Pathways for Recovery
Interim report

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1. Introduction

Pathways for Recovery is a part funded European Social Fund, South East Midlands Local Enterprise Partnership (SEMLEP) wide comprehensive employment support initiative delivered by a regional partnership including specialist support providers, employment and skills organisations and strategic stakeholders. It focuses on the SEMLEP area which occupies a strategically important location, linking Oxford, Cambridge, London and the Midlands. The area is composed of local authority areas: Bedford Borough, Central Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes, North Northamptonshire, and West Northamptonshire[1]. Overall, Pathways for Recovery aims to

- build a locally integrated employment service that tackles the significant impact that COVID 19 has had on the region. Their aim is to support those who have been most affected by the pandemic, both financially and individual's mental health/wellbeing.
- address barriers by providing specialist support to clients who need advice and guidance. They will help the participants gain the necessary confidence needed to engage with the job market and progress to sustainable employment, education and/or training, improving social inclusion and mobility.
- focus on job seekers and inactive people, including the long term unemployed and people far from the labour market who need support to get themselves back into employment.

This interim report presents the results from the research evaluating the Pathways for Recovery programme (from July 2022 to December 2022) which aims to help those most disadvantaged in our communities due to the impact of COVID-19. Specifically, it helps job seekers and inactive people, including long term unemployed and people far from the labour market who need support to get themselves back into employment.

The evaluation is mixed methods, using both quantitative and qualitative data collection. The quantitative data presented in this report were gathered through an online questionnaire that captured the responses of 11 programme participants (in English and Ukrainian) on the psychological benefits, in particular self-efficacy and well-being, and employment benefits of the programme[2]. Qualitative data consisted of 10 semi-structured interviews with both participants and delivery partners, focused on the needs of programme participants and the programme performance.

[1] https://www.semlep.com/south-east-midlands/.
[2] Due to the low number of questionnaires collected, this report includes only the descriptive statistics of the respondents' demographics.

2. Literature Review

The most recent data for the South East Midlands area shows relatively high unemployment levels among individuals who are categorised as economically active. The unemployment levels are the following: Bedford Borough 3.4%, Central Bedfordshire 2.5%, Luton 5.3%, Milton Keynes 3.2%, North Northamptonshire 2.8%, and West Northamptonshire 3.1% (NOMIS, 2023[3]). These levels are in line with the national levels (3.8%), with Luton having higher levels than the national level.

Areas	Unemployment	Inactive
Bedford Borough	3.4%	25.6%
Central Bedfordshire	2.5%	17.7%
Luton	5.3%	27.3%
Milton Keynes	3.2%	19.1%
North Northamptonshire	2.8%	23.9%
West Northamptonshire	3.1%	19.1%
Great Britain	3.8%	21.4%

Table 2.1. Unemployment levels in South East Midlands.

Unemployment and mental health are strongly related, in fact, unemployment significantly affects mental health (Karsten and Klaus, 2009). Unemployment is a stressor that can affect psychological and physical well-being (McKee-Ryan, et al., 2005), self-esteem, and quality of life (Peláez-Fernández, Rey, and Extremera, 2021). Employment not only provides income that is an important stressor (Freyer, 1997), but it satisfies important psychological needs: social inclusion, purpose and activities, time planning, and status (McKee-Ryan, et al., 2005; Karsten, and Klaus, 2009). Moreover, unemployment leads to a series of consequences that produce additional stressors and exacerbate wellbeing, among which financial instability, and family and marital difficulties (McKee-Ryan, et al., 2005).

These difficulties have been exacerbated by COVID-19. Coronavirus (COVID-19), also known as SARS-CoV-2, is a virus that has been spreading worldwide, affecting an individual's lungs and airways (with a number of other affects under investigation at the time of writing). In February 2021, there had been over 3.5 million confirmed cases and 106,000 deaths in the United Kingdom, with over 111 million confirmed cases and nearly 2.5 million deaths worldwide). The impact of COVID-19 on individuals' mental health and well-being has received increased attention, with the United Kingdom's government releasing guidance to the public on mental health and well-being (Public Health England, 2020). Research reveals that infectious diseases have a wide-ranging impact on an

[3] https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/reports/lmp/la/1811939769/report.aspx#supply

individuals' levels of anxiety and stress (Xiang, 2020). However, the true extent of the impact of COVID-19 on people's lives (including, financial security, well-being, and safety) is currently unknown. Service continuity during COVID-19 has been, and indeed remains, highly complex, with organisations expected to rapidly adapt to circumstances completely beyond their control (i.e., lockdown and Government restrictions). The COVID-19 situation has exasperated existing problems with unemployment and economic activity. Research by Thomsen (2009) showed that the longer an individual was unemployed, the more negative the effect of unemployment became on the individual, with the long-term unemployed (longer than one year) being over three times less likely to get a job. Moreover, studies found that social relationships help unemployed individuals to cope, consequently those with higher supportive relationships (which reduce significantly because of COVID-19 and the distancing measures) have a reduced impact on their wellbeing (McKee-Ryan, et al., 2005, Pinquart and Sörensen, 2000). An individual's motivation, well-being and personal accomplishment are strongly associated with their efficacy beliefs, which influence their choices and resultant actions (Pajares, 1996). In the context of employability, it is critical to address issues of self-efficacy because highly efficacious individuals will have more confidence in their abilities to succeed in gaining future employment (Lucas and Cooper, 2005). Prior research provides evidence of predictive relationships between increased self-efficacy, job-searching and job procurement (Creed et al., 2001; Eden and Aviram, 1993; Meyers and Houssemand, 2010).

3. Methodology

The research uses a longitudinal mixed-methods design across the evaluation, with both qualitative and quantitative research methods. Although the research includes both research methods, emphasis is placed on qualitative information gained through the participants' personal narrative.

3.1. Qualitative data

The research seeks to capture qualitative data in the form of semi-structured interviews with participants, as well as key internal and external stakeholders. Crucially, the participant interviews are longitudinal in nature (initial interview and follow-up interview) so that rich, in-depth data can be gathered on the impact that the programme has on individuals over time. The researchers embed themselves within the partnership as much as possible, ensuring that they spend time observing the work that is done (tactical level data gathering) and also observing the strategic operation of the project (e.g. sitting-in on regular steering group/board meetings). This immersion will be key in helping the researcher to both develop an in-depth understanding of the project and also to build rapport with the key project partners.

