# care 4 carers

# Publication on Employment Support of Family Carers

# Project Information

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# Contents

# Executive Summary

This document is developed in the framework of "Care4Carers", a European project funded by the Key Action 2 'ADU' of the Erasmus+ programme, dedicated to cooperation partnerships in the field of adult education.

The **Care4Carers** project is dedicated to addressing the needs of family carers in Europe who aspire to reintegrate into the labour market. Its primary objective is to empower family carers and equip them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to enhance their employability and successfully transition into gainful employment. Through a collaborative approach involving professionals in adult education, social institutions, and policymakers, the project aims to foster an environment that is conducive to the successful integration of family carers into the labour market. Also, it aims to create an online European environment for carers, to share and exchange experiences and knowledge.

This publication (Project Result 5) aims to engage **professionals in adult education and social institutions, managers** of these institutions, and **political decision-makers**. By doing so, it seeks to increase awareness and understanding of the challenges faced by family carers while preparing for going back to work. Hence, this document tries to generate a constructive dialogue among professionals, institutions, and policymakers involved in adult education and social support systems. By fostering a deeper understanding of the unique circumstances faced by family carers and highlighting the importance of their re-entry into the labour market, this publication strives to mobilise collective efforts and drive positive change.

The publication offers not only a comprehensive analysis of the challenges that family carers face in their daily lives but also delves into the Care4Carers project, and how it can address the challenges mentioned above. More specifically, the publication presents the structure, the different elements and the content, and the approach of the Care4Carers programme, and promotes the necessity for educational and counselling support of family carers. It provides practical recommendations and strategies for professionals in adult education and social institutions to effectively support family carers on their journey to regain their economic independence and pursue their career aspirations. These recommendations are the results of the piloting of the programme, and the first experiences partners gained from its implementation. Hence, the present document guides how the Care4Carers programme can be implemented. Equipped with this knowledge, professionals can tailor their approaches and support mechanisms to effectively assist family carers in their journey towards re-entering the labour market.

# 1. Introduction

It is estimated that family carers provide **over 80%** of all long-term care in Europe, with an especially heavy burden falling on **women** (Hoffmann, F., & Rodrigues, R. 2010). Family carers are defined as informal carers providing unpaid support to ageing, chronically ill, or disabled relatives or friends. Their role is critical and will grow in importance even more in the future due to the **ageing population** and the increase of **age-related diseases**. Despite the high toll this (often) underestimated and misunderstood role takes on so many people in Europe, this group remains largely neglected when it comes to the availability of a structured support system, designed specifically for them. While their dedication and commitment are commendable, family carers often encounter difficulties in balancing their caregiving responsibilities with their personal and professional lives. Additionally, despite their valuable contributions, family carers often experience isolation, financial strain, limited access to education and training, and barriers to re-entering the labour market. These challenges can hinder their personal growth, economic stability, and overall quality of life.

In nearly all EU countries, **over 50% of informal carers under the age of 65 manage caregiving responsibilities with employment** (Eurofund 2010). The majority of these working carers navigate a delicate balancing act, often caring for both children and elderly relatives. Without sufficient support, they may find themselves compelled to reduce working hours, involuntarily shift to part-time employment, or ultimately leave their paid jobs, resulting in diminished income and pension entitlements. The nature of caregiving also influences the types of jobs these carers can undertake, with many opting for local, flexible, low-skilled, and low-paid positions that align with their caregiving schedules (Eurocarers 2017).

For those informal carers who temporarily exit the labour market to fulfil caregiving roles, re-entering can pose challenges, especially after a longer caregiving period. The associated financial, physical, and emotional pressures, coupled with social isolation, can become even more obvious. According to the 3rd European Quality of Life Survey, 14% of non-working carers report being depressed all or most of the time, which is more than twice the corresponding figure for working carers (Eurocarers 2017).

Supporting family carers in both entering and reintegrating into the workforce is not only a social imperative but also an economic one. The impact of carers struggling to balance work and care extends to their employers and the broader economy. Skilled workers operating at a lower skill level to accommodate caregiving needs result in a loss of human potential. The peak caregiving age, 50–64, often corresponds with the most skilled and experienced age group in a company. Inadequate support for working carers incurs economic costs, as individuals unable to balance work and care contribute less to taxes, pension funds, and may increase welfare and healthcare expenditures (Eurocarers 2017).

In addition to the need for high-quality, affordable, and accessible formal long-term care services, facilitating the return to the labour market is crucial. Recognising and certifying the skills acquired during caregiving can empower carers to re-enter the job market. Tailored training, coaching, and counselling play pivotal roles in assisting informal carers in finding their way back into the labour market after caregiving periods.

# 2. The Project

The Care4Carers project addresses the needs of family carers in Europe, focusing on the delicate balance between caregiving and professional life and facilitating re-entry into the labour market. Funded by the Erasmus+ programme's Key Action 2 'ADU,' the European initiative spans two years (from 01/02/2022 to 01/12/2023). Collaborative partners include Die Berater Unternehmensberatungs Gesellschaft MBH (Austria), serving as the project coordinator, KMOP – Social Action and Innovation Centre (Greece), Bupnet Bildung Und Projekt Netzwerkgmbh (Germany), CATRO (Bulgaria), Center for Social Innovation (Cyprus), Enaip Veneto Impresa Sociale (Italy), and Sosu Ostjylland (Denmark).

This project recognises the invaluable contributions of family carers and the need to support family carers of working age. The initiative seeks to empower informal carers by providing educational and counselling support, enabling them to effectively balance their caregiving responsibilities with their professional aspirations. By offering a range of training modules, counselling guidelines, and online resources, the Care4Carers project aims to enhance the employability and overall well-being of family carers. The primary objective of the project is to equip family carers with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to facilitate their successful transition back into the labour market. Through a collaborative approach involving various stakeholders, including adult education professionals, social institutions, and policymakers, the project aims to create a supportive environment that recognises and addresses the unique challenges faced by family carers.

The Care4Carers project is designed to address two primary target groups: (former) family carers (family members or friends providing unpaid care) and professionals engaged in adult education and social institutions.

