

THEMIDA CHILD PROTECTION PROGRAM

January - March 2021

BETTER DAYS





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- **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.

ACRONYMS & DEFINITIONS

- **UASC/UAM:** 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
- **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

THEMIDA CONTEXT

SITUATION OF UNACCOMPANIED MINORS IN GREECE

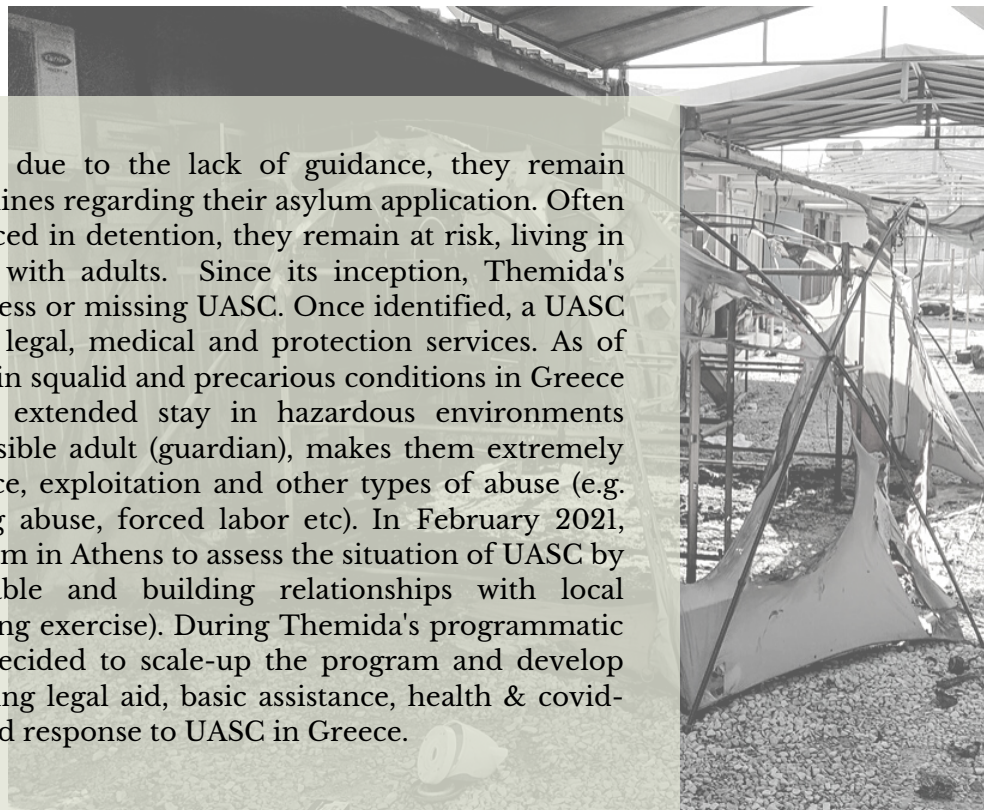


Themida, a joint program of Better Days Greece and DCI-Greece, was launched in December 2019 to provide a holistic approach of legal aid and child protection to unaccompanied minors in Greece. This program has been divided between different exercises, two located on Lesbos (December 2019 - October 2020) and one based in Athens (October 2019- ongoing).

In Greece, the situation of unaccompanied children is complex and alarming. According to the EKKA's (National Center for Social Solidarity) March 2021 report, 3854 unaccompanied children are currently residing in Greece out of whom more than 900 are outside of the accommodation scheme, in other words, are either homeless, in detention (for protective custody) or living in RICs (Reception and Identification Centers).

UASC often enter the Greek territory by sea passing through the island's hotspots or from the continental border in Evros (Northern-East of Greece). In the absence of proper mechanisms to protect and guide them, they often make their way to Athens completely unnoticed, hoping to find assistance.

