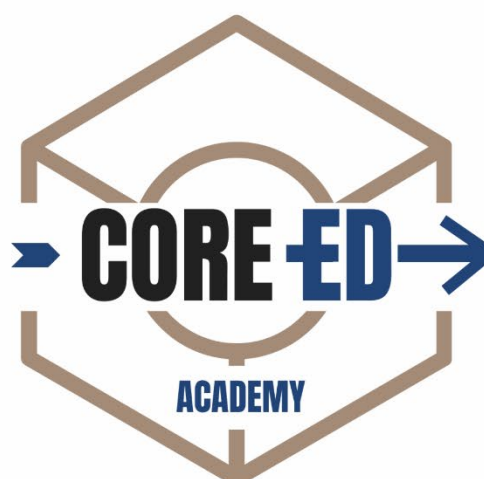




D3.3 - Modelling the CORE ED according to ESG factors

Project: 101179359 — CORE-ED ACADEMY — ERASMUS-EDU-2024-CBHE



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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Purpose of the CORE-ED Model

Deliverable 3.3: *CORE-ED Model aligned to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors*, is developed under Work Package 3 (WP3) of the CORE-ED ACADEMY project. It stands as one of the project's central outputs. Laying theoretical and operational groundwork for integrating sustainability, inclusion, and ethical governance into correctional pedagogy across the Western Balkans, the CORE-ED Model can be used as a framework and a philosophy of action: it offers a structured approach to educational material, occupational profiles, and professional competencies in the correctional sector, while remaining aligned with the ESG principles that define contemporary European policies. By remaining consistent with these principles at every level (from the curriculum design to institutional decision-making), this model supports the development of a correctional education ecosystem that is at the same time socially aware, environmentally conscious, and transparently governed.

Traditional correctional pedagogy has focused on disciplinary instruction and rehabilitation; however, such approaches often fail to address the evolving ESG frameworks that now guide institutional responsibility. Integrating ESG principles into correctional education reframes learning not merely as a rehabilitative process, but as a driver of sustainable human development and institutional transformation. The green pillar of ESG supports sustainable institutional practices in correctional education by incorporating green training and environmental awareness programmes, thereby aligning educational pathways with ecological responsibility (Moran & Jewkes, 2014)¹. The social pillar of ESG emphasises inclusivity, equity and stakeholder well-being; in correctional education contexts, this means programmes that enhance learners' social engagement, trust and agency, thereby contributing to reintegration and social cohesion (Galeshi et al., 2022)². The *governance* aspect highlights transparency, ethical management, and accountability, which can inform evidence-based education programs and participatory learning models that empower incarcerated learners (Milward et al., 2021). The governance pillar of ESG in correctional education promotes transparency, accountability, and participatory decision-making, ensuring that learning environments are managed ethically and responsibly. In this context, incorporating restorative and participatory governance frameworks

¹ Moran, D., & Jewkes, Y. (2014). "Green" prisons: Rethinking the "sustainability" of the carceral estate. *Geographica Helvetica*, 69(4), 345–353. <https://doi.org/10.5194/gh-69-345-2014>

² Galeshi, R., Alipour, A., & Zandi, I. (2022). *The influence of correctional education, skill proficiency, and lifelong learning on social outcomes of incarcerated individuals: Results from PIAAC*. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336730246_The_influence_of_correctional_education_skill_proficiency_and_lifelong_learning_on_social_outcomes_of_incarcerated_individuals_Results_from_PIAAC

strengthens trust, legitimacy, and the quality of educational outcomes (Coyle & Fair, 2018; Council of Europe, 2020; European Parliament & Council, 2022)³.

The CORE-ED Model builds on these intersections, positioning education as the central mechanism for reform, rehabilitation, and social cohesion within correctional systems, thereby transforming ESG principles into measurable pedagogical outcomes.

It is developed through a collaborative and evidence-based process that includes DACUM competency analyses, national reports, policy mapping, and multi-stakeholder consultation. Each partner country (Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania, and Greece) contributed with insights from higher education institutions and correctional authorities. This ensures that the resulting framework is both academically sound and adaptable to national realities.

As its main purpose, the CORE-ED Model aims to provide a cohesive structure through which education in correctional institutions can evolve into a sustainable, inclusive, and ethically governed system. Under this light, it will be able to enhance both the professional standards of correctional staff and the social reintegration of learners.

In line with the definitions established in the D3.1 Synthesis Report, the term *correctional pedagogy* refers to the professional field that integrates educational, psychosocial, and rehabilitative practices in correctional and juvenile-justice contexts. The term *juvenile justice professionals* encompasses all practitioners engaged in the care, education, supervision, and rehabilitation of children and young people in conflict with the law, including educators, psychologists, social workers, probation and correctional staff, and judicial officers.

1.2 Key Objectives and Expected Outcomes

The main goal of the CORE-ED Model is to embed ESG principles into correctional pedagogy systems, contributing to the transformation of education and training in the correctional sector. This goal can be further divided into three distinct objectives: a) to integrate environmental sustainability into the educational design, as well as the practices of the various institutions. This will promote responsible resource use, environmental awareness, green competencies within correctional facilities and green culture. b) To

³ Coyle, A., & Fair, H. (2018). *Strengthening Prison Governance*. Institute for Criminal Policy Research (ICPR), University of London.

https://www.prisonstudies.org/sites/default/files/resources/downloads/strengthening_prison_governance_-_icpr.pdf; Council of Europe. (2020). *European Prison Rules (Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)3)*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe.

https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016809ee581

strengthen the social dimension of correctional pedagogy by embedding equality, diversity, inclusion and social justice into the educational process. In this way, equal opportunities for learners and fair working conditions for educators will be ensured. c) To reinforce good governance within correctional and higher education institutions through transparency, ethical management, and participatory decision-making, thus keeping internal structures in alignment with European standards and values.

These objectives can be achieved by targeting specific outcomes. The CORE-ED model serves as a blueprint for the design and delivery of educational material that is both impactful and accountable, benefiting four key domains:

1. **Professional development and workforce competence:** Through the alignment of skills frameworks with ESG indicators, the model can enhance the competencies of correctional educators, social workers, and administrators alike. It will be able to equip them for the management of complex ethical, environmental, and social challenges within their work environments.
2. **Institutional governance and quality assurance:** The model includes governance mechanisms that can promote accountability, peer review, and evidence-based decision-making. In this way, transparency and quality control are supported as indispensable features of correctional education systems.
3. **Curriculum innovation and employability:** The ESG alignment supports curriculum reform, which can encourage the development of curricula that increase employability. Learners will be prepared for sustainable occupations, both within and beyond the correctional context.
4. **Community impact and social reintegration:** By connecting educational practices to rehabilitation goals, the model strengthens the link between learning and social reintegration, thus turning education into a central pillar of restorative justice.

In addition, the CORE-ED Model provides the conceptual bridge toward subsequent project phases (WP4–WP6), serving as the theoretical backbone for the creation of new curricula, the establishment of the *CORE-ED Competency Framework*, and the introduction of micro-credentials. In this sense, D3.3 consolidates WP3 results but also supports the future evolution of the CORE-ED ecosystem as a whole.

1.3 Relevance of ESG Integration

The integration of ESG principles within correctional education systems is beyond necessary: correctional institutions often act as a concentrated image of society, reflecting its inequalities, its governance challenges, but also its potential for evolution. By embedding



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sustainability, social responsibility, and ethical governance into correctional environments, the CORE-ED project responds to the European Union’s call for education that advances the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, the European Green Deal, and the European Skills Agenda. It also supports the Pact for Skills and broader strategies that advocate resilient, future-oriented education systems. In this context, ESG alignment acts as a catalyst for transformation that shifts correctional education from a reactive model (focused on compliance and control) to a proactive model centered on empowerment, inclusion, and long-term social sustainability. Through the incorporation of environmental awareness, social justice, and transparent governance into the core of educational design, the CORE-ED Model ensures that institutions act by example of the very values they seek to instil in learners.

In the Western Balkans, correctional education functions within intricate socioeconomic shifts, making this alignment especially important. By incorporating ESG principles, participating institutions can strengthen their ethical standards and establish trust, while creating international partnerships that advance regional stability and information sharing. Additionally, it encourages the modernisation of curricula, the professionalisation of correctional educators, and the recognition of micro-credentials, elements that complement the goals of the Bologna Process and the larger European Higher Education Area.

Thus, the CORE-ED Model is a novel approach to policy as well as a useful road map. It can bring together the goals of sustainable development and the practicalities of correctional pedagogy, guaranteeing that education in these systems fosters change for students, institutions, and the communities they return to instead of just compliance or rehabilitation.



