



Voices from the Field | CVI – Centro de Vida Independente (Norte) – Portugal

At CVI (Centre for Independent Living), we advocate for the quality of life of people in situations of dependency and their families. Within that organisation, CVI Norte operates in two districts, providing personal assistance services across Porto and Vila Real. Our work spans both the local and the national level: planning and organising activities, maintaining partnerships with public and private entities, and ensuring that the voice of personal assistance users is heard where decisions are made.

We joined LeTs-Care because we believe scientific research in the field of care is of utmost importance. Personal assistance services, in their true sense, represent something genuinely distinctive within formal care: they are centred on the person who benefits from the service, taking into account their choices, wishes and preferences. We felt we had something real to contribute, and equally that we had much to learn from other types of responses and services across Europe. The centrality LeTs-Care gives to care work as a political and social issue also felt key to us — it is an urgent and necessary discussion.

Long-term care remains an undervalued area with insufficient investment in Portugal. The welfare state model is heavily family-centred: families absorb the primary caregiving responsibilities, especially for older people and people with disabilities. Formal community services are insufficient, often reduced to the strictly essential, and in many respects of poor quality. Salaries are low, training is inadequate, and the issue remains largely absent from the political agenda. The state delegates its responsibilities to non-profit organisations and families — and leaves them largely to manage alone.

Our contribution to the research has been to share perspectives on what personal assistance services actually are: their characteristics, principles, challenges, strengths and weaknesses. The personal assistants who work with us participated through interviews, and we were able to facilitate those contacts for the research team.

What we hope to take away is a scientific perspective on best practices in long-term care, complementary learning about approaches we may not yet be aware of, and a broader understanding of the profound complexity faced by people in situations of dependency — including, fundamentally, a deeper perspective on labour issues in this field.

"The interview with the LeTs-Care researchers was a very enriching process — a sharing of achievements, challenges, anxieties, difficulties, and paths that we know need to be explored urgently."

— Ana Catarina Correia, Porto Coordinator and member of the National Board, CVI Norte