

2025 ANNUAL REPORT

Open Cultural Center Greece

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A word from our board

Dear reader,

The Board of Open Cultural Center (OCC) is pleased to present the 2025 Annual Report of OCC in Greece.

2025 has been a challenging year in Greece, defined by a difficult political climate with constantly changing and increasingly restrictive migration policies. These developments have had a significant impact on how the country approaches migration and, consequently, on the day to day of OCC and its participants. Our work supporting displaced people in Greece has therefore never been more important.

During the year, OCC supported over 2,420 people, 45% of them in Greece. Through our programmes and the tremendous passion and dedication of our staff and volunteers, we continued to provide education, cultural exchange and safe spaces, strengthening our community and making it more inclusive.

This year also marked the start of a strategic transition process, in which we began revising our organisational structures and ways of working. Our aim through this process is to become even more efficient, better support our team and volunteers, and strengthen our overall governance.

We finish this introduction with a thank you to all our volunteers, partners, staff, members, donors, and all other supporters for making this work possible. Your trust and commitment continue to make it possible for refugees, migrants and asylum seekers to access meaningful opportunities, support and community.

Best,
The Board of Open Cultural Center



OUR PURPOSE

“Supporting the inclusion of migrant and refugee people through community, education, and access to opportunities.”

HISTORY OF OCC GREECE

Open Cultural Center (OCC) was established in 2016 as a collective initiative by independent volunteers at the Idomeni refugee camp. Quickly the center became an important resource in the camp for organising cultural events and workshops. Following the closure of Idomeni, OCC continued its work in Cherso and Sounio. In June 2016, it formally registered with the Greek Ministry of Migration and Asylum as a non-governmental organisation under the name of Open Cultural Center.

Then, in February 2017, the organisation moved to Northern Greece. Operations shifted away from reception and emergency support, towards the inclusion and integration of migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers in the municipality of Polykastro, and the nearby Nea Kavala refugee camp.

Polykastro

WORKING CONTEXT

The **Nea Kavala refugee camp** is located near the border with North Macedonia. People live in containers, surrounded by walls and constant surveillance, creating an atmosphere of isolation.

OCC, from its center in **Polykastro**, provides aid to the residents of the camp by developing educational, cultural and inclusion activities, including non-formal education for adults and children, sports & leisure activities, transport services, employability workshops and more, all to support the camp community.

Since 2016, OCC has also been active in **Barcelona, Spain**, where it focuses on creating inclusive communities and opportunities for exchange between local inhabitants and newcomers.

OCC also operates in **Moianès**, a rural area an hour north of Barcelona. There, we run the Youth4all project, providing a home-fostering and emancipation program to promote the socio-labor inclusion of young migrant people through training in green skills, language learning, and community engagement.



