

Project information

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Executive Summary

This report aims at communicating the UPCARING project's main aims and objectives as well as its intermediate results to all those who are interested in the theme of innovation of training systems with particular reference to integration of training and other employment-oriented services and training in home care work.

UPCARING intends to design and implement an **integrated e-learning system to serve workers and aspiring workers in the home care sector**, allowing learners to benefit from three environments to improve their professionalism: i) the **learning resources** contained in the platform, ii) a **system for validation of prior learning**; iii) a **system for demand/supply matching of home care services** assisted by expert operators.

The innovative character of UPCARING lies in the integration between the three systems described above, which allow all-round support to the professionalization of home care workers.

The UPCARING project promoter and coordinator is an Italian research centre specialising in social research, evaluation of public policies, research on the intersection of demand & supply of labour and on the connection between VET and the labour market, analysis of the care service sector, willing to develop new tools to support the professional growth of home care workers. The project partners are organizations from Italy, Lithuania, Spain, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom with various types of expertise and specialization (research on education and knowledge issues, social work, e-learning, validation of prior learning) and a Spanish organization in charge of project evaluation. Full details of the project partnership and contact persons can be found in Section 3 of this report.

The UPCARING platform is currently being finalized with a view to the prototype being ready for internal testing on 15th December. It will undergo internal testing by the partners until 31st January 2013; the pilot is expected to start in February 2013.

Due to its complex organization, the UPCARING project involves several different professional profiles from each partner organization. The partners of the consortium were selected according to the mission and characteristics of the single organizations in order to guarantee the implementation of the project to an excellent extent thanks to the quality of the staff involved:

- social welfare work and training and labour policy experts;
- experts of learning processes, training design and needs analysis in the field of social work and home care services;
- experts of e-learning and didactics applied to ICT.

The future plans for UPCARING envisage possible exploitation of the main project outputs (the e-learning model, the validation of prior learning model, and the demand/supply matching model) to boost lifelong learning approach in the social care sector and improve policies promoting the embedding of learning in everyday life.

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1. Project Objectives

The UPCARING Project was designed in order to **improve the professionalism of home care workers and enhance their chances of employment.**

To do so, an **e-learning system** based on four macro-areas of competence - drawn from comparison of national and regional curricula of the partner countries and regions, a **system for recognition and validation of prior formal, informal, and non-formal learning attainments**, and a **demand/supply matching system** will be embedded in a web-based platform. The demand/supply matching system will be operator-assisted and will act as a connection between home care workers and their market (families with older relatives needing care).

The **UPCARING platform - integrating e-learning system, validation of prior learning system, and demand/supply matching system** - is the main expected product of the UPCARING project. Therefore this document will mention **“UPCARING project”** meaning the overall project that includes the creation of the platform, and **“UPCARING platform”** meaning the platform itself, which is expected to be ready for pilot in February 2013.

Achieving the development of the learners’ knowledge and skills in home care work through e-learning, **enhancing their professionalism** through validation of their prior learning, and **supporting their employability** through a demand/supply matching service are the main objectives of the UPCARING project, the three primary environments of the platform and the possibility of either “à la carte” or integrated usage being its main features.

In an increasingly ageing Europe, where the impact of invalidating illnesses also increases and, as a consequence, the need for family care assistance grows, the labour market demands competent, qualified home care workers. The UPCARING platform offers an innovative all-round learning-validation-matching system allowing quick access to learning, skill validation/certification, and employment opportunities.

The UPCARING project was designed to meet the needs of and offer significant benefits to both **home care workers** and **intermediary professionals in welfare and home care services**.

Among **home care workers**, the addressees of the UPCARING platform are both those who are already practising - and wishing to achieve further recognition of their skills - and those who are planning to work in home care and need to acquire the necessary knowledge, competence and skills.

As regards **intermediary professionals in welfare and home care services**, focus is concentrated on vocational guidance and skill assessment experts in charge of supply/demand matching, i.e., professionals who perform both needs analysis and skills assessment of candidates searching for a job in the home care sector.

