

Annual Review 2020-21



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Anything is possible

An introduction from Elena Moustaka, Managing Director, Better Days.



If 2020 has taught us anything, it is that everything is fluid and anything is possible. With the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020 was a year of unprecedented change for humanity, a year that shook people to their core. The pandemic affected every aspect of our daily lives—our lifestyles, our work, our social experiences, and our means of realising our aspirations and goals. To our detriment, we saw the closing of schools, the collapse of the public health sector, the abolition of community-led activities, police and military interventions to manage civil unrest, lockdowns, and travel bans. COVID-appropriate hugs replaced warm embraces, and hundreds of thousands of lives were lost.¹

As happens with all crises, COVID-19 magnified every existing inequality in the world. Areas affected by war and conflict were hit hardest, and marginalised groups, such as those experiencing homelessness and/or displacement, often suffered most severely. Inevitably, aid organisations across the globe were faced with extraordinary challenges wherever they worked with both an increased demand for aid and the need to respond to a novel virus causing serious health and safety concerns amongst the communities served.

For us to maximise our efforts to assist those most affected by the pandemic, difficult decisions had to be made. Locally, increasing

100k

over 100,000 thousand refugees and asylum-seekers were in need of assistance living in, and around, overcrowded camps across Greece.

numbers of families sought help to meet their basic needs, such as buying groceries, paying electricity bills, and purchasing PPE. Whilst at the same time, many local children, as well as those from refugee communities, were unable to access public and informal education online due to a lack of adequate IT equipment and unreliable internet connections. Most gravely, confined within the fences of Moria camp, thousands of asylum seekers occupied a territory as densely populated as Manila in the Philippines. At a time when COVID-19 meant only a handful of organisation's staff and volunteers were permitted access to the camps, it was estimated that over 100,000 thousand refugees and asylum seekers were in need of assistance living in and around overcrowded camps across Greece.²

Over time, governmental and civil society efforts became entangled in an effort to manage local outbreaks amongst vulnerable communities, such as refugees living in Moria-like camps, elderly care homes, and medical centres. On Lesbos, Better Days, along with other local organisations, INGOs, and UN agencies, quickly responded by putting together the Central Triage Clinic, a mega-health project to support Hellenic National Public Health Organization's (EODY) and RIC's efforts to safeguard the health and safety of over 12,000 people living in Moria.

Although our educational programmes Socrates and Gekko Kids were temporarily suspended, this year saw us launch other

Below: Elena in Moria camp during an interview for "Der SPIEGEL".



Credit: Nikos Pilos / DER SPIEGEL

programmes, most notably our legal intervention programme Themida, and our joint medical initiative Central Triage Pharmacy. Furthermore, we supported the distribution of PPE and basic aid to hundreds of local families, refugees, healthcare workers, nursing homes, and first responders. In hindsight, the suspension of our flagship programme Gekko Kids in March 2020 signalled a shift back to emergency response for Better Days. Whether we were providing access to medical care, education for UASC, or psychosocial support, our mission focused on alleviating the suffering caused by COVID-19. Moreover, we worked hard to manage the collateral physical and mental damage refugee children were exposed to while surviving the daily horrors of living in Moria camp during the lockdown.

The truth is, 2020 has temporarily altered our trajectory. When the pandemic first hit, we thought it would be short-term and seasonal, but, as we approached the end of the year, we finally accepted its most permanent impacts, its persistence, its intelligence, and the long-lasting implications it would have on our lives and our work. Today, we know there is no going back to 'before COVID' and to how things were. According to the UN's Department of Economic and Social Affairs³, in one year COVID has managed to wipe out 20 years of educational gains. In fact, by April 2020, close to 1.6 billion children and youth were out of school and nearly 369 million children who rely on school meals needed to look to other sources for daily nutrition. Furthermore;

- Over 100 million people were pushed back to poverty.
- Travel and tourism was paralysed on a global scale.
- Over 250 million full-time jobs were lost.
- Over 240 million women and girls experienced intimate partner violence⁴.
- According to WHO, **global deaths attributable to COVID-19 in 2020 is at least 3 million, representing 1.2 million more deaths than officially reported.**

While the pandemic still soars uncontrollably on our streets, claiming lives and turning vibrant cities into ghost towns, we feel it is our primary responsibility to help provide aid to as many children as possible.

I could not but feel incredibly proud of Better Days, a group of young humanitarians



Above: Afghan family cooking dinner on the olive groves of Moria.

who worked tirelessly in Moria during the outbreak, in extreme heat and in full PPE dress wear, to perform DNA tests, eliminate scabies in areas where unaccompanied children slept, distribute vitamins and other medication to sick people, and support medical actors. Despite the global pandemic, this team managed crowded areas and were physically there to provide psychosocial support and education to children deeply affected by the lockdown of Moria camp. Moreover, I am incredibly thankful to our partners for the kindness, strength and solidarity they demonstrated in these difficult times; furthermore, I am grateful to our donors and families who stood by us during these unsafe, transformative, and confusing times. This has been a period as disorientating and frightening for each one of us as it has been for the world as a whole.

While finally coming to terms with the almost irreparable damage we have caused our planet, our intention and our humanity as individuals are being put to the test. The world has experienced unimaginable loss and witnessed bravery. The times are calling for both collective and individual action. Let this call be the one that awakens us to create a greener, safer world, a world where no child, under any circumstances, is forced to endure the displacement, hunger, trauma, homelessness and exclusion from education and learning, currently faced by millions of children across the world.

Elena Moustaka,
Managing Director, Better Days

1 The World Health Organization said that 1,813,188 people died from the novel coronavirus in 2020. 2 <https://reporting.unhcr.org/greece> 3 <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sdgs-framework-for-covid-19-recovery/> 4 <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus>

1.6bn

children and youth were out of school and nearly 369 million children who rely on school meals needed to look to other sources for daily nutrition.

Local and political events



Tensions between Turkey and Greece

Over 20,000 people, including over 1,000 UASC living in Moria

Protests against the creation of a closed facility in 'Karava' location, Lesbos and violence against NGOs

Fire in Moria results in death of a 6 year old child

Fire at OHF facilities where EcoHub program was based

First Covid-19 lockdown Moria Camp

Better Days activity



UASC Interventions: Medical, PPE & UAMC

Themida legal intervention for UASC

Community volunteer Support Program launched

Gekko Kids and Socrates programmes ceased due to protests & Covid-19 measures

MIRE phase II: identifying vulnerable UASC

Community volunteer Support Program

EcoHub, ceased due to OHF fire

UASC Interventions: PSS phase 1

Organisational & Community support: Local and Community support (Donations)

Community volunteer Support Program

The events of 2020 were the most challenging times for Moria residents and Better Days

2020

January

February

March



Overview: Timeline

National Covid-19 lockdown

Heavy movement restrictions for residents of Moria Camp

First Covid-19 lockdown Moria Camp

Heavy movement restrictions for residents of Moria Camp

Fire in Moria, relocation of most UASC to mainland

UASC Interventions: PSS phase 1, remote sessions, launched due to Protests, Covid 19.

UASC Interventions: Medical, PPE & UAMC, ceased due to Fire

Themida, Lesvos based

Community volunteer Support Program

Organisational & Community support: Local and Community support (Donations)

Launch of Central Triage Clinic & Pharmacy

UASC Interventions: PSS phase 2, sessions in Section A, ceased due to fire

UASC Interventions: Medical, PPE & UAMC, ceased due to Fire

Themida, Lesvos based

Community volunteer Support Program

Organisational & Community support: Local and Community support (Donations)

UASC Interventions: Scabies exercise 2

MIRE III

Central Triage Clinic & Pharmacy

UASC Interventions: Emergency Fire response

Cease of UASC Interventions: Medical, PPE & UAMC

Relocation of Themida beneficiaries and provision of services remotely

CTP ceased

Community volunteer Support Program

Organisational & Community support: Local and Community support (Donations)



April -
May

June -
Aug



Sept

Overview: Timeline

Construction of the New Provisionary Camp: Mavrovouni Camp
Massive homelessness issue

Harsh life conditions at Mavrovouni Camp
Second Covid-19 lockdown

Harsh life conditions at Mavrovouni Camp
Second Covid-19 lockdown

Themida, remote & Athens based due to fire and relocation of UASC

Themida, remote & Athens based due to fire and relocation of UASC

Themida, remote & Athens based due to fire and relocation of UASC

Organisational & Community support: CbM

Organisational & Community support: CbM

Organisational & Community support: CbM

Community volunteer Support Program

Community volunteer Support Program

Community volunteer Support Program

Organisational & Community support: Local and Community support (Donations)

Organisational & Community support: Local and Community support (Donations)

Organisational & Community support: Local and Community support (Donations)

Oct

Nov

Dec





Above: Better Days team assessing the state of Moria after the fire.

A year of devastation

Violence, inhumane conditions, a catastrophic fire, COVID-19.
The events that effected the lives of 12,000 people in Moria refugee camp .

Moria refugee camp was a living hell — inhumane, insufficient, and dangerous. Described as ‘the worst refugee camp on earth’, its demise was not lamentable, but the aftermath proved devastating. In the lead up to Moria’s ruination, the situation had grown worse than ever. Over winter 2019, as refugee and asylum seekers numbers increased, the frustration of local islanders reached a pinnacle and, in February, the ever-present threats to humanitarian workers and displaced peoples erupted in a fury of violence forcing many operations to close and causing almost all workers and volunteers to evacuate. Since March, those living on the Moria compound had been almost completely confined to the camp and jungle area, without opportunity to leave freely and without education, leisure, or other services. Over summer, the pressure grew unbearable and the anger from within the camp community

"During the last year, I haven't showered in warm water."

