

# Themida Greece

A CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAM FOR  
UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN

## BETTER DAYS

April - June 2021







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## ACRONYMS & DEFINITIONS

- **UASC:** Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children/ Unaccompanied Minor: foreign nationals or stateless individuals below the age of 18 who arrive on the Greek territory unaccompanied by a responsible adult.
  - **PSS:** Psycho-social Support
  - **DCI:** Defence for Children International
  - **Family Reunification** is a procedure governed by the Dublin III regulation allowing members from the same family to be reunited in one host country, despite their country of entrance in the EU.
  - **Dublin Office:** Offices that are in charge of applying the Dublin III Regulation regarding asylum seekers in Europe.
  - **International Protection:** is the recognition by an EU State of a non-EU national or a stateless person as a refugee or as a person eligible for subsidiary protection
- **SGBV:** Sexual and Gender-Based Violence refers to any act that is perpetrated against a person's will and is based on gender norms and unequal power relationships. It includes physical, emotional or psychological and sexual violence, and denial of resources or access to services. Violence includes threats of violence and coercion. SGBV inflicts harm on women, girls, men and boys and is a severe violation of several human rights.

# THEMIDA GREECE

A PARTNERSHIP OF BETTER DAYS WITH  
DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL



DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN  
INTERNATIONAL  
GREECE



# THEMIDA GREECE

## BETTER DAYS GREECE

Better Days Greece (Better Days) is a Greek non-profit organization with HQ on the island of Lesbos. Since 2015, Better Days has worked with thousands of unaccompanied minors living in Greece, offering critical services ranging from quality education to psychosocial and medical support. It is mandated to aid children from displaced communities and disadvantaged backgrounds.

## DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN

Defence for Children International (DCI) is a non-profit international organization, of which the Greek unit is based in Athens. It is mandated to promote and protect children's rights in accordance with international law by documenting violation of children's rights, advocating for greater protection, and offer free legal aid to children.



<https://www.betterdays.ngo>



<https://defenceforchildren.org>



# CONTEXT OVERVIEW

## SITUATION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS IN GREECE



### ATHENS & MAINLAND GREECE

The existing structural reception deficiencies on both the Greek islands and at the borders of Evros have a domino effect on the situation of refugee children in the mainland and other parts of the country. On a daily basis, children are crossing through the borders of Evros without being registered by the Greek authorities. As a result they make their way to Athens without knowing how to register or to apply for international protection and without understanding how to access formal accommodation and other protection services. Too many end up finding temporary refuge in parks or in shared, crowded apartments with strangers. Simultaneously, many children seem to travel illegally from the hotspot camps of Lesbos and Samos hoping to find help, safety and shelter in Athens.

According to the last available official data published by EKKA (National Center for Social Solidarity), 3128 UASC are currently present in Greece with only 1434 long-term shelter placements available. However, the number of UASC should be revised upwards since it does not take into account the unregistered or missing unaccompanied children who remain unseen to the Greek authorities.

Unaccompanied children, outside the public child protection mechanism are exposed to serious protection risks, including sexual exploitation, child labour and abuse. Additionally insufficient access to formal or non-formal education directly violates the right of a child to education and stalls their development and learning. A child's living conditions and experiences usually impacts their psychosocial and physical wellbeing and more often than not UASC will enter adulthood with no security of asylum, limited opportunities to education, income, or career prospects.