In response to the challenges mentioned above, the Care4Carers project offers a modular training programme tailored for family carers. This programme focuses on developing transferable skills, validating competencies acquired through caregiving, enhancing employability, and boosting self-confidence. Modules cover crucial areas such as time management, communication skills, digital proficiency, self-care, and vocational guidance. By acquiring these skills, family carers can effectively navigate the demands of caregiving while preparing for re-entry into the labour market.

Simultaneously, professionals in adult education and social institutions play a vital role in supporting family carers. As part of the Care4Carers project, these professionals receive comprehensive training and counselling guidelines. This equips them with the knowledge and skills necessary to address the specific needs of family carers. They are empowered to provide career guidance, offer educational opportunities, and deliver personalised counselling support. Through this approach, professionals create a supportive and inclusive environment that empowers family carers, facilitating their successful reintegration into the labour market. The aim is to minimise the negative impacts of caregiving and enhance the overall well-being of both family carers and the individuals they support.

The five outputs of the project, available in six languages (English, German, Bulgarian, Greek, Danish, and Italian) are the following:

## 1. Stocktaking Report 'Educational and labour market needs of family carers'

research that gathers information on the existing support schemes for family carers and best practices in the partner countries to identify the gaps and the specific educational and labour market needs of family carers. More specifically, for the stocktaking report, each partner conducted desk research that played a crucial role in the Care4Carers project by reviewing existing literature, studies, and national contexts on family caregiving and labour market integration. Except for the desk research, each partner conducted interviews with family carers and professionals, working with them. These interviews were structured to gather in-depth insights into the lived experiences, challenges, and aspirations of family carers. By engaging directly with family carers, the project aimed to capture their unique perspectives and incorporate their voices into the development of tailored interventions. Similarly, interviews with professionals in adult education and social institutions provided valuable input regarding the existing support systems, gaps in services, and recommendations for improvement.

## 2. Counselling guidelines for counsellors and staff involved in adult education

a supporting document that aims at equipping the education and counselling staff to work with family carers and deal with their specific needs. Hence, the partners developed a document with counselling guidelines for professionals, based on i) the results of their research and ii) the theoretical approach of systemic constructivist counselling, which is a specific personal support and development strategy that considers the client as "the expert in their affairs". The specific framework is based on acceptance, empathy, suspension of judgement and appreciation of the other, and focuses on the theory that everyone can develop solutions, and assess their skills and resources through an open dialogue.

## 3. Training modules for family carers

an important learning resource for the target group of family carers, to be provided in blended learning mode. They cover different topics to better fit with their demanding life situation and to prepare them for the labour market. The consortium developed an educational curriculum for family carers, on different aspects of returning to work, based also on the previous research findings , to address their needs. The partners also developed a methodological guide for adult educators on how they can implement the training programme, through a flexible and blended learning approach (including multimedia material). The five modules cover essential topics such as personal and social competencies, and competencies analysis, digital skills, job orientation, and job application techniques. Finally, a pilot of the training took place in each country – based on the feedback received, the respective resources were adjusted and fine-tuned accordingly.

## 4. Family Carers Online Hub

a central information and resource brokering point where family carers who want to address labour market and career issues can find support, learning and information materials, and net-working tools. The partners created a user-friendly online space for carers from Europe to form an online community and address their needs. The Online Hub includes  all educational and counselling materials, in two separate sections for the two target groups. More specifically, the section for family carers includes all training modules with learning materials and resources. The online training is interactive and offers a wide range of learning provisions, e.g., multimedia learning objects, task-based learning, quizzes, games, videos etc, a wide range of information on family care, legal aspects, labour market integration, funding and support issues, a networking area to share experiences with other family carers. The section for adult education professionals contains the Counselling Guidelines, competence assessment tools, methodological guidance and suggestions on how to run the face-to-face seminars and how to encourage participants to use the online learning offer, and a networking area to share experiences with other adult edu-cators working with the target group.

## 5. Publication "Employment support for family carers"

(the present document) addresses professionals involved in adult education and social insti-tutions who work with family carers, as well as the managers of these institutions and political decision-makers. It aims at raising awareness among relevant stakeholders of the themes and the outputs of the project.
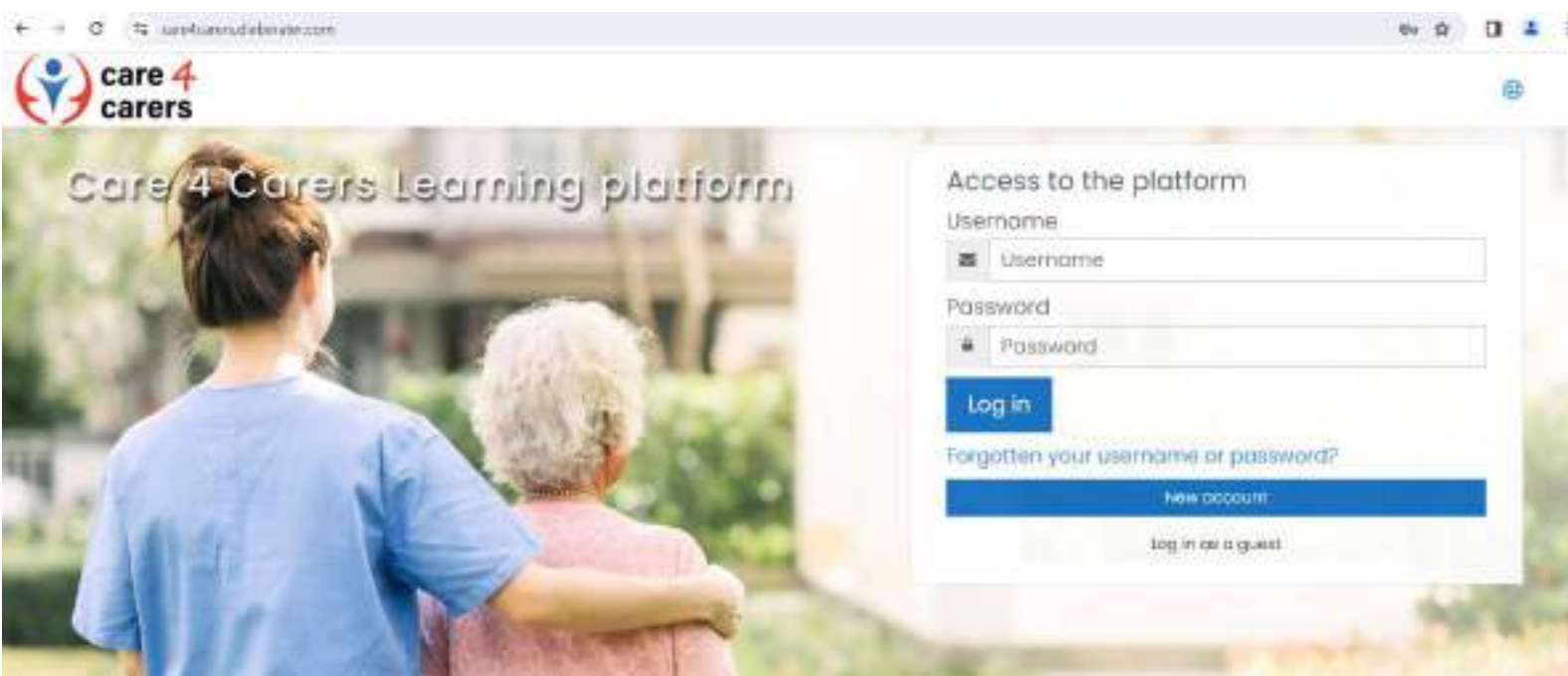
# 3. The Care4Carers Programme