When an UASC arrives in Athens, due to the lack of guidance, they remain unregistered or miss important deadlines regarding their asylum application. Often afraid of the authorities or to be placed in detention, they remain at risk, living in the streets and sharing apartments with adults. Since its inception, Themida's primary target population are homeless or missing UASC. Once identified, a UASC at risk is offered access to essential legal, medical and protection services. As of 2019, the situation of children living in squalid and precarious conditions in Greece became extremely concerning. An extended stay in hazardous environments without the supervision of a responsible adult (guardian), makes them extremely vulnerable exposing them to violence, exploitation and other types of abuse (e.g. physical violence, survival sex, drug abuse, forced labor etc). In February 2021, Better Days relocated an outreach team in Athens to assess the situation of UASC by identifying current services available and building relationships with local stakeholders (actors & service mapping exercise). During Themida's programmatic review in early 2021, Better Days decided to scale-up the program and develop Themida into a 360° program offering legal aid, basic assistance, health & covid-response, protection, outreach & rapid response to UASC in Greece.



THEMIDA

PARTNERSHIP OF BETTER DAYS & DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN INTERNATIONAL



BETTER DAYS GREECE

Better Days Greece (Better Days) is a Greek non-profit organization based on the island of Lesbos since 2015. It provides critical support to unaccompanied minors living on Lesbos. In the past two years, Better Days worked with over 1200 unaccompanied minors, offering several services from non-formal education to legal aid support.



<https://www.betterdays.ngo>

DEFENCE FOR CHILDREN

Defence for Children International (DCI) is a non-profit international organization 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://defenceforchildren.org>

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PROGRAM STRUCTURE

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**THEMIDA - PROTECTION
FOR UASC IN GREECE**



**GREECE: HUNDREDS OF
VULNERABLE DISPLACED UASC
HOMELESS & UNPROTECTED**

**UNACCOMPANIED
CHILDREN**
REGISTERED IN GREECE

3854

2026

**PLACEMENTS IN
STATE'S SHETERS**
LONG TERM PLACEMENTS

**HOMELESS &
INFORMAL HOUSING**
OFFICIAL EKKA* NUMBERS

917

THEMIDA SNAPSHOT

JANUARY -MARCH 2021

WHAT DO WE DO?



OUTREACH & MAPPING

Our outreach team locates as many UAC at risk as possible and ensure their efficient referral to Themida program



LEGAL AID

Themida is providing legal support for vulnerable and unaccompanied children on Lesvos and in Athens.



CASE MANAGEMENT

We are providing case management support to find shelters or others crucial primary services.



ADVOCACY

Themida is also advocating for changes at a national and european level and offering a voice to invisible children.



CHILD PROTECTION FOCUS

In all operations, we observe high standards of child protection. Implemented processes that respects children as the main subject of their cases.

MAIN FIGURES

63

Number of new cases referred to our program Jan-March 2021

167

Accumulative Number of active Themida cases

134

Accumulative total of UAMs active Themida cases

FAMILY REUNIFICATION FOCUS

67

Active number of UAMs supported with family reunification

33

UAMs with successful cases waiting to be transferred to destination countries.

0

Transfer to destination countries organized by Greek authorities



3

DNA tests implemented on Lesvos for family reunification purposes.

WHAT IS NEXT?



THEMIDA GREECE PLAN

Following the set-up of Better Days team in Athens, we are actively brainstorming and re-designing key components of the program in order to improve and broaden the services we can offer to UASC.



EMERGENCY KITS

In the framework of Themida, 80 emergency backpacks including winter NFIs have been prepared and distributed to UASC.



SENIOR CHILD PROTECTION OFFICER

A Senior Child Protection Officer has been hired, starting in April 2021.

OUTREACH AND MAPPING

Following the relocation of all UASC to the mainland (after Moria's destruction), Better Days mobilized an outreach team in Athens. By March we had 7 staff members and two community volunteers working in the mainland.

