a strategic intention. Staff at global and regional levels reflected on the separate theories of change, outcome/output measures, and tools and how these have in the past weakened alignment with education core competency MEL.

As noted above, the journey to develop BLP MEL resources, processes and assure their alignment with the education core competency has been one of notable effort. With a standalone TOC, strong partnership with the Arctic University of Norway, and a commitment to advocating for PSS in education, this resulted in the creation of a strong evidence base and important brand strength for BLP.

However, there is general agreement in the interview data that this separation has created ongoing challenges to integration with broader education core competency MEL practices, tools and approaches. Interviews at all levels emphasize that having separate tools and staffing structures has led to duplication, fragmentation, and a lack of integrated evidence as the quote below indicates.

“At country level we had different MEL tools for BLP than for the rest of education. It created duplication and confusion because staff didn’t know which system to follow.” (Country office interview)

A specific example was given by one interviewee of how the BLP has its own capacity assessment tool which is distinct to the one used by the education core competency. Additionally, the same individual noted how multiple indicators within the BLP TOC are tracking the same group of children as that of other education programme output indicators. They gave the example of how the number of children receiving PSS may be equivalent (or a combination) to the number of children attending classes or receiving NFE instruction. Yet, these output level indicators have been reported on separately. As this individual noted:

“We measure a lot that’s basically the same thing. And that’s because... [children] use all the services.” (Global level interview)

While this may be a similar to challenges faced in other core competencies in regards to output monitoring at NRC, CO staff did emphasise the feeling of duplication within their CO and implementation teams.

Across all interviews and level of staff, there is also agreement that efforts under RtW25 to more closely align BLP outcome measures and its TOC with those of the education core competency, including through inclusion of a mandatory well-being outcome measure in the global TOC are warranted and needed. Previously, the BLP connected to the education core competency outcome of safe and inclusive learning environments through the indicator “learners feel safe and protected”. However, this did not accurately reflect the full contribution of BLP to psychosocial well-being. With the inclusion of the new mandatory indicator on improved psychosocial well-being, there is now a more natural fit for the BLP in the education core competency TOCs. It also means that it will compel all COs to integrate psychosocial well-being into their education responses, given it is a mandatory outcome across all response approaches.

However, interviewees also noted that country-level uptake of and shift in the global outcome reporting system is inconsistent — some COs align quickly, while others continue to use older tools or parallel systems. This unevenness will likely continue as the new Monitoring Toolkits become more fully integrated; interviews suggest that such full absorption may take up to two years.

6.3.3 Changes in MEL practices and tools, and specifically the SLEC, have led to limited confidence for COs to use BLP MEL effectively and to promote programme learning.

Changes in MEL guidance and tools—as noted above— have left COs uncertain about how best to monitor, track and report on outcomes from the BLP. Country offices reported some confusion due to multiple iterations of the SLEC tool, as well as ongoing refinements to guidance from global and regional teams. While formal communication was made with each iteration of the SLEC (SLEC-26, SLEC-21, SLEC-15), informal sharing of these tools amongst COs and staff may have increased confusion. Interviews emphasise that it continues to be unclear when to use the SLEC and which version for certain contexts. As an example of this, one CO team noted that it was almost impossible to use the SLEC with the FLER, given its short duration. However, the guidance on use of SLEC in FLER is clear—it is not feasible or appropriate in an emergency response—and should not be used. This highlights challenges in communications and sensitisation regarding MEL tools, and may indicate mainly the current “point in time” of RtW25’s significant MEL updates when this evaluation has taken place.

While the refinement of the Monitoring Toolkit and resources under RtW25 has aimed at increased useability, relevance and alignment across COs, there is still need for significant time to build confidence at CO level to use the toolkits effectively, as indicated by 2025 survey responses in Figure 16 below.

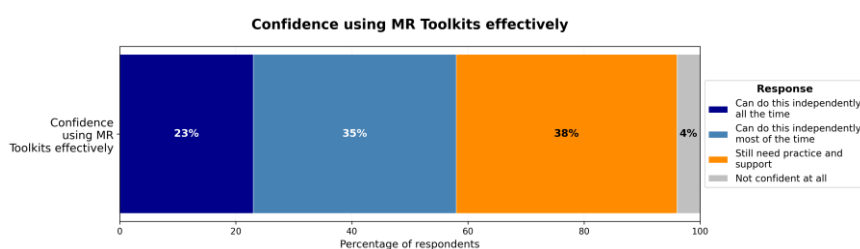


Figure 15: Confidence in using MR Toolkits, 2025 survey³³

Additionally, there continues to be an overreliance on the SLEC at the country level and a view that it is the only way to monitor the implementation of the BLP, despite it being an outcome measurement tool. Across CO interviews, SLEC remains the most widely used tool as part of BLP MEL.

“Yes, there is a lot in the MR Toolkit. But the tool we use to measure the outcome of BLP is the SLEC.”
(Country level interview)

Some COs note that the data produced is often difficult to translate into actionable programme learning, often due to a lack of guidance or understanding of how to analyse the data. This was a view reiterated at the regional level where some advisors described the SLEC tool as overly complicated and not fully suited to programme learning unless proper analysis could be conducted.³⁴ These interviews also emphasised how diverse CO use of the SLEC is. The below quote notes this point, emphasising that without sufficient guidance on data analysis the data itself is not easily translated to programme learning.

“The programme staff do not have the expertise to use the tool or do the data analysis, and the MEL staff don’t have the education expertise to interpret the findings in a way that can help improve programming.”
(Regional level interview)

³³ In the course of this evaluation, the official name of the toolkit changed from MR Toolkit to Monitoring Toolkit; throughout the report we use the newer name but note that in survey and quotes there is still reference to the older version, i.e. MR Toolkit.

³⁴ This evaluation offers point in time perspectives from data collection completed in June-August 2025. As of October 2025, the new Monitoring Toolkit features a new and simplified analysis tool. This tool has been presented to Master Trainers and will be rolled out with the Monitoring Toolkit.

Global interviews reflected the strongest critique of the SLEC as currently used. These interviews emphasise the significant investment that was made in its development and subsequent iterations, and its potential to be used in specific scenarios where there is strong capacity to effectively analyse data and use its results effectively. However, it is generally understood that its current usage is not effective or efficient, particularly without increased support to assure the data can be meaningfully analysed and used for programme learning.

“MEL [discussion] is only about the SLEC...my response is ‘we are measuring well-being. We are monitoring well-being.’ And right now, we use the SLEC to do that, but it could change in a year. What we need to be focused on is well-being, not just the tool. How do we understand well-being in context? It’s also cultural and contextual... So what we are developing globally should look different in countries where it needs to be different... This should be the focus, not the tool.” (Global level interview)

As such, the fact that SLEC is now *the* key measure by which improved psychosocial wellbeing as an outcome will be measured across the education core competency also poses risks, particularly when used in isolation from the other tools available in the Monitoring Toolkit. For instance, SLEC was designed as a pre-post assessment which could be administered prior to and immediately following delivery of the mandatory BLP-1 lessons. As non-specialised PSS becomes increasingly embedded across all education programmes, and supported through other, complementary actions beyond BLP, practices around when, how and for what the SLEC is administered will need to be reassessed.

6.3.4 NRC emphasises a culture of learning which is evident from global to country office levels, as well as with the significant investments made in research on BLP. However, MEL practices prioritise donor accountability, and this has led to an overemphasis on an easily packaged single tool (the SLEC) and less emphasis on multiple data sources which may include qualitative and descriptive data.

Across all levels of interviews NRC staff believe strongly in the value of MEL and evidence generation to inform programme improvements. An important part of the “BLP brand” has been its powerful claim that it is evidence-based. Country interviews emphasize the power of this evidence base in advocating both internally within NRC staff, as well as externally with partners, ministries, and other funders. In locations where country-specific evidence exists because of investment in research, interviews note the continued use of such evidence for learning, partnership, and other advocacy efforts (see box below).

Using MEL data and research in Kenya

In Kenya, staff stressed the importance of both MEL processes and research, to positively impact BLP implementation and partnership in country. Kenya survey data reflects strong MEL skills, noting excellent understanding of the Monitoring Toolkit, significant improvement in MEL skills in the last three years, and indication that the team strongly agrees that the GBU MEL support has improved monitoring practices.

In terms of the SLEC, staff describe that it is successfully used to monitor outcomes, **but importantly with a strong emphasis on the complementary qualitative data collected** via focus group discussion tools. Such data was then analysed through effective partnership across MEL and education teams: “We worked closely with the MEL team to use the SLEC and other tools...It is a coordinated effort between the education staff, the Master Trainers, and the MEL team.” Via such collaboration, they have successfully identified students with additional protection concerns.

Between 2022-2023, the Kenya CO also participated in a qualitative study on BLP-1 led by the MHPSS Collaborative. According to CO staff, data from this research which emphasized perceptions of impact, challenges, and enablers of effective programming has informed programme decisions and improvements and has also been used in advocacy efforts with the Ministry of Education, with whom NRC currently has an MoU to institutionalise BLP within national teacher training.

Other COs note the need for context-specific evidence as well as more descriptive data. In Ethiopia, teams emphasised that documenting, reporting, and understanding how BLP is being implemented at the classroom level is a key area of improvement. Interviews emphasised that, while MEL teams assure alignment with all grant requirements, there is often foundational information missing that would help education programme teams know where to focus their implementation efforts. A key challenge is the over-reliance on the SLEC to do this. According to one of the Ethiopia education staff:

“The problem I see with the SLEC is that I don’t know what is actually happening in a classroom, so I don’t know anything about BLP from this data. The data that would be the most useful is to be able to see what of the BLP is actually being used, how it is being done in the classroom. It would be... the most helpful to be hearing from the teachers and knowing what they are seeing and doing.” (Country level interview)

Importantly, many interviews pointed to use of the SLEC alone when it is intended to be used as part of a suite of other data collection and monitoring tools. The Monitoring Toolkits include specific tools for qualitative data collection, and other tools from the education core competency such as classroom observation tools, are ideally complementary to the SLEC and would encourage more efficient programme learning. However, data points to COs often selecting and using the SLEC as a standalone tool. Figure 17, below, emphasises the need for continued support to understand use of the Monitoring Toolkits.

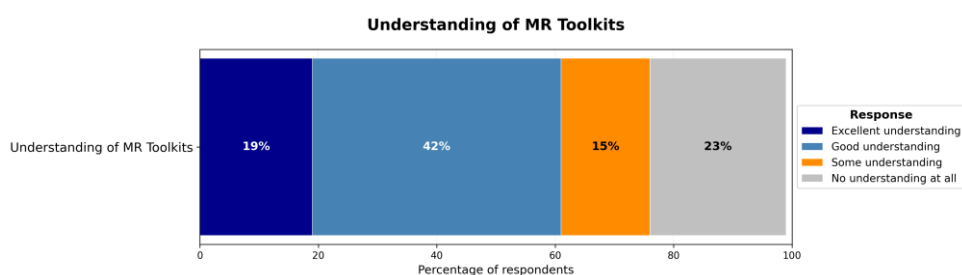


Figure 16: Understanding of MR Toolkits, 2025 survey

Additionally, the structure of NRC whereby programme and MEL teams are separated creates an additional impediment, as the lines of responsibility and accountability, as the demands on each team are quite different. MEL teams are often overstretched across multiple sectors and lack the technical expertise to analyse BLP data meaningfully, and the time to translate it into learning for programme teams. This disconnect means findings are often reported to donors but not used or fed back for programme learning purposes, as the quote below notes.

“MEL data too often ends at reporting, not feeding back into practice.” (Global interview)

There were only a few examples of joint analysis amongst education and MEL colleagues. As a result, data often stops at reporting and does not loop back into programme learning (see above below text box on Kenya as an exception to this point as well as the Venezuela case study).