Figure 1 - International Partnerships

2. Introduction

2.1 The Concept of CORE-ED

The CORE-ED model represents an innovative framework for transforming education and professional development. It is conceived within the wider objectives of the CORE-ED ACADEMY project, responding to a growing need for educational systems that are both driven by sustainability and keep to a human-centered philosophy, while also being able to connect learning to ethical governance, social responsibility, and environmental awareness. The CORE-ED model embodies the basic idea that education must be built around the core competencies that define responsible professionalism in the correctional sector. Its design and delivery must reflect the ethical and sustainable core of institutional and societal values. The model highlights education as a process of knowledge transmission, but also as a dynamic ecosystem in which learners, educators, and institutions co-create value for the wider community.

Although the approach can be used in a variety of fields, its adaptation to correctional pedagogy is especially important, as the correctional environment, delicate, complex, and frequently underfunded, calls for educational models that can address challenges both in cognitive and in socioemotional learning. One such model is offered by the CORE-ED approach, by combining sustainability and ethical principles with learning based on competency. This entails creating educational programs in correctional settings that are able to promote civic engagement, employability, and rehabilitation, while they also enhance the institution's ability to function in an open and compassionate manner.

Within the CORE-ED ACADEMY project, this approach has been put into context through an extensive process of research, consultation, and validation. This process combined DACUM methodology (to identify and update occupational profiles), with stakeholder hearings, policy mapping, and comparative analyses of European and Western Balkan practices. The resulting framework defines the CORE-ED Model as a tool that can guide higher education institutions, correctional authorities, and training providers in aligning pedagogy, with ethical governance and sustainability imperatives. By turning theory into practical methodology, CORE-ED stands as a bridge between academic innovation and social reshaping. It promotes the foundation of a pedagogy that reacts to correctional challenges, but also anticipates them, shaping new professional standards.



2.2 The Role of ESG in Educational and Professional Development Frameworks

The incorporation of Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) factors into education is currently one of the most important updating mechanisms. The ESG factors, which began as a framework for responsible investing in the corporate and financial sectors, have lately developed into a multifaceted tool for the evaluation and direction of the performance of institutions in various fields, foremostly including that of education. ESG gives organisations a way to highlight how dedicated they truly are to sustainability, ethics, and inclusivity, values that are becoming more widely seen as necessary.

In the context of educational and professional development frameworks, ESG factors help institutions answer fundamental questions, such as how the environment in which learning takes place can be sustained; how society can be served through equitable access, inclusion, and social impact; and how procedures can be governed ethically and transparently. As it comes to the environmental dimension, it can extend beyond the management of resources, all the way to encompassing ecological literacy and the creation of sustainable learning environments as a whole. It challenges educators and administrators to follow responsible practices, such as the design of sustainable physical spaces or digital infrastructure that supports learning with a low carbon footprint. Concerning the social dimension, with inclusion, equity, diversity, and social justice are all key elements of education in general. To be fully aligned with ESG, curricula that reflect pluralism, learning processes that empower any marginalised voices, and institutional cultures that prioritise the wellbeing of both learners and instructors are required. Lastly, the governance dimension of ESG ensures that these efforts are implemented in systems that are characterised by transparency and accountability. It involves clear policies, participatory decision-making, and mechanisms of quality assurance that protect learners' rights and promote ethical behaviour across all institutional levels.

Since correctional facilities are not isolated but rather serve as representations of communities where issues of justice, equity, and sustainability collide, ESG concepts are extremely relevant to today's correctional education systems. The facilities are reorganised as places of learning and development when ESG factors are incorporated into their curriculum. By transforming correctional educators into human development and social change agents, it is guaranteed that educational interventions have a direct impact on rehabilitation and reintegration, as well as employability.

The European Green Deal, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, and the Council of Europe's Education for Democratic Citizenship agenda immediately come to mind as examples of how the integration of ESG into correctional education aligns these systems with larger European and global frameworks. Correctional education acquires increased legitimacy, as a field that may promote social progress and sustainability as a result of this connection.

2.3 Objectives and Scope of the Report

This report presents the structure of the CORE-ED Model, one of the major outputs of Work Package 3 on the CORE-ED ACADEMY project. The Model's main goal is to combine research findings, theoretical perspectives, and stakeholder inputs into a comprehensive framework for educational reform and policy development in the correctional sector. Specifically, the report aims to:

- Define the conceptual rationale of the CORE-ED Model, clarifying how ESG principles are operationalised in correctional education;
- Illustrate how the model supports competency development, institutional improvement, and sustainable governance;
- Provide the methodological basis for the subsequent CORE-ED Competency Framework and related curricula (developed under WP4–WP6); and
- Offer guidance to higher education institutions, correctional administrations, and policymakers on implementing ESG-aligned pedagogical practices.

The scope of this report extends beyond theoretical analysis, as it combines policy research, stakeholder input, and applied methodological work to produce an actionable model adaptable across the Western Balkans and other regions seeking similar reforms. The model is structured in a flexible way, so as to allow its adjustment to institutional capacity, national policy frameworks, and specific correctional contexts.

The deliverable's structure is as follows:

- **Section 1 (Executive Summary)** provides a general overview of the purpose and relevance of the ESG alignment.
- **Section 2 (Introduction)** outlines the conceptual and policy context.
- **Section 3 (ESG Factors in Correctional Pedagogy)** analyses the ESG dimensions in correctional pedagogy in depth, exploring their impact on education, workforce, and governance.
- **Section 4 (Development of the CORE-ED Model)** details the development of the CORE-ED Model itself, with its parameters, processes, and intended outcomes.



- **Section 5 (CORE-ED Competency Framework)** describes the corresponding Competency Framework that informs the CORE-ED Model,
- **Section 6 (Recommendations for Implementation)** offers recommendations for implementation and sustainability, and
- **Section 7 (Conclusion)** includes concluding remarks on the entire report.

Through the successful integration of environmental, social, and governance perspectives into a common educational framework, the CORE-ED Model aims to establish a new structure of correctional pedagogy: one that promotes human dignity, ethical governance, and sustainable development in learning. It places the correctional sector at the centre, as a field where education becomes both a rehabilitation tool and a pathway to a more resilient and fair society.



3. ESG Factors in Correctional Pedagogy

This section examines how ESG factors intersect within the correctional pedagogy ecosystem. It essentially explores their individual and collective impacts on educational environments, as well as on workforce competencies and institutional governance. The section also illustrates how ESG principles can be embedded in a solid way into correctional education, through international standards and good practices.



Figure 2 - ESG Factors

3.1 Environmental Factors

Correctional institutions have a certain complexity, as ecosystems, as they combine educational, administrative, and supervisory functions. At the same time, they also require intensive resources (and their management), as they consume a great deal of energy and water, while producing significant amounts of waste. The environmental conditions of such institutions, such as air quality, lighting, temperature, noise, access to nature, all have direct implications for health and wellbeing, as well as the effectiveness of learning within them. The Revised European Prison Rules (2020) stress this reality, by affirming that detention facilities must ensure adequate lighting, ventilation, sanitation, and access

to outdoor exercise. In this way, they can promote a living environment that mirrors community life as closely as possible (Council of Europe, 2020)⁴. These standards reflect a “normalisation principle,” according to which the conditions of imprisonment should resemble those of ordinary life to the greatest extent possible, affirming that humane conditions are of vital importance to rehabilitation and learning (Prison Observatory, 2015; Penal Reform International, 2020)^{5 6}.

In educational terms, environmental factors extend beyond an institution’s physical infrastructure, as they encompass how sustainability and ecological awareness are integrated into curricula and daily institutional practices. The CORE-ED Model interprets this dimension through three main lenses: a) the greening of facilities and operations, b) the inclusion of ecological literacy within teaching programs, and c) the modeling of sustainability in institutional governance. Classrooms, workshops, and vocational programs alike can all serve as preparing grounds for sustainability, incorporating gardening, waste reduction, and recycling initiatives. Through this practice, that can not only reduce environmental impact but also become tools for experiential learning and skill development.

3.1.1 Environmental Education as a Correctional Reform Strategy

Environmental education can serve as a decisive factor for correctional reform itself. Facility sustainability and pedagogy can be linked, making institutions able to promote responsibility and active citizenship among both staff and learners. The UNESCO Greening Education Partnership (2022)⁷ calls for embedding sustainability principles into all educational ecosystems, which highlights lifelong learning as essential to climate resilience and social change. Similarly, the European Commission’s GreenComp Framework (2022)⁸ offers a comprehensive model of sustainability competences, including critical reflection,

⁴Council of Europe. (2020). *European Prison Rules* (Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)3). https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=09000016809ee581

⁵ Prison Observatory. (2015). *The European Prison Rules: Norms and normalisation*. <https://www.prisonobservatory.org/>

⁶ Penal Reform International. (2020). *Global Prison Trends 2020*. <https://www.penalreform.org/resource/global-prison-trends-2020/>

⁷UNESCO. (2022). *Greening Education Partnership*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/greening-education-partnership>

⁸ European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC). (2022). *GreenComp: The European sustainability competence framework* (Publications Office). <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/13286>

and collaborative problem-solving, competences that are directly translatable to correctional pedagogy. In particular, GreenComp competences such as “*Systems Thinking*” and “*Supporting fairness*” align closely with correctional education tasks, as the first encourages educators and learners to understand the interdependence between institutional practices and wider social outcomes, and the second connects sustainability with equity and justice, teaching staff and learners to act responsibly toward both current and future generations while reflecting on past social patterns of exclusion.

