



ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Building Tomorrow, Together





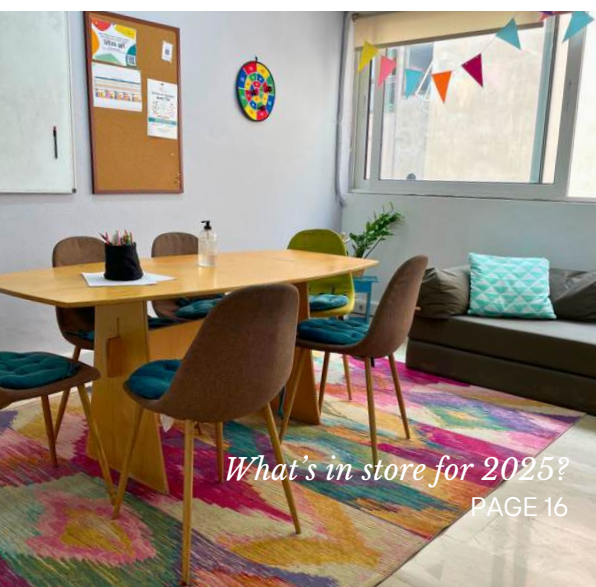
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Elena Moustaka*
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Together for Better Days



www.betterdays.ngo



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OPENING STATEMENT

Dear Friends,

The year 2024 was a year of persistence. It challenged our resilience and demanded our unwavering commitment as we worked to safeguard Better Days' mission and Gekko's transformative role in the lives of displaced children and young people.

As in most places worldwide, the work of non-profit organisations in Greece was crippled by a difficult funding landscape, a shrinking civil society and fewer opportunities for education-focused work. There were moments when the odds felt insurmountable, when our efforts to secure the future of Gekko yielded little return. Yet, through every setback, we refused to stand down.

This past year reminded us that impact does not always reveal itself in victories easily counted. It lives in the consistency of showing up, in the quiet determination of teams who choose hope - and love - over despair, and in the steady rhythm of a classroom that continues to welcome its students against all odds. We lost some battles, yes, but we also won others - not in grand gestures, but in the perseverance of a community that continues to believe in education as a tool for dignity, empowerment, belonging, and positive change.

Better Days is still here because of that belief. Because we continue to try everything, to adapt, to reach out, to rebuild and to give our all, led by an extraordinary team of women whose dedication, courage, and humanity sustain Gekko and Better Days every single day.

As we look to 2025, we carry with us the lessons of a painful year - one marked by loss, uncertainty, and hard decisions. We move forward because of the strength of the people who make this work possible, and because of the steadfast commitment of our long-standing donors, Le Rosey and Choose Love, without whom Better Days would not be here today. We do so with a promise to keep pushing forward - one step, one student, and one act of courage at a time.

With gratitude,



ELENA MOUSTAKA
Co-Founder & Executive Advisor



SITUATION OVERVIEW

Broken records: forced displacement in 2024

2024 saw the world's population of forcibly displaced people rise to 123.2 million - breaking the previous year's record for the twelfth consecutive year. Greece recorded over 56,000 new arrivals in 2024 - a 22% increase from 2023 - and 32,900 displaced residents. The number of applications for international protection reached a five-year high of 73,687. 25% of these were from minors, including 4,136 from unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

Political scapegoating of migrants

From the USA to the EU and beyond, right-wing and extreme-right political parties were elected in 2024. These parties rely on anti-immigration rhetoric to justify policies and practices that defy international human rights law, including pushbacks, detention, racial profiling, and "pausing" of asylum claims processing. 2024 marked a palpable shift towards securitization in the global migration regime.

UASC: a cloudy picture

Responding to the needs of displaced people in Greece is made more difficult by the lack of reliable data on essential statistics, including the number of UASC residing in camps and the conditions they face. The Child Rights Advocacy Network (CRAN) raised concerns about overcrowding in so-called "Safe Areas" and inadequate access to essential services including medical care, legal aid, education, and basic supplies. Though international law guarantees higher protections to UASC, their safety and well-being is far from guaranteed while under the protection of the Greek state.

Fewer services, limited resources: education access in Greece

Data from June 2024 record 27,500 children from displaced backgrounds living in Greece, 21,790 of whom were of school age. The Ministry of Education reported 16,200 refugee and migrant children enrolled in schools. Despite progress in enrollment and attendance rates, drop-out rates remain high - especially in secondary education.