“The big challenge to doing MEL for BLP is that there is a big, big distance between the MEL staff and the education programme. We need the MEL team to do the data collection, sampling, reporting. But they do not know the education programme, so there is a large divide... We have a difficult time with any learning for the programme because we are just good that we got the data.” (Country level interview)

Importantly, the SLEC has been successfully used in such research to generate evidence of the impacts of BLP. The tool itself is a well-designed, and research-validated measurement tool that has been used outside of NRC, via its public availability.³⁵ It is comparable to other research-validated tools designed to measure psychosocial wellbeing in a variety of humanitarian contexts globally. It also provides a quick snapshot of the impact of BLP implementation, particularly to funders.

“The culture of learning at NRC is there, but in a resource and time constrained environment, accountability to donors will often win out.” (Regional level interview)

The risk of the SLEC, however, is its misuse, or rather construal as the only way to do MEL for the BLP, according to its developers at the Arctic University of Norway. UiT sees the SLEC as a single piece of a larger toolkit that includes methods to provide more in-depth understanding of both impact and implementation detail, as well as the context itself. While the Monitoring Toolkit does include these additional resources, including qualitative guides, SLEC is often selected to be used on its own—due to its perceived “simplicity” to administer, and the fact that it is on this outcome measure that COs are ultimately accountable to donors, and now global level measures of effectiveness of the education core competency.

6.3.5 BLP’s advocacy and communications work to date has been largely externally focussed with a very successful track record of profiling NRC’s innovation and success to the sector, as well as in raising its visibility with partners and funders.

BLP’s advocacy and communications efforts have historically been primarily externally facing and geared towards global level funders and actors. These efforts have significant success in elevating the profile of NRC as a leader in the PSS and education space, as well as enhancing its visibility among partners and funders. It is through such work that the BLP “brand” had been built, one which as discussed in the previous section, has elevated NRC’s position as a leader in the EiE community over the past decade.

Interviews attribute this success to BLP’s ability as something that is both fundable and tells a compelling story.

“BLP is sexy... it attracts ready money.” (Global level interview)

They emphasised how the programme’s track record and ability to foster interest and engagement with governments and Ministries of Education, and with clear pathways to impacting how education

³⁵ See <https://inee.org/measurement-library>

is delivered within national systems is compelling to donors who are seeking long-term, systems-change oriented impact. But it also speaks to humanitarian-oriented donors, or those interested in mental health, who are drawn to BLPs evidence base and human-centered narratives on how young people can recover from the traumas caused by displacement.

“Kids sell... It’s a heartstring sort of program.” (Global level interview)

There is, as more than one individual mentioned, a sense of personality-driven advocacy as well. The head of the GBU was noted to be someone, who universally, was seen as able to share and communicate a compelling story about the BLP and bring new funders to the table.

All of this serves foundation for many of the externally focussed communications and advocacy products, including through short films, documentaries and advertisements. Interviewees noted that the investment and resourcing that has gone into this work was both needed and necessary to maintain and build an increasingly diversified set of funders to the table on supporting BLP.

At the country level, advocacy efforts also turn towards engagement with external actors and CO teams name support from the GBU as essential to this. Amongst survey respondents, 83% agree or strongly agree that advocacy and communications material from the GBU is useful. Additionally, 79% of respondents note moderate or significant improvement in their CO’s capacity to advocate for PSS in education in the past three years based on some of the work produced by the GBU’s advocacy and comms advisor. In country level interviews, staff note that the power and visibility of the BLP brand—maintained through such advocacy efforts—has also helped in ensuring BLP is included in all funding proposals.

All this work has been supported by having in place a dedicated advocacy and communication role, which has been able to craft powerful messages and narratives for funders and external stakeholders. Examples of work done by individuals in this role include publishing of a BLP Global Newsletter, development of blogs, papers, advocacy briefs, as well as the production of three award-winning documentaries, as well as other short films/advertisements for fundraising and external advocacy.³⁶ Having such a role for a specific initiative, however, is atypical, not only for the education core competency but across all of the core competencies. Additionally, the education core competency as a whole, does not currently have a dedicated advocacy and communications support function embedded in the team, and rather relies on the general support provided through HQ level structures. There was recognition that if similar attention and investment were put into advocacy and communications work in other areas of the core competency, that the education programme of NRC as a whole might benefit, rather than just one specific component of it.

³⁶ Documentaries can be found at the following links: [Stressed: A Pandemic of Fear, Reclaiming the Night](#), and [Edge of the Valley](#)

6.4 Sustainability, Strategic Positioning and Future Directions

This section reports on the following key evaluation questions:

- What are the gaps to achieve BLP's sustainable integration into NRC, and how might this be best addressed?
- What gaps remain to sustain country office capacity to implement the BLP?
- Given the uncertainty of future funding and the structural changes underway at NRC, what are the potential strategic directions for the education and BLP teams to ensure the sustainable in-house integration of PSS/BLP?

6.4.1 Sustainability may be constrained by the absence of a clear exit strategy and an overreliance on donor-based funding for the BLP.

Over the last five to seven years, the growth of BLP has been swift and comprehensive, fuelled by strong donor engagement and investment in NRC's capacity and willingness to scale the BLP rapidly. Additionally, because of the wider focus and interest across the education in emergencies community in evidence-based models of non-specialised PSS, NRC was able to capitalise on this momentum with a practice it had already built over the previous decade.

Across all levels of interviews, there is consensus that the RTW's reliance on donor funding means that sustainability of BLP as currently implemented is fragile. For instance, interviews pointed to the recent loss of Master Trainers at COs because of restructuring and downsizing, as a clear indication that institutionalisation cannot be supported through external funding commitments alone. Likewise, the future role of regional PSS Managers is currently precarious despite the high value they hold for COs, particularly those who are still struggling to implement the BLP. Lastly, if COs are less able to fundraise successfully for the continuance of BLP in their work, it can also create large staff turnover, and risk undermining the capacity, expertise, and ownership that has been established towards the importance of supporting children's well-being across all education programming.

"It would be a real problem to lose a Master Trainer because they are very specialised in BLP now. We depend on them for the training and knowledge of BLP for our offices...when there is an individual that holds most of that knowledge it can be a risk." (Country level interview)

The BLP institutionalisation has been a rapid journey, driven by a multitude of interconnected factors. It has been shaped by NRC's own conviction on the importance of improving children's well-being across all its education programming, but also by donor engagement and interest as well as increasing attention and focus within EIE response to MHPSS, particularly during and following the COVID-19 pandemic. As the demand and need for evidence-based responses grew globally, the BLP offered an evidence-based and relatively easy to implement approach to introduce non-specialised PSS into new countries and regions. Through implementation additional needs, gaps and refinements to how BLP should be delivered were identified as the quotes below note.

"You can always create a next step, or additional ways in which we could improve BLP... we could always generate more evidence, or refine our guidance, or create new tools. There have been so many versions of every resource. And I think that this was okay, this was necessary to get us to where we are now. But we are no longer in the same funding environment, and so we can't move forward like we have been." (Global level interview)

"From a funding perspective, there can be a lot of buy in in the beginning. Donors are interested in certain things, certain trends. And so there may be big investment originally, and then maybe also to scale the thing... then donors often move on to another trend, so the maintenance is harder to fund." (Global level interview)

But these quotes also signal the need to be clear on when institutionalisation has been successfully achieved, particularly in a context where funders are looking for the next innovative idea to take to scale. A concern raised, by more than one key informant, was whether it was clear at what point NRC should phase out from the intensive support and attention it has given to BLP over the past years.

“When is it ‘enough’? This is a key question and I’m not sure we can answer it easily. BLP1 and BLP2 in every country? But that is not about institutionalisation, and that is much more difficult to quantify... I don’t know if we really thought about what the end result would look like.” (Global level interview)

Without now establishing this clear exit strategy and more sustainable structures to maintain some core support to non-specialised PSS within the education core competency, the achievements noted to date remain somewhat precarious.

6.4.2 Future integration of PSS requires merging roles into broader education structures, not maintaining parallel technical tracks. This may however, compromise capacity and support to COs, in an area that remains in high demand

Across the organisation, there is recognition that the sustainability of PSS within NRC’s education core competency depends on embedding it into its core roles and systems, rather than maintaining separate specialised roles and functions. For instance, COs emphasised that PSS Managers and dedicated roles have been essential for introducing BLP and building early capacity. Still, they recognise that individuals or individual roles that remain focussed only on BLP can lead to their expertise remaining separate from broader conversations around holistic education (for example, teacher professional development that has not explicitly requested BLP support).

“As a Master Trainer, I know that I have the most BLP knowledge and staff come to me then with questions or need for support or training. I try to make it clear that PSS should be integrated in everything, but it can feel like without the BLP activities or trainer then we will not be able to implement PSS.” (Country level interview)

There was, however, concern from at least some COs, that removing specific roles for BLP implementation could undermine the attention and focus which is given to it at present.

“If everyone is responsible for everything, then no one is responsible for anything.” (Country level interview)

Nonetheless, there are examples of COs that have integrated BLP expertise as part of wider technical support. For instance, in the case of the Afghanistan country programme, BLP was integrated into NRC’s non-formal education programmes prior to 2021.³⁷ NRC’s programme focussed on supporting students with literacy and numeracy, but there was a recognised gap with embedding psychosocial support within this to improve students’ academic functioning. Master Trainers helped to introduce BLP into the programme. Their technical assistance, however, was embedded within a wider remit of teacher professional development targeted at supporting educators to holistically improve academic outcomes of struggling students.

Likewise, country and regional interviews emphasise that long-term sustainability requires integration with external systems, as well. In Ethiopia and Kenya, working with ministries and teacher training institutes to merge PSS functions into standard teacher education has been central to growth and sustainability of programming. South Sudan staff similarly underscored that without integration into government structures, PSS will remain dependent on implementation through specific projects and individual champions.

³⁷ While the current Afghanistan CO does not implement BLP2, this conversation originally referenced BLP2 which may have reflected the previous iteration of BLP implementation or reference to activities under a (also previous) community-based education programme. We have left this example in text as it reflects the experience and reflections of the interviewee on the value of an integrated TPD approach.

Regional interviews emphasised the need for flexible and expansive roles to support the range of CO-level needs. BLP capacity building support, these interviews suggested, can and sometimes are expanded to cover broader education capacity building, including the integration of education and BLP training. This has been exemplified in the MENA region, where BLP sessions have been incorporated into existing teacher professional development packages, such as the Teacher in Crisis Contexts curriculum. This is likely due to the longer period in which BLP has been integrated into education programming in MENA, and thus can be a useful example to learn from for other, more nascent countries. Similarly, BLP features as a central, foundational component of NRC's FLER programming, showcasing how BLP elements can (and should) be effectively woven into broader thematic areas to improve emergency education.

Global interviews echoed the alarm of maintaining the siloed approach moving forward, particularly in terms of long-term sustainability. There was a view that while this focussed technical expertise may have been needed at the outset, there was an expectation that this level of support was no longer as necessary.

"If we still need to rely on technical experts, and do not have some level of capacity within all education staff, then that to me means that institutionalisation has not been achieved." (Global interview)

These global stakeholders were unanimous that a parallel technical track for PSS is not viable in the medium to long term. Several warned that sustaining "PSS Managers" risks siloing wellbeing rather than embedding it as a cross-cutting mindset. Instead, there was a strongly held view that wellbeing had to be "mainstreamed" across the education core competency theories of change, structures, and roles to start, and then later within government systems. How this transition is managed, however, must be carefully managed, given that COs continue to value and demand the expertise provided by the GBU. In the short-term, this will likely mean maintaining some roles at the global level around technical and professional development support for BLP while the phase-out from a separate technical unit to being mainstreamed across the education core competency occurs.

6.4.3 While BLP-1 may be confidently and independently implemented across many countries, demand for further support on other BLP components remain. This includes for BLP-2, BLP-3, BLP-Y, MEL alignment, external advocacy and institutionalisation, as well as for new countries and especially low-capacity contexts, where basic PSS integration must be established before BLP can be meaningfully scaled.