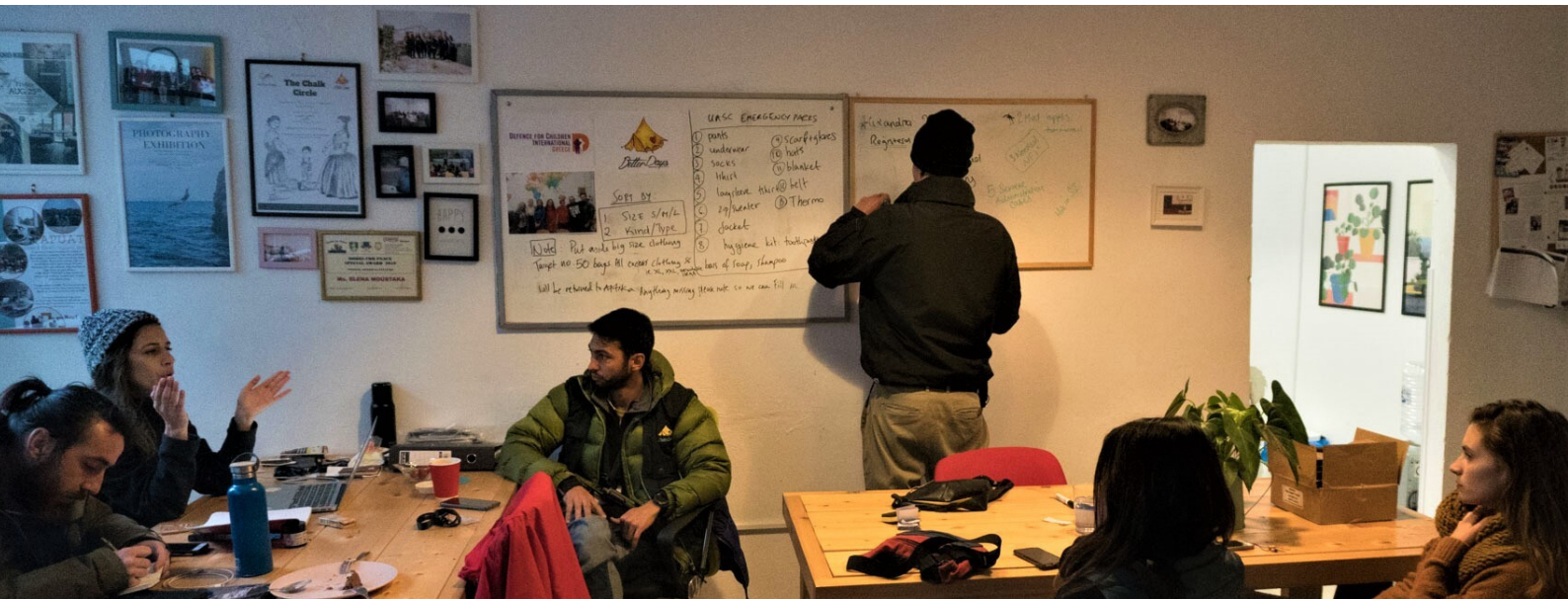
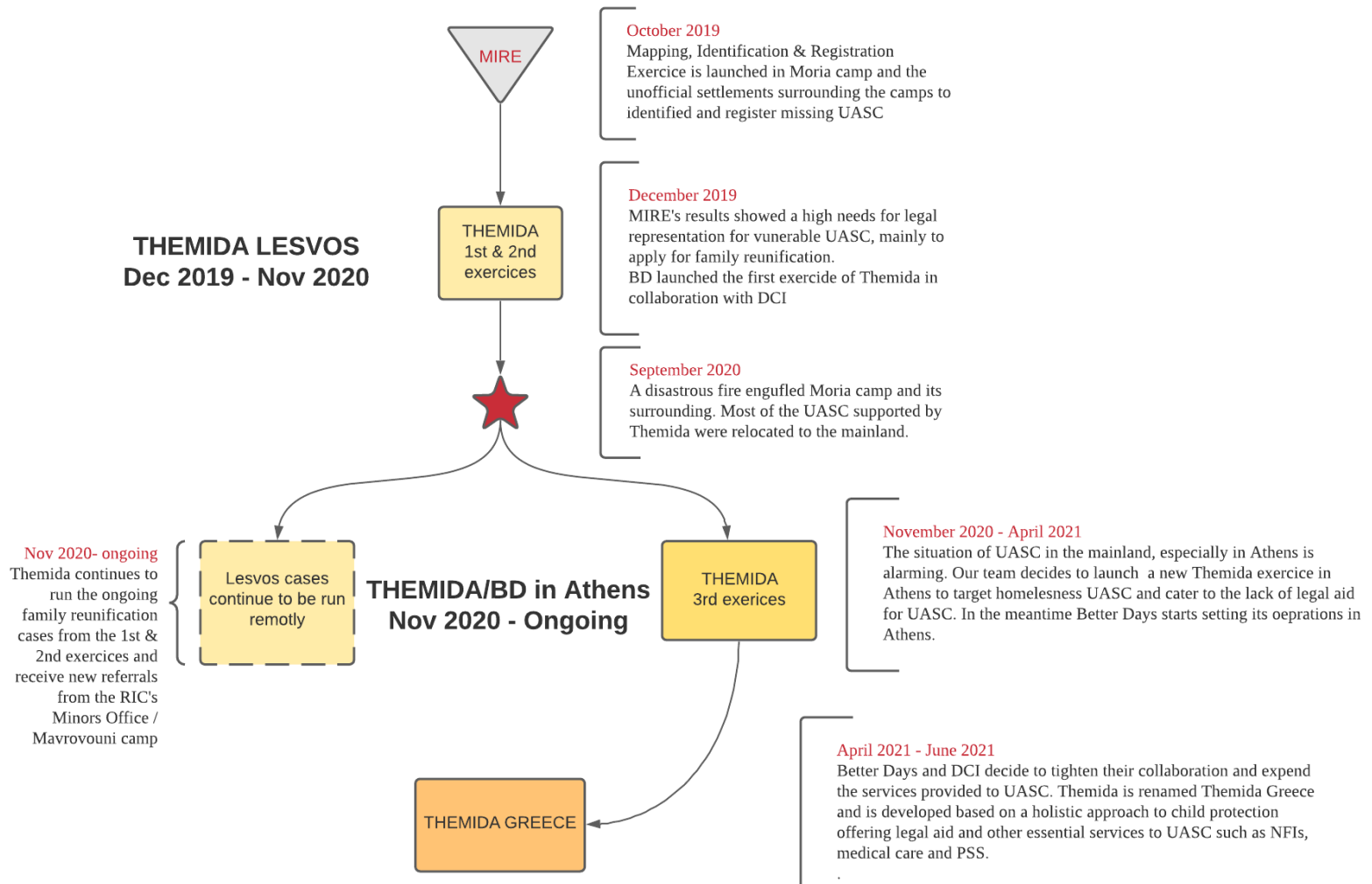
Following the relocation of UASC from Lesbos to the mainland, the focus of Themida was shifted to Athens, where approximately 1000 UASC were thought to live homelessly or excluded from the Greek Protection mechanism. From November 2020 until the end of March 2021 we identified 120 new cases of vulnerable children in need of critical legal intervention. Better Days hired a Farsi Interpreter and a Greek Outreach Officer to ensure effective communication with the authorities in Athens. In early 2021 Dan Teuma, Director of ER & Programming and Daniel Larios, Outreach Coordinator, were relocated to Athens, where they assessed network opportunities and additional gaps in UASC-specific services. The analysis of the needs assessment results revealed an alarming reality - the crippling absence of holistic child protection services dedicated to supporting UASC and the need for capacity building in identification and referral of UASC by streetwork officers. In March Better Days Directors Elena Moustaka & Andrew Foley relocated to Athens to support with the design and development of Themida Greece. By April 2021 Better Days launched a tailored made and holistic approach to child protection and legal aid for UASC in mainland Greece in partnership with DCI.