## 3.1. Methodological Approach

The Care4Carers programme is shaped by a constructivist coaching philosophy. This client-centred approach prioritises acceptance, empathy, and the activation of resources, aiming to empower family carers to independently achieve their goals.

In practical terms, the programme embraces a collaborative model, engaging professionals and family carers in a collective effort to address challenges. It offers flexible training modules that are concise, modular, and accessible, catering to the time constraints and mobility challenges faced by family carers. These modules focus on developing transferable skills such as time management, communication, digital proficiency, self-care, and vocational guidance to enhance employability.

Additionally, the programme empowers adult education professionals and career counsellors by providing them with comprehensive and easy-to-use tools for training and counselling in individual and/or group sessions. This ensures that they are equipped to address the unique needs of family carers and offer tailored support.

The constructivist approach of Care4Carers is designed to be adaptive and collaborative, contributing to the well-being, resilience, and successful reintegration of family carers into the labour market.

# 3.2. Structure elements and content

## Counselling Guidelines

With the Counselling Guidelines and its annexes, the project Care4Carers addresses the needs of a very specific target group, that consists of counselling staff dealing with family carers. This is because one of the main project's objectives is to improve job counsellors' qualifications to help them assist this particular kind of client in the process of reintegration into the labour market or search for a better balance between work and care activities.

The purposes of the Counselling Guidelines are:

> **Providing a concise methodology for educators of adults or counsellors in working with the vulnerable group of family carers**

> **Increasing the counsellors' skills in the assessment of informally acquired competencies.**

Moreover, the Counselling Guidelines aim at sensitising adult education professionals to the specific situation of family carers.

The Care4Carers counselling guidelines follow the approach of systemic constructivist coaching (or counselling) as mentioned above, so it is based on acceptance, empathy, suspension of judgement and appreciation of the other. The starting point is to consider that everyone can develop appropriate solutions and responses when they can adequately assess the resources and skills they have at their disposal. The client's wishes and needs are in the foreground. Through dialogue, conditions are sought within which the client can activate their resources to achieve their goals independently.

The structure of the document consists of a handbook guide which, thoroughly, accompanies the job counsellor in getting to know, assisting and supporting the family carer (or the vulnerable client). After an insight into the Care4Carers project, the aims and methodologies of the output and a sketch of the target group 'family carers', the Counselling Guidelines address all steps of the counselling pathway:



INITIAL WELCOME

EMOTIONAL SUPPORT

THE ASSESSMENT OF THE CLIENT'S COMPETENCES

FINAL FOLLOW-UP AND MONITORING

SITUATION ANALYSIS

IDENTIFICATION OF THE CLIENT'S PLAN

SUPPORT OF CLIENT'S ACTIVE JOB SEARCH

The Counselling Guidelines are then complemented by 7 attached documents: these annexes are concrete tools that the counsellor can use during activities with the client. Some of them are nationally specific, as they include links, resources, and services available in the different local contexts; some others are transversal, as they can be used in a standard manner regardless of the Country, they belong to address certain stages of the route (i.e.: the preliminary question-naire that the counsellor delivers to the client). The core annex is the tool to be used to assess competencies acquired in informal contexts: apart from a few different specific resources, the cross-cutting tool that can be used (available in several languages) is the ProfilPASS, which sup-ports adults in identifying skills and competencies that they have gained at some point during their lifetime. The tool enables a systematic assessment and documentation of strengths and competencies and also helps to recognise and appreciate competencies that have been gained in informal settings.

Finally, the Counselling Guidelines are closely related to the third project result, the training modules available within the hub: wherever the job counsellor recognises the client's need for self-training, they can direct him to attend the most suitable e-learning module.

With this structure, the Care4Carers Counselling Guidelines are mainly designed to meet the needs of the target group of professionals consisting of counsellors, trainers, mentors and ex-perts who are associated with the provision of systematic and integrated support of long-term unemployed people towards their reintegration into the labour market, but they can also provide professionals with useful tips and tools to help those family carers who already have a job to bet-ter reconcile caring and working life.