Two European examples illustrate how environmental sustainability and rehabilitation can coexist within correctional institutions. Norway’s Bastøy Prison is a first example, as it operates on an ecological model that encompasses renewable energy, organic farming, and self-sustaining resource systems. Bastøy Prison inmates participate in agricultural activities, animal care, and the maintenance of the facility, cultivating both their practical skills and a sense of responsibility for their environment. In Italy, the Gorgona Island Prison⁹ follows similar principles. It integrates agricultural labor, environmental care, and therapeutic work practices that combine productivity and rehabilitation. In both cases, sustainability is at the centre of correctional education, linking ecological awareness with self-efficacy and rehabilitation.

“Green prison” initiatives demonstrate that environmentally conscious operations reduce resource expenditure and improve mental wellbeing and behaviour. Facilities that implement environmental programs, such as garden care, solar energy use, or recycling schemes report positive impacts on the inmates’ morale, ability to discipline, and willingness to participate in education (Prison Journalism Project, 2023)¹⁰. Corporate ESG disclosures from entities such as CoreCivic further demonstrate how environmental metrics are increasingly embedded in correctional management frameworks (CoreCivic, 2023)¹¹. These practices show that environmental sustainability and educational reform can progress hand in hand.

⁹ Gorgona Island Prison (Italy). (n.d.). *Rehabilitation through agro-ecology* [Ministry of Justice/official info]. <https://www.giustizia.it/>

¹⁰ Prison Journalism Project. (2023). *Green prison initiatives and outcomes* [Article]. <https://prison-journalismproject.org/>

¹¹ CoreCivic. (2023). *Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) Report*. <https://www.core-civic.com/esg>

3.1.2 Theoretical Framework: Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and ESG Alignment

The CORE-ED Competency Framework operationalises the competency standards identified through the D3.1 Synthesis Report and the national country reports. It consolidates these findings into a unified, ESG-aligned structure defining the observable knowledge, skills, and attitudes required for juvenile-justice and correctional-education professionals.

The UNESCO (2014, 2020)^{12 13} vision of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) lays the pedagogical groundwork for bringing Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) values into correctional education. ESD gives meaning and direction to sustainability, as it explains why education should foster awareness, empathy, and responsibility for the future. ESG, in turn, offers the structure that allows these values to take root in institutions, as it translates them into policies, practices, and measurable standards. In this sense, ESD speaks to the learning process, while ESG shapes the system that sustains it. Together, they provide both a philosophy and a framework through which sustainability, inclusion, and accountability become part of everyday correctional practice. At its core, ESD embraces holistic thinking, participation, and transformation, principles that the CORE-ED Model adopts to help learners reassess their place in society and take shared responsibility for their own growth and that of others.

Instead of treating learning as a one-way transfer of information, ESD turns it into a dialogue, a process of reflection, questioning, and collaboration. This participatory approach connects directly to the governance dimension of ESG, since it encourages learners to become active stakeholders in institutional and social change. Since in correctional environments autonomy and trust are often limited, such a way of structuring education can help rebuild a sense of agency and purpose. The UNESCO ESD Roadmap (2020) and the Greening Education Partnership (2022)¹⁴ both call for this kind of cooperation between policymakers, community actors, and educators. Through the ESG lens, the CORE-ED Model translates those ideals into everyday correctional practice, making them concrete and measurable.

¹²UNESCO. (2020). *Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374802>

¹³UNESCO. (2014). *UN Decade of ESD (2005–2014) Final Report*. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000230514>

¹⁴ UNESCO. (2022). *Greening Education Partnership*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/sustainable-development/education/greening-future>

3.2 Social Factors

Correctional education is intrinsically tied to its social dimension, as education in prisons and juvenile facilities is a basic human right, one that restores dignity, supports reintegration, and opens the path to change and rehabilitation. The European Prison Rules clearly convey that the loss of liberty does not mean the loss of fundamental rights; detention should always aim toward social reintegration and active participation in community life (Council of Europe, 2020). The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its General Comment No. 24 (2019)¹⁵ highlight the same principle, urging child-centred justice systems, where education stands at the heart of rehabilitation, and deprivation of liberty remains a measure of last resort. Together, these frameworks form the normative foundation of the CORE-ED Model's social orientation.

However, correctional education also unfolds within deeply unequal social realities. Many learners in custody have experienced limited opportunities for learning, as well as marginalisation or systemic discrimination, even long before their incarceration. To address such inequalities through education becomes an act of social justice in itself. An analysis by the RAND Corporation found that inmates who take part in educational programmes are 43% less likely to relapse and express criminal behaviour, and far more likely to find work after release (RAND, 2016)¹⁶. Every dollar invested in correctional education saves roughly five in reincarceration costs, which is a clear reminder that learning is a sound and humane social investment, rather than just about rehabilitation.

3.2.1 Gender, Youth, and Intersectionality in Correctional Education

The social dimension of correctional education cannot be fully understood without considering intersectionality. Women, youth, and ethnic minorities experience incarceration in distinct ways, each facing their own barriers in education. The Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5¹⁷ on *Women in Prison* stresses the importance of gender-responsive learning opportunities, childcare provision, and vocational training that pro-

¹⁵ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2019). *General comment No. 24 on children's rights in the child justice system*. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/documents/general-comments-and-recommendations/crc-c-gc-24>

¹⁶ RAND Corporation. (2016). Davis, L. M., et al. *How Effective Is Correctional Education, and Where Do We Go from Here?* https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR564.html

¹⁷ Council of Europe. (2018). *Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 concerning women in prison and women offenders*. https://search.coe.int/cm/pages/result_details.aspx?objectid=09000016808fd25



mote both dignity and economic independence. In a similar spirit, the EU Youth Guarantee and the European Skills Agenda¹⁸ highlight pathways to employability for disadvantaged youth that correctional education can provide through micro-credential courses and mentorship schemes. By embedding intersectional inclusion at its core, the CORE-ED Model seeks to address inequalities, through deliberate and equitable pedagogical design.

A pedagogical system that is inclusive also requires awareness of mental health, trauma, and the role of peer mentoring. According to UNESCO's Prison Education Case Studies (2023)¹⁹, learning that is led by peers significantly boosts motivation and engagement. In this sense, education becomes far more than a skill-building exercise, as it turns into a means of cultivating empathy, solidarity, and renewed identity. These are all essential elements of rehabilitation and reintegration.

Programs that combine the arts, digital literacy, and vocational skills show how social inclusion can be cultivated in a holistic way. Initiatives such as *Rehabilitation Through the Arts* and *The Last Mile* demonstrate that creative and digital education strengthen communication, self-confidence, and employability, reinforcing the social purpose of correctional pedagogy (Rehabilitation Through the Arts, 2023; The Last Mile, 2023)^{20 21}. Environmental projects, including prison gardens, add yet another layer to this approach by fostering cooperation, responsibility, and a tangible sense of community.

In the Western Balkan context, the *Terre des hommes Kosovo* juvenile justice programme illustrates how these principles take shape locally. Operating within juvenile detention centres, it trains staff and educators to deliver learning experiences that emphasise dignity, personal growth, and social reintegration. By combining pedagogical support with rights-based rehabilitation, the initiative demonstrates how correctional education can

¹⁸ Council of the European Union. (2020). *A Reinforced Youth Guarantee*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0277>

¹⁹ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). (2023). *Prison Education: Case Studies*. <https://www.uil.unesco.org/>

²⁰ Rehabilitation Through the Arts. (2023). *Program overview*. <https://www.rta-arts.org/>

²¹ The Last Mile. (2023). *Program overview*. <https://thelastmile.org/>



bridge protection, learning, and reintegration for young people in custody (Terre des hommes Kosovo, n.d.)²².

3.3 Governance Factors

The governance dimension of ESG, especially when it comes to institutional governance, refers to the systems, policies, and practices that uphold transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct. In correctional settings, governance takes on special meaning, given the implications of depriving individuals of their liberty. The *Revised European Prison Rules* outline several principles directly relevant to the management of education within prisons; those include, among others, regular inspections, independent monitoring, and accessible complaint mechanisms (Council of Europe, 2020). Together, these elements form a solid structural foundation upon which sound educational governance must be built. Within the CORE-ED Model, participatory governance can be promoted through steering committees and quality assurance boards, which bring together educators, prison management, and, where possible, learner representatives. Such transparency ensures compliance, but also nurtures trust, and reinforces legitimacy, while strengthening the value of correctional education as an integral part of a just and humane system.