Reception Classes for Refugee Education (ZEP) are established by law, but they rarely function in reality; programs are understaffed, have limited capacity, and are often delayed until months into the school year. This leaves children who do not understand Greece effectively excluded from the educational system.

All Children in Education (ACE) no longer

Beginning in 2021, ACE - a collaboration between UNICEF and the Ministry of Migration and Asylum - provided much-needed support for displaced students to succeed in Greek public schools. Services included language classes, homework support, and psychosocial services. The program concluded in June of 2024 having supported over 25,000 children. Despite suggestions that it would recommence with local implementing partners and support from the Ministry, no announcements or calls for partnerships have been made. The closure of ACE widens already-serious gaps in support services for displaced learners in Greece.

Top 3 barriers to education



Inadequate language support

Students sit in classrooms conducted in a language that they do not understand - and are left largely to their own devices.

Lack of context awareness in schools

Public school teachers lack the training needed to manage highly multicultural and multilingual classrooms and to meet the exceptional needs of displaced learners.



Limited advanced opportunities

Displaced young people face major barriers to higher education and employment, as opportunities for formal skill recognition are scarce. Those who finish high school are often excluded from university by demanding entrance exams.



GROWING ROOTS IN ATHENS

Through our flagship program Gekko, Better Days has become a trusted and valued ally for the city's displaced learners.

GEKKO EDUCATION CENTER

From classrooms to community

2023 was a year of transition, relocating Gekko and adapting to a new target population; in 2024, we saw our efforts pay off tenfold. Gekko evolved from the “new kid” in Athens civil society to a well-established leader in non-formal education for young people affected by displacement.

Our team and services stabilized while maintaining the adaptability that defines Better Days’ approach to humanitarian support. Gekko’s community grew organically through word-of-mouth referrals - proof that our most important stakeholders, the students themselves, value our services. Among the countless lessons we’re taking from 2024, one stands out: Gekko’s personalized approach to education is in high-demand among displaced learners.

2024 was a record-breaking year for Gekko in Athens by any metric. But our favorite measure of our impact is found in the moments between classes: a crowded student lounge, filled with laughter, dozens of languages, and young people united around a game of UNO. These moments remind us of the deeper reasons for our work: building a community that encourages mutual respect and acceptance, and values the unique gifts and contributions of each individual.

Looking forward, we are exploring new opportunities to support older teens and young adults, including pathways to higher education and job training, while continuing to adapt our programs to maximize impact for displaced learners in Athens.



Pillars

- Personalized approach
- Safe, dignified space
- Context-aware methodologies
- Qualified teachers
- Support beyond the classroom
- Collaboration with like-minded organizations

Mission

Gekko’s context-aware programs address the specific needs of displaced learners, dismantling barriers to education. Working hand-in-hand with partner organizations, Gekko serves as a bridge to broader support - connecting students to psychosocial, medical, and legal services while fostering integration into Greek society.

Services	
<i>Core subjects</i>	Greek (all levels); English (all levels); Computer Skills (all levels).
<i>Referral pathways</i>	Referrals to partner organizations to meet needs beyond the classroom, including psychosocial, medical, and legal services.
<i>Edu+ support</i>	Transportation: • Safe and reliable transportation opens the door to learning. We provide transportation passes to ensure distance is never a barrier to attendance; 8,140 trips provided in 2024 Attendance rewards: • Students shouldn’t have to choose between school and stability. Gekko’s grocery voucher attendance rewards help students stay committed to their education and earn recognition for their dedication to learning; 900 vouchers (20 EUR each) distributed in 2024 Workshops and extracurricular opportunities • From Art and Music to CV Writing and Ethical AI, Gekko workshops help students build new skills and discover new passions - providing a creative outlet beyond the core subjects; 45+ workshops implemented in 2024

GEKKO BY THE NUMBERS

Impact data for 2024 show high demand for Gekko services and meaningful engagement with the student population. We received applications from far more students than our space and team could accommodate, and structured the program to allow as many students as possible to attend. We welcomed 90 students per day, on average, throughout 2024.

