

Lifelong  
Learning  
Programme



# **Integrated Platform with Online Resources for Teaching of All Languages**

Progress Report

Public Part

## Project information

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# Executive Summary

iPortal brought together partners from six European countries to develop an e-learning platform. The aim was to improve the quality and access to independent language learning tools by combining existing e-learning tools with a new Open Source platform (e.g. resources, virtual classroom, Second Life learning environment)

It was a three year project which started in January 2013.

The platform enables teachers to teach students of various nationalities in different languages in an attractive, interactive and effective way.

The partnership brought together technical expertise, expertise in language learning and different pedagogical approaches. The resources developed were materials at CEFR levels A1 to B1 in English, Spanish, German, Bulgarian, Polish and Turkish, although a few additional resources in French were also created.

The target groups for the project are:

- Language teachers in formal education settings;
- VETPROS and decision makers working in the field of language education;
- Small and medium language education centres;
- Freelance language teachers;
- Disabled people, both language teachers and learners;
- People who want to learn foreign languages by using the Internet;
- Employers, migrants and other actors in the language education sector;

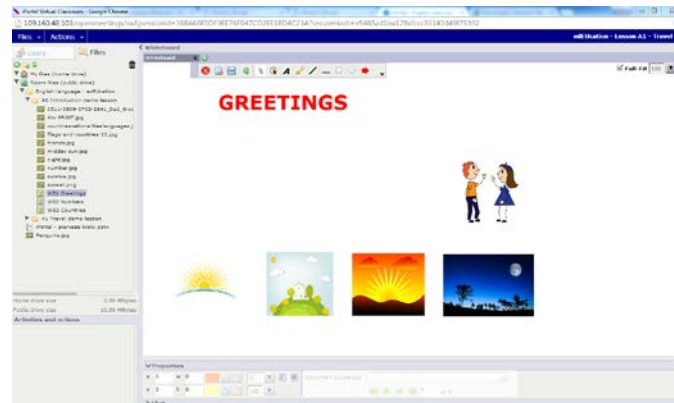
The project has achieved its overall objectives and has developed three main strands for language learning.

These are:

- The main [iPortal Platform](#). This is an e-learning platform with all of the usual administrative and monitoring functions, but one that enables teachers to create a language course and to upload, download and share resources. Sets of exemplar resources in the six main partner languages are available and there is also a set of online tutorials, both text and video to help teachers navigate their way around the platform. The platform is available among other languages in English, German, Polish, Turkish and Spanish. The platform has already been exploited to provide additional sites, which have been developed by users.



- The Virtual Classroom is a unique facility within the iPortal Platform to facilitate distance and independent learning. It enables the teacher to create a virtual class of learners from all over the world. The teacher can prepare and upload resources such as text, image, presentations, PDF files and video and also has access to a virtual interactive whiteboard. Additionally the virtual classroom operates as a language laboratory and the teacher can speak to the whole class, individuals or groups or arrange for the learners to communicate with one another. This facility also enables the teacher to monitor the learners.



- The [iPortal Island](#). This is a virtual environment in Second Life. The iPortal island has 16 settings to be used for practical communication skills. Members of the iPortal create an avatar and can interact with other members from anywhere in the world using the [Second Life viewer](#). The iPortal island is designed as a ludic way of developing oral language skills online.



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# 1. Project Objectives

The need for teaching and learning foreign languages in Europe and all over the world is currently increasing and will continue to increase.

The environment is also changing. Free access to the Internet almost everywhere in Europe, the fast growing market of mobile communications and advancing technologies lead to a situation where people rely more and more on ICT and mobile tools, which are replacing traditional methods. Additionally the traditional method of undertaking formal language learning lessons in a classroom situation has moved on with people wanting access to tailored provision and independent learning.

The iPortal project aimed to address these growing opportunities and needs by:

- improving the quality and access to independent language learning tools by developing a platform which combined existing e-learning tools with a new Open Source and Second Life learning environment.

The objectives were to:

- establish a new learning environment framework
- develop the iPortal platform which incorporated language learning resources and provided access to creative methodologies through tools to develop and access video, audio, a virtual classroom and 3D simulation through Second Life.
- improve access to learning resources in English, German, Spanish, Polish, Bulgarian and Turkish at CEFR levels A1 to B1
- develop a Second Life facility, the iPortal island, to enable learners to meet and communicate on-line
- create a networking facility through the platform for language centres and freelance teachers

This approach of developing an integrated platform for foreign language teaching (iPortal – Integrated Platform with Online Resources for Teaching of All Languages) brought together tools for e-learning, language learning resources and the newly created virtual world through a single site.