The **advantages for home care workers** are mainly connected to the possibility of benefitting from learning and validation opportunities that can be accessed from anywhere and at any time.

The advantage for **intermediary professionals in welfare and home care services** is the possibility to test two systems (validation of prior learning and demand/supply

matching) to help recruitment of home care workers to respond to the demands of families.

Finally, the **training, employment, and social welfare systems** could benefit from UPCARING thanks to the involvement of significant stakeholders from private and public organisations in the project initiatives to stimulate reflections upon policy recommendations relevant to the themes of flexibility of learning, professionalization of care work, support to active inclusion of challenged groups thanks to education and training in a European perspective.

2. Project Approach

The UPCARING project can be considered as a **first step towards a new-concept, all-round approach to home care workers' professionalization**.

UPCARING aims at offering the European care workers and the welfare and home care services intermediary professionals the opportunity to get to know and explore the context of home care work-related learning and its connection to employment by means of the integrated approach implemented thanks to the UPCARING platform (that will be accessible and operational for piloting at the address www.upcaring.eu on 1st February 2013). We prefer to talk about “learning” rather than “training” to underline the central role of the user.

The UPCARING platform offers three main functionalities:

- **e-learning,**
- **validation of prior learning,**
- **demand/supply matching** of home care work

Learners can choose to access them sequentially or to pick only the one or two most suitable to their needs. Advice on recommended pathways will be made available based on the learners' profile information collected on registration to the platform, but learners will be free to make their own choice.

The use of English as the official language for the project and its deliverables is accompanied by translation of public deliverables into the languages of the partner organizations to respond to the need for multilingualism as a way to achieve democracy in access to knowledge and learning. The **European dimension in learning** is favoured by the availability of learning resources in multiple languages, which can contribute to improve learning of languages for special purposes as a further transversal competence.

The project implementation is accompanied by an evaluation activity based on a factual approach, oriented to improve the performances of the partnership on a constructive basis. The evaluation approach involves both observation of processes and assessment of the quality of the project results and outcomes. Besides peer review exercises performed on the project deliverables, evaluation includes assessment of each Consortium meeting achievements. Mini-reports are produced by the Evaluator after each Partners' meeting pointing out the most relevant issues emerged, analyzing the quality of the response of the Consortium to such issues and offering recommendations.

At the start-up of the project, the UPCARING logo was designed and a slogan was chosen to accompany the logo in communication and dissemination activities.



Supporting the professionalization of home care work

Fig. 1. UPCARING project logo and slogan.

The project website, which will host the UPCARING platform, was the first dissemination tool to be created in addition to press releases on the UPCARING project published in the partners organisation websites and/or newsletters.

The part of the website designed for dissemination contains the following pages:

- Home
- Partnership
- Contact
- Project (Overview, Objectives, Context, Forum)

as well as “Photos” and “Newsletter” sections. A “Join us!” button connects to the social network accounts of the project.



Fig. 2. Upcaring website homepage.

An “**Enter the UPCARING platform**” button will be made visible at the start of the pilot phase on 1st February 2013.

A Dissemination Plan and an Exploitation Plan were drawn up to describe the dissemination and exploitation activities to be taken, providing guidelines on how to identify and analyse the project stakeholders.

Direct contacts with stakeholders (local health services, local welfare services, VET providers, migrants' associations, families associations, employment centres), and with potential end-users (welfare operators and other intermediary professionals, home care workers contacted through migrants' associations, charities, voluntary associations) started at the beginning of UPCARING and are ongoing, aimed at presenting the potential of the UPCARING platform and to propose participation in the pilot which will be officially launched on 1st February 2013.

Dissemination at local level during the first half of the project was mainly made through individual contacts with stakeholders and potential end-users. Tools such as headed paper for communication and press releases and a presentation template to be used in dissemination seminars and meetings were produced to ensure project corporate image in dissemination. In the course of the dissemination action carried out so far, particular effort was concentrated on making the information consistent with the project progress as the works went on, in order to guarantee coherence with the public's expectations.