Themida's blueprint can now be replicable anywhere in Europe, a trauma-aware and child-friendly program addressing critical and basic needs for UASC in distress. Since December 2019, the Themida partners have changed the lives of 248 individuals at risk, 206 of whom were UASC and 42 who were vulnerable accompanied children and their families at-risk.



# THEMIDA JOURNEY

TIMELINE DECEMBER 2019- JUNE 2021



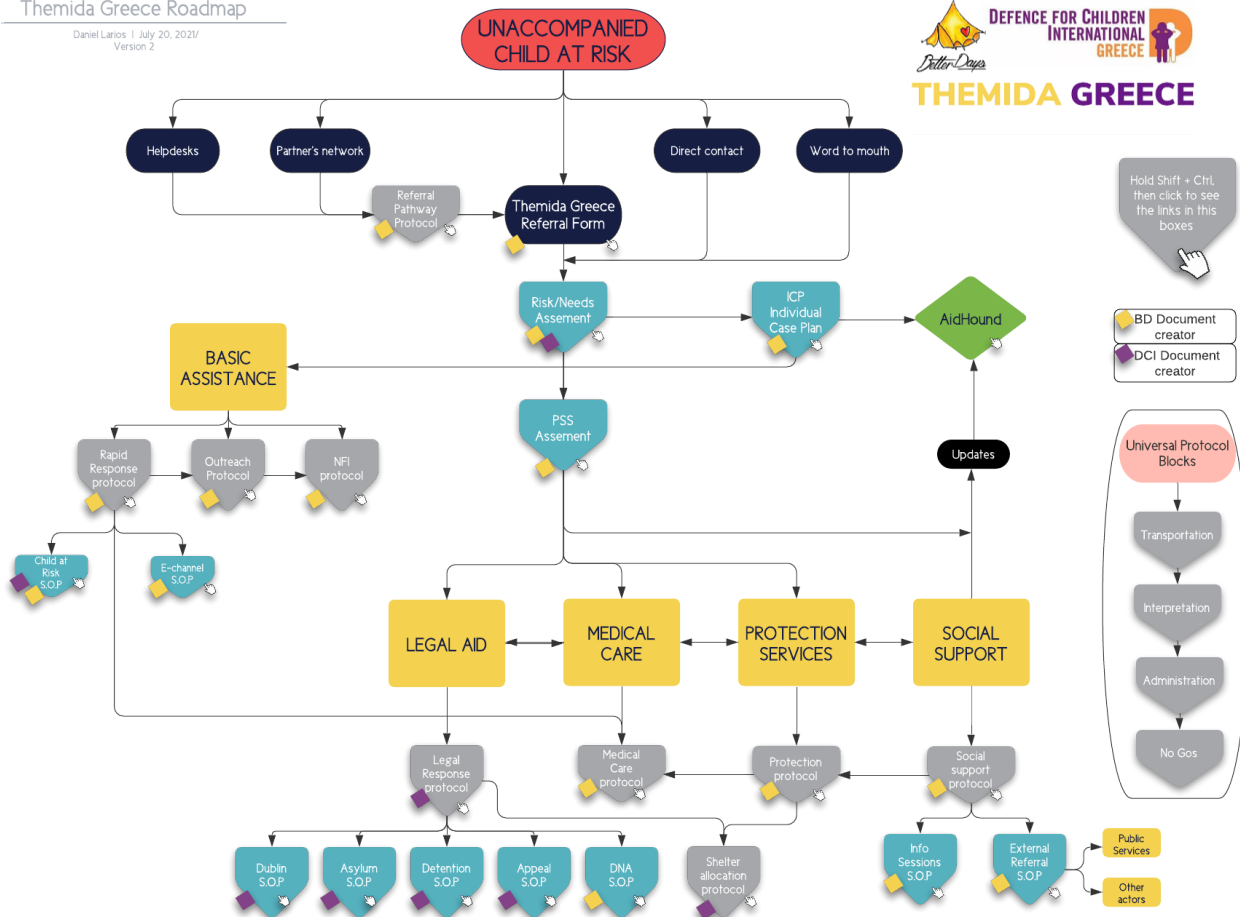


# THEMIDA GREECE

## PROGRAM ROADMAP

Themida Greece Roadmap

Daniel Larios | July 20, 2021/  
Version 2



Each UASC identified or referred to our program is contacted within 48-72 hours for a Needs and Risk Assessment. This form helps us understand the level of risk, or emergency, and determine a timeframe for our intervention. If there are indicators of immediate risk, the UASC is contacted immediately and our rapid response protocol is put in effect in order to move the child to a secure location.