891

total applications

341

active students

2,283

total teaching hours

93%

avg. student
satisfaction

59%

avg. retention
between terms

67%

avg. individual
attendance

Learning together: research at Gekko

Board Games as a Language Learning Tool

Niki Panteliou, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Gekko's Head of Academics, Niki Panteliou, conducted her PhD research during summer 2024, testing the effectiveness of board games for teaching Greek as a second language. Her findings, centered on student perspectives and experiences, will be published in the Canadian Center of Science and Education's English Language Teaching journal (February 2025).

Learning on the Move

Erma Mujić, University of Minnesota

In Fall 2024, researcher Erma Mujić explored how the schooling, family, and cultural backgrounds of displaced learners shape their aspirations. Gekko students participated in arts workshops and interviews that informed this study.

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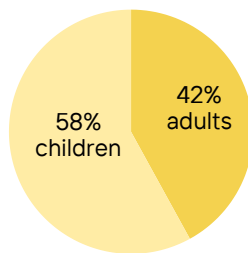
Gekko's beautiful and **inviting** space, highly **dedicated** teachers and staff, along with their **innovative** approach that employs Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) and trauma-informed methodologies creates an environment where refugee youth can thrive and pursue their dreams.

*-University of Minnesota College of Liberal Arts
Human Rights Program*

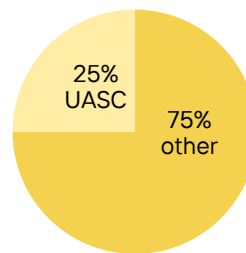


COMMUNITY IN FOCUS

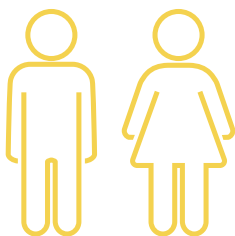
About Gekko students



Gekko services are available to students ages 15-24. On average in 2024, **58%** were children (ages 15-17) and **42%** were adults (18-24).



On average in 2024, **25%** of Gekko students were unaccompanied or separated asylum-seeking children (UASC).



30% of 2024 Gekko students were female, reflecting the gender breakdown of the larger asylum-seeking population in Greece (26%).



Gekko students represented **37** different nationalities in 2024, including Egypt, Afghanistan, Palestine, Côte d'Ivoire, and DRC.



The 2024 student body spoke **38** different mother languages, evidencing the highly multicultural environment at Gekko.



What do the students say?

"I felt **safe and welcomed** because the staff was very kind and understanding towards us. They do their jobs well."

"The teachers at Gekko are really nice and friendly. I learned **useful activities** such as soil, drawing and handicrafts."

"I learned to speak English very well and I made **new friends**."

"The lessons were excellent. My achievement is that my English has **improved** and I have become familiar with computers. Thank you for your hard work for us."

"I would say that somehow I found myself more **creative** in terms of ideas since I joined you guys."

ECOFEMINISM AT GEKKO

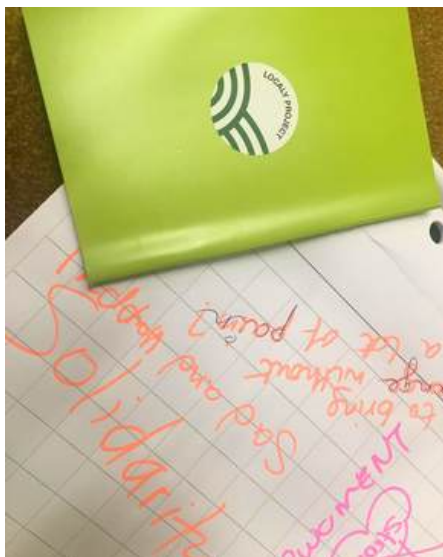
What if women ruled the world?

In fall 2024, eight young women from displaced backgrounds explored that very question through LOCALY - a program implemented by Goethe-Institut at Gekko.

Over four dynamic sessions, participants discovered how gender equality, environmental justice, and art intersect. They visited the National Museum of Contemporary Art to experience the exhibition, What if Women Ruled the World?, then sat down with featured artist Maria Tsagkari to discuss how creativity can drive social change.

Through the program, these young women deepened their understanding of the links between climate and gender inequality, and envisioned new ways to take action in their own communities. "If this project didn't have this collaboration with Gekko, it wouldn't have been the same," reflected one youth worker. "The fact that it was with Gekko made a difference, as [...] Gekko means a lot to them. [...] As they trust you, they also trusted what you recommended and, eventually, the project."