3.2. Quantitative data

Longitudinal outcome data in the form of a brief user friendly, academically validated and robust psychological scale, is collected from participants both at the start of their engagement (Time 1) and again at a time later in their engagement (Time 2)[4]. In addition, quantitative data are also presented/reported in relation to the social impact delivered to society. This involves the research team engaging with secondary data in order to develop frameworks that could be used to identify the fiscal and social impacts of the intervention.

3.3. Social Impact Matrix

In addition, quantitative data are collected in relation to the Social Impact Measurement Framework developed for the project and/or the project's Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) identified. The University of Northampton's 'Social Impact Matrix' utilised the prior work of McLoughlin et al. (2009) and combined it with the 'triple-bottom line' that is present in the business models of social enterprise and also the delivery of public services. The triple-bottom line consists of economic, social and environmental impacts that are delivered by organisations and (in the absence of a current theoretical definition of social value) used as a proxy for social value. Any organisation that seeks to use the model to develop their own social impact matrix has to first decide what specific areas of

[4] Time 2 is dependent on length of engagement and will be agreed with delivery partners.

impact that it has in the economic, social and environmental spheres. Once these areas have been defined the organisation must then identify what its specific outputs, outcomes and impacts are for these areas of impact and then develop or identify tools or formula that can be used to measure these specific outputs, outcomes and impacts. A simplified example of this would be if a social enterprise that works in the work-integration sector sought to evaluate its social impact. First, it would map the economic, social and environmental areas that it operated in. One example of this would be employment, which would be present in both the economic and social elements of the model. An employment related output would be the number of jobs created; an employment related outcome would be the psychological benefit to an individual of being employed; an employment related impact would be the savings to the state of reduced welfare payments. Specific tools would then need to be selected in order to capture this data. This would be simple for the number of jobs created; however, for the outcomes and impacts specific tools or formula would need to be utilised/created. Psychological scales that measured constructs such as well-being, self-efficacy or anxiety could be employed to measure outcome. Impact could be measured by adopting a formula that multiplied the number of jobs created (J) by the annual income of an individual on job-seekers allowance (B). The result of this calculation could also be added to the increase in income tax and national insurance income created by the new employment (T). This would give a calculation that would provide the fiscal savings to the state of the intervention [(J x B) + T].

4. Quantitative data analysis

Since November, quantitative data were collected using an online survey translated in English, Ukrainian, and Polish. The programme participants were asked to reply to the survey, on a voluntary basis, for the first time at the beginning of their participation in the programme and for the second time at the end. In total, 11 responses were collected, 10 for the first time and one for the second time (Table 4.1)[5].

Time of the questionnaire completion	Absolute value	Percentages
First Time	10	90.9%
Second Time	1	9.1%
Total	**11**	**100.0%**

Table 4.1. Time of the questionnaire completion

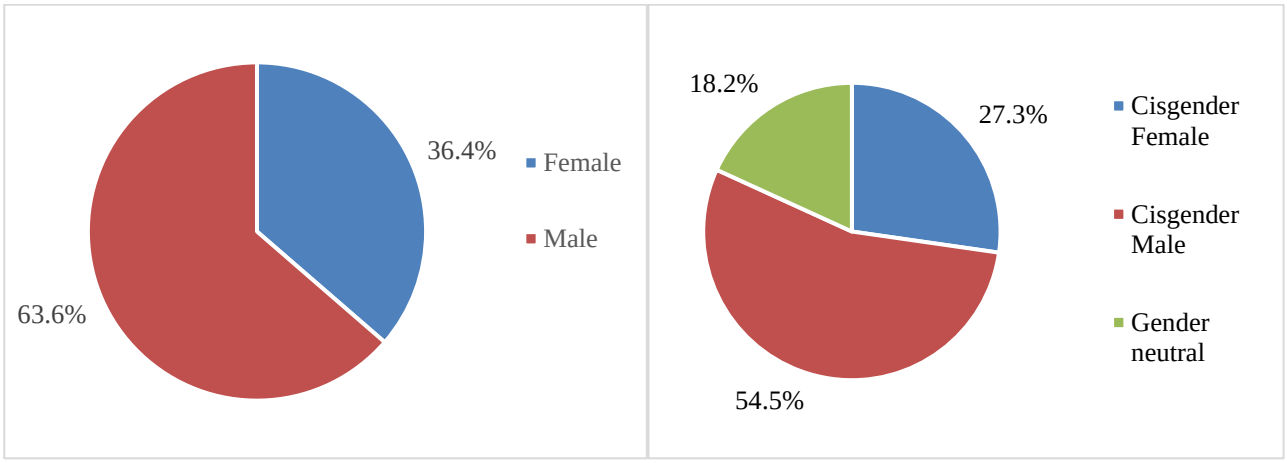
Most of the respondents were from SOFEA (36.4%) and Northampton Town Football Club Community Trust (27.3%). Moreover, the majority of the respondents are not about to leave (81.1%), in fact, a third of the respondents have been participating in Pathways for Recovery between one and three months (36.4%). Table 4.2 provides a breakdown for the respondents' participation in the programme.