Following the first Needs and Risk Assessment, a personalised case plan (ICP) is drafted by our team to allow for optimum response to the child's individual needs. Daily check-in on rapid response cases is necessary to ensure that they feel safe and supported until their final transfer to a formal shelter and in order to cover the child's basic and legal needs. If state shelters are unable to provide services, we continue to support the UASC. Otherwise check-ins are biweekly and are usually performed by Better Days Legal Coordinator Romane Bernet, with the valuable support of cultural mediators.

## MAIN PILLARS

- Legal aid (i.e., Child-friendly legal information, legal representation, access to DNA tests, access to safe long-term shelters),
- Medical care (facilitate access to medical care in private and public medical services)
- Protection services (access to a psychologist, initial PSS assessment, mainstream, specialized and nonspecialized support pathways)
- Social services (support transportation and escort services for vulnerable cases, translation services for Farsi, Somali, Bengali, French and Arabic)
- Basic assistance (Rapid Response for children in distress, NFIs, PPE and covid19 support)



# SNAPSHOT

## THEMIDA PROGRAM

### OVERVIEW DEC 2019 - JUNE 2021

**248**

Accumulative number of new cases supported by Themida

**206**

Accumulative number of UASC supported

### MAIN FIGURES SINCE JAN 2021

**110**

Number of new cases referred to our program (Jan-Jun 2021)

**35**

Total of UASC placed in safe shelter (Jan-June 2021)

**16**

Number of successful legal cases in June 2021

**26**

Number of new cases registered with the asylum services

### ZOOM IN - QUARTER 2 (APRIL - JUNE)

**47**

Number of new cases referred to our program

**86**

Accumulative number of legal active procedures in June

**16**

Psychosocial individual counselling sessions

**7**

Number of successful legal procedures/positive answers

**6**

Access to registration with asylum services

**22**

Placements in safe shelter found

### WHAT'S COMING NEXT?



#### ACCESS TO PSYCHOSOCIAL SERVICES

After spending most of this quarter designing Themida PSS department we are eager to provide access to PSS to new and current Themida cases.



#### EMERGENCY KITS

Securing and ordering winter appropriate NFIs for UASC



#### OUTREACH & IDENTIFICATION EXERCISE

We have received trusted information regarding the presence of unregistered UASC in camps around Athens. We are considering replicating a Monitoring, Identification and Registration Exercise (MIRE) across specific locations.



#### THEMIDA PILLARS

Continue developing Themida's blueprint and pillars of services in order to reinforce the lifechanging impact of the program. In Q3 we will be assessing the critical gaps in education and vocational training for UASC in Athens.



#### ISO 9001 CERTIFICATION

In July 2021, Better Days will undergo its external audit in order to receive the ISO 9001 certification attesting of the quality of the services delivered by Themida Greece.



# BASIC ASSISTANCE

## OUTREACH TEAM

Our main objective in Outreach for the first half of 2021 was to create a trusted network of partnerships with local organisations that are likely to meet with, or come across, UASC (i.e., organisations doing street work, distributing free meals, medical teams) and provide training on how to identify but also on how to efficiently refer and process the information received by asylum-seeking children alleging to be unaccompanied.

When children are identified and referred to our program, they often live in dire conditions and have survived on their own for months, deprived of any basic care. To fill this gap and assist them in covering their basic needs, Themida Greece officially started to cover the following needs as of April 2021, with the support of other local actors:

- Medical care, (in collaboration with Medical Volunteers International)
- None-food items (in collaboration with Attika Human Support and Refugees4Refugees)
- Emergency hot meals from (Agios Anthropos or local restaurants).

## MAIN FIGURES

REFERRAL RECEIVED	TOTAL
Q2 (APRIL - JUNE)	47
YEAR 2021	110

REFERRAL RECEIVED	MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS	ESCORTS	NFIS BACKPACKS	EMERGENCY MEALS	RAPID RESPONSE
Q2 (APRIL - JUNE)	65	116	31	20	1



# HOMELESSNESS

Better Days Rapid Response Team was created on Lesbos following the increased number of life-threatening incidents faced by lone children on the olive groves of Moria camp.

Today its main mission remains to respond to emergencies and when UASC are in immediate danger.

