



Beyond Borders

Inside Project Noor's approach to Support & Impact.

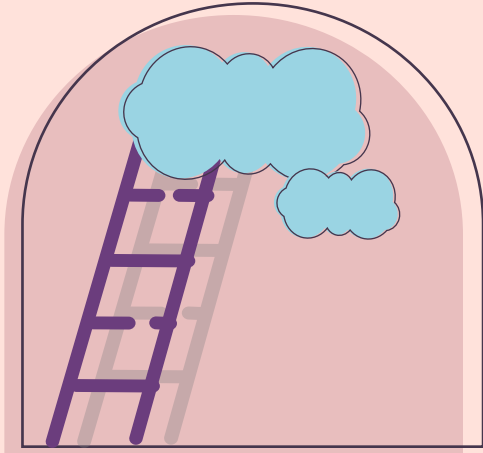
CONNECT.SUPPORT.PARTICIPATE

Born out of a partnership between **The Max Barney Foundation** and the **SHM Foundation**, Project Noor was launched in **June 2021** with the aim of supporting **refugee women from the Middle East** in facing the unique, complex challenges of their journey in the UK.

With a focus on financial independence and employment, **Project Noor** adopts a holistic approach to supporting women in a way that is meaningful, impactful, and far-reaching.

In this report, our team shares insights from Project Noor's pilot, grounded in a belief in the power of the personal and the importance of reimagining how impact is defined and captured.

What challenges do refugee women face in the UK?



Over **half** of refugees in the UK come from countries in the **Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region**.

While the ability to work and generate an income can be pivotal in managing life in a new country, recent reports indicate that only **34% of refugee women** are employed, compared to over **60% of refugee men**—a staggering gender disparity.

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Difficulty navigating new systems and cultural norms

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Language barriers

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Refugee women often struggle with their mental health wellbeing, especially in the face of the isolation, stigma, and discrimination of day-to-day life

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They often arrive to the UK with no previous work experience

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Caretaking responsibilities



Project Noor supported refugee women from the Middle East to achieve financial independence, by helping them obtain the right skills and tools to find employment or start their own businesses, while addressing their other intersecting needs.

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Why do we need a new approach to supporting refugee women?