Our primary focus upon arrival to Athens has been to reach out to local actors and introduce ourselves, establish relationships & grasp interest in potentially referring UASC to the Themida Program. Further on, our team of experienced interpreters and outreach officers worked tirelessly to support UASC with medical, legal, and other important appointments within the public and private sector.

COVID restrictions have been challenging to navigate. Most notably, it caused delays with our service and actors mapping exercise, as we were unable to meet as many actors as we would like face to face which is a huge variable when building trust. Nevertheless, in Feb-March we successfully met over 15 different actors, established partnerships with 9 of them, while mapping 111 others. As a direct result of these meetings, Themida received 12 new referrals from our recently established partnerships. Additionally, 51 cases were referred by existing partners.

To build awareness and confidence across groups and actors operating in Athens, we are currently preparing an induction training course. We aim to build capacity amongst aid workers and volunteers working with displaced communities to identify UASC and be able to follow appropriate referral pathways such as Themida's to support them.



MAIN FIGURES

FROM THEMIDA

167

INDIVIDUAL CASES

Total number of active accumulative cases for Themida (January - March 2021)

During this reporting period, Themida received 63 new referrals, which brings the number of cases we actively support to 167.

Most of the cases referred are UASC in critical need of legal aid and child protection services.

Out of the 167 individual active cases, 134 are UASC, 18 are accompanied children and 11 are single mothers or accompanying family members.

The vast majority of the cases supported are unaccompanied boys from Afghanistan and Bangladesh.

TOTAL Referrals to Themida (January-March 2021)

Individual referred	63
Referral assessed	63
Cases included in Themida	63

Themida participants status

UASC	134
Alleged Minors (* unaccompanied minors recognized as adults)	4
Accompanied Children & vulnerable adults (*single mothers or accompanying adults)	29
TOTAL ACTIVE CASES	167

LEGAL AID

REPRESENTATION & COUNSELING

REGISTRATION

Unregistered UASC are completely invisible in the eyes of the Greek authorities and do not get the chance to apply for asylum or other legal procedures such as family reunification. Being unregistered, they remain excluded from safe accommodation, legal assistance, medical care and education. One of the first steps to take once an unregistered unaccompanied child is identified is to inform the public prosecutor (legal guardian of all UASC in Greece) and establish communication with the asylum services to obtain a registration appointment. Once registration appointment is given (usually within a few weeks) DCI's legal team prepares the child for the appointment.

ASYLUM PREPARATION

The greek asylum process is complex to navigate. Many of the UASC have experienced traumatic events in their home countries, during their journey, or during their stay in Greece and some of them still suffer from serious PTSD. Trauma has various effects on someone's ability to clearly relate events, and children's perceptions of situations can be different from adults. Our legal team is there to accompany UASC in the preparation of their asylum interview where they will have to expose their traumatic and difficult life story to request International Protection in Greece.

To increase chances of success, our legal team submits a legal memo supporting the arguments exposed by the child asking for International protection (around 40 pages) and emphasizing the importance of children's rights as a primary consideration in the asylum decision. The asylum process is extensively long, currently, asylum seekers have to wait for over one-and-a-half to two years to receive a first interview appointment.

FAMILY REUNIFICATION

Children should not grow up without the love and care of responsible adults. European Dublin III Regulation organizes a legal and safe way for children to be reunited with their family members living in other European countries.

Unfortunately in practice, family reunification is a complex and time-consuming process that can't be navigated without the support of an experienced professional. During the reporting period, our team has actively supported 67 UASC throughout their family reunification case, from application to the very last step of litigation in front of the responsible court of law in the destination country. Due to extensive delays to receive answers from the destination country to the first application or re-examination request, the duration of this process often exceeds 12-months.

LEGAL AID

REPRESENTATION & COUNSELING

OTHER LEGAL SUPPORT

Our program is also providing legal support for highly vulnerable cases for :

- age assessment; when serious doubt exists regarding the age of a participant wrongly assessed as an adult, an age assessment can be requested from the authorities.
- guardianship procedures
- funding and implementation of DNA tests (this procedure is costly and time-consuming). Themida works with a private clinic in order to provide a rapid response to critical legal cases.
- funding and coordination of translation of official identification documents to support legal cases.