In a broader sense, they have been developed to serve also as a guideline for people interested in career development occupations and/or working with vulnerable groups, as it constitutes a significant toolbox for all those professionals who are associated with the provision of training/ counselling/ any other kind of emotional or social support, such as career counsellors and adult trainers working with disadvantaged groups, carers' associations and other NGOs dealing with family carers, health care and psychology professionals who might be involved in the counselling process.
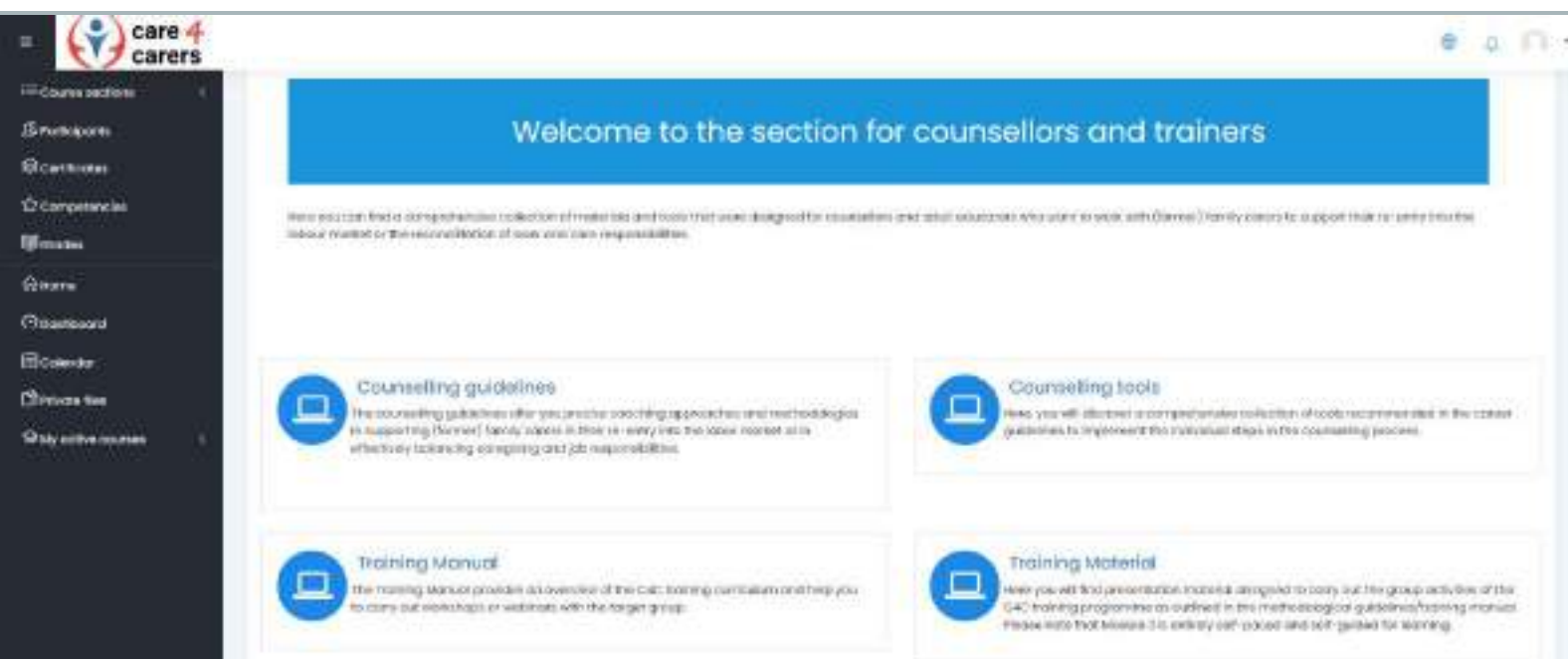
# Guidance of the Counselling Guidelines

## Accessibility

Care4Carers Counselling Guidelines and its annexes are freely accessible online and down-loadable via two routes: in the '**Results & Materials**' section of the project website (direct access) and in the Care4Carers **online HUB** (for every user who registers on the platform).

While the guidelines are a document aimed at consultation by the professional (which can therefore be used in digital format), some of the accompanying tools, aimed at clients, can be printed out for better administration (i.e., preliminary and follow-up questionnaires).

The structure of the document is designed to be adaptable to the different characteristics that the counselling process may assume, as a flexible application of tools and techniques is recommended in line with the needs of the family carers and the goal of the counselling prac-tice: the aim is to help the family carers achieve positive and lasting change. The document talks about **Individual Steps of the Counselling Process**: the professional can choose to skip one or more of the steps highlighted in the guidelines, as the process is individual and can change from one person to another (i.e.: after the self-diagnosis and the situation analysis, managing an emotional support phase may not be necessary if there isn't any situation of stress, decision-blocking, anxiety, sadness, discomfort, depression, self-devaluation, etc.…). Moreover, it is essential to recognise the fluidity of goal setting and let the client decide where to start since it is their journey and the role of the counsellor is one of companion, or co-voy-ager, and not of leader.

## Duration

The duration of the counselling process depends very much on the time resources each family carer might have at their disposal. The methodology must be very flexible in this regard and provide guidance based on shorter and longer counselling processes.

## In person/Online

The counsellor should also consider the possibility of adopting a blended approach: de-pending on the situation, the different steps of the process highlighted in the Counselling Guidelines can be managed in person or online. The complexity of the issues identified in the first meeting with the client will help to determine whether physical contact is critical for sub-sequent sessions or whether they can be conducted virtually.

## Individually/Group

If the job counsellor considers it appropriate and receives the consent of the clients involved, some activities dealt with in the Counselling Guidelines can also be carried out in groups. Also here, the first meeting with the client will determine the best option.

Fundamental principles behind the use of each tool and methods:

- Co-operation between the counsellor and the client

- Conversations as foundations of understanding life stories and experiences

- The client decides which information to send

- Privacy and confidentiality

- All notes taken by the counsellor must be accessible to the client

The Care4Carers Counselling Guidelines contain a list of suggested methods and tools to be used during the counselling process. Although some of the techniques suggested involve writing or drawing, much of any shared reflection will be verbal so the counsellor faces the challenge of both nurturing that contemplative process and capturing its essence for further discussion.

The most suitable technique to put into practice the counselling activity is the narrative approach, as a narrative, and the particular form of narrative called "story", deals not just with facts or ideas or theories – or even dreams, fears, and hopes -, but with facts, theories, and dreams from the perspective of someone's life and in the context of someone's emotions.

## Transferability

The counselling strategy of the Care4Carers Counselling Guidelines can be transferred to other target groups who have been forced to exit the labour market for a longer time due to other reasons (e.g., childcare responsibilities, a medical condition).

Moreover, by adopting the systemic-constructivist approach, these guidelines can also be used for counselling in various fields, not only that of work placement, such as in private life, in the organisational field, halfway between private and professional life, etc.