The LOCALY program didn't just inspire conversation; it sparked confidence, connection, and a sense of possibility for a more equitable, sustainable future.



GEKKO STUDENTSHIPS

When one door closes...

Higher education is a powerful driver of peace and prosperity, yet displaced learners face overwhelming barriers to access. Only **7%** of refugees worldwide are enrolled in higher education. This exclusion deepens socioeconomic inequalities, restricts opportunities for individual growth, and stifles innovation and societal progress.

Better Days' Gekko Studentship program reduced barriers by providing monthly financial support to displaced learners pursuing higher education. Inspired by cash-based models of aid, the program complements tuition scholarships by covering living expenses, allowing students to focus fully on their studies. This approach fosters independence, empowerment, and responsible resource management.

Eligible participants were 18–24-year-olds from displaced or refugee backgrounds enrolled in university or vocational programs in Greece.

While the program achieved meaningful results in 2023–2024, its continuation proved unsustainable under current funding realities and within Greece's limited ecosystem of higher education support for displaced learners.

Studentships impact

15

Scholars received monthly financial support



€15,560 contributed to student living expenses



€3,300 invested in Panhellenic exam prep

Another door opens

Higher education is a powerful driver of peace and prosperity, yet displaced learners face overwhelming barriers to access. Access to higher education remains essential for long-term stability, dignity, and opportunity for people affected by displacement. However, in Greece, pathways for displaced learners remain scarce.

Following the conclusion of the Studentship program, Better Days launched a **Needs Assessment** (September–December 2024) to better understand the landscape of higher education support in Athens and identify the most pressing barriers faced by displaced students.

Our research confirmed what many in the field already know: despite tremendous ambition among displaced youth, access to higher education remains out of reach for most. While existing programs — such as certification pathways, vocational training, and scholarships — are valuable, they are chronically under-resourced and unable to meet the level of need.

The assessment engaged over 70 displaced youth and more than 30 professionals from non-formal education programs, public schools, private universities, and government institutions.

100% of respondents to our survey indicated that they would want to pursue advanced education if given the opportunity. We are committed to exploring ways to create these opportunities.



BUILDING FROM THE GROUND UP

Better Days continues to challenge outdated and hierarchical models of aid, guided by insights from the ground and centering participant input.

ABOUT THE TEAM

Better Days' organizational structure

Better Days and its programs operate under a non-hierarchical, participatory model. The organization is led by a Board whose members act as legal representatives and treasurers, providing strategic oversight without managing daily operations. They guide program development, represent the organization publicly, engage donors, and ensure compliance and financial stewardship.

Daily operations are managed by Better Days' Executive Leadership Team (ELT), composed of department heads in Academics, Outreach, Program Management, and Communications & Fundraising. Together, they implement programs with oversight by the Executive Advisor. ELT members supervise staff and volunteers on the ground, making project decisions by consensus.

This approach empowers ground-up decision-making and cross-departmental coordination, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for the impact our work has on the communities Better Days serves.

Learning & development

In 2024, Better Days continued to invest in the growth and well-being of its growing team, recognizing that strong, knowledgeable staff are central to delivering high-quality education and care. Over the year, staff and volunteers completed over 141 individual hours of training, covering a diverse range of skills and knowledge areas.

Training highlights included First Aid certification with the Red Cross, Training of Trainers and Restorative Justice delivered by Terre des Hommes, and online training on Internal Control, Accounting, and Innovative Financing. Staff also enhanced their capacity in IT skills, Psychological First Aid (PFA), and completed Safeguarding Essentials, reinforcing the organization's commitment to creating safe and supportive learning environments.

Alongside external training, Better Days placed strong focus on internal capacity-building, with induction programs for new staff, targeted academic training, and essential Health & Safety sessions, including evacuation and fire safety procedures.

Team members



Academics

- Head of Academics
- Greek Teacher
- English Teacher
- Computer Teacher
- STEM Coordinator



Project Support

- Project Manager
- Admissions Officer
- Volunteer & Outreach Manager
- Facilities Cleaner



Organizational Support

- Quality & Impact Manager
- Chief Financial Officer
- Accounts Officer
- Communications & Fundraising Coordinator



OUTREACH & VOLUNTEER COORDINATION

Volunteer program

2024 was a turning point for Better Days' volunteer program. Despite contextual challenges, including Greece's remarkably low national volunteer rate (10%, compared to the European average of 23%), we successfully implemented a new and improved volunteer recruitment procedure. Hosting volunteers from around the world, we ensured the organization's needs were fully met while offering a fulfilling and impactful experience for volunteers.