Target groups were:

- Language teachers in formal education settings;
- VETPROS and decision makers working in the field of language education;
- Small and medium language education centres;
- Freelance language teachers;
- Disabled people, both language teachers and learners;
- People who want to learn foreign languages by using the internet;
- Employers, migrants and other actors in the language education sector;
- The partners in the consortium as organizations providing language training

The project identified expatriate families, particularly from Bulgaria, Poland and Turkey as new target groups, and overseas associations of schools linked to these countries. In many cases the second generation of these migrant families will no longer learn their heritage language or indeed have access to language lessons. The aim was to provide the opportunity to do so through iPortal.

This project has therefore:

- enabled small and medium language education centres and freelance language teachers to go beyond the traditional provision of language teaching and thus become more flexible and competitive in the language education market
- provided accessible learning resources for the commonly used languages of English, German and Spanish, and the less widely known and used languages of Turkish, Polish, Bulgarian
- addressed multi-cultural issues by enabling people from all over the world to meet and communicate in Second Life while learning foreign languages or improving their language level

## 2. Project Approach

The project had a number of different phases, which were converted into Work Packages, led by different members of the partnership.

The first phase was preparatory, both in terms of the potential content and the technology. Partner 1, Future 21<sup>st</sup> Century Foundation of Bulgaria, as the key technological partner developed the technological elements of both the platform and the virtual environment. The expertise of the other partners was pedagogical and they were involved in preparing the linguistic resources and pedagogical approaches.

In the initial stages, all partners identified key language and ICT specialists who would be able to offer advice through a set of Advisory groups. A further Advisory group of 24 language centres was also set up. The role of these groups was to provide information about current practice and tools and to respond to the strategies proposed by iPortal. This information was then collated into an [E-guide](#) and a [State of the Art report and Needs Analysis](#). The initial idea of holding on-line conferences with these groups was dropped due to logistical issues but the information gathered proved useful for the development of the Portal.

The technological development required specialist skills, which were obtained through a set of sub-contracts by Future 21<sup>st</sup> Century Foundation of Bulgaria. This sub-contracting process was completed by the end of summer 2013 and the sub-contractors worked on development and refinement throughout the project, supervised by Future 21<sup>st</sup> Century Foundation.

The work on developing the iPortal infrastructure and virtual classroom was the second phase of the project. Alongside this, was the design of the Second Life environment. Once these were completed in their initial formats, the pedagogical partners moved to the next phase, which was the creation of the content.

Although the intention was to develop exemplar content at CEFR levels A1 to B1, in English, German, Spanish, Bulgarian, Polish and Turkish, partners recognised that there was also a need for resources for absolute beginners. Partners therefore decided to provide additional resources at a very basic level, which we called A0 and these were created in English, German, Spanish, Polish and Turkish. The exemplar resources were designed to fully exploit the technological capacity of the iPortal, including the virtual classroom. Having explored the options for integrating existing resources into the platform, partners decided to create a '[Resource Centre](#)' that is open to any teacher or learner. This resource centre allows teachers to both upload their lessons and to download lesson plans or materials. In time it is hoped that this will develop into a substantial database for all languages, not only those of the partnership.

Technical evaluations were on-going and the pedagogical partners regularly fed back on what worked well and what needed further refinement. It quickly became apparent that the platform was complex and partners then decided to break it down so that users could work with the modules that best suited their own needs. To support this, a set of 22 [online tutorials](#), both in text and video versions, was developed. Once these were completed,



partners entered a more formal training and testing phase. The initial training and testing was undertaken with staff of the partner organisations and an internal evaluation report was produced following this work. Partners then moved to undertake training with a range of teachers representing the different target groups. Across the partnership 166 teachers (46 male and 120 female) teaching at schools, universities, vocational and training centres, adult education facilities or as freelancers were trained in the use of iPortal. The majority of teachers were language teachers covering the 6 partner languages as well as French, Swedish and Russian. The outcomes of this training were evaluated and they were very positive. The [Training evaluation report](#) is available on the project website.

After the teacher training, the platform and resources were trialled with different groups of learners. This was carried out in part by teachers who had undertaken the training and in part by partners.

Across the partnership a wide range of participants were involved in the trials, primary and secondary school pupils, university students, young participants in EU mobility projects and lifelong learning adults.