## Care4Carers Training

**There are 2 principal components of the Care4Carers training:**

1. The Care4Carers training consists of five training modules including **15+ hours of online self-learning,** which can be further supplemented by face-to-face **workshops** or **webinars** (depending on how feasible this is due to the framework conditions and mobility of the participants). The training is subdivided into modules and units, with each unit containing self-study materials and quizzes, available on the Care4CarerOnline HUB.

The Care4Carers training modules are the main learning resource for the target group of family carers. They cover different topics relevant to better cope with the demanding life situation and to prepare for the labour market. The training modules aim to promote the following skills and competencies among the learners (family carers):

• strengthen their abilities to **develop perspectives** and to **assess** themselves;

• development of **personal, social and digital competencies**;

• knowledge of the **job market** and skills in **job application techniques**.

The five training modules cover the following topics:

• Module 1. **Personal and social competencies/resilience** (7 Units). In this module, the participants expand their competencies. The provided learning activities support the learners in developing coping strategies for their life situations. In addition, these transversal competencies are important to sharpen the participants' profile in the job searching process. Learning activities help the participants to raise awareness of their self-perception and perception by others.

• Module 2. **Competence analysis** (4 Units). In this module, the participants learn how to record formally and informally acquired competencies (e.g. ProfilPass), and how to use them professionally. Learning activities improve their ability to assess themselves.

• Module 3. **Digital competence** (5 Units). This module provides the learners with basic knowledge on handling information and data; digital communication and collaboration; creation of digital content, and data security.

• Module 4. **Job orientatio**n (4 Units). In this module, the participants receive information on the labour market and work out possibilities for their professional re-entry or possibilities that are (better) compatible with the care situation. In addition, they receive input for a successful application.

• Module 5. **Job application** (6 Units). Job application training makes possible effective job searches using various media. Current standards for application letters/resumes, frequent questions in job interviews and training of application situations are practised.

2. Most, if not all, units are also supplemented by group activities, delivered by a trainer. A dedicated resource – Methodological guidelines for adult educators, inform on the learning objectives of each unit, how to conduct a group activity related to its topic, and where to find additional information. There are a total of 16 group activities to supplement various elements of the training content. Group activities can be delivered in a face-to-face or online format depending on the circumstances. In principle, 2 webinars and one face-to-face workshop are planned to complement the online training.

# Guidance on the Care4Carers Training

## Accessibility

Care4Carers Training is freely accessible online and downloadable via two routes: in the '**Results & Materials**' section of the project website (direct access) and in the Care4Carers **online HUB** (for every user who registers on the platform).

## Self-study

Self-study of the Care4Carers training materials is possible, but it is not the default option envisaged for their use. It is recommended that the self-study phase be preceded by a face-to-face workshop or webinar (see blended learning).

Learners need to create an account to access the Care4Carers training modules. They can self-enroll in their respective language version of the training. The five modules are available as separate pages on the Hub. Each unit of the training is visible as an eBook, with the learner going through approximately 30–40 pages of content. It is recommended that learners use a maximised view for reading. Even though the authors limited the amount of text on each slide, the amount of content makes for a challenging reading in a minimised view or on a mobile device. Nevertheless, such a form of engagement is also possible – especially if the learner wants to come back to the content they already studied.

**Common elements of all units include:**

- **Learning outcomes** of each unit are provided in the beginning.

- **References** and extra resources are available at the end.

- On certain pages of the unit, learners have to complete **quizzes**, watch **videos**, and **listen** to audio.

- **Self-reflection** questions are contained in many parts of individual units

- Some of the activities contained within the units require the use of **additional handouts** and activity sheets, which are available on the Care4CarerOnline HUB

Upon completing all units, the learners can take part in a final quiz, which will result in a **certificate** of completion. However, since the training is intended to be flexible and modular, this feature should be seen as an extra, not as a requirement.

## Blended learning

The course is intended as a blended learning offer. Many of the topics contained within are covered in group activities, which are available in the Methodological guidelines for adult educators. Before creating a training programme, the trainer is recommended to find out the training needs of the participants – via a questionnaire, or talks with them. Different participants might require a different focus – some might need a greater focus on personal competencies and have a limited interest in a job search, while others might need dedicated support on the latter subject.

It is recommended that 2 webinars and one face-to-face workshop complement the online training:

1. A **face-to-face workshop** is a good way to find out the training needs of the participants, foster motivation for self-study, and select the most appropriate steps for follow-up. It is recommended that the first part of the training:

- Is always conducted face-to-face if the circumstances permit;

- Allows sufficient time for participants to get to know each other;

- Creates a room for expressing expectations and needs;

- Allows for peer-to-peer exchanges;

- Contains activities from the following Modules: Personal and social competencies/ resilience and Competence analysis.

2. A **self-study** phase of the online course as described above.

3. A supporting **webinar** during the study of the online course:

- Allowing learners to share questions and concerns;

- Following up on some of the topics addressed in the self-study materials;

- Containing activities from the following Modules: Personal and social competencies/ resilience and Competence analysis; Digital competence.

4. A final **webinar** near the end of the training. If the circumstances of the learners' permit, this session could also be delivered in a face-to-face format, allowing for more exchanges. If not, however, it is more important that the face-to-face session is held at the beginning of the training. The session should contain:

- A review of what participants have learned.

- A discussion of practical questions on what comes next.

- Activities from the following Modules: Job orientation; Job application.

Organisations can issue their certificates for the completion of the course, in addition to the certificate created for online course completion. Learners retain access to the Care4Carers Hub and are welcome to return to the materials to periodically review them, or go through units they missed. If learners are engaged in a coaching/consulting process, coming back to the training topics and reviewing how they affected the learners might be conducted several months after the completion of the training.

# Family Carer Online Hub

The Care4Carer Online HUB is a comprehensive learning and training platform dedicated to (former) family carers and trainers working with this target group. Serving as the core of the C4C programme, the platform offers a full spectrum of learning and training resources developed in the project. The platform is freely available, but users are required to register before enrolling in the various courses offered. The creation of the Family Carers Online Hub serves as a central information and resource point. It caters to the diverse preferences of family carers by providing interactive and multimedia learning materials, including quizzes, games, videos, and a networking area. This online platform allows family carers to engage with the content at their own pace and according to their preferences.