Country office interviews expressed confidence and readiness to independently implement BLP-1, with limited or no external support. In all CO level interviews, they point to the notable progress made in recent years to build that capacity with strong support especially from the regional level. This is supported by survey data where very few COs identified the need for further training or support on BLP 1 specifically (see **Error! Reference source not found.**).

At the same time, many COs note that there is need for ongoing support for implementation of BLP-2, BLP-3, and BLP-Y. With the addition of BLP-T, this will likely also be the case. This is true for COs which have not yet begun any implementation beyond BLP-1, as well as countries that are implementing other forms (mainly BLP-2 or BLP-Y) but note a lack of capacity to continue to scale without support from regional and/or global levels. Additionally, in multiple country interviews, education specialists noted that there remains a need and demand for the more specialised programming (BLP-2 and BLP-3) as well as for BLP-Y. They also recognise that this would require significant investment, acknowledging the time and ongoing effort that has been needed to achieve readiness to implement BLP-1 independently.

Finally, country interviews also emphasize that external institutionalisation efforts—specifically with engaging with partners and ministries—is an area where ongoing support, particularly from the global office is still needed. In countries where there has already been notable interaction with governments, including Kenya, Syria, and Iran, for example, interviews describe the support of the global unit as essential to furthering such conversations. In other countries—including Myanmar, Venezuela, and Ethiopia—interviews reflected that additional support will be needed before they are

able to effectively advocate for external uptake of the BLP and/or non-specialised PSS. This support to transfer capacities to partners will become increasingly relevant under TfW30, both with institutional partners such as MoEs and partner implementers under the White Label Approach.

Still, in contexts characterised by low capacity and less established PSS integration, support remains essential for building capacity and scaling BLP. Many CO interviews stressed the initial challenges and support needed to build capacity for BLP-1. This was especially true in certain countries or regions such as Eastern Africa. Country, regional, and global interviews all provided examples of locations which required much more intense initial and ongoing support—and noted this is likely to continue.

“There is tremendous difference across countries and regions, and our support to country teams adjusts to where they begin... you have to walk before you can run.” (Regional level interview)

“There are locations where we must introduce PSS concepts from nothing. Teachers and staff with no prior experience with the terms or ideas. And with no experience or understanding of... how [PSS] should be a part of education.” (Global/roving level interview)

The process of building initial capacity often involves simplifying and contextualizing BLP resources, which itself requires support. Early BLP materials were sometimes described as overwhelming, leading to confusion and difficulty for busy field staff to digest, and slowing uptake or processes of institutionalisation. While COs name many examples of organic contextualization efforts, they also emphasise that support for contextualisation is crucial and ongoing. Across East Africa, for instance, specific education challenges—such as overcrowded, multi-age, or multi-language classrooms, or the lack of suitable learning spaces—have also presented significant impediments for COs to implement the BLP and required the COs or the RO to develop their own innovations and adaptations to the BLP implementation process (see box below).

BLP Audio Recordings

In East Africa, there has been a notable push by regional and CO staff to make BLP resources more accessible through the development of audio resources and digitised content. One of these projects was to record BLP sessions in local languages, recognising the challenges of, for example, extremely large class sizes and limited teacher capacity. In Ethiopia, the CO has undertaken development of BLP audio recordings into five local languages (Amaric, Tigray, Afanoromo, Afar, and Somali), motivated by the need to support teachers in integrating BLP sessions, particularly during emergency responses. This initiative was initially spurred during first-line education response for earthquake-affected communities in Afar and Oromia and has since become a key tool for integration of BLP into all education programmes. Importantly, these efforts have relied on CO level funding efforts, including contracting a PSS manager consultant for the region: *“In East Africa, there are places where BLP would never have gotten off the ground without significant and enduring support to introduce, capacity build, and embed BLP.” (Regional level interview).*

Like the BLP Audio recordings, the BLP App was developed in direct response to needs identified by CO level implementers. The App is intended as a support for teachers, parents and other caregivers to communicate with and support their children’s psychosocial wellbeing. It includes guided instruction and activities to help adults understand the effects of trauma on children in their care, and ways in which they can support their learners’ wellbeing. It is further intended to be a tool to integrate a holistic model of care for children that goes beyond the classroom to include trusted adults in the home and community. While 2025 survey data indicates the newness of the App’s rollout globally, CO and regional level interviews indicate notable interest. The App is another notable example of innovations to better support BLP uptake that are informed by needs indicated at the CO level.

7 Lessons

In this final section of the report, two of the remaining key evaluation questions are briefly explored

- What lessons can be drawn from the BLP institutionalisation process for capacity development?
- What lessons can be drawn from the BLP institutionalisation process for organisational learning?

7.1 What lessons can be drawn from the BLP institutionalisation process for capacity development?

1. Dedicated investment in capacity building is essential at the outset of scaling any innovation

The successful scale-up of BLP was enabled by strong investment in global and regional expertise. This was especially valuable in regions and COs, where non-specialised PSS and the BLP approach were new and required intensive onboarding. As funding evolves, however, capacity development efforts need to be designed with a transition in mind—from externally supported functions toward locally sustained ownership, with embedded roles and systems to ensure continuity.

2. The Master Trainer model is effective but must be embedded within the core competency

While effective in building technical depth at the CO level, the model is resource-intensive, relies on key individuals, and can be affected by staff turnover. It is a highly specialised model and one that sits outside of core functionalities and organisational structures within the education core competency. Given the value, however, of this technical expertise, the role could easily be expanded to support wider teacher professional development efforts which are central to much of NRC's work in education. The compromise, of course, is always one of depth of knowledge and expertise vs breadth.

3. Regional adaptation and ownership are crucial, and BLP has been a strong model of how programming can iterate based on feedback.

Latin America, Central and West Africa and East Africa are all regions that have effectively improvised and localised BLP to fit their contexts by condensing BLP, developing audio versions for BLP delivery, and adapting it for indigenous groups and local customs and norms. Such adaptations have informed global guidance, showing the value of bottom-up innovation and highlighting the success of this approach to date. This approach demonstrates the potential in empowering regional and country teams to lead adaptation, with global units providing strategic guardrails. Moving forward, NRC should be exploring how it can build capacity and empower CO teams to drive contextual innovation within any of its programmatic models; but at the same time ensure it stays aligned with a set of core principles and strategic goals that are set out in the Global Strategy.

7.2 What lessons can be drawn from the BLP institutionalisation process for organisational learning?

1. Leverage on existing mindsets

BLP has been an effective mechanism, as an evidence-based initiative with a strong brand, to scale an initiative across NRC's country offices. As the BLP has been introduced to a range of new COs over the course of the RTW25 initiative, it has had greatest traction where there is a pre-existing mindset towards embedding non-specialised PSS in all education responses. But even in COs where this was not the case, through the support provided on implementing BLP, they now have greater

ownership and understanding of how they can do this and why it is important. It highlights how with time and strong capacity building efforts, BLP can be effectively integrated into all education responses, and an instrument for shifting and/or leveraging mindsets on the importance of supporting children and youth's well-being across a range of diverse implementation contexts.

2. Institutionalisation is not the same as scaling

There is a distinction between scaling and institutionalising—one which was identified in the initial scoping paper when the regional BLP unit in the MENA regional office was set up. The paper identifies that scaling can occur relatively quickly and typically focusses on directly implementing a practice at scale. Success of a scaling measure is defined by its reach. On the other hand, institutionalisation often moves beyond focus on a specific practice, to shifting an organisational approach or mindset to how it does things. While the scaling of BLP has been an effective mechanism for scaling a practice and institutionalising a mindset (on the importance of non-specialised PSS), it carries a risk that BLP is seen as the only approach to embedding non-specialised PSS in NRC's responses.

3. Institutionalisation ≠ Standardisation

Attempts to standardise BLP across diverse contexts (e.g. session sequences, MEL tools) often clashed with local realities. Flexibility and contextual relevance have been key to success, and particularly CO ownership. Regional PSS Managers have highlighted effective ways to support COs to foster such ownership, through gradual integration and supportive structures. NRC has done this well to date and should continue to emphasise that any global "package" needs to recognise existing practices, and resonate and respond to local norms, values and beliefs around well-being, rather than being rigidly replicated. This may mean that approval and management of contextualisation approaches should be regionally or nationally situated, rather than globally centralised.

4. Institutionalisation does not occur by happenstance

The BLP's ability to be scaled and institutionalised has greatly benefited from a growing focus and interest of the EiE community on well-being as part of embedded a stronger protection mandate in EiE responses, donor engagement, focus and interest in this area, and external stakeholders who have also seen the importance and need for this (particularly during and after the pandemic). NRC was able to successfully capitalise on being in the right place at the right time, and respond adeptly and quickly to this global demand through an evidence-based, scalable programme.

5. Mainstreaming vs. Standalone Identity: A Strategic Tension

Some feel that mainstreaming BLP into broader areas (e.g. TPD, FLER) could dilute its identity. Others argue that mainstreaming is essential for sustainability and integration. As part of any future innovation, it is important to balance programme identity with strategic integration. This means innovations like BLP can be 'flagship programmes', but not siloed from the rest of the core competency or the organisation as a whole. This comes with the caveat that at earlier stages of growth at CO level, there may be more structured and intensive support needed.

6. Building the evidence base and using it for advocacy and communications is important

BLP's dedicated advocacy and communications, and MEL roles have been highly effective at the global level securing and building donor engagement in the BLP scale-up process and positioning NRC as a leader in PSS in education. For future institutionalisation efforts, embedded MEL and advocacy/communication roles can be a key enabler to support fundraising and engagement efforts with donors and external partners. Organisationally, however, this will necessitate increased resourcing and staffing for dedicated MEL and advocacy/comms support functions to core competencies with scope for innovation, growth and learning.

7. Continued institutional investment is important

When senior NRC management endorses an initiative—such as *Right to Wellbeing 2025* or *Together for Wellbeing 2030*—there should be a matching commitment of NRC core funding. This signals organisational ownership, supports sustainability, and ensures that flagship initiatives are properly

resourced. Without such investment, NRC risks weakening its credibility with donors, undermining sustainability, and perpetuating siloed fundraising.

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

This final section of the evaluation provides a summative judgement on the question of whether and how BLP has been institutionalised across NRC's education programming since the start of RtW. Where gaps and issues on this are noted, specific recommendations for the global office/team (including the GBU), and county offices are provided.

8.1 Has BLP been institutionalised?

The overall aim of RtW25 was to ensure that BLP was sufficiently institutionalised across NRC's education core competency and embedded in all COs. A review of programme documentation and donor proposals suggests two main aspects to institutionalisation which are captured in Figure 2 namely that COs have greater capacity to implement BLP in line with standards and guidelines produced by the GBU, and that NRC has systems and capacities in place as a foundation for a strong PSS in education programme. In Table 6, below, these are further broken down, based on some of the specific evaluation questions presented in the findings section.

For instance, the **capacity to implement BLP in line with standards and guidelines produced by the GBU would mean, in the current context, that:**

- COs have the necessary skills and capacities to implement relevant aspects of BLP
- COs are implementing and contextualising the BLP components needed and necessary for their context.
- COs are engaging in monitoring, evaluation and learning activities as part of BLP implementation in line with the global guidance produced.

And, in relation to **NRC having the system and capacities in place as a foundation to sustain a strong PSS in education programming, this would mean that:**

- A strong mindset and commitment exist across NRC (at global and CO level) on the importance of PSS to support children's well-being as part of any education response.
- A sustainable approach to ensuring COs have the necessary support and capacity to sustain and improve PSS in education programming is in place.
- NRC has embedded PSS related outcomes and goals into its global education strategy and key outcomes across its different responses.

Based on the findings presented earlier an overall assessment of how well each of these facets has been achieved as of now is specified below.

