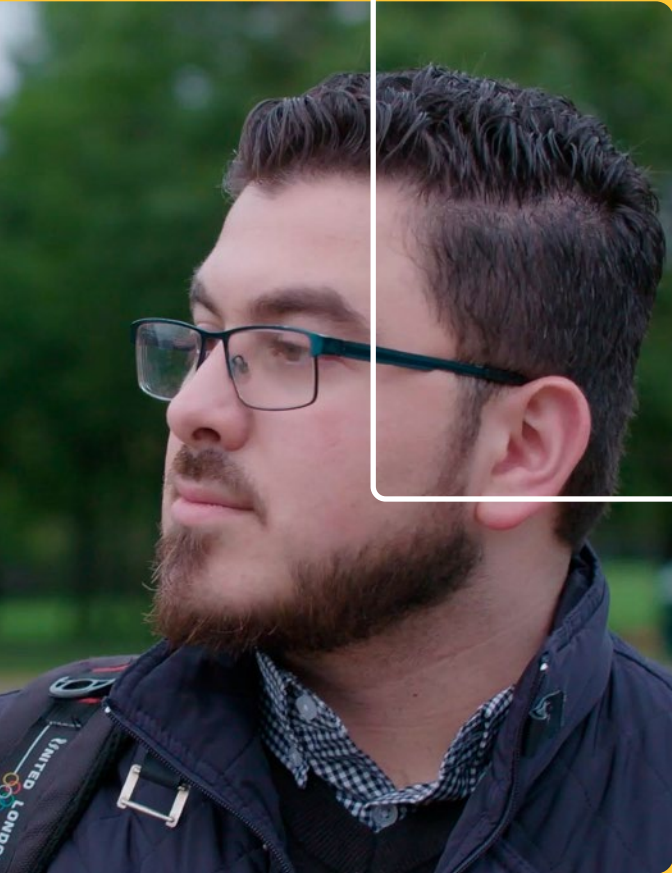


# *Impact Report*



*2020 – 2021*



## Our Vision

is that every refugee and person of refugee background can fulfill their potential and integrate into their new home through employment that matches their skills, experience, and aspirations.

## Our Mission

is to help refugees and people of refugee background to acquire knowledge, confidence and experience to get stable, fulfilling employment. We give a central role to businesses, involving them directly in finding employment solutions and providing support that gets refugees into work.

## Our Values

Our values reflect who we are as a charity and what our clients, donors and staff can expect from us:

### Mission-led

Our clients come before everything else.



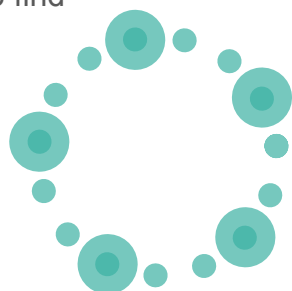
### Welcoming

We want all people to feel happy, comfortable and secure with us.



### Collaborative

We are supportive and considerate, curiously exploring other viewpoints to find solutions.



### Enterprising

We are discerningly bold, entrepreneurial and have the courage to give things a go.





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# Our highlights: June 2020 – May 2021

## Understanding client needs

During the first wave of the pandemic we surveyed our clients and in June 2020 published the results in our first client needs assessment – **The Impact of Covid-19 on Refugees in London**. The findings highlighted the disproportionate impact the pandemic was having on refugees, who were experiencing higher levels of furloughing and less likely to have the digital access and skills required for the new world of work many of us were experiencing.

## Our first Impact Report

In October we published our first ever Impact Report for FY19/20. The report showed that since our inception we had supported **1,045 people of refugee background** – 50% of whom have achieved their goal of entering employment, education, training, or volunteering. **This figure is now well over 1,300.**



## Summer

## Bringing back our support

After months of closure due to Covid-19, in July 2020 we were thrilled to **bring back support for our clients through a safe, accessible, and entirely remote service**. Based on the findings from the needs assessment we were able to incorporate digital training into our offering, helping clients to build new and essential digital skills such as document sharing and video calling.