"I am diabetic, I've not had my injections for 3 weeks now".

"I have a girlfriend, she goes to the sea at 5am to wash in the dark with other young girls so nobody will see them and they are safer together".

Testimonies from camp residents living in Mavrovouni camp, also known as Moria 2.0

visible and profuse, especially when lockdown measures were eased for local populations but not for refugees or asylum seekers. There grew a greater sense of desperation that had profound effects on the mental health of Moria’s residents. There was also an ever-increasing disbelief about COVID-19, viewed by more and more as a means

to control the camp residents. Then, amidst these insufferable pressures, the camp burned to the ground. Despite Moria’s grievous conditions, seeing the camp destroyed in September 2020 left residents and workers with severe anxiety and grief. As we processed the consequences of this sudden destruction, 12,000 people faced catastrophe—the demolition of what little they had, a sense of profound loss, and emotional and physical pain, made more complex by further desperation, trauma, and unbearable uncertainty.

The new camp, Mavrovouni, initially housed over 7,500 people, of whom 62% were women or children. Already decried as ‘worse than Moria’, ‘a living nightmare’, and ‘dangerous for children’ and commonly referred to as ‘Moria 2.0’, the shocking new camp conditions have already been exposed via international and local media, camp residents, and NGOs.

Once more, refugees and asylum seekers live in deplorable conditions with limited access to water and fully exposed to extreme weather. The outbreak of COVID-19 only added to this tragic environment. People were undernourished, without adequate clothing, battered by wind and rain, baffled by administrative or asylum procedures, frightened, and exposed to danger. Lost in transition and barely visible within a mass of tents obscuring them, the light that refugees and asylum seekers held up, and their hope for a better future, slowly disappeared.

Facilities such as Lesvos Solidarity's Pikpa, a project that embodied the meaning of dignified aid for the most vulnerable groups amongst displaced populations, was closed by local authorities.

The protective shield and positive standards provided by settlements like this, as well as Kara Tepe, which will be closed imminently, are soon to be forgotten.

Naturally, the devastation of Moria and the development of the new camp has brought challenges to those providing and those receiving humanitarian assistance. Once again, residents who have been under strict lockdown measures since March 2020, have been forced to live in deprivation as well as highly unsanitary conditions. By late 2020, with a sharp increase in COVID-19 infection rates amongst residents, service accessibility was seriously impeded for refugees and asylum seekers within and out with Mavrovouni camp.

12,000

people faced unbearable uncertainty after the fire devastated the Moria refugee camp.

7,500

The new camp, Mavrovouni, initially housed over 7500 people, of whom 62% were women or children.



Left: Over 300 UASC were identified and transferred to TAPUAT the morning following the devastating fire which destroyed the camp. BD's protection officers and outreach team were instrumental to the success of this mission.

The invisible problem

The situation for UASC in Greece is complex and alarming. Most arrive either via a dangerous sea crossing or over the lamentably documented Evros border in the North East.

The situation for UASC in Greece is complex and alarming. Most arrive either via a dangerous sea crossing or across the lamentably documented Evros border in the North East. Arriving in any area of Greece, UASC are invisible to the authorities until their asylum or family reunification claim is registered. Regrettably, without adequate identification and tracking systems, these vulnerable children often go missing or remain unaccounted for months. Many, left without proper child protection mechanisms and professional adult guidance, make their way to Athens in the hope of finding support and security there. During this critical time, UASC are at high risk in an unfamiliar place without official access to basic survival supports such as shelter, food and water, hygiene, or medical care. Not only existing without basic humanitarian assistance, those children not placed in state accommodation are without access to developmental education opportunities and necessary legal interventions.

Far too many unaccompanied children are forced to sleep rough in the fields or olive groves surrounding the overcrowded official



Above: Deplorable living conditions and child deprivation is evident everywhere you look in the camp.

camps or on the streets of bigger cities. These are vulnerable children who are left waiting for months to simply receive a first appointment at the asylum services. In fact, official EKKA statistics from March 2021 report that there are over 900 UASC not living under any registered accommodation scheme. In other words, over 900 UASC are either homeless, in unregistered shelters, in detention, or living in dismal Reception and Identification Centres.

When they finally access their first appointment, UASC must explain why they wish to apply for asylum in Greece. This initial statement is absolutely crucial to the rest of their asylum procedure. However, at the point in which this statement is made, no free legal support is provided to these children on their own. Furthermore, depending on their point of entry into Greece, the child may have already waited up to a year to explain their situation. For a child without legal guidance, this can lead to an initial statement that misses vital elements and appears fragmented and confused due to the passage of time. This is especially likely for UASC

900

UASC not living under any registered accommodation scheme in March 2020.

who have lived for extended periods in high-risk environments without access to basic assistance and facing daily risk of abuse or exploitation

Regrettably, during this initial registration, there have also been many cases where we have observed authorities registering a child's personal information incorrectly – even assessing them as an adult despite the child producing their birth certificate and/or identification documents from their home country. This leads to gross failures for these UASC who are never able to realise their fundamental child rights.

After the first appointment, UASC often wait for long periods of time to receive a decision from the asylum authorities. If the decision they receive is negative, it is nigh impossible for an appeal process to be completed successfully without the support of an experienced lawyer.

The family reunification process is another complex and time-consuming procedure to navigate, especially for an unaccompanied child. It involves the submission of legal supportive documents and sometimes necessitates costly procedures, such as DNA tests, and the presentation of officially certified document translations. European Member States' decisions are often delayed, leaving UASC in a prolonged state of anxiety and uncertainty, with several cases rejected without valid reasoning or consideration for the children's best interests. Ultimately, even if the procedure is successful, it is extremely lengthy and can require litigation in front of the requested country's responsible court. We have known the time from a child's initial reunification application to their actual family transfer to take up to one and half years. Again, this is another period in which UASC are left in limbo with their mental and physical health rapidly deteriorating.

A child's reunification application to their actual family transfer can take up to one and half years. Left in limbo with their mental and physical health rapidly deteriorating.



Top: Better Days outreach and protection officers talking with unaccompanied children during our Mapping Identification & Registration Exercise.

Bottom: Striking graffiti slogan on the exterior wall of Moria Camp.

| Focus area | Programme | Impact in KPIs |
|------------------------------|--|---|
| Emergency response | UASC interventions: Emergency fire reponse | 300+ UASC identified 3000+ medical items and drugs delivered for first care treatment |
| Rights and protection | Themida <hr/> MIRE | 131 legal cases <hr/> 719 UASC registered 201 packs distributed |
| Education | Gekko Kids & Gekko X <hr/> Socrates <hr/> Connect By Music | 263 registered students, 58% UASC 71 PSS sessions by the school counselor 16 subjects, 47 IEPs <hr/> 30 participants, 77% attendance 15 participants referred for an IEP <hr/> 18+ training hours. 83.3% of the teachers think that the consultancy will have a practical impact |
| Environmental | Ecohub | 40 children per week as average 9 adult workshops with 25 people per group as average |
| Health | UASC interventions: Scabies <hr/> UASC interventions: Medical, PPE provision & UAM Clinic <hr/> Organisational Support: Local and Community support <hr/> Organisational & Community support: CTP Triage <hr/> Organisational & Community support: One Happy Family | 340 UASC treated, 0% outbreaks in treated patients till September 2020, coordination of bolted organisations <hr/> UASC supported with 8669 items donated prior and during Covid19 <hr/> 55+ actors supported, 2200 furniture, IT and school supplies donated <hr/> 129000 Medical, Hygiene and PPE items procured and distributed <hr/> 3 months' worth of supplies, needs assessment survey conducted to 504 camp residents |
| Wellbeing | UASC interventions: Psychosocial support <hr/> Organisational & Community support: Community Volunteer Support | 16 emergency PSS sessions, 23 individual PSS sessions <hr/> 12 individuals supported, 3 volunteer houses |



Above: An educational activity in the sections of Moria camp.

The education solution

Gekko Kids School is solving the growing challenge of educating children whilst they continue to face the daily struggles to survive.

THE PROBLEM

Often UASC and asylum-seeking children face critical education gaps whilst in transit that negatively impact their development of vital soft skills, as well as impede their formal learning progress. During 2020, access to education was a particular challenge for asylum-seeking children in Greece. Their practical learning opportunities were hindered by hurdles such as restrictions of movement and obstructed access to remote online practices. Without consistent access to schooling, many school-aged asylum-seeking children missed out on crucial development steps to support their longer term positive integration and growth.

Further complications related to education access came as the series of lockdowns in Greece led to the temporary suspension of NGO programmes outside of Moria camp. For Better Days, this affected our

Gekko Kids, Gekko X, and Socrates programmes. With repeatedly extended COVID-19 quarantine measures, access to education for UASC was high impossible. Restrictions imposed by the government and the local management in Moria kept children in camp and unable to reach Gekko school. As of March 2020, educational activities were considered as non-essential and all such services inside and outside Moria were suspended.

Meanwhile, all children living in Moria camp and adjacent olive groves were stuck in a place of danger and stagnation. Even before COVID, these children struggled daily to survive the perils of this insecure and toxic environment. In fact, due to their traumatic backgrounds and deplorable living circumstances, many Gekko students were referred to the PSS Manager by their teachers, which constantly affirmed the perennial need to identify PSS issues and develop

individual plans to manage behaviors so as to ensure each child could attain a sense of well-being.