Table 6: Assessment of aspects of institutionalisation

Aspect of institutionalisation	Overall assessment
COs have the necessary skills and capacities to implement relevant aspects of BLP	Partially met
COs are implementing and contextualising the BLP components identified as necessary in their setting	Partially met
COs are engaging in monitoring, evaluation and learning activities as part of BLP implementation in line with global guidance produced	Partially met
A strong mindset and commitment exist across NRC (at global and CO level) on the importance of PSS to support children's well-being as part of any education response	Largely met
A sustainable approach to ensuring COs have the necessary support and capacity to sustain and improve PSS in education programming is in place	Partially met
NRC has embedded PSS related outcomes and goals into its global education strategy and key outcomes across its different responses	Largely met

8.1.1 Strengths and needs at the CO level

Findings highlight how **confidence and competence for COs to implement the BLP-1 is notably higher than it was at the outset of RtW25**. This is the product of significant investments on the part of the GBU—largely through support provided by Regional PSS Managers and strengthening a cadre of Master Trainers and BLP Champions in country offices. Where gaps remain, however, is in CO capabilities to deliver BLP-2, BLP-3, BLP-Y and BLP-T. It is important to note not all components of BLP will be relevant or possible for all COs to implement. For instance, BLP-3, requires specialised expertise and training, as well as staffing to deliver. BLP-2, however, can be integrated into most education responses and is important to the overall goals of NRC's Education Strategy with its explicit focus on supporting struggling learners with executive functioning and study skills to improve capacity to learn.

As results from the most recent survey indicate though, only 36% of COs are currently implementing the BLP 2, despite most COs who responded noting that they are implementing formal education or NFE programmes where BLP 2 would be relevant. Additionally, nearly 50% of the COs identified BLP 2 as a clear capacity building need. This suggests that **while BLP 1 may have been institutionalised, there are still gaps with BLP 2 implementation**. Importantly, BLP2 has not yet undergone a full contextualisation process, which has created challenges in adapting it to regions such as ESA and CWA. Such contextualisation will be crucial for the next steps of rolling out BLP2 to more countries.

There is also a view amongst COs that they would like to implement BLP-3, when in fact most COs have limited or no understanding of BLP-3 and have not engaged with the BLP-3 manual. Many also highlight BLP-3 as a clear capacity need. Noting the specialised PSS nature of BLP-3 implementation, guidance on the go/no go conditions under when and how it might be relevant to different COs may need to better disseminated and socialised.

Importantly, there is **clear evidence of how COs are contextualising the BLP in a range of ways to suit their circumstances**. This has been supported by the GBU in several ways, but mainly through the Regional PSS Managers and the establishment of BLP Communities of Practice. The latter has been instrumental in helping COs to learn from each other on best ways to respond to challenges with BLP implementation in their context, and to adapt how they do so accordingly. More recently, the BLP contextualisation guidance developed by the GBU provides a clearer set of expectations on how contextualisation should be approached, and a specific process to be followed as part of this. Uptake of this new guidance into practice will take time, but in many COs the contextualisation process is underway demonstrating strong CO ownership of BLP. Moving forward the challenge is mainly about how best to support the ongoing needs for CO contextualisation of BLP with less external support.

An area of ongoing need which this evaluation highlighted is support to COs with MEL for the BLP. Findings suggest that: (1) Despite significant efforts to provide improved guidance to COs on how to best use the SLEC in an efficient and standardised way, there is significant variability in how this is

done; and (2) Opportunities for learning about BLP implementation through complementary MEL approaches and tools, such as classroom observation and focus groups, which are common in other parts of education core competency MEL, are not used or integrated as systematically as they could or should be in BLP implementation. The recent release of the new Monitoring Toolkits provides greater guidance in each of these areas, but as noted in earlier sections of the report, release of the toolkits and guidance alone will not guarantee uptake. Concerted efforts must be made through the support of global and regional advisors to help COs see BLP MEL activities as integrated and aligned, rather than distinct from practices and approaches used for the rest of their education programme monitoring and learning.

8.1.2 Strengths and needs in terms of global integration and sustainability

The RtW has helped to catalyse a pre-existing mindset across the organisation on the importance of integrating PSS into education responses (as noted in the 2022 global survey responses) and provided a clear approach (the BLP) for achieving this. As noted in the findings, **there is strong evidence demonstrating how BLP has become the key vehicle for integrating PSS into the overall NRC Education Strategy and outcome measures, and subsequently across all response measures.**

Integration has been achieved on several fronts in the past three years. **BLP under the current education strategy, has become the vehicle by which NRC aims to provide access to basic psychosocial support across all its education programmes.** As a result, BLP is integrated as a component into all of NRC's education responses, ranging from FLER, to non-formal education responses, to systems strengthening work in formal education systems. However, as survey responses suggest, uptake into COs actual programmatic responses still varies, with BLP- Y for instance, still at the nascent stage of wider integration into COs due to still in pilot stages of development, and similarly the degree of integration does vary by regions—with MENA being the most advanced, and regions like ESA and CWA less so.

Irrespective, evidence from the evaluation indicates that at present **BLP is embedded in almost all COs' education strategies and funding proposals and is actively being promoted with partners and funders with whom these COs are engaging.** Importantly, because of a systematic and concerted effort towards building capacity on BLP within NRC's COs through the Master Trainers approach, and through the dedicated support of Regional PSS Managers, there is a strong level of competence in key dimensions of core BLP knowledge and skills today.

Finally, **BLP outcome measures have now been integrated into the global theory of change (improved psychosocial well-being), and into each respective response TOC.** This is a recent and notable shift and will ensure that improved psychosocial well-being is a key objective of any education response, given the mandatory nature of global outcome reporting.

The BLP brand has successfully raised NRC's visibility and has been an effective entry point to generate interest in other education priorities. NRC must now strategically balance brand strength with internal coherence and partner-led sustainability. There is agreement across interview levels that BLP has boosted NRC's visibility, and that through the BLP brand, NRC has been positioned as an effective global leader in education-based PSS. Effective advocacy and communications work directed at these stakeholders has contributed to this and has enabled effective fundraising for BLP over the years. Funders of BLP describe its establishment and scaling as a notable success story—and one which they also can share as a success story with their internal constituencies. Much of the power of this BLP brand can be tied to it being evidence-based, simple and straightforward, and with clear, apparent impact.

Nonetheless, it is still unresolved as to how these efforts will be sustained. **BLP's integration across the organisation is a direct result of the GBU's capacity to successfully fundraise over an extended period.** As noted earlier in the evaluation, it is seen as a high cost, high-return model of institutionalisation, and one that has been almost entirely project funded. This has enabled work on BLP to sit in a separate unit within the global education team. **It has led to a view amongst many that the efforts on BLP integration across the core competency, while successful, has been done in a rather siloed way.** This has included, for instance, having dedicated support and expertise for advocacy and communication, MEL, and regional and global positions which are explicitly (and narrowly) focussed on the expansion and institutionalisation of BLP. Much of this has been enabled

by a small, committed group of funders who have backed the institutionalisation process for several years. At this point, however, several of these funders are keen to shift their focus and attention to NRC's work to scale the BLP outside the organisation.

Hence, **NRC must carefully consider how much resources it can invest internally to ensure quality BLP delivery can be maintained but with greater efficiencies and cross-fertilisation across different response priorities.** For instance, the Master Trainers model to date has had a narrow focus on supporting BLP implementation in COs, which by many accounts is unsustainable. There is scope, however, to merge this responsibility with a remit for wider teacher professional development support—one which is a cross-cutting priority across the education strategy and potentially, better enabling COs to fund such roles within their own proposals. Similarly, there is opportunity to use Master Trainers to further promote the next stages of BLP under the Together for Wellbeing initiative.

Additionally, while the support of Regional PSS Managers is highly valued and important, having this focussed expertise on BLP is perhaps too narrow to justify continued internal investment. However, if there is broadening of scope/responsibilities for these managers to support not only BLP but also other capacity building efforts across the education core competency—there may be more scope to continue these roles within the organisational structure—and continue to complement the work of regional advisors. Ultimately, integration requires BLP implementation becoming business-as-usual across all of NRC's education activities and be fully integrated into NRC's core competency team. **This means, rather than a standalone unit, technical support for PSS is mainstreamed across NRC's ongoing capacity development work.**

Importantly, **the model of funding which has supported the rapid expansion of BLP across COs will need to change.** COs or regions may have to take more responsibility for funding specialised technical roles if they are seen as needed and important for quality implementation. For instance, the Regional PSS Manager for East Africa has been funded by COs in the region, rather than the GBU, recognising the significant needs which remain to implement and integrate BLP there. Likewise, where needed, BLP may need to be embedded within wider programmatic innovations, such as FLER, and funded as one component amongst many, within a response.

8.2 Key Recommendations

The recommendations below identify what different levels of NRC must do as part of exiting from the internal institutionalisation of BLP to ensure quality PSS programming is maintained and continues to be embedded across all responses, and which should ideally occur over the next 18 months.

Global:

- Maintain in the short-term, a team comprised of the Global PSS Head of Unit, along with the Regional PSS Managers and global MEL support as needed, to support COs in three main priority areas: (1) ensuring that trained Master Trainers and Champions (along with Regional Education Advisors) are sufficiently capacitated to support the inclusion of BLP 2 in relevant education programmes/responses within their COs and regions; (2) supporting COs to familiarise themselves with the Monitoring Toolkits, and to identify ways to collect data and information which can support programmatic learning and reflection, rather than outcomes alone; (3) focus engagement and investment of support in COs where capacities to implement BLP1 are still more limited or constrained, and to build capacity to use and encourage innovations like the BLP App and BLP Audio to address these challenges.
- Ensure that Regional Education Advisors are both familiar with and are actively socialising the BLP Guidance Kit with senior leadership and technical teams within the education CC or their COs, particularly in terms of when, how and why different BLP components are relevant, and how to go about assessing capacity and need for them. Some of this work can be done in the short term in partnership with the Regional PSS Managers.
- Put in place the necessary structures for the BLP Communities of Practice to be self-sustaining beyond 2026, with the focus of these communities being to support COs with

specific implementation challenges and dilemmas, and support learning between COs in terms of their contextualisation approaches.

- As part of an ongoing review of the education strategy and NRC's suite of responses, identify where and how components of BLP, other than BLP- 1, may be relevant to specific responses within NRC's education programme portfolio, and provide clear guidance on where and how to integrate elements like BLP 2, BLP-T and BLP- Y. Consider, as well, how BLP contextualisation processes may offer guidance across education programme portfolio.
- Rework the Terms of Reference of Master Trainers to one which is focussed on teacher capacity development, with a strong PSS focus, rather than an explicit focus on BLP.
- Review the NRC Toolkit for PSS and BLP Capacity Development and identify how specific components might be integrated into NRC's wider guidance and resources on TPD under the umbrella education strategy.
- Develop a decision tree based on the BLP Programme Quick Reference, and other elements of BLP not included in the BLP Guidance kit to help COs identify when, how and if certain components of the BLP might be relevant to their education programme response. This could be an interactive, digital AI tool with prompts to provide clear advice to COs based on their inputs into the context and current situation.
- As part of the BLP Digital Hub, embed an AI tool to enable COs to easily identify the most relevant resources required for their needs.
- Drawing on the learnings of the global advocacy and communications work of the BLP Unit, build the capacity of COs to both identify, generate and utilise localised evidence as the basis for fundraising and advocacy purposes.
- Make it clear to COs across all guidance that BLP addresses specific dimensions of well-being, and that if needed or necessary, they have the liberty to adopt, adapt, or concurrently use other non-specialised PSS approaches in their responses.