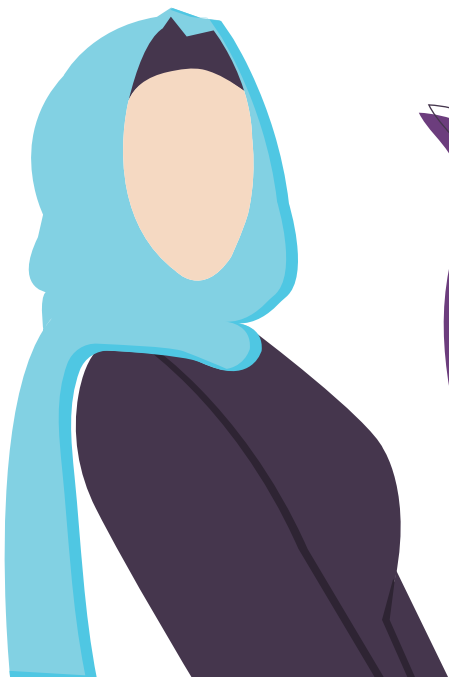
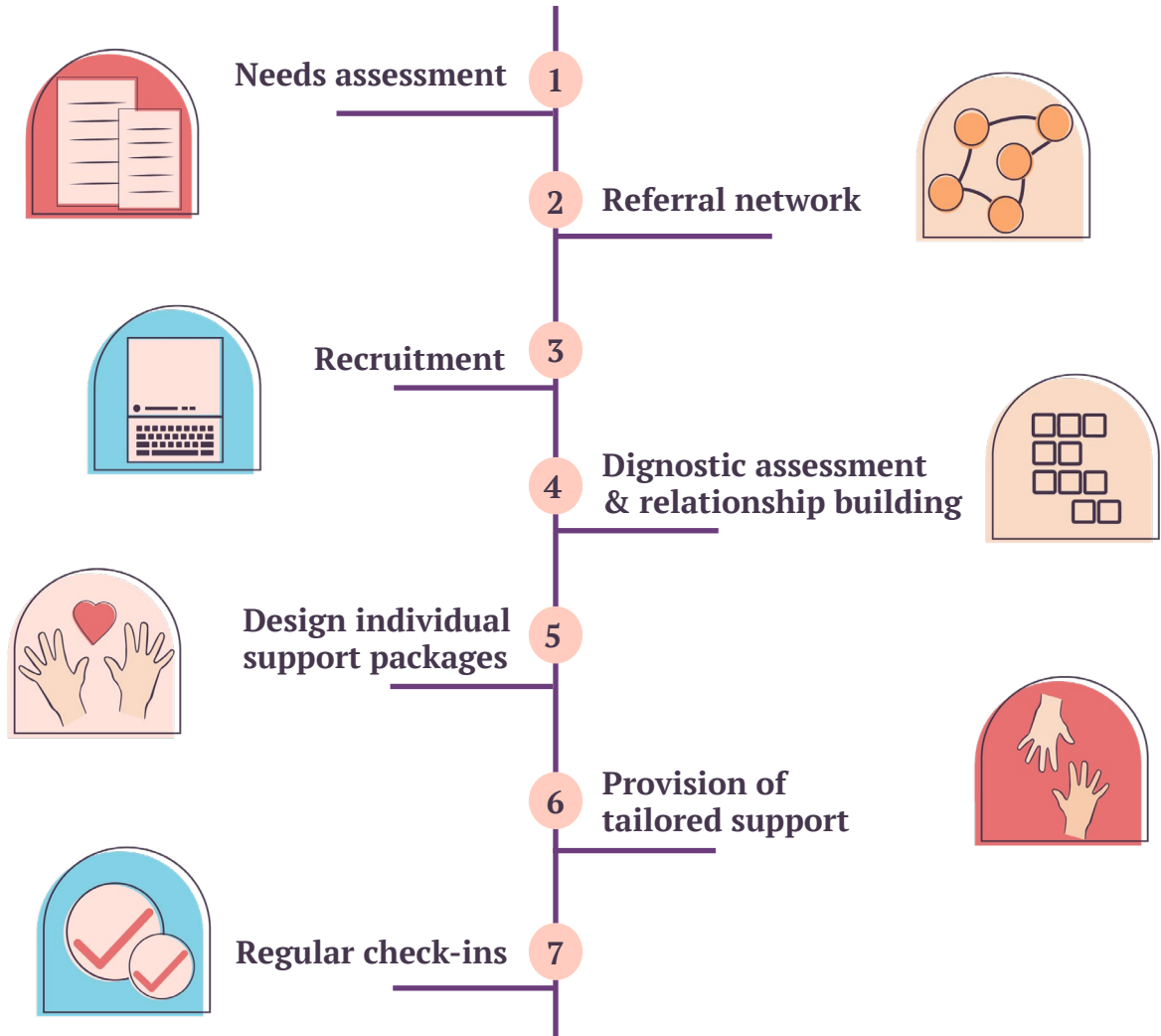
To help us find ways to support refugee women, we conducted an assessment of needs exercise to identify the gaps and opportunities around refugee employment and entrepreneurship in the UK. We contacted many London-based service providers and talked to refugee women themselves.

What we found was that **available support was disjointed and short-term**. Women told us that they perceived a **lack of signposting**, making it difficult for them to find the right information and supports. We also found that available supports took a **one-size-fits-all approach**, which fails to consider the complexity of the intersecting needs and experiences of individual women.

Another major gap we observed was that support was narrowly focused and often neglected some of the basic types of support women needed, like navigating public transport, paying bills and taxes, and registering with a GP.