3.3.1 ESG Reporting and Restorative Governance

At the international level, the *EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive* (CSRD, 2022)²³ sets out clear standards for ESG disclosure. It encourages institutions to report transparently on their environmental, social, and governance performance. Although correctional institutions are not yet bound by these requirements, adopting similar principles can greatly enhance accountability and public trust. In practice, integrating ESG indicators into the management of prison education could mean annual reporting on inclusion, energy efficiency, learning outcomes, and governance transparency.

²² Terre des hommes Kosovo. (n.d.). *Juvenile justice and child protection programme*. Pristina: Terre des hommes Foundation (Kosovo Delegation). Retrieved from <https://www.tdh-kosovo.org/en/juvenile-justice>

²³ European Parliament & Council. (2022). *Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive* (Directive (EU) 2022/2464). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2022/2464/oj>



The *European Education Area (EEA) 2030*²⁴ vision further highlights the importance of participatory governance, inclusion, and evidence-based policy. Translating these concepts into correctional contexts aligns institutional practice with the end goals of restorative justice: governance becomes a form of rehabilitation in motion. Decision-making that brings together learners, staff, and community representatives reflects fairness and shared responsibility, which means the same democratic values that correctional education strives to cultivate.

Sound governance also depends on reliable data. Monitoring enrolment, achievement, satisfaction, and post-release outcomes supports a model of ongoing improvement and policy refinement. Equally vital are transparent financial procedures and ethical training for staff, which safeguard institutional integrity. In this sense, governance evolves beyond administration into a moral practice, and a way of embodying justice in the everyday life of an institution.

3.3.2 Data Governance and Ethics

Effective governance in correctional education also depends on how information is managed, shared, and protected. In environments where learners' personal histories are sensitive and often linked to judicial data, transparent and ethical data management becomes an essential part of institutional integrity.



Figure 3 - GDPR and Security

²⁴ European Commission. (2020). *European Education Area 2030 – Communication*. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/school/eea>

Data governance within the CORE-ED Model should follow the principles of the *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR 2016/679)²⁵ and the ethical standards of the European Education Area²⁶. It requires that all personal and educational data be collected lawfully, processed with explicit purpose, and stored securely with limited access. Learners must be informed of how their data are used and retain the right to access, rectify, or withdraw their information.

Because correctional education frequently involves minors or young adults, additional safeguarding measures should apply. Child-protection principles (such as consent through legal guardians, anonymisation of assessment data, and restrictions on public disclosure) are essential to ensure that participation in education never compromises individual rights or safety²⁷.

Transparency in reporting extends beyond compliance. Institutions should communicate clearly how data are used to improve learning, monitor outcomes, and evaluate ESG performance. Ethical oversight committees or designated *Data Protection Officers* can supervise these processes, ensuring that monitoring and evaluation respect human dignity and the confidentiality of learners.

3.4 Interrelation of ESG Dimensions

Environmental, social, and governance factors form a dynamic and interdependent set of values. Enhancing environmental conditions, from access to natural light and sustainable infrastructure to the creation of green spaces, directly improves learner wellbeing and motivation, thereby reinforcing the social dimension. In turn, social inclusion nurtures trust and participation, which make governance reform both possible and sustainable. Transparent governance, for its part, safeguards the continuity of these environmental and social gains, completing the circle.

²⁵ European Union. (2016). *Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (General Data Protection Regulation)*. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 119, 1–88. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679>

²⁶ European Commission. (2020). *European Education Area by 2025 – Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions*. COM(2020) 625 final. Brussels: European Commission. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0625>

²⁷ Council of Europe. (2019). *Guidelines of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on child-friendly justice*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/children/child-friendly-justice>



This synergy is embodied in the *ESG triangle* of correctional pedagogy: a model in which each dimension supports and amplifies the others, creating a self-sustaining ecosystem of education, integrity, and human development.

3.5 Illustrative Case Studies

Practical examples from international experience demonstrate how ESG principles can coexist in correctional education, revealing both the transformative potential of such integration and its practical challenges. The following cases highlight different scales and models through which sustainability, inclusion, and good governance can be realised in custodial and educational settings.

3.5.1 The Last Mile (United States)

The Last Mile (TLM) was launched in 2010 at San Quentin State Prison in California. It has since expanded to more than a dozen correctional facilities across the United States. The programme provides training in web development, coding, and digital entrepreneurship for incarcerated individuals, as it blends technical education with mentoring and post-release job support. Beyond its evident vocational value, TLM stands as a great example of how ESG principles can be embedded within correctional education.

From an environmental perspective, TLM operates through a fully digital infrastructure (which means paper-free coursework, online collaboration tools, and remote mentoring). In this way, it significantly reduces resource use and carbon emissions. Its social impact is equally clear: participants report greater self-confidence, stronger social connections, and improved employment outcomes after release. The programme's partnerships with major technology companies extend this social dimension further, linking rehabilitation directly to fair and sustainable access to labour-market opportunities.

Governance is the third pillar that completes the model. TLM's structure reflects transparency and accountability: data on outcomes and funding are made publicly available, curricula are co-designed with universities and private partners, and the use of solid ethical protocols ensure learner privacy. Taken together, these practices position *The Last Mile* as a comprehensive, ESG-aligned model of educational governance in correctional contexts (The Last Mile, 2023). Independent evaluations by the RAND Corporation and



the U.S. Department of Justice confirm the positive impact of educational and digital literacy programmes, citing lower recidivism rates and higher post-release employment among participants (Davis et al., 2016; U.S. Department of Justice, 2022)^{28 29}.

3.5.2 Bastøy Prison (Norway)

Often described as the world's first "eco-prison," Norway's Bastøy Prison³⁰ offers a striking European example of ESG principles put into practice. Located on an island in the Oslo Fjord, Bastøy runs largely on renewable energy and self-sustaining agriculture. Incarcerated residents maintain farms, livestock, and forestry projects, which allows them to develop skills that can be directly applied after release. The environmental focus is clear: waste is composted, food production follows organic methods, and energy use is carefully monitored.

Socially, Bastøy is guided by the principle of trust through responsibility. Residents live in small houses rather than traditional cells. They manage their own routines and take part in community decision-making. Education blends vocational training with ethical reflection, cooperation, and sustainable living. Governance reinforces this model of autonomy through participatory management, where staff and residents jointly address community issues, and transparency is maintained through regular inspections and public reporting. The results are exceptional: Bastøy's recidivism rate stands at about sixteen percent, compared with sixty to seventy percent in many other systems. The prison's success shows that environmental sustainability and humane governance can directly improve social outcomes. Bastøy demonstrates that ESG alignment can shape an entire correctional culture built on learning, accountability, and ecological ethics.

Independent evaluations further confirm the effectiveness of Bastøy Prison's model. According to Hurlburt (2018)³¹, the prison's exceptionally low recidivism rate stems from its emphasis on humanisation, responsibility, and education rather than punitive control.

²⁸ Davis, L. M., Bozick, R., Steele, J. L., Saunders, J., & Miles, J. N. V. (2016). *How effective is correctional education, and where do we go from here? The results of a comprehensive evaluation*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR564.html

²⁹ U.S. Department of Justice. (2022). *Evaluation of prison education and reentry outcomes*. Washington, DC: DOJ Office of Justice Programs.

³⁰ Bastøy Prison (Norway). (n.d.). *Ecological prison model* [official/overview resource]. <https://www.kriminalomsorgen.no/>

³¹ Hurlburt, A. H. S. (2018). *Building Constructive Prison Reform on Norway's Five Pillars*. APLPJ, 19(2).

The author identifies Bastøy's success as rooted in five structural "pillars": dynamic security, meaningful activity, personal responsibility, reintegration, and normalisation. Together, these elements create an environment where trust replaces coercion and learning becomes integral to rehabilitation. Hurlburt's analysis concludes that Bastøy's outcomes are not the product of leniency, but of a deliberate correctional philosophy that treats dignity and personal growth as measurable components of justice, offering a clear model for evidence-based, socially sustainable prison reform.

3.5.3 Western Balkans cases

Albania

In the Western Balkan context, Albania offers a tangible example of how correctional education can integrate ESG principles through practice-based and governance-driven initiatives. According to the 2024 report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), the Albanian prison system has broadened access to educational and vocational training across several institutions. In Fier Prison, inmates were offered courses in electrics, cooking, tailoring, plumbing, and welding, while in Peqin Prison twenty-three learners completed a four-month home-appliance repair programme and about twenty attended elementary-level classes (CPT 2024)³². These developments reflect an emerging model in which learning operates as a pathway to dignity, responsibility, and social reintegration, aligning the rehabilitative aims of correctional education with the *Social* dimension of ESG.