In total, Better Days welcomed **34** volunteers throughout 2024, who contributed **1600+** hours of voluntary services. Their contributions to teaching, workshop implementation, admissions, and administrative tasks were invaluable.

Collaboration with University of Missouri, USA

This year also saw Gekko's first group placement in Athens. We hosted seven student teachers from the University of Missouri (UM) College of Education and Human Development, who dedicated 84 hours to Gekko's regular English classes and an additional 27 hours to our Language Corner and IT Corner drop-in programs. The collaboration benefited everyone: students received extra support from energetic new teachers, Gekko staff gained valuable assistance, and UM students gained hands-on experience in a specialized educational context.

Better Days has provided me many opportunities to learn and grow in my career and in my personal life as well. I feel extremely lucky to have this experience and build connections with the students and staff at Gekko! Teaching ESL has been a great challenge and taught me lessons that will last a lifetime, I hope to be back one day!

*-Morgan Cannon,
UM student*



Outreach

2024 has been a pivotal year for Gekko, laying the groundwork for stronger connections and collaboration in Athens and beyond. Our outreach to nearly **40** organizations - including shelters, community centers, and other local actors - helped strengthen our network and visibility.

Our outreach efforts contributed to a growing level of trust within the communities we serve, evidenced by an increase in students referring friends and family members to Gekko, and significantly expanded access to our classes, allowing more students to benefit from our programs.

In addition to outreach, we collaborated with **14** partners to co-design and implement workshops and activities tailored to the interests and needs of our students as well as a capacity-building training. These efforts not only enriched the learning experience but also built a solid foundation for future partnerships, ensuring that Gekko's programs continue to be responsive, inclusive, and impactful.

BD SERVICE LEARNING

Global learning, local impact

In May, Gekko welcomed seven students and two teachers from Institut Le Rosey for a memorable service learning trip. In the weeks leading up to their visit, our team worked with Le Rosey to design an immersive itinerary exploring the challenges faced by displaced communities in Greece and the work of organizations supporting them.

The Le Rosey students dove into an eye-opening experience through hands-on sessions at Gekko, visits to key partner organisations, and engaging excursions alongside their Gekko peers. This unique blend of learning and collaboration gave them a deep insight into the grassroots humanitarian aid sector.

Among the trip's standout moments was the visit to the National Archaeological Museum of Greece, where Gekko students partnered with Le Rosey peers on a creative media assignment, blending curiosity and creativity in a fun, educational challenge. A close second? The legendary Gekko Bowling Night - an evening of strikes, laughter, and pizza that brought both communities together as one.

The trip was an unforgettable journey of learning, connection, and shared experiences. Our sincere thanks to Refocus Media Labs, Saffron Kitchen Project, Attika Human Support, and Project Armonia for hosting us.



Service learning isn't just for students...

Our curriculum connects people of all backgrounds with the ongoing challenges of forced displacement in Greece, encouraging collaboration and community-based learning.

Contact us at hello@betterdays.ngo to learn more.

COMMUNICATIONS & FUNDRAISING

Fundraising update: collaboration with Better Days Switzerland

In 2024, in light of a shrinking donor landscape for education programs targeting displaced children and young people, we reached out to partner organisations to explore collaboration opportunities in the area of fundraising and share programming costs. Our search did not generate promising results, as most organisations were already overwhelmed by their own bleak outlook for the future.

Despite team expertise and the submission of several strong grant applications to Greek Institutions, it soon became clear that opportunities for new funding were extremely limited. Most donors had shifted their priorities away from education, and many foundations had significantly reduced their available budgets for 2024–2025. While no new donors were secured, we were grateful that our long-standing supporters, Le Rosey and Choose Love, confirmed their renewed commitment for another year.

During the second half of 2024, with most operational costs secured for the academic year, our fundraising efforts shifted towards identifying sustainable funding sources from Swiss foundations. This work was led by Better Days Greece's co-founder and carried out in close collaboration with Better Days Switzerland, marking a meaningful reconnection between the two entities since their last joint programme at the Olive Grove in 2015. The team developed a comprehensive dossier to support outreach to more than 30 (mainly) Swiss-based foundations whose missions and values align with those of Better Days.