Country offices:

- If required, embed requests for technical support on PSS into funding proposal, and explore if resources can be collectively pooled to support regional level advisors.
- Explore how the expertise of Master Trainers can be utilised across education responses where teacher professional development is a key component and invest in their upskilling and further capacitation.
- Continue to ensure that the BLP is embedded across all education responses where relevant, but sufficiently contextualised and adapted to the programmatic and circumstances of end-users, in line with global guidance and resources.
- Build localised evidence (research, testimonials, evaluations) on the effectiveness of the BLP to supporting children's well-being as a precondition to learning and use that for localised advocacy and fundraising purposes.
- Continue to assess the various well-being needs of learners as part of any education response, and identify if and how BLP is relevant, or if other non-specialised PSS approaches are necessary alongside or instead of the BLP.
- Ensure that MEL activities related to BLP extend beyond use of the SLEC to encompass other useful monitoring and learning activities embedded in the newly released Monitoring Toolkit, such as focus groups and classroom observations, to enhance opportunities for programmatic learning.

Additionally, below some considerations are provided for NRC as part of its transition to external scaling of BLP under the Together for Wellbeing 2030 initiative:

- Identify if the primary role NRC wants to play in coming years is to expand BLP as a 'white label' approach in response to partner requests, or to provide external support on non-specialised PSS in EiE contexts. Depending on what the intention is, this will determine if NRC's primary role at both global and CO level is to advocate for BLPs' integration into

education systems and/or the responses of other partners, or to provide ongoing oversight, technical expertise for quality implementation of the BLP specifically. This will also determine the required ongoing staffing mix required to promote this work and at what level.

If the decision is to support BLP as a white label approach:

- Maintain technical expertise on the BLP at global office, and through the Regional PSS Managers to support COs in working with partners. Close support to country offices while they determine the most effective ways to work with external partners will be critical.
- Clearly articulate and identify what core components of BLP delivery are required to ensure quality PSS outcomes for each of the BLP approaches, recognising that not all partners will have the same capacities, resources, or ability to implement BLP as NRC has. It is important that these requirements are not too onerous, as a rigid or overly burdensome process for quality assurance and permissions for contextualisation could deter COs and external partners from seeking support and advice.
- Explore which BLP guidance, tools and resources are both needed or required to support partners with a minimal level of expertise to implement the BLP, and as part of that review where and, working with these external partners, further and simplify this guidance to meet their needs.
- Through TfW30, global and/or regional staff will need to provide close support to COs for the institutionalisation of BLP with Ministries of Education. True sustainability requires embedding PSS/BLP practices into larger education systems through teacher professional development approaches. NRC has experience with this kind of support in countries such as Palestine and Kenya. While it may not be necessary to develop explicit tools given such work's dependence on context, close support and guidance from regional or global colleagues (or via the Communities of Practice) are necessary.

If the decision is to support the institutionalisation of non-specialised PSS:

- Ensure that COs are driving discussions on how best to support the institutionalisation of non-specialised PSS across all education responses in their setting, noting that they are best poised to identify the capacities, needs and contexts of local partners and stakeholders, and what forms of evidence, advocacy and engagement are required.
- Maintain and grow NRC's leadership on non-specialised PSS in global fora, including INEE, ECW, Global Hub for EiE, and work alongside other partners and funders with a strong record of delivering and/or financing non-specialised PSS programmes (such as Save the Children, IRC, War Child) to ensure children's well-being remains a priority in all EiE responses.

9 Annexes

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Right to Wellbeing 2025 Initiative

Terms of Reference for Summative Evaluation

1. Background information

Background on the organization

The Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is an international non-governmental, humanitarian organisation with 75 years of experience in helping to create a safer and more dignified life for refugees and internally displaced people. NRC advocates for the rights of displaced populations and offers assistance within the shelter, education, emergency, food security, legal assistance, and water, sanitation and hygiene sectors - referred to in NRC as "core competencies".

Description of the Better Learning Programme

Psychosocial Support (PSS) is a cornerstone of NRC's Global Education Strategy (2022–2027), reflecting the organization's commitment to addressing the holistic needs of displacement-affected children and youth. These children and youth face significant barriers to reaching their full potential, often stemming from the psychological and emotional impacts of displacement and trauma.

Recognizing this urgent need, NRC launched the [Right to Wellbeing 2025 \(RtW25\)](#) initiative in 2022, with the aim of enhancing the wellbeing and learning outcomes for half a million children and youth worldwide. A key objective of this initiative has been the institutionalization of NRC's signature classroom-based PSS *Better Learning Programme (BLP)*, within NRC's Education Core Competency (CC). As of end of 2024, six regions and 34 country offices have received direct capacity building and technical support.

To embed BLP into NRC's education programming, a comprehensive process was initiated in 2022, focusing on the following areas:

1. **Global integration and systems set-up:** Establishing the frameworks, tools, and guidelines needed to support implementation and learning, and integrating in existing systems.
2. **Capacity Building:** Creating regional PSS hubs supported by dedicated PSS Managers, equipping education and Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) staff with the necessary skills and knowledge, and certifying Master Trainers within country offices to drive local ownership and sustainability.
3. **Quality Assurance and Standardization:** Developing and disseminating guidance for implementation while providing technical expertise to balance standardization with the flexibility needed for contextualized approaches that address diverse local needs.
4. **Research and Evidence:** Generating data and evidence to validate and refine programme approaches, demonstrate impact, and guide future decision-making processes.
5. **Advocacy and Awareness:** Raising the profile of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support (MHPSS) in education in emergency and the importance of BLP through targeted advocacy and communications.

The initiative is managed by a multi-disciplinary team sitting in a global BLP unit (GBU) composed of the head of PSS, global MEL specialist and advocacy and communication advisor.

2. Purpose of the evaluation and intended use

Overarching purpose

The objective of this summative evaluation is to assess the *Right to Wellbeing 2025* initiative, focusing on the extent to which the *Better Learning Programme (BLP)* has been effectively institutionalized within NRC's education core competency. Additionally, the evaluation aims to document lessons learned and provide actionable recommendations regarding the continuation/conclusion and the sustainability of the institutionalization process. Sustainability will be assessed in relation to the new initiative, *Together for Wellbeing 2030 (TfW30)*, which will be piloted in 2025 and is expected to launch in 2026.

2.2 How will the evaluation be used?

The evaluation will serve as a critical tool for shaping the future of PSS integration within NRC's education programming. Its findings will be used primarily by the Education Global Lead and PSS Head of Unit to refine the strategic direction, ensuring the continued integration of PSS and the sustained delivery of high-quality interventions.

Additionally, the evaluation will provide global, regional, and country office technical teams with a clear framework to identify priorities and implement actionable recommendations. By aligning efforts across all levels, the evaluation will drive meaningful improvements in programme delivery and further institutionalize PSS as a core component of NRC's education strategy.

3. Scope and lines of inquiry

Scope

The summative evaluation will assess the work completed from 2022-2025 to integrate BLP in the education core competency and to build the capacity of five regional PSS managers, 51 master trainers and the education and MEL teams in 34 country offices.

Lines of inquiry

The evaluation should answer the following questions:

Integration of psychosocial support and BLP into systems, tools, strategy and processes:

1. To what extent has psychosocial support (PSS) and BLP been integrated effectively into the education core competency strategy, processes, systems and tools?
2. What are the gaps to achieve a sustainable integration and how to address them?
3. What lessons can be drawn for organizational learning?

Implementation, knowledge and understanding of PSS/BLP at regional and country office levels:

4. How effective and relevant was the capacity building of regional and country office teams?
 - a. How well do the country offices understand the psychosocial needs of children and youth?
 - b. To what extent have country offices acquired the knowledge and skills needed to implement quality BLP directly and with partners?
 - c. How effective and relevant is the Master Trainers model and approach to support quality BLP implementation in country offices?

What gaps remain to be addressed in order to achieve sustainable country office capacity?

6. What lessons can be drawn for future capacity building work?

Strategic Future Vision:

7. What strategic direction should the Education Core Competency take to build on the progress achieved so far and ensure the sustainable in-house integration of PSS within the education core competency?

4. Methodology

The evaluation consultant(s) should develop the evaluative methods in line with the lines of inquiry, including an evaluation matrix which sets out for each sub-question: judgment criteria, methodology, source of evidence and sampling framework. It is anticipated that the methodology will include:

- Review of key documents including but not limited to education strategy, GBU strategy and workplan, regional PSS managers workplans, relevant research completed by partners (University of Tromsø, MHPSS Collaborative) in addition to relevant donor proposals and reports.
- Interviews with internal and external key informants and stakeholders.
- Up to three case studies of country offices at various stages of PSS integration in education, capacity building, partnerships and programming.
- A survey could be considered to assess the capacity building levels in all relevant NRC country offices.

The final methodology will be agreed upon during the inception phase.

5. Management of the evaluation

The person responsible for ensuring that this evaluation takes place is the head of the PSS unit. An evaluation manager has been appointed to internally coordinate the process and will be the evaluation team's main focal point.

An evaluation Steering Committee (SC) is established by NRC, with the following members: chair, evaluation manager and steering committee members.

The Steering Committee will oversee administration and overall coordination, including monitoring progress. The main functions of the steering committee will be:

- Establish the Terms of Reference of the evaluation
- Select evaluator(s)
- Review and comment on the inception report and approve the proposed evaluation approach and methodology
- Review and comment on the draft evaluation report
- Establish a dissemination and management plan.

A management response will be developed within one month of the evaluation report being finalised.

A dissemination plan will be developed to ensure that important learning is shared with internal and external stakeholders.

6. Timeframe and deliverables

The consultancy is expected to start on 7 April and end by 26 September, 2025.

The consultancy will be home-based. Approximately 40 days are expected for this consultancy.

Deliverables	Deadline
Inception report	9 May
Data collection	13 June
Validation session of preliminary findings	19 June
Final report, maximum 25-30 pages. Case studies are separate documents from the report, maximum 4 pages each.	22 August
Two presentations for internal and external stakeholders	September
External briefing note to share with donors	September

7. Evaluation consultant team

NRC seeks expressions of interest from people and teams with the following skills/qualifications:

- Senior evaluation experts, with a minimum of eight years of experience.
- At least 7 years of professional experience in programme evaluation in the context of humanitarian aid, with demonstrated competence in applying qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods.
- Extensive experience in evaluating programme development and institutionalization work in humanitarian organizations.
- Knowledge of psychosocial support programming and education in emergency.
- Extensive experience evaluating capacity building programmes.
- High proficiency in English, including strong report writing skills.

Annex 2: Participant List

Name	Date Completed
Global Level	
Camilla Lodi, Head of GBU	June 25
Stephanie Bassil, GBU MEL Specialist	July 24
Tarek Jacob, GBU Communications and Advocacy Specialist	July 15
Constantijn Wouter, Global Education Lead	July 15
Barbara Bergamini, Global Education Advisor	July 17
Marta Schena, Global Education Advisor	July 21
Craig Dean, Global Youth Advisor	July 4
Annelies Ollieuz, Global Programme Policy and Development Director	July 15
Anne Laure Rambaud, Alexia Latsou, Global Roving Education Advisors	Jun 27
McLane Heckman, Philanthropic Fundraising Specialist	July 14
Dieuwerke Luiten, Porticus (funder)	July 14
Lara Dimmer, Luxemburg (funder)	July 23
Jon Hakon Schultz, Arctic University of Norway (research partner)	July 2
Total global level participants:	14
Regional Level	
Julie Chinnery, Regional Head of Core Competency	June 26
Regional PSS Manager FGD (Margo Goll, Enas Barhoum, Paola Toffetti)	June 24
Regional EA FGD (Hollyn Romeyn, Fabio Mancini, Romain Monsieur)	July 16
Regional EA (Carlos Ramirez)	July 17
Total regional level participants:	8
Country Level	
Afghanistan Specialist (Reza Ahmadi), Education Officer x 2 (3)	July 24
NCA Specialist (Susana Cabrera), Education Officer (Leticia Medina) (2)	July 30
Syria Country Office Specialist (Marwa Alsharqawi; Rawan Awad) (2)	Jul 24
South Sudan Country Office Specialist (Patricia Mushayandebvu), PSS Education Officer, Education Technical Officer, M&E Officer (4)	July 31
Burkina Faso Specialist and Education Officer (2)	July 22
Ukraine Specialist (Marco Fuduli)	July
BLP MT: Kenya, Emily Ndunda	Jul 22
BLP MT: Myanmar, Hnin Aye Phyu	Jul 18
BLP MT: Iran, Zahra Choopankareh	Jul 21
BLP MT FGD, CWA region (Yakuba, Burkia Faso; Moussa, Niger; Lala, Mali; Bony, Congo) (4)	Jul 17
Total CO level participants:	21