THE SOLUTION

The goal of Gekko Kids has always been to provide a safe space for children affected by trauma, a place where they are supported by their school counselor and passionate, professional teachers and staff in order to heal and grow. Located outside of Moria, Gekko Kids provided eight hours of escape from this hell into a colourful, child-centred world focused on social and emotional activities and individualised learning.

With referrals coming from both our MIRE programme and the government-run RIC, of our total 263 students, 58% were UASC. Other children lived with their families in Moria camp, Kara Tepe, or Mytilene shelters. Gekko Kids was a hub for our

263

students attended Better Days Gekko programme.

16+

subjects available daily to students.

entreprs

Gekko Kids is shortlisted (among 5000 nominations) as one of the World's Best Practices on Sustainability and Innovation for the 5th edition of the Global Entreprs Awards and 5Gcitizens International Congress.

Themida cases — a safe place where progress could be monitored and where children had access to their legal officers.

Pre-COVID, Gekko students had a choice of over 16 subjects daily. Classes, taught under the principle of differentiation within the classroom, ranged from foreign languages to computers, from photography to geography, and mechanics to mathematics. Sessions ran across two four-hour periods with transport and snacks provided by Better Days. With high attendance figures in February, the positive response to Gekko Kids was clear. Talented students were even able to apply for Arts or Robotics scholarships, as well as prepare and sit for certified accreditation of English and Greek language.

Additionally, our four-person PSS team built a consistent strategy enabling Gekko Kids to host a structured PSS schedule. Activities

including psychomotor therapy, art-therapy, and yoga were introduced as universal subjects. There were also individual PSS sessions running for 7 hours a day, and every time a new child entered Gekko, a psychological assessment occurred. In early 2020, we worked with a total of 47 vulnerable children guided by Individual Education Plans to enhance talents in a multidisciplinary way. We introduced 'Circles of Girls' as part of a gender empowerment programme, as well 'Time for Boys' to contain complicated PSS behaviour cases with children presenting disruptive behavior. Socio-emotional learning and psychosocial support was simply a part of the Gekko's culture and curriculum.

When lockdown measures were enforced, our teachers worked tirelessly to design a semi-online educational programme with the ambition to ensure a stable continuation of lessons as a midterm solution until children could re-attend Gekko Kids. This programme was ready to launch as part of the new academic year 2020/21 when the devastating fire in Moria camp happened. In June 2020, following the request of RIC to support the new relocation programme, our staff completed 67 educational profiles and 6 PSS reports, which accompanied our students' relocation applications.

Although 2020 saw the suspension of Gekko Kids, the programme is still celebrated for its valuable work in offering quality education and promoting integration for refugee children on Lesbos. Most notably, in 2020, our teachers were invited to present Gekko at SCIREA Project's Final Conference "Inclusion of Migrants and Refugees through Education" and, in November 2020, Better Days received a nomination for Gekko Kids to the Global Entreprs Awards, categorising Gekko Kids as among the 300 World Best Practices on Sustainability and Innovation.



Above: Gekko Kids enjoying STEM classes at Gekko X where Robotics and 3D programming classes took place every day.



My name is Mahdi and I came from Afghanistan to Lesvos in August 2019. I was placed in the minors section at Moria camp until the fire in September 2020 resulted in me moving to the mainland. I am now safe, living in an apartment in France where I learn the language and I am looking forward to attending school as of September.

Through my time in Gekko Kids, I found myself and had one of the best times of my life. The teachers were kind, friendly, and supported us while I had the opportunity to practice my hobbies which are drawing, playing guitar, and taking photography classes. I was awarded a scholarship and joined Art lessons in a local studio.

During my time in Moria, I realized that health is the greatest need, and nurses and doctors can help people more than others. This is what inspired me to pursue my dream of becoming a nurse and for which I try hard every single day.

One of the greatest lessons I've learned is to believe in my ability to achieve my aspirations. The world can and will become better.

Words by Mahdi A.

Mahdi, born in 2003, Gekko Kids student, Socrates player, UASC Interventions, PSS support

I am a nurse

The story of Mahdi's
dream to become a nurse

Vital support through sport

Better Days Socrates programme is a place for UASC to play, learn and grow, focusing on skills for life including self-control, persistence and confidence.



75%

supported through Socrates programme were living in high-risk, overcrowded circumstances.

38%

Socrates participants were living in the 'jungle' area, sleeping in tents.

Above: Our coaches not only gave football tips but also for daily life situations.

THE PROBLEM

The right to play is fundamental in the development of a child as is stated in Article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The positive, nurturing impact of sports was even praised by Albert Einstein, who said “play is the highest form of research”. In fact, it is well-known that sport and play equip children with valuable life skills, presenting challenges that can be strategically, peacefully, and playfully overcome with discipline and determination. The self-learning that occurs in environments external to the classroom can springboard children to future successes by encouraging them to explore, engage, and excel in non-formal yet controlled spaces that present learning opportunities in creative ways. Participating in sports enhances brain function and cognition through increasing blood flow to the brain, which has a strong link to improved academic performance and

overall cognitive development over time, especially when started at a young age. Studies have shown better test scores and more positive attitudes, as well as improved classroom manners and attention spans, in children who participate in sports from a young age.

As has been discussed throughout this report, conditions in Moria camp presented an overwhelming obstacle to the healthy growth of children and severely hampered their learning, productivity, and psychological development. The above positives drawn from sport delivered in a creative, structured way in a safe, healthy space, were simply unreachable for the children of Moria and its jungle who played in dank, dirty, insecure spaces. With the progressive, healing power of sport and play in mind, Better Days initially launched Socrates in 2019. By 2020, Socrates supported UASC living in Moria camp and the adjacent fields known as the 'jungle'. At this time, 76% of our players lived in high-risk, overcrowded



Above: Debriefing after a Socrates pitch session.

conditions without regular access to electricity or water. Furthermore, 38% of our players were sleeping in tents in the jungle.

THE SOLUTION

Socrates provided a safe place for learning, play, and development. Within the nurturing environments of Gekko Kids, our Olimpico Football pitch, and Gekko X, UASC were able to attend class, wash, eat nutritious food, play football, and develop personal skills. Socrates became a place of belonging, where self-expression through sport was able to assist children to overcome traumatic life experiences, set realistic goals, and build new friendships. Through sports, we worked closely with students to assist them to build soft skills like persistence, self-control, curiosity, and confidence—crucial to every child's healthy development. Using football to enhance personal capacity, we encouraged children to self-express through play and reflect how their on-pitch actions can impact or influence their real life. The exercises encouraged

behavioral competency development under duress and, concurrently, technical footballing skills, enabling UASC to grow both as players and individuals.

Socrates was built around three pillars: Pitch Instruction, Class Instruction, and PSS Support. This structure led to a positive mix of role-play, reflection, and analysis, as well as supported counselling, respect, and understanding of rules. We took inspiration from the FA's Four Corners model, from Social Emotional Learning, and from BodyFlow practices. Partnering with La Liga, Mediapro, and Athlead led to customised, quality programming providing UASC with a sense of value. Overall, 50% of Socrates participants were, in fact, PSS cases, children who regularly attended PSS sessions to help them cope with depression, suicidal ideations, anxiety, self-harming, PTSD, and other issues. The Socrates programme became a powerful backup tool for growth and development and a key contributor to Better Days' holistic approach to socio-emotional and physical development for traumatised children and youth.

50%

UASC attending Socrates via this PSS referral mechanism became a powerful tool for growth and development.

When COVID restrictions forced us to suspend our programming, we went ahead and designed closure sessions. These closure sessions were delivered inside Moria camp, when the lifting of restrictions permitted our team to travel back to Lesvos. Implementing Socrates' closure sessions inside the camp during lockdown provided us with the opportunity to reconnect with our participants and support their situational coping in this new pandemic reality. Though we could not play football during these sessions, we focused on the sport in different creative ways. Furthermore, we grasped the opportunity to explain why the sessions had ended abruptly and discuss the difficulties felt by all during this time. Together we were also able to celebrate the success of the programme. Listening to our students reflect on what they had gained from attending Socrates in 2020 was incredibly touching and powerful. Socrates has only reaffirmed our commitment to sports and development as a healthy growth tool, actioned from a holistic perspective, leading to physical and cognitive development for refugee and asylum-seeking children who are struggling to deal with trauma and who may be unable to attend, cope with, or perform well at school and, in consequence, end up losing confidence and hope.



Hi, I'm Milad! I arrived on Lesbos in September 2019 and, at some point, I was placed in the UAMs Section in Moria Camp. I'm now living in Germany and sharing a house with 10 other children – it's totally different here.

Better Days found me at a time when I was really hopeless. I found strength by attending Gekko Kids to improve my learning and gained resilience through PSS sessions. I have loved being fit since I was 15 so I was delighted to be part of the Socrates sport and development programme too. All these interventions filled me with hope and taught me that after every storm comes calm.

I still enjoy keeping fit and regularly swim. In fact, one day I would love to become a fitness coach or a body builder! Watching famous athletes fills me with inspiration to keep improving and get one step closer to my goal! I hope one day you will see me as a trainer with many students – but, most importantly, I will be a person who is happy and satisfied, kind and friendly.