This initiative represented a deliberate attempt to diversify our funding base amid increasingly challenging conditions for non-profits in Greece and worldwide.

However, by December 2024, we were forced to acknowledge that our efforts to secure new, multi-year funding from Swiss foundations had not borne fruit. Despite our commitment, investment, and hard work, the funding environment offered little hope for sustaining Better Days in the years ahead.

By January 2025, we made the difficult decision to suspend all major fundraising activities in order to protect our limited resources and prioritise Gekko and its students. Yet, through resilience, teamwork, and an unwavering belief in our mission, we succeeded in securing 100% of the funds needed to keep Better Days and Gekko operational for another academic year.



Communications highlights

In 2024, we made significant investments in our Communications Department to strengthen Gekko's visibility in Athens and promote our services to the communities we serve and beyond. These efforts also aimed to encourage partnerships and advocate for social justice and human rights.

Hiring a dedicated Communications Officer enabled us to reach broader audiences and make better use of social media, sparking a wave of interest from new partners, students, and volunteers from across the world. In 2024, we saw notable increase in our performance.

410%

increase in
page visits

322%

increase in
content reach

\$15,294

raised in crowdfunding

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

<i>2024 starting balance</i>	€4,029
<i>Donations & income received</i>	€392,074

2024 spending breakdown			
<i>Direct Programming</i>	Staffing, student support, studentships, food, transport, extracurricular activities, program facilities & infrastructure, health & safety, consumables & supplies, technology & IT	€227,130	64.17%
<i>Program Support</i>	HR, volunteer recruitment & support, program facilities management & logistics, fundraising & communications, third party & community support, visibility & reporting	€96,167	27.17%
<i>Back Office</i>	Accounting, legal/compliance, infrastructure, IT/technology, contingency	€30,673	8.66%
<i>Total</i>		€353,970	100%

Given our close collaboration with BDS during this year, many Gekko-related expenditures were covered directly by Better Days Switzerland (BDS) and will be reflected in their Financial Accounts and Annual Report. In 2024, BDS has also covered most communications, fundraising and organisational development costs. Total expenses reported by BDS amount to €104,945.

Donors



Individual donors

30 individuals donated to Better Days projects on GlobalGiving.

- 19 one-time donors
- 11 recurring donors



2025 PREVIEW

What's next for Gekko?

2025 holds exciting changes for Better Days' award-winning education program.

Certification pathways

2025 marks Gekko's move toward certification pathways, empowering students to earn formal recognition for their learning. In partnership with ELNOR, we'll offer IELTS preparation, and work toward accreditation as an official ECDL Exam Center to support digital skills certification.

Homework support

In partnership with Lighthouse Relief, Gekko will launch a 2025 pilot program offering structured homework and academic support for displaced junior high and high school students. The initiative aims to strengthen comprehension, confidence, and academic performance through targeted, consistent guidance.

Innovative curricula

In spring 2025, Gekko's integrated Language and Digital Skills curriculum will introduce basic digital literacy into English and Greek language classrooms. This approach enables teachers to use interactive digital tools to enhance learning, while allowing students to develop both language and digital skills concurrently.

Introducing the Gekko Leadership Council

Developed based on our Needs Assessment findings, the Gekko Leadership Council (GLC) is a leadership project for representatives of the Gekko target population guided by a team of Facilitators recruited from among alumni of the Studentship Scholars. The Council's charge is to execute a tangible project, designed together with the participants, that will advocate publicly for increased access to higher education for young people affected by displacement in Greece. We can't wait to see what these young leaders will accomplish! Our sincere thanks to Choose Love and the Bezos Family Foundation for making this opportunity possible.



*Higher impact,
lower costs*

After optimizing operations in 2024, Gekko streamlined expenses without compromising program quality or impact. In 2025, we'll relocate to a more suitable, cost-effective space that better supports our growing student body and fosters a brighter learning environment.





*To our donors, for your steadfast support.
To our team, for your unwavering dedication.
To our volunteers, for your energy and compassion.
And to our participants, for your courage and resilience.
Together, you make Better Days possible.*

THANK YOU!