## Autumn

## Big Give success

For our Christmas 2020 fundraiser we took part in the Big Give Christmas Challenge for the second time, setting ourselves an ambitious target of raising £20,000. **We were thrilled to reach the target in just 6 hours**, raising much needed funds for our employment support. We were so thankful to our clients Abdulrahman, Beilqes, Gobika and Murat for helping us achieve the target by sharing what Breaking Barriers support means to them.





## Leave Home, Save Lives

In January 2021, Breaking Barriers was proud to present **Leave Home, Save Lives** — an online exhibition in collaboration with world-renowned photographer, Rankin, to **celebrate the inspirational stories of seven refugees and asylum seekers**, their journeys to the UK, their lives, and their roles in essential frontline services during the pandemic. It was the first time Breaking Barriers annual photography exhibition was hosted online and it received over 25 pieces of national and local press coverage, as well as **over 6,000 visits to the website** in the first month.



## Winning a Queen's Award

We were extremely proud to have our work recognised in April by **receiving the Queen's Award for Enterprise** for Promoting Opportunity through Social Mobility.

The Queen's Award is an incredibly prestigious prize and we were especially grateful to the committee for believing in our work and our mission, especially at such a challenging time for refugees who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic.



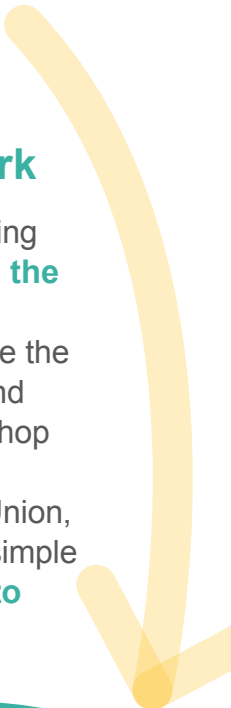
## One Year Later

In March 2021, a year on since the start of the pandemic, we conducted and published our second client needs assessment **One Year Later – The Impact of Covid-19 on Refugees**. Following on from our first report, the key highlights were how the tough labour market, and a continuing lack of digital access and literacy was impacting the opportunities, experiences, and support needs for people of refugee background.



## Creation of the Fuse network

After months of development and working closely with our partners **we launched the Fuse Network**, with the aim of uniting businesses in common goals to improve the lives of refugees through meaningful and sustainable employment. After a workshop with founding partners such as Grant Thornton, Mayer Brown and Western Union, we created the Fuse Action Plan as a simple tool to **help businesses take action to support refugees** into meaningful employment and foster a diverse, inclusive and thriving workplace.



## Tua's story

**Tua is a Breaking Barriers client who also participated in our Leave Home, Save Lives photography exhibition, which celebrated the contributions of people of refugee background who worked on the front line during the pandemic.**



**This is Tua's story as told to us in November 2020, we're proud to say that she's now enrolled at university studying mental health nursing.**

Before the lockdown I was volunteering as a domiciliary carer, going from house-to-house. I love cooking and I cook well for my clients. Now I work as a live-in carer in Milton Keynes with a client who has a spinal cord injury and mental health problems.

I try to make English food for her – she likes roast chicken, mashed potatoes, and I'm an expert in making scrambled eggs the way she likes them. I stay there for two weeks at a time. There are some days that are really stressful, some days are really busy. If my client becomes a bit stressed, it's difficult for me as well as for her.

I've had a lot of challenges for many years. I waited for 15 years for my refugee status eventually getting my documents in 2019. I started looking for jobs, but it was a bit difficult because of the pandemic and because I had been unemployed for so many years. I was so stressed and knew that so many people were now also applying for jobs because of the pandemic.

I want to go to university to study mental health nursing. I took my job as a placement, to learn. When the nurses come to visit my client I ask a lot of questions. Little by little they always respond. Mental health is not an easy course at university. But I will get there, by the grace of God.