Milad S., born in 2003, Gekko Kids student, Socrates player, Themida participant, PSS beneficiary

Words by Milad S

I am a fitness coach

The journey from Moria refugee camp to Germany



Protecting vulnerable children

Launched in December 2019, Themida programme, in collaboration with Defence for Children International Greece, provides legal aid to vulnerable children.

THE PROBLEM

With an overcapacity of over 560% in January 2020, the huge influx in people arriving on Lesbos' shores had forced our team to consider how to best fill the monumental service gaps and ensure UASC were safeguarded. Having identified a major ongoing legal aid gap for UASC as part of our MIRE initiative, we decided to implement Themida, a programme focused on legal aid for UASC, especially those who met family reunification criteria with cases identified as time sensitive.

Subsequently, the environment on Lesbos shifted colossally in September 2020 as fires engulfed Moria refugee camp, leaving approximately 12,000 people homeless. Immediately after the fire,

Above: After lockdown, Better Days performed all DNA sampling tests in the camp. Due to strict movement restrictions Themida beneficiaries could not get to our facilities in town.

all UASC previously residing in Moria camp were transferred to emergency hubs on the mainland. Meanwhile, many UASC, already living in Athens and surrounding areas, were reportedly found living in precarious conditions, unable to register their presence in Greece and, therefore, unable to access protection services. The exact numbers of children in this situation were not known due to their 'invisible', unregistered presence, increasing their exposure to critical ongoing protection risks with almost no ability to access legal support. At this point, we had to make a decision about what our next programmatic steps for Themida would be.

THE SOLUTION

The main goal of Themida was always to fill in the gap in existing legal assistance and representation officially provided to UASC on the move in Greece. Launched in December 2019 as a programme run by Better Days in collaboration with Defence for Children International Greece, Themida was based primarily in Lesvos, targeting UASC residing in Moria camp. The successes of Themida's first and second phases saw 79 UASC assisted, with most receiving legal support for family reunification procedures. By December 2020, 45 family reunification cases had received a positive outcome with 25 others still running. The remaining cases had applied for the European relocation scheme or to receive asylum in Greece.

After the fire and following the relocation of most UASC from Lesvos to the mainland, we decided to extend our operation to Athens. As of November 2020, we have provided legal aid to a further 52 vulnerable children. Renamed 'THEMIDA GREECE', the programme is still run jointly between Better Days and Defence for Children International



131

UASC assisted with legal support for family reunification.

Greece and focuses mainly on providing unaccompanied children with legal aid and social support to register and prepare for asylum or family reunification. Furthermore, the programme focuses on finding shelter for homeless UASC in state accommodation and releasing any UASC from detention. In 2021, we are planning to extend the programme's scope of work and provide holistic support to UASC in Athens through basic assistance, legal aid, psychosocial support, general case management, and rapid response in situations of extreme vulnerabilities.

Top: MIRE's helpdesk collected over 20,000 points of data for over 600 UASC in order to assess critical needs for unaccompanied minors and tailor solutions to respond to pressing issues.



Hi, I'm Sayed. I was only 16 when I arrived in Lesvos. Whilst living in Moria camp, I always slept in the jungle even though I was only a child at the time. Thankfully, I was referred to Better Days and they helped me alot! I was involved in so many programmes like Socrates, Gekko Kids and Themida - and I was also able to access PSS sessions. My experience with Better Days was one of the best things to happen to me whilst I was in Greece.

Even though I have experienced many hardships in my life, I am grateful that I have met kind people all over the world. These days, my life is very different now that I live in France. I am focused on learning the language as I love studying new things. I am also very social and look forward to playing football with the new friends I make in France. In the future, I would like to start my own business selling cars. I am very ambitious and I want to build a really big, successful company! This is my ambition and I hope that, one day, people will view me as the best in the business.

Sayed M., born in 2003, Gekko Kids student, Socrates player and Themida participant

Words by Sayed M.

I am a business man

From Moria refugee camp
to a new life studying in France



Above: Adults and children, all benefited from the ECO Hub programme.

A thriving programme

The environmental, community-building project ECO Hub is a quiet, safe space for individuals to learn and share feelings.

THE PROBLEM

As has already been discussed, late 2019 through all of 2020 was one of the darkest times on Lesbos. Teams on the ground were stretched, services were at breaking point, and both residents and locals were desperate, full of fear and anger. At no other time was a place of sanctuary such as ECO Hub more needed - an open space in nature to nurture friendships, encourage integration, promote skills-building, advance protections for the environment, and promote interactive learning. It was especially necessary for human mental and physical well-being to have a place that could provide the opportunity for people to reconnect to the healing properties of the lush natural world around them because, even though Moria

camp and its jungle was surrounded by fields, hills, and green space, the environment was unsanitary and without fresh water sources, plant life was trampled and suffocated by tents and over crowdedness, there was a stench in the air, and no opportunities existed to practice outdoor skills for leisure. In short, the spaces in which refugees and asylum seekers lived on Lesbos were not places for positive growth or healthy development, and the increased tensions that swelled between locals, diverse refugee communities, authorities, and humanitarian workers prevented constructive and productive interactions between these groups.

THE SOLUTION

At the beginning of 2020, the ECO Hub team continued, despite the grim realities all around, to provide a multi-purpose, therapeutic space where individuals, communities, and the environment could regenerate and heal. With ever-changing community demographics, we worked hard to diffuse tensions that sometimes erupted between communities; team leaders from different cultural groups cultivated safe spaces for individuals to share their feelings and actively denounce language discrimination. Despite the unstable, sometimes violent, local climate, visitors were still welcome to come to the site to engage, in both an intrinsic and guided way, in accessible ecotherapy through the touch and smell of plant life, by sharing stories, or simply by sitting quietly amidst nature. Classes

ECO Hub wins Permaculture Magazine's 2020 Prize.

Top to bottom:

A female participant of EcoHub gardening workshops is tidying up the greenhouse after class.

Eco hub multicultural team of staff and volunteers.



continued at the International School of Peace to ensure children actively participated in critical learning about life sciences and were encouraged to view the environment as an equal partner. Gekko Kids environmental workshops began in February 2020 with an average weekly attendance of 40 children. Nine adult workshops, with an average attendance of 25 per class, also took place where group learning occurred on environmental topics such as pollination, herb cutting, olive harvesting, horticulture, and hot compost. There were also gender-specific workshops at the One Happy Family space where the main branch of the ECO Hub existed. These workshops offered platforms for positive integration between international and local communities as instruction and guidance were provided by local permaculture initiative Sporos Regeneration and international volunteers.

Unfortunately, in late February 2020, as the state of lawlessness grew worse with frequent attacks and armed, masked mobs setting up roadblocks to deliver justice against migration issues as they saw fit, the OHF centre was forced to close due to serious safety concerns and, thus, ECO Hub's activities were temporarily discontinued. In the run up to this, Better Days' ECO Hub team had

already taken measures to mitigate risk where possible, implementing a check-in and check-out system, regularly briefing the team to ensure all were informed on risk reduction techniques, and ensuring team members were radio trained. However, an arson attack on OHF centre in March 2020 saw full closure of the site, and the consequent COVID-19 global pandemic meant that ECO Hub was suspended for Better Days. We are pleased to say that during this reporting period we did, however, manage to offset OHF's food costs by €250 euros through the vegetables grown. Furthermore, even when regular activities ended in March, a small ECO Hub team still provided 11 vulnerable families in Moria camp with fresh vegetables.

In July 2020, we formally and delightedly handed over ECO Hub to Sporos Regeneration Institute, a local actor focused entirely on environmental protection and community relationship improvement. In 2020, the ECO Hub programme won the Permaculture Magazine's Prize. After what was a horrific year, we are so full of joy to see this environmental, community-building project continue with safe hands to guide it under this trusted team. We look back fondly on ECO Hub and are proud of the 181 kg of fresh produce, including 11 different varieties of herbs and 27 types of vegetables, the on-site teams of gardeners cultivated during this time. We also feel fulfilled by the ways in which initiatives, such as volunteer environmental cleanup activities and farm day events—hosted at Sporos and attended by both the international and local communities, exposed diverse groups of people to one another to bond authentically over common social goals in safe, natural spaces to relieve growing divisions and tensions.





I'm Zahra and I have been in Greece since October 2018. I live in Athens in a rented house these days but, when I first arrived in the country, I lived for a long time in Moria Camp.

It was great to be one of Better Days' EcoHub volunteers. This was a great opportunity to have a positive impact on the natural world around me and use my talent to create a calm place for women to relax in. After my journey from Iran and my experience as a migrant, it is my goal to help the world and the people in it. To problem solve in a creative way is what success is to me!

I am ambitious and am driven by my past challenges. It can be hard to think back about my country and the children there affected by the war, but this is what encourages me to use all my power to achieve my goals. I was recently involved in a project called 1000 Dreams which was a platform for me to share my story in my own words and explain my individual talents. It was amazing to have my voice shared around the world!

In the future, I will stay busy and hope to leave positive footprints everywhere – in photography, filmography and painting. Every day I smile to myself and because my dreams are big, I know you will see me and women like me again!

Zahra, born in 2000, EcoHub volunteer

Words by Zahra G

I am an artist

The journey from Iran to Moria refugee camp, Lesbos to Athens



Above: Many children residing in Moria camp remained invisible to the eyes of the authorities.

Finding the lost children

Suspicion for missing, unsupported and unregistered unaccompanied minors residing on the outskirts of Moria Camp call for an immediate intervention lead to the creation of Better Days MIRE project seeking to identify and assess the immediate needs of these forgotten children.