Better Days Emergency Response Director leads and trains the Better Days team to respond to critical situations with caution and care. A security consultant supports when necessary.

In Athens, our main target population is homeless unaccompanied children. UASC who are sleeping rough on the streets, living in parks in Athens, or end up sharing rooms with adults. Unfortunately, it is not unusual for children outside of safe accommodation to report exploitation and systematic abuse (forced labour, sexual abuses, survival sex etc). When a homeless child is identified, we make it our priority to ensure their transfer to safe accommodation.

If a life-threatening situation is identified, Themida's Rapid Response team is deployed to remove the UASC from immediate danger while DCI submits a legal report informing the appropriate authorities and requesting placement in state shelter.

During this quarter, our team has identified 54 homeless UASC in need of a safe shelter. This brings up the total of homeless UASC we have worked with this year alone to 102.

SHELTERS	REMAINING HOMELESS	SHELTER FOUND	RELEASED FROM DETENTION
Q2 (APRIL - JUNE)	54	22	0
YEAR 2021	54	35	8



# CHILD-FRIENDLY LEGAL AID

Unregistered children are completely hidden to the Greek authorities and cannot access basic services (such as the public health system, accommodation, public education etc). Without guidance, children are not well informed about the registration process and are unable to access asylum or other legal procedures, such as family reunification. Due to systemic issues within the asylum services it can take more than 6 months to receive a registration appointment. This time period can be reduced to 2-3 months when supported by our legal team.

Regardless of the difficulties faced when registering their presence in Greece, UASC are not provided with any state legal support in order to prepare their International Protection application (asylum or subsidiary protection) or their family reunification request. This complex process, already difficult to navigate even for an experienced lawyer, is nearly impossible for any UASC to successfully complete alone. Due to the lack of legal information and support available, UASC are unable to meet the complex requirements of asylum procedures causing them to stay in limbo for years to come. On the 7th of June 2021 a Joint Ministerial Decision considered Turkey a safe third country for asylum seekers from Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Syria and Somalia. This new decision already have disastrous effect as asylum applications are now assessed on admissibility rather than on substance for these 3rd country nationals. This also applies to UASC who are 15 y.o and above. This harmful practice contradicts with the best interest of the child by taking away their chance to tell his story and start a new life in Europe.

DCIs experienced lawyers make it their priority to identify a child's individual legal needs and incorporate a personalized legal response to the ICP. Applying for family reunification within reasonable timeframes and with all relevant documentation in place incl. a thoroughly written BIA is of grave importance.

Every UASC receives child friendly information regarding their legal situation and the next steps to be taken in their native language. Very often, these legal procedures are time-consuming and create a lot of anxiety for participants. However, throughout the lengthy procedure, UASC are able to count on our caring team to offer an attentive ear to listen to their issues and provide the best possible solution for their difficult situation on a biweekly basis.

OPEN LEGAL PROCEDURES	ACTIVE*	PENDING*	TOTAL
ASYLUM	25	18	43
DUBLIN	14	26	40
AGE ASSESSMENT	1	0	1
LEGAL CUSTODY	2	0	2

*\*Active means that regular legal actions are still needed for the case.*

*\*Pending means that the case has entered a long waiting period or is awaiting transfer to the destination country or a shelter that will take over the legal procedure.*



# LEGAL AID

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## FROM THEMIDA

**"THEY REGISTERED ME AS  
AN ADULT WITHOUT EVEN  
ASKING ME..."**

# 1

## AGE ASSESSMENT

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*Total number of active accumulative cases  
for Themida as of the 30th of June 2021*

Some UASC are wrongly registered as adults by Greek authorities upon arrival in Greece. Following this malpractice, alleged UASC are excluded from any protection services including access to family reunification. They can then fall into the category of single adults and lose their child protection rights. In order to remedy this situation, our legal team must persuade the authorities to proceed with an Age Assessment. This usually takes place through medical processes, including X-rays. Access to Age Assessment for alleged minors is very limited especially on Lesbos. For many months no age assessment took place on the island. Within this reporting period the situation improved and 17 alleged minors underwent an Age Assessment, however 50 cases of alleged minors are still pending assessment living in the new camp of Mavrovouni on Lesbos.