2.420

people assisted last year
45% in Greece

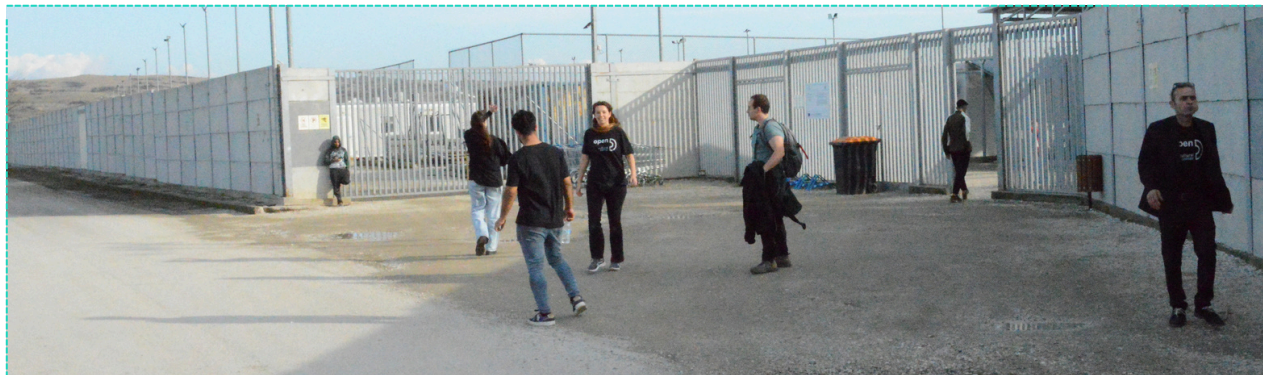
NEA KAVALA REFUGEE CAMP IN 2025

In 2025, changes in migration policies at Greek, European, and national levels significantly affected the context in which OCC Greece operates. Shifts in asylum and migration policies in other European countries, including Germany, contributed to changes in mobility patterns, with some people, particularly from Syria, returning to Greece.

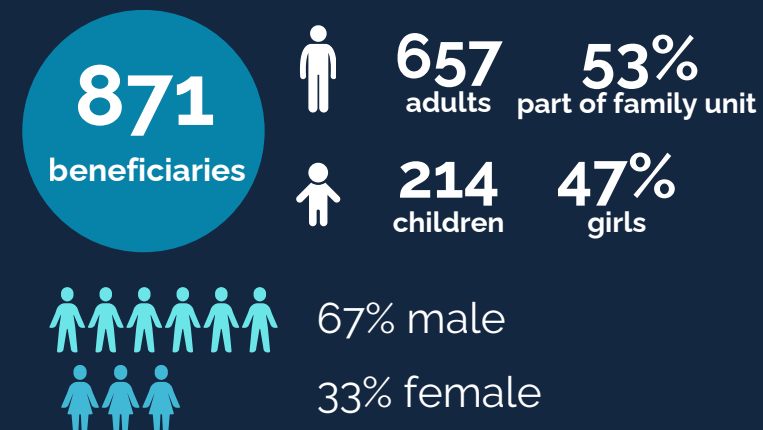
At the beginning of the year, increased transfers from Greek islands and arrivals through new routes, particularly from Crete, contributed to a rise in the population of Nea Kavala, which reached around 1,100 people by the end of March. The increase in arrivals from Sudan was particularly significant, with **Sudanese participants representing 25% of OCC beneficiaries** in 2025, compared to **1% in 2024**.

In July, Greece **suspended the right to asylum for all new arrivals**, a measure that violates the Geneva Convention. In practice, new arrivals were unable to apply for asylum and were treated as detainees, held in closed camps without rights or support. **Open camps were converted into detention facilities** almost overnight. This measure remained in force for three months and was lifted in October. It was replaced by a new law introducing an initial screening by the asylum office within the first week of arrival. Only those deemed eligible are allowed to apply for asylum, while others are automatically transferred to detention centers.

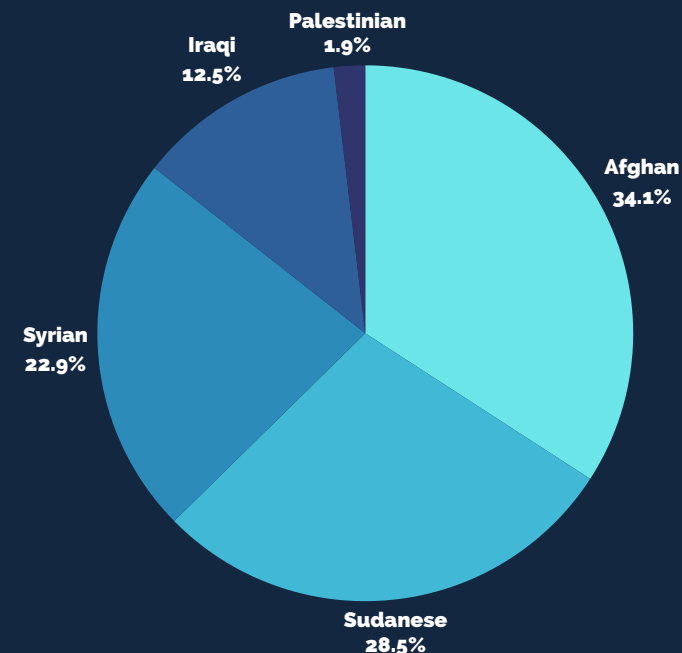
These developments reflect Greece's increasingly harsh stance toward refugees in an effort to limit arrivals. The suspension of the right to asylum significantly reduced camp populations, including in Nea Kavala. Feedback from beneficiaries suggests that many refugees will avoid Greece in the future and instead move toward countries such as Italy, echoing patterns seen between 2020 and 2023.



