



Breaking Barriers

Meaningful employment
for refugees



Impact report 2021-2022

Our vision

We're Breaking Barriers so every refugee can access meaningful employment and build a new life.

Our mission

We welcome refugees into meaningful employment with advice, experience, and education. We believe in the power of responsible business to change society for the better through our innovative partnerships.

Our values

Mission-led

We put refugees first in everything we do. We listen and respond. We act with integrity. We're focussed on impact.



Welcoming

We welcome people of all backgrounds with an open mind. We will make everybody feel comfortable working with us every step of the way. We treat everybody fairly. We champion diversity, equality, and inclusion.



Entrepreneurial

We believe in the entrepreneurial spirit of every individual to build a better life. We believe in the power of responsible businesses to achieve social change. We're brave and bold enough to give new things a go. We're driven by making a lasting impact.



Collaborative

We believe in the power of teamwork and partnerships. We work collaboratively with colleagues to find creative solutions for the greater good. We're proud to share our expertise and knowledge with partners to further our positive impact.



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Foreword

A message from our Chair and CEO

Breaking Barriers is now in its seventh year of operation, and we've grown from a small group of people sat around a kitchen table to a £3 million organisation employing nearly 70 people, working with hundreds of volunteers across three major cities, and most importantly we've supported over 1,800 refugees and people of refugee background since our inception.

We're in the final year of our three-year strategy and it's exciting to see in this report that we've made considerable progress towards meeting the goals we set in 2020 (pre-pandemic):

1. provide the most effective and inclusive support model in the sector,
2. increase our impact by expanding our services,
3. continue to improve and refine our organisational infrastructure,
4. diversify the impact of our corporate partner offering,
5. continue to increase and diversify income, and
6. develop our position as experts within the sector.

We want to take a moment to celebrate this achievement and praise our team of staff and volunteers who work tirelessly to support refugees into meaningful employment every day.

However, it would be remiss of us not to recognise that the external environment we're working in continues to challenge us humanitarially, politically, socially, and economically. In this period alone we've seen Afghan and Ukrainian refugees forced to flee in their thousands, lives uprooted by war and persecution. It's devastating to think of these communities and many more that need our support.

What has been bolstering throughout these tough times is to see the public outpouring of support and welcome from individuals and businesses for those seeking safety in the UK, and we've been able to forge new relationships that will mean we can better respond to the growing and urgent need for our services.

We are now looking ahead and planning our vision and strategy for 2030 and what scaling our organisation looks like to meet the need for high quality employment, education, and training support for refugees nationally.

Breaking Barriers is committed as ever to ensuring refugees can access meaningful employment and build a new life. We want to thank everyone who has supported us this year and we look forward to continuing our work together.

Matt Powell, CEO and Founder

James Newell, Chair of Trustees



Diversity and inclusion

At Breaking Barriers, we have continued to prioritise our work on diversity and inclusion by scaling up the work across the year

The Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) Group continued to support organisational-wide initiatives. They continued a quarterly newsletter and regular communications, for example, highlighting festivals such as Ramadan, Easter, and Passover and supporting our Breaking Barriers ‘Ramadan Greetings’ campaign. The group also outlined the importance of feedback and shared resources to support the personal development of staff at Breaking Barriers.

The D&I group also prepared a survey to gather statistics on protected characteristics of the organisation which is completed yearly and enables us to monitor and evaluate the diversity of our organisation but also makes clear plans for progression for those from global majority and refugee backgrounds.

As part of an increased focus on D&I through a new role of Head of People, Projects, and Strategy – the recruitment process was updated to be more consistent and include inclusive resources for hiring managers. We also developed guidance for hiring managers on how to hire individuals that were previous clients of Breaking Barriers.

We’re committed as ever to being an organisation that celebrates its diverse team and clients, as well as actively tackling racism and inequality, and have committed to delivering a full D&I strategy with a focus on how we better include people from a refugee background in our work next year.

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Sherehan's story

My name is Sherehan and before I came to the UK I used to live with my family in Cairo and work as a human rights lawyer. I moved to Europe to do my Masters in 2016.

While I was studying in London, the Egyptian Government began to target individuals working in human rights and arrested some of my colleagues because of our work, some people I know were given a death sentence and my manager was given a ten-year prison sentence. I was advised not to return and to seek asylum in the UK. This was such a hard decision as I had to leave behind my family, my career, and my whole life.

Once I completed my studies and achieved my refugee status, I found it incredibly hard to find a job matching my skills and previous career. You apply for thousands of jobs and hear nothing from them. Trying to understand how the UK job market works is very difficult, add to that, the cost of transferring qualifications here with no access to jobs or low-paid jobs makes things even harder. For example, to practice as a qualified solicitor here in the UK I need to do specialised study and exams to be able to practice, and it costs thousands, which isn't easy to afford with the retail jobs I had.

When I found Breaking Barriers, they helped me in so many ways. I had personalised mentoring sessions that helped me to improve my application and interview skills. My caseworker helped me to arrange sessions with professional volunteers to advise on what is needed for the jobs I was applying for. Also, I attended different employability workshops related to my experience and field helping to improve my knowledge of the job market in my sector.



Through Breaking Barriers partnership with Barbri, I was able to access a course that is helping me to prepare for the SQE exam, which will enable me to qualify as a solicitor here in the UK.

To gain the experience I needed, I was then able to get a work placement as a litigation paralegal through Breaking Barriers Academy programme. It was an amazing experience that helped me to use my knowledge in human rights and environmental issues and helped me to network with other solicitors and professionals in the legal field.

I'm now employed at the law firm in a permanent full-time paralegal role, and it feels incredible to see how far I have come. Breaking Barriers has helped me to feel part of a community and less alone, and I look forward to rebuilding my future and being able to help other refugees, which has always been my passion.

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Our strategy

In 2019 we developed an ambitious three-year strategy (2020–2023) with six strategic objectives that would enable us to have a clear focus for the future of the charity and meet the needs of our clients. This impact report covers the midway point of the strategy, so we wanted to review our progress and share the highlights of this year.

Our objectives:

1 Provide the most inclusive and effective support model in the sector, increasing the accessibility of our services whilst maintaining a high-level of impact for all clients no matter where they are on their employment journey.

This year we achieved our 1,000th outcome in August 2021 and since then our clients have gone on to achieve nearly 200 additional outcomes across employment, education, training, and volunteering. After nearly two years of remote-only support because of Covid, we were able to reintroduce face-to-face appointments for the clients who wanted it. Whilst only 14% of clients requested this type of interaction, we recognise its importance in making our service as accessible and inclusive as possible.

2 Increasing our impact through the expansion of our services, making our services more geographically inclusive, and developing programmes that take a holistic and long-term approach to ensuring our clients achieve their employment goals.

We are thrilled that this year we expanded our programmes outside of London into Greater Manchester and Birmingham. Enabled by the first Refugee Social Impact Bond in the UK, we started receiving client referrals and recruited our first regional volunteers in January 2022, and by the end of May 2022 had enrolled over 100 clients offering them our bespoke employment and education support.

We introduced a structured employment foundations training programme to increase client engagement. We found that our clients understanding of employment skills and how they valued our support increased if we set out sharing knowledge and learning new skills in structured way. Working towards a milestone of completing the course gave our clients a sense of achievement and increased their likelihood of securing employment.



3 Continue to improve and refine our organisational infrastructure using learnings and technological innovations to create lean processes and a fruitful working environment, whilst maintaining a level of flexibility that leads to enterprising and efficient programming.

In the past year our team has grown by 30%, reflecting not only our expansion into new cities but also investment in our capacity to deliver on our ambitions. To meet the needs of this growing workforce we've created a People team and invested in training for all staff and managers on topics such as unconscious bias, how to have difficult conversations etc. We also invested in an employee engagement platform which gives our staff additional benefits such as access to a 24/7 employee assistance programme, as well as discounts and recognition.

4 Diversify the impact of the corporate partner offering to increase the range of opportunities available and the proportion of people from refugee backgrounds benefitting from them.

We are passionate about the role the private sector can play in supporting refugees into meaningful employment and in Refugee Week 2021 we launched our business network, Fuse, with the aim of uniting businesses in a common goal to improve the lives of refugees through meaningful and sustainable employment.

In August 2021 thousands were forced to flee Afghanistan as the Taliban took power. Aware of the urgent and growing need in the UK we launched Business Behind Refugees to harness the power of the business community to respond to international and humanitarian crises. The demand and urgency only grew in February 2022 when the war in Ukraine began. Over 100 businesses got in touch, and we're now actively working with over 50 companies that provide financial and pro-bono support, hiring opportunities through direct job opportunities, work placements, and bespoke recruitment pathways, alongside skills-based volunteering such as mentoring, and employability skills workshops.

5 Continue to increase and diversify our income and improve infrastructure to ensure we can support more clients and continue meeting the needs of refugees and individuals of refugee background over the long term.

Over the past year, we have worked hard to develop diverse and stable income streams, and to strengthen our organisational infrastructure to meet the growing needs of refugees across the UK. Our income increased by more than 30% from the previous year, including a doubling of income from our Philanthropic partners including charitable trusts and foundations, and major donors. We also continued the development of our work with statutory sources, including acting as a delivery partner for the first refugee-focused social impact bond in the UK.

Working closely with key partners, we invested in crucial infrastructure roles and projects in the organisation that have enabled our regional growth and will enable further growth in the future. We are grateful to our donors and funders for the trust they place in us by funding these essential aspects that will form the basis of our support for refugees across the whole UK.



6 Develop our position as experts in the sector to maintain the highest quality of support and raise awareness of the needs of refugees and those of refugee background among stakeholders.

We know that alongside meaningful employment the path to successful integration and meaningful employment is one affected by many interconnected issues, and it requires a joined-up, evidence-led response not just by ourselves, but with our corporate partners and funders, our sector partners, government, and the wider population who support refugee causes. Our thought-leadership strategy, developed and launched in December 2021, focusses on the many ways in which we can achieve this, from working in partnership with the business community, to sharing our knowledge with the sector, and changing existing narratives about refugees for the public and media.

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Loujean's story

I'm Loujean, a Syrian refugee who came to the UK after the war in Syria in 2014. During my time in the UK, I studied Media, Public Relations and Advertising at the University of Westminster in London, and I'm currently employed at a well-renowned public relations agency in London.

Breaking Barriers has supported me a lot on my journey, especially when applying for jobs, CV writing and preparing and practising for job interviews. It's worth mentioning Breaking Barriers introduced me to mentors in similar career fields, who gave me useful information and who were very helpful when it came to pursuing my career. Thanks to the support I've been receiving, I hope to upskill myself, and eventually be promoted within my career and be a role model in the media and PR world.

Adjusting to the cultural norms of a new country, as well as learning the local language isn't easy. That's why I would encourage

employers to be patient with employees from refugee backgrounds and give them the time and space to learn. Employers should also remember that refugees can bring a variety of skills to companies, one of which includes different perspectives and way of looking at things.

I'm proud of who I am and I'm proud to share my story. I think of it as one way to empower other refugees to not give up despite the difficulties and barriers they might face. Asking for help is a very powerful thing, and it's great to have charities in the UK who are working hard to create opportunities for people of refugee background. I heard about Breaking Barriers from a friend who told me they could help me with university and job applications.

If anyone reading this is of a refugee background and feels like they are not getting anywhere, don't give up! Keep chasing your dreams and remind yourself that one day you will be where you need to be.



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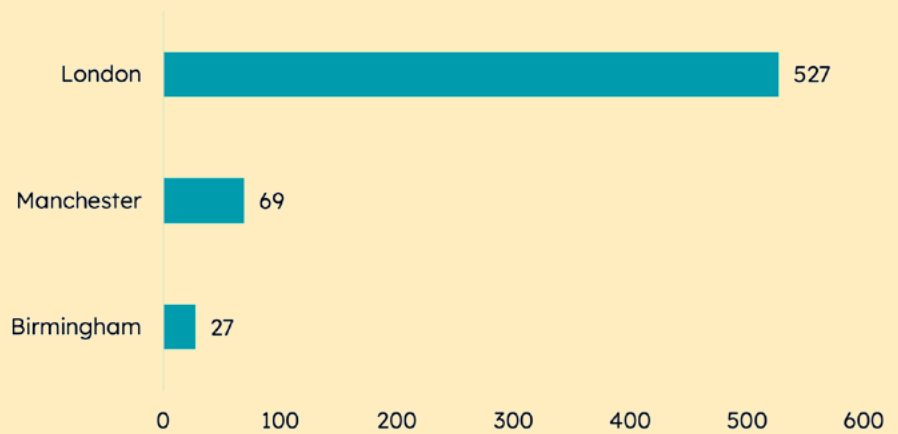
Our impact

Our reach

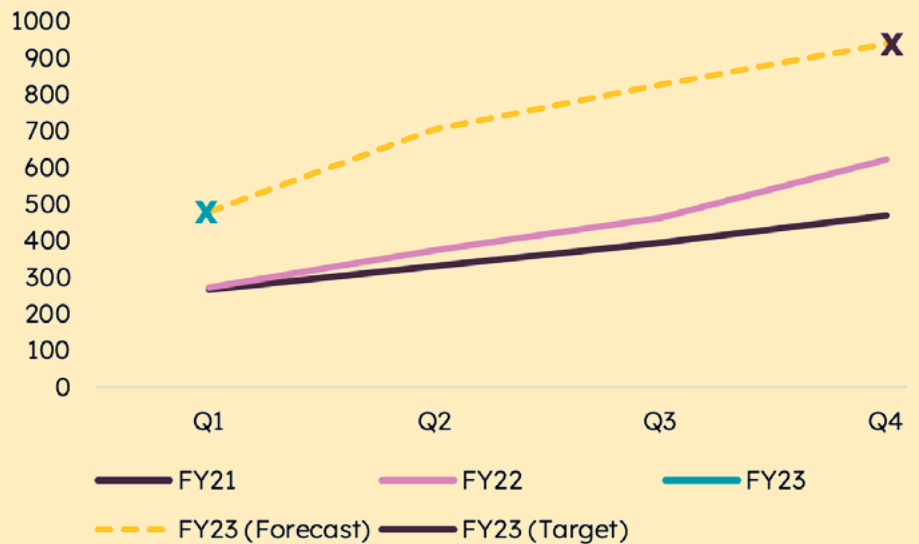
During the year we supported **623 clients**, of whom 314 were newly enrolled between June 2021 and May 2022. 223 clients completed their support with Breaking Barriers during the year. This is the greatest number of clients we have ever supported in a one-year period.

For the first time, this year we supported clients outside London, starting our delivery in Birmingham and Greater Manchester in January 2022. We supported 96 clients in these two cities, with the remainder in London.

Clients supported per region



Cumulative clients supported per quarter by financial year



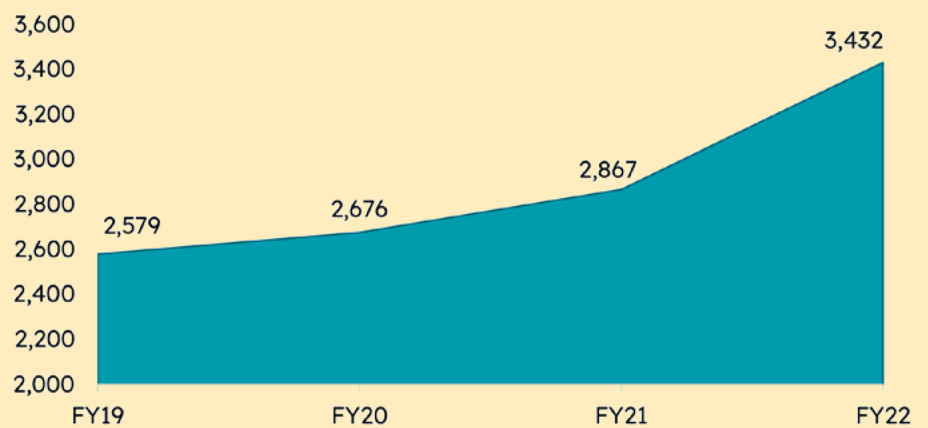
Our support for clients

During the year, Breaking Barriers provided these clients with over **3,432 hours** of one-to-one employment support (through Information, Advice and Guidance sessions, or IAGs). This is a 20% increase on last year and 27% higher than average for the last three years. We also delivered **401 education classes** (covering English language, IT and employability skills) and **31 workshops** with volunteers from our corporate partners. More than a quarter of clients (167) attended at least one education class, and one in five (132) attended at least one workshop.

We could not have provided this level of support without our roster of excellent volunteers. During the year, **288 volunteers** supported our clients, including 156 volunteers from corporate

partners, 52 English language teachers, 17 operations volunteers, and 63 volunteers who provided almost 430 hours of one-to-one support for clients in IAGs.

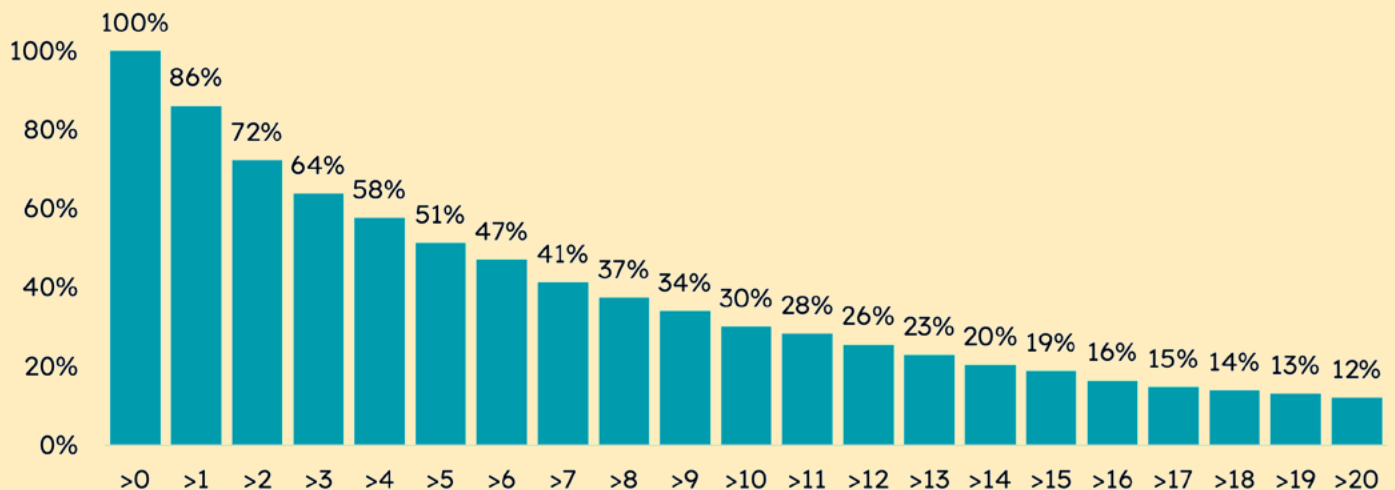
One-to-one support hours delivered per year



On average, clients received **nine hours of support** from Breaking Barriers during the year, of which six were one-to-one employment support sessions (IAGs), with the remainder being education classes and workshops. However,

the average is affected by more than one in ten clients completing more than 20 hours of support. Most clients received six hours of support or less during the year.

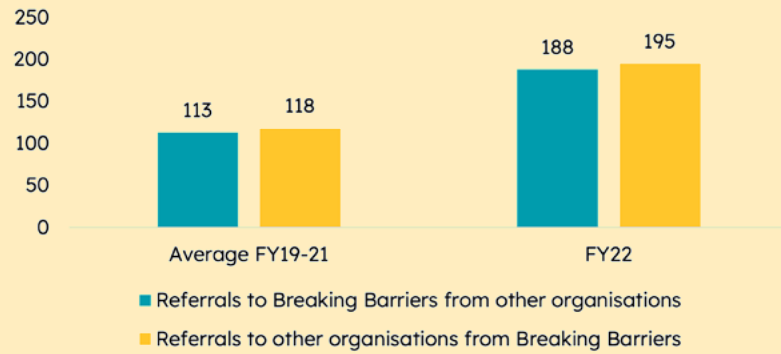
Clients by total number of support hours received



Collaboration

Breaking Barriers also provided support in closer collaboration with other organisations than ever before. More clients were referred to us by other organisations than at any point in the last three years, and, similarly, we also referred more of our clients to receive additional support from other organisations than ever before.

Clients referred to and from Breaking Barriers



Face-to-face support

Finally, this year allowed us to return to providing face-to-face support to clients for the first time since March 2020. Over one in ten clients (14%) opted to receive face-to-face support. In total, 219 hours of support were delivered face-to-face this year.

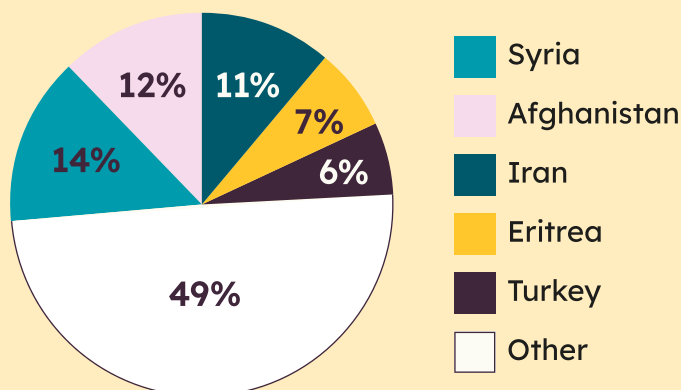
When surveyed, a sample of clients who attended face-to-face sessions said that they found them more beneficial in helping them achieve their goals. The majority of these clients also said that they felt “much closer” to their advisor as a result of seeing them face-to-face and cited improved emotional wellbeing as a reason for preferring face-to-face support.

In addition, face-to-face sessions were more accessible for clients with lower levels of digital skills, who benefitted a great deal from being able to share a device with their advisor. There is early evidence that clients who attended face to face sessions were more likely to report that Breaking Barriers “improved” (or “greatly improved”) their ability to use digital technology in daily life.

Our clients

Clients came from **63 different countries of origin**, highlighting the diversity of their experiences and the troubling range of circumstances that can lead to someone being forcibly displaced. The five most common countries of origin among our clients were Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Eritrea, and Turkey. However, collectively, these top five still only account for half of the clients we supported, with the remainder from elsewhere.

Clients by country of origin

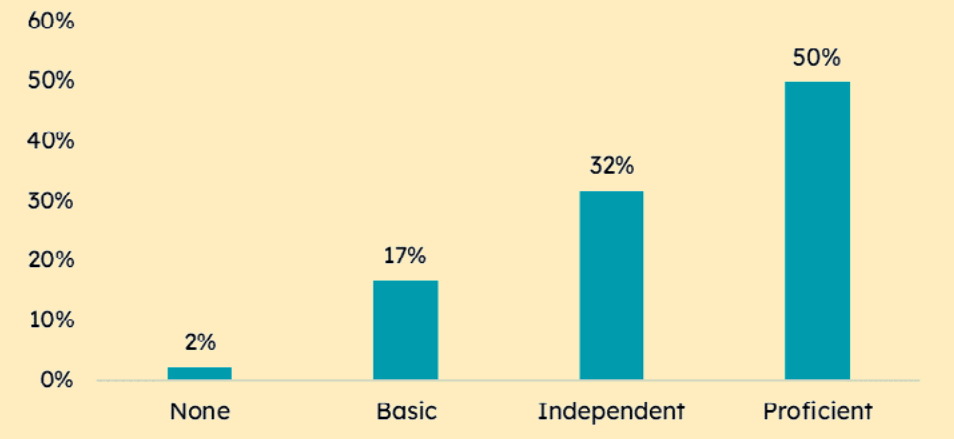


The majority of all clients (50%) identified as Muslim, and a further 32% of clients identified as Christian, with the remaining 18% identifying with other religions or no religion.

45% of clients identified as women, and 6% of clients identified as either gay, lesbian, or bisexual (nearly double the proportion for the UK population as a whole).

Most clients had quite good levels of English language, with 82% able to speak English at least independently, and 50% of clients ranked as proficient in English.

Clients by English language-speaking ability



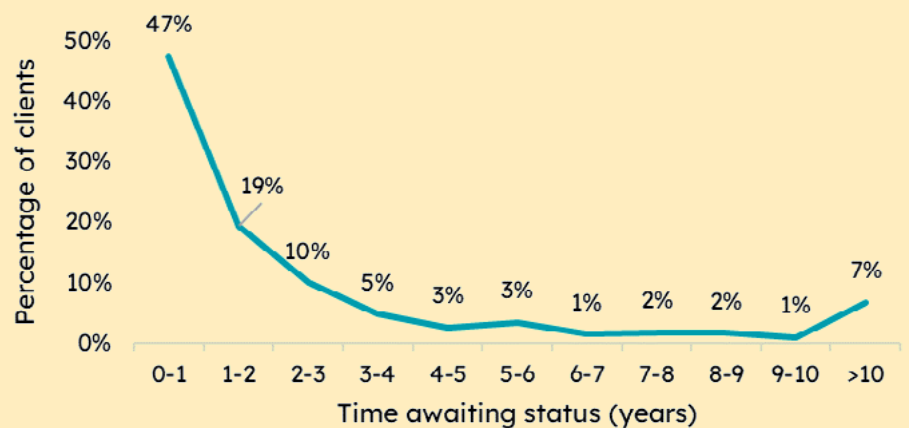
Similarly, most clients were well-educated. 50% of all clients had an undergraduate degree, and 20% had a postgraduate degree. However, **82% of clients were unemployed** when they enrolled with Breaking Barriers, showing how even the most highly educated clients face significant barriers to finding work.

More than a quarter of clients **(26%) reported having a mental health problem**, and, worryingly, a quarter of clients (24%) were formally homeless when they enrolled with Breaking Barriers. 50% of all clients also had an immediate family with them in the UK when they enrolled.

Another disturbing characteristic of our clients' experience was how long some of them had spent awaiting their refugee status. While nearly half either received status within a year (or arrived with refugee status as part of a resettlement scheme), one in ten clients were waiting more than 8 years for refugee

status. As those awaiting the outcome of asylum applications are prohibited from working in almost all circumstances, and must survive on very limited funding (at the time of writing, £5.84 per day), this is a deeply distressing length of time for clients to have had to wait for these decisions.

Clients by duration of time awaiting refugee status after UK arrival

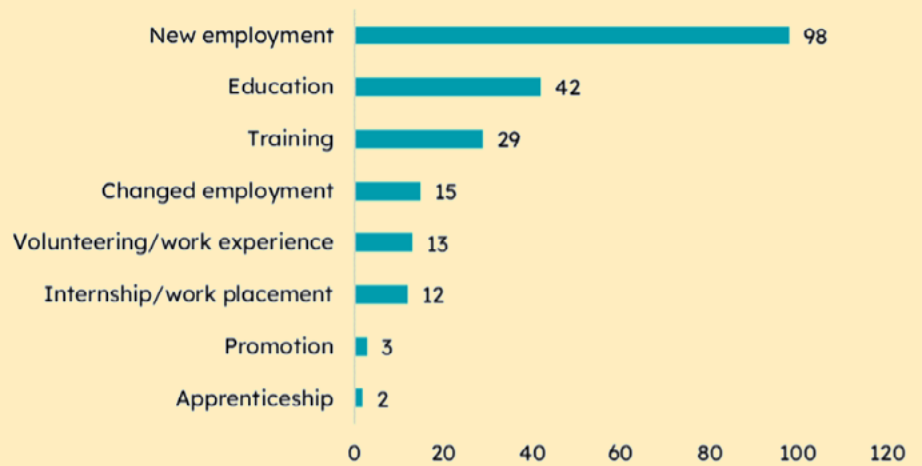


Client outcomes

During the year, 111 clients entered employment – with 103 clients ending a period of unemployment, and 16 changing employers or winning promotions. Between them, these clients started 130 new jobs in the year. In addition, 76 clients started a qualification, training course or volunteering opportunity that helped them progress toward their career goals.

We refer to clients progressing towards their goals in this way as clients ‘achieving outcomes’. During the year, 168 clients achieved an outcome.

Number of outcomes achieved by category

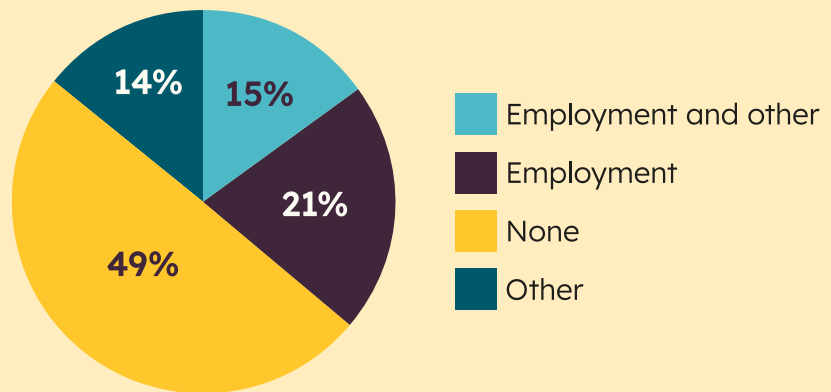


However, this headline outcome rate can be misleading, as many clients were enrolled toward the end of the financial year, and these clients have not had sufficient time to achieve an outcome.

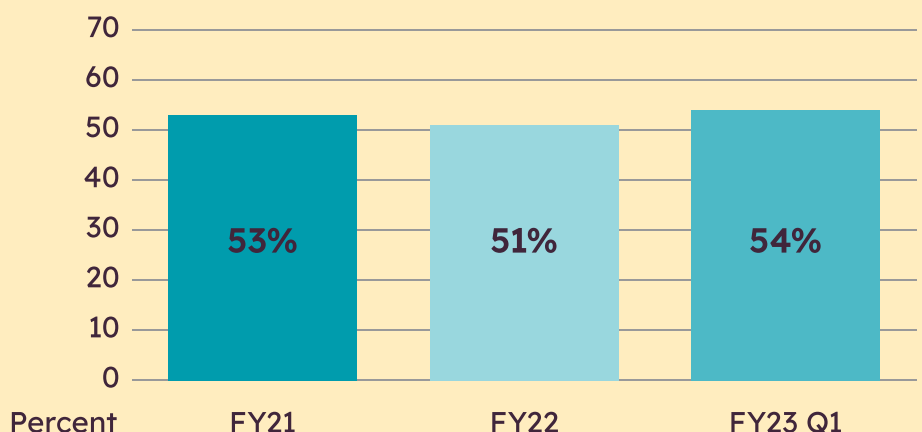
To get a more accurate impression of clients’ success, we can look at clients’ achievements at the point when they stopped receiving support from Breaking Barriers. During the year, 223 clients completed their support with Breaking Barriers. Of these, **51% (113 clients) achieved an outcome** while being supported by Breaking Barriers, and **36% entered employment**.

The proportion of clients who achieved an outcome having completed support in FY22 is fairly consistent with comparable figures for FY21 (53%) and FY23 to date (54%).

Outcome of clients completing support



Outcome rate for clients completing support



In addition to hard outcomes, we ask clients to self-assess their progress through regular impact surveys. These surveys revealed that following their support from Breaking Barriers:

- **93% of clients** had improved or greatly improved their understanding of what is needed to do well in their preferred sector
- **92% of clients** felt more or much more motivated to meet their goals
- **90% of clients** felt more or much more confident in meeting their goals
- **84% of clients** felt they had improved or greatly improved their understanding of UK workplace culture
- **84% of clients** reported better or much better chances of finding a job role
- **82% of clients** felt more or much more confident during job interviews
- **77% of clients** had improved or greatly improved their ability to use technology in daily life

The impact of our corporate partnerships

This year, 24 of our corporate partners directly supported Breaking Barriers' clients.

130 clients attended workshops with our corporate partners, and six clients started new job roles with them. 13 corporate partners supported clients through work opportunities and training.

Surveys sent to clients after they attended workshops with our corporate partners showed the impact that these events had:

- **97% of clients** said they improved their professional skills
- **91% of clients** said they increased their confidence in meeting their goals
- **87% said** they improved their knowledge of UK work culture

In addition, 95% of the corporate volunteers attending these workshops said that the experience improved their understanding of the needs of people from a refugee background.

84% also said that the event increased their pride in working for their employer, and 100% said they would recommend the experience to a friend.

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Kizzy's story

“An apprenticeship is five years. That’s longer than most degrees, so it was really important to me to commit to the right company.

I cancelled final interviews at two of the “Big Four” accountancy firms as soon as Grant Thornton offered me an apprenticeship. The deciding factor was their partnership with Breaking Barriers because it showed that no matter who you are or where you come from, they will genuinely support you.

My parents didn’t go to university, and English was not their first language. I didn’t know about

Breaking Barriers beforehand, but I have lots of refugee friends who weren’t given opportunities because of their status, so it’s a big deal to me that a top accountancy firm would support anyone from any background.

I’ve been volunteering at all the workshops so far, helping refugees to build employment skills and doing mini-interview practices with them. It has been amazing to talk to such different people and still find similarities. I have learned that no matter our differences, there is always something that ties us together.”



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Looking ahead to 2023 and beyond

Our aim for the next financial year is to continue our growth and consolidate the growth of the previous year.

Our programmatic priority is to increase our reach by approximately 40%, from supporting circa. 600 clients to nearly 1,000. We aim to do this by focussing on securing our positions in our newest regions of Greater Manchester and Birmingham, whilst continuing to improve and innovate our service within London.

We are also futureproofing our programmes by standardising them so that we can scale them nationally and reach more refugees and people of refugee backgrounds that need our support.

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.



ALLEN & OVERY



Breaking Barriers Project Catalyst is part funded by the EU Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund. Making management of migration flows more efficient across the European Union.

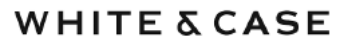


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Breaking Barriers Project Rebuilding Refugees Lives through Work London is part funded by the European Social Fund.





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