*Nasrullah an unaccompanied boy from Afghanistan arrived on Lesbos in 2018 when he was 13 years old, but was registered by the Greek authorities as being 18. When he was referred to our program in March 2021, Nasrullah was in a very bad psychological state following an attempt to end his life while living in a camp in the mainland. Themidas legal team sent an urging report asking the authorities to proceed with an age assessment for his case. The UASC underwent a medical Age Assessment in April 2021. Following the results of the age assessment the Greek state recognized Nasrullah as being a 17 y.o UASC. We were then able to find a safe shelter for him and are now preparing him for his first asylum interview .*

# 2

## CUSTODY CASES

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*Total number of active accumulative cases  
for Themida as of 30th of June 2021*

Some children may be separated from their parents while all residing in Greece. Our program supports family cases in order to grant custody of children to their relatives. This procedure often requires completion of DNA tests.



# PSYCHO-SOCIAL SUPPORT

## & CHILD PROTECTION

Children on the move have too often faced traumatic events in their home country and/or during their journey to Greece. Many more are subjected to ongoing trauma whilst living in Greece awaiting their next steps. Whilst providing them with basic or legal assistance is a primary importance, it is also crucial to offer these children a safe space and access to a mental health professional. Such interventions help them to cope with the immediate impact their traumatic journey has on their daily life (experiences such as nightmares, anxiety, depression, memory loss, at-risk behaviors, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, self-harm etc).

Following our recognition of the great need for a psychosocial support element in our programme, we hired Elena Dimitra Pangiotopoulou as a Senior Child Protection Officer, a Psychologist with experience working with children and in art therapy. During our Senior Child Protection Officer's first three months on the ground, she focused on reviewing Better Days Child Protection mechanism and designing Themidas Psycho-Social Services (PSS). She also ran her first individual psycho-social counselling sessions with four extremely vulnerable beneficiaries.

Once fully operational, the PSS department will provide every newly-referred UASC with an initial PSS assessment in order to identify if further PSS intervention is needed. PSS support can take multiple forms, from individual counseling to group PSS-therapeutic activities and/or more specialised interventions. At the moment, our PSS activities are limited to individual sessions, for reasons of social distancing related to COVID-19, however we hope to start organising group activities such as art therapy in the near future. As a psychologist, Elena also provides a new angle to our legal casework by adding supportive psychosocial analysis to beneficiary files.

One of our key objectives for this quarter has also been to ensure that every Better Days' team member has been trained appropriately in Child Protection mechanisms, Child Safeguarding principles and in Psychological First Aid for Children training. We aim to continue providing relevant training in child protection, and across other humanitarian areas, to ensure on-going programmatic high quality and the continued professional growth of our passionate team within the last half of 2021.

4

Number of highly vulnerable participants that benefited from a PSS intervention (April - June 2021)

16

Number of individual PSS sessions provided (April-June 2021)

2

PSS reports written to support UASC's legal cases or shelter placement requests



# TESTIMONIES

READ THE STORIES OF THEMINDA PARTICIPANTS

## ~~UN~~SAFE

Hello, I am Taha's mother.

"I am really thankful for your kindness and I am glad that we have you. I am waiting for Taha to finally be able to come next to me".

You are typing...



*When this 17 y.o Iranian UASC was referred to our program in March 2021, he was immediately identified as a very vulnerable case with a damaged psychological state. He was sleeping rough on the streets and was unregistered. Our team immediately informed the relevant authorities and a shelter was found within 24hrs. The legal team also requested a registration appointment urgently for the boy to be able to apply for family reunification with his mother currently in Sweden. The family reunification case was submitted after completing a DNA test. By the end of May, the family reunification request was accepted by Sweden. The UASC is now waiting in a safe shelter until the day of his transfer to Sweden.*

*Rubel is a 17 y.o adolescent from Bangladesh. When he contacted our program, he was homeless, sleeping rough in the parks of Athens despite having been officially recognized as an UASC by the asylum authorities. Rubel did not have access to food for 3 days and was terrified of being attacked at night by adults living in the parks. We organized for Rubel to receive daily hot meals and basic assistance whilst urging the competent authorities to place him in a safe shelter. Shelter was found within a few weeks.*

*Rubel has asked us to help him apply for family reunification with his uncle living in Italy.*



Hello, I am Rubel.