They were all invited to test the platform as end users during teacher-led training sessions. There were 155 male and 134 female participants. The languages covered in the testing were all the 6 partner languages and in addition French, since in the UK it is the dominant foreign language taught at school.

Overall the reaction of the students to the lessons delivered using iPortal was very positive. The [Testing evaluation report](#) is available on the project website.

Throughout the project all partners were engaged in dissemination activities and quality assurance. In the latter stages partners also produced an exploitation plan, which incorporated plans for sustainability, intellectual property rights and a marketing strategy.

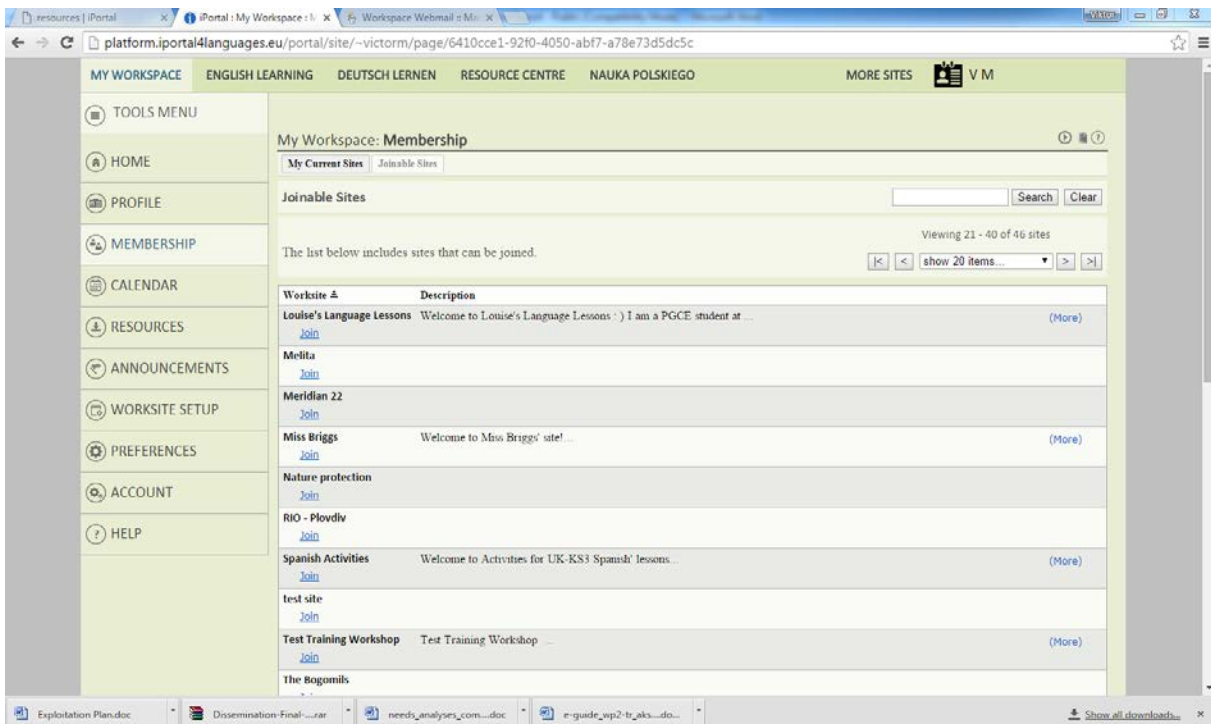
### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

The prime outcome is the [iPortal platform](#) itself including the Virtual Classroom and the associated virtual environment, the [iPortal island](#) accessed using the [SL viewer](#).



Registration on the platform is free and once a user has registered, they can access a very significant range of tools or resources. Access to these is supported by the [online tutorials](#).