Organisation	Absolute value	Percentages
Northampton Town Football Club Community Trust	3	27.3%
PBIC	2	18.2%
SOFEA	4	36.4%
TRACK NN	2	18.2%
Total	**11**	**100.0%**
Length of support		
Less than 1 month	2	18.2%
1 - 3 months	4	36.4%
3 - 6 months	2	18.2%
6 - 12 months	1	9.1%
More than 12 months	2	18.2%
Total	**11**	**100.0%**
Left/about to leave		
No	9	81.8%
Yes	2	18.2%
Total	**11**	**100.0%**

Table 4.2. Involvement in the programme

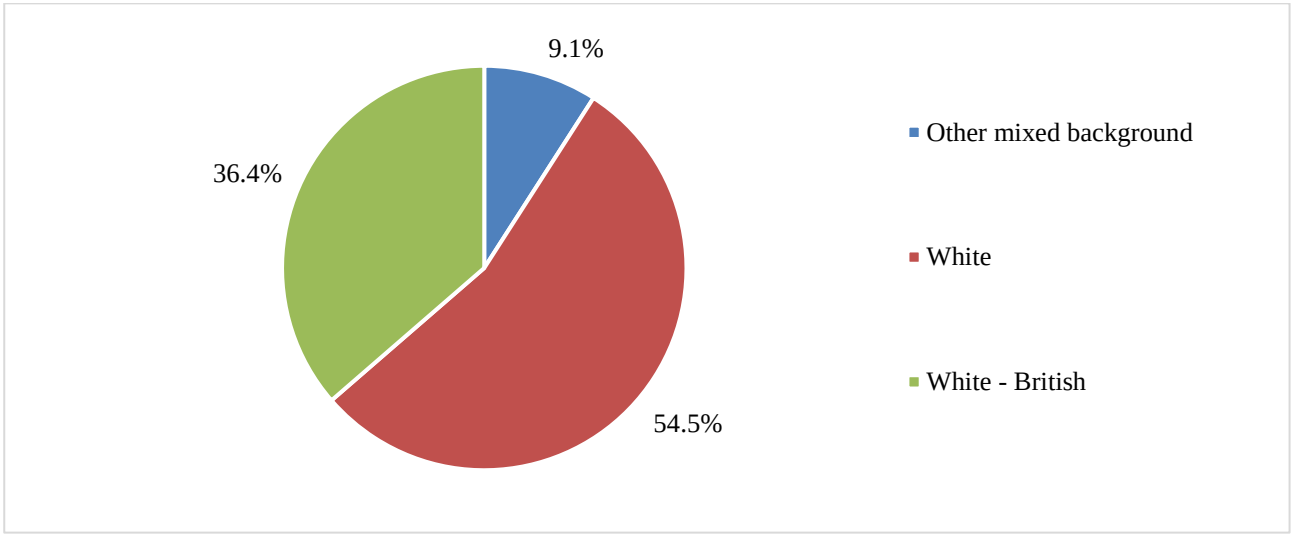
[5] The number of responses is not high enough to draw inferences about the impact of the programme, therefore this section will present only the descriptive statistics of the respondents' demographic data and their permanence in the programme.

Two third of the respondents are male (63.6%) and a third are female (36.4%) (Figure 4.1). The majority of the respondents are cisgender (81.8%) while 18.2% identified as gender neutral (Figure 4.2).



Figures 4.1 and 4.2. Respondents' sex and gender

Figure 4.3 presents the respondents' ethnicity, most of the respondents are white (54.5%) or white British (36.4%).



Figures 4.3. Respondents' ethnicity

With respect to the educational level, almost half of the respondents are qualified at level 1 and below (NVQ Entry Levels 1-3) (45.5%), then they are equally distributed among GCSE/O-Level grades A-C & professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 2), Higher Education and professional/vocational equivalent (NVQ Level 6), and no qualifications (18.2%) (Figure 4.4)

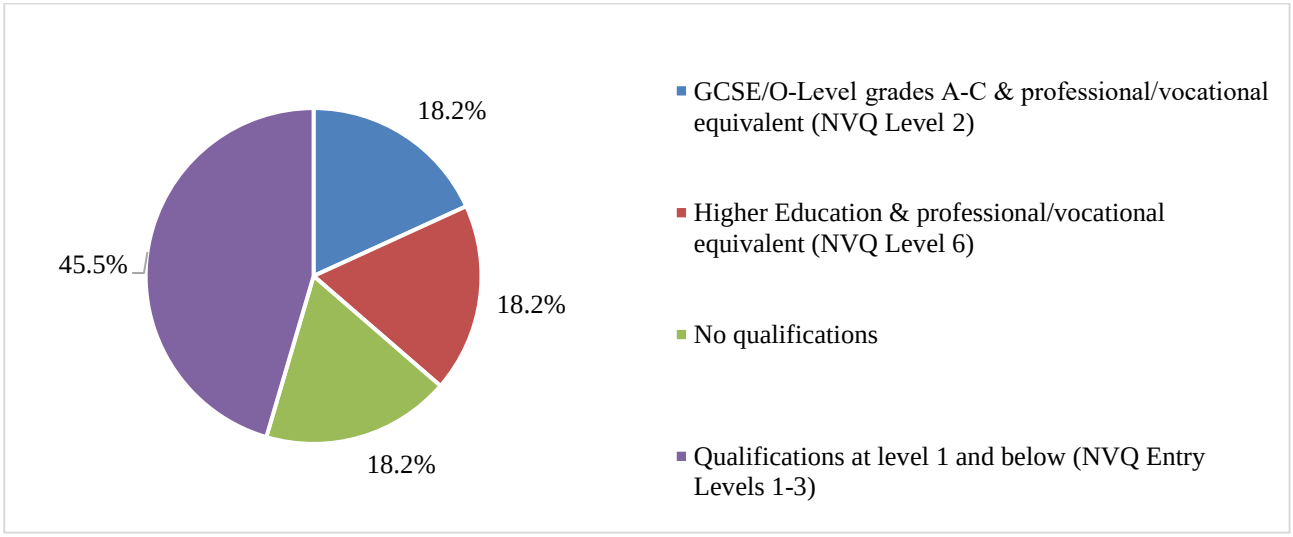
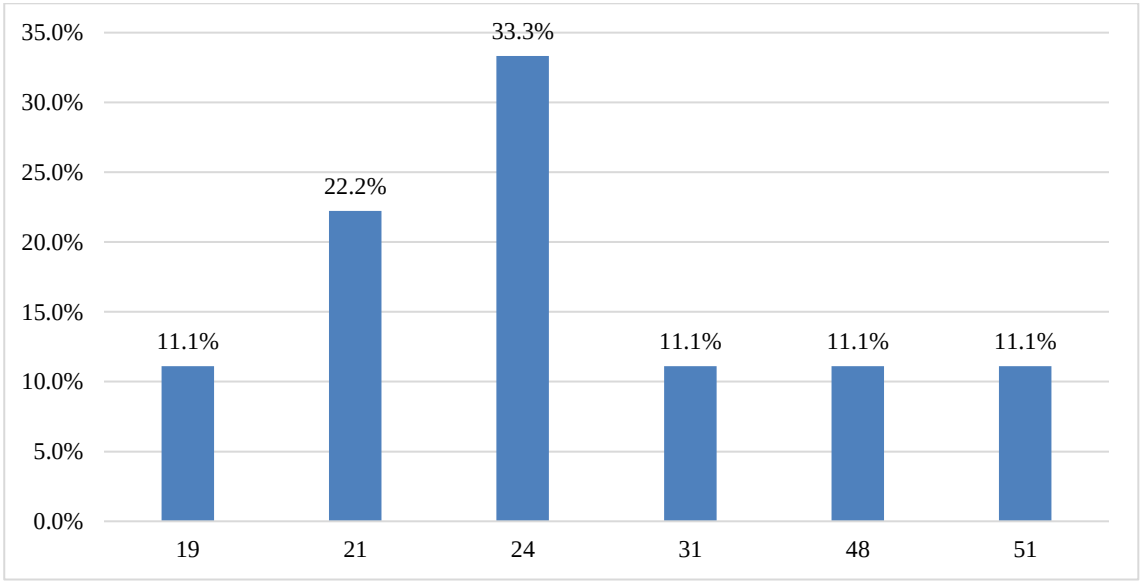