The HUB comprises four distinct sections:

## Section for Family Carers:

The training modules are the core of the C4C programme addressing (former) family carers who want to get back into the labour market and wish to acquire new skills, knowledge and useful strategies to prepare for the next job. After the training, participants can take a quiz comprising 30 questions related to the course content. Upon achieving a passing score, participants will automatically receive a training certificate.

## Information Resources:

This section provides practical and easily understandable information on rights, funding, and support services for family carers. While primarily aimed at family carers, the material also serves trainers and coaches seeking a comprehensive overview of available support services. It includes information provided as concise Documents on the following four topics:

### 1) Care and Work:

This area informs about concrete possibilities to combine caregiving responsibilities with employment. Users can access tips on combining care and work seamlessly, along with information on their rights and entitlements in the workplace.

### 2) Services for Carers:

Information is provided on the different social services available to family carers, including psychological support, care services for the care-dependent person, interest groups, and funding opportunities.

### 3) Returning to Work after Caregiving:

This section offers tips on how to navigate the emotional and mental aspects of returning to work after a break due to caregiving. There is information on upskilling training courses and the importance of recognizing and leveraging skills for a successful return to the workforce.

### 4) Time for Self-Care:

Focused on the often-neglected aspect of self-care for caregivers, this sectionrs practical advice on dealing with stress and high burdens. Diverse relaxation techniques antrategies for managing stress can be explored.
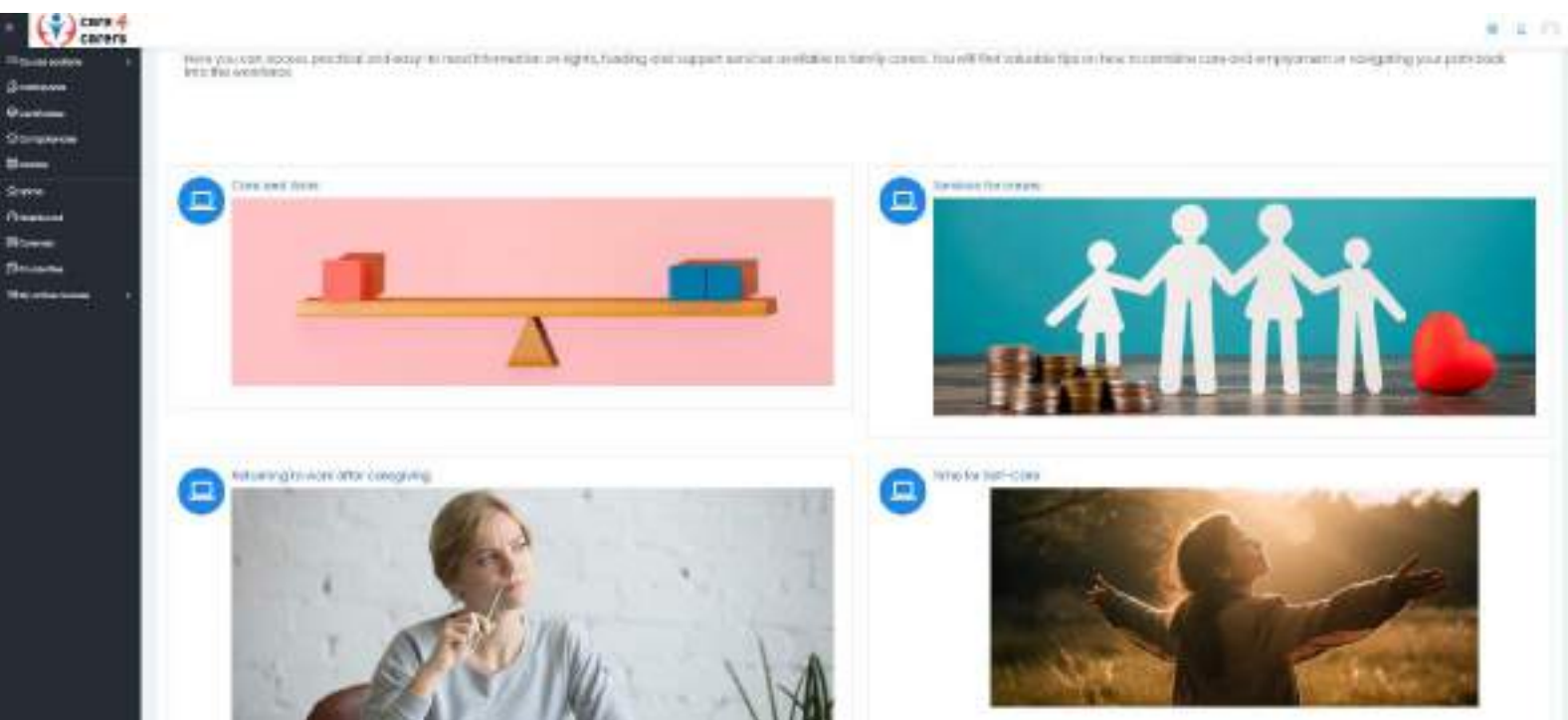
## Section for Counsellors

This section is addressed to adult educators, counsellors, coaches, and trainers engaged with family carers or those interested in expanding their understanding of the counselling process concerning family caregivers. The collection of materials and tools consists of the following:

- Counselling guidelines (PR2), that is described above, designed to support (former) family carers.

- Counselling tools: a selection of questionnaires and information sheets that are required for the counselling process and serve as complementary materials to the counselling guidelines.

- Methodological Guidelines for Adult Educators: a document that offers an overview of the C4C training curriculum and provides detailed instructions for trainers to conduct f2f-workshops or webinars complementing the self-learning component of the programme.

- Training Material: a compilation of short PowerPoint presentations required for the implementation of the f2f workshops or webinars.

## Networking Space:

The Networking Space is designed for family carers, coaches, and trainers, offering a platform to share experiences and discuss specific issues related to care and work.

# Guidance on Family Carer Online Hub

## Accessibility

The Care4Carers Online Hub is freely accessible to every user who registers on the platform. Instructions on how to access the HUB can be found on the **website of the C4C project**.