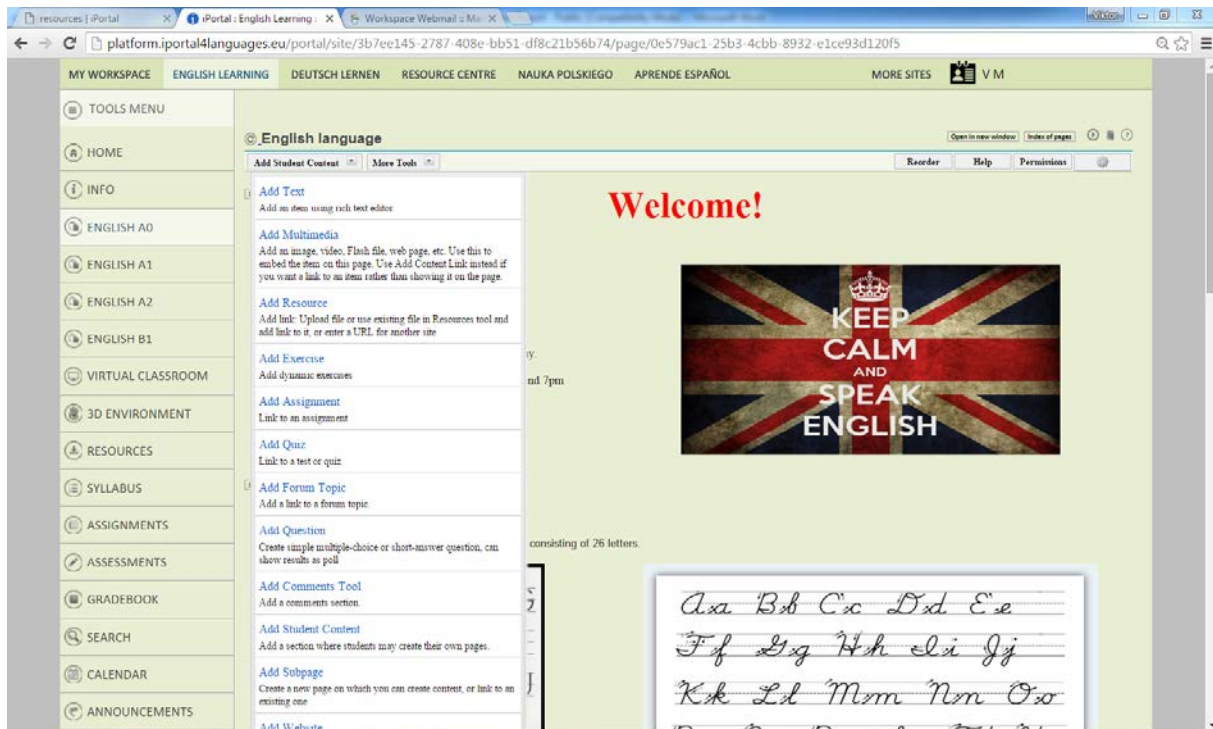
Students who wish to use iPortal for distance learning need to enrol in one of the existing course sites and get in touch with the teacher offering the specific course. They create a profile for free and browse the Membership tool to find a joinable course site.



Teachers who wish to set up a course on iPortal can register for free and use the tools to create a course site, which would typically include among others: a lesson builder, assessments, assignments, various communication channels, calendar, news, etc. but also the very important Virtual classroom and the 3D Second Life environment.

Here are some snapshots illustrating some of the main tools:

### Lesson builder:



The lesson builder offers a wide choice of elements to be used in a lesson: rich text editor, media (pictures, videos), in-built websites, interactive exercises, quizzes, questions, resources, etc.)