Figure 4.4. Respondent's education level

The respondents' age varies between 19 and 51 years, with a mean of 29.2 years and a standard deviation of 12.0 years. A third of the participants were 24 years-old (33.3%), followed by 21 years-old (22.2%), and then equally by 19, 31, 48, and 51 years-old (11.1%) (Figure 4.5).



Figures 4.5. Respondent's age.

The respondents were asked to identify with one of the target groups for the programme (respondents were able to select more than one option). Almost half were unemployed (45.5%), almost a third had learning needs (27.3%), few preferred not to say (18.2%), and a minority was a student, had physical disabilities, and/or belonged to other groups (9.1%) (Table 4.3).

Vulnerable group	Absolute value	Percentages
Student	1	9.1%
People with physical disabilities	1	9.1%
Other	1	9.1%
Prefer not to say	2	18.2%
People with learning needs	3	27.3%
Unemployed	5	45.5%
Total of the respondents	**9**	**100.0%**

Table 4.3. Programme respondents' vulnerability

A section of the questionnaire investigated the impact of COVID-19 on the programme participants. Half of the respondents did not belong to the high or moderate risk groups for COVID-19 (45.5%), almost a third belonged to the high-risk group (27.3%), a minority to the moderate risk group (9.1%), and 18.2% preferred not to say. Among the respondents, 27.3% replied that their well-being was affected by COVID-19, and among these 33.33% felt alone and/or isolated and/or lost many stimuli, for 66.7% felt that their anxiety increased, and for all their routine changed, and fund it difficult to cope (the respondents were able to select more than one option). Those that had their ability to find a job affected by COVID-19 were 45.5% (Table 4.4).

Belonging to the high or moderate risk groups for COVID-19	Absolute value	Percentages
No	5	45.5%
Yes, I belong to the moderate risk group (clinically vulnerable)	1	9.1%
Yes, I belong to the high-risk group (clinically extremely vulnerable)	3	27.3%
Prefer not to say	2	18.2%
Total	**11**	**100.0%**
COVID-19 affected respondents well-being		
No	8	72.7%
Yes	3	27.3%
Total	**11**	**100.0%**
If COVID-19 affected respondents well-being, how?		
I felt alone and isolated	1	33.3%
I lost many stimuli	1	33.3%
My anxiety increased	2	66.7%
My routine changed, and I found it difficult to cope	3	100.0%
Total	**7**	**100.0%**
COVID-19 affected respondents' ability to find a job		
No	6	54.5%
Yes	5	45.5%
Total	**11**	**100.0%**

Table 4.4. COVID-19 impact

A third of the respondents declared that they have been unemployed for 60 months (33.3%) and that they are claiming benefits for 60 months (40.0%) (Table 4.5).

Months of unemployment	**Absolute value**	**Percentages**
3	1	16.7%
6	1	16.7%
12	1	16.7%
36	1	16.7%
60	2	33.3%
Total	**6**	**100.0%**
Months of claiming benefit		
3	1	20.0%
6	1	20.0%
36	1	20.0%
60	2	40.0%
Total	**5**	**100.0%**

Table 4.5. Months of unemployment and claiming benefit.

5. Qualitative data findings

In November 2022, 10 semi-structured interviews were conducted with both delivery partners (n = 5) and programme participants (n = 5). Participants and delivery partners volunteered to participate in semi-structured interviews with anonymity and confidentiality assured, therefore, the results presented in this report are anonymous[6]. The interviews were analysed by identifying themes through a thematic analysis approach, with four main themes identified: participants' needs (composed of 'unemployment, and the multiple needs that hid behind' and 'COVID-19, a further barrier'), a wide range of support, impact on the participants, and Pathways for Recovery space for improvements (composed of 'the objectionable aspects of Pathways for Recovery' and 'more tailored support through fundings').

5.1. The needs of unemployed individuals in Pathways for Recovery

5.1.1 Unemployment, and the multiple needs that hid behind

All of the participants on the programme experience unemployment, lack of working experience, and lack of confidence in the workplace. therefore, through the programme, they are mostly aiming at developing these kinds of skills.

> *"They've had no experience of working anywhere else before and they just want to have experience. […] We've got one or two who have been brought in by parents who are very supportive but they are so timid and shy that they just need to build their confidence and feel welcomed somewhere, get an idea of what the workplace is like but with the extra support so if they feel they need to step out of the [work environment] and come and have a cup of tea and a chat then they can. So, it's easing them into preparing for work." (DP1)*

> *"I think a lot of the time it's the confidence to work and to go into employment. It's also routine and structure and the motivation to get up every day and turn up. It's in preparation for employment so this is a trial for them to be here twice a week or three times a week and turn up for the time they said they would turn up and help in the [work environment], do the work experience. So, I think it's the confidence building, the routine and structure, the social skills, to be around other people." (DP2)*

> *"Quite often when they come to our office they are unemployed or it can be a single mother." (DP4)*

[6] The research team labelled the Delivery Partner' feedback as "DP(numbers)" and Participants as "P(number)" .