The dissemination strategy of the project plans that the web will be used as a major dissemination medium during the second half of the project - when piloting will take place - with a Facebook page, a Twitter account, a YouTube channel, and via the Scooplt content marketing platform. It has also been envisaged to produce expressly designed promotional materials to be distributed to the public to accompany the launch of the pilot. The materials will be chosen by the partners and – besides brochures and leaflets - will include everyday-use objects like re-usable tote bags, office stationery, or computer devices, which are more concrete ways to reach the identified targets.

The sustainability design underlying the project is that after the end of the funding period the UPCARING model should be publicly available in social service organisations, libraries, vocational schools, migrants' organizations, etc. Commercial exploitation may be undertaken either by the consortium as a whole or by individual partners depending on an agreement on exploitation and intellectual property rights. A plan for financial and operational sustainability of the UPCARING system will be drawn up before the end of the funding period.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The major mid-stage **IMPLEMENTATION OUTPUTS** of the UPCARING project are relevant to:

1. **Research** to support the design of the UPCARING platform tools,
2. **Design of UPCARING platform tools.**

1. Research to support the design of the UPCARING platform tools

Two report were produced as preliminary research on which the UPCARING platform tools design was based:

- **Review of European Models of Validation/Certification of Competences, E-learning and Demand/Supply Matching Systems for Professional Care Service Providers**

The review was carried out on 16 European regions/countries grouped into five major areas according to the national systems of funding and services provision:

- United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Wales and North Ireland - taxation and mainly private provision;
- Continental Europe: France, The Netherlands, Germany – social insurance and some taxation;
- Nordic region: Sweden, Finland – taxation and state provision;
- Southern Europe: Italy (Emilia-Romagna, Apulia, Tuscany), Spain, Portugal, Greece – moving from family support model to state assessment and mixed provision;
- Eastern Europe: Lithuania – family support model with fragmented formal services.

The review report showed that training and certification, cultural and legal scenarios in Europe vary remarkably and was the basis for further research on national and regional competence frameworks for home care workers aimed at sketching a proposal for a common European competence framework in this area.

- **European Competence Framework for Home Care Workers**

The proposal for a European Competence Framework for Home Care Workers is based on a review of existing competence frameworks, curricula and qualification standards for home care workers carried out by the project partners.¹ The result of the review showed the existence of **four macro-areas of competence** common to all of the curricula and qualification standards analysed:

¹ Background information on European models of validation/certification of competences, e-learning and demand/supply matching systems was also collected in a *Review of European models of validation/certification of competences, e-learning and demand/supply matching systems for the professional Care service provider* (see point 1 above).

- i) **Establishing a positive relationship with the person being cared for**
 - ii) **Hygiene and safety of the person being cared for and of his/her environment**
 - iii) **Operational care-giving techniques**
 - iv) **Care-giving organization and planning**
- besides a number of other additional technical-professional skills.