Essential workers are unique. We are saving clients' lives. Without us, they would not be here. I'm doing it from the bottom of my heart. It's not about money — it's about your care, your love.

I'm really grateful, and I really appreciate meeting Breaking Barriers. My caseworker has been like a sister to me, and has helped me so much with my university application.

Working as a refugee in the UK, some people think that maybe we don't have rights. I'm very proud to be a refugee in this country though, and to go to school in this country, and to study at university to get my job. Of course you have to be proud of who you are. That's me.

## The Challenge

The UK offered protection to 9,113 people in 2020. In 2019 it was estimated that 374,000 people of refugee background were living in the UK, and approximately 50% of these are in London.<sup>1</sup> Refugees face great hardship in fleeing war, violence and persecution, but upon arriving in the UK they face additional setbacks in the form of marginalisation, racial discrimination, lack of language support and other significant barriers to integration.

We know that refugees can and do make valuable contributions to society, and that employment can be a crucial factor in helping them integrate into their new home. However, UK refugees currently suffer from much higher rates of unemployment than the general population and no national strategy to aid the transition of refugees into the labour market exists.

## The impact of Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic had a significant impact on all aspects of our charity and the services we provide. We conducted two client needs assessments to understand in more detail how the pandemic was affecting our clients.

17% of clients who were in work prior to the pandemic lost their job, significantly higher than the 5% of people who had lost their jobs by October 2020 in the UK overall and over 80% of clients told us that they still urgently needed employment and English support during the pandemic.<sup>2</sup> As a result, we spent the first quarter of the financial year setting up remote delivery for all our existing services.

1 [Refugees and the UK Labour Market \(2019\), COMPAS](#)

2 All percentage figures relating to survey responses are percentages of respondents, not percentages of overall clients. Figures from [The impact of Covid-19 on the support needs of refugees and people of refugee background – One year later, \(March 2021\), Breaking Barriers](#)



We also adapted our support structure to meet the additional needs of clients that had been caused or amplified by the pandemic. For example, we increased the flexibility of our appointments and introduced a Conversation Café to help reduce social isolation and improve wellbeing.

We found that 54% of clients had access to a laptop, compared to 88% of the UK population having access to a computer at home.<sup>3</sup> And 1 in 5 (19%) of clients said they could not easily work from home, and a quarter of survey respondents (26%) reported low digital literacy.<sup>4</sup>

To ensure that as many clients as possible could access our new remote services effectively, we developed a package of digital support and resources. Furthermore, we introduced additional education courses on digital skills for work, and digital skills for life, building on the beginner's IT course that was already available. These new support packages have been vital in building the digital literacy of clients to ensure they can both access our support and independently navigate an increasingly online world.

Moving to remote delivery was a positive development for some of our clients. We found more female clients were able to access our services, 48% attended remote education classes compared to 34% last year, and 80% of clients said they'd like to access remote employment support in the future, giving us a clear indication that we should continue with remote delivery.<sup>5</sup>

3 [The impact of Covid-19 on the support needs of refugees and people of refugee background – One year later, \(March 2021\), Breaking Barriers](#)

4 Internal survey on face to face and remote delivery, completed by 185 clients.

5 Internal survey on face to face and remote delivery, completed by 185 clients.

## Our support

We've experienced a high demand for our services from refugees and people of refugee background since 2015, and as a result of this, and from investing in our infrastructure and working with businesses to develop bespoke recruitment pathways for refugee employment, we've been able to expand our services rapidly.

This expansion slowed in FY 20 and 21 due to Covid-19, which led to very reduced delivery in the last and first quarter of the past two financial years respectively.

Nevertheless, the number of clients supported each quarter has continued to increase and we have increased the depth of our services through new programmes and initiatives, such as BB grants and the introduction of digital skills support.

The reduced labour market resulting from Covid-19 restrictions has led to fewer clients achieving an outcome than in previous years.