"Because I wanted to volunteer and try and get experience to do any type of jobs in [work environment]." (PP2)

"Just to get a job really." (PP5)

Nonetheless, even if unemployment is a prerequisite and therefore a common factor, the programme participants' needs beyond unemployment vary. Some programme participants' came from disadvantaged backgrounds, some have high levels of anxiety and mental health difficulties, some experience disabilities, and some lack confidence.

"We might have ten people come in and they all have similar needs and then we'll have someone come in who's got completely different needs. […] I would say the main need I've noticed is there's a lot of anxiety. The majority I would say are capable of working but they are very, very anxious to go out and socialise, learning. We've had some that perhaps have had additional needs that may not have been diagnosed so they struggle a little bit […] Whereas we have some that come in who are so capable but it is just their confidence and once they've done that you see them move on quite quickly, which is great. It's what they want." (DP1)

"[…] some of them come from such disadvantaged background, even having a laptop or setting things up, they would be struggling." (DP2)

"What I'm seeing a lot is it tends to be self-esteem more than anything, a lot of lack of confidence within themselves. With the nature of some of our work, one of our biggest departments is Disability and Inclusion […] So I think a lot of them there's been a bit of self-doubt into work. A lot of nature of learning difficulties from disability, because they've got a learning disability they don't see themselves as good enough to work or they can't access the work. […] So that's the main one I've come across at the moment, learning difficulties." (DP3)

"It would be to help and support particularly those with barriers, so that could be anxiety, depression, long term unemployment, mainly to get back into work; back into some sort of training. So just motivating them through that process." (DP5)

"Confidence and trying to find a job, both at the moment, it's difficult." (PP1)

Some participants experienced several difficulties because of their background as refugees and/or migrants, for example, they might be waiting for the right to work or the visa, and experience English as a barrier.

"I've done a fair bit of work with refugees as well. Obviously that process is waiting for the right to work, the visa side of things and a bit of a language barrier. So we have tried to enrol as many as possible on English speaking courses to build up their English skills." (DP3)

"Quite often it's because they are migrants so quite often they are new to the country so they don't really know what to do, what their next step should be so they come to us and we help them to action plan their next steps, what they should do. We help them, point them in the right direction." (DP4)

"I have no work. I did not know very much about how it works here, how to find work, how to apply for benefits and all the things like this. And I was a little but frustrated as well".(PP4)

5.1.2. COVID-19, a further barrier

As mentioned in the literature review, the existing economic situation has been aggravated by COVID-19 and the physical distancing measures, leading to two main consequences for the programme participants. First, the programme participants' anxiety, mental health, and physical health difficulties were exacerbated due to the pandemic and the distancing measures.

"Some of the young people are perhaps prone to anxiety or have autism of some sort, then they've 'been at home, it's harder for them to socialise and mix anyway but then they've had that period at home which has just taken them back. So it's integrating them back into the work place - and being around people day to day and having a routine again. But I do think it has been influenced by that, yes." (DP1)

"Maybe in terms of their confidence and anxiety levels, potentially because some of them haven't left their houses for three years or longer because of Covid, or have limited contact with people. That's made them more anxious to speak to new people and build friendships. […] I haven't seen that much difficulties but I do know that could play a role. […] I think Covid plays an element, but I think the majority of them, they either have anxiety difficulties or they are anxious to meet new people, or just lack confidence to come out. […]" (DP2)

"It seems to be for the younger generation between 18 to the early-20s gap - I've worked in education through different roles, and I've seen quite a lot of struggle in social interactions. It seems to be when what would have been the college phase of 16-18, the ones that missed out on the full two years of 16-18 education seem to have the biggest trend in lack of social skills. That's something I've noticed myself." (DP3)

"I think a lot more people are a bit more anxious, particularly going out is still an issue but also if they were already unemployed prior to Covid, that's added an extra amount of time, so it does knock their confidence." (DP5)

"Do have clients who still suffer from long Covid and even though before they got ill they were perfectly active and healthy, now they struggle to get back into employment purely because of their health." (DP4)

Second, programme participants' employment and volunteering experiences, as well as educational levels, have decreased because of COVID-19 which has an impact on generating the experience required for entering employment.

"I think it probably has been affected by Covid because they've had a longer gap and then there's a gap on a CV, they've not carried straight on from school or college, they have this huge gap and they have not - Whereas I think when you've been in the routine of going to school, the routine of carrying on at college or workplace just continues whereas when you've had a huge break [..]." (DP1)

5.2. A wide range of support

The delivery partners provide comprehensive employment support initiative delivered by a regional partnership including specialist support providers, employment and skills organisations and strategic stakeholders., with the aim of supporting unemployment To achieve the ultimate aim of the programme, move participants into employment, the delivery partners support the programme participants with their well-being, confidence support, CV writing, and completing general paperwork.

"We might have ten people come in and they all have similar needs and then we'll have someone come in who's got completely different needs. Then we have to have conversations, which we do, 'What will the process be for this young person? How long do you think we'll be working with them? Do they need one of us supporting them one to one in the [work environment] for their well-being and building their confidence? Do we need to pair them up with someone? Is there any outside support that we would be able to eventually move them on to? What do they want as well essentially?[…] We also have men's group that they go to and some participate more than you think but actually it integrates them amongst some of the other people there, learning to speak out a little bit and mix in. The ultimate goal is that they move on." (DP1)

"We also do one to one check ins with them and complete an assessment […] which assesses their mental well-being state, just to see do they feel useful, do they fell they have a purpose in life, do they feel loved? Or do they feel cheerful, it's just a quick snapshot, a couple of questions to see where they are at in terms which well-being and then we can maybe help them. Once I did it with somebody and he said that he felt not very useful. I asked why and he said because he feels like he's not contributing at home, he's not helping his mum with bills or money or anything, he just feels a bit like a burden because he's sitting there eating and not helping. So then we started looking for a job because he felt he was ready. Now we've got him a part time job, so from that assessment, that questionnaire, we've identified he is really ready and needs to do something, so he's now moved on." (DP2)

"[…] quite often when they come to our office they are unemployed or it can be a single mother. So, the first thing we need to do for them is apply for benefits and at the same time start searching for jobs and point them in the right direction regarding their language needs because it is quite common that their English is not very good so that's where we start. We just try to help them to make a difference in their life. Obviously, our ultimate goal is to help them get into employment because they are unemployed." (DP4)

In particular, confidence-building seems to be a great tool to ease programme participants into a daily routine, meeting new people, and trusting themselves, important prerequisites to be able to maintain a job.

"No, they all start here in the [work environment] but we will monitor them and see their confidence build up. When their confidence builds up we'll have the conversation with them if they want it. The majority of them will want to start working to get some money, I suppose." (DP1)

"So, they have the support to ask questions, that helps them to build confidence. Then we do have community outings which is open to the Pathways as well. We might go and play mini golf, we do it as a trip together. Next month we want to go to the Birmingham Christmas market, so it's also open to the Pathways. We have the education programme at [the organisation] but we also have the Pathways so it's open to both so they can come. We do stuff like that to increase their social skills to come out." (DP2)

Moreover, the delivery partners helped the programme participants with the development of employment skills, among which support with CV writing, cover letter, finding employment, preparing for interviews, and improving their English.

> *"We support with CVs, looking for jobs, applications, assessing whether we feel that they are ready to make applications for things. Also documents, things like ID and completing the general paperwork as well. […] So, we do a lot of one to one stuff." (DP1)*

> *"I think it's a structured programme, or we have structured it at [the organisation], from the day they come through the door, looking around, doing the paperwork, signing them up, getting all the documents. Being in the [work environment] then assessing if they are ready for employment, to do their CV, cover letter, finding employment, that's all advantage because we definitely try and move them on. […] I think it's what we were just talking about, they are quite often new the country so they don't really know how it works here. Sometimes they have no idea how to start creating their CV because, for example, in their country the CV had a completely different layout." (DP2)*

> *"Build up work experience, the skills and then we can signpost them to other vacancies." (DP3)*

> *"If they are unemployed, if they are searching for a job we will help them with that. If they need a CV, if they are searching for courses, they want to develop their English skills, we also find them ESOL courses. […] We do have work for employability skills - we help them prepare for interviews, we teach them how to create a CV, how to change them depending on the job role they apply for. And we also teach them how to actually search for jobs. For example the importance of social media and how to search for jobs online, these kind of things. […] ESOL, the whole idea of learning English. Basically it's the most important skill when you live in this country, if you want to go into employment you need to have quite good English skills. The other thing is the whole idea of searching for jobs online or even connection with local labour market, that we have some sort of connection with employment agencies and we can connect them with these agencies. And sometimes agencies actually contact us and tell us that they, for example, need people for [work environment] or factories locally so I think they do appreciate this kind of support." (DP4)*

> *"I work with participants on a one to one basis mainly. We do some group activities but mainly one to one, and that's a mixture of face to face, Teams, phone calls, so regular support to talk through supporting with CVs, job searching social media activity to get back into work. We've*

got customers looking for self-employment opportunities and looking for training as well." (DP5)

"I was settling in, finding a job, applying for benefits, just answering questions they have about living here, helping with my CV and a lot of other things. So I agreed to take part and to use this chance for my benefit." (PP4)

Another activity mentioned by the delivery partner consisted of supporting programme participants with paperwork, for example, applying for benefits or for the schools for their children.

"Or simply even if they are disabled and they need help applying for benefits, all sorts of things. Sometimes they even struggle to apply for schools for their children, we also help with this." (DP4)

"[The delivery organisation] helps me a lot and my family as well, another son who came with his family too. She helps me to do all documents, pension credit and she gave a lot of advice on how to act, how to behave also. When we came […], we didn't know the laws of your country - where must we go, where should we go, what should we do, how to begin - and she helped a lot. I like this agency, […] because a lot of people come there and have a lot of help from that organisation. They are very active people and they do much for people, for Ukrainians as well." (PP3)

Some of the aforementioned activities were achieved thanks to one to one support. According to the delivery partners, some of the programme participants found great support in having a mentor or someone they can talk to.

"I think they benefit the most with having a mentor in the [work environment], somebody buddied up with them and showing them the stuff. […] But being with somebody is one of the biggest, I think, to keep them coming back and doing the work." (DP2)

"I think it's more the fact that it's one to one bespoke support for each participant. That's easy to do now while the numbers are a bit lower but maybe moving forwards when they are bigger there might be an opportunity to do things group. But I think at the moment because it's one to one the participants benefit more from that bespoke support.[…] It helps and that is a real advantage, the fact that you can focus in on that person's individual need rather than trying to do it as a collective, which doesn't always end up with the positive outcomes." (DP5)

5.3 Impact on the participants

Confidence has been discussed positively in relation to participants' needs and delivery partners' support. It forms an important aspect of the Pathways for Recovery project. Both delivery partners and programme participants mentioned that the programme helped them in gaining confidence, in themselves, in their employability skills, in their social skills, and ultimately to find independence.

> *"Confidence, definitely confidence; being around other people, feeling like they can talk to colleagues or staff. We praise them when they are doing well and we try and build them up. But I would say that's the biggest thing, the main thing I notice when young people come in is the lack of confidence. Anxiety is very prevalent in here, it seems to be quite a big thing but the more they come in and stick with their routine, get praised, do well, you see their confidence grow. That's the main thing.[…] And the fact that we've been able to move people on to jobs with it, earning a nice amount of money and get independent, that's brilliant and really satisfying to see as a member of staff." (DP1)*

> *"Definitely confidence, the first day they walk through the door they are very quiet, very timid, very shy; maybe the parents talk for them. And after a couple of weeks and months they come and find you and will be like, 'Can you help me with my CV? Can you help me apply for a job?' I invite them back in to write a cover letter, then they will come back and sit with me. There's just a whole level of communication and confidence that's very difference to the first day they've walked through the door to a month later, two months later." (DP2)*

> *"They are getting more confident, they start believing in themselves. It does happen that we have people who think even though they are well qualified in their countries and they have a good education they don't believe in themselves, they think, 'How would I be able to progress with my career? I can only do cleaning jobs or be a factory worker'. We help them to believe in themselves and be much more open minded and just be brave enough and confident enough to make this first step towards changing their career for better. So I believe they feel more confident and more empowered to actually make that change and take steps towards a better future." (DP4)*

> *"Their confidence and their motivation to go out into the world of work. All the people that have come through the project with a positive outcome or progression have been able to secure employment. So it's the idea that they were lacking that motivation and confidence, maybe feeling a bit anxious, lacked some of the skills they needed to get back into employment and they've managed to succeed with that." (DP5)*

"I'd say my confidence in working has gone up a bit." (PP1)

"I like to come here because it gives me more experience and once I get all the experience I need I can go and find a job. So hopefully I can get a job.[…] I would say confidence and getting a job." (PP2)

Understandably, employment is one of the areas in which the programme participants experience greater impact.

"So being able to support people on the path to getting back into employment is very important, I think that's the biggest advantage of the project, that we can spend lots of time with them and support them on their way back into employment. […] we're really actually happy that we can actually help people under this project. We see that it is huge impact so it's good for us as a charity organisation to be able to work under the project and help people. It gives us the opportunity to spend lots of hours with them and support them in many shapes and forms." (DP4)

"Yes I enjoy it. And it helped me, I had some meetings and I was told about career advice here and how it works. They helped me with my CV and with [….] my diplomas." (PP4)

Participants' self-esteem has been positively affected by the delivery partners' support, which in return helped them to find confidence and believe in themselves.

"Some of them have gone into work and they've seen that they are capable despite thinking of their learning difficulties." (DP3)

"I think first and foremost Pathways for Recovery allows the initial interaction of the participant coming to you. The consistent work with the participant, it allows breaking the barriers […] Some of my participants, again going back to the learning difficulties, they have the self-esteem that they are not good enough to work. We've got them work experience and they've seen for themselves that they are capable of work. So yes, getting to know the people, working with the people and then the follow-up work comes from itself really." (DP4)

"I've felt more calm and acquainted with procedures here in the UK and I know where to look for jobs, different websites, and what a job application process looks like. And it was nice to talk to the advisers at [PPAC] because they are very attentive and empathetic. So for me it improved my self-esteem." (PP4)

Although the programme appears to impact most of the participants, some seem to beneficiate more than others. In particular, delivery partners mentioned males and young people as those that beneficiate the most.

> *"I think the one way to put it, the nature of [the organisation and the work provided] sometimes think that some of the guys, the boys, they benefit a bit more than the girls because a lot of girls that come through the door are not big fans of being in the [work environment]. I don't blame them, some of the girls. Some girls really like it and enjoy it but others come in and they are like, 'Oh, it's cold', they don't want to be in there. At which point it's difficult because then what else can we offer them? We sometimes give them cleaning and maintenance jobs like hoovering and doing the laundry, dishwashers, other stuff, life skills. Some of the guys benefit a lot more […] because they are happy to do that. I think for girls it's a little bit harder at times. (DP2)*

> *"Going back to the Covid-19 of the younger generation between 16 and early 20s, I'm seeing a lot of struggling engagement. With going to the youth group through the Job Centre, they've said the same things, it's always other providers such as Princes Trust, the Job Centre, Prospects, they've all had a lack of engagement from that band of people. Whereas people who genuinely want to go into work, they will engage and get into work." (DP3)*

> *"Definitely those who have a higher level of need I think are the ones that benefit more. I wouldn't necessarily say an age group or anything like that, I think it's just those who have more challenging needs, maybe, and more barriers who would benefit more." (DP5)*

5.4 Pathways for Recovery space for improvements

5.4.1. The objectionable aspects of Pathways for Recovery

One of the comments raised by the programme participants refers to the inability of helping participants with higher needs. Although the organisation seems to be able to support the participant with higher needs, it acknowledges that it might not be able to help her/him with employment.

> *"Negatives I would say is when we have young people who have much higher needs, that they can only do - like I said, we've got one young person who hasn't got any diagnosis but my view would be that he has additional needs. He will only do one particular job, so he'll only move around the Pot Noodles from one place to another. He's very happy coming here and we're happy for him to come here, we all really like him and are really glad he feels there's somewhere he can come where he can talk to people, sit and have a cup of tea with people. But*

realistically long term it would be very difficult to move him on to employment unless it's aimed at - to be supportive – Even with the additional needs they all want to feel valued and that they are doing a job and earn a bit of money and through Pathways they don't get any money. It's done through choice and they don't get any payment. I think that would be my only concern. But we're doing what we can and they feel very comfortable and happy coming in but you wonder long term, 'How are we going to move this person on to somewhere where he feels valued and can actually earn a bit of money?'" (DP1)

Another suggestion was made about the lack of contacts with both employers and other delivery partners. The interviewees underlined how the programme participants might struggle at the beginning of a new employment and having strong connections with employers can help them with the settling in process. Moreover, one delivery partner discussed how their organisation is not able to support some programme participants and, having a greater connection among the partners, could help in redirecting the participants to other organisations according to their needs and desires.