LEGAL CASES FIGURES

Legal procedures (Jan-March)	
Registration with Greek authorities	
Unregistered* (still waiting for their appointment)	29
Registered	19
Ongoing Legal procedures	
Under Asylum Procedure (including unregistered cases)	100
Asylum preparation	N/A
Family Reunification (Dublin)	67
Additional Support	
DNA test	3
Age Assessment	0
Guardianship	1
TOTAL individual legal cases	167

52

POSITIVE DECISIONS

Total number of positive decision for family reunification of UASC

34

DNA TEST

Total number of DNA tests implemented for family reunification and guardianship cases

11

CASE CLOSED

11 case were closed during the reporting period due to different factors (e.i the participant had left the country or the case was successfully closed)

LIVING SITUATION

UNACCOMPANIED MINORS

DETENTION

Despite international criticism, Greek authorities continue to detain homeless UASC as a protective custody measure. In these circumstances, they are often unaware of their right to apply for asylum and other rights they are entitled to as children. Once identified, Themida alarms the responsible authorities and starts the process in order to find safe accommodation for the child. Priority is to get the UASC released from detention and ensure s/he has access to child protection services. During the reporting period, 8 UASC were identified and released from detention following Themida's intervention.

HOMELESSNESS

Unaccompanied children have the right to be safely accommodated by the public authorities. This right is often violated without the intervention of human rights activists. As mentioned previously, many UASC are sleeping rough in Athens' streets and parks or living in shared accommodation with adults. By living in such conditions they are exposed to severe danger and abuse. Themida team often has to cover the gaps of the public services and take all possible measures to protect the child whilst informing the authorities. This procedure can be long and pressure needs to be maintained before the child is safely accommodated. Meanwhile, we remain in contact with the UASC, doing whatever we can to ensure their safety until adequate placement is found. Once a placement is found, we arrange for all medical examinations, covid-19 test to take place without delays and complete the transfer of the UASC in the shelter. During the reporting period, 31 children were placed in state accommodations. The team of Themida continues to work tirelessly to move another 48 UASC out of the streets of Athens and into safe accommodation.

UAC's Accomodation Status (Jan-March 2021)	
Homeless (out of state accommodation)	48
Released from Detention	8/8
Placement in State Shelter	31



CHILD PROTECTION

& RAPID RESPONSE

PSYCHO-SOCIAL

Better Days is currently in the process of hiring a new Senior Child Protection Officer in order to reinforce the psycho-social aspect of our response. The objective is to strengthen our 360 approach to case management for UASC. By providing PSS and access to psycho-therapeutic activities we hope to see many of our participants cope with trauma, depression and PTSD as well as gaining agency over their lives. As part of our Individual Case Plan (ICP) protocol, the Senior Child Protection Officer will be performing a PSS assessment for all cases which will complement the child's file. Additionally, they will work on our Child Safeguarding Policy, protection protocols and training for the whole team.

(NFIs) NON-FOOD-ITEMS

Many UASC have been referred to us after living on their own for several weeks, even months. Very often, they struggle to access basic and essential non-food items such as hygiene and clothing. As of 2019, Better Days & Attika Human Support have worked together to create season & age-specific clothing kits, (backpacks for homeless children). In this reporting period, we prepared over 180 emergency backpacks for UASC. Refugee4Refugees (R4R) distribution team in Athens has been great in supporting last-minute requests and emergency NFIs.