1,156

unaccompanied minors reported on the island in 2019.

50%

50% of registered UASC did not receive protection or shelter support from RIC due to a lack of space, beds and resources within the camp's designated 'safe' areas.

THE PROBLEM

In late 2019, with increasing numbers of refugees arriving in Lesvos, conditions in Moria camp grew more overcrowded, unsanitary, and unsafe. As a result, both the physical and mental health of those detained in the camp became increasingly compromised. During this influx, it also became clear that, of the 1156 unaccompanied minors who had arrived on the island, almost half were considered missing and - aside from the concern that they may be at immediate risk of harm - this meant these children were deprived of their basic rights as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). Knowing that these children were existing in dangerous situations, denied medical services, legal

support, and shelter, many without seasonal-appropriate clothing, exposed to human trafficking, drug abuse, violent attacks, sexual abuse, and exploitation, we recognised it was vital to launch an emergency operation to map, identify, register, and assess these missing minors.

THE SOLUTION

In December 2019, we began planning and implementing the Outreach phase of our Mapping Identification and Registration Exercise (MIRE project). To begin the operation, our team, supported by volunteers from two other NGOs, searched tent by tent and structure by structure to locate, identify, and assess the immediate needs of these forgotten children. Initial findings

revealed that over 400 UASC were homeless - sleeping rough in the olive fields next to camp Moria with limited or no access to electricity, food, water, and other basic services and support, existing in a high-risk context. By building strong collaborations with partners on the ground, we identified new areas of outreach to locate unaccompanied children, including different NGO-provided services both within Moria camp where UASC might be receiving services, as well as at points external to the camp, e.g., community spaces, educational centres, squats, and other unofficial residences supported by NGOs and civil society organisations. During this period, we also distributed over 201 Emergency NFI Kits, including seasonal-appropriate clothing, backpacks, blankets, and hygiene kits

In the first Outreach phase of 2020, running from January through March, we mapped, identified, registered, and assessed 678 unaccompanied minors. By working in close collaboration with EASO, UNHCR, METAdrasi, and the RIC Minors' Office, we were able to ensure these re-registered minors were placed into a system that would facilitate their access to vital services, such as shelter and time-sensitive legal support. The data captured during our Outreach programme, as well as each individualised, follow-up assessment, was vital for locating over 150 UASC eligible for the new relocation programme (to 11 European countries), implemented by EASO and UNHCR, in which Better Days' involvement was directly requested by the Minors' Office

Ultimately, our work resulted in over 900 unaccompanied minors being transferred from devastating circumstances on Lesvos between March 2019 and September 2020. The action taken by our team, in positive collaboration with other actors at different levels, resulted in these children's rights being recognised and accessed and the opening of doors for them to build a life in Europe outside of a refugee camp unfit for children.



Top: Moria camp is expanding in unprecedented pace. Amongst the population living outside the camp's main facility are homeless and 'missing' UASC, vulnerable families, people with disabilities and serious medical conditions such as cancer.

Our work resulted in over 900 unaccompanied minors being transferred from devastating circumstances on Lesvos between March 2019 - September 2020.

200+

we distributed over 200 Emergency NFI Kits, including seasonal-appropriate clothing.

678

In the first Outreach phase of 2020, running from January - March, we mapped, identified, registered and assessed 678 unaccompanied minors.

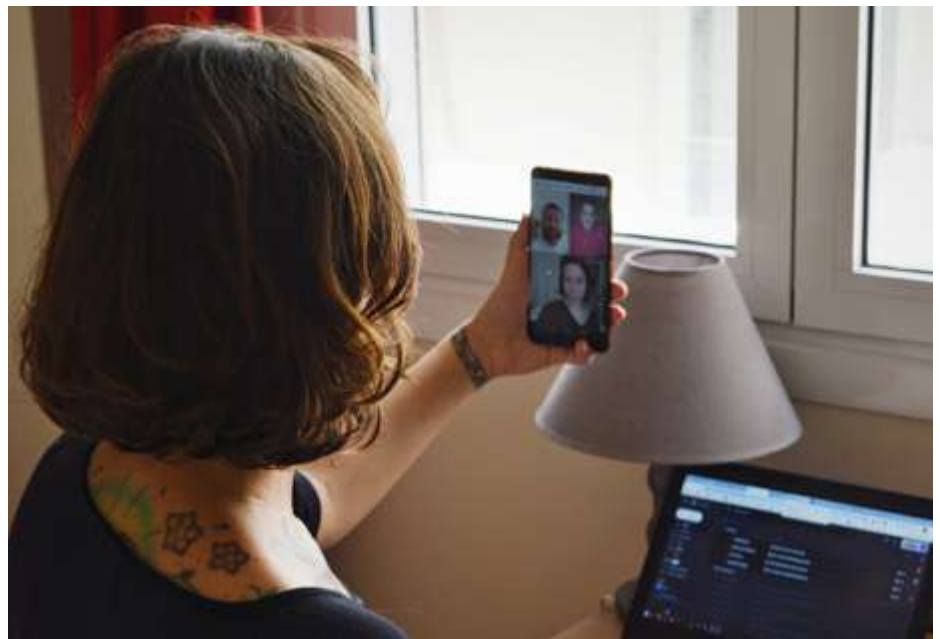
Repair from despair

As incidents of disruptive, violent and self-harm were increasing dramatically, it was essential UASC had a safe space to build coping structures which would enable them to learn and grow.

THE PROBLEM

In March 2020, Better Days' team had to evacuate Lesvos due to safety concerns resulting from increasing aggression from local islanders towards international volunteers and NGO staff that, on many occasions, resulted in physical violence. Local unrest was instigated following the government's announcement to build a camp on the island of Lesvos. With local police and authorities in voluntary limbo, crowds of aggravated islanders marched the streets of the island, blocking road access to and from Moria, and attacking rental cars and foreign-registered vehicles. Following a series of serious attacks on refugees and NGO staff and volunteers, many actors evacuated non-essential personnel from the ground to allow for civil unrest to defuse. Unfortunately, as the global pandemic then hit Europe, those who were temporarily relocated to Athens, including Better Days' PSS team, were unable to return to Lesvos due to COVID-19 movement restrictions.

To compound the fact that we could no longer deliver PSS sessions in person, Moria's new camp commander announced the confinement of the asylum-seeking community of Moria within the territorial borders of the camp and the surrounding olive groves. This had a negative psychological impact for all children within, whose access to education and other services outside the camp was abruptly taken



Top: Delivering online PSS sessions to UASC during lockdown.

away. In the midst of this despair, we witnessed a dramatic increase in suicide attempts, panic attacks, behavioral issues, aggressiveness arousal, sexual issues, and substance abuse during 2020.

THE SOLUTION

Following the suspension of Gekko Kids and the indefinite confinement of UASC behind the fences of Moria, access to PSS became increasingly urgent. While stranded in Athens, our PSS team was able to provide online sessions and remote psychosocial support to unaccompanied minors living in Section A with the invaluable support of the RIC staff in that area.

Between April and May, Better Days delivered 16 emergency PSS sessions remotely, with the aim of helping these children find strategies to cope with their situation in light of the global pandemic.

As restrictions lifted, we were able to provide hands-on support in Moria camp again. Between June and September, our PSS team, headed by Better Days PSS Director, delivered 23 hours of individual sessions and 16 hours of PSS per week (approximately 60–70 hours of PSS activities per month). Our PSS programme inside Moria consisted of four key areas of interventions: Individual PSS Sessions, Case Management, Staff Support in Children’s Mental Health Management, and a Psycho-Education Programme of activities.

As incidents of disruptive, violent, and maladaptive behaviour, including self-harm, were increasing dramatically, it was essential UASC had a safe space to build coping structures that would enable them to learn and grow. Individual sessions took place to alleviate anxiety and other issues, but also as an opportunity to offer coping resources that would lead away from maladaptive behaviors. Cases were referred or identified by our outreach team in the midst of our Themida legal intervention (Mapping and Identification Exercise) and also by RIC staff. During this time, we supported 60 vulnerable children, 75% of whom were living within Section A, with the other 25% living in the olive groves of Moria, also known as the jungle. On three occasions we supported very vulnerable families.

Lastly, the Psycho-Education programmatic aim was to bring structure back into the UASC’ lives, promoting emotional regulation and social skills. Activities included socio-emotional learning, socio-educational assemblies, psychomotor therapy, and arts.



23

online sessions were performed during lockdown, by our PSS Manager.

Top: Deplorable and inhumane living conditions for everyone living in Moria camp and adjacent olive groves.



I am Khalid and I arrived with my brother in Lesvos in 2017. I was placed in Moria camp, moved to a shelter, and then back to UAM Sections.

My hobbies are arts, such as drawing, painting, and photography, and playing guitar. However, my passion is football. My dream is to be a footballer and, besides this, I want to study law and be a lawyer. I know that my dream isn't something easy to achieve. It's something that needs a lot of hard work. Therefore, I want greater and bigger things in my life and I am working hard for it.

I am currently located in Belgium, in a camp slightly better than Moria. I managed to join a local football club, attend school and get good points. I added one more language to my skills and I'm waiting to receive my Asylum decision.

I know that I'm not yet who I am supposed to be but, through life and its hardships, I will become the best version of myself. Honest, hard worker, nice, kind, respectful, talented, literate, and educated is how I want others to characterize me one day.