This progress is underpinned by a robust legal framework that anchors inclusion, accountability, and transparency within national policy. Law No. 37/2017 on Criminal Justice for Children defines education and reintegration as central objectives of juvenile justice, stipulating that detention is a measure of last resort and that all minors in custody must have access to accredited education and vocational programmes matching their abilities (Law 37/2017, Arts. 2–6, 52–60)³³. It also establishes coordinated planning between justice, education, and child-protection authorities to ensure continuity of learning upon release. Complementing this, Law No. 79/2020 on the Execution of Criminal Sanctions enshrines legality, non-discrimination, and respect for human dignity as governing principles, mandating external oversight, quality assurance, and institutional accountability for

³² European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). *Report to the Government of Albania on the Visit Carried Out in 2024*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2024.

³³ Republic of Albania. *Law No. 37/2017 on Criminal Justice for Children*. Official Gazette No. 64, March 30, 2017, Art. 2.

all rehabilitation and training activities (Law 79/2020, Arts. 3–12)³⁴. Together, these measures embed the *Governance* component of ESG into Albania's correctional education system, promoting transparency, equality, and sustainable reintegration pathways.

Kosovo

A youth-dedicated example comes from Kosovo, where Terre des hommes Kosovo implements the EU-supported Juvenile Justice and Education Programme in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and the Kosovo Correctional Service. The initiative combines formal education with psychosocial and life-skills training for young offenders, aiming to prevent re-offending and support reintegration. Through classroom learning, counselling, and vocational workshops, the programme ensures that children and adolescents in detention maintain access to education and develop skills relevant to their reintegration. Independent assessments by UNICEF highlight its contribution to improving educational continuity, safeguarding standards, and social rehabilitation within juvenile correctional institutions in Kosovo (Terre des hommes Kosovo, 2023)³⁵.

Montenegro

Montenegro has taken progressive steps in integrating education and rehabilitation into its correctional system, consistent with ESG's social and governance principles. The Institute for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions (ZIKS Podgorica), in cooperation with the Ministry of Education, implements programmes for adult education, vocational training, and reintegration that correspond with the European Prison Rules and Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education). These programmes emphasize social reintegration through basic literacy, secondary education, and accredited vocational qualifications³⁶.

³⁴ Republic of Albania. *Law No. 79/2020 on the Execution of Criminal Sanctions*. Official Gazette No. 119, June 25, 2020, Art. 3.

³⁵ Terre des hommes Kosovo. (2023). *Juvenile Justice and Education Programme*. Pristina: Terre des hommes Foundation Kosovo. Retrieved from <https://www.tdh-kosovo.org/en/juvenile-justice>

³⁶Ministry of Justice of Montenegro (2023). Report on the Implementation of the Strategy for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions 2017–2023. <https://www.gov.me/en/ministry-of-justice>

Council of Europe (2022). European Union and Council of Europe Support to the Reform of the Prison System in Montenegro. <https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/pccsee/montenegro-prison-reform>

Institute for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions (ZIKS) – Official Page. Programs and Activities in Education and Rehabilitation. <https://www.ziks.gov.me>

3.5.4 UNESCO UIL Prison Education Case Studies

UNESCO's Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) has recorded numerous prison education initiatives around the world that reflect the ESG triad (UNESCO UIL, 2023)³⁷. Several European and Latin American examples are particularly noteworthy.

Portugal – Education for All in Prisons Initiative

Portugal's national programme integrates prison education within the public education system, ensuring alignment in curricula, teacher qualifications, and certification standards. The social dimension lies in universal access to primary and secondary education, while governance innovation emerges through close coordination between the Ministries of Justice and Education. Environmental considerations include building modernisation and the use of digital resources to reduce paper consumption. The programme's main strength is its institutional stability: operating under national education law secures both funding and quality assurance beyond changes in government.

Serbia – Adult Education and Reintegration Reform

In Serbia, ongoing reforms supported by the European Training Foundation and UIL have reinstated adult education within correctional facilities, thus combining literacy training with vocational programmes in agriculture and maintenance. The reform strengthens the social pillar through reintegration and employability. It enhances governance by linking prison education to the national qualifications framework. Although environmental measures remain limited, vocational training increasingly includes green skills, reflecting regional commitment to the *European Green Agenda for the Western Balkans* (2020)³⁸.

Latin America – Human Rights and Sustainability Modules

Across several Latin American countries, including Chile and Colombia, UIL highlights initiatives that blend environmental awareness with human rights education. Learners engage in community recycling projects and environmental monitoring, demonstrating how sustainability and civic responsibility can support rehabilitation goals. These programmes

³⁷ UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL). (2023). *Prison Education: Case Studies*. <https://www.uil.unesco.org/>

³⁸ European Commission. (2020). Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/green-agenda-western-balkans_en



also underline the role of transparent governance, as partnerships among prisons, universities, and NGOs create conditions for accountability, scalability, and long-term impact.

3.5.5 Comparative Insights and Lessons for CORE-ED

Across these examples, several shared insights can be identified. Environmental sustainability proves most effective when it is integrated into daily routines rather than treated as an additional activity. The experiences of Bastøy and the Latin American initiatives show that when the living environment itself reflects ecological values, sustainability becomes a form of experiential learning. Social inclusion, in turn, relies on connecting education with community life and labour-market opportunities, as demonstrated by *The Last Mile* and Portugal's *Education for All* programme. Finally, governance quality, marked by transparency, accountability, and participation, emerges as the key condition for long-term sustainability. All successful cases feature structured cooperation among justice authorities, educators, and external partners, ensuring that progress endures beyond changes in policy or government.

For the CORE-ED Model, these lessons highlight the importance of multi-level collaboration, evidence-based management, and consistency with international ESG standards. Each case demonstrates that when correctional education functions as a balanced ecosystem, integrating environmental responsibility, social inclusion, and ethical governance.

3.6 Implications for the CORE-ED Model

The preceding analysis shows that integrating Environmental, Social, and Governance factors into correctional pedagogy is essentially the basis for a wider transformation. The CORE-ED Model must function as an educational, institutional, and ethical system in which sustainability, inclusion, and accountability act together to shape both the quality and the purpose of correctional learning.

The first implication is conceptual. ESG principles offer the philosophical foundation that defines the main goal at the centre of the CORE-ED Model. They shift the focus of correctional education away from narrow skill acquisition toward a holistic understanding of human development and institutional responsibility. By embedding environmental literacy, social justice, and ethical governance into both curricula and organisational culture, the model turns education from an instrument of compliance into one of empowerment.

This conceptual shift ensures that correctional pedagogy moves from a reactive stance that addresses deficits to a proactive one that builds sustainable citizenship.

The second implication is structural. The model must translate ESG ideals into practical mechanisms such as procedures, tools, and performance indicators, for results to be tangible. Environmentally, this involves applying resource efficiency in learning environments and facility operations. Socially, it calls for policies that ensure equitable access to education, gender-sensitive teaching, and individualised learning paths. In governance, it requires transparent quality assurance processes and participatory decision-making that includes educators, learners, and community partners. Through this structure, the CORE-ED Model aligns correctional education with European frameworks including the European Green Deal (2020)³⁹, the European Pillar of Social Rights (2017)⁴⁰, and the EU Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET)⁴¹.

The third implication relates to competency development. ESG alignment means that correctional educators, managers, and learners must develop new cross-cutting skills. Educators need expertise in sustainability pedagogy, ethics, and diversity management. Managers must cultivate ESG literacy, learning to monitor environmental impact, assess social inclusion, and uphold transparent governance standards. Learners themselves should gain green and social competencies that strengthen employability in sustainable sectors. These competencies will later be formalised within the CORE-ED Competency Framework developed under WP4 and WP5, ensuring continuity between conceptual design and practical implementation.

The governance dimension redefines how correctional institutions understand accountability. Instead of relying on hierarchical control, the CORE-ED Model promotes restorative governance, a participatory approach inspired by the principles of restorative justice. Decision-making becomes a dialogue that includes educators, staff, and learners in setting priorities and shaping institutional reforms. This participatory model strengthens legitimacy and demonstrates democratic citizenship within a structured environment. In this sense, the governance of learning becomes a learning process in itself. Evaluation

³⁹ European Commission. (2020). *The European Green Deal* (COM(2019) 640 final). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0640>

⁴⁰ European Commission. (2017). *European Pillar of Social Rights*. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/economy-works-people/jobs-growth-and-investment/european-pillar-social-rights_en

⁴¹ European Commission. (2018). *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – European Reference Framework*. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/291008>

and impact measurement form another key implication. For ESG integration to be credible, it must be supported by consistent data collection and transparent reporting. The model should therefore incorporate key performance indicators that measure progress across all three ESG pillars: reductions in environmental footprint, improvements in learning and reintegration outcomes, and increased governance transparency. Aligning these indicators with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions), places the project within a global policy framework and enhances its potential for replication beyond the Western Balkans. From an institutional development perspective, the implications are transformative. Integrating ESG principles will encourage higher education institutions, ministries, and correctional administrations to work together across traditional boundaries. Universities can contribute pedagogical innovation and research expertise, correctional authorities can provide access and implementation contexts, and civil society organisations can ensure external oversight and advocacy. This multi-actor form of governance improves quality assurance and reflects the European Commission's vision of an Education and Training Area built on openness, transparency, and partnership.

