

Fuse Action Plan:

*Unlock the potential
of refugees*



**Learnings, insights
and recommendations
for businesses to
unlock the potential
of refugees in the UK**

Breaking Barriers

Breaking Barriers' mission is to empower people of refugee background in the UK to acquire the knowledge, confidence and experience they need to secure stable fulfilling employment.

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



Fuse

Launched by Breaking Barriers, Fuse brings like-minded businesses together to share best practice, enabling us to collectively grow and take action to achieve more for refugees in the UK.

Fuse exists to unite businesses in common goals to improve the lives of refugees through meaningful and sustainable employment.

The Fuse Action Plan is a tool to support your business on the journey to unlocking the potential of refugees and fostering a diverse, inclusive and thriving workplace.



Unlock the potential of refugees

Barriers faced

The UK is home to approximately **374,000** people from a refugee background.¹ Refugees flee from persecution, violence and war. Yet, once in the UK, they face many more challenges to start their new life, access to employment being one of them. Prior to Covid-19, those of a refugee background had an unemployment rate that is four times higher than the national average² due to the barriers faced, these include:

- Employment gaps on CVs due to lengthy asylum process
- Lack of UK work experience or education
- Lack of English language skills
- Limited understanding of the UK job market and no professional networks
- Public misconceptions and discrimination

There is no UK strategy to aid the transition of refugees into employment, and this is where Breaking Barriers comes in.

We know refugees make valuable contributions to business and society, and that finding a stable job is an important factor in helping refugees to rebuild their lives.

Diverse talent

Breaking Barriers' refugee clients come from 50+ different countries, are aged between 18–68 and have a diverse range of backgrounds, skills and aspirations. Prior to enrolling in our services, 68% of our refugee clients have been unemployed for over a year,³ despite having skills and experience to bring to the UK job market:



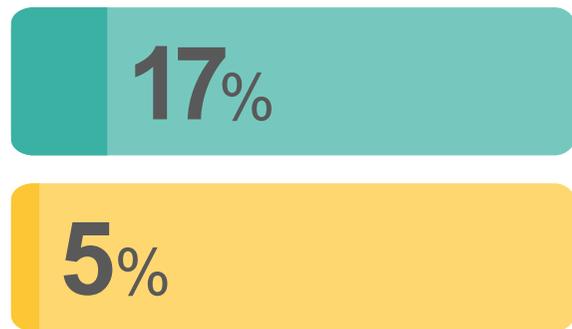
¹ Compass Report: Zovanga Kone, Isabel Ruiz and Carlos Vargas-Silva, 'Refugees and the UK labour market', (2019)

² Ibid

³ Breaking Barriers 2020, [Breaking Barriers Impact Report for 2019–20](#)

Responding to the Covid-19 pandemic

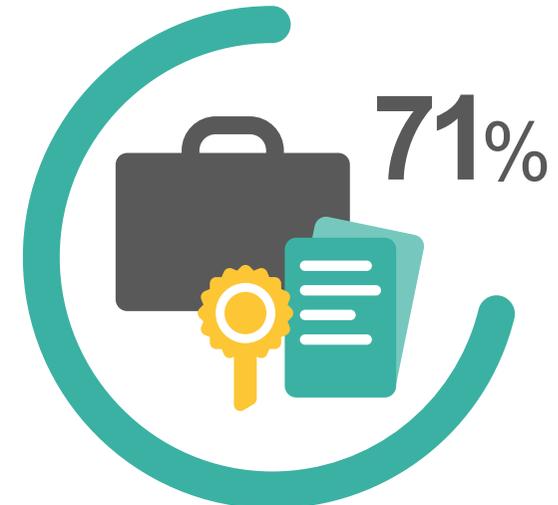
Covid-19 has exacerbated the barriers faced by people of a refugee background, including loss of work due to a challenging labour market and lack of digital skills and access. Breaking Barriers' research conducted in March 2021, highlighted that people from a refugee background have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic intensifying these barriers:



17% of respondents who were in work prior to the pandemic lost employment, significantly higher than 5% of people in the UK overall.



58% of respondents had access to a laptop compared to the 88% of UK households that have access to a home computer.