Annex 3: Team Biographies

Lead Evaluator: Dr Jennifer (Jenn) Flemming (USA)	
Bio	<p>Jenn is a technical researcher with a professional skillset in methodologies (evaluation methods, qualitative and quantitative, mixed methods, and participatory methods especially with children and youth) as well as theory, policy, and practice-oriented data analysis and reporting.</p> <p>She currently leads the Education and ECD portfolio at The MHPSS Collaborative, where she has developed the organization's 2025-2030 strategy and serves as Team Lead or Technical Advisor on projects implementing, evaluating, and researching MHPSS programming in education settings globally including most recently in the EU, Gaza, Pakistan, and Jordan. For the last decade, Jenn has worked as a researcher in the Education in Emergencies, MHPSS, resilience, and youth programming spaces with particular emphasis on supporting organizational learning and making research, data and evidence accessible and actionable.</p> <p>From 2021-2024, Jenn led a qualitative research project examining aspects of BLP (and MHPSS programming broadly) in Kenya and Colombia, where she was able to develop deep understanding of BLP implementation in diverse settings. She has additionally worked for NRC in the development of the organization's youth wellbeing framework (2019-2020) and the Tracer Study toolkit (including a variety of tools for participatory data collection) for youth programs (2021-2023).</p>
Role	Jenn served as the main point of contact with the NRC team. She has co-lead the design, development, and finalization of all tools, protocols, and reports, and managed the work plan. Jenn conducted remote interviews, and lead the analysis of both survey and interview data. She planned and co-facilitate dissemination activities, and lead the production of the donor brief.

Evaluator/Director of Tauwhirota: Dr. Ritesh Shah (New Zealand)	
Bio	<p>Ritesh has over 15 years of experience in leading programmatic, strategic and sectoral evaluations for a range of INGOs, bilateral and multilateral donors—mostly in Education in Emergencies or conflict-affected settings. Many of the evaluations completed have drawn on extensive collection of, and/or analysis of quantitative and qualitative data to assess the impact, relevance, and sustainability of programme activities. Strategic and programmatic recommendations and conclusions reached in evaluations have always been co-constructed with clients to ensure they are practical, actionable, and evidence-based.</p> <p>Importantly, Ritesh has been involved in prior evaluations of NRC's education programming in Palestine (2014), camp education programming in Jordan (2017), host education programming in Jordan (2018), and the BLP programme in Palestine (2017). Ritesh also wrote the scoping paper for the BLP regional programme in 2019, and supported the initial design process for the programme. Ritesh has also supported the Palestine and Jordan NRC offices with research activities, including under the BLP regional programme. Ritesh also holds a permanent part-time academic position at the University of Auckland within the field of education in conflict-affected contexts. He is strongly involved in supporting the process of translating research into policy and practice.</p>
Role	Ritesh has provided intellectual and technical advising on the conceptualisation of the design and methodologies of this evaluation, on interpretation of the data, and on the finalisation of both reports. He shared in tasks of conducting interviews and also quality assured all deliverables before submission with a view to ensuring all key evaluation questions are sufficiently explored and grounded in an evidence base. Ritesh will also be the focal point for contracting matters with NRC as the director of Tauwhirota Ltd.

Venezuela Case Study

1. Introduction

This case study forms part of the broader RtW25 evaluation, which examines how the Better Learning Programme (BLP) has been institutionalized across NRC. While the evaluation synthesizes findings from surveys, interviews, and global analysis, the Venezuela case study provides a more in-depth, context-specific perspective on how BLP has been integrated and sustained in practice. It illustrates the dynamics of building capacity, adapting tools and approaches, and working with ministries within a particular country office (CO), thereby grounding the evaluation's broader themes in country level implementation and strategic experience.

1.1 Background

Since 2015, Venezuela's education system has been disrupted by a complex humanitarian crisis driven by economic collapse, political instability, international sanctions, and the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have compounded existing vulnerabilities, exposing children and adolescents to protection risks such as displacement, family separation, child labour, and recruitment by armed groups. The education sector faces critical challenges, including teacher shortages due to migration, extremely low salaries (under \$30/month), deteriorated infrastructure, deterioration of school feeding programmes, and lack of basic services (e.g., 80% of schools lack access to water and sanitation). As a result, over 1.5 million children were out of school in 2021–2022, with dropout rates rising to 30%, reaching nearly 41% in 53 schools surveyed by the NRC Country Office (CO), particularly in border and mining regions. These figures reflect not only systemic barriers to access and retention but also deep psychosocial distress among students and educators, including emotional trauma, learning gaps, and behavioural issues.

For NRC's Venezuela CO, these issues underscore the urgent need to prioritize integrated interventions that address both educational access and psychosocial support (PSS). This includes strengthening teacher capacity, restoring infrastructure, expanding inclusive learning opportunities, and implementing targeted retention strategies to ensure continuity, safety, and quality in education for all children, especially in high-risk zones. Importantly, teacher capacity development was highlighted as a key need, as due to high rates of migration many teachers have little or no formal training (and are often community members volunteering).

Acknowledging the above country's education system challenges, the Venezuela CO's education programming integrates three approaches to education programming: first-line education response (FLER), non-formal education, and support to formal education systems, with a strong emphasis on protection, inclusion, and community engagement. The FLER provides rapid, short-term educational support, including mobile and transitional learning spaces for children in transit or whose schools are repurposed as temporary shelters. Non-formal education offers flexible, structured learning pathways for out-of-school children, facilitating their transition into formal schooling. Formal education support includes teacher training, infrastructure rehabilitation, and school retention initiatives.

BLP is central to the CO's education programming, and has been embedded across the three approaches, particularly within the school re-entry and academic catch-up strategy and the school retention and wellbeing framework. It is implemented through teacher capacity-building, classroom-based psychosocial activities, and targeted support for children at risk of dropping out. BLP also supports the CO's school-based remediation and levelling strategy, which addresses learning gaps among children in over-age or post-crisis situations. By embedding BLP into both emergency and recovery phases, the CO ensures that education serves as a right and a protective and stabilizing force for children in vulnerable contexts. This integrated approach has contributed to national efforts to reduce educational exclusion, strengthen resilience, and promote inclusive, quality learning environments. It has positioned NRC as a key partner in supporting education authorities throughout

the education system mainly through technical assistance and capacity development. NRC additionally aims at ultimate policy adaptations but within the current system.

2. Methodology

This case study is informed by the methods of the larger evaluation, which included the following:

- **Document review:** Programme documentation, AARs and prior evaluations or research, Theories of Change and strategy documents, BLP resources and toolkits; 80+ documents reviewed
- **Key Informant Interviews and Focus Group Discussions:** With education and PSS staff at global, regional, and country level offices; external donor/research partners; 61 total participants
- **Global survey:** 29 responses covering 25 COs plus Syria regional office across all regions; filled in by education specialists
- **Validation workshop:** With 17 participants from global, regional and CO levels

In Venezuela, the evaluation team conducted three interviews and two FGDs of 60-75 minutes, mainly in Spanish; seven key informants participated in these consultations. All participants had over two years of experience working in the CO and were involved either in the BLP's planning, implementation, or MEL processes. Additionally, relevant documentation of BLP implementation in Venezuela was reviewed and analysed to support the elaboration of this case study. Most data were collected in Spanish and translated into English for analysis and reporting purposes, aiming at maintaining its original meaning as much as possible.

3. Findings

3.1 Capacity Building, Technical Support, and Relevance

Strong and sustained efforts at phased capacity building has been a central enabler of BLP's integration in Venezuela. Across all interviews, staff described significantly increased capacity to implement BLP based on the training and support received. NRC has invested in Master Trainers and education staff who, in turn, provided ongoing coaching and mentoring to teachers. Staff repeatedly emphasized that without this layered approach—training, refresher workshops, and peer-to-peer support—teachers risked using BLP tools mechanically. Instead, capacity building has allowed teachers to engage with the psychosocial underpinnings of BLP, embedding practices into their classrooms in meaningful ways.

Regional PSS advisors and Master Trainers were described as the most critical sources of support, providing responsive, context-aware accompaniment. This hands-on technical guidance ensured that BLP tools were used meaningfully rather than mechanically. Country staff emphasized that contextualization with teachers and Ministry staff was equally important. Adapting examples, images, and activities helped teachers recognize themselves in the material and encouraged ownership. Teachers reported being more comfortable and motivated once they recognized themselves in the examples. This process required creativity and time, but it was viewed as critical for ownership.

Interviews did note that at first, there was hesitation from staff about embedding the new BLP approaches into their already full work loads. Initially, there was notable concern about increase in workload, as well as its relevance or place in programming beyond non-formal education. According to an interviewee: “We did lots of work to raise awareness amongst the staff of the relevance of BLP, and we accomplished that... now I would say that our staff is very settled and committed to BLP.” Interviewees emphasised that much of the support offered to staff and teachers was in showing how BLP complements and enhances the work they are already doing, instead of adding to their plate.

Additionally, staff noted that the Master Trainers model and its micro-projects training approach are at the centre of the capacity building process in the CO, enabling them to expand and sustain BLP

implementation. A Master Trainers' micro-project, focused on developing teacher peer support groups, became embedded as an important teacher coaching model for the CO.

“The premise was to do something that can be sustained in the long-term in the country... We formed peer-support groups and designed a coaching booklet so teachers could sustain the programme even when NRC projects ended. The coaching model has made it possible to sustain BLP at the school level. These teacher leaders became the go-to resource for BLP. We equipped them with materials, so they could train others. The model allowed BLP to expand within schools over two years, especially in projects where we had long-term presence.”

Through the teacher learning circle model, interviews note that a focus on teacher wellbeing began to emerge and became a new priority. Thus, the Master Trainer model has resulted in notable capacity development of staff and teachers, with a mind to sustainability beyond the project or NRC.

3.2 Integration of BLP and PSS into Education Programming

In Venezuela, BLP has become a visible and widely known element of NRC's education programming. Staff describe how BLP tools were incorporated into education projects at different levels and via different avenues of support, particularly through the classroom-based activities and teacher training. Rather than existing as a stand-alone project, BLP was framed from the outset as a set of approaches and resources that could be seamlessly integrated into broader education responses.

A major enabler of this integration was alignment with national education priorities and the Bolivarian curriculum. NRC staff worked closely with ministry counterparts to frame BLP content as complementary to existing education structures. This allowed teachers and officials to see the programme as reinforcing, rather than replacing, preceding priorities. In practice, this alignment meant that BLP was easier to accept and adopt at school level and strengthened NRC's ability to advocate for its use. Additionally, the positioning of PSS as central to NRC's approaches has allowed for more efficient approvals from the government, who often view I/NGO's sceptically and often do not approve programming aimed at “humanitarian” situations. Because of a strong culture of holistic wellbeing for children in the country, NRC has strategically placed BLP at the centre of its responses which has thus assured buy in from authorities.

Integration was also supported by teachers' enthusiasm. Many were quick to adopt BLP strategies once materials had been contextualized and training was provided. Teachers reported that the programme addressed real classroom challenges, especially the psychosocial stressors affecting Venezuelan learners. Their buy-in reinforced BLP's position as part of NRC's education programming rather than a temporary or externally imposed initiative. BLP has been effective in encouraging teachers, schools, caregivers, and partners to embrace routines of care and validation of children's emotions and mental health. According to one interviewee: “This starts with us, as education staff, teachers, and caregivers.”

“A substantial impact of BLP in our education programming has been the idea of realizing the school as a safe space where children feel more confident to improve their learning process. This is not something that happens from one day to another; it takes time and requires ongoing support. It is an impact that is not always captured by quantitative indicators, but it is a change in the children, teachers and caregivers' mindset.”