The environmental aspect of the CORE-ED Model also introduces new ways of thinking about operations. Correctional facilities can function as living laboratories for sustainability, testing renewable energy systems, green infrastructure, and circular economy models while involving learners in their maintenance and assessment. Integrating these projects into educational programmes blurs the line between learning and institutional development, allowing both inmates and staff to act as co-designers of sustainability practices.

At the social level, the model's implications extend beyond formal education. The CORE-ED approach views learning as a bridge between incarceration and civic participation. Through ESG integration, correctional pedagogy becomes a process of rebuilding trust, identity, and belonging. Reintegration programmes linked to sustainable employment sectors such as green construction, renewable energy, and the circular economy show how education can contribute directly to social and economic progress. This vision aligns with the EU Skills Agenda (2020)⁴², which calls for inclusive upskilling and reskilling aligned with both green and digital transitions.

⁴² European Commission. (2020). European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0274>

Finally, integrating ESG principles brings deep cultural change. It reshapes how society perceives correctional institutions, not facing them only as spaces of custody but also as spaces of contribution. When a prison or reformatory operates in line with ESG standards, it demonstrates accountability to the public and active participation in the wider effort for global sustainability. This transparency builds public trust and opens the door to stronger partnerships with educational institutions and private actors. The CORE-ED Model therefore serves both as a pedagogical innovation and as a governance tool, offering a framework through which closed institutions can evolve into open learning ecosystems connected to social transformation.

In summary, the implications of ESG integration within the CORE-ED Model could be viewed across three levels of impact.

Short-term: the model offers practical tools for curriculum design, institutional coordination, and ESG literacy training (evidenced by the creation of national pilot courses, educator training sessions, and self-assessment toolkits).

Medium-term: it establishes governance mechanisms, competency frameworks, and evaluation metrics that ensure continuity and accountability, such as the adoption of ESG committees and the publication of institutional performance reports.

Long-term: it nurtures a culture of sustainability and ethical responsibility, transforming correctional pedagogy into a force for social innovation and democratic resilience, reflected in measurable improvements in reintegration outcomes, stakeholder satisfaction, and alignment with EU and SDG targets.

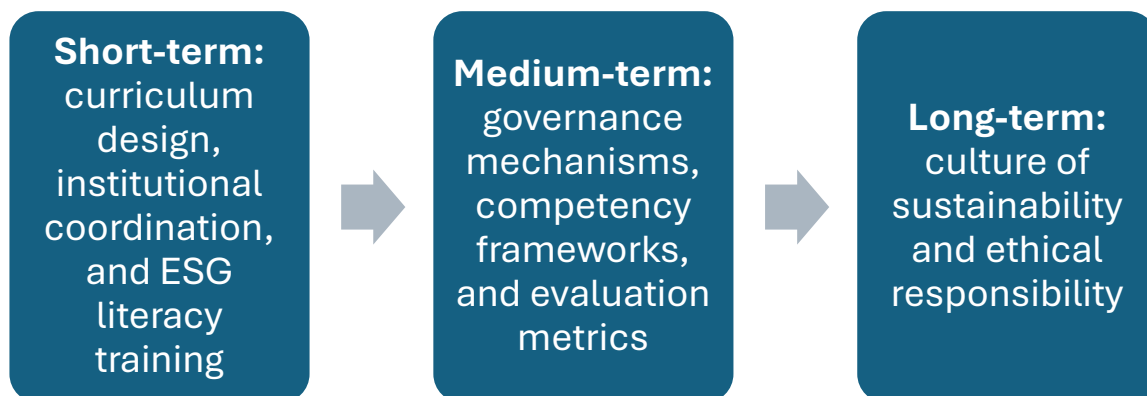


Figure 4 - ESG Integration - Levels of Impact

Through this integrated framework, the CORE-ED Model affirms that education, when grounded in sustainability, inclusion, and good governance, has the power to transform correctional systems from within, turning them into laboratories of ethical progress and engines of sustainable human development.

3.6.1 Logic Model: Translating ESG Principles into Practice within the CORE-ED Framework

This logic model summarises how the ESG principles evolve from institutional inputs and operational activities into measurable outputs and sustainable outcomes, turning values into verifiable practice across environmental, social, and governance domains.

Table 1 - Logic Model: translating ESG principles into Practice within the CORE-ED framework

ESG Dimension	Inputs	Activities / Mechanisms	Outputs	Outcomes & Impacts
Environmental	Institutional commitment to sustainable operations; training in GreenComp	Greening of curricula, facility energy audits, environmental projects (gardens, recycling)	Sustainable learning environments; reduced resource use	Increased ecological literacy; improved well-being; alignment with Green Deal targets

	compe- tences			
Social	Inclusion policies; educator training on intersectionality and SEL	Gender-responsive and youth programmes; peer-mentoring and arts-based learning	Broader participation of marginalised groups; improved learner engagement	Greater equity, employability, and social reintegration
Governance	Transparent management frameworks; QA systems; GDPR compliance	Creation of ESG committees, reporting dashboards, participatory boards	Regular ESG reports; external evaluations; data-ethics compliance	Enhanced accountability, legitimacy, and trust in correctional institutions

4. Development of the CORE-ED Model

4.1 Methodological Approach

The CORE-ED Model is developed through a research and co-creation process that brings together empirical evidence, policy frameworks, and stakeholder expertise. Its design follows a mixed-methods approach combining comparative policy analysis, stakeholder consultation, and competency-mapping workshops based on the DACUM (Develop A Curriculum) technique. Originally introduced by Norton (1997)⁴³ and later adapted for higher education by Adams (2016)⁴⁴, DACUM enables practitioners and experts to jointly define occupational functions and the competencies required to perform them, using a structured facilitation process. Within the CORE-ED ACADEMY project, this methodology was applied across correctional and academic contexts to identify both transversal and technical skills relevant to correctional pedagogy.

The analytical phase draws upon key international standards, including the *Revised European Prison Rules* (2020), UNESCO's *Education for Sustainable Development Roadmap* (2020), and the *EU GreenComp Framework* (2022). Through those, the conceptual basis through which Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles were interpreted within educational settings is provided. Building on that foundation, the present deliverable follows the multi-layered methodology outlined in the CORE-ED Synthesis Report (D3.1). In simple terms, the model was developed through a combination of desk research, field studies, and co-creation workshops using the DACUM method. All tools and instruments were translated into the national languages of the participating countries to ensure that the process was genuinely inclusive and contextually grounded.

The research took place across Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro, while additional DACUM workshops were organised in Greece and Romania to strengthen the regional perspective and support transferability.

Sources and data collection. The evidence base was built through several complementary activities:

- Desk research that reviewed legislation, institutional structures, and reforms in correctional and juvenile education across the Western Balkans;
- Questionnaires completed by 469 practitioners from correctional, justice, education, and social sectors;

⁴³ Norton, R. E. (1997). *DACUM Handbook*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, CETE.

⁴⁴ Adams, S. (2016). *DACUM in higher education: Adaptation/Applications*



- Semi-structured interviews with 43 key experts; and
- Six DACUM workshops which mapped the core tasks, skills, and knowledge areas relevant to professional roles in correctional and juvenile justice education.

Sampling and translation. All questionnaires and interview guides were made available in Albanian, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, Montenegrin, and Kosovo Albanian, allowing participants from different regions and backgrounds to contribute. Although the survey was not designed to be statistically representative, it significantly enriched the available evidence by capturing the experiences and perceptions of a wide range of professionals.

Analysis. Quantitative data were used to build descriptive profiles (covering education levels, professional roles, training history, and self-assessed competence) while qualitative materials were analysed thematically. The analysis focused on identifying existing strengths, gaps, and capacity needs in correctional education systems. These findings were then interpreted through the ESG lens, highlighting the environmental, social, and governance conditions that shape educational practices and institutional readiness across countries.

Co-creation process. The DACUM workshops formed the collaborative core of this methodology. Practitioners, educators, and administrators worked together to define occupational functions and the competencies required to perform them effectively. The resulting task charts and competency lists became the practical blueprint for the CORE-ED Model, grounding it firmly in real institutional contexts rather than theoretical assumptions.

Validation and triangulation. The insights from desk research, surveys, interviews, and DACUM outputs were reviewed together through a continuous process of comparison and refinement. This ensured that the model reflects both European standards—such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Council of Europe’s child-friendly justice principles—and the lived realities of correctional education in the Western Balkans.