71% of respondents cited support with employment, higher education, or training as one of their three most important needs.³

4 Breaking Barriers (2021) 'One year later: The impact of Covid-19 on the support needs of refugees and people of refugee background'

Social challenge to business opportunity

At Breaking Barriers, we believe collaboration with businesses is vital to addressing the multitude of barriers people from a refugee background face to employment in the UK. We also recognise that navigating the support and hiring of refugees can be complex.

The Fuse Action Plan will support your organisation to transform this social challenge into a business opportunity that has a lasting impact not only for people from a refugee background, but for your employees, customers and community.

The value to your business

- **Future workforce** – recruiting refugees will address skills gaps at every level of employment due to the diverse range of talent and potential in the refugee community.
- **Retention** – refugees have often experienced extensive periods of instability so are more likely to seek secure and long-term employment.
- **Diversity & inclusion** – improve the diversity of your organisation owing to the range of nationalities and backgrounds, whilst nurturing an inclusive workplace and reducing unconscious bias.
- **Staff engagement and development** – creating opportunities for your employees to interact with a range of people, developing soft skills and improving collaboration.
- **Social impact** – by supporting and hiring people from a refugee background you will be tackling unemployment, inequalities and accelerating effective change through greater leadership.



How can your business support people from a refugee background?

We have combined our expertise with the experience of our corporate partners, to inform and inspire your journey to supporting refugees into meaningful employment.

Here are four steps to help you and your business take positive action regardless of your size, sector or starting point so you can unlock the potential of refugees in the UK.

- 1 Educate**
Inform yourself and your business
- 2 Collaborate**
Come together across your organisation
- 3 Identify**
Find the path that's right for you
- 4 Participate**
Let's take action together

Now is the time to take action and unlock the potential of refugees

1 Educate

Inform yourself and your business



We all need to understand the context, lived experience and barriers faced by refugees and those of refugee background to offer the most effective support and maximum impact. Improved knowledge will support your business to become a more inclusive and welcoming organisation helping to level the playing field for people from a refugee background.

Actions



Understand that refugees have the right to work in the UK – those with refugee status can legally work, so tap into their talent and transferable skills to add value to your organisation.



Learn about the barriers excluding refugees from the UK job market – explore how you can help to remove them. Challenges include unexplained gaps on CVs created by the lengthy asylum process, limited understanding of the UK job market and culture.



Share your new knowledge – amplify and celebrate the valuable contribution made by refugees, dispel myths and normalise the hiring of people from a refugee background.



Since 2016, Mayer Brown has been committed to Breaking Barriers, learning about the employment challenges affecting refugees in the UK and sharing that new knowledge across their organisation.

“Throughout our partnership, we have conducted lunch & learn sessions, workshops on employability, numerous employee briefings, and paid six-month work-placements for refugees. We have also supported two Breaking Barriers photography exhibitions sharing the inspirational stories of refugees and asylum seekers, their journeys to the UK, their lives, and their roles in essential frontline services during the pandemic. Mayer Brown is extremely proud of our ongoing partnership with Breaking Barriers and staff engagement has been key to its success. We look forward to sharing our experiences and continuing to support refugees in a challenging economic climate and evolving digital workplace”.

Mehreen Malik, Pro Bono and CSR Manager, Mayer Brown

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Collaborate

Come together across your organisation



To have greater impact, we believe this is a journey that needs to engage staff from across your organisation. Many of your colleagues will be passionate about diversity and trying to make your business more equitable and inclusive. Bringing together groups and teams can also connect staff across locations, helping you to reach new employee audiences and ensure your social responsibility runs throughout your business.

Actions



Reach out across your business – include recruitment teams, Corporate Social Responsibility, HR, Diversity and Inclusion leads and tap into employee networks. All these teams and groups have unique skills, expertise and goals integral to delivering change.



Engage senior leaders in discussions – a senior sponsor can help influence and progress your journey to meet strategic needs and have maximum impact.



Bring a project team together – involve different parts of your organisation to champion Breaking Barriers and refugees, together you can support the project delivery and engagement to ensure positive outcomes.



WesternUnion \\ WU

In partnership with Breaking Barriers, Western Union provides placement and training opportunities for refugees in London.

“As we don’t have a central CSR team, we deliver our partnership with Breaking Barriers by bringing together different stakeholders to achieve cross-organisational buy-in and make our journey more successful. Our team of four work within different business units, and since our partnership began, the key to success has been our relationships with various teams across the business, helping us source varied placement opportunities and recruit volunteers to deliver skill-building workshops. This has had a greater impact for both our employees and Breaking Barriers clients.”