## Assessments:

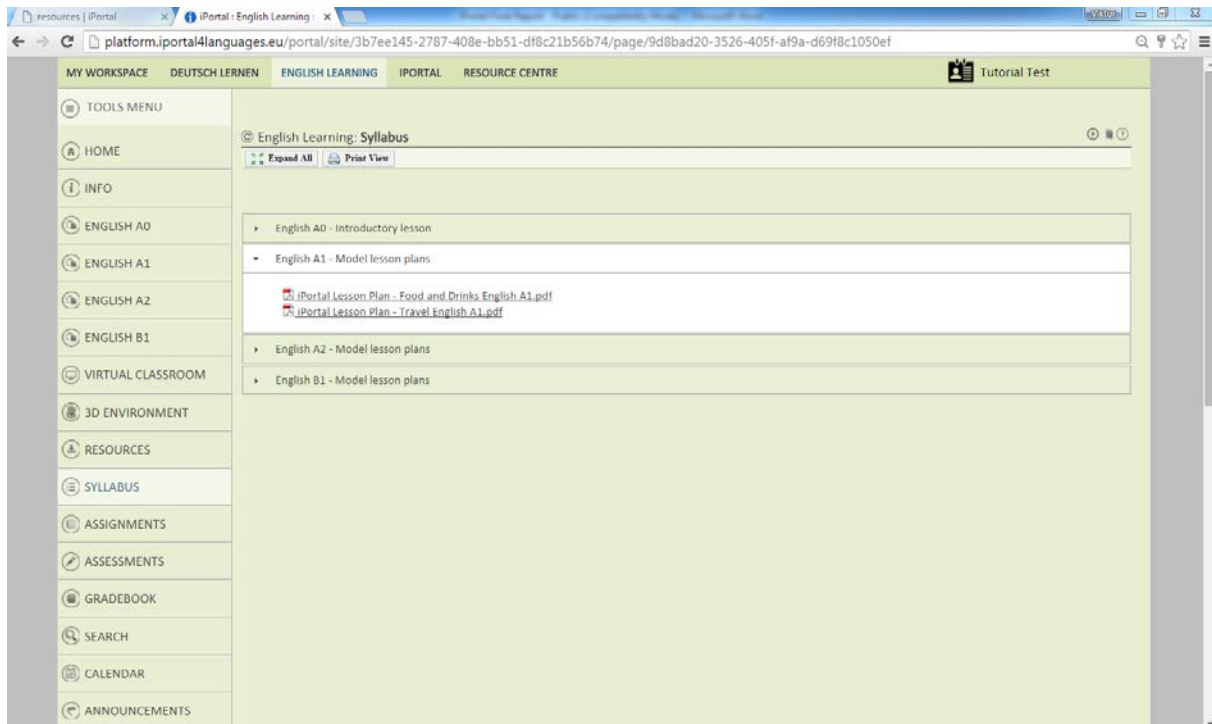
## Assignments:



## Communication channels (example: Chat room)

## Calendar:

Teachers have the possibility to organise their courses and publish the course content structure in the Syllabus tool. The project partners have all created sample lessons related to the topics of travel and food&drinks at levels A0, A1, A2 and B1 and they are published also as Lesson plans. Users can find the lessons in the corresponding course sites: [Уча Български](#), [Nauka Polskiego](#), [Türkçe dersleri](#), [English Learning](#), [Aprende Español](#), [Deutsch Lernen](#).

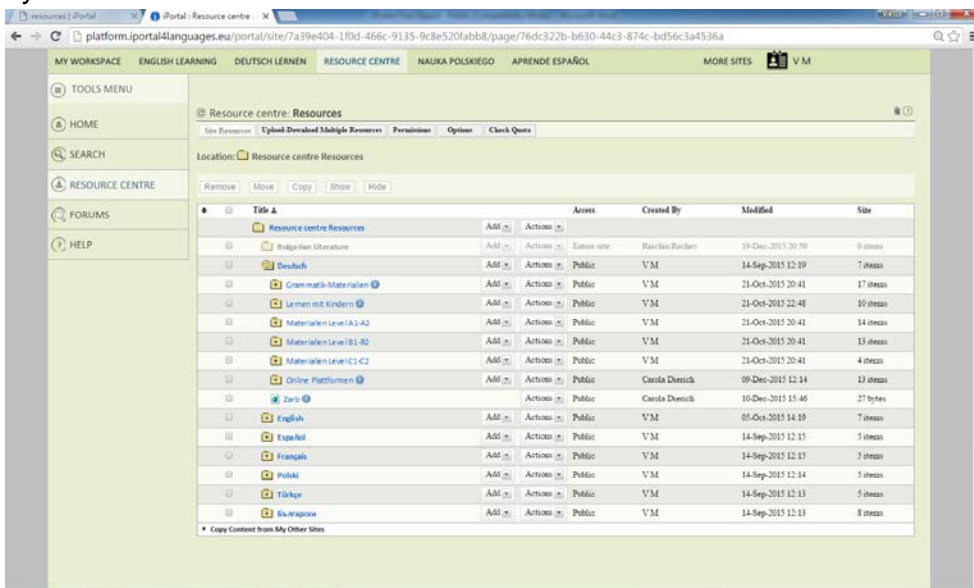


The Virtual Classroom (illustrated by a snapshot earlier) is used to deliver an online real time class, possibly uniting in one virtual room a teacher and students from anywhere in the world. Most usual function of an e-whiteboard are available, you can write, draw, use cliparts, but also upload and display documents in different formats: doc, pdf, images, videos, websites, presentations etc.

The Second Life 3D environment provides a unique way for learners to exercise their verbal skills in a mind capturing way. Over 16 major environments have been created for the sole use of iPortal students, recreating common 3D environments suitable for language learning. One of the environments is for instance the Exhibition Hall, which is rich in content related to the six partner languages and cultures:



The [Resource Centre](#) is a common tool to all the languages (present and future) and functions as a common repository of learning materials to be used, shared and downloaded by teachers.