OUR COMMUNITY IN 2025



21 Nationalities



88% of our community stayed in Greece for **6 months or less**.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

MISSION

To equip people with migrant backgrounds with the tools to access opportunities and build a future while advancing equality and inclusion within local communities through intercultural exchange, education, and advocacy.

VISION

To become a key player within the community of organisations working to enhance the social and economic integration of migrant people at a local level, as well as an important voice advocating for policies that protect their rights and favor their inclusion within a diverse European society.

PURPOSE

To strongly contribute to an inclusive society without barriers to the legal, social, and economic participation of migrant people as equal and valued members of society.

VALUES

Inclusion and diversity, community building, volunteering, youth empowerment, and innovation.



OUR PILLARS

Aligned with global goals

Social Transformation

SDG 16 : Peaceful & inclusive societies

Through our campaigns and projects, we challenge stereotypes, promote positive narratives, and create spaces for dialogue that encourage empathy, participation, and lasting social change.

Community Building

SDG 11 : Sustainable Cities & Communities

We create opportunities for people from different backgrounds to connect, collaborate, and build meaningful relationships that strengthen social cohesion and make more inclusive, diverse and resilient communities.

Innovation

SDG 9 : Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure

Innovative approaches are needed to improve the quality, effectiveness, and reach of inclusion initiatives.

We design, test, and share innovative methodologies throughout our projects to ensure they are useful, tailored and impactful.

Beyond Borders

SDG 17: Partnerships for Goals

Partnerships and international cooperation strengthen learning, innovation, and collective impact. We foster collaboration between OCC Spain, OCC Greece, and NGO partners across Europe to exchange knowledge, share good practices, and expand the reach and sustainability of our work.

Social & Economic Inclusion

SDG 5: Gender equality SDG 8: Decent work & economic growth

Displaced people should have improved access to career opportunities, decent work, and meaningful participation in social and economic life within their new countries.

We support people with a migration background to develop skills and access education and employment opportunities. We place a particular focus on reducing gender inequality by addressing the barriers faced by migrant women in the technology sector.

Youth Empowerment

SDG 4 : Quality Education SDG 10: Reduced inequalities

We support young people to develop skills and confidence through quality education, training, and volunteering opportunities, helping to reduce inequalities and strengthen both individual potential and community engagement.





THE PROJECTS



Our Mobility services

Through our **bike service**, camp residents can rent bikes and move independently and access essential services in town, such as health care, food, and administrative offices.

Our **bus service** continues to provide reliable transport to our center in Polykastro, allowing residents to attend classes, events, or enjoy safe spaces.

Trips run in the morning and afternoon, with some journeys reserved exclusively for children accompanied by trained volunteers.

The majority of passengers use the bus for adult or children's classes, and on Mondays it serves women traveling to the Women's Space.

Improvements in 2025

Number of bus journeys increased by 12% from the previous year, therefore increasing the total number of passengers of the year

Mobility

Refugee camps are often deliberately located far from local towns and villages, reinforcing the isolation of their residents. One of OCC's goals is to help **break down these barriers** by improving connectivity between Nea Kavala camp and the town of Polykastro.

Located **seven kilometres apart**, **Nea Kavala and Polykastro** are not connected by public transport, making access to essential goods, services, and our centre challenging for residents. Through our mobility services, we help people travel more **independently**, **reduce isolation**, and improve **access to opportunities** and support.

