



Local perspectives for a European challenge: mapping meaningful practices to shape Long-Term Care's future

LeTs-Care project's mid-term findings help grounding the European Care Strategy



[Lets-Care project](#)

February 2026

Author: [REVES Aisbl](#)

As Europe navigates a crucial 2026 for Long-Term Care policies, the EU-funded “LeTs-Care” project is stepping up to bridge the gap between high-level policy and the diverse realities on the ground.

A [new action plan](#) is under preparation to implement the EU pillar of social rights, reinforcing the focus on Long-Term Care as the continent undergoes dramatic demographic change and faces increased demand for affordable, quality care services.

Eurostat projections indicate that by 2050 more than one in ten EU citizens will be 80 or older - nearly twice the current figure. At the same time, there will be less than two people of working-age for every individual over 65.

We are moving toward a scenario where nearly every family within the bloc will have at least one older relative needing Long-Term Care.

This universal challenge requires a local focus.

As EU Member States face pressure to turn talk into policy, the LeTs-Care project is anchoring theory into frontline research.

By embedding researchers in care settings, it helps disentangle what the different aspects of Long-Term Care mean in each national context, serving as a vital resource for the [European Care Strategy](#).



UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM



REVES



Roskilde Universitet



Funded by
the European Union

Its intermediate results provide the context-sensitive understanding needed to turn recommendations into accessible, sustainable and quality services across Member States.

Researchers have investigated the challenges Long-Term Care systems face in seven EU countries: **Austria, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Portugal and Spain.**

The work relies on **18 ethnographic case studies** and **150 interviews with a wide range of actors**, such as informal caregivers, professional health workers, care receivers, service providers and other key stakeholders.

It has performed a **systematic analysis of national and regional policy documents** and employed **policy labs** in order to promote dialogue between researchers and policymakers.

The aim is to **explore what lies behind the labels we use and how concepts change as they cross borders.**

Through the lens of “meanings”, the project reveals not just what different countries do, but why certain solutions make sense in one place and fail in another.

The notion of meaning highlights how key Long-Term Care concepts, such as “care”, “needs” or “quality of care”, are situated within specific histories, political systems, care regimes and national contexts.

They vary across time, place, and actors, shaping both the framing of problems and the possible policy interventions.

Understanding these meanings is essential for navigating the fragmented and often incoherent nature of the Long-Term Care field, where different policy domains (healthcare, social care, informal care) intersect without clear boundaries or shared assumptions.

For instance, there is no single, universally accepted definition of the *Long-Term Care workforce* across the seven LeTs-Care countries. Instead, care work is broadly divided into three categories - formal, informal and non-professional - with their scope and meaning varying significantly from country to country. While the overall size of the Long-Term Care workforce relative to the older population is remarkably similar in most countries, ranging between 7% and 8%, the composition of that workforce varies sharply. In Denmark and The Netherlands, the share consists almost entirely of formal care workers. By contrast, in Italy the majority of workers is made up of non-professional carers. Austria and Spain fall somewhere in between. Regional variations within countries further complicate the picture.

The meaning of *professionalism* itself varies widely. In Denmark, formal care workers are generally regarded as professionals, and professionalism serves as the main benchmark for evaluating quality in Long-Term Care. In Italy and Portugal, the concept is closely tied to the acute health care sector, compared to which Long-Term Care work is frequently viewed as less professionalised.

LeTs-Care’s focus on meanings provides a new way to think about long-standing challenges.

It moves beyond technical and traditional comparative investigations focusing on fixed terms and variables, to reveal how Long-Term Care is structured by deeper historical legacies, institutional logics, cultural expectations and political negotiations.

By making these underlying meanings visible, the project offers a foundation for more reflexive and context-sensitive policy development, aligning itself with the EU Care Strategy (2022) and the EU Pillar of Social Rights (2017), whose [Principle n.18 focuses on Long-Term Care](#).

These key documents provide the overarching strategic framework aimed at reinforcing the European Union's social foundations. They serve as the principal reference points to facilitate convergence and mutual learning across Member States - where primary competence for Long-Term Care lies.

The Strategy has played a strong political role by including recommendations for national action plans to provide quality, accessible, affordable and sustainable Long-Term Care services. At the EU level, it was instrumental for including Long-Term Care as a priority in such programmes as Horizon Europe, which allowed to finance research - such as LeTs Care's - in the field.

The European Commission has said the next multi-annual financial framework is expected to deal with the consequences of demographic trends. Resources' allocation under the framework may possibly be affected by the stronger focus on Long-Term Care foreseen in the new action plan for the EU pillar of social rights.

The establishment of the [European Fund for economic, social and territorial cohesion](#) also put emphasis on the role of Long-Term Care to build a resilient Europe, impacting National and Regional Partnership Plans.

In such a framework, the intermediary results of the LeTs-Care project contribute to a better understanding of meanings, of national differences and perspectives for national policy-making in this crucial area.

In the coming weeks and months, we are going to share insights into the meanings that have emerged from the research, together with firsthand accounts from the researchers and inputs from prestigious stakeholders at the national and EU levels.

Our goal is to generate grounded insights for the ongoing policy work and to build momentum on the research findings.

Stay tuned!