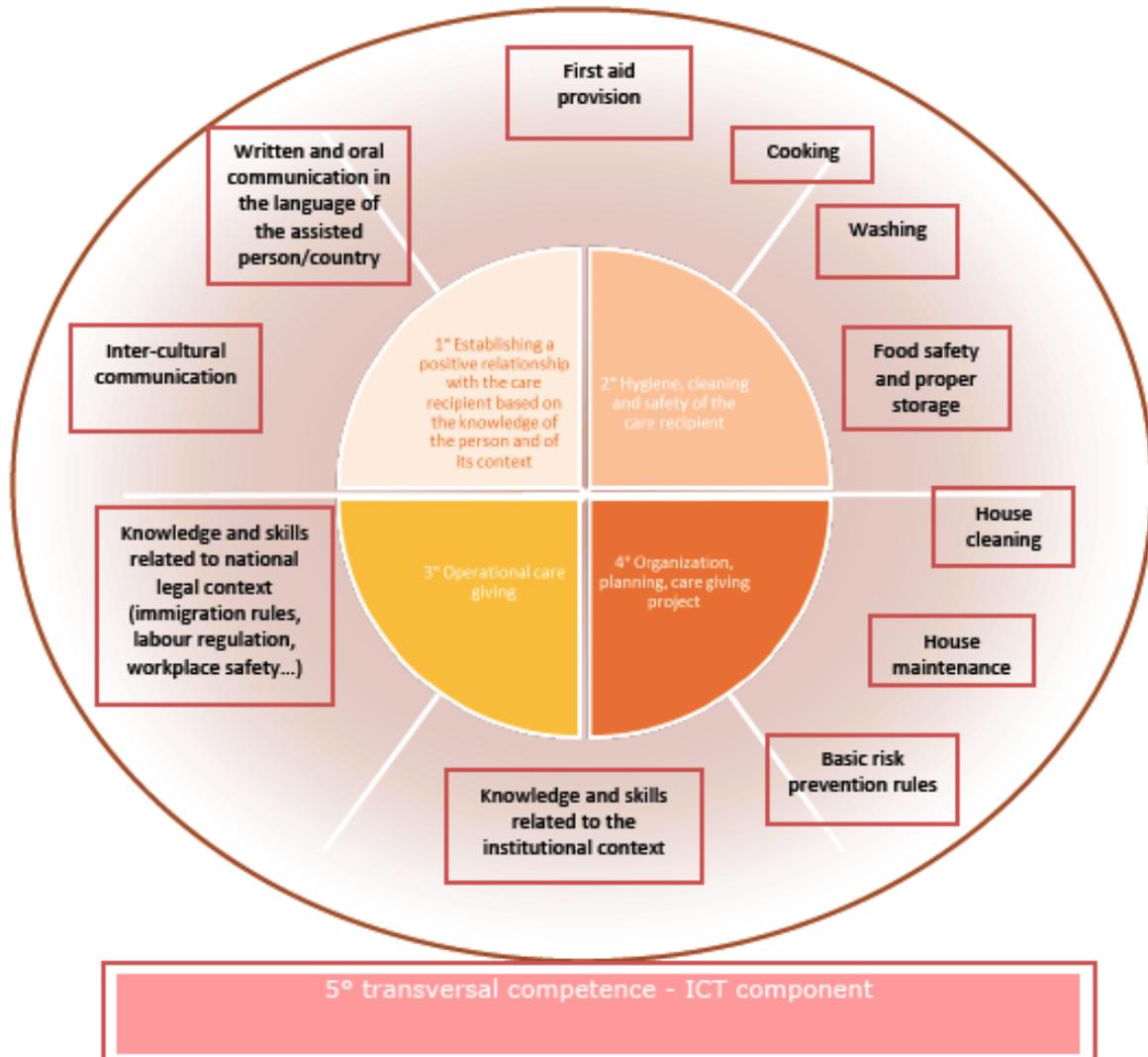


Fig. 3 – Proposal for a European competence framework for home care workers.

ICT as a transversal skill was also considered to access e-learning and, more generally, to handle basic digital devices that could be useful in the workplace.

2. Design of UPCARING platform tools

As described above in this report, the **UPCARING platform** will integrate three tools for home care workers' professionalization:

1. an **e-learning system** based on the open source virtual learning environment Moodle;
2. a **system for validation of home care workers' prior learning**
3. a **system for demand/supply matching** of home care services.

The UPCARING platform prototype (and in particular the e-learning system) should have been completed by 31st October. Due to takeover of the project activities by a new team within the partner organisation in charge of developing the platform occurred during the design phase, the Consortium partners agreed that the product be re-engineered by the new project team and its delivery postponed of 45 days to comply with the new specifications. The prototype is currently being finalized with a view to it being ready for internal testing on 15th December 2012 and ready for piloting with all of its three environments operational and working on 1st February 2013.

The **e-learning system design** and the **validation of prior learning design** are the platform tools that have been completed during the first reporting period whereas the demand/supply matching system design is due on 31st December 2012.