2025 in numbers



16,223 total passengers during the year



116 Bike Rentals



413 Bus Rides



39 Passengers per ride





Our classes

All educational activities take place at our community center in Polykastro and are delivered with the support of our volunteer community. For **children**, we provide language lessons, arts, sports, and science activities, as well as outings, organized into age-specific groups:

- Falafels (age 4–8)
- Eagles (age 8–13)
- Pirates (age 13–17)

Our non-educational activities are designed to give children the chance to learn, play, and simply be children in a safe space outside the camp.

For **adults**, we run classes and workshops designed to offer practical skills useful for future opportunities. These include language learning (English, English literacy, French and German) as well as Computer Classes where participants can train their digital skills.

Improvements in 2025

Started the DAPHNE project, a project funded by the European Union, which allowed us to organise participatory **arts-based workshops** for displaced teenagers (Pirates students) over the course of the year

Education

OCC Greece provides **non-formal educational opportunities** for children and adults living in Nea Kavala refugee camp. Through **language classes, digital literacy, employability training, and creative activities**, we create safe spaces where participants can learn new skills, build confidence, and connect with others.

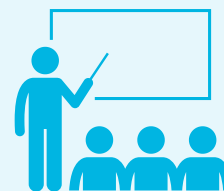
2025 in numbers



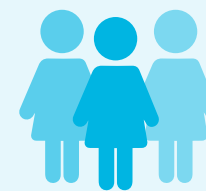
214 students participated in the children's classes
100 were girls



553 classes for children



1284 classes for adults



33% female students





Our spaces & activities

The **Cafeteria** is a colourful and inclusive common space open to community members of all ages. It is a gathering place to rest and relax but also where we host activities, workshops, and events.

The **Women's Space** is a dedicated safe space for women living in Nea Kavala, offering them the opportunity to connect, relax, and participate in creative and informative activities. Every Monday, women can take time for themselves while OCC team members support childcare. Activities include yoga, hairstyling, henna sessions, photography, and other workshops based on participants' interests.

The **CV Hub** provides support and guidance for community members looking to improve their resumes, prepare job applications, and search for job opportunities online.

Improvements in 2025

→ **New sewing machines** were introduced, allowing community members to use them to mend clothes and develop creative skills.

→ The number of Women's Space sessions almost doubled, increasing **from 22 in 2024 to 43 in 2025**. This meant that participation also increased, with **647 women** joining the sessions over the year. This success, in part, was due to the tailoring of sessions based on specific wishes and requests from the women.

→ **13 CV Hub sessions** were organised, supporting 25 participants in their employment journeys.

Community Building

Our centre provides **safe and welcoming spaces** where community members can access services, take part in activities, and spend time away from the challenges of daily life in the camp. Through our community activities, we hope to foster connection and exchange between members of our community and our volunteer team.

Spaces for our community



Women's Space

for workshops, connection, community



Cafeteria

for classes and activities



CV Hub

for employability support

Community activities and events in 2025

- Community dinners with music and food
- Eid al-Fitr celebration
- Children's Open Day, where children shared their artwork and activities with their families
- Refugee Week 2025 activities, including a photography exhibition, a screening of the True Stories podcast, and a community lunch
- Photography classes developed with a new curriculum designed by volunteers
- Trips and outings for children, including visits to Vergina, a Sports Day in Thessaloniki, the Planetarium, and a basketball game, supported by the Boustany Foundation
- Legal clinic sessions at our centre to provide legal assistance



OCC Greece participated in the implementation of **4 EU-funded projects**, reinforcing our collaboration with fellow NGOs, and working together towards improving the situation of migrant and refugee people across Europe.

Our projects generally address the following themes:

- **Youth:** ESC 2024-2026, ESC 2025-2027, VOLTERI 5, VOLTERI 6
- **Education & Expression :** True Stories, Daphne-Reflections



European Projects

OCC is dedicated to building communities between local and displaced people in Catalonia and Greece. Our collaborations at European level enrich our work through the diverse perspectives, expertise, and experiences of our partners. By establishing a European network of migration experts, we are able to better support the migrant communities across Europe, all together.