Additional outcomes were the iPortal website [www.iportal4languages.eu](http://www.iportal4languages.eu). This went through three sets of transformations and is primarily a site promoting and signposting the iPortal platform itself. Nevertheless it also hosts some additional outcomes, which are available on the [resources section](#):

- [the State of the Art and Needs Analysis reports](#)
- [the Evaluation report on the teacher training](#)
- [the Evaluation report on the testing](#)
- [the Overall dissemination report](#)

- [the project newsletters and partner videos](#)
- [the Project's exploitation plan](#)

The project also developed a specific management section of the website for partners to access. This hosts all documents. From an internal management perspective, a number of management tools were produced; partnership agreements, a management plan, reporting templates and dissemination, quality and exploitation plans.

A significant set of outcomes from the project relate to dissemination.

The tools used for dissemination were:

The project website [www.iportal4languages.eu](http://www.iportal4languages.eu) was a key dissemination tool and the project had a social media presence on [Facebook](#).

The project produced 6 project newsletters, several YouTube videos and partners delivered formal presentations and held numerous meetings to promote the iPortal.

An agreed 'corporate' presentation was produced, which was then localised by different partners and a [newsletter](#) has been published after each of the partner meetings and distributed by partners to key individuals and organisations. In some cases there were supported by [video clips](#) providing updates on the project.

Partners developed a database of over 1200 contacts of individuals and organisations, which have been of interest to the project. These were divided into target groups as well as countries of origin and are appended to the summary dissemination report.

Altogether, during country specific dissemination, almost 130 activities took place reaching over 4870 people.

A second dissemination strategy was based on the Internet campaign managed and carried out for iPortal partnership by an expert [marketing company Kompan](#). Due to the specific character of the project product, the Portal Internet campaign took place at the very end of the project as partners wanted all the amendments to be implemented in the platform. During our campaign project internet banners were displayed to over 7,140, 000 users and the project website was visited by over 35,400 users who showed interest in the platform. The Internet campaign consisted of banners that appeared on websites related to project specifics and ad-words determined for each of the partner languages.

The detailed dissemination activities and the numbers reached are in the [final dissemination report](#), but the types of dissemination carried out by each partner can be summarised as follows:

Partner 1 - Future 21<sup>st</sup> Century Foundation participated in 36 dissemination activities. During these a group of more than 1300 people were reached from the following target groups:

- Language teachers in formal education settings
- VETPROS and decision makers working in the field of language education;
- Small and medium language education centres;
- Freelance language teachers;
- Disabled people, both language teachers and learners;
- People who want to learn foreign languages by using the Internet;
- Employers, migrants and other actors in the language education sector;



Partner 2 - English Unlimited carried out 41 dissemination activities. During these a group of over 2600 people were contacted. These do not include 1430 Facebook fans and 3500 English Unlimited website visitors per month. The target groups reached were:

- Language teachers in formal education settings
- VETPROS and decision makers working in the field of language education;
- Small and medium language education centres;
- Freelance language teachers;
- Disabled people, both language teachers and learners;
- People who want to learn foreign languages by using the Internet;
- Employers, migrants and other actors in the language education sector;

Partner 3 – Aksaray University focused dissemination activities on the internet by putting information about iPortal on different websites of its choice. Altogether, 11 dissemination activities were organised. The Twitter account of Aksaray University is followed by almost 1400 people and the university web page is visited by over 250 000 people per month. As part of the websites were dedicated to education and academic activity we can identify some of the target groups as:

- Language teachers in formal education settings
- VETPROS and decision makers working in the field of language education;
- Small and medium language education centres;
- Freelance language teachers;
- People who want to learn foreign languages by using the Internet
- 

Partner 4 - edUcation ltd reached to about 255 people representing various target groups during 11 dissemination events. This partner concentrated on face to face dissemination, discussions and power point presentations. Respondents represented such target groups as:

- Language teachers in formal education settings
- VETPROS and decision makers working in the field of language education;
- Small and medium language education centres;
- Freelance language teachers;
- People who want to learn foreign languages by using the Internet;
- Employers, migrants and other actors in the language education sector;

Partner 5 - Iniciativas de Proyectos de Formación disseminated iPortal project through 13 activities in which 365 people have participated. P5 participated in seminars, gave presentations, face to face meetings, performed on-line dissemination and participated in a radio program. Target groups reached were:

- Language teachers in formal education settings
- VETPROS and decision makers working in the field of language education;
- Small and medium language education centres;
- Freelance language teachers;
- People who want to learn foreign languages by using the Internet;
- Employers, migrants and other actors in the language education sector;

Partner 6 – Wisamar has performed 15 activities and reached a group of 353 people and an additional group of people was reached through internet dissemination. Partner concentrated on such activities as face to face meetings, presentations, mailing, website information. Target groups reached were:

- Language teachers in formal education settings
- VETPROS and decision makers working in the field of language education;
- Small and medium language education centres;
- Freelance language teachers;
- People who want to learn foreign languages by using the Internet;
- Employers, migrants and other actors in the language education sector;

## 4. Partnerships

The partnership brought together organisations from six countries with different areas of expertise and access to different ranges of target groups. The principle behind this partnership was to share experience and expertise and exploit the complementary competences of the partners.

The project applicant and coordinator for the first half of the project was Future 21<sup>st</sup> Century Foundation (F21) in Bulgaria. F21 brought technical expertise to the project and led on the technological development and the exploitation of the iPortal. F21 has been managing its own Regional Cisco Academy for 13 years, and has trained more than 700 disabled people. F21 participates in numerous infrastructure and research IT projects at national and international levels and has been a partner in various Transfer of Innovation projects related to e-learning, ICT and virtual worlds. F21 produced the resources in Bulgarian and undertook the training and testing in Bulgaria.

English Unlimited (EU) from Poland has extensive experience in methodology and in material development for foreign language teaching, having been involved in many multilateral projects devoted to foreign languages. EU also runs a Teacher Training College for language teachers of English and German as a foreign language, and is an Examination Centre for Cambridge English examinations, Goethe Institute and the LCCI Business English examinations. EU led on the state of the art analysis and on dissemination, produced the resources in Polish and undertook the training and testing in Poland.

After the original Turkish partner, Abant İzzet Baysal University, withdrew at the start of the project, it was replaced by Aksaray University, whose mission is to offer education on the basis of contemporary and universal values. The University consists of eight faculties, five schools, six vocational schools and two institutes. Aksaray University has adopted a vision to be a leading university with a prestigious place in the world of science, arts, and technology with its research, education and publications. Aksaray University led on the Integration of Language Courses Content & Teaching Materials produced the resources in Turkish and undertook the training and testing in Turkey.

The UK partner was originally Teesdale Education Trust, but was replaced after 18 months by edEducation Ltd, who took over the role of coordinator after October 2014. This is consultancy, which has been involved in numerous international projects over the years, and has experience in external evaluation and project management. The staff have extensive experience of e-learning and language training. edEducation Ltd led on the overall management in the second half of the project, the testing of the iPortal. edEducation produced the resources in English and undertook the training and testing in the UK.

IPF, Iniciativas de Proyectos de Formación (Initiatives for educational projects) is a non-formal training and research company in Malaga specialising in education and training projects, with more than 17 years' experience in the area. The main aims are to achieve improvements in education by providing training for young people and counselling for job seekers. IPF's methodology focuses on personal management, teaching and research. IPF took the lead on Quality Assurance, produced the resources in Spanish and undertook the training and testing in Spain.

The German partner was Wisamar Bildungsgesellschaft Gemeinnuetzige GmbH (WBG). Through their language and mobility schemes, they offer young people, teachers, trainers and human resources managers the opportunity to gain practical experience abroad or to have exchanges with colleagues about teaching methods, content and organisation. In addition to sending groups to other countries, WBG hosts 300 people a year from all over Europe for a further education in Leipzig. WBG is an active member of networks on a regional and European level, including the European association Cooperation Network for European Citizenship (CO.NE.CT). Wisamar led on the teacher training, produced the resources in German and undertook the training and testing in Germany.

## 5. Plans for the Future

Partners developed an [exploitation plan](#), which aimed to ensure the longer term sustainability and development of the iPortal.

This plan incorporates these deliverables into three main strands.

- Sustainability
- Further Development
- Marketing

### **Sustainability**

Through the project funding, F21 has purchased servers to host the iPortal platform. F21 will continue to use these servers to host and maintain the iPortal after the end of the funding period and for a minimum of five years. The aim is to develop the platform partly on a commercial basis, which will provide funding for its longer-term maintenance and ultimate upgrading.