- **E-learning system design**

The UPCARING e-learning system design is based on the open source virtual learning environment Moodle to support the identification, development and validation of four common macro-areas of competence identified for the home care workers and described in the ***European Competence Framework for home care workers***. Those four macro-areas correspond to as many subject areas in the e-learning system.

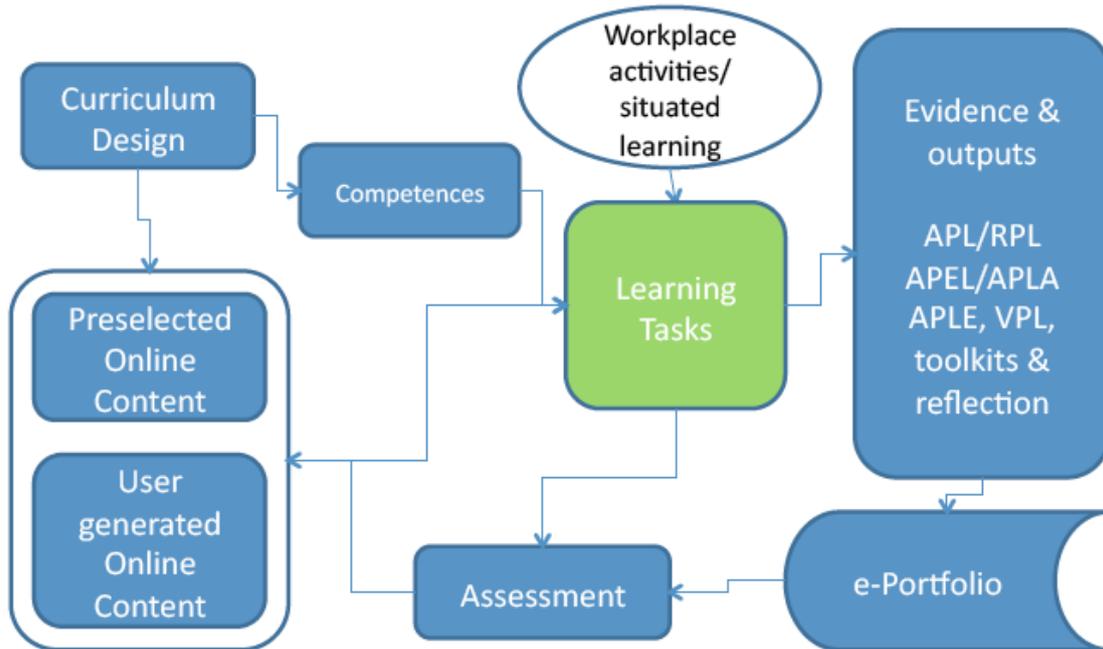


Fig. 4. UPCARING e-learning model.

Besides resources on the common competence macro-areas, resources on transversal and side competences such as linguistic skills, legal and labour market information to foster employment, cultural context elements to facilitate social integration, etc. will be available in the UPCARING e-learning system.

Learners entering the e-learning section will be able to choose whether to navigate freely among the available learning resources or follow the structured pathway of the four “default” macro-areas described above.

Besides providing preselected online content the e-learning system design foresees the possibility for learners to generate and share their own learning contents and resources.

- **Validation of Prior Learning system design**

The Validation of Prior Learning section of the platform will provide tools for the identification, validation and certification of knowledge, skills and competences which have been previously acquired by the learners in various learning contexts (formal, informal, non-formal) and will aim at empowering them to make further professional choices.

The Validation process designed for UPCARING consists of 5 steps:

- i) Awareness-raising and self-assessment
- ii) Recognizing competences and valuating prior learning
- iii) Profiling: from “what can I do?” towards “what do I want to do?”
- iv) Portfolio building – based on the UPCARING Competence Framework
- v) Personal development plan / Assessment

Validation of Prior Learning can be applied to both aspiring and already practicing home care workers.