2025 in numbers



4 EU projects

Covering youth, inclusion, and language



1 new project launched

As well as 2 projects completed



6 partner organisations

From 5 different countries





Youth European Projects



European Solidarity Corps



A programme OCC has collaborated with for several years is the European Solidarity Corps (ESC) initiative, funded by the European Commission.

The general objective of the programme is to create **opportunities for young people** aged between 18 and 30 to volunteer in **meaningful projects that benefit communities** around Europe. Through this programme, young people get housing, a stipend, and learning opportunities, which they can use in their job search after the project.

The project allows OCC to **host volunteers in our Spanish and Greek offices**, who then form an essential part of our teams in both countries.

11

Long-term volunteers
in 2025*

*Within the projects : ESC 2024-2026 & ESC 2025-2027



VOLTERI 5 & 6



Volunteering Teams Supporting Refugees fleeing Disasters in Greece (VOLTERI) is a project that creates an **international team of 60 short-term volunteers** who work at OCC Greece's center in Polykastro, helping to address the well-being and social inclusion challenges faced by the migrant, refugee, and asylum-seeker communities who come to OCC's space and uses its services.

The project aims to benefit both the target groups and young participants, assisting in **capacity-building, cultural exchange and personal development**.

Partners: [Open Cultural Center](#) (Spain), [Amaita intercultural](#) (Italy)

60

Short-term volunteers
in 2025

*Within the projects : VOLTERI 5 & VOLTERI 6





Education & Expression

European Projects



DAPHNE-Reflections

Daphne  **CHILD**
Shaping tomorrow's child protection services with children

**NEW
in 2025**

Through **participatory arts-based activities**, the project addresses **educational exclusion** as a form of systemic violence affecting children with a refugee background. **Young people aged 12–17 from our community** took part in needs assessments, focus groups, creative workshops, and theatre-based activities, the results of which will be compiled next year into a co-designed handbook next year. The project is co-funded by the European Union under the CERV programme (Daphne-CHILD sub-grant scheme).

Partners: [Eurochild AISBL](#) (Belgium), [Terre des Hommes](#) (Hungary)



5 creative workshops
including theatre, poetry & drawing



Pre-needs assessment
to tailor activities and outputs



50 children
between the ages of 12–17



True Stories

**TRUE
STORIES**

Through **media training workshops** and a **multilingual podcast**, the project aims to transform perceptions of migration by improving the **representation of displaced people in the media** and training them in media techniques to tell their own stories. The final podcast featured the **voices** of migrant people themselves and focuses on their achievements and hopes for the future. This project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union.

Partners: [French Red Cross](#) (France), [OCC](#) (Spain), [Louie Media](#) (France)



3 Media training workshops
in Spain, Greece and France



2360 views on Youtube
of the 6 different stories



6 podcast episodes
featuring 2 people from OCC Greece





OUR TEAM

OUR TEAM IN GREECE

This year, we had **five staff members** in Greece, who formed the backbone of our operations, ensuring the smooth running of our projects and activities.

Our work in Polykastro is made possible thanks to the invaluable contribution of volunteers, who support the implementation of all of our activities. Over the course of the year, we welcomed a total of **79 volunteers**. The majority (71) joined us from all over Europe through the European Solidarity Corps, and 8 resident volunteers living in the Nea Kavala refugee camp also joined our team.

Resident volunteers continue to play a fundamental role in our work. As members of the refugee community, they provide continuity to our programmes, act as linguistic and cultural mediators, and help build trust between participants, international volunteers, and the wider team. Their contribution strengthens the quality of our activities while creating opportunities for their own personal and professional development.

During the year, we also welcomed two new colleagues to the team: a new **Volunteer Coordinator** and a new **EU Projects Manager**. The Volunteer Coordinator plays a key role in supporting our volunteer community, ensuring everyone feels welcomed, informed, and prepared throughout their placement. The EU Projects Manager strengthens our capacity to develop and implement collaborative projects with international partners, allowing us to expand our programmes and increase our impact.

Our team also participated in a Terre des Hommes **workshop on psychosocial support** for vulnerable children and young people and joined the Children Rights Advocacy Network, contributing to collective advocacy efforts at European level.