Words by A. Khalid H

Khalid, born in 2006, Gekko Kids accredited student and Socrates player

I am a lawyer

The journey from Lesvos to Belgium and the ambition to become a lawyer

Together for health

Tackling an outbreak of scabies in Moria camp required a collaborative effort from multiple organisations working together.



THE PROBLEM

Repeated outbreaks of scabies plagued Moria camp and its outskirts for years. This dank, dirty, overcrowded camp was a fertile breeding ground for this parasitic infection that thrives in unhygienic spaces. When left untreated for long periods, this skin disease causes intense itching and rash, skin sores, and chronic dermatological issues. In extreme cases, it can lead to septicaemia, heart disease, and kidney failure (CKD). In Moria, many of the minors we worked with regularly complained of having scabies. These complaints had been ongoing for half a year, and no treatment or cure for the scabies had been successful.

In reality, over the years, there had been several attempts by many different actors to treat infected minors living in Moria, but there were always new outbreaks caused by limited access to medical care and washing facilities. These outbreaks were further worsened by the unsanitary and rancid living conditions within the Safe Area, Section A & B, Moria's designated housing for over 400 unaccompanied children.

THE SOLUTION

Finally, Health Point Foundation (HPF), a young medical/dental organisation that had been working in Moria since 2015, pushed for a strong, united response to scabies and, with this, a large-scale exercise was designed and coordinated by Better Days named "Together for Health". The aim was to treat existing infections in children residents and to take corrective action to prevent further transmission of scabies amongst current and new occupants of each isobox. Extensive resources, capacity, and effort were required to implement "Together for Health". Its success depended on the support of multiple actors, as well as the buy-in and collaboration of RIC's management. During this operation, in collaboration with Attika Human Support, over 1297 clothing packs were compiled with clean clothing and bedding and distributed to 340 infected children during the 2-week treatment period. RIC employees, Eurorelief, and Help International volunteers supported the distribution of clothing packs while HPF provided weekly hygiene sessions to all minor patients on how to avoid, diagnose, and treat scabies.

Each scabies intervention required Benzyl lotion to be applied for four days and, ten days after this, a two-day treatment had to be followed. As all the clothes and bedding of an infected child had to be washed at a high temperature, we collaborated with the local non-profits Dirty Girls of Lesvos and The Lava Project, as well as a local laundry service on this action. Seven of Better Days' teachers, volunteers, and other staff were placed in Moria to ensure the effective implementation of the programme. Better Days also hired a local pest control company who ensured the disinfection of all rooms in Sections A and B, as well as all administrative and service spaces, e.g., the school and kitchen isoboxes. A new protocol for inducting new occupants into the sleeping areas was introduced to both Sections to manage contamination. Children transferred from the olive groves had to be examined by a doctor and be treated separately prior to joining their dorms (in reality, overcrowded isoboxes infested by mice and cockroaches). HPF regularly performed scabies checks in the sections up to September, and there were 0 new incidents of infections recorded amongst the population served by "Together for Health".



Delivering essential supplies

Providing medical supplies, cleaning products, school equipment, vitamins.

8,669

health and basic supplies delivered by Better Days since March 2020.

Top: Reusable masks were distributed to children living in the safe areas of the camp.

THE PROBLEM

Generally, all living conditions in Moria were unsafe, unsanitary, and overcrowded. There were 400 UASC living behind the fences of Moria, in Sections A, B and the Safe Zone, initially built to accommodate no more than 144 in total. A further 800 UASC were surviving in the camp overflow and were excluded from basic care and protection. In fact, only 147 UASC were actually housed in urban accommodation in Mytilene. Overcrowdedness results in a decrease in hygiene, health, and safety, and, within refugee settlements, increases tensions and violence between different communities and authorities. Without security and protection, the situation for all Moria's residents was precarious - especially for UASC. These catastrophic conditions provided no opportunity for children to develop positively in secure, clean conditions and led not only to physical risks, but also to complex mental health issues.

THE SOLUTION

Our positive relationship with other actors and our long history supporting unaccompanied minors meant we were trusted by those around us to prioritise UASC's children's health and basic needs. We worked tirelessly to understand the specifics of all requests made to ensure we comprehensively delivered the necessary items; for example, we procured medical supplies, including wound treatment and First Aid items, to be distributed by RIC staff and also designated actors directly to support UASC. Better Days also donated cleaning products, drugs, hygiene items, school supplies, vitamins, energy bars, sunscreen, mosquito repellent, and clothing packs. In total, our non-exhaustive list of supplies provided to the Sections, the Rubhall, and the UAM Clinic, since March 2020, totalled 8669 items. Subsequently, when the UAM Clinic was later under threat of closure, BD supported site management, coordination, procurement, and funding for both medical supplies and staff in order for the UASC clinic to remain operational.



Top: Section A (UASC housing area) was totally destroyed. Photo taken a few hours after the fire.

Moria refugee camp burns

12,000 residents became homeless overnight, with people fleeing to nearby olive groves and villages.

THE PROBLEM

On the night of 9 September, 2020, in the midst of a growing panic around the growing number of positive COVID cases in Moria, a large fire broke out, devastating the camp. Overnight, approximately 12,000 people became homeless, many of whom were women and children. During the fire, most camp residents escaped Moria and fled into the olive groves or onto the streets of the nearby villages. This circumstance presented a devastating, high-risk scenario, yet it was a circumstance we had prepared for. With the camp destroyed and no shelter available, Better Days reacted immediately to identify and locate over 350 missing unaccompanied children

who had fled for their lives when the fire broke out. There was a grave need to secure the health and personal safety of these children.

THE SOLUTION

Following the fire, our initial priorities focused on locating, identifying, and transporting UASC to a predetermined safe area. Within the first 24 hours, Better Days' first response team and senior protection staff worked tirelessly to identify over 300 UAMs and 5 alleged minors. In close coordination with RIC's Minors Office and UNHCR, who arranged buses to evacuate those UASC to a nearby facility (approved by the Special Secretary for the Protection

of Unaccompanied Minors Irini Agapidaki), we aided the transfer of 315 UASC to TAPUAT, where UNICEF offered to provide emergency shelter. As of that evening, we set up overnight tracking systems and deployed outreach teams within the remnants of Moria to search for missing UASC and account for losses. Between 10 and 20 September, our 24/7 Helpdesk received 85 requests from volunteers and NGO workers needing support with identification and safe transportation of UASC.

In agreement with UNICEF and RIC, we set up a triage clinic and pharmacy inside TAPUAT that was staffed by CMI volunteers, doctors, and BD staff. Together, we were able to provide wound and trauma



care to all affected children on-site. Additionally, we provided medical supplies and 2000 single-use masks. In collaboration with EODY Support, the Minors Clinic, Iliaktida, and UNICEF, we procured and provided COVID-19 tests for over 300 UASC and managed crowd control and information-sharing amongst the affected community. Better Days also took care of PPE and medical supplies for TAPUAT and other evacuation sites over the following days and weeks.

Having worked closely with MSF in preparing and implementing the Central Triage Pharmacy programme and COVID-19 Emergency Response Protocol for Moria camp, Better Days' non-medical staff were designated to support and equip TAPUAT's emergency clinic with medical supplies. In total, and within a small number of hours only, we provided 494 drugs, 2582 hygiene supplies, 585 medical items, and 142 blankets to TAPUAT's temporary clinic.

12,500

Overnight, 12,500 people became homeless - including over 400 UASC left without any institutional or organisational safety and protection.

300

UAMs identified, and 5 alleged minors, within the first 24 hours after the fire.



Top to bottom: Photo sent to a BD's protection officer on the night of the fire. Standing in the photo is a UASC who has managed to distant himself from the flames.

Devastating views of what was left from Moria camp after the fire.



My name is Reza and I arrived in Lesvos in the winter of 2019. During my time on the island, I lived in Moria camp. Today, I'm still in Greece but now my situation is very different from before - I am living with a family in Athens.

I have an ambition to be a mechanic and I am working hard every day to achieve this dream. I am committed and will do whatever I can! At the same time, I also enjoy planting nature and building different things.

I am not sure how the world will be for me in the future, and I don't know how people will see me but I will stay focused on my dream!

Reza, born 1999, Ecohub Community volunteer

Words by Reza Nezai

I am a mechanic

The journey from Moria refugee camp to living with a family in Athens



Above: BD supporting Attika Human Support delivering essential items.

Supplies for life

In 2020, we invested more than €125000 to support the emergency medical response to COVID-19.

THE PROBLEM

In March 2021, the Greek government announced its first national lockdown and a switch to distance learning for both middle and high schools. The impact of the global pandemic affected all of Better Days' programmes and, subsequently, heralded a shift in our organisational focus. Meanwhile, the consequence of the first lockdown, as well as those that followed, was felt almost immediately, leaving a serious gap in healthcare and education activities, as well as on the donations that such programmes depended on. Furthermore, the lockdowns had a crushing impact on the local economy. Alarming discussions with local authorities revealed severe gaps in medical infrastructure, staff, and equipment. With all other programmes suspended and little expertise in the area of public health crisis, we repositioned our team to (a) facilitate and enable access to online education for school age children in Lesvos and (b) redirect funds and resources to protect the island's communities and manage the outbreak of COVID-19 locally. It soon became apparent that the transition to remote learning was nigh impossible for government schools without the technical expertise and resources to adapt to this new online-learning reality. The 22 students of Kara Tepe camp who

120,525

Medical,PPE,
Hygiene items donated.