External Challenges

- Transitory nature of our target population.
- Extensive delays for case registration and asylum interviews with the Greek Asylum Office.
- Limited availability in State accommodation for unaccompanied children.
- Extensive delays from destination countries' Dublin Offices and from the Greek Dublin Office seriously affecting family reunification cases.
- Unlawful rejection of Dublin cases.
- Suspension of all family reunification transfer since January 2021.
- Socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown on host and refugee communities
- The MoE is promoting education in the camps, UNICEF and IOM seem to be on board with the plan. Very scarce access to public school for refugee children.
- Government's anti-NGO sentiment is affecting acceptance from host community / general scepticism.
- Police aggression and brutality, frequent protests.





SUPPORT UNACCOMPANIED CHILDREN AT RISK

~~IN~~VISIBLE ~~UN~~SAFE ~~DIS~~CONNECTED



LANDMARK CASES

~~HOME~~LESS

Elena, young unaccompanied girl and vulnerable SGBV victim, was placed in a state shelter at her arrival in Greece. Some smugglers managed to locate her and she was forced to flee the shelter for her own safety.

In Athens, she met a family which she lived with for a long time. After receiving International Protection, the family was asked to leave the state accommodation and ended up homeless, as well as Elena.

Once identified, several meetings took place with the young girl in order to gain her trust. After our intervention accommodation in a shelter for UASC was granted for her.

She will also be referred to Themida's psychologist and we have arranged for volunteer teacher to start English lessons with her.

~~DIS~~CONNECTED

Despite the submission of several supportive pieces of evidence and a DNA test strongly proving the kinship, Meysam's family reunification case with his older brother was rejected by the German authorities. After 7 months of waiting for an answer, the child's mental health rapidly degraded. The legal team of Themida worked closely with the German Lawyers of Equal Rights Beyond Borders' to continue pressuring the authorities to reassess their decision. The case was finally accepted in February 2021.

Meysam is now waiting for his transfer to be reunited with his family.