"I am in Greece for 9 months. I have an asylum applicant card but I have no house. I live in the park right now, It is not safe. Please help me".

You are typing...



## HOME~~LESS~~



# TESTIMONIES

READ THE STORIES OF THEMINDA PARTICIPANTS

## HOPELESS

Hello, I am Abu.

"I left Somalia because I had to. I arrived in Greece when I was 16 y.o. My first memory of Moria was the first night I slept on the streets. It was a hard life on a cold and scary night. I am a refugee; no one listens to me, even if they know what is going on. My best memory is when I met Better Days. When I arrive in Greece, I didn't know about family reunification. They came to my tent and asked me if I have any family in Europe. For the first time, I was happy and hopeful that I will be reunited with my family. Since then, they have supported me any way they could for me to be happy."

*Abu arrived from Somalia to Lesbos as an unaccompanied teenager in October 2019. He was found by Better Days outreach team living in a summer tent in the unofficial settlements surrounding Moria camp. Never being informed of his rights to apply for family reunification, it was a relief for him to learn that there was a chance for him to see members of his family again and escape the nightmare of Moria. Together with the support of our team, he submitted his claim to family reunification with his uncle in the UK. Unfortunately the UK soon sent a negative response, rejecting the case on the grounds that the family link wasn't established through the submitted evidence. The last resort for 's case was to undergo a DNA test. With the impact of the covid-19 global pandemic and Europe being in full lockdown, it took close to two months to receive the positive DNA results. Without consideration for Abu's difficult situation, the UK rejected the case again.*

*Lacking available legal options from the greek side, our team contacted legal organizations in the UK until someone agreed to litigate the case in front of the responsible national court. After more than a year of fighting for his rights, Abu's case was finally accepted by the Home Office and the whole family was able to celebrate. However, Abu's happiness was short-lived. During this long waiting period he turned 18 years old and he was asked to leave the safe accommodation he was recently transferred to as an unaccompanied child. Left with little option, he was resigned to sleep rough and endure this last part of his journey until Greece could organized his transfer to the UK. We finally found temporary shelter for Abu back in Lesbos where he felt secure and at peace to wait for his transfer. He was notofied 5 months after and was finally transferred to the UK.*

# MAIN CHALLENGES

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## INTERNAL

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- COVID-19 has limited the presence of Themida team members in our office in order to comply with Covid19 measures and internal health and safety protocols.
- DCIs office is currently located in a part of Athens which is not easily accessible for the team members and the participants.
- We have received several referrals from alleged unaccompanied minors providing us with fake documents. At the moment we did not succeed in finding official ways to apostille documents provided by alleged minors.
- Lack of capacity to provide interpreters in all the different native languages of the beneficiaries. At the moment we are providing mainly Farsi, Pashto, Urdu, Dari and Bengali and we are looking to secure interpretation for Arabic and Somali.

## EXTERNAL

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- The target population is on the move which means that we constantly have to adapt and follow up on the participant's situation and living conditions.
- COVID-19 is limiting our in-person interactions with the participants and the implementation of group activities. It has also impacted our capacity to meet with other humanitarian actors to develop collaboration and partnerships.
- The overstretched asylum services cause long delays in registration appointments and asylum interviews.
- The new ministerial decision considers Turkey a safe country for nationals from Afghanistan, Syria, Somali, Pakistan and Bangladesh.
- Unlawful decisions and extreme delays in European Dublin Offices are negatively impacting the mental health of the participants and the extending duration of their legal case.
- Unavailability of public services for unregistered UASC (i.e. public health system).
- Lack of capacity in state accommodation to shelter homeless UASC.



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**THEMIDA GREECE**

## SPONSORS

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## COLLABORATORS

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