"Somewhere to improve for us personally is making connections with other employers around the surrounding area. We've got some connections with John Lewis and Ikea […]. Some of the young people, they are perfect, they can do the work but initially they are going to come across there as shy and timid but they can do the work. You just have to give them the chance to settle in for a month and then they can do the work. But it's finding these connections to other employers, to understand and work together. They are very capable of doing the job, you just need to be understanding and give them the support that they need. […] It's building those connections. They can be in Pathways and come through but maybe if they don't want the [work environment] we could find some alternative to work with them together to give them the right work experience. […] Another one, like I've mentioned for the girls, I would like to find alternative work experiences for them, whether it's hairdressing or working in a cafe or something like that, that's something I have been working on." (DP2)

"I think we need to be a bit more transparent of what everyone brings to the table; what does everyone offer? And how can we incorporate everyone's skill set to redirect participants between each other. From my point of view, I might not be an expert in catering, as an example, so if I get a participant who wants to work in food, catering, I might refer them to Café Track who deals with the café side of things, so that might be a good referral. And if there is other training that - I've forgotten the name - if we can signpost each other to allow the best opportunity for the person. So Café Track, for example, they might get someone who really

wants to do sport, signpost them to me and if I've got someone who wants to do catering I signpost it to him. I know everyone brings different stuff to the table, I think we just need to be a bit better in referring each other within the project, not seeing each other as competitors but actually working together." (DP3)

Some of the participants are not able to cover the transportation costs which has an impact on accessing employment opportunities.

"Sometimes transport costs, some people don't have money to come in so they haven't got the budget or they are living on universal credit and then taking the bus to come and go-" (DP2)

"There's a lot of need for [the organisation type of] work at the minute but I've got participants who are willing to work and want to work but they physically can't get there because it's an A-road or dual carriageway, too far away or public transportation doesn't get them there. So that's a big barrier. I've got big companies like Panther, that's quite local to Duston so it is walkable, but I've got Royal Mail, Cummins, some big named organisations who were asking for the people but I can't get the people there. Yes, that's definitely a big barrier. With the nature of people we work with, they are not going to be financially on top of things so they are not going to have the money up front for public transport or a car or whatever transport it is. That is a massive barrier; it's getting to the point where it has to be pretty much walking distance or the public transport literally takes them directly there." (DP3)

Another difficulty that delivery partners experienced was with paperwork. It is not the bureaucracy per se, but some of the specific documents the programme requires once the participants find employment.

"I have to be honest, compared to other projects the bureaucracy is, I would say, better with regard to not that much paperwork with regard to that, definitely, because we have similar projects and the paperwork was very challenging; this one is definitely easier. [however] One thing that actually is giving me lots of worries is that when the clients secure employment they need for us to be able to claim outcome […]. And that is a tricky one because obviously- -when they go into employment it's very difficult to get hold of them, […]. The other thing I can think of as a disadvantage is when we have a person who is employed as an agency worker but they have not been called to work for quite a long time, technically they are unemployed but they have not received a P45 and obviously they still are employed so we can't really enrol them on the project. That is a tricky one." (DP4)

"I think the paperwork is quite lengthy but I think that's just something that comes with all of these projects. Getting through that initial sign-up process for a participant can be a bit of a challenge sometimes. That can delay a little bit them starting, so it can be." (DP5)

5.4.2 More tailored support through funding

In line with the aforementioned difficulties, the delivery partner and the programme participants suggested increasing the funding for both helping the participants to get to activities and employment opportunities and to provide more services.

"[…] they are spending money to come here, the money that they don't really have. So that can be a barrier sometimes to turning up. We've had that with a few people. It's difficult, so that would be something. And also some of our community activities, social activities, we very much try to find the funding for it but it would have been nice if there was something Pathways also had for the social interaction skills, to do some fun activities. We don't want people to just come in, do the work and go home, we need to build a bigger picture - their social skills, building friendships, being happy when they come here because that's how you keep them engaged. If you just put them in the [work environment], they do two hours of work and go home, after a while it's not enough. They need to have more of a connection, more friendships, do some nice activities, feel part of the family and the service. Right now it's possible because we've requested fundings everywhere else but it would have been nice to also get that from Pathways." (DP2)

"I think if there was some money or funding available for participants to access external training. So if they wanted to become self-employed and they wanted to upskill in - for instance, if they want to be a cake maker and they want to learn how to do that professionally, it's a bit restrictive because there isn't any sort of funding available for me to say, 'Here's a course, off you go and do it'." (DP5)

"[…] maybe it might be more range of services. […] For me it would be maybe some counselling even, people in a situation like me suffered from war experience. I don't know if it can be done under this particular project." (PP4)

Another improvement would be to create more connections with employers, in order to be able to offer more work opportunities to the programme participants, also to those with special needs.

"No, I just think it's important to have external employers available so when they finish with Pathways and they are ready to move on- […] and also a special needs because some of them,

you don't know where to move them on to, you don't know where to take them. […] But I think that's really important, after Pathways, to move them on to more meaningful employment." (DP2)

6. Conclusion and recommendations

This interim report illustrated the findings from the Pathways for Recovery, a programme part funded European Social Fund, SEMLEP wide comprehensive employment support initiative delivered by a regional partnership including specialist support providers, employment and skills organisations and strategic stakeholders. This programme aims to help those most disadvantaged in our communities due to the impact of COVID-19. In particular, it helps job seekers and inactive people, including long term unemployed and people far from the labour market who need support to get themselves back into employment. To evaluate the programme both quantitative and qualitative data collection implemented from July 2022 to December 2022. The quantitative data presented in this report were gathered through an online questionnaire that captured the responses of 11 programme participants (in English and Ukrainian) on the psychological benefits, in particular self-efficacy and well-being, and employment benefits of the programme. Qualitative data consisted of 10 semi-structured interviews with both participants and delivery partners, focused on the needs of programme participants and the programme performance.

The interim report showed that Pathways for Recovery is performing strongly, enabling the programme participants to improve their mental health, including confidence and self-esteem, and to improve their employability skills, their social skills, and ultimately to find independence. Based upon the data outlined in this report, the research team proposes the following key recommendations for developing the project:

- **Improve connection opportunities among delivery partners:** Increasing the opportunities for collaboration among delivery partners to allow programme participants to be referred to the organisations that can help them the most and have the most appropriate work opportunities
- **Improve connection opportunities among delivery partners and employers:** Increasing the opportunities for collaboration among delivery partners and employers, to be able to offer more work opportunities to the programme participants, also to those with special needs.
- **Increase funding:** Supporting the delivery organisations with more funding would improve the activities and services opportunities, and would allow the delivery organisations in supporting the participants to travel to activities and employment opportunities.

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