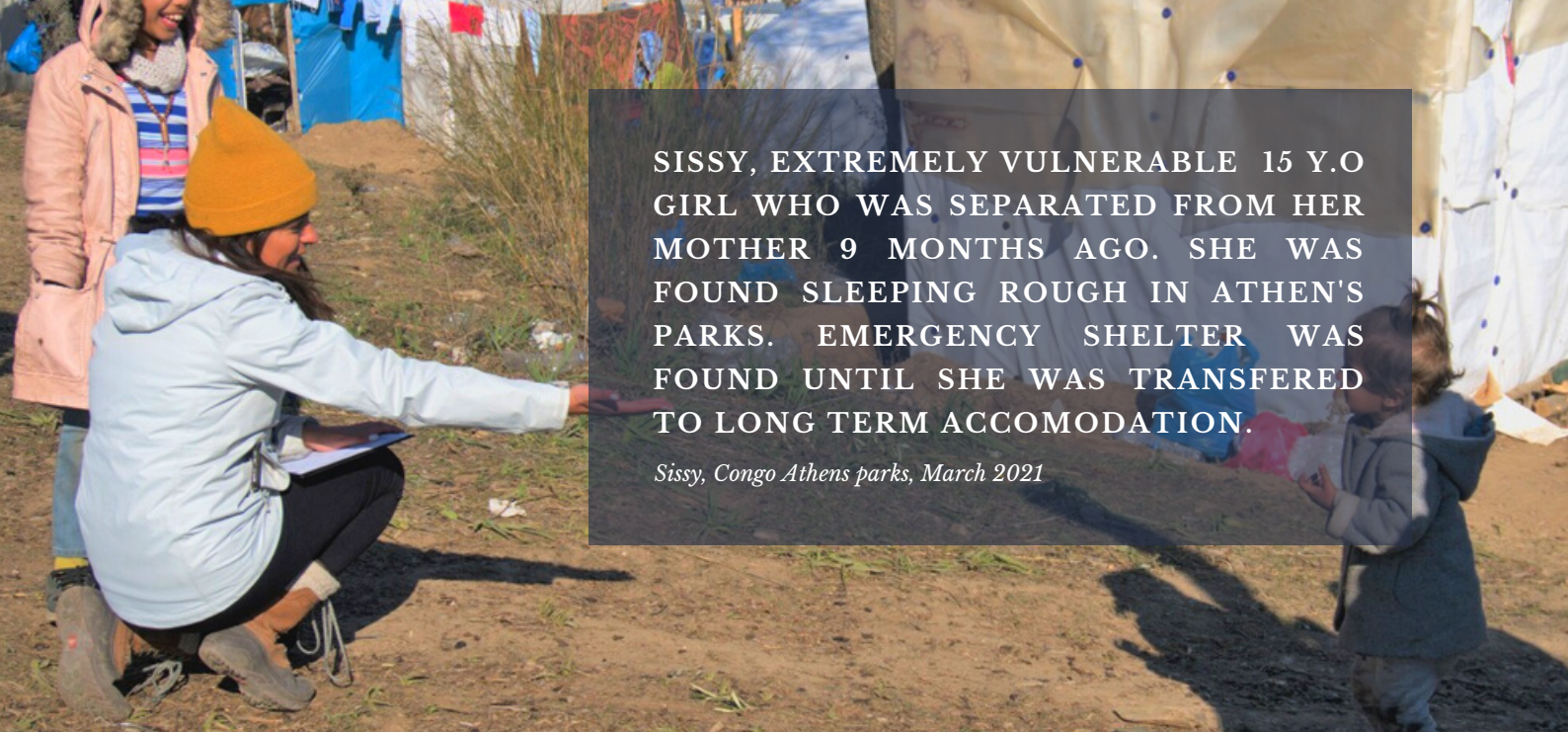
~~UN~~SAFE

Despite the new Greek law that promised to put an end to child detention, Themida's helpdesk received another referral in January 2021 regarding a 15-year-old Syrian boy in detention. After visiting the police station to ask for help and a safe shelter, he was detained from one police station to another until he finally ended up in Amygdaleza detention center.

Even though the unaccompanied boy repeatedly expressed his will to apply for asylum, he was instead presented with a decision from the state ordering his deportation. This event highlights two major issues:

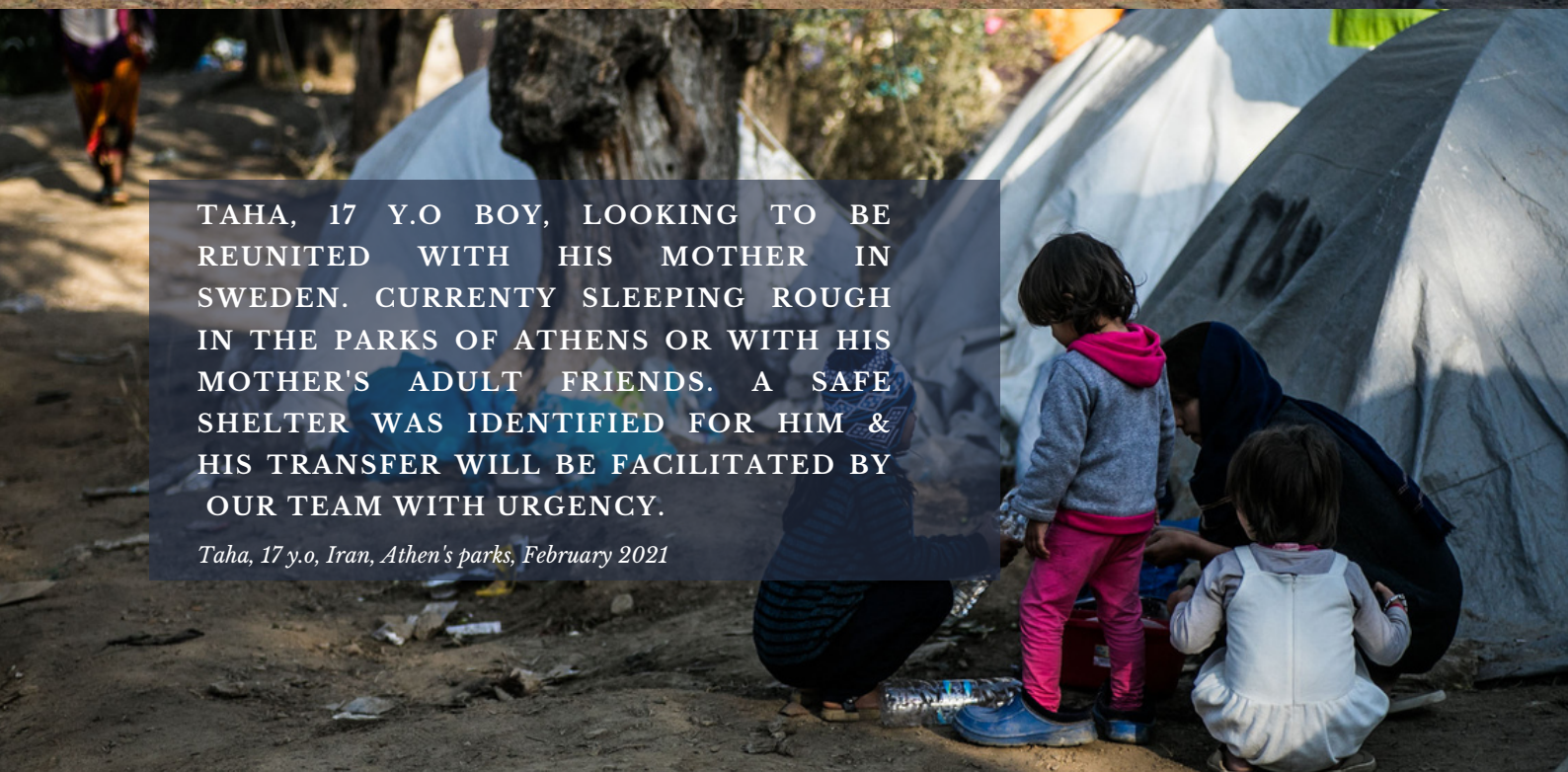
1. When UASC are held in police custody/detention are frequently deprived of proper legal advice and information about their rights in Greece. In this instance, the boy could not understand why he was being detained, was not made aware of his rights and the state did not provide for a lawyer.
2. There are still police officers with limited or no appropriate training in child protection or UASC rights. As a result, they fail to ensure that unaccompanied children are guaranteed their rights.

Our team informed all the competent authorities of this incident and continues to advocate via the appropriate national and European forums for an alternative solution to detention (protective custody) for children. Thankfully, in this case a safe shelter was found within two days. We ensured that the boy quickly performed all mandatory medical exams and Covid test to be transferred to the shelter.