Kate Dalton, Key Account Manager,
Western Union

3 Identify

Find the path that's right for you



Each organisation is unique which means there isn't a one size fits all approach across different sectors, sizes, capacities and budgets. You are the experts in your field and are best placed to understand your business and its needs. The future of work is also continually evolving with an even greater demand on digital skills and access, so we must continue to adapt our approach. Whilst every business is different, there are some common themes to support you on your journey.

Actions



Understand your current programmes – do you offer work experience, traineeships, insight days or apprenticeships? Look at these and how you recruit and train your staff to see if existing initiatives can be adapted for refugees.



Learn from other businesses and similar organisations – see how others support under-represented groups to improve your understanding of what is possible in your organisation. Fuse brings like mind-businesses together to do just that.



Be flexible in your approach – starting small or piloting initiatives will enable you to invest time in exploring existing or innovative approaches, along with scoping the digital support needed to work for your business and provide meaningful employment opportunities for refugees.



Since 2017, IKEA UK/IE has worked in partnership with Breaking Barriers and supported over 150 refugees so far.

“Working with Breaking Barriers we developed a unique and tailored approach for IKEA to support refugees in London. However, as a result of the pandemic and challenging environment, we needed to adapt our programme, evolving it to meet our business needs and goals. Together we developed a customer service and retail competence workshop followed by an 8-week paid work-placement, helping refugees to gain vital work experience in the sector, improving their English and confidence, getting them closer to gaining meaningful employment. This bespoke pathway is meeting the needs of the business whilst supporting refugees and the mission of Breaking Barriers.”

Ibtissam Ward, Project Leader:
Refugee Skills for Employment, IKEA UK/IE

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Participate

Let's take action together



In Breaking Barriers first 5 years we've supporting 1,300 people from a refugee background with their employment and education journeys. In that time, we have worked with companies of all sizes and sectors to build bespoke shared-value partnerships and activities that work towards the goals of the organisation and our refugee clients. Together we can support refugees to fulfil their potential through employment that matches their skills, experience, and aspirations.

Actions



Contact the team at Breaking Barriers – we can advise on how to best facilitate your next steps and build engagement across your organisation. Together we can develop partnership activities that work for you, your business and our refugee clients.



Sign-up to the Breaking Barriers Academy – we partner with businesses to develop six-month paid placements for our refugee clients to gain valuable UK work experience moving them closer to achieving their goals. We provide support from recruitment to delivery and have successfully implemented over 50 placements.



Join Fuse – the network from Breaking Barriers to unite like-minded businesses to share best practice and collectively learn, grow and take action, to achieve more for refugees in the UK.



Since 2018, Grant Thornton has developed and grown a partnership with Breaking Barriers providing extensive opportunities for people from a refugee background in the UK.

“We hosted our first ever refugee work placement helping someone who hadn't worked in over 10 years to adapt to a fast-paced business environment and stand a greater chance of finding meaningful employment. We have delivered further placements and heartily encourage other companies to do the same. Working with Breaking Barriers has allowed our people to develop their coaching skills to support others, and it has been hugely rewarding to see people leaving us with increased confidence and skills ready for the next stage of their employment journey.”

Karen Higgins, Head of Sustainability,
Grant Thornton UK LLP

Success story

Awais Ahmad, Tax assistant in the Global Mobility Services Tax team at Grant Thornton, and Breaking Barriers client.

“ 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's Global Mobility Solutions team 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.

”



Conclusion

Through the shared recommendations and experiences of our corporate partners we believe these common themes and first steps can help you on the journey to supporting refugees into meaningful employment.

By educating, collaborating, identifying and participating in these actions, we believe that you will unlock the potential of refugees for your business. Covid-19 has only deepened the divide and exacerbated the barriers faced, highlighting why now is the time to take action.

This is our call to businesses to take responsibility for driving forward a more diverse, inclusive and welcoming employment landscape for refugees in the UK.

Together we can have a greater impact and lead the way in inclusive and responsible business, by addressing the systematic barriers to employment and opening-up more opportunities for people from a refugee background.