Limitations and strengths. The Synthesis Report acknowledges that the survey data are not statistically representative, but this limitation was balanced by the diversity of respondents, the depth of qualitative inquiry, and the participatory nature of the DACUM process. This combination allowed the project to capture a nuanced and credible picture of the sector’s training and competency landscape.

Overall outcome. The final methodological framework is therefore both evidence-based and human-centred. It blends:

1. *Normative coherence* with international standards and ESG principles;



2. *Empirical grounding* in the everyday practice of correctional educators and administrators; and
3. *Operational precision* derived from the DACUM workshops, which translate these principles into concrete roles, competencies, and training pathways.

Together, these elements ensure that the CORE-ED Model is academically sound but also realistic, inclusive, and sensitive to the social and institutional environments in which it will be applied.

4.2 Structure and Components of the Model

The CORE-ED Model is organised as a systemic framework that connects ESG principles with three interdependent domains: pedagogy, institutional practice, and competency development. It translates the concept of sustainability into practical terms for correctional education, demonstrating how environmental responsibility, social inclusion, and ethical governance can guide both learning processes and institutional management.

4.2.1 Conceptual Foundation

Conceptually, the model builds on the “whole-institution approach” to sustainability promoted by UNESCO (2021) and on Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (1979)⁴⁵, which views learning environments as interconnected systems operating at personal, institutional, and societal levels. Applied to correctional pedagogy, the CORE-ED Model places the learner within a micro-system of teachers, peers, and immediate learning conditions; an institutional intermediary system that includes governance structures and infrastructure; and a macro-system shaped by policies, social expectations, and sustainability objectives.

This ecological perspective redefines correctional institutions as more than places of custody. It presents them as living educational ecosystems in which design, culture, and governance work together to support rehabilitation and personal development.

⁴⁵ Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: Experiments by nature and design*. Harvard University Press.

4.2.2 Core Components

The model puts the ESG three elements into practice through three interconnected components that reflect both the correctional environment and the educational process.

Environmental Component

This component links sustainability education with the greening of institutions. It promotes ecological literacy, resource efficiency, and climate awareness in both curricula and facility operations. Learners take part in projects on waste reduction, renewable energy, and sustainable agriculture, following the example of leading European institutions such as Bastøy Prison in Norway. Educationally, it incorporates modules based on the EU GreenComp competency areas, which include values, systems thinking, futures literacy, and agency.

Social Component

The social dimension focuses on inclusion, diversity, and equitable access to learning. It recognises education as a fundamental right, as set out in the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) and the *European Prison Rules* (2020). Programmes are tailored to individual learning needs, as well as to gender, age, and language differences. This component also integrates psychosocial support and restorative approaches to teaching, drawing on findings from the *RAND* meta-analysis (2016), which identified strong links between participation in education and lower rates of reoffending.

Governance Component

Governance converts ethical and transparent management into a system of educational accountability. It introduces participatory boards, coordination between ministries, and ongoing quality assurance in line with the *EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive* (2022). The component also highlights data ethics, learner feedback, and external evaluation, consistent with the *ENQA ESG Standards* (2015)⁴⁶.

Together, these three components form a continuous feedback system in which environmental literacy enhances wellbeing, social inclusion strengthens the legitimacy of governance, and transparent governance supports lasting environmental and social performance.

⁴⁶ ENQA, EUA, EURASHE & ESU. (2015). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. <https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>

4.3 Processes and Mechanisms

The CORE-ED Model functions as a dynamic system of continuous improvement, following the logic of the Deming Cycle (PDCA: plan, do, check, act). It operates through four interconnected processes.

a) Design and Planning

Institutions can begin with an ESG self-assessment using a dedicated toolkit. Baseline indicators such as energy use, participation rates, and governance structures are recorded to establish a reference point for future progress.

b) Integration and Capacity Building

Training modules for educators and managers strengthen ESG and ESD literacy. These activities are supported by digital learning environments such as Moodle, which facilitate both accessibility and collaboration.

c) Implementation

Pilot courses can introduce sustainability-focused modules, social inclusion strategies, and participatory governance mechanisms into correctional education practice.

d) Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Results can be reviewed by internal quality assurance committees, who use the findings to produce recommendations for policy and institutional refinement.

The model's governance loop is designed to be participatory. It involves representatives from higher education institutions, correctional administrations, learners, and community partners, reflecting the principles of participatory governance promoted in the *European Education Area 2030 Vision* (2020). Digitalisation further enhances transparency. Online dashboards display anonymised data on ESG performance and educational outcomes, in line with the open-data approach encouraged by the European Commission's *Digital Education Action Plan* (2021–2027)⁴⁷.

⁴⁷European Commission. (2021–2027). Digital Education Action Plan. <https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital/education-action-plan>

4.4 Alignment with Correctional Sector Needs

The CORE-ED Model has been designed specifically for the realities of the correctional sector in the Western Balkans, where fragmented governance and uneven resource allocation have slowed educational reform. According to *Council of Europe* progress reports (2023)⁴⁸, most systems in the region continue to struggle with overcrowding, insufficient staff training, and outdated infrastructure. The *European Commission's Country Reports* for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Montenegro identify similar challenges, including low participation in adult education, weak digital capacity, and limited coordination between the ministries of justice and education.

The CORE-ED Model responds to these issues by embedding ESG integration within institutional governance itself. Its environmental component introduces practical, low-cost sustainability measures such as energy audits, waste reduction, and the use of digital learning materials, all of which improve conditions without requiring major infrastructure investment. The social component promotes equality through gender-responsive and inclusive pedagogy, in line with the *Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)5 on Women in Prison*. The governance component strengthens policy coherence by linking correctional institutions to higher education quality assurance networks and EU-level frameworks.

In addition, by aligning correctional education with the *EU Skills Agenda* (2020) and the *Green Agenda for the Western Balkans* (2020), the model supports both social reintegration and regional economic transition. Learners trained in green and digital competencies contribute to the development of sustainable industries, allowing correctional education to serve as both a reintegration pathway and a strategy for inclusive growth and long-term development.

In operational terms, the successful implementation of the CORE-ED Model across Western Balkan correctional systems can be tied to a set of prerequisites that reflect both regional realities and European integration requirements.

First, institutional coordination mechanisms could be formalised through joint steering committees between National Authorities and Higher Education, ensuring alignment of curricula, accreditation, and staff training procedures.

⁴⁸ Council of Europe. (2023). Progress reports on prison systems (WB region). <https://www.coe.int/en/web/cdppi>

Second, higher education institutions would benefit from a baseline digital and pedagogical infrastructure to host blended learning and micro-credential modules; this includes stable internet connectivity within correctional facilities, digital literacy among educators, and compliance with GDPR and ethical data-management standards.

Third, national qualification frameworks could be prepared to recognise ESG-aligned micro-credentials (for the project OERs that will require it) within existing accreditation routes, as foreseen by the European Council Recommendation on Micro-credentials (2022)⁴⁹ and the Bologna Process peer-learning guidelines. Fourth, a minimal level of financial and policy commitment would be required from justice authorities to secure recurrent staff participation in DACUM-based training and to maintain local Research Centres for Correctional Pedagogy. Finally, cooperation with civil-society organisations and employers in sustainable sectors could be institutionalised to guarantee work-based learning opportunities and labour-market reintegration pathways. Together, these proposed operational prerequisites could establish an enabling environment through which ESG integration can become structurally embedded within Western Balkan correctional education systems, ensuring both sustainability and scalability of the CORE-ED Model.

In implementing the CORE-ED Model across the Western Balkans, several structural and contextual risks can influence success. The most critical among them include:

1. Fragmented governance and policy inconsistency. Justice and education responsibilities are often divided among ministries with limited coordination, which may hinder the adoption of joint ESG-aligned frameworks. *Mitigation:* establishing inter-ministerial steering committees under Memoranda of Understanding ensures policy coherence and regular alignment of standards and funding streams, following the coordination model proposed in the EU's *Education and Training Area 2030 Vision*.

2. Insufficient staff capacity and professionalisation. Many correctional institutions lack qualified educators trained in sustainable and inclusive pedagogy. *Mitigation:* rolling out regional “train-the-trainer” programmes through the four Balkan Research Centres for Correctional Pedagogy (WP5).

⁴⁹ European Council (2022). *Recommendation on a European Approach to Micro-credentials for Lifelong Learning and Employability*, OJ C 243/02;

3. Limited digital and infrastructural readiness. Low connectivity and outdated equipment threaten the implementation of blended learning and ESG monitoring tools. *Mitigation:* adopting low-bandwidth Moodle environments and utilising EU Structural Funds to upgrade digital infrastructure provides sustainable reinforcement at minimal cost.

4. Financial instability and resource volatility. Public budgets for correctional education remain vulnerable to political change. *Mitigation:* introducing multi-annual budgeting tied to ESG performance indicators and embedding correctional education within national qualification frameworks secures both continuity and accountability.