### From June 2020 – May 2021:

- 462 people of refugee background accessed our services. 41% were new enrolments, 47% were continuing to receive support from the previous financial year, 12% had re-engaged in our services
- 133 accessed our education programme
- 133 accessed one or more of our 33 corporate partner workshops
- 78% actively engaged in our services.

# 94%

**94% of clients were satisfied or very satisfied with the support we provided to them**



**The best thing about Breaking Barriers is they don't allow you to work alone. They work with you every step of the way – Kemi**



### How we supported our clients:

- Clients received an average of 7.6 hours of employment support <sup>6</sup>
- Clients on the education programme on average participated in 7.5 hours of classes
- 145 clients received one-to-one digital technology support within one or more of their appointments.

### Overall we delivered:

- 2,867 hours of one-to-one employment support
- 1,443 hours of education classes
- 630 hours of corporate workshops and training.

### All with the support of:

- 293 highly skilled volunteers who delivered 3,145 hours of support.

### And:

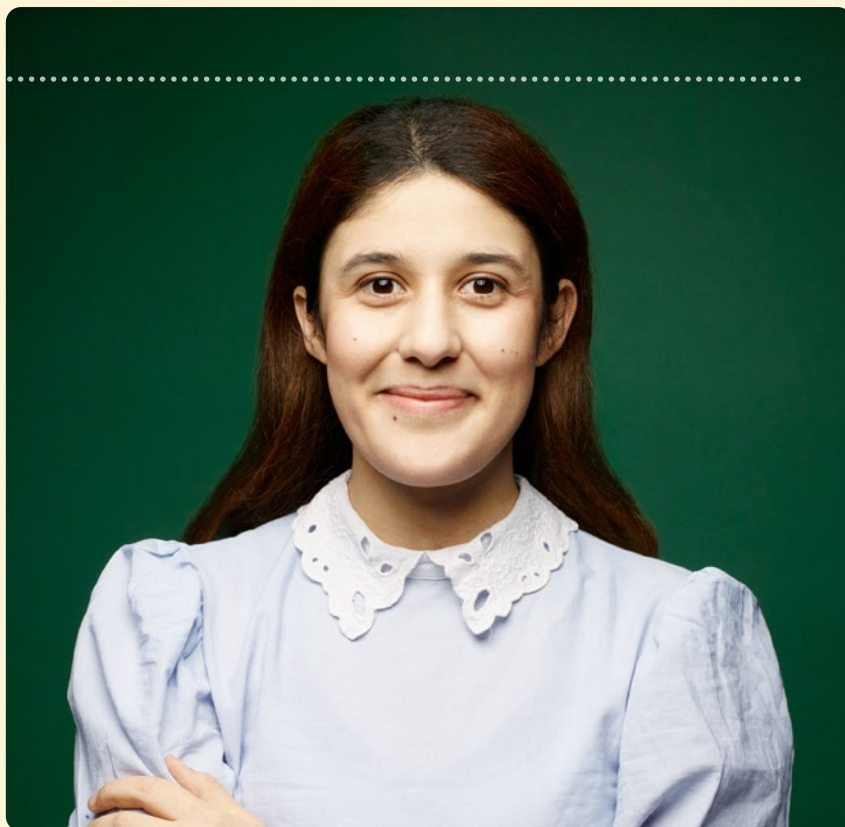
- 94% of clients were satisfied or very satisfied with the support we provided to them.

<sup>6</sup> Employment support includes IAGs, mentoring, informational interviews, workshops, external training (short), BB meetings.



## Pinar's story

**Pinar was a Breaking Barriers client who participated in the Leave Home, Save Lives photography exhibition, which celebrated the contributions of people of refugee background who worked on the front line during the pandemic.**



I remember people talked about Coronavirus since the beginning of January, but it came to the UK around March. At first, I thought that I was going to lose my job. I thought that if there's a lockdown, I can't go out — and if I can't go to work, then that means I will be unemployed. And so I thought that I could be made redundant. But I just kept working.

My manager took the decision that we could work from home for a short time. We started doing everything virtually. I work in recruitment HR for a care company. I contact our candidates to see if they need to complete online training and practical skills training and I respond to their emails if they have any queries.

After a while we had to return to the office to give PPE to our carers. Travelling to work, most of the time I was alone on the bus during the lockdown. There was no one around me. It would be nice if people noticed that what we are doing is not an easy thing.

I have learned how to deal with problems during these times. We are living in such a difficult world; anything can happen, and no one could have imagined this current situation would happen two years ago.

I never had a chance to work in Turkey. I graduated in 2019 and straightaway came to the UK. I did my internship in Human Resources for a non-profit organisation that

helps children. Starting my working life in a different country with a totally different environment and learning a new language has been a challenge.

I normally don't tell people that I am a refugee and prefer if my colleagues don't know. I think some people have quite a bad impression of refugees and asylum seekers in their minds, and that automatically will have a negative image towards me. That's why I keep it a secret as much as I can.

When you work as a refugee, many people don't even know that you have the right to work in the UK. It would be nice if people understood our rights more.

**As told to Breaking Barriers in Nov 2020.**

## Our clients

One of the strengths of our clients is that they are incredibly diverse and come from a variety of backgrounds. This year we supported clients from 55 different countries, 89% of clients were BAME/Global majority ethnicities, 45% were female, 7% had a disability, and 6% were gay, lesbian or bisexual.<sup>7</sup>

### All have skills to bring to the UK economy:

- 47% have completed higher education
- 40% have good to advanced English
- 57% have 4+ years of work experience.

### However, they also face many barriers to integration:

- 58% have never worked in the UK
- 54% have no immediate family in the UK
- 24% have mental health concerns
- 19% are homeless<sup>8</sup>
- 68% have been unemployed for over a year.<sup>9</sup>

## Achieving outcomes

At Breaking Barriers, our employment and integration advisers work one-to-one with our clients on developing their skills, knowledge, and confidence to progress towards their employment goals. When someone finds a job, enters education or training, or takes up a volunteering role, we call it an outcome.

**184 employment, education, training, and volunteering outcomes were achieved overall**

**184**



**68%**

**68% of clients have been unemployed for over a year**



### Employment, education, training and volunteering outcomes:

- 28% of all clients entered employment, education, training or volunteering
- 19% of clients achieved multiple employment goals in FY 21
- 184 employment, education, training, and volunteering outcomes were achieved overall, this included nine job starts with one or more of our corporate partners

### Outcomes by type:

- 46% employment<sup>10</sup>
- 48% training/education
- 6% volunteering

We saw a large increase in the proportion of training and education outcomes – 48% in FY 21 compared to 32% in FY 20. This was to be expected given the challenges of the labour market.

<sup>7</sup> For comparison, only 2.7% of the UK population identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual in 2019 – see [Sexual orientation, UK - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

<sup>8</sup> Broad government definition

<sup>9</sup> Excludes clients who received their status within a year prior to enrolment as unemployment time is not counted beyond the date status is received. Nearly all clients were unemployed for a significant period of time before receiving refugee status in the UK as asylum seekers cannot work in the UK and many refugee camps and host communities do not allow refugees to work.

<sup>10</sup> Includes apprenticeships, paid internships/work placements, new employment, changing employment and promotions.

People at all stages of their employment journey access our services. For those further away from the job market and those already in employment, the biggest impact we can have is often on self-perceptions and knowledge of life in the UK. These impacts have the potential to benefit people throughout their lives and last way beyond achieving that first employment goal, and help them to build the foundation for lifelong success.

- 92% of clients are more motivated to reach their goals
- 88% are more confident that they will reach their goals
- 80% think their chances of finding a job have improved.