Lastly, interviewed staff agreed on that a substantial impact of BLP on education programming that has been realized by all education staff has been the idea of realizing the school as a safe space where children feel more confident to improve their learning process. Staff note that positioning children's wellbeing at the centre of their education programming approaches, they have realised notable and significant impact.

BLP and education as protection

The BLP implementation in a mining area of Callao focused on identifying out-of-school children, mostly miners' children or those involved in mining work. Over 100 out-of-school children were identified, many working in mines. NRC coordinated with the local educational authority and with the nearby school to open an educational extension (satellite school), encouraged the community to build a basic classroom, and supported the educational council to undertake the administrative steps to formalize their own school. The initiative protected children by removing them from mining work and reintegrating them into a safe, educational environment that prioritizes their wellbeing.

3.3 Organisational and Programmatic Learning

NRC staff stressed the necessity to enhance BLP MEL by rethinking a more localized approach that flexibly responds to the specific features and priorities in their context. Thus, there was the perception among consulted staff that BLP MEL process fall short in capturing relevant, intended and indirect outcomes/impacts of the BLP implementation, including disaggregation by age, gender, etc.

"I think that we need to rethink our MEL from the field perspective, because there are many things that we do from our desk. We need to contextualize much more across the MEL process. My desire is focused on paying more attention to the nuances and needs we find in the field. ... For instance, we did not intend to benefit teachers as direct recipients of the socioemotional support BLP activities provide because our primary target is the student. However, we ended up working closely with teachers, school leaders and school supervisors. There was nothing to measure these unforeseen outcomes. SLEC allows us to measure some aspects of the training, but it is important to consider those additional outcomes. We report all these results, but we don't have an evaluation tool or system to map and document additional or indirect outcomes beyond the attention we provide to children."

Staff pointed out that, despite major gaps, the CO has managed to integrate BLP MEL tools that support the evidence generation process. This has even contributed to filling a gap in limited availability of official educational databases in the country. As well, the CO has in place information systems that enable the consolidation and analysis of data that can help use data for strategic programmatic decisions, as point that is likely unique to Venezuela.

Finally, education and MEL staff emphasized the necessity to foster opportunities to enhance the alignment between the programming team and MEL. It was suggested that MEL staff should be included in the BLP's training processes; informants mentioned that it would be an efficient way to facilitate the articulation and communication between both teams. As is currently done, MEL staff does not directly intervene in the data collection process. This has created a sense of disconnection between the implementing and the monitoring teams, as was seen in other countries.

3.4 Sustainability

While BLP1 has been strongly integrated across NRC's education programming in Venezuela, sustainability remains fragile. Staff pointed to the reliance on project-based funding as the central risk. Training, mentoring, and contextualization processes were all implemented under donor-funded projects, which means continuity is not guaranteed once those projects close. The lack of long-term

or flexible funding streams has left staff concerned that progress could be lost if donor priorities shift.

Staff also highlighted the tension between the visibility that BLP has given NRC and the risks that come with this recognition. On one hand, the programme has positioned NRC as a leader in psychosocial support within education. On the other hand, this visibility has reinforced the perception of BLP as a stand-alone “brand,” raising doubts about whether it can be sustained without continued external support.

“BLP has raised NRC’s visibility, but that also means people mostly identify us with this programme, not with education more broadly.”

According to interviews, BLP’s long-term sustainability in the county will depend on the CO’s capacity to continue consolidating the robust internal training process led by MTs. This could mitigate the impacts of the high rate of implementing staff turnover internally, and at the school level, this training model could create continuity, increasing the likelihood that teachers apply what they’ve learned year after year, even when the project ceases activities in the school.

True sustainability, staff suggested, will require embedding BLP practices into teacher training and national education systems. Although NRC has worked closely with the Ministry of Education to contextualize the manuals and demonstrate alignment with the Bolivarian curriculum, there is not yet a clear pathway for government ownership. Without this transition, BLP in Venezuela will remain dependent on NRC’s presence and donor priorities.

“For sustainability, it has to be part of teacher training and the education system, not just an NRC project... due to the country’s challenges with teacher deficit and retention, the training we provide through BLP education is seen as an opportunity by the MoE and local educational authorities to leverage their teacher training efforts and, therefore, quality education... this is an opportunity.”

4. Conclusions

The Venezuela case study offers a nuanced understanding of how BLP has been integrated, implemented and sustained within the CO’s education programming in a context marked by a prolonged crisis and systemic educational challenges. BLP’s integration across emergency, non-formal, and formal education programming has proven to be a key enabler of long-term impact. By embedding BLP as central to all education action, the CO has positioned psychosocial support as a foundational element of its education response. Capacity building support, especially from the regional level, have led to notable increases in CO staff capacity in recent years. The Master Trainers model and teacher coaching initiatives have further strengthened internal capacities, enabling continuity despite persistent challenges such as high staff turnover and shifts in the humanitarian and funding landscape.

Challenges persist, particularly in MEL processes, where current tools inadequately capture qualitative and indirect outcomes. However, the CO’s efforts to localize MEL processes and improve coordination between implementation and monitoring teams are promising steps toward more responsive and inclusive evaluation systems.

Looking ahead, the CO has developed crucial capacities to sustain the current implementation of BLP1, and it is well-positioned to progressively include BLP2, BLP3, and youth-focused programming. Continued investment in long-term projects, internal capacity building, and strategic partnerships with education authorities will be essential to sustaining and scaling BLP’s impact. This case underscores the transformative potential of embedding psychosocial support into education programming, not only to improve learning outcomes but to create safe, inclusive environments where children, educators, and communities can thrive.

Ethiopia Case Study

1. Introduction

This case study forms part of the broader RtW25 evaluation, which examines how the Better Learning Programme (BLP) has been institutionalized across NRC. While the evaluation synthesizes findings from surveys, interviews, and global analysis, the Ethiopia case study provides a more in-depth, context-specific perspective on how BLP has been integrated and sustained in practice. It illustrates the dynamics of building capacity, adapting tools and approaches, and working with ministries within a particular country office (CO), thereby grounding the evaluation's broader themes in country-level implementation and strategic experience. By highlighting concrete processes and challenges at country level, the case study deepens understanding of the opportunities and constraints for institutionalizing Psychosocial Support (PSS) within the education core competency of NRC, as well as in education systems broadly.

1.1 Background

Since 2020, Ethiopia has faced overlapping crises of armed conflict, displacement, and climate shocks that have destabilized the country's humanitarian and education landscape. By mid-2024, more than 20 million people required humanitarian assistance, including over 4 million internally displaced persons. Food insecurity deepened due to conflict, displacement, drought, and flooding, with nearly 16 million people facing acute hunger by early 2025.³⁸

Children and schools have been heavily impacted by the crisis, including killings, maiming, sexual violence, and recruitment by armed groups.³⁹ More than 3.5 million children remained out of school in 2024, with hundreds of schools destroyed or closed.⁴⁰ In Oromia alone, some 650,000 children were unable to attend school due to conflict and displacement.⁴¹ Teachers and education staff were displaced in large numbers, undermining continuity of services. Despite efforts by the Ministry of Education and partners to reopen schools, recurrent violence, infrastructure destruction, and lack of resources constrained the resumption of safe and continuous learning.

Acknowledging these challenges, NRC's Ethiopia Country Office (CO) integrates multiple approaches to education programming: First Line Education Response (FLER), non-formal education, support to formal education systems, accelerated education programs (AEP), and vocational and skills training, including TVET. These approaches emphasize inclusion, protection, and flexible learning pathways for children and youth affected by crisis.

Central to NRC's education response is BLP (currently BLP-1) which has been scaled rapidly as an integral part of emergency, non-formal, and formal education interventions. Through teacher capacity-building, classroom-based psychosocial activities, and targeted support for learners affected by trauma and displacement, BLP seeks to ensure that education functions not only as a pathway to learning but also as a protective and stabilizing force in conflict-affected regions of Ethiopia. This integrated approach has positioned NRC as a key technical partner in MHPSS and education, including as the lead agency for BLP implementation within the Education Cannot Wait multi-year resilience programme II, and as a trusted actor working alongside government and partners to embed psychosocial support into the national education response.

³⁸ OCHA, "Ethiopia: Humanitarian Situation Update, January - December 2024," March 17, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-humanitarian-situation-update-january-december-2024>

³⁹ UN General Assembly and Security Council, "Children and armed conflict: Report of the Secretary-General," A/79/878-S/2025/247, June 17, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/22495-haunting-cries-children-affected-conflict-endured-unconscionable-number-grave-violations-2024>

⁴⁰ "UNICEF Ethiopia Humanitarian Situation Report No. 9, October - November 2024," UNICEF, January 2, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/unicef-ethiopia-humanitarian-situation-report-no-9-october-november-2024>

⁴¹ Education Cluster; UNICEF, "Ethiopia Education Cluster Quarterly Newsletter Jan - March 2025," April 29, 2025, <https://reliefweb.int/report/ethiopia/ethiopia-education-cluster-quarterly-newsletter-jan-march-2025>

2. Methodology

This case study is informed by the methods of the larger evaluation, which included document review, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), a global survey, and a validation workshop. For the Ethiopia case study, a total of 13 participants directly involved in BLP's planning, implementation, or MEL processes took part in KIIs or FGDs. These participants included the Head of Programmes, Education Project Manager, Area Manager, Education Specialist, Education Officers, and Master Trainers/Education Coordinators. All participants have significant experience within the NRC Ethiopia Country Office, providing a comprehensive view of BLP implementation. The insights gathered from these interviews and other relevant documentation form the basis of this synthesized case study.

3. Findings

3.1 Capacity Building, Technical Support, and Relevance

Strong efforts in phased capacity building have been instrumental in the integration of BLP in Ethiopia. Initial BLP trainings, including a Training of Trainers (TOT) in June 2023, were provided for NRC education teams, followed by Master Trainer (MT) trainings in Nairobi in 2024. Ethiopia currently has three certified MTs, two Education Officers (with specific PSS focus), and one education Coordinator (with specific PSS focus). And has also recruited dedicated BLP officers and Education Coordinators specific to PSS, which helps reduce the burden on MTs who are typically education coordinators or managers with a range of other responsibilities.

Master Trainers are recognized for their valuable capacity to provide direct and contextually-relevant support to teams and teachers on the ground. They also play a crucial role in building the capacity of implementing partners, which is integral to how NRC operates in country. The global survey responses show solid capacity (indication of confidence that staff could do activities most or all of the time) for the majority of implementation related questions for BLP-1. This includes indication that staff could explain key steps of BLP-1 *all of the time*. Interviews emphasize that the support of regional staff has been critical in the development of staff capacity.

BLP's relevance and high staff buy-in have been key enablers of a quickly increased capacity. It is considered an integral and essential program, particularly for children affected by trauma from conflict and displacement, which is well understood by NRC staff overall. Interviews illustrate a high level of commitment and belief in BLP's transformative power and relevance to the Ethiopia context. Teachers report that BLP activities are engaging for children and can be integrated into teaching methodologies, helping students, as well as themselves, to manage stress and improve wellbeing.

3.2 Integration of BLP and PSS into education programming

BLP has been widely integrated across NRC's education programming in Ethiopia. Within just two years of its inception in June 2023, BLP is described as a key aspect of all education responses, including FLER, non-formal education including accelerated education, formal education and TVET, across all NRC locations in the country. BLP has proven to be a valuable entry point for education initiatives, particularly in contested areas where formal education is stalled due to curriculum disputes. As BLP is not tied to specific curricula, it facilitates the initial re-establishment of learning in complex political contexts.

At a strategic level, interviews report that BLP is included in all education proposals, and NRC Ethiopia has developed its own BLP theory of change that aligns with the global framework. NRC Ethiopia holds a significant role as the technical lead for MHPSS within the ECW (Education Cannot Wait) multi-year resilience Programme II that covers April 2025 to April 2028, supporting other partners and government entities in BLP1 implementation. NRC's reputation in Ethiopia is increasingly associated with its PSS expertise and BLP, complementing its established leadership in both accelerated education and TVET programming.