2,126

Furniture,
school supplies,
IT donated.

55+

Better Days responded to requests of more than 55 actors who worked with a sense of solidarity to support vulnerable local and/or refugee populations.

Below: Medical staff acquiring medication for patients, PPE and medical equipment from BD's Triage Pharmacy.

were registered in public education had no way to access online teaching, whilst Greek parents across Lesvos were struggling to ensure access to expensive IT equipment and stable internet for their children to attend school remotely. Huge financial pressures were put upon the local island community, which had already struggled to cope economically under restrictions that had halted residents' ability to work. The negative economic impact harmed the profit margins of local stores, such as smaller grocery stores, that worked at a significantly reduced capacity under the regulations and found far fewer customers with disposable incomes due to wider job losses. During these difficult times for the island, we worked around the clock to support the heroic efforts of medical professionals from both the NGO and public-health sector. We, as Better Days, committed to assisting the most vulnerable, the elderly, single-headed households, and asylum-seeking

children and families as well as other marginalised groups to survive the pandemic.

THE SOLUTION

To realise our mission to contribute towards the fight against COVID-19 and manage the devastating consequences of the pandemic in local households, hospitals, shelters, and camps on the island, Better Days supported a total of 55 actors. We focused primarily on securing resources to guarantee access to online education by providing student material, internet, and IT equipment. By distributing PPE kits to hundreds of teachers and students on Lesvos, we promoted a COVID-19 responsible environment for several schools on Lesvos, particularly for those neglected communities outside Mytilene.

With our support, community areas were furnished to meet COVID-19 regulations. By expanding our mandate to cover medical aid, Better Days took on a new specialty, for which developing expertise and knowhow was a necessity to ensure compliance with legal and humanitarian standards. In 2020, we procured thousands of medical supplies, drugs, PPE, and rapid COVID-19 tests to support first responders and medical personnel working in Moria, including Moria's Triage, as well as 7 public health centres on the island. For people in need of food and nutritional support, we funded local businesses to enable dissemination of vouchers and door-to-door distribution of groceries to disadvantaged families. Overall, throughout 2020, we invested more than €125,000 to support a range of emergency responses to COVID, including medical and educational interventions, which covered both the local and refugee community.





A path back to employment

Better Days developed a Community Support Program for some of those least visible persons to begin on a path back into employment.

THE PROBLEM

Those seeking asylum arriving on Lesbos' shores before 9 September 9 2020 found themselves sleeping either in Moria camp or its 'jungle'. Most reports from those who have survived Moria describe the camp as a hell on earth, with many referring to it as their worst nightmare. Referral mechanisms to rehouse the most vulnerable into safer shelters were very slow and, even when successful, only ever amounted to a narrow range of options all low in capacity (Kara Tepe, Pikpa, Estia). Too many vulnerable minors and at-risk families were left to endure one of the harshest refugee settlements globally and exposed daily to violence, indignity, and desperation with little to no pocket money to get by on. In fact, data show that, during this reporting period, families survived on between 160–245 euros per month and single adults on €75 only. For refugees and asylum seekers with

specific or transferable skills, years of credible work experience, and/or valid certificates to facilitate employment, even volunteer positions were almost impossible to come by. Furthermore, any opportunities that they were able to access were usually associated with poor working terms, short-lived, and without basic remuneration.

THE SOLUTION

Better Days Community Support Programme was born in the olive groves of Moria in 2015. Over the years, we continued to develop this programme in order to respond to individual needs whilst broadening the range of services and aid we could offer to each applicant. This programme aimed to provide immediate relief by improving a person's standard of living and allowed some of the least visible people from the refugee community, primarily

single young males, to live in a more humane manner and prepare for employment in Greece. In 2020, community volunteers provided Better Days with essential translation skills and assisted in teaching, outreach, and emergency response programming. Our CSP programme allowed people to receive emergency shelter, a living expenses allowance, essential work tools or educational equipment, basic supplies, food and NFIs, access to medical care, legal support, transport, and telecommunications. In 2020, Better Days Volunteer House comfortably accommodated two families with young children and 5 community volunteers. Last year, we donated over €7,500 to support community volunteers who were trying to survive the horrors, inhumane living conditions, and indignities of the refugee camps in Greece and the country's broken system of aid and build a better, more prosperous life for themselves and their families.



My name is Samer and I have been in Lesvos since summer 2016. I was quite young when I arrived and was placed into Moria Camp and, today, I live in a shelter with other adults.

I have been given many opportunities by Better Days during my time here which has always kept me busy. I really enjoyed my time with Better Days as an EcoHub volunteer and another great experience was being part of their Community volunteer Support Programme.

I have a variety of skills, many of which I began educating myself in when I was living in Syria. With very little opportunity there, I trained in several areas, including as a handyman and a cook, and these are skills I continue to develop. I also have talents as an interpreter and translator due to my language skills.

My dream job would be to work as a pilot though. Of course, it's a challenge to get registration in a flight school since it is very expensive, but I will continue to work hard towards this ambition. I hope the world will get better and, most importantly, I hope that people look at each other in a more humane way.

Samer M., born in 1992, Ecohub Volunteer and Community Volunteer Support Program beneficiary, translator volunteer

Words by Samer M

I am a pilot

The journey from Syria
to Moria refugee camp

Better together

A shared response to the rising medical needs of Moria residents due to COVID-19.

11

local business supported by Better Days.

€95,000

With Choose Love's Covid19-specific funding, we procured medication, PPE and medical equipment worth +95000EUR which allowed medical staff to effectively operate the Central Triage Clinic in Moria camp.

Above: Grateful health workers after one of BD's deliveries.

THE PROBLEM

Over several years, the medical support provided in Moria camp grew ever-more decentralised. Rather than one universal institutional provider for healthcare, many providers were responsible for different medical aspects at different times. With disparate providers, there was not always clear coordination of medical responsibilities and, too often, the lack of medical staff and other resources, combined with the overwhelming demand, put high pressure on medical actors within Moria and its outskirts. Throughout 2020, there was also an ever-present fear of a COVID-19 outbreak in Moria, which, considering the overcrowded, unhygienic living conditions, lack of PPE and medical access, and inability to social distance, was sure to lead to disaster. The global pandemic emphasised how vital it is that public health be made accessible to all for the protection of all. It was also clear that there must be a medical area where people with a fever could receive a COVID-19 screening and quarantine, if necessary, rather than simply return to the overcrowded camp and risk spreading the endemic infection. When this manifested in the creation of a Triage Clinic and Pharmacy, coordinated primarily by EODY Support, Better Days committed to do what it could to support this vital public health intervention.

THE SOLUTION

EODY, MSF, CMI, and UNHCR designed the Central Triage Clinic programme to manage a COVID-19 outbreak in Moria camp whilst, at the same time, centralising the provision of medical aid to thousands of asylum seekers under EODY, effectively delegating resources and responsibilities amongst medical actors. This ambitious programme brought, for the first time in the history of Moria camp, all medical aid under one roof and enabled more effective spending and a more adequate response to the medical needs of the community. Seven organisations worked together to achieve this and 150-200 patients were visiting CT Clinic



daily. Better Days took over the design and implementation of the Central Triage Pharmacy, which primarily included the sourcing of 8,218 medical items; 102,999 PPE supplies for medical staff, non-medical staff, and volunteers; and 18,222 drugs. Aside from providing medical aid, we almost exclusively funded the above needs as well as implemented stringent local procurement protocols to avoid delays in medical stock. We also secured the timely logistics of deliveries and fulfilled all administrative and reporting obligations concerning the impact and cost of the project whilst ensuring full transparency with other actors involved.

Whilst the Central Triage Pharmacy was supplied on a weekly basis, Better Days committed to cover any urgent, sometimes unexpected, needs that arose. The on-site pharmacy was always well stocked by Better Days' personnel with necessary quantities to enable examinations and fulfil prescriptions of medication to sick patients. At the same time, a network of different local businesses and pharmacies was developed to guarantee support of the local economy and fulfil EODY's requirements regarding Greek medication.

In total, €95,000 was donated to the CTP by Better Days in partnership with Choose Love and over 26,400 drugs and medical items were provided through the Central Triage Clinic.

One Happy Family

Better Days supported NGO One Happy Family helping to reduce the pressures they faced from the challenges of COVID-19.

THE PROBLEM

The global COVID-19 pandemic created huge issues across the sector. Suddenly, an unexpected demand for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) grew exponentially with huge logistical and economic impact. Navigating the new measures was exceptionally difficult for grassroots actors, especially those with large community centers for vulnerable populations on the islands. Furthermore, following Moria's destruction and in the midst of the hasty creation of Mavrovouni camp in its place, the pandemic was being battled worldwide and on the island. This new, unforeseen reality, in which NGO roles were not clearly defined and access for many was restricted, brought with it many challenges to providing basic humanitarian assistance to the asylum-seeking community of Lesvos. With camp residents once more under strict lockdown rules and living again in highly unsanitary conditions with no ability to distance, there was a sharp increase in COVID-19 infection rates in Mavrovouni camp, which was housing over 8000 people. Throughout this prolonged emergency period, there was minimal access to services outside food and shelter in tents.

An NGO-run space facing huge challenges in light of COVID-19 and the new, unstable context was One Happy Family's Community Centre, a space where over 11 actors collaborated offering a broad range of services to the asylum-seeking community of the new camp. One



100+

over 100 beneficiaries attending OHF per day.