### **Further Development**

The platform will be developed in several ways:

- Firstly additional resources will be provided for different topics in the existing languages at the existing levels.
- Secondly additional resources will be developed at higher levels of the CEFR scale.
- Thirdly resources will be developed in additional languages.

A further development strand is using the iPortal for subjects other than languages and to promote it as a general e-learning platform.

### **The Virtual Environment**

The learning island will be developed further by adding other venues for language learning or by adapting the venues to facilitate the learning of other subjects.

### **Technical Developments**

F21 aims to undertake numerous technical developments over the next three years:

- Launching of a Rating system
- Improvement of the User Dashboard
- Adoption of advanced methodologies, like suggestopedy and desuggestopedy
- Integration of new statutes such as assistant teachers, passive accounts etc.
- Provision of improved accessibility for people with different disabilities – transition from Flash to HTML 5, to make the Internet radio interface accessible for screen readers of visually impaired people, etc.

- Integration of adaptive learning tools and adaptive tests
- Up-grade of the basic infrastructure with priority to the NAS and the extension of RAM of the main servers
- Establishment and management of mirror servers
- Development of a billing system
- Provision of support for additional tools for language and other courses

## Marketing

The existing resources and the platform are free to use and available on open licence. However, there are certain ways in which the iPortal platform will be developed on a commercial basis.

- Additional training will be provided at a commercial rate
- For teachers or language centres who wish to use iPortal to deliver their own courses by distance learning, a fee will be chargeable for the hosting of their course
- For institutions wanting to use the platform to host their own e-learning, a negotiated fee will be payable
- A fee will be chargeable for the hosting courses in subjects other than languages.
- A negotiated fee will be payable for the transfer of iPortal to a client's own servers.

Our targets by the end of the first two years of further expansion and promotion are that 100 additional teachers and 2000 additional learners will be reached by expanding the existing language provision at the existing levels.

50 additional teachers and 1000 additional learners will be reached by developing the language provision at higher levels of the CEFR scale

100 additional teachers and 2000 additional learners will be reached by developing additional languages.

In order to facilitate this, the iPortal has developed a Resource Centre, where teachers of any language from anywhere in the world can upload resources to share and download resources that have been made freely available. This facility will remain free to all users and partners expect that it will develop its own dynamic to build up a large repository of language learning resources.

Through developing the iPortal as a more generalized e-learning platform and incorporating other subjects, the longer-term targets are as follows:

By the end of the first two years of expansion into new subject areas it is expected that 100 additional teachers and 2000 additional learners will be reached.

In using the iPortal as a general administrative tool, the target is to have up to 1000 teachers using it and up to 10000 learners subscribed by the end of the second year.

These figures are seen as conservative, given the numbers reached during the internet campaign.

The work has already started and in Bulgaria F21 has recruited more than 140 additional teachers/learners for 2016 (ICT – CCNA, virtual servers, Java programming, screen readers, Sliven Municipality site) , more than 30 potential other teachers (Spiritual heritage site) by using iPortal for other subject or administration – and more than 280 sites including in Armenia, Italy, Turkey, Moldavia (translation in Romanian launched), Lithuania (integration of BADGE system launched as a subpart of the Rating system).

Through the marketing strategy our targets are to reach 250 teachers undertaking additional training, either face to face or online in each year.

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

This project addressed several different aspects of EU policy.

Firstly the project addressed the Europe 2020 Strategy of reinforcing the attractiveness of education and training to help meet Europe's immediate and future skills needs, and to reduce the social impact of and facilitate recovery from the crisis.

Additionally, the project contributed to the promotion of language learning by providing information about language learning opportunities, and access to language learning facilities. By improving provision in this way, it serves to facilitate mobility and make people more competitive on the European and Trans-European labour market.

In terms of the specific priorities and objectives of the Lifelong Learning Programme, it addressed the following:

- Promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity
- Promotion of the development of innovative ICT-based content, services, pedagogies and practice for lifelong learning
- Promotion of the quality and transparency of Member States' education and training systems
- Promotion of language learning and support to linguistic diversity in Member States
- Promotion of the acquisition of key competences throughout the education and training system.

iPortal also offered to help people with disabilities to learn or teach foreign languages.

As a combination of ICT, e-learning methods and vocationally oriented language learning, it supported improvements in the quality of and innovation in vocational education and training systems, institutions and practices, and enhanced the attractiveness of vocational education and training.