5. Low stakeholder engagement and social stigma. Public perceptions of prisons and offenders can reduce participation and external support. *Mitigation:* systematic awareness campaigns and community partnerships to promote societal ownership and normalise correctional education as part of civic development.

Together, these targeted mitigation moves convert identified weaknesses into opportunities for institutional learning and regional policy convergence, aligning Western Balkan correctional systems with European standards of transparency, inclusion, and sustainability.

4.5 Expected Outcomes and Impacts

The CORE-ED Model is designed to produce measurable results at three interconnected levels: educational, institutional, and systemic.

Educational Outcomes

Learners, including both incarcerated students and educators, will develop knowledge and competences related to ESG principles, such as environmental responsibility, social empathy, ethical reasoning, and participatory decision-making.

Institutional Outcomes

Correctional and higher education institutions will strengthen their governance capacity through quality assurance frameworks, data-driven decision-making, and transparent resource management. These mechanisms reflect the governance principles established in the *EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive* (2022), supporting accountability and long-term institutional integrity.

Systemic Impacts

At the broader level, the model contributes to the implementation of *UN Sustainable Development Goals* 4 (Quality Education), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions). It also gives practical form to the objectives of the *European Green*



Deal (2020). By embedding ESG literacy into correctional systems, the CORE-ED Model turns education into a driver of sustainable governance, social reintegration, and community cohesion.

To ensure that these outcomes remain verifiable and comparable across partner countries, the CORE-ED Model integrates a monitoring matrix combining *quantitative and qualitative* indicators.

At the educational level, progress can be measured through the following, specific KPIs, as mentioned in the CORE-ED Application Form:

- Number of new training programmes – 2
- Number of digital competences included in the training – > 3
- Number of sustainable competences included in the training – > 3
- Number of learning outcomes – > 50
- Number of handbooks – 7
- Number of multiple training strategies from which partners select for training implementation – > 6
- Number of question-items for the Quiz Bank – > 100
- Number of activities/tasks for the WBL and practice modules – > 20
- Number of adaptation workshops in total – 15
- Number of participants in the adaptation workshops in total – 150
- Number of Capacity Building Workshops – 3
- Number of HE staff attending the programme of Capacity Building Workshops – 6 per involved HEI
- Number of enrolled professionals from correctional settings for the professional training – > 100
- Success rate of completion – > 60 %
- Rate of satisfaction declared by learners – > 95 %
- Number of enrolled students from the partner HEs to the course – > 100
- Success rate of completion – > 60 %
- Rate of satisfaction declared by students – > 95 %
- Number of accreditation scenarios – > 6

At the institutional level, indicators could include (as mentioned in the Application Form):

- Number of DACUM Validation workshops held by HE involving learners, students, teachers, potential employers, correctional stakeholders and civil society – 5
- Number of participants in the DACUM Validation workshops – 50



- Number of webinars/workshops to validate the Occupational Profiles at EU and national level – 6
- Number of regional stakeholders in a common webinar to validate the updated profiles – 50
- Number of national stakeholders to adapt the Occupational Profiles in country-specific context – 25
- Number of the new competence areas developed – > 20
- Number of structured public hearings delivered – 5
- Number of attending stakeholders – > 150
- Peer-reviewed strategy on implementation for the Research Centres – 1
- Number of Balkan Research Centres for Correctional Pedagogy – 4
- Number of Capacity Building activities for HE staff to set up and run Research Centres – 5
- Number of HE staff attending the programme of Capacity Building Workshops – 6 per involved HEI
- Mentoring online programme for staff running the Centres – 1

At the systemic level, monitoring can rely on the following Application Form KPIs:

- Number of research and policy documents reviewed – 50
- Number of interviews conducted with stakeholders – 50
- Number of questionnaires – 500
- Number of country reports with quantitative findings – 4
- Number of Occupational Profiles reviewed – > 15
- Number of Occupational Profiles updated with new skills – 3 – 5

Data collection will follow the procedures outlined in WP2's *Quality Assurance Mechanism*. This structure guarantees that each outcome of the CORE-ED Model is supported by measurable, evidence-based indicators and remains aligned with EU standards for impact assessment.

4.6 Validation and Transferability

To ensure transferability, the CORE-ED Model follows a multi-level validation process that includes pilot testing, peer review, and external evaluation. To ensure comparability of results across partner countries, the project applies a set of KPIs, that are in fact aligned

with the ESG (ENQA, 2015)⁵⁰, EQAVET indicators (European Commission, 2024)⁵¹, and the European Training Foundation's CBHE monitoring templates (ETF, 2023)⁵². The KPIs of the CORE-ED ACADEMY project define a common taxonomy of *input*, *output*, and *outcome* indicators, covering resource use, staff participation, course completion, and institutional ESG adoption.

During the pilot phase (WP4–WP5), the CORE-ED model will be implemented in selected correctional and higher education institutions across the partner countries. Data will be collected through pre- and post-assessments of ESG literacy, institutional self-evaluations, and participant feedback. Independent evaluation will be carried out by the Quality Assurance Board together with external experts appointed under WP2. Through internal and external assessment, the process distinguishes between internal QA, focused on continuous improvement within the partnership, and external evaluation, which serves as an independent impact assessment, conducted by external experts to validate outcomes. Peer-learning workshops will provide opportunities for EU and Western Balkan partners to compare results and share experiences, supporting cross-context validation.

The findings will inform the development of a *Transferability Toolkit* aimed at adapting the model to other institutional and national contexts. The Toolkit is already foreseen as Deliverable 7.2 in the Application Form and will gather templates, methodological guidance, and adaptation checklists that enable other higher education and justice institutions to replicate the CORE-ED Model in different contexts while preserving alignment with ESG, EQAVET, and GreenComp frameworks. Sustainability beyond the project's lifetime will be secured through integration with national qualification frameworks and memoranda of understanding between ministries of justice and education. The model's open-access materials (guidelines, training modules, and self-assessment tools) will remain available through the project's digital platform, in accordance with EU policies on open science and open education.

⁵⁰ European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). (2015). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Brussels: ENQA. <https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>

⁵¹ European Commission. (2024). *EQAVET Indicators for Quality Assurance in VET and CBHE Implementation Guidelines*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://eqa-vet.nqai.eu/qa-indicators>

⁵² European Training Foundation (ETF). (2023). *Monitoring Quality Assurance in Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) Projects*. Turin: ETF. <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications/monitoring-quality-assurance-cbhe>

5. CORE-ED Competency Framework

5.1 Framework Overview

The CORE-ED Competency Framework serves as the practical extension of the model presented in the previous section. While the CORE-ED Model establishes the overall structure through which ESG principles are integrated into correctional pedagogy, the Competency Framework translates these principles into the concrete knowledge, skills, and attitudes required of professionals, educators, and learners within the correctional and juvenile justice sectors.

The framework is developed through a structured process combining desk research, stakeholder consultation, and comparative analysis of European and international standards. Its design follows the logic of the *European Qualifications Framework* (EQF) and the *European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training* (EQAVET). In this way, it is ensured that competencies are expressed in terms of knowledge, skills, and responsibility or autonomy. It also reflects the guiding principles of UNESCO's *Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) 2030 Roadmap* and the *EU Green-Comp Framework*, which define sustainability competences as integrative and action oriented.

The purpose of the CORE-ED Competency Framework is threefold.

a) It ensures that all learning and training activities developed under the project are competency-based, fostering consistency and transparency across countries and institutions; b) it provides a shared reference point for curriculum design, micro-credential development, and professional training for correctional staff and educators; c) it supports long-term quality assurance and policy alignment by linking competencies directly to ESG dimensions and to the broader goals of sustainable and ethical governance in education.

The framework adopts a holistic perspective, recognising that effective correctional education involves diverse professional roles (such as educators, prison officers, psychologists, social workers, NGO facilitators, and administrators). Each of them contributes to a complete rehabilitative ecosystem. Competencies are therefore defined at the level of individual performance but also in relation to collaborative and institutional practices.

The framework builds on the results of the DACUM workshops, and the *Chart of CORE-ED Competences* created in the project's current stages. These outcomes were validated against international benchmarks such as the *OECD Learning Compass 2030*, which identifies transformative competencies (responsibility, agency, and collaboration) as essential to sustainable societies. Through this alignment, the CORE-ED Competency Framework

situates correctional pedagogy within the global discourse on lifelong learning, sustainability, and justice reform.

Finally, the framework is conceived as a living and adaptable structure of a dynamic nature, as it provides a unified foundation while allowing each partner country to tailor competency implementation to its own policy environment, regulatory systems, and institutional capacities. This flexibility ensures both coherence and national ownership, supporting sustainable transfer, adaptation, and policy uptake beyond the lifetime of the project, linking competencies directly to ESG dimensions and to the broader goals of sustainable and ethical governance in education.

Each competency domain primarily advances one ESG pillar. *Pedagogical* and *Social-Emotional Learning* domains reinforce the **Social** pillar, