



# Breaking Barriers

Meaningful employment  
for refugees

## Impact report

2024-2025



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# Foreword

**It's astonishing how much can happen in a year.**

For many of the people we serve at Breaking Barriers – refugees building new lives from the ground up – a year can mean the chance to find safety, stability, and take the first steps towards a new beginning. For others, it's defined by reaching a huge milestone, as they secure meaningful employment and start an exciting, if challenging, new chapter.



**Ciara Devlin,**  
CEO

For the team at Breaking Barriers, the 2024-25 financial year has been no less momentous. In April, we marked our 10th anniversary and reflected on our journey from a start-up established by Matt Powell, with the support of a small, visionary group of donors, to a national charity. Over the past decade, our mission to support refugees into meaningful employment has remained a constant, and we are so proud of our staff, volunteers, funders, donors and partners who have supported 3,848 people during this time.

2024-25 has been our most impactful year yet. We supported 1,450 individuals - the highest number in any single year and a 16% increase on 2023-24. But we know that these aren't just numbers. They represent transformed lives, unlocked potential, and strengthened futures.

Change was a defining theme, as we responded to a world in flux. We welcomed RefuAid's award-winning Language and Re-accreditation Programmes into our service offering.

This was a bold decision amid a difficult funding climate. But it is one that not only strengthened our expertise and reach, but reflects our unwavering commitment to holistic, high-quality support for refugees and asylum seekers.

Beyond our organisation, the shifting political and economic climate also presented new challenges and opportunities. We refreshed our Theory of Change and began redesigning our service model to meet growing need in a sustainable way, with sharper ambitions to reach more people in more places across the UK.

Now, as we look ahead, we do so with hope. Not because the path is easy, but because the people we walk alongside show us what can be overcome with belief, determination and collaboration.

Thank you to everyone who has been part of our journey so far. We can't wait to see what the next year holds for us.



**Alba Chiara Lamberti,**  
Chair of the Board of Trustees

# About Us

## 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 focused 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.



# Why we exist

Refugees flee their homes in fear. From war, persecution, and violence. With yet more hardship waiting in the UK. A new country and language. Stigma and suspicion.

While they wait for a decision on their asylum application, most people are not permitted to work, cannot choose where they live, and typically rely on government grants of £7 per day for food, sanitation, and clothing.

After they are granted humanitarian status, refugees still face many obstacles to gaining employment and building new lives. These can include:

- Language barriers
- Gaps on CVs due to lengthy asylum processes
- Lack of UK work experience
- Non-recognition of qualifications
- Limited understanding of the UK job market
- No local professional network
- Cultural differences
- Public misconceptions and discrimination

Refugees in the UK are almost three times more likely to be unemployed than people born here. And often, they are left to face these barriers alone.

We think that's wrong. And it's why we exist.

Our team at Breaking Barriers, alongside more than 100 volunteers, provides one-to-one advice and guidance, education, and training to support refugees.

We also work with partners and employers to build employability skills and UK experience, provide education and employment opportunities for refugees, and promote inclusive, equitable hiring practices and workplaces.

Together we break down barriers, so that every refugee will be welcomed into meaningful employment. Because we know that employment is about more than just a job.

For refugees, meaningful work doesn't just offer financial independence. It can restore a sense of identity, purpose and belonging. It can help people who've lost everything to connect with their new communities and build new lives. And, at the same time, employers can benefit from welcoming talented new colleagues with skills, experience and potential for innovation that can impact us all for the better.



# Diversity, equity and inclusion

Our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) embodies two of our core organisational values – Welcoming and Collaborative. In 2024-25, we built on previous activity to embed DEI even further:

## Workplace diversity

We exceeded targets for diversifying our staff profile in age, LGBTQ+, disability, and ethnicity at senior levels. We are working towards increasing ethnic diversity at all levels.

## DEI Working Group

Our well-established DEI working group:

- Fed into an internal policy review to ensure inclusivity
- Led regular sessions to encourage staff involvement in DEI activities
- Arranged events to celebrate occasions such as Race Equality Week and Mental Health Awareness Week
- Organised ‘Deepening Awareness’ sessions on global issues to enhance staff knowledge of the challenges faced by our refugee clients and colleagues

## Staff support

- We achieved [Pregnant Then Screwed](#) accreditation to support our pregnancy, maternity and paternity policies
- We recruited and trained more volunteer Mental Health First Aiders who provide valuable wellbeing support across the organisation



Anna Kingsley-Nyindah, Director of People

## Lived Experience

- We updated and relaunched our Lived Experience Strategy, placing greater emphasis on internal support and career progression, to assist staff from refugee backgrounds or with experience of seeking sanctuary or forced migration. To help us meet these objectives, we also improved our employee data and started a programme to offer targeted learning and development for staff with lived experience
- The voice of diversity and lived experience continued to feature prominently in our work through the Lived Experience Panel, with increasing influence on strategy, operations and amplifying our presence externally

As we continue to embed DEI initiatives across the organisation, we are always learning and evolving our processes. We also remain committed to advocating for DEI and the benefits of diverse workplaces among businesses and employers.

# Lived Experience Panel

The Lived Experience Panel (LEP) continues to be a driving force for inclusive change at Breaking Barriers.

## Changing how we work

In 2024-25, LEP members contributed more than 400 hours of paid consultancy, embedding their professional and lived experience knowledge across service design, recruitment, partnerships, fundraising, communications and strategic development. The consultants:

- Contributed to our new Theory of Change
- Participated in the DEI working group
- Influenced our DEI strategy
- Designed interview processes to support inclusive recruitment
- Participated in shortlisting and interview panels for new staff and LEP members
- Ensured practices reflected our values and centred clients' voices
- Enhanced internal communications
- Informed HR policy
- Guided staff learning on forced displacement and cultural sensitivity

## Representing Breaking Barriers externally

LEP members supported campaigns, contributed to fundraising applications, and represented Breaking Barriers at sector events and roundtables alongside our business and charity partners.

Notably, 100% of staff who worked with the LEP reported satisfaction with their involvement, praising the panel's professionalism and insight.

The LEP's work is about more than representation – it is about co-creation, shared leadership, and shifting power. We are proud to keep building on the panel's valuable contribution together.



Nanou, Lived Experience Consultant

## Nanou, Lived Experience Consultant, 2024-25

66 Being part of the Lived Experience Panel at Breaking Barriers has been a powerful leadership journey. One of my proudest moments was interviewing the current and former CEOs of Breaking Barriers, where I brought forward the voices of refugee communities. I also spoke directly with business partners, advocating for fairer employment opportunities and more culturally responsive practices.

These experiences deepened my confidence and positioned me as a changemaker within the organisation. Collaborating with my Breaking Barriers colleagues and panel members, I've helped shape services and policies that reflect real needs.

It's been an honour to lead with purpose and ensure lived experience is at the heart of everything Breaking Barriers does.

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Find out more about our [Lived Experience Consultants](#)

# Mika's story



66 I am from Azerbaijan and came to the UK on 21 February, 2016. I still remember that day. Isn't it strange remembering the dates while other people do not even remember their anniversaries?

As a refugee, I faced many challenges – navigating a new system while dealing with language barriers, homelessness, and the responsibility of caring for my disabled mother. It was overwhelming at times, especially not knowing where to turn for support.

For example, when I was granted refugee status, my mother and I became homeless and had to rely on the local council. At the same time, I was trying to continue my education while being my mother's full-time carer.

Despite these challenges, I stayed focused on my goals. I pushed through university and got my degree, and I became passionate about helping others in similar situations.

The support I received from Breaking Barriers has been such an important part of my journey.

While I was still studying, my caseworker was Anisa – she was absolutely lovely and incredibly supportive. After I'd graduated, Abdul became my new caseworker, and he's been even more supportive. I felt quite lost, unsure of what direction to take. We started having regular online check-ins every two weeks. He listened patiently to all my worries – and even my rants!

Thanks to Abdul's support and encouragement, I got a full-time role at the Refugee and Migrant Centre as an adviser and became a Lived Experience Consultant at Breaking Barriers. It's been an amazing journey with Breaking Barriers, and I'm so grateful for everything.

Meaningful employment is about being in a place where I feel I truly belong – working alongside people who share the same mindset and being part of a compassionate and understanding environment where my values are reflected in the work I do.

My ultimate goal is to become a lawyer. I know it's a long and challenging journey, but I'm committed and truly believe I'll achieve my dream. Step by step, I'm working towards building a career that reflects my passion for justice and helping others.

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# A decade of impact

During 2024-25, Breaking Barriers reached a significant milestone, as we marked our 10th anniversary.

In 2015 our founder, Matt Powell, launched Breaking Barriers' mission to support refugees into meaningful employment from his parents' kitchen table. From those modest but ambitious beginnings, we have since grown into a charity with national reach.

Our [Breaking Barriers: Building Futures](#) campaign began in April 2025, creating an opportunity to look back on a decade of our clients' achievements, and ahead to the future we want to see for refugees. It featured 10 of our clients, reflecting on their journey to meaningful employment, plus insights and highlights from 10 Breaking Barriers partners and long-term supporters.

# 10 years

## 3,848

clients supported across the UK between 2016-17 and 2024-25



## 1,920

clients have achieved

## 3,540

positive outcomes in employment, education and volunteering



## 1,558

employment outcomes

## 1,663

education and training outcomes

## 319

volunteering outcomes

## 1,435

clients have participated in education programmes



## 279

group recruitment and skills sessions hosted by

## 74

corporate partners



## 50%

of clients have achieved a positive outcome during their time enrolled with us



# 2024-25: A momentous year

In December 2024, Breaking Barriers integrated two successful programmes from partner charity, RefuAid, into our service offering:

**Language:** Working with English language teaching institutions across the country, this service offers refugees structured tuition to help them achieve a high level of English or gain the language qualifications they need to enter UK higher education or employment.

**Re-accreditation:** This programme provides expert guidance to help refugees who have international qualifications to achieve the certifications they require to re-enter their chosen field in the UK.

These two services joined our established **Employability Programme**, which provides support and training to help refugees identify, access and apply for workplace and education opportunities. It combines one-to-one advice, group recruitment and skills sessions led by our corporate partners, plus pathways that bring together refugees and employers to build knowledge and create opportunities in specific job sectors.

Each of these programmes tackles different barriers to employment, and in combination they allow us to offer tailored support to meet each of our clients' needs. Because every refugee's situation is unique. As are the skills, talents and experience that they can bring to workplaces across the UK.

We are also excited that the integration of the Language and Re-accreditation Programmes has further expanded Breaking Barriers' geographical reach. We continue to support clients from our hubs in London, Manchester, Birmingham and Glasgow. But our re-accreditation support is offered fully remotely to clients country-wide. And our language education partners provide both online and in-person courses across the UK.



Click to watch the joint CEO interview about the integration of the Language and Re-accreditation Programmes from RefuAid into Breaking Barriers

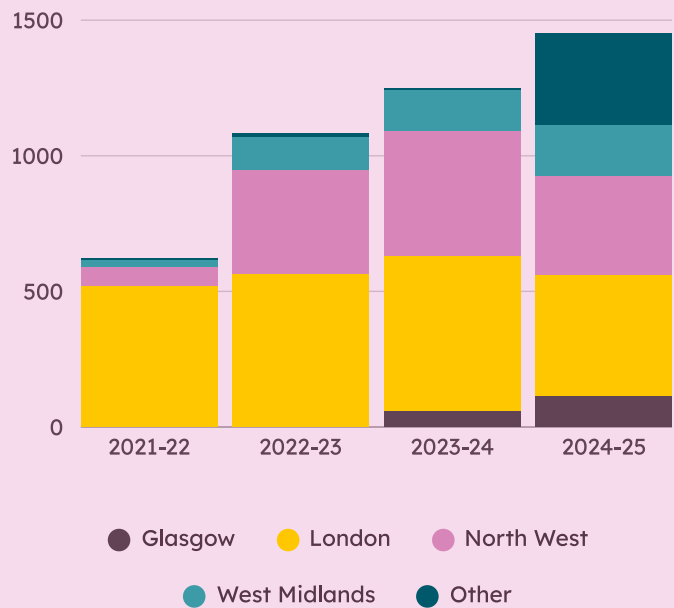


## Our year in numbers

Together, in 2024-25\*, our Employability, Language and Re-accreditation Programmes increased Breaking Barriers' impact and allowed us to reach more refugees, wherever they are in the country. 1,450 people benefitted from our support – the highest number in any year to date, and a 16% increase on 2023-24.

\*Our financial year runs from June to May.

Clients supported by location<sup>1</sup>




**1,450**  
clients supported -  
more than any  
previous year

+

**42%**  
of clients achieved outcomes  
**4%**  
higher than 2023-24


**269**  
new jobs started  
by clients



**904**  
positive outcomes  
achieved by  
**612** clients  
– the highest number  
of outcomes ever,  
and a  
**27%**  
increase on 2023-24



**90%**  
of clients reported an improved understanding of their  
preferred sector of work



**126**  
dedicated volunteers  
gave one-to-one  
employability support,  
mentoring or tutoring  
to clients



**41**  
group recruitment  
and skills sessions  
hosted by  
**29**  
corporate partners



**88%**  
of clients reported  
increased  
confidence in  
meeting their  
employment goals



<sup>1</sup> Client location is determined either by the Breaking Barriers hub through which they receive support, or their address, whichever is most appropriate.

## Esraa's story

66 I have a job and I'm studying for my master's degree.

People see that and think I'm successful. But I want to share the struggles I went through. So that anyone reading this is inspired to help refugees. Or, if you are a refugee, to show that you just have to keep working and waiting for your time.

I'm from Sudan. I have two degrees in computer science, and I worked as an ICT teacher for primary children. I'd worked since I'd graduated, I lived a good life, and I was very independent.

I arrived in the UK to study a master's degree in business analysis and consulting. However, war broke out in Sudan, my company was no longer able to sponsor my studies, and it was not safe for me to go home. In one moment, I went from excitement for my master's, to becoming a refugee. I lost everything.

I started to apply for jobs. It was so hard. Most companies didn't answer my applications. I had some interviews but I didn't get the jobs and they didn't give me any feedback, so I didn't know how to improve.



Then I came to Breaking Barriers and I met Safia, my Employment Adviser. We worked on my CV and cover letters. She also helped me with my interview skills. I went on courses and workshops with Breaking Barriers and their partners too.

Safia saw my potential and helped me gain the confidence to apply for jobs where I could develop my skills. I applied for a role as an Employer Engagement Officer and got an interview. This was good news! Breaking Barriers helped me to prepare and, 10 minutes after I left the interview, the manager called me and offered me the job.

I came to the UK to complete my master's, and that is still my primary goal. I began my course in September 2024, but I've continued working at the same time. I also hope to pass my driving test soon, and become fully independent again.

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# The people we work with

## Who are our clients?

Breaking Barriers supports people in the UK who've been granted refugee status or other humanitarian protection – such as those with visas under the 'Ukrainian Family' or 'Homes for Ukraine' schemes, and British National (Overseas) visa holders from Hong Kong.

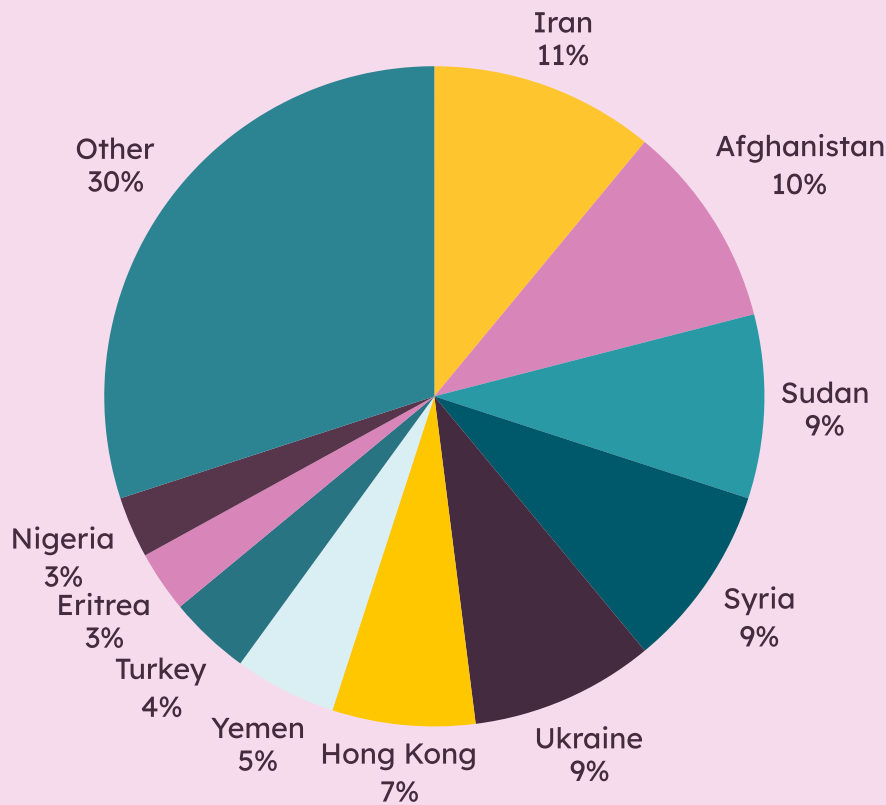
We also support, asylum seekers who have the right to work and, on our Language Programme, those who have the right to study in the UK.

Our clients have a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. Here is a snapshot of the people we supported in 2024-25.<sup>2</sup>

### Country of Origin

Our clients came from 76 countries, but almost half were from just five: Iran, Afghanistan, Sudan, Syria and Ukraine.

Top 10 countries of origin

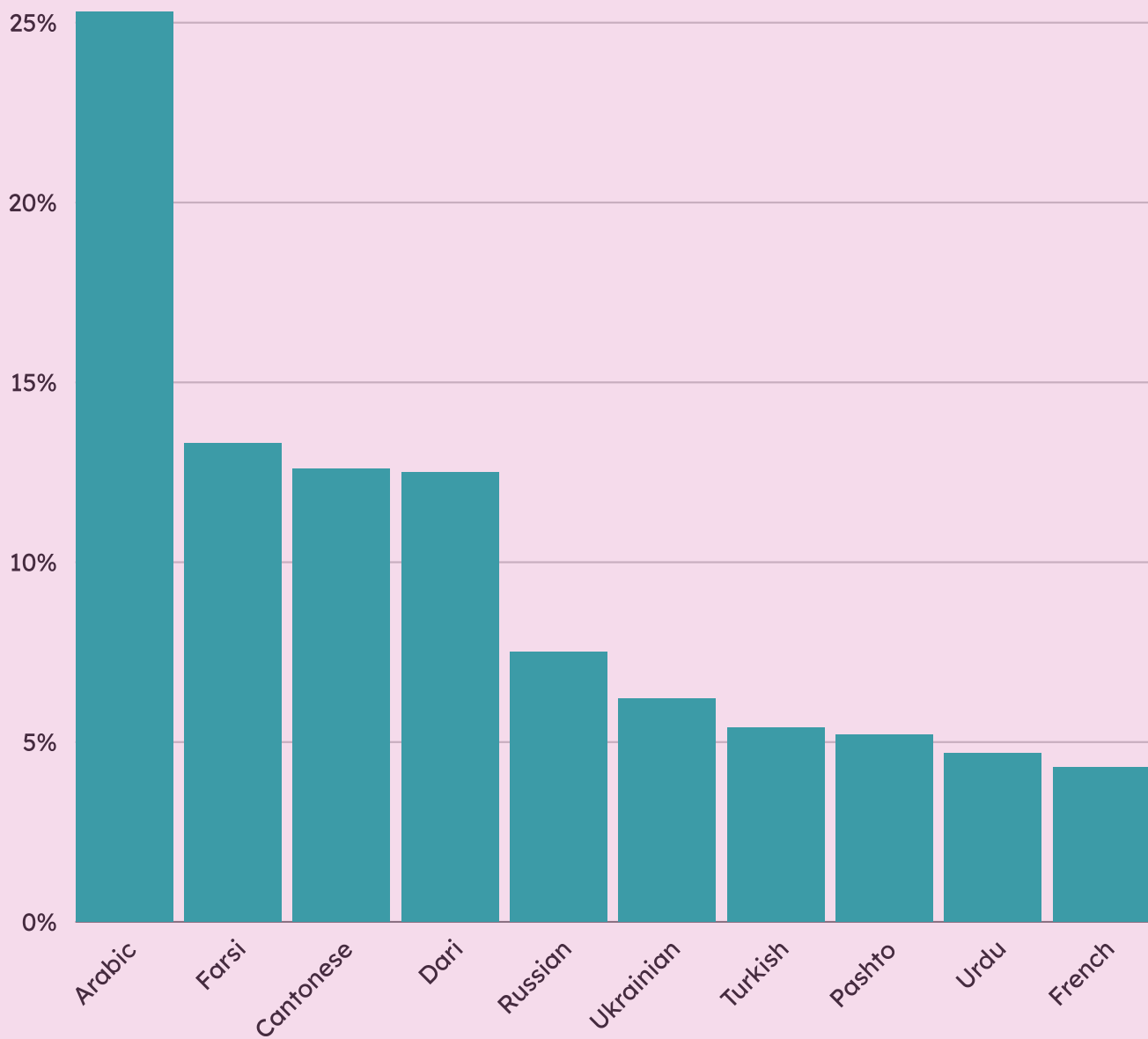


<sup>2</sup> The information collected about clients receiving employability support differs from that historically collected for the Language and Re-accreditation programmes integrated from RefuAid. Where specified, insights for 2024-25 relate to a sub-set of clients.

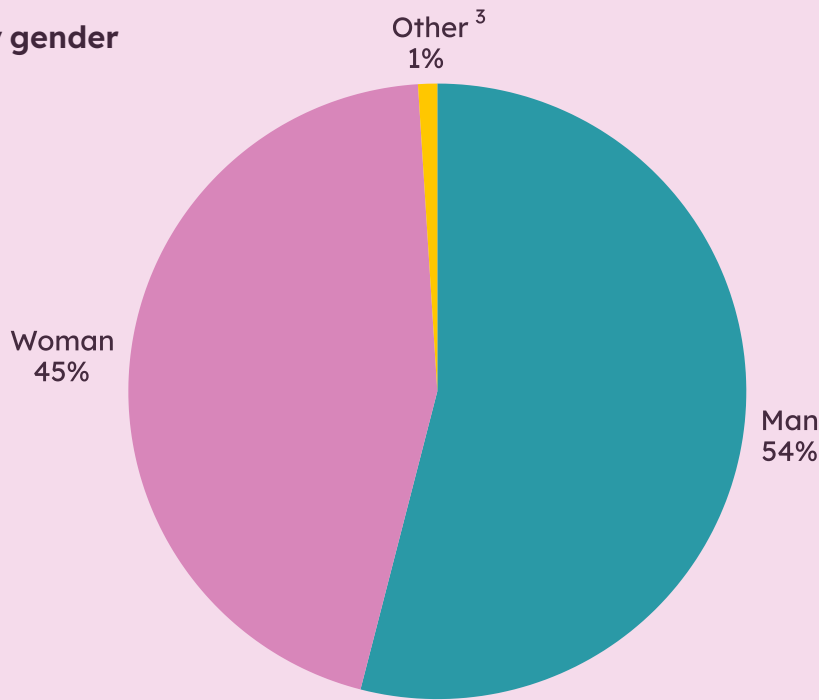
## Languages

More than 100 languages are spoken by clients on our Employability Programme, with the most common being Arabic, Farsi, Cantonese and Dari.

### Top 10 languages spoken by clients



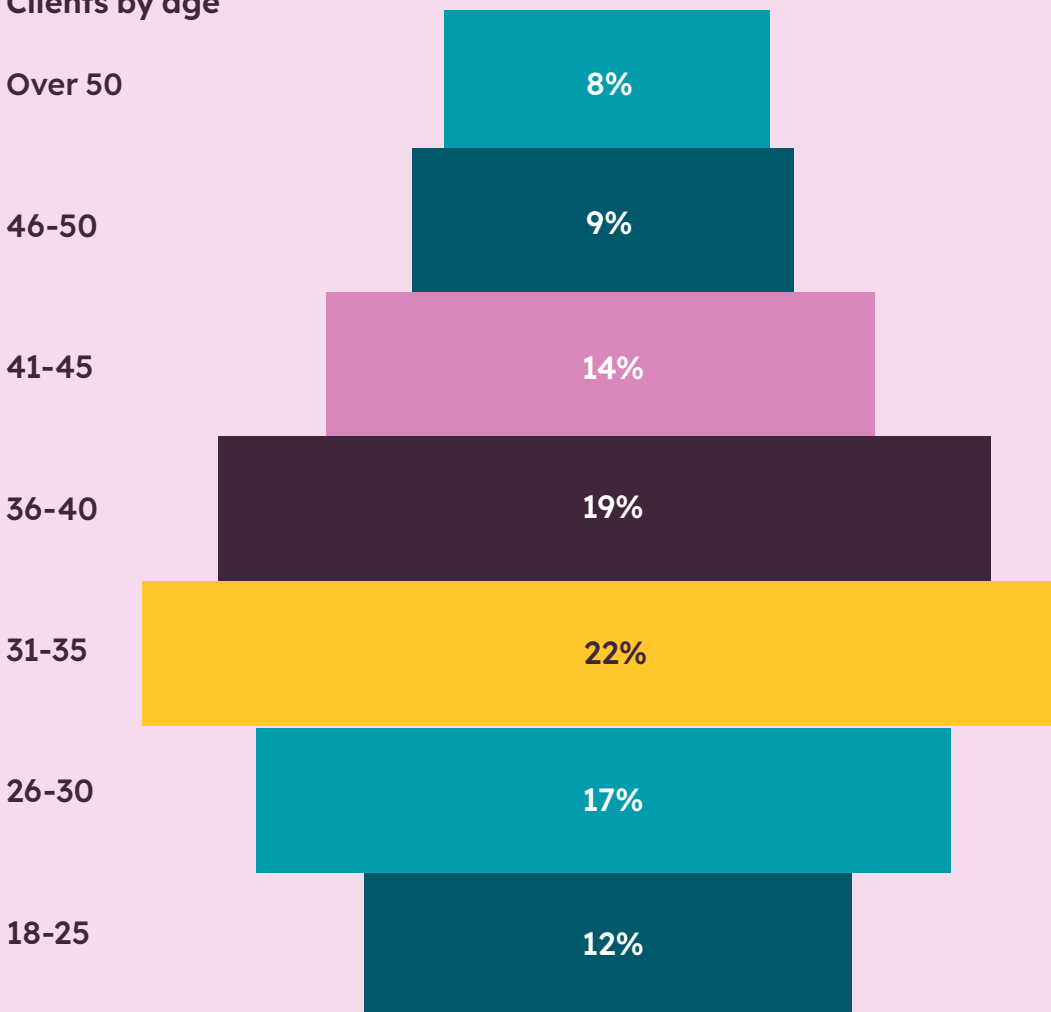
Clients by gender



Gender

54% of our clients identify as a man and 45% identify as a woman. This compares with 58% and 41% respectively in 2023-24.

Clients by age



Age

Our clients' ages range from 18 to 50+. Over two-thirds are aged 40 or under.

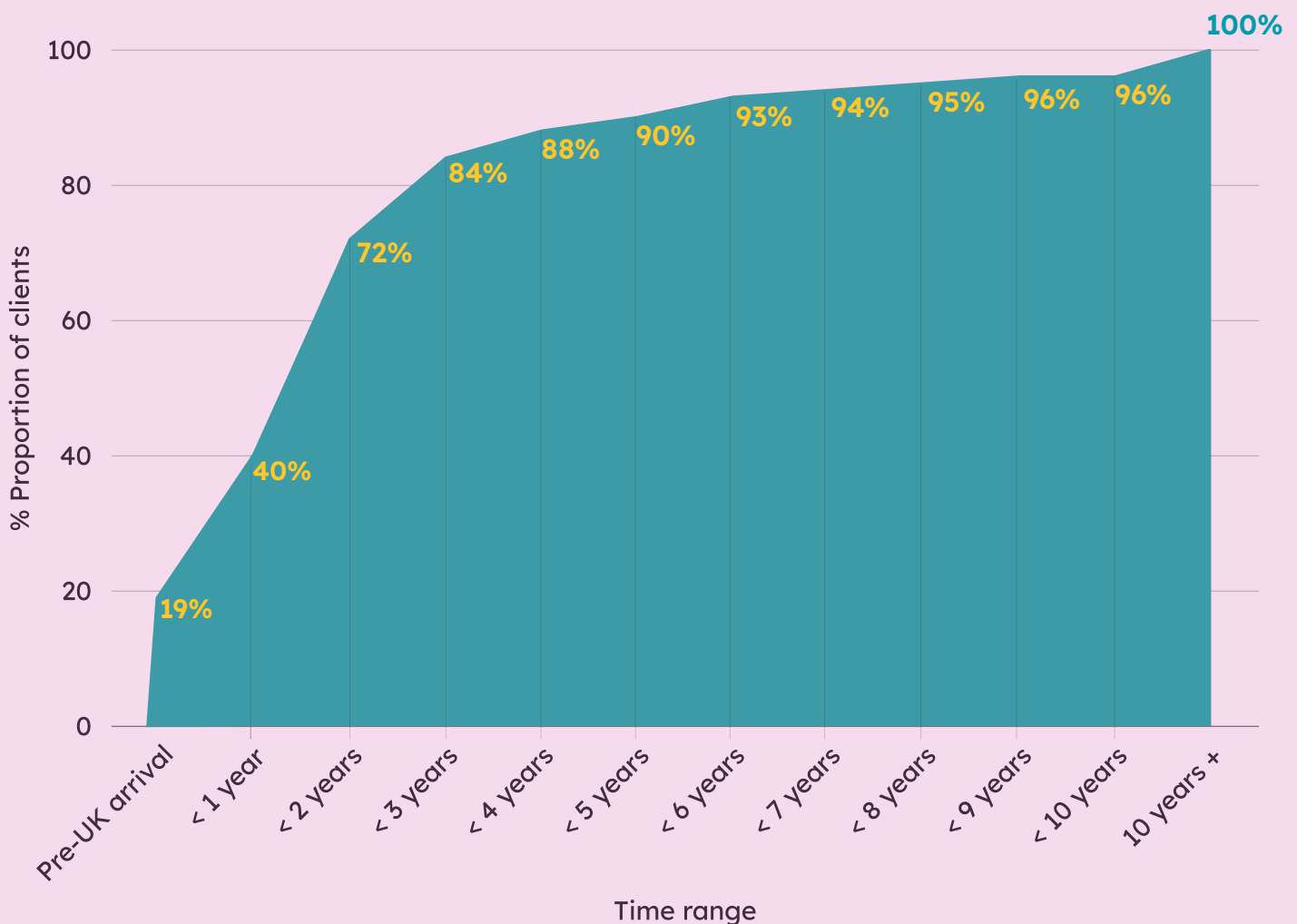
<sup>3</sup> 'Other' includes one non-binary client and where the client's gender is not known.

## Time waiting for refugee status

Our data indicates that more than a quarter of clients receiving our employability support in 2024-25 had waited for over two years to receive their refugee status. Some waited considerably longer – with 4% waiting 10 years or more.

Because most of our clients are only permitted to work after their asylum claim has been granted, many face lengthy gaps on their CVs and risk falling behind with the skills and advancements in their industries.

### Clients by time spent awaiting refugee status





## Rebecca, Employment Adviser

66 My caseload includes clients at different stages of their lives and in a range of circumstances. While it is rewarding to support those beginning their careers — helping them explore options and what excites them — it's equally inspiring to work with experienced clients who are retraining in a new industry or returning to a familiar one.

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## Education and qualifications

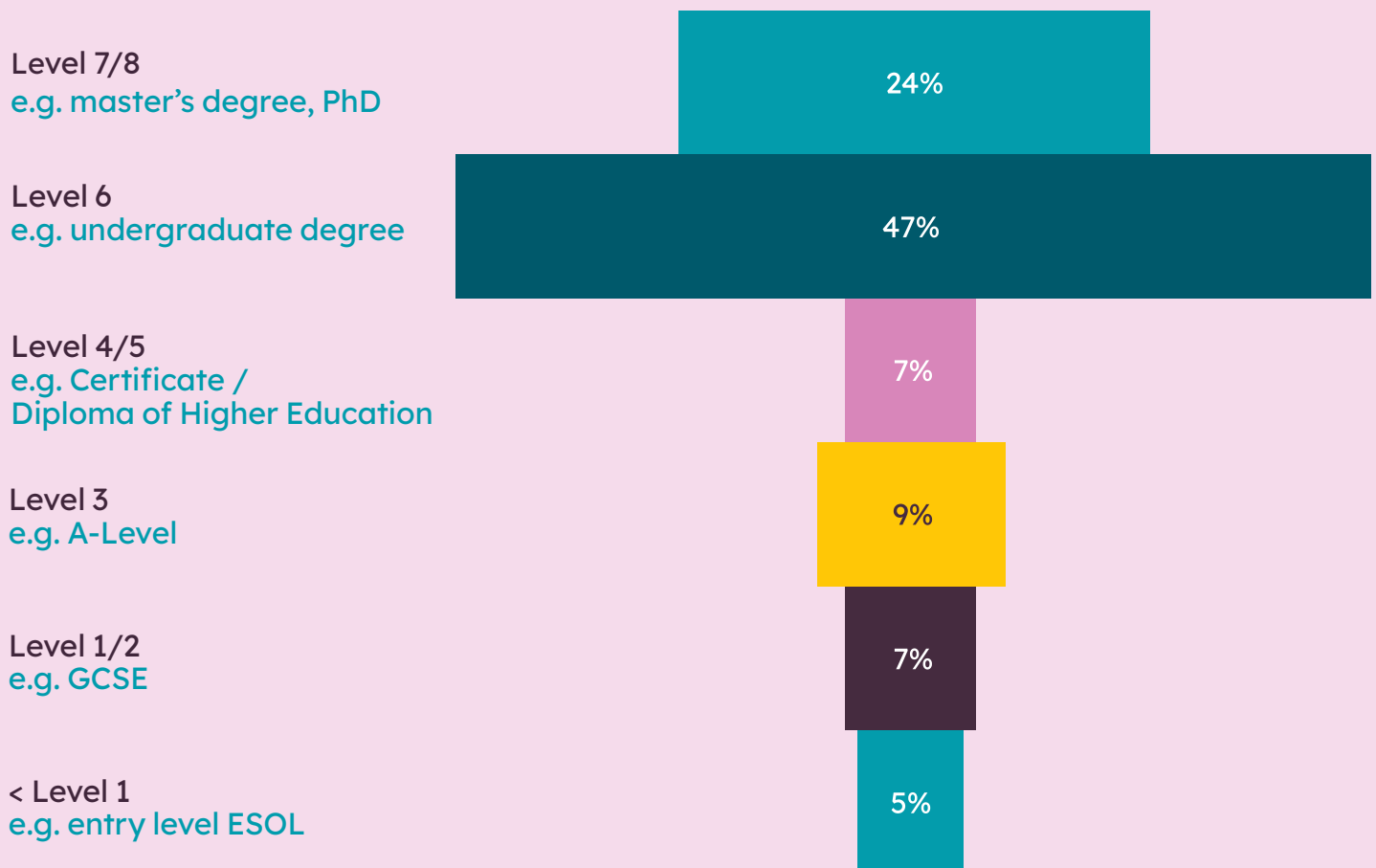
Most of our clients are highly educated. Our data indicates almost three-quarters (71%) of those supported in 2024-25 have at least an undergraduate degree or other Level 6 qualification, such as a Graduate Diploma. And 24% hold a master’s degree, PhD or other Level 7/8 qualification.

Overall, our clients have a higher level of education than the British public as a whole. 78% of clients have at least a Level 4 qualification (eg, Certificate/Diploma of Higher Education or equivalent), compared to 37% of the general public.

For more information on British Qualification Levels, visit:

<https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean>

### Highest level of client education



<sup>4</sup> Based on 2021 census data from the [Office for National Statistics](#) (for England & Wales) and the [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#), and 2022 census data from [Scotland’s Census](#). Census data is for residents aged 16 or above, so may understate education levels relative to Breaking Barriers clients, who are all aged 18+.

## English Language

Learning a new language is one of the biggest challenges many refugees face when they reach the UK.

Nearly 90% of the people we supported in 2024-25 were recorded as having good English speaking ability at enrolment. But complex language in recruitment or contracts can still create a barrier to employment. Whilst workplace jargon and unfamiliar communication styles can make jobs harder for those who are learning English.

Breaking Barriers works one-to-one with clients to help them navigate recruitment and onboarding processes. We also support corporate partners to make recruitment more accessible and open-up job opportunities to our clients. And we work with professional bodies to try to set inclusive recruitment standards across industries.

We also work alongside a network of over 160 language teaching institutions across the UK to address the fact that applicants for many jobs – and most higher education courses – must pass an English language test.

Preparing for and taking these tests can be time-consuming and expensive, often putting jobs or courses out of reach for refugees and asylum seekers. So, we connect clients with free, structured English tuition, and cover travel and exam costs, to help them achieve the qualifications they need to enter university or rejoin their previous profession.



## Work experience and employment status

Before enrolling with us, most of the people we supported in 2024-25 had substantial work experience abroad or in the UK. Our data indicates that two-thirds had at least three years' experience, while 30% had worked for 10 years or more.

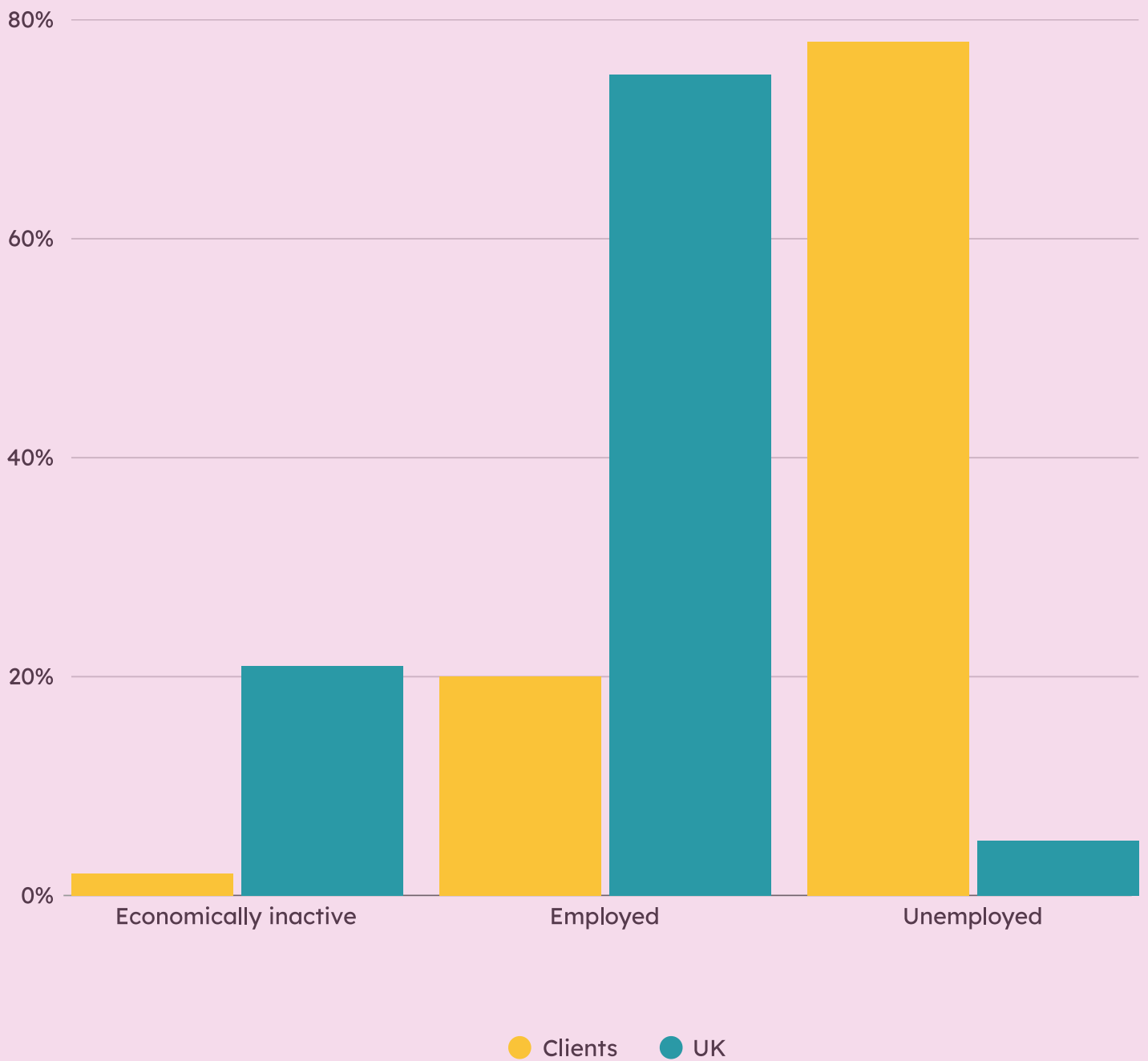
Despite high levels of education and experience, and four fifths having already started their job search, 78% of clients on our Employability Programme were unemployed when they enrolled with us. This compares to 5% of the UK population as a whole, and reflects the many challenges refugees face when looking for work in the UK.<sup>5</sup>

### Years of work experience at enrolment



<sup>5</sup> [Office for National Statistics Labour Market Overview July 2025](#)

### Clients' employment status at enrolment



## Labour market knowledge

One of the barriers between refugees and meaningful employment is understanding how UK recruitment processes and the labour market work.

When they enrolled, three quarters of clients on our Employability Programme felt they knew where to look for job opportunities, and over 70% had applied for jobs in the previous three months. But almost half of those who'd started their job search had never had a UK job interview, and nearly a third had been looking for work for at least a year.

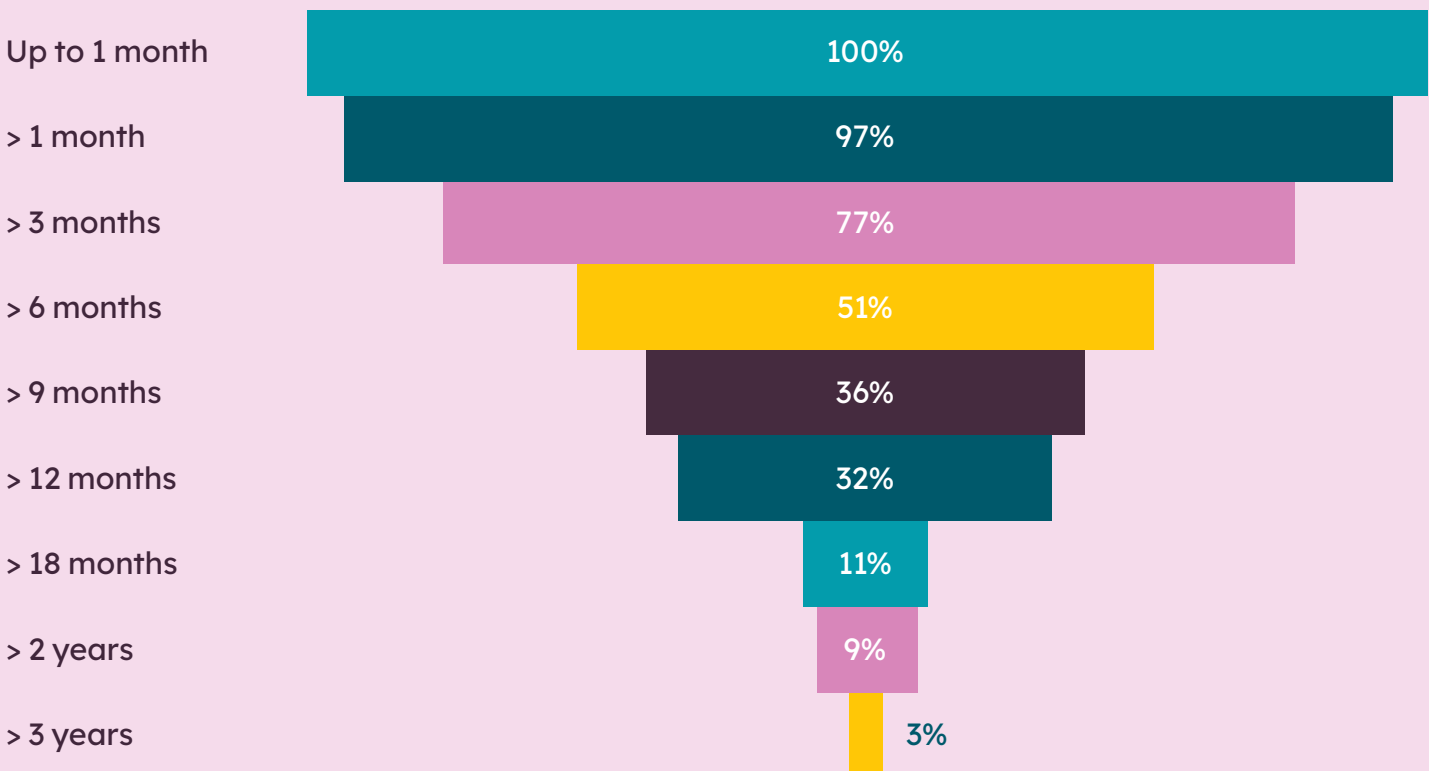
Our one-to-one employment advice, client workshops with corporate partners, and sector-specific training pathways can all help bridge the gaps in refugees' knowledge of the UK and improve their chances of success in job applications.



**87%**  
of employability clients had a CV when they enrolled, but only

**43%**  
felt confident about writing a cover letter

### Active job seekers: Time looking for work pre-enrolment



## Said, Employability Programme client

66 Before joining Breaking Barriers, I had attended a few interviews but was unsuccessful. At that time, I lacked confidence and wasn't sure how to approach job applications or interviews, especially since I had no work experience in the UK.

After joining Breaking Barriers, my confidence started to grow. I even began considering new career paths. Breaking Barriers helped me see different options and opened my mind to new opportunities. Even though I only attended one job club session, it gave me the knowledge and confidence I needed to move forward and prepare for interviews. During a one-to-one Zoom session, I practised answering interview questions, which really helped me prepare.

Shortly after that, I attended my first interview since joining Breaking Barriers, and I got the job! This experience showed me just how valuable the support from Breaking Barriers is. Sometimes, people just need a small spark to ignite their potential.

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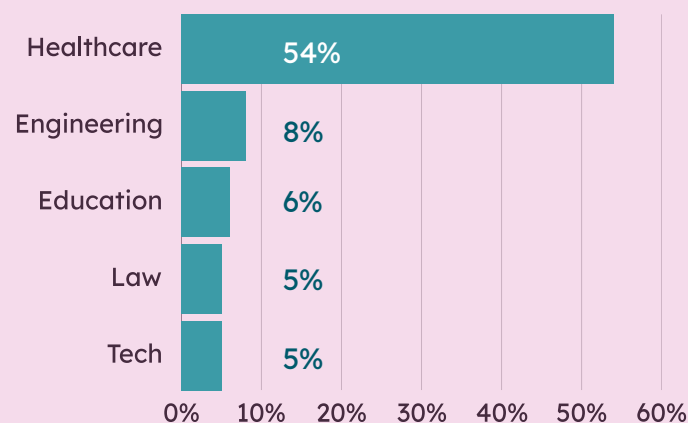
## Professions and job sectors

Clients join us with a wide variety of employment goals. For example, they may be seeking their first UK work experience, looking for a role where they can build their English skills, or trying to progress from insecure employment.

But many of our clients have a specific employment path in mind and need help either to access specific training or education, or to restart previous careers. These goals are a particular focus for our Language and Re-accreditation Programmes.

In 2024-25, our Language and Re-accreditation teams supported a diverse range of professionals, from doctors and teachers to electricians, pharmacists and even a Merchant Navy Officer. Healthcare was the most popular sector within these programmes - with over half of clients wanting to kickstart their UK career in this field.

### Top employment sectors for Language and Re-accreditation clients



## Interrelated challenges

The challenges and barriers faced by refugees are complex and interrelated. So, whilst we focus on refugee employment, we work alongside organisations with other expertise to extend the support for our clients. In particular, we refer clients to – and have clients referred to us by – organisations that provide support with housing and mental health.

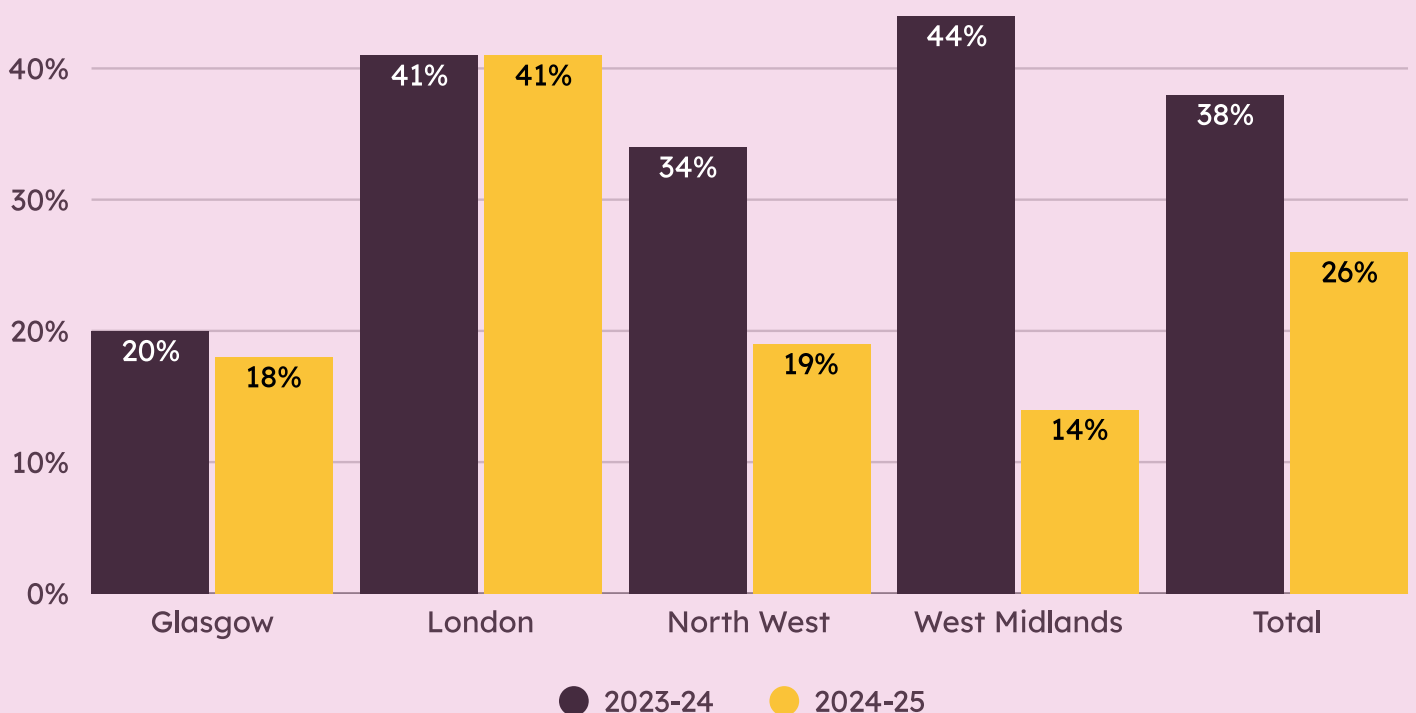
## Homelessness

Many of our clients struggle with homelessness and insecure housing.

The percentage of clients on our Employability Programme who were homeless at enrolment fell outside London in 2024-25. However, over a quarter were experiencing homelessness when they joined us. This creates many challenges and can affect people’s ability to find employment.

For example, clients without a secure home may not know how long they’ll be living in a particular area. They may not have access to WiFi, or a desk or table to sit at. And they may be in overcrowded or shared accommodation without a private space for online job interviews or to work.

Employability clients experiencing homelessness



## Mental health

The proportion of our employability clients who said they were experiencing mental health difficulties when they joined us fell from 25% in 2023-24 to 21% in 2024-25. However, this still means that one in five reported that they regularly struggled with their mental health.

It's also important to note that, due to ongoing stigma and different cultural perceptions or understanding of mental illness, this challenge may be under-reported.

The causes of mental health challenges for our clients are often complex, but can include:

- **Complicated and lengthy legal and asylum processes**
- **Homelessness or insecure housing**
- **Language barriers**
- **Financial stress**
- **Fears for family and friends who are unsafe**
- **Racism, discrimination and prejudice**
- **Trauma**
- **Social isolation**

### Aziia, Employability Programme client

66 I am very grateful for Breaking Barriers' support. Maybe I haven't achieved any significant or desired results yet, but what I've done and where I am now is also an achievement for me. Because honestly speaking, this was the most psychologically difficult year of my life and I'm glad that I went through certain things in it, and I was not alone.

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# Outcomes and Impact

Thanks to the determination of our clients, dedication of our teams, and the support of our volunteers, partners and donors, 2024-25 was a record-breaking year for Breaking Barriers.

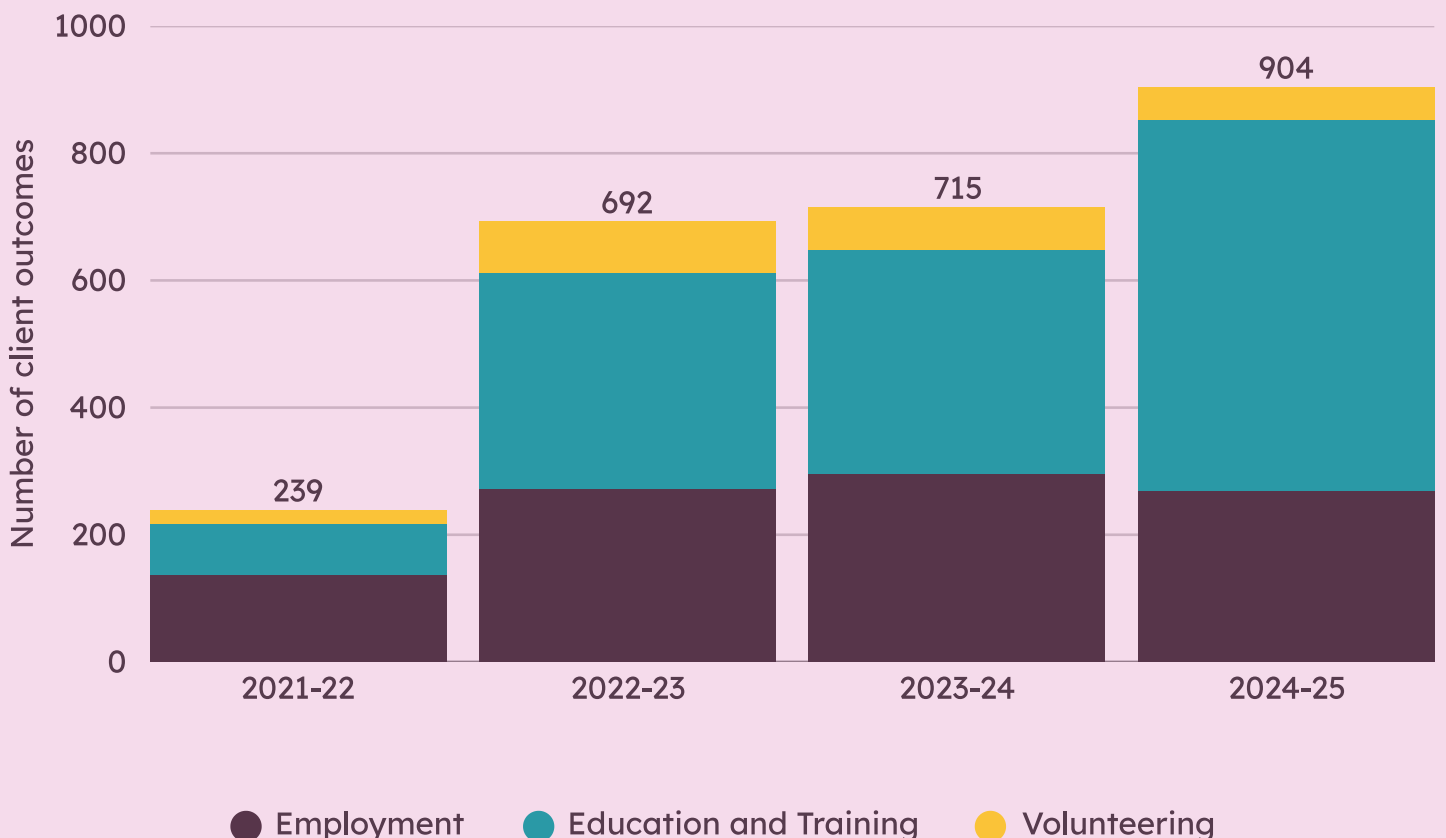
Across our Employability, Language and Re-accreditation Programmes, we supported a total of 1,450 clients. This is more than any previous year, and 16% higher than 2023-24.

2024-25 also saw 612 clients achieve a record 904 positive outcomes on their employment journeys. These outcomes include starting jobs, achieving education or training goals, or entering volunteering – which can help refugees to gain UK work experience, practise English and integrate into their new communities.

The number of outcomes is a 27% increase on 2023-24. And the percentage of clients achieving at least one outcome also increased, from 38% in 2023-24 to 42% in 2024-25.

Here, we highlight some of the key factors behind these figures, before exploring our clients’ employment, education and training outcomes in more detail.

## Client outcomes by year



## Our corporate partners

We believe in the power of responsible business to change society for the better. And our corporate partnerships can help to meet the needs of refugees at various stages of their employment journey.

Our partners provide critical funding for our services, free access to training and other resources, employment opportunities and, in many cases, hands-on assistance for refugees.

In 2024-25, 192 clients were supported in 41 group recruitment and skills sessions delivered by 29 of our corporate partners. These included:

- Jobs fairs that create opportunities for clients to connect directly with a range of local employers
- Insight sessions on sectors as diverse as law, health care, and green jobs
- Employability workshops on topics ranging from CVs to transferable skills and using AI in job searches.

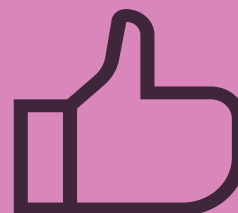
Clients may join individual sessions, or a pathway of events focused on building knowledge and experience of a particular sector. These pathways can also lead directly to paid work experience for our clients.

**85%**

of clients giving feedback on workshops felt their confidence applying for jobs and their understanding of the UK workforce had increased.

**84%**

also felt that the workshops had increased their job interview confidence.



**Laura Mountain,**  
**Head of Foundation,**  
**Social Value & Sustainability,**  
**City & Guilds Foundation**

“ Working with partners like Breaking Barriers is absolutely critical for achieving our social impact goals. We simply couldn't do it without them. ”

”

## Breaking Barriers with Macquarie

“At Macquarie, we’re passionate about driving social impact through both our financial and non-financial resources. We recognise that many people face systemic barriers to employment, so much of the Macquarie Group Foundation’s support focuses on building effective pathways into work. Given this, working with Breaking Barriers felt like a perfect fit.

We began our collaboration with three main goals:

- To support refugees by funding Breaking Barriers’ employment and education programmes
- To contribute directly to individuals achieving employment outcomes
- To grow national support through skills-based volunteering within Macquarie.

The immense challenges refugees face, from language barriers to lack of UK work experience, make them around three times more likely to be unemployed than UK-born individuals. Such challenges can’t be fixed overnight. But we are proud to have supported the achievements of many Breaking Barriers’ clients.

Our CV and Interview Skills workshop, led by volunteers from Macquarie, showed how meaningful direct connections with refugees can be for all involved. This was demonstrated more recently at Employer Insight Sessions, where Macquarie employees shared their personal employment journeys, and offered advice to attendees.

Being part of Breaking Barriers’ Business Behind Refugees movement has connected us with like-minded companies across sectors.



**Rachel Engel,**  
Regional Director of the Macquarie  
Group Foundation

This unique, non-profit-led initiative offers a safe space for collaboration, allowing us to share best practices and increase our collective impact.

Reflecting on the past year, the personal stories of refugees like Fatima and Nanou, from Breaking Barriers’ Lived Experience Panel, have been especially inspiring. These stories bring the data on employment barriers and support programmes to life, reinforcing the importance of listening to those with lived experience.

Meaningful collaboration has been key to success. By respecting each partner’s expertise and including refugees in decision-making, we have created a truly impactful partnership. We encourage our employees to engage in ways that suit them best, whether through workshops, mentoring, or fundraising challenges with matched donations.

In summary, if your company seeks to address systemic employment barriers and support motivated, talented individuals, a collaborative partnership with refugees could be the right fit.



## Volunteering

Volunteers play a vital role in supporting Breaking Barriers’ clients.

In 2024-25 this included workshop volunteering by corporate partner employees, volunteer-led, one-to-one employability sessions covering everything from job searches to interview practice, and longer-term relationships between clients and a volunteer tutor or mentor.

Volunteer tutoring is allied primarily with our Language Programme. It pairs teachers with refugees who need one-on-one support to develop their English language skills to enter employment or education.

Mentoring is an established part of Breaking Barriers’ work. It connects clients with someone who has experience in a particular role or sector, or who is able to give guidance to help them progress into a better role.

With the integration of the Re-accreditation Programme, we are also excited to be partnering with the CIPD Trust, whose commitment to opening doors for refugees through mentoring and professional development has transformed lives. Together, we connect refugee professionals with experienced UK-based volunteers who provide not only career guidance but also encouragement and confidence, helping refugees believe in the possibility of rebuilding meaningful careers in the UK.

### Jolie, Breaking Barriers volunteer

66 Volunteering at Breaking Barriers broadened my own world outlook and gave me a better understanding of the hurdles faced by refugees in the UK. I was humbled by the experiences the clients had been through and the challenges they had overcome to get to the start of their life in the UK. Their resilience impressed me greatly.

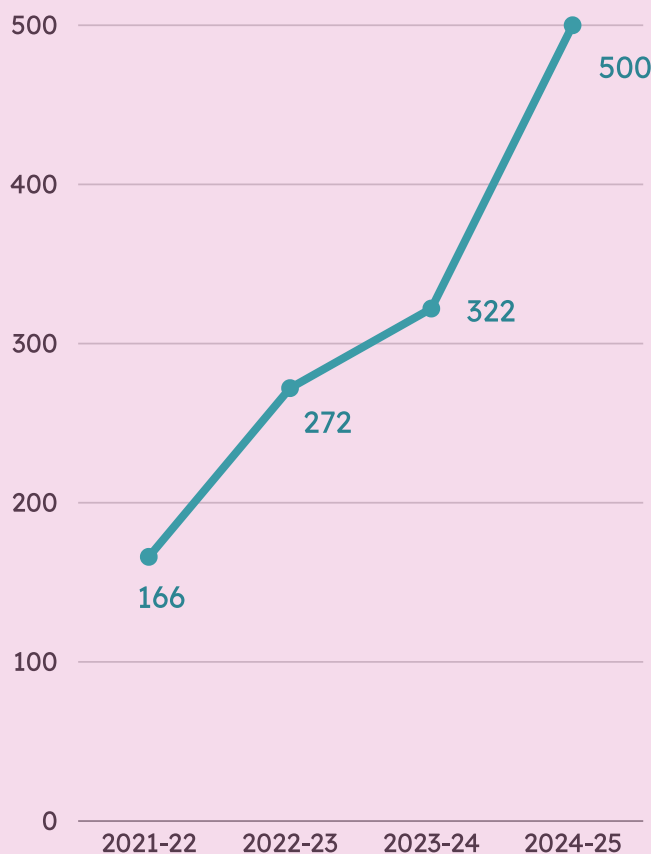


## Education classes

We supported 500 clients to access education opportunities in 2024-25. Because of the integration of the Language Programme, this was an increase of 55% compared to 2023-24, and more than triple the number of clients in 2021-22.

The education support offered during the year comprised a mix of education classes delivered in-house and structured English courses offered by our UK-wide network of partner language schools, universities and online learning platforms.

Clients participating in education programmes





## Fiona Dunlop, Principal at Wimbledon School of English

66 Wimbledon School of English has a long and rewarding history working with the Language Programme, which was part of RefuAid and is now part of Breaking Barriers. We have offered nearly 100 scholarships to students from the programme since 2016 and look forward to welcoming many more.

We have had so many positive results from the students coming to study with us over the years. They are always inspirational and driven, bringing so much to our student body and to the school in general. We are humbled by their stories, their efforts and their progress as we see them making friends, achieving academic goals and rebuilding study journeys or careers.

We thank Breaking Barriers for all that it does in allowing us to support these students. Its support and hard work makes this happen so seamlessly. All in all, it's a great partnership, building something positive in the lives of those in need of a little support, through no fault of their own.

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# Employment related outcomes

Despite a challenging economic climate, our teams were proud to support 219 clients to achieve 269 new jobs in 2024-25.