Besides the implementation outputs described above, other outputs have been produced relevant to **DISSEMINATION**, **EXPLOITATION** and **QUALITY ASSURANCE**:

- **Dissemination Plan**

The Dissemination Plan contains a detailed description of the dissemination strategy, on the actions to be performed and on the target groups and direct and indirect stakeholders groups of the project.

The UPCARING project communication strategy is based on the following aspects:

- Visual Identity
- Internal Communication
- 2.0 Communication
- External Communication / Public Relations.

The Plan also contains instructions for the partners on how to carry out operationally the required dissemination actions.

- **Exploitation Plan**

The UPCARING Exploitation Plan describes the activities to be undertaken during the project in order to facilitate the continuation of UPCARING after the end of the funding period. A comprehensive exploitation strategy is proposed on how both the project results and tools can best be used and exploited within the social welfare institutions, beneficiaries and workers (i.e., by European policy makers, decision makers, adult education and training providers, certificate bodies, public and private employment centres/agencies, public and private social welfare services and workers, home care services recipients and their families, and any other actor of the social welfare sector).

- **Evaluation and Quality Plan**

The Evaluation and Quality Plan presents the main quality guidelines and evaluation procedures for the UPCARING project with specific reference to:

- Project Management structure and approach;
- Relevance of Evaluation;
- Evaluation tools;
- Quality planning and control.

For any enquiry on the UPCARING project the partners' contact details are the following:

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United Kingdom Nikolaos Bizas	<u>University of Edinburgh</u>	<u>v1nbizas@staffmail.ed.ac.uk</u>

4. Partnerships

The UPCARING partnership is made up of seven organisations representing five European countries:

1. [IRS – Istituto per la Ricerca Sociale, Milano IT](#)
2. [SCIENTER, Bologna IT](#)
3. [Vytautas Magnus University, Kaunas LT](#)
4. [COFORA, Doetinchem, NL](#)
5. [FeSALUD, Málaga, ES](#)
6. [SCIENTER-CID, Granada, ES](#)
7. [University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK](#)

So much in UPCARING as in any European project involving participation of partners – and, more significantly, of *people* – from various countries, the dialogue and exchange of different cultural approaches result in an overall enrichment for all those who are involved in the workgroup.

The major elements adding to the UPCARING project with respect to shared European value can be summarized as follows:

- the UPCARING methodology applies not only to the specific territorial contexts of the partner countries/regions but may be extended to other European countries;
- the background information collected at the start-up of the project showed that the UPCARING thematic and pedagogical issues are dealt with in different ways by the different partner countries/regions; such differences constitute one more point of interest and reciprocal learning opportunity for moving towards a common model that can cross borders and become European;
- at the project start-up a semantic exercise was performed by the partners to achieve an agreed definition of the terminology to be used throughout the project with specific reference to the definitions of *home care workers* and *intermediary professionals* – direct target groups of UPCARING.

At local level and in a perspective of development and sustainability, the UPCARING project requires the establishment of solid relations with stakeholders and social welfare / labour market / VET system players, aimed at spreading the information on its new-concept, all-round approach to home care workers' professionalization.

From this point of view, an important achievement is constituted by the connections established with **universities** and **VET centres**, which might develop into new branches of contents to be conveyed through the UPCARING e-learning system, and by those established with **local health services, public and private social welfare services, public and private employment services, migrants' associations**, who can guarantee successful pilot and feedback on the UPCARING platform as well as effective support in its constant improvement.

5. Plans for the Future

This report covers the first 12 months of the UPCARING project whose duration is 24 months. During the first half of the project, two of the three major outputs (the **E-Learning system** and the **Validation of Prior Learning system**) were designed as described in Section 3 above, and are going to undergo public testing during the pilot phase starting in February 2013.

The dissemination activities started at the beginning of the project and are ongoing, being developed gradually and through different promotional products (website, presentations, individual contacts and meetings with stakeholders and potential end-users, leaflets, web 2.0. communication) according to the development of the platform.