**Get in touch and unlock
the potential of refugees**



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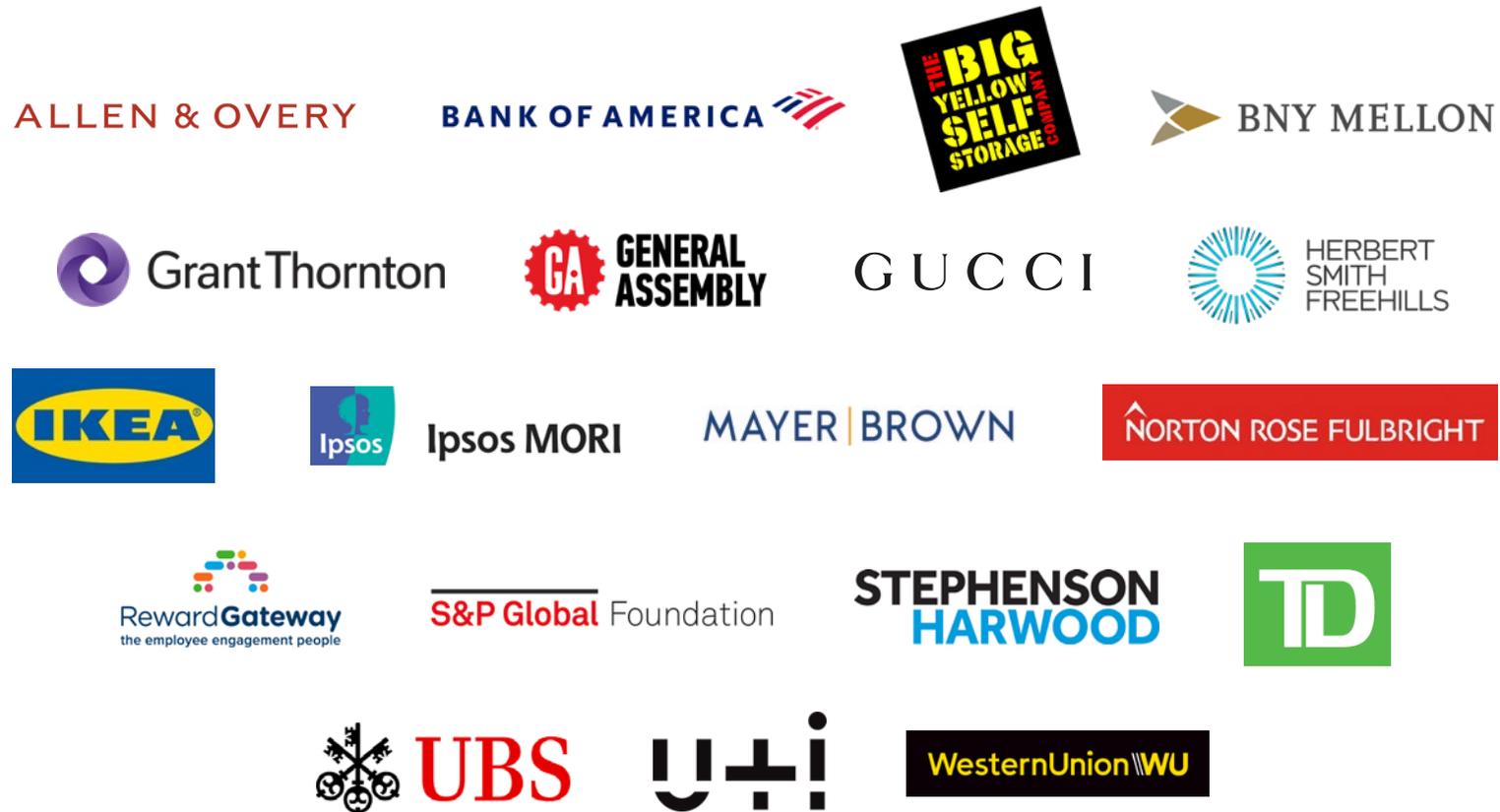


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With thanks to all our partners who have supported Breaking Barriers and those who have contributed to the Fuse Action Plan:



Further reading

For additional guidance on hiring refugees in the UK, Breaking Barriers has contributed to the following resources:

[Tent Partnership for Refugees: UK Employers' Guide to Hiring Refugees](#)

[UNHCR: Tapping Potential, Guidelines to help British Businesses Employ Refugees](#)