Contextualisation efforts have been ongoing since the inception of BLP in Ethiopia. Most notably has been the development of audio recordings of BLP sessions in multiple local languages (Amharic,

Tigray, Afan-Oromo, Afar, Somali), an initiative supported by the regional offices. According to interviewees this has made BLP significantly more accessible and reduced the burden on teachers.

Challenges remain in effective integration. Education staff note that it remains challenging to know how fully BLP is being integrated at the school or classroom level. Master Trainers note that teachers often lack clear understanding to deliver BLP sessions, or they may implement them as separate activities rather than integrating them into daily classroom routines. Education staff emphasise that much has been accomplished, but that full integration across all types of education programming is still ongoing. And while BLP is being introduced into TVET and youth programs, its integration there is progressing slowly. Currently, BLP1 is the most widely known and implemented level, with a noted desire within NRC to expand to BLP2 and BLP3, which offer more specialized PSS support.

3.3 Organisational and Programmatic Learning

For monitoring BLP, interviews reflect that education staff is committed to using the MR Toolkit, including the SLEC and pre- and post-training checklists for teachers. However, significant challenges exist within the MEL processes. Education staff note the distinct disconnect between MEL and education teams. Data is collected, but analysis and reporting that is aimed at programme learning is uncommon. Survey data underlines this lack of capacity; for the question

“How would you rate the general understanding for staff implementing BLP in your CO in relation to the BLP MR Toolkit”, the response was “No understanding at all”. The existence of different SLEC versions has also caused confusion among field teams.

How frequently do you and your team engage in the following learning activities related to the BLP?	
Reflect on BLP implementation experiences informally	Sometimes
Share lessons learned on BLP implementation with colleagues	Sometimes
Use M&E to improve BLP programming	Sometimes
Access and use BLP research and evidence	Rarely

Overall, interviews reflect a perceived inadequacy in current tools to capture qualitative data and more subjective outcomes, as well as for understanding the details of contextualization and classroom level implementation. Staff highlight the need for more consistent classroom observation to assess the quality of BLP implementation and identify areas for contextualization.

To improve MEL, suggestions include integrating MEL staff into BLP training processes to enhance collaboration between teams. Developing tools that are sensitive to the various areas of implementation, as well as to different actors, was also named. Some staff spoke to a desire for more innovative MEL approaches such as audiovisual documentation alongside other uses of technology such as the BLP App. Additionally, CO staff noted that their advocacy work with governments and donors would benefit from Ethiopia-specific evidence and research.

“We often use evidence from other countries to show effectiveness of BLP to donors. We would really benefit from research that has been done here and is directly relevant to our context.”

3.4 Sustainability

Sustainability of BLP in Ethiopia remains a concern, largely due to its reliance on project-based funding, a concern shared across many countries. Despite the program's increased visibility in recent years, staff express worry that its perception as a “stand-alone” brand could hinder its long-term integration without continuous external support.

The CO is planning for the contextualization and institutionalisation of BLP both within NRC and externally with local government, federal authorities, education working groups, and implementing partners. The ECW grant provides a significant opportunity for NRC, as the technical lead for MHPSS, to train other partners and embed BLP within broader consortia.

Increased engagement with the government is a key strategy for sustainability. NRC has engaged in discussions with the Ministry of Education to assure permissions for implementation of BLP-1. Such interactions, and specifically the advocacy efforts within them, have been well-received. Plans are

underway to include ministry officials and regional education experts in future TOT trainings. The long-term vision of the CO involves incorporating BLP into national education systems and teacher training colleges, a critical step to ensure its continuity beyond NRC's direct involvement. Staff note that learning from other countries where this has occurred will be valuable.

Interviews emphasize how localization efforts are central to sustainability, focusing on empowering local actors and communities to take greater ownership of BLP. This includes suggestions such as training local "champion teachers" and providing incentives.

"I think for all of our programmes, a driving force needs to be localisation... really bringing our kind of expertise to local actors and assuring that they can continue doing what we're doing. In so many of the regions we're working, we're not there forever."

To enhance internal capacity and ensure continuity, NRC plans to continue to cascade internal training processes led by Master Trainers to more field locations, creating a broader pool of skilled individuals. There is also an emphasis on documenting learnings and processes to facilitate the onboarding of new staff and partners.

Challenges to sustainability include high staff turnover and the inherent volatility of the Ethiopian context, which makes long-term planning difficult. Religious sensitivities and the perception of BLP as a "Western" concept also require ongoing navigation, with likely further and more in-depth contextualization of materials. A key ambition for the future is to move beyond BLP1 to fully implement BLP2 and BLP3, which offer more specialized psychosocial support, and to ensure BLP is integrated into formal curricula.

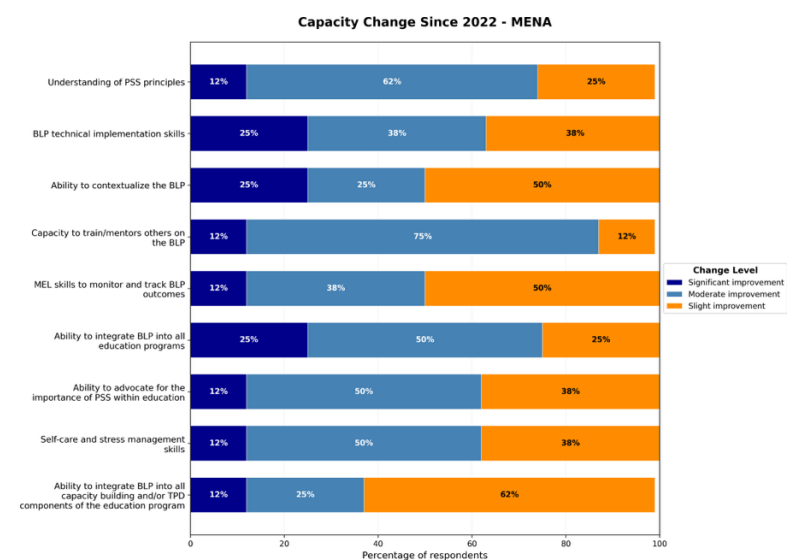
4. Conclusions

The Ethiopia case study provides a picture of how BLP has been integrated, implemented, and sustained within the CO's education programming amidst a prolonged crisis and systemic educational challenges. It highlights an example of rapid scaling, with BLP becoming an integral component of all NRC education responses within a short period, often serving as a critical entry point for education in contested areas.

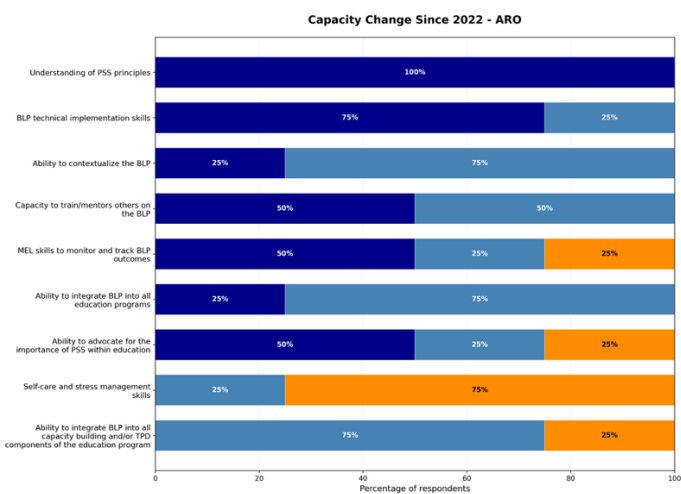
Key enablers of this success include the tailored support of regional NRC staff, as well as the Master Trainer model which fosters on-the-ground capacity building and knowledge transfer, and strategic contextualization efforts, most notably the translation and audio recording of BLP sessions in multiple local languages. NRC's growing reputation as a leader in PSS and BLP expertise has further strengthened its position amongst education actors in country.

However, challenges persist, particularly in strengthening MEL processes to more adequately capture context specific outcomes of BLP, as well as of assuring the use of MEAL data for programme learning. The institutionalization of BLP within government structures and broader education systems remains a critical objective for long-term sustainability and requires continued advocacy and capacity building efforts. Looking ahead, the CO has developed capacities to sustain the current implementation of BLP1, and it is well-positioned and eager to progressively include BLP2, BLP3, and BLP Youth.

Annex 5: Regional comparison graphs for capacity change since 2022 per 2025 survey⁴²

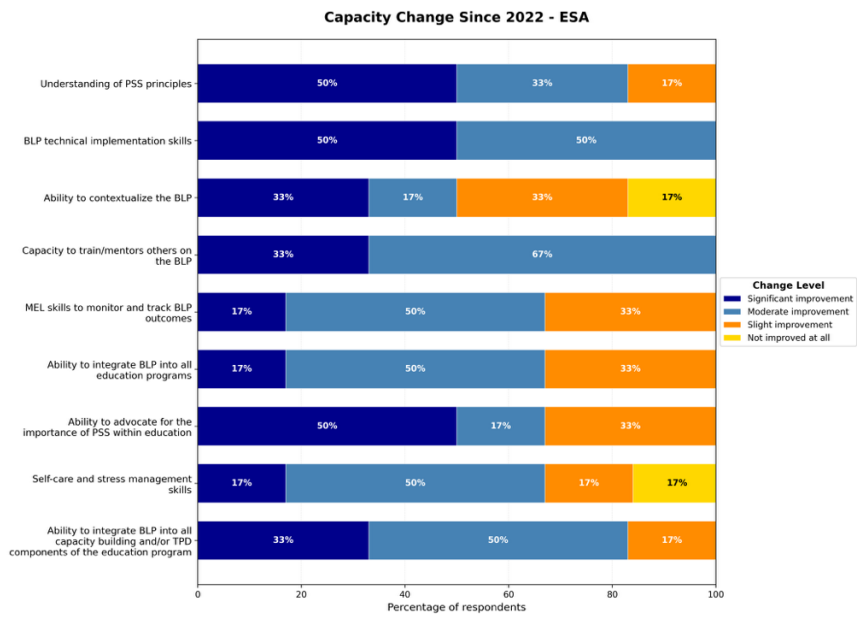


MENA countries include: Lebanon, SRO, Yemen, Jordan, SCO, Palestine, Iraq, Libya

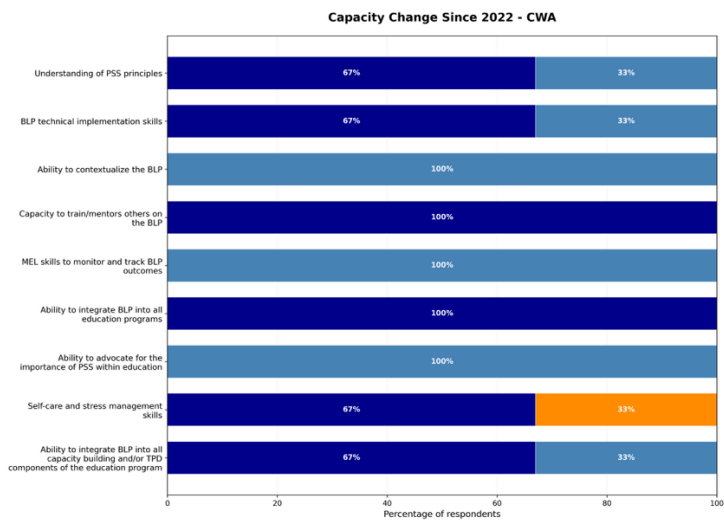


ARO countries include: Iran, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Afghanistan

⁴² The LARO and CEERO regions had incomplete responses to this survey question in enough respondents (more than 50%) to render comparisons less useful.



ESA countries include: Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia



CWA countries include: DRC, Burkina Faso, Nigeria



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