During the next 12 months, after the **Demand/Supply Matching System** is developed and has been integrated in the platform in December 2012 and after the project partners have tested all of the platform functionalities in January 2013, **the UPCARING platform will be published online on 1st February 2013** and made available for **piloting by a panel of 150 home care workers and 50 intermediary professionals in Italy (Emilia-Romagna), Spain (Andalucía), Lithuania (Kaunas) and United Kingdom (Scotland).**

The pilot phase will last 8 months, ending on **30th September 2013**. After that date the UPCARING platform will be available in its final version thanks to the feedback received during both internal testing by the project staff and public testing by the trans-national pilot groups.

In order to receive feedback on the platform functionalities, an **on-line feedback questionnaire** will be administered to the piloters panel, aimed at analyzing the expectations, the attitudes toward the UPCARING approach, the interest in one or more of the UPCARING tools.

Instructions and learning resources for users of the UPCARING platform will be produced as **Toolkit for Home Care Workers** and **Toolkit for Intermediary Professionals** and will be produced in both printed and electronic version available for download before the pilot phase.

The keyword for this second phase of the project is co-operation, in that the development of the UPCARING approach will be supported by the direct involvement of the participants in the pilot. In this phase, the task of the Consortium partners will be that of encouraging both groups of piloters (home care workers and intermediary professionals) to take active part in the testing by providing short training sessions in the use of platform tools whenever necessary and by closely following the progress of the pilot phase.

At the same time, with a view to the exploitation of the project results, each partner will consolidate local stakeholder networks to explore possibilities for sustainability after the end of the funding period and draw up a project sustainability plan.

Launch seminars will be organized in each country/region involved in the pilot, accompanied by press releases to be published online in partners' corporate websites and newsletters and in specialized press. A closing conference will be held in Italy in October 2013 to present the UPCARING platform to the public in its final version validated after the pilot phase.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The UPCARING Project was approved under the Development of Innovation strand of the Leonardo da Vinci Sub-programme of the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP), and was designed to meet the LLP objective of **helping improve the quality, attractiveness and accessibility of the opportunities for lifelong learning available within Member States**. Thanks to its integrated approach the UPCARING platform allows personalized learning, professional self-awareness, personal self-empowerment, overall professionalization, and facilitates access to knowledge by people belonging to challenged groups such as migrants, or low-skilled workers, who are the ones most frequently employed in the care work sector. In this respect the UPCARING project also addresses the LLP objective of **contributing to increased participation in lifelong learning by people of all ages, including those with special needs and disadvantaged groups, regardless of their socio-economic background**.

The specific objective of **supporting participants in training and further training activities in the acquisition and the use of knowledge, skills and qualifications to facilitate personal development, employability and participation in the European labour market**, as well as the operational objectives of **improving the transparency and recognition of qualifications and competences including those acquired through non-formal and informal learning, and supporting the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning**, are also met: e-learning facilitates access to lifelong learning anytime and from anywhere, to develop necessary skills and competences that have been carefully analyzed and identified at European level and are thus more widely recognizable in a perspective of workers mobility; validation of prior learning support learners in either growing professionally in home care work or exploiting their skills into a new or different work experience; demand/supply matching can accelerate skilled home care workers' access to the labour market.

Developing Vocational Skills considering the labour market needs (New Skills for New Jobs) is the priority met by UPCARING thanks to its all-round approach to home care workers' professionalization integrating learning, validation of prior learning, and support in access to the labour market through a demand/supply matching system.

It is also important to underline that the new all-round learning concept introduced by the UPCARING Project addresses the LLP Horizontal Policy relevant to **making provision for learners with special needs, in particular by helping to promote their integration into mainstream education and training**, by fostering access to lifelong learning by people belonging to challenged groups such as migrants and low-skilled workers, promoting inclusion through multilingual supports and the use of ICT, and complements the **ET2020 work programme** by proposing a flexible system for lifelong learning opportunity considering the connection with the European Qualification Framework.