Top: Months of PPE supplies were donated to OHF to provide a safe working environment for staff, volunteers, partners and visitors of the One Happy Family Community Center.

Happy Family is a Swiss-Greek NGO with whom we have always had a strong relationship. In fact, our own ECO Hub programme has been running at their centre since 2017. Thus, in 2020, Better Days consulted for the OHF team to help them reduce the pressures they faced in responding to the gaps faced by those accommodated in the newly established camp amidst a pandemic.

THE SOLUTION

Eager to assist OHF during this crisis, we worked closely with them to understand their biggest needs. Aside from PPE requirements, legislated to reduce risk of infection-spread, COVID-19 regulations necessitated full compliance with national measures for distancing and cleaning with disinfectant and negatively impacted



24,698

PPE supplies donated by Better Days.

Top to bottom:
Better Days
team deploying
questionnaires at OHF.

the beneficiary numbers OHF could support daily, which in turn reduced their interactions and understanding of these groups' needs.

OHF was left in a difficult position and, thus, together we developed three objectives for which BD could provide support. An immediate challenge was PPE, without which OHF's operation would be suspended. We filled this essential need, providing OHF with three months of PPE: 24,000 single-use masks, 60 reusable masks, 550 soap and disinfectant items, and 800 boxes of gloves. This amounted to a total of 24,698 PPE supplies donated to OHF by Better Days. Next, we created a survey to understand immediate camp needs that was issued in October using a questionnaire covering a representative sample of 504 people from Mavrovouni. With this, three key needs areas were identified: Wifi and WASH (99% insufficient), Relaxation and Sport (95% insufficient), Shelter, Medical Care, Food, Volunteering (88-85% insufficient). These findings were then presented to OHF by BD. A third needs-request made was capacity building. The OHF team wanted to enhance their knowledge of Safety and Security, scale up their Child Safeguarding Policy, and adopt more effective procurement processes. This third intervention would allow them to build back their operation to be stronger, led by individuals who had undergone training and who now had increased organisational insight. Thus, we developed a programme covering practical security training, protocols with focus on emergency response, incident reporting and briefing requirements, and documentation to develop Child Safeguarding and Procurement expertise, as well as maps and essential planning actions in case of mass evacuation or dynamic crisis situations for OHF.



Above: CBM team during one of the trainings provided.

Better musical education

Working with Dutch NGO Connect by Music to create a child safeworking enviroment in their classrooms.

THE PROBLEM

Connect by Music (CbM) has been operating in Greece since 2017. With a focus on teaching music to refugees and asylum seekers, CbM provides support and escape for vulnerable people facing unimaginably deplorable and undignified situations living in camps and shelters. They have worked with us in Gekko Kids and in TAPUAT centres where they brought music as part of a greater curriculum designed by Better Days. When Gekko Kids was suspended, initially due to local unrest and subsequently as a result of COVID-19, we remained committed to finding means of working together to support the refugee community. This commitment fuelled a series of ideas that manifested into a new collaboration in psychosocial support

training and SEL methodology in CbM classrooms, managed by Better Days Greece, and a partnership with CbM and ChildHouses in Syria that was funded by Better Days Switzerland.

THE SOLUTION

Diving into the world of child protection can be as overwhelming as it can be rewarding for field teachers and humanitarians. Having experienced this world firsthand only a few years before, Better Days felt confident to share learning and experience with the CbM team. To start, and following a participatory needs assessment process, the partners agreed to tackle the following key areas in CbM programming on Lesbos:

- ❑ Develop a child protection policy
- ❑ Design a new curriculum; one that can contemplate alternative pedagogies, trauma-informed practices, and SEL and PSS approaches.
- ❑ Capacity building for the existing team with regards to child protection standards, behavioral management, and PSS-informed pedagogical practices.

We are honored that CbM trusted us to facilitate and to accompany them in this journey of demanding and challenging growth and are extremely grateful to have contributed to their development. We have been enchanted by their demeanour throughout this process and positively impacted by how much learning has taken place in only 3 months.

Advocacy and News

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|----------------|
| Al Jazeera | Aid workers face growing hostility on Lesbos | February 2020 |
| The New Humanitarian | Lesvos: Empower both islanders and asylum seekers to defuse tensions | February 2020 |
| Human right watch | Greece/EU: Urgently Relocate Lone Children | March 2020 |
| Le Figaro | Lesbos: health time bomb among migrants | April 2020 |
| Forbes | In Moria Detention Center Refugees Fear The 'Catastrophe' Of A Coronavirus Outbreak | April 2020 |
| VOGUE | A Forgotten Crisis: Inside The 'Worst Refugee Camp On Earth' During The Pandemic | May 2020 |
| University of California TV | Compassion in Times of Crisis: Struggle and Hope in the Moria Refugee Camp - Compassion Beyond Borders | July 2020 |
| BD medium | ANOTHER BRICK IN THE WALL | September 2020 |
| Human right watch | Kids in Greece are Depending on Us | September 2020 |
| Catalunya Radio / TV3 | Interview/discussion post fire for the public catalan tv and radio | October 2020 |

Thank you

Better Days responds to complex and challenging problems, but it wouldn't be possible without the dedication of our donors, key associates and collaborators.

Donors



Our work would not have been possible without the private donations and generous support of Swiss-based institutions who have supported Better Days Switzerland during 2020.

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International rescue committee
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Bazooka Goals

Hope from despair

And so we witnessed the end of an era - the total destruction of Moria. While it burned, we waited in tears and in agony to hear from those who lived behind the fences. But the communities of Moria emerged victorious from yet another hardship. Zero deaths. Zero deaths.

The cause of the fire is now known. A potent cocktail of rumours, conspiracies, and islamophobic cursing took over social media. The state pledged no responsibility. On the contrary, we realised there was no desire for reflection, nor time to learn from the mistakes of the past. The government would go ahead and build a new 'temporary camp', and we were all expected to support until Lesvos' closed facility - aka refugee prison - was built.

We saw from our experiences that the mere existence of Moria was enough to break a person, to light a fire, to cause one's loss of humanity and sanity. Those physically responsible for endangering the lives of thousands of people were ultimately brought to justice. Meanwhile, the EU Task Forces and RIC management worked tirelessly alongside UNHCR and international and local NGOs to build a new camp, Moria 2.0. In the days following the fire, people protested, asking for freedom, human rights, and dignity. The protests were usually suppressed by force, sometimes paused for mediation with NGO volunteers. Eventually, people were forcibly escorted to the new camp and all that was left behind was the rubbish, dirty baby clothes, makeshift beds, and tents that briefly housed people's revolution and hopes for a fair opportunity to asylum and humane living conditions. 'No More Morias' said one of the banners.

In the 72 hours following the fire, over 400 unaccompanied children would find refuge in dignified housing across Greece. Paradoxically, their future prospects seemed more promising than ever. We worked tirelessly to ensure that their safe transfer was achieved and that no child was left behind. We hit the camp at sunset. By noon, we had identified hundreds of unaccompanied children who came running down the olive groves as soon as they saw us. A child we worked with at Gekko approached

400

In the 72 hours following the fire, over 400 unaccompanied children would find refuge in dignified housing across Greece.

us concerned. The child, a young boy from Afghanistan, told us a friend of his had refused to leave the camp and was still in Section A in room 8. The police had searched the camp, which was still smoking, and had confirmed zero casualties. We decided to check again. Aref was in room 8, hiding under the white sheet of his tiny bed. He looked distressed and was pale and shaking. I remembered him. He had attended Gekko briefly, a very quiet boy, tall and thin, with severe PTSD, depression, and anxiety. We asked him to come out. He refused repeatedly. I asked why.

I do not want to come out because I wish to burn with Moria. What would change if I came out? I do not want to have to live in another Moria until I am old and broken enough to be deported back to Afghanistan. I prefer not to have to be 18 in a few days because I know there is no future for me. I wish I had died with Moria.

Aref was finally escorted out. But there it was, another moment that defined the existence of Better Days. We were not going to participate in the building of another Moria. This was not our purpose of existence as a non-profit organisation. The mission of Better Days is to create tailored educational solutions for children from displaced communities who are often excluded from public education and quality education. We want to continue our work with children like Aref, children who were abused and psychosocially compromised by the hardships they faced alone and in toxic environments such as Moria. We envision a world in which unaccompanied asylum-seeking children are guaranteed access to state protection and legal aid so they can move on with their lives and achieve excellence, so they can be happy and reach dreams of growing wiser and older. And with that in mind, we moved on.

"I do not want to come out because I wish to burn with Moria. What would change if I came out? I do not want to have to live in another Moria until I am old and broken enough to be deported back to Afghanistan. I prefer not to have to be 18 in a few days because I know there is no future for me. I wish I had died with Moria".

Aref



We want to see a world where refugees and asylum seekers are guaranteed access to their rights as per the The Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and are treated with dignity and humanity. A world where no child under any circumstances is forced to endure the trauma, stagnation and dehumanization currently faced by millions of children across the world.

Better Days is a humanitarian NGO dedicated to creating and sustaining innovative physical, mental, and emotional spaces for displaced people, currently based in Lesbos Greece. We're here to help alleviate some of the suffering and address critical challenges as best we can.

Every and any contribution to our work makes a difference in the lives of those we support. If you'd like to share your knowledge, energy, time, and passion with us to create a difference in people's lives, or find more about how you can support us, contact us at hello@bettedays.ngo

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