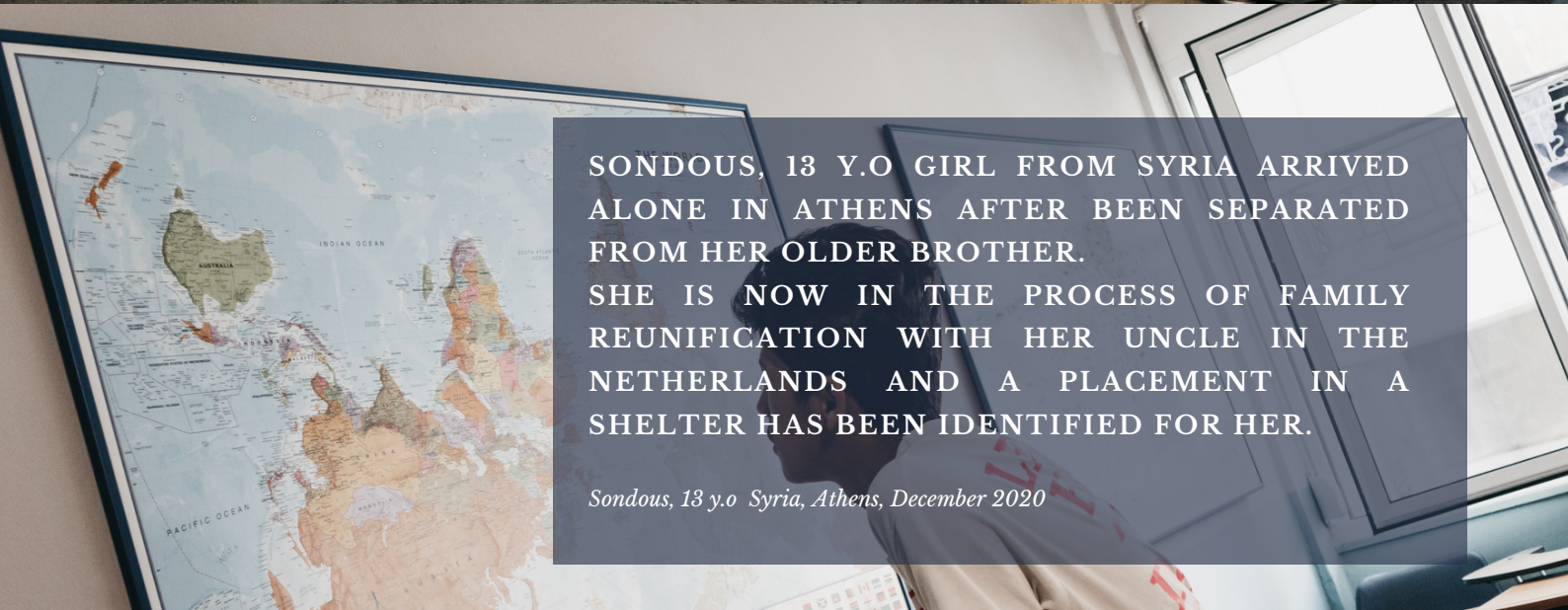
SISSY, EXTREMELY VULNERABLE 15 Y.O GIRL WHO WAS SEPARATED FROM HER MOTHER 9 MONTHS AGO. SHE WAS FOUND SLEEPING ROUGH IN ATHEN'S PARKS. EMERGENCY SHELTER WAS FOUND UNTIL SHE WAS TRANSFERED TO LONG TERM ACCOMODATION.

Sissy, Congo Athens parks, March 2021



TAHA, 17 Y.O BOY, LOOKING TO BE REUNITED WITH HIS MOTHER IN SWEDEN. CURRENTY SLEEPING ROUGH IN THE PARKS OF ATHENS OR WITH HIS MOTHER'S ADULT FRIENDS. A SAFE SHELTER WAS IDENTIFIED FOR HIM & HIS TRANSFER WILL BE FACILITATED BY OUR TEAM WITH URGENCY.

Taha, 17 y.o, Iran, Athen's parks, February 2021



SONDOUS, 13 Y.O GIRL FROM SYRIA ARRIVED ALONE IN ATHENS AFTER BEEN SEPARATED FROM HER OLDER BROTHER. SHE IS NOW IN THE PROCESS OF FAMILY REUNIFICATION WITH HER UNCLE IN THE NETHERLANDS AND A PLACEMENT IN A SHELTER HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED FOR HER.

Sondous, 13 y.o Syria, Athens, December 2020

WHAT IS NEXT FOR THEMIDA GREECE

March 2021 was a milestone in the future of THEMIDA GREECE. Within two months we have completed a needs, risks & opportunities assessments, an actors & service mapping and redesigned Themida with the aim of maximizing its impact and quality as well as our capacity. We are now in a position to launch THEMIDA GREECE as a blueprint, a holistic child protection program that can be replicated everywhere in Europe.

THEMIDA GREECE will provide legal support, child protection, PSS, medical referral, NFIs and rapid response to UASC at risk in Greece with a physical presence in Athens and Lesvos.