The Project Noor process

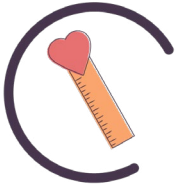


It took many years for me and my family to be able to come to the UK. Coming from a war zone with bad economic situation prevented me [from having] access and learn[ing] to use digital devices such as a smartphones and computers. When I arrived, I had a lot of stress and suffered from PTSD. I also had to take care of my sick sister and mother. IT was very difficult for me to navigate all those challenges and know where to start to be able to settle in my new life.

– Project Noor Participant



Project Noor's approach



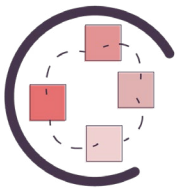
Tailored & Accessible

Support packages are tailored to the individual needs of refugee women, taking into account the diversity and complexity of their individual experiences and circumstances. We meet women where they are, in ways that works for them.



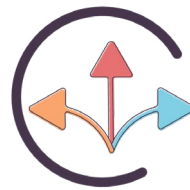
Holistic

Support packages are designed based on a comprehensive assessment of several life dimensions, including the women's background, legal status, physical and mental health, as well as their skills, resources and career aspirations.



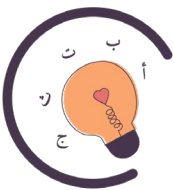
Not reinventing the wheel

We take the time to map available services and networks in order to leverage existing resources and avoid duplicating efforts or increase fragmentation.



Flexible

We understand that circumstances change and needs evolve. The support provided in Project Noor can be adapted to meet the changing needs of participants.



Culturally sensitive

Support is delivered through a team who understands, often through lived experience, the asylum system and the cultural context. Support is also provided in Arabic to avoid language barriers.



Personal

We take the time to get to know each individual woman in the program, and we strive to foster strong relationships and networks among participants. We want to create a space for women to meet and exchange support, experiences, challenges, and opportunities.

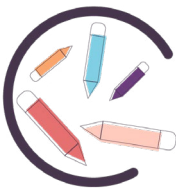




Participatory
We engage refugee women in the design of the program to ensure that its essence aligns with their needs and values.



Quality over quantity
We believe in the ripple effect of focused, personalised attention. We prioritise providing meaningful support with sustainable impact.



Forward-looking
We value consistent, long-term support that nurtures strong relationships and enables meaningful change and transformation.

A snapshot of Project Noor in numbers

All **13 women** participating in Project Noor's pilot are in **part-time or full-time employment or volunteer roles**, paving the path towards the next steps in their careers.



Project Noor's Approach to Impact

*I arrived in the UK with a degree and motivation to build a better new life. The reality is that **I found difficult to integrate and start pursuing my dreams.** There were many other obstacles to cross on the way. I sometimes **felt alone** and it was difficult to untangle those challenges on my own. **Project Noor helped me connect with women who know about the context I come from and are facing similar challenges.***

*It is nice to communicate about your struggles in your mother tongue. I was able to talk about day-to-day struggles such as **commuting, paying bills, and understanding how things work where I live.** It was also nice to have someone who I could reach out to get support from to be able to find job opportunities as I navigate day-to-day challenges and settle in my new community.*

– Project Noor Participant



The personalised approach of Project Noor meant that **we could not rely on traditional, standardised measures of capturing impact.** No two Project Noor journeys were the same, and so impact had to look different from one woman to the next.

Along with individualised support plans, **we set individualised objectives to help us measure impact.** We used **regular check-ins** to assess progress towards these goals, which we were quick to adapt with the changing needs and circumstances of women over time.

We also made sure to **seek personal stories and testimonies that could contextualize their challenges and achievements,** and to understand what Project's Noor impact meant to them.

We had to be comfortable with complexity to enable meaningful change.

Next steps

We want to share our learning and experience with interested stakeholders including other organisations, academics and researchers, companies or any other interested entity. We believe that Project Noor's model is replicable and can be used as a blueprint for other organisations providing support to refugee women.