Learners can engage with the C4C program through various options based on the setting of the training, the target group and their specific needs.

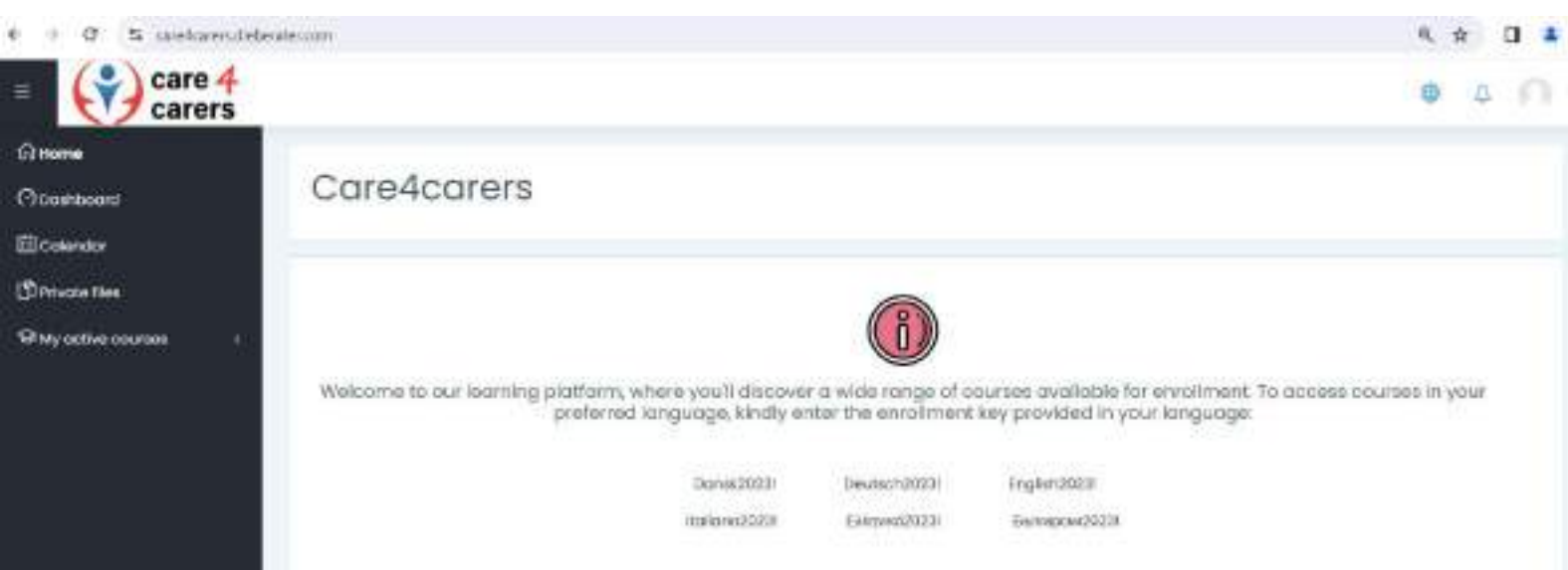### Option 1: Individual learning on the HUB

This option is designed for individual learners, i.e. (former) family carers who are seeking employment or are looking for advice in balancing care and work. Through individual online learning, users can prepare for the job market or gain insights on specific care and work topics. After registration on the HUB, they can autonomously engage with the C4C online training at their preferred pace. They have the flexibility to choose between completing the entire training or selecting specific modules to build certain skills based on their needs (e.g., personal and social competencies, digital competencies, etc.).

Individuals who favour using their smartphones over a laptop or PC can engage in the training through the mobile version. However, for an optimal user experience, we recommend following the training on a desktop.

### Option 2: Blended learning for adult education providers

This option is tailored for adult education providers seeking to deliver comprehensive blended learning training to the target group. Trainers are encouraged to register on the HUB, explore available resources, and acquaint themselves with the training modules, training material, and the accompanying training manual, which encompasses the entire training curriculum. Trainers have the flexibility to establish a blended learning programme, covering either the entire C4C program or selected topics. The Training Manual guides conducting face-to-face activities, ensuring effective delivery. Depending on preferences, there are several possibilities to implement the blended-learning programme with family carers. In general, we suggest starting and ending the course with a classroom session and providing some time for individual self-learning in between. The length of the training can be adapted according to the format of the course and the time resources of the learners.

Please note: Trainers can use, remix, tweak and build upon the materials, as long as they follow the rules of the CC-BY-NC-SA Creative Commons licence.

### Option 3: Central hub of knowledge and collaboration

The HUB serves as a multifaceted information and exchange platform for both family carers and professional counsellors, coaches, and trainers. For family carers, the platform offers a comprehensive resource hub, providing specific information on various care-related topics along with a curated collection of links to key websites. Additionally, family carers can use the platform for networking opportunities, fostering connections with other users for meaningful exchanges on relevant subjects.

Professional counsellors, coaches, and trainers can utilise the HUB as an informative platform to enhance their knowledge base. It offers them the ability to get access to relevant information and equips them with valuable materials to guide their clients effectively during the counselling process. The platform serves as a centralised hub where professionals can inform themselves and direct their clients to relevant resources, thereby enhancing the overall support system for both family carers and those in the counselling profession.

Within the networking section, users have the opportunity to actively engage in discussions regarding their experiences and share insights into the tools used in their counselling or training processes.

# 3.3. Pilot Insights and recommendations

All partners tested the Care4Carers materials, which were developed in the course of the project to get feedback from external users (who were not involved in the development stage). This was done as a sort of a reality check for partners to test, among other things, the resources' applicability, user-friendliness, and potential for sustainable use after the project ends with the people they were developed for. The project's outputs were piloted with the end users in all partner countries: Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Denmark, Germany, Greece and Italy. The testing phase took place at different times in the period July – November 2023. Partners conducted 19 piloting sessions in total with both target groups in online and face-to-face format in the form of training sessions, workshops, webinars, info sessions as well as structured phone calls and emails. Face-to-face sessions with a duration up to 4 hours were prevailing (12 F2F vs 7 online) and was the preferred format also by participants themselves.