## Client employment outcomes by sector

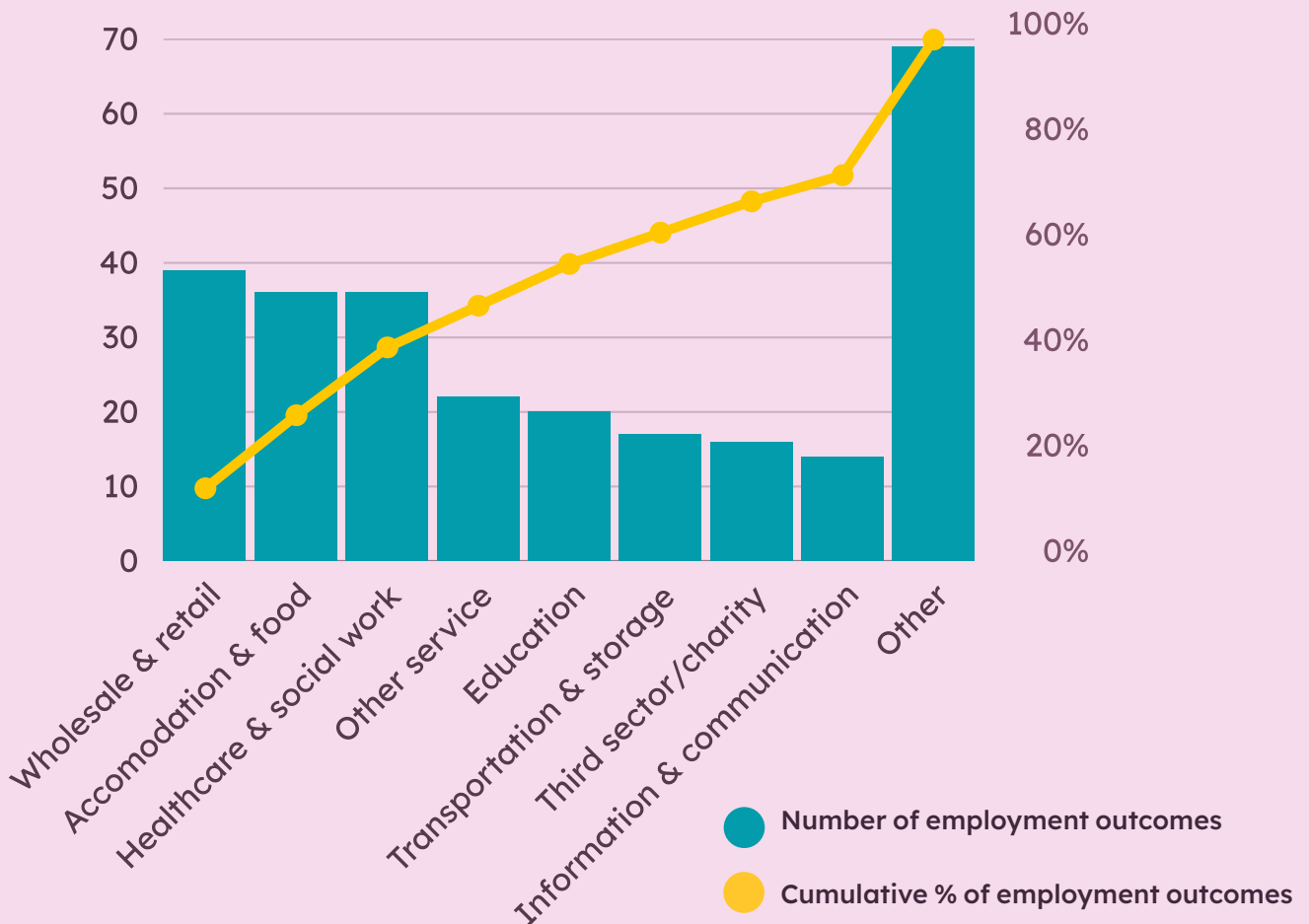
In 2024-25, our clients secured jobs in a wide range of industries, from construction and engineering to the arts and entertainment. But almost three-quarters gained positions in just eight sectors.

The top three sectors for employment outcomes were:

- Wholesale and retail
- Accommodation and Food
- Health and social work



## Top sectors for clients' new jobs

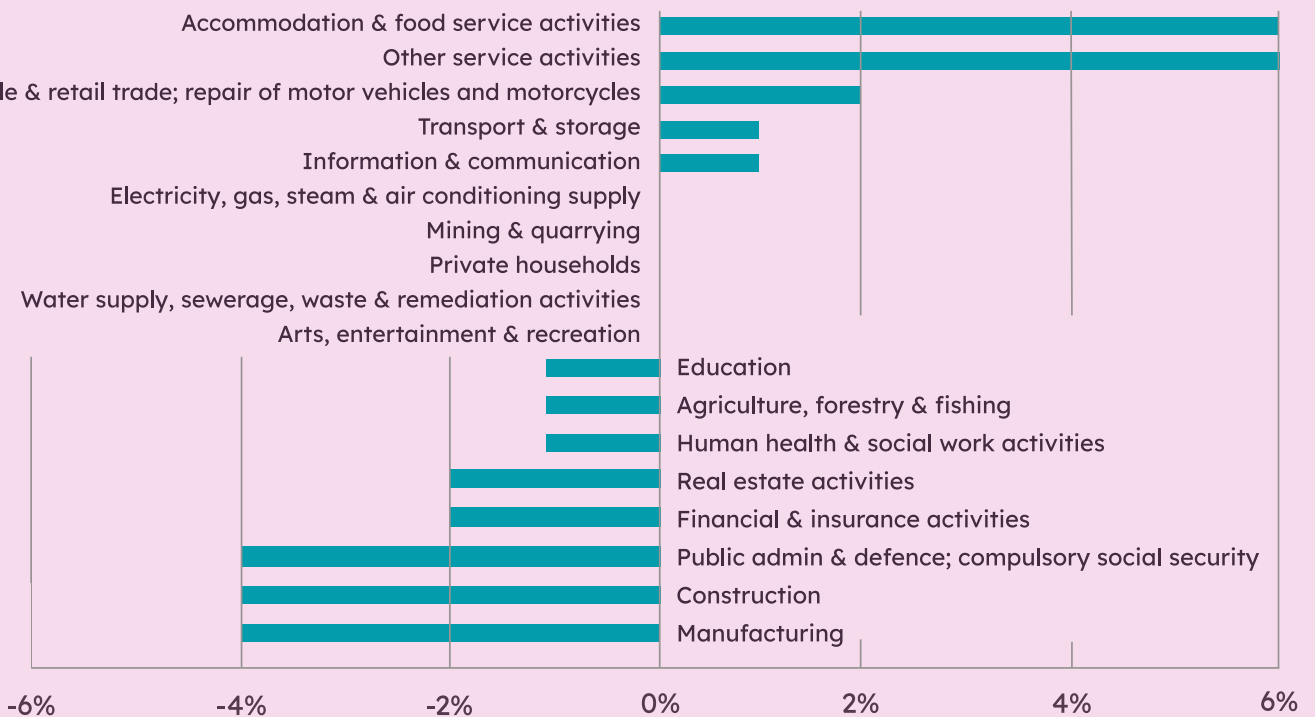


## How does this compare to the UK population as a whole?

The proportion of Breaking Barriers clients entering jobs in the accommodation and services sectors is significantly higher than the proportion of UK workers in these industries. Our clients were also over-represented in wholesale and retail roles, following a -3% under-representation relative to the UK workforce in 2023-24.

The sectors our clients entered at the lowest rate relative to overall UK employment were professional, scientific & technical activities, and administrative & support services. But, with the integration of the Language and Re-accreditation Programmes, previous under-representation in health & social work (-5% in 2023-24) and education (-4% in 2023-24) largely disappeared in 2024-25.

### Client employment outcomes by sector vs the UK workforce



## Role seniority and contracts

Despite our clients' often high levels of experience and education, the majority of new jobs achieved in 2024-25 by clients on our Employability Programme were at a junior level – with 70% of roles being either entry level or internships.

This may indicate underemployment, with refugees being overqualified for the job they hold. But, for many clients, such roles represent a valuable stepping-stone towards their long-term employment goals. For example, allowing them to build their English skills or gain UK experience whilst completing education or training.

More than a third of our clients' employment outcomes in 2024-25 were permanent jobs, while 31% were temporary roles and 26% were zero-hours contracts.

Again, some clients will have been seeking fixed-term or flexible employment to fit around education, family or other commitments. But, for others, a lack of income security may present a challenge, and is one of the reasons refugees can benefit from our support even after they've achieved their first employment in the UK.

# Thomas' story



66 **My name is Thomas and I'm from Hong Kong. I moved to the UK in September 2023 and now live in Manchester. Like many people starting over in a new country, I knew I needed to find work, but I didn't know where to begin. Everything felt unfamiliar: housing, the weather, even the lifestyle. It was overwhelming.**

I first heard about Breaking Barriers through Manchester City Council. I received one-to-one support from Rebecca, my adviser at Breaking Barriers, who guided me through everything. She helped me to improve my CV and cover letter writing skills, prepare for interviews, and feel more confident overall.

In the autumn of 2024, Breaking Barriers partnered with IKEA to offer places on an eight-week internship.

Rebecca supported me with applications and interview practice and, as a result, I got the internship. Just four weeks in, IKEA offered me a permanent contract for a Sales Cworker position. I never imagined that I could be so successful.

Having meaningful employment means so much to me. At work, I enjoy talking to customers, answering their questions, and even having small chats about life. It brings me satisfaction and helps me feel part of the community. It's also improved my mental health and given me the confidence to explore new opportunities.

Since receiving support from Breaking Barriers, I feel my life has changed quite a lot. I joined a football refereeing course and now work part-time as a referee, taking part in more local activities to integrate into the city.

My next goal is to pass my driving test. If I do, I'd love to return to my previous career - I worked as a postman for almost 10 years in Hong Kong. I'd like to bring that experience here, continue to build a life in the UK, and contribute my skills and abilities to the local community.

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Watch a video interview with Thomas on [breaking-barriers.co.uk](https://breaking-barriers.co.uk)



## Education and training outcomes

Accessing education or training is vital to many of our clients’ employment goals.

We measure a range of outcomes in this area. From accessing entry-level digital skills courses and professional development training, to passing vocational qualifications or formal English language tests and securing places on university courses.

Our clients achieved a phenomenal 584 positive education and training outcomes in 2024-25. This represents a 66% increase on 2023-24, associated primarily with our Language and Re-accreditation Programmes.

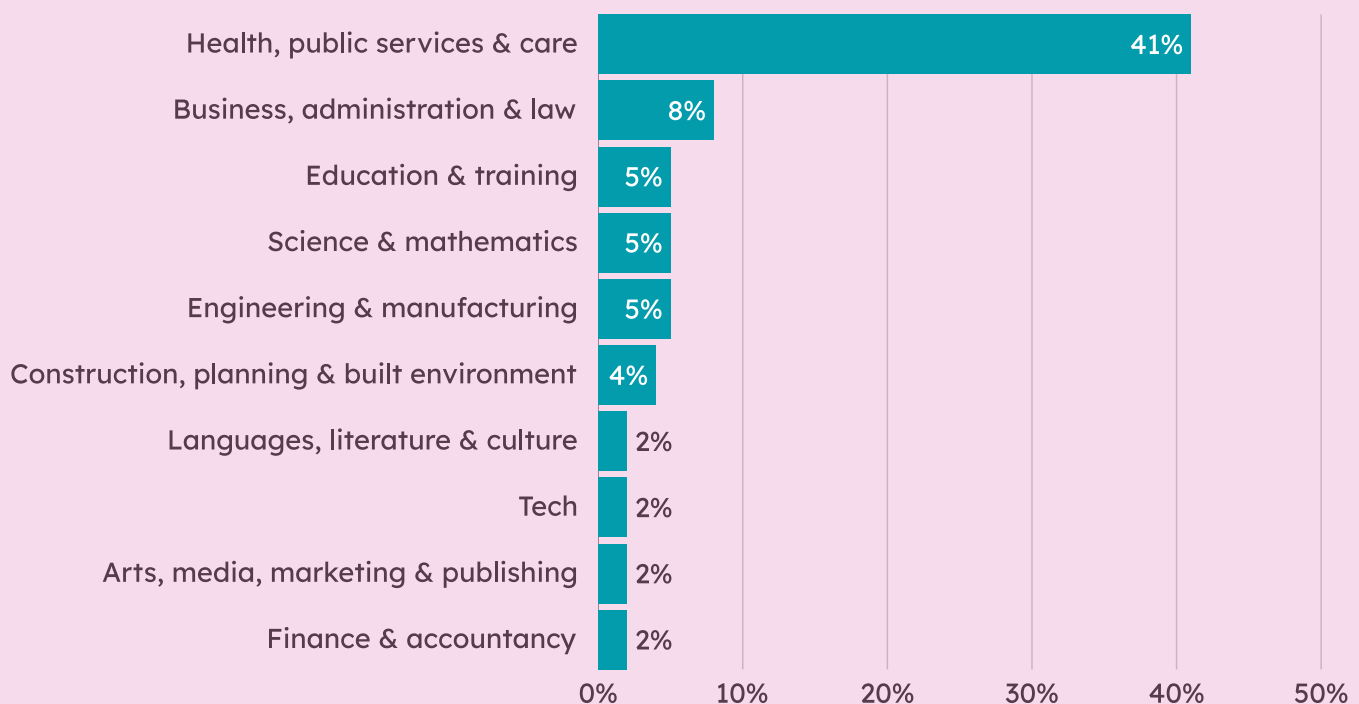
It’s also worth highlighting that these programmes were integrated into Breaking Barriers in December 2024, so only six months’ outcomes are included in this 2024-25 report.