“

**Without Breaking Barriers’ support, a lot of things would not have happened in my life. – Abdulrahman**

”

## Impact of our partnerships

We are passionate about the role the private sector can play in supporting refugees into meaningful employment. Our partners offer funding, expertise and opportunities for our clients in the form of workshops, mentoring, paid work placements and permanent jobs.

We work with companies of all sizes to develop bespoke shared-value partnerships and activities that work towards the goals of the organisation, employees, customers and community.

**88% of clients are more confident that they will reach their goals**

**88%**



### This year:

- 26 corporate partners directly supported Breaking Barriers clients
- Overall, there were 133 workshop attendees and 9 clients started work placements with one of our partners
- 17 corporate partners supported our clients through work opportunities and training.

**Utilising the skills of our corporate partners through employability workshops had a huge impact on our clients. Of clients attending our workshops:**

- 92% said they improved their professional skills
- 87% said they increased their confidence in meeting their goals
- 87% said that they improved their knowledge of UK work culture.

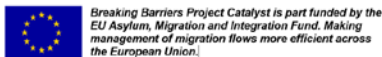
We also use our workshops to raise awareness in the corporate world of the barriers that refugees face. Workshops were highly successful in this regard, with 90% of corporate volunteers at our workshops saying that the experience improved their understanding of the needs of people of a refugee background.

In addition, our workshops proved beneficial for employee engagement – 88% of corporate volunteers attending workshops said that the experience increased their pride in working for their employer, and 100% of participants said they would recommend the experience to a friend.

## With thanks

We are grateful to our donors, supporters, partners and those who prefer to remain anonymous, for their support which has made our success possible.

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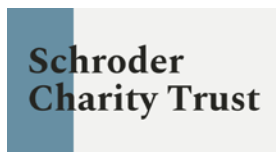
EQ foundation

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Loan Syndicate Manager's Forum

London Community Response Fund

SWIRE CHARITABLE TRUST



Mears Group

Peter Stebbings Memorial Charity



The Sir Jules Thorn Charitable Trust

WeWork

## Awais' story

**Awais Ahmad did a six month placement at Grant Thornton and is now employed full-time as a Audit Associate in the TMT (technology, media and telecom) London Audit team. He shared his story with us in June 2021, as part of Refugee Week and to launch the Fuse network.**



Before my placement, I hadn't spoken with British people at length. Nor had I worked in a large company. I didn't understand the little things about British working culture, like business language or having coffee with colleagues.

When my case worker at Breaking Barriers recommended I apply for a work placement at Grant Thornton, it was risky, but too good an opportunity to miss. I gave up a permanent job, which wasn't fulfilling my potential. Instead, I wanted a role where I could apply my ACCA qualification and build upon six months' experience as an accountant.

It was a real culture shock and sometimes I questioned whether I would last the whole six months, but when I asked for support, Grant Thornton and Breaking Barriers were so helpful and patient.

Gradually, I built enough confidence to speak up more, take extra responsibility and greater risks. Work placements like this are rare, so I worked hard and put myself under pressure to perform. Thankfully, my efforts and contribution were noticed, which led to an offer of a role with the firm and my life changed forever.

I feel I belong now. I'm more settled and can begin dreaming about the future in a way I couldn't before. I'm proud that, in such a competitive environment where businesses can pick and choose talent, Grant Thornton embraces talent from diverse backgrounds. I want to encourage other businesses to look beyond the usual approach to recruitment.

## About Breaking Barriers

Breaking Barriers supports refugees and people of refugee background in London to acquire the knowledge, confidence and experience they need to secure stable and fulfilling jobs.

We offer bespoke, intensive and flexible employment support to enable refugees to rebuild their lives in the UK.

We also give a central role to businesses in the UK, involving them directly in finding employment solutions and providing support that gets refugees into work.



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[Facebook](#)



[Twitter](#)

[breaking-barriers.co.uk](http://breaking-barriers.co.uk)



**BREAKING  
BARRIERS**

*Integrating refugees through employment.*