The Counselling guidelines and relevant sections of the Hub were tested with **82 career counsellors and adults educators** from the 7 partner countries, who work with various groups of clients (vulnerable populations, particularly female migrants, unemployed adults, students looking for a job, long-term unemployed people, people from minorities, young unemployed, people over 50 years old, people with disabilities etc. but also family carers in particular); apart from job counsellors and trainers there were also a coach, psychotherapist, healthcare professionals, individuals associated with educational NGOs as well as counsellors with a "dual" role — serving as caregivers for individuals with Alzheimer's in the morning and providing support to family carers in the afternoon.

Different parts of the Training modules and the Online Hub were piloted with a diverse group of **99 family carers**. The profile of participants from this group varied in each country and included mostly female informal carers in different age groups (including such above 50 years old) – people reconciling care with work and such who left the labour market due to a care episode and are willing to re-enter. There were also medium- and long-term unemployed persons, part-time employed people, retired persons, student informal carers in their final stages of formal social and healthcare education.

The structured and detailed feedback received from both groups in each country was predominantly positive with some constructive criticism and suggestions for improvements which are summarised in an internal Consolidated Piloting Report. However, some valuable lessons learnt and recommendations for future use of the Care4Carers programme, based on the provided feedback can be found in the next section.

## Lessons learnt and recommendations for future use of the C4C Programme

The Counselling guidelines offer a **multidisciplinary approach**, which was highly appreciated by the counsellors and trainers who reviewed and tested the document. Combining job counselling with psychological counselling and non-formal education and peer-to-peer learning is a beneficial approach which can be easily applied in the day-to-day work of a counsellor.

The Care4Carers programme was specifically developed for supporting family carers who had to leave their full-time job due to a care episode and would like to re-enter the labour market as well as for those people, who are in a situation where they need to reconcile their job with care responsibilities in the family. But our piloting experience showed that **the C4C offer is highly transferable** to different groups and contexts. As it offers a set of diverse tools and strategies and follows an approach of putting the client in the centre of the counselling process, the programme, or at least relevant parts of it, can be easily used by counsellors and trainers working with clients of diverse backgrounds and further tailored to the respective needs.

At the same time, the document really did make both counsellors and trainers aware of the challenges faced by the family carers – something that the case studies therein particularly contributed to. It was shared by users that this part was very helpful to better understand a group of potential clients, who were not so visible before.

Another conclusion on the applicability of the Guidelines in Denmark is that this tool is not fully applicable in a professional context within the Danish labour market system, which is completely different from the other partner countries and the counselling process for family carers in particular is centralized and regulated differently.

As far as the training modules are concerned, the testing phase once again highlighted the need people have for **experiential learning in a face-to-face setting within a grou**p. The non-formal learning environment proved once again to be most effective and enjoyed by adult participants, as it offers an opportunity for a peer-to-peer exchange like no other. Of course, in such a case, careful preparation is needed, exploring on one hand the specific needs of the group and their background as well as adapting the training content and material accordingly.

What else has emerged from our piloting experience is the necessity to have a **clear overview of the participants** and consider their personal characteristics (age, gender, family situation) and socio-professional conditions (level of qualification, education, profession, work and financial situation). The preliminary analysis of these characteristics will allow you to better identify the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours of the different learners, in order to adapt your training material according to the specific needs of one or more target groups.

Another recommendation related to the Methodological guidelines developed for trainers of adults, is to **consider the group activities in this manual as suggestions**. These are ideas, which can be further developed and adapted (both in terms of content and duration) to the specific audience, its needs as well as the specific training circumstances. These are only guidelines with suggestive nature rather than game-like activities with strict rules to follow. It is also important to keep in mind that most activities suggested in this manual are meant for a face-to-face training to be most effective and engaging, rather than a training in an online setting, even if they all can be adapted if needed.

Last but not least, when referring people to the training course on the Online hub it would be good to make them aware that **some prior basic digital skills are required** in order to take full advantage of the offered course. It is also recommended to note that the C4C course should be followed on a **desktop rather than a mobile device** (even if technically feasible) for a better user and learning experience. The course may seem long and complex, but it is important to know that it is designed in a modular way, so people can choose to follow the parts which are relevant for them in the order they wish. The ongoing progress of each learner is saved in their account, so the course can be taken in a bite-sized, self-paced manner over a longer period if preferred.

# 4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the Care4Carers project, rooted in a constructivist coaching philosophy, stands as a promising initiative to support family carers facing the delicate balance between caregiving responsibilities and labour market reintegration. The publication has meticulously detailed the methodological approach, structural elements, and content of the programme, showcasing its adaptability and collaborative nature. The counselling guidelines, with their multidisciplinary approach, received positive feedback during the piloting phase, emphasising the programme's transferability to diverse groups and contexts.

The project's thorough piloting process provided valuable insights and recommendations. It highlighted the need for experiential learning in face-to-face settings, underscoring the effectiveness of non-formal learning environments, especially in peer-to-peer exchanges. The importance of considering the personal and socio-professional characteristics of participants and adapting training materials accordingly emerged as a key takeaway. Additionally, the necessity for a nuanced understanding of the participants' backgrounds and the clear communication of prerequisites for the online course were emphasised to ensure optimal engagement.

The Care4Carers programme's potential impact extends beyond its immediate application. By recognising and addressing the challenges faced by family carers, the programme contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of this often-overlooked group. The multidisciplinary approach, combined with the insights gained from case studies, enhances awareness of the unique needs of family carers. The adaptability of the programme to diverse contexts and its positive reception suggest its potential to improve the quality of life and well-being of family carers across Europe. As family carers navigate the complex interplay between caregiving and professional life, supporting their reintegration into the labour market not only improves their individual well-being but also contributes to the overall resilience of societal support structures. By equipping family carers with transferable skills and addressing their specific needs, the programme lays the foundation for sustainable solutions that benefit both individuals and the broader community.

In light of the lessons learned and recommendations provided, the Care4Carers project emerges not only as a practical tool for supporting family carers but also as a model for future initiatives. By embracing flexibility, adaptability, and a person-centric approach, the programme sets a precedent for effective, inclusive, and impactful interventions in the realm of family caregiving.

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