## Connecting education and training to jobs

Many of our clients’ education and training outcomes are either in a subject specific to a particular industry, or a language qualification taken by a client seeking to enter that sector in the UK.

In 2024-25, over 40% of all our clients’ education and training outcomes were related to health, public services & care. Other common sectors included business, administration & law, education & training, engineering & manufacturing, and science & mathematics.

### Top 10 sectors for education and training outcomes



## Oleksii's story

66 Of all the support Breaking Barriers provided, the most valuable opportunity for me was the fully funded course arranged in partnership with BARBRI and Linklaters.

It included a preparation course for the Solicitors Qualifying Examination (SQE1) and a funded place for the exam itself. I applied and was fortunate to be awarded one of the places.

To further support my preparation, I was matched with a mentor who was a Managing Associate at Linklaters. During our one-to-one sessions, she generously shared her own experience of sitting the exam, helped me navigate complex aspects of the material, and reinforced my belief that with dedication and hard work, anything is achievable...

In January 2025, I successfully passed the SQE1 exam, bringing me one step closer to qualifying as a solicitor in England and Wales.

To help you understand how meaningful this achievement is to me, I would like to share a bit of my personal story. On 23 February 2022, I had my first court trial as a qualified advocate in Ukraine. I still remember delivering my closing speech – it was shaky and rushed due to nerves, but I won the case.



However, the very next morning, life changed completely for me and for millions of Ukrainians when Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine and left an indelible mark on an entire generation. Everything that had mattered just a day before suddenly felt meaningless, and the future became painfully uncertain.

When I arrived in the UK, I never imagined I would have the opportunity to work in litigation again, let alone pursue qualification as a solicitor. Now, it feels not only possible – it feels real. I am genuinely grateful for the support and encouragement I have received on this incredible journey.

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# What our clients say

We use an impact survey to understand the benefits that our support is bringing to clients in helping them achieve their career goals.<sup>7</sup> In 2024-25, the responses to this survey showed:

- 88% of clients increased their confidence in achieving their goals
- 81% of clients believed their chances of starting a new job had increased
- 85% of clients reported increased confidence during job interviews
- 90% of clients reported an improved understanding of their preferred sector of work

These insights are vital to help us measure the personal impact of our support beyond the employment, education, training and volunteering outcomes our clients achieve.

And, just as important to us as data, is the individual feedback we receive from clients. About the changes to their lives, and the impact that Breaking Barriers, our partners and supporters have had on their employment journey.

<sup>7</sup> This impact survey is sent at a timepoint agreed between the client and their Employment Adviser when the client enrolls with us. The timing will vary depending on how much the client is able to engage with our services and what the client's goals are, but the usual time for a client to receive the survey is around three months after their enrolment.

66 Maybe most of us asylum seekers or refugees feel at some point frustrated, disappointed, or worried that maybe we won't get a job. But when you come to organisations like Breaking Barriers, they help you and provide support. I think that changes everything.

– **Baldomero**

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66 I have already found my next steps and new job and I am happy. I want to thank Breaking Barriers for giving me a chance. The feeling of having someone who truly stood by my side and genuinely wanted to help, made me feel like I wasn't fighting alone... A newcomer in the UK might not have the means to find employment opportunities, but Breaking Barriers gives us a chance.

– **Michelle**

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66 I want to say a special thanks to this organisation and appreciate my adviser, Abdul. He is a real angel in my life. I can't compare how I feel now to around six months ago. I owe my situation to him and Breaking Barriers. God bless you all and I hope to reach my goals to show you how you impacted my personal life and career. Thank you all.

– **Mahmood**

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## Looking ahead

With demand for our services rising, our mission is more urgent than ever. The world around us presents real challenges, from hostile rhetoric about refugees to shrinking funding and the rollback of DEI initiatives. These pressures make our work harder, but also underline just how vital it is.

Thankfully, we're supported by a powerful coalition of individuals, funders, employers, and allies who not only invest in our mission but help create real opportunities for refugees.

Our donors and corporate partners recognise that not everyone starts from the same place and that meaningful change requires rethinking systems to address structural inequality. That's why we work with employers to build inclusive pathways into work, and celebrate those who lead by example.

In 2025-26, we'll continue growing a network of like-minded organisations and businesses who share our values and commitment to driving change. Whether through advocacy or direct collaboration, collective effort remains one of our greatest strengths.

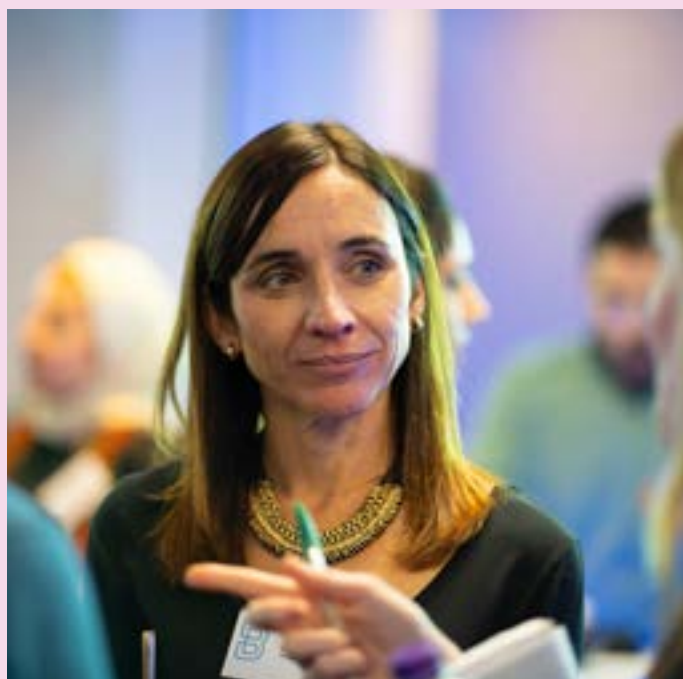
We're also excited to welcome new trustees to our board, bringing fresh insight, lived experience, and strategic leadership to ensure Breaking Barriers continues to thrive, evolve, and deliver lasting impact.

Looking ahead, we'll continue to adapt our services to meet refugees' needs in a changing job market. We're reviewing how we monitor and evaluate our outcomes and impact for clients.

And we're exploring the transformative potential of AI - investing in our ability to harness this evolving technology responsibly in service of our mission.

Our vision is for Breaking Barriers to support many more refugees, in more communities, across the UK. Helping them to achieve their career goals and build new lives. And we want to see more businesses realise that hiring refugees isn't just morally right, it enriches workplaces and is smart economics. The UK stands to gain enormously from the skills, perspectives and resilience refugees bring.

It's powerful to imagine a future where Breaking Barriers is no longer needed because refugees face a truly level playing field in the UK labour market. That remains our aspiration. But, until that time comes, we'll stand firmly beside each of our clients on their journey towards meaningful employment. And, together, we'll keep breaking down the barriers refugees face to building a new life.



# With thanks

Breaking Barriers exists because of the generosity and determination of individuals and organisations who stand with us for an inclusive society.

We are grateful to all our donors, supporters and partners, including those who prefer to remain anonymous. You are helping refugees across the UK to access meaningful employment and build new lives.

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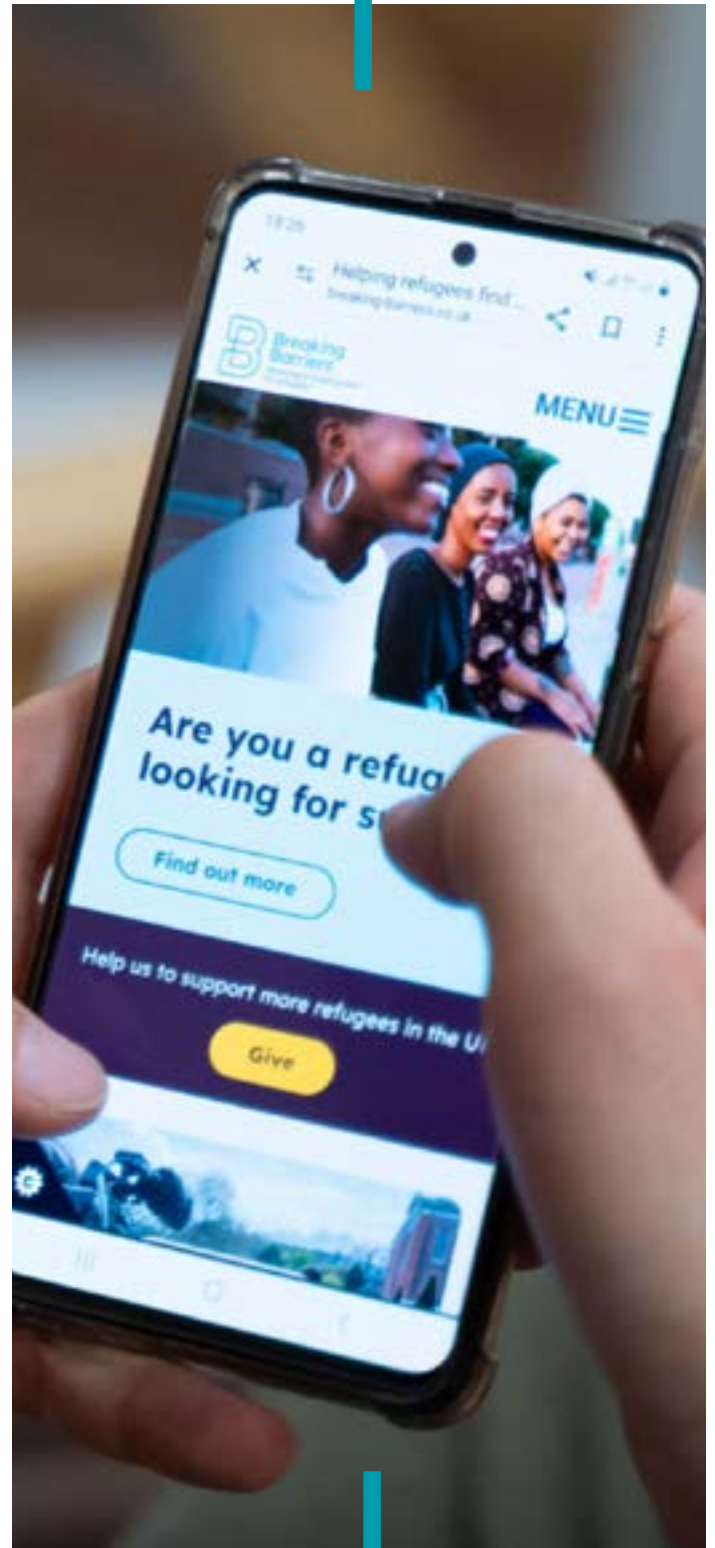


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