5 Staff Members



71 ESC volunteers



8 resident volunteers



THE PARTNERS

Partners

EU grants, private and public funding and partnerships, have been fundamental to OCC Greece's growth over the last few years, enabling us to improve the quality and impact of our work that fights the exclusion and isolation of displaced communities.

Private sponsors



Public funding



Collaborating NGOs & entities



OUR NETWORK

OCC has built a valuable network of institutional, private, and third-sector partnerships. We have also established meaningful partnerships with companies through **Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) initiatives**. Thanks to this, we have guaranteed the quality and sustainability of our projects.

The support of our corporate partners has been crucial in fulfilling our mission to create life-changing opportunities for refugees and migrants. Partners gain early access to a talented workforce, while their employees benefit from valuable hands-on experience as technical and non-technical instructors and mentors.

Financial contributions have been vital in providing essential resources for our students. Moreover, our partners' dedication to volunteering and offering employment opportunities has profoundly impacted our graduates, opening doors to new possibilities and promoting diversity in the tech sector.

Partnering for impact

At OCC, we value strong partnerships based on shared value. We are committed to transparent, mutually beneficial, and meaningful relationships.

Collaborating with us allows your organization to:

- **Drive meaningful impact** by supporting access to education, employment, and career growth for underrepresented talent.
- **Connect with diverse talent** by meeting skilled, motivated professionals who bring fresh perspectives and lived experiences to your teams.
- **Engage your employees** through mentoring, volunteering, and knowledge-sharing opportunities that create real connections and purpose.
- **Strengthen your ESG and DEI commitments** by turning your values into measurable action.
- **Help shape a more inclusive future** by contributing to a stronger, more diverse tech and green ecosystem.

Together, we can create opportunities that transform careers, strengthen organizations, and make our industries more inclusive for everyone.

A photograph of three young men with beards, smiling and posing together. The man on the left is holding a white ukulele with a colorful floral design on the body. They are wearing casual clothing, including hoodies. The background is a simple, light-colored wall. Overlaid on the center of the image is the text "ACHIEVEMENTS & OUTLOOK" in a large, white, sans-serif font.

ACHIEVEMENTS & OUTLOOK

IMPROVEMENTS IN 2025

In 2025, we continued strengthening our volunteer programme by **improving the experience and support provided to volunteers**. Following feedback from various volunteer flows, we developed an enhanced volunteer welcome handbook, created a practical guide for volunteers supporting the community helpdesk, and updated our Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), centralising key documentation in a shared Notion handbook to improve accessibility and consistency across the team.

We continued working towards our goal of **greater collaboration with local actors** by organising a workshop in Polykastro with participants from partner organisations, creating space for exchange and shared learning, whilst increasing our visibility at a local level. To foster closer collaboration with our colleagues at OCC Spain, we introduced quarterly online information sessions between our teams in Greece and Barcelona, to increase understanding of each other's contexts and work.

Community engagement also continued to grow throughout the year. We organised six community events, bringing together more than 300 participants, while strengthening our monitoring systems to better track participation and measure the impact of our activities.

871
beneficiaries

1800+
hours of classes
& training

79
volunteers

Looking ahead

2026 will be a landmark year for Open Cultural Center as we celebrate **ten years since the founding** of our organisation.

We will use this milestone to continue strengthening our work in Greece by **expanding access to education, psychosocial support, and legal assistance for people seeking refuge**. Through our programmes in Polykastro, we aim to support 700 refugee participants with activities that promote wellbeing, learning, and social inclusion, while providing educational opportunities for 250 children living in the Nea Kavala refugee camp.

Alongside our direct services, we will continue advocating for more humane and evidence-based migration policies. Through **public events, publications, and digital communications**, we aim to reach 20,000 people with reliable information on the impact of European migration policies on refugees, contributing to a more informed public debate and promoting a culture of welcome and solidarity.



**READ OCC SPAIN's 2024
ANNUAL REPORT ON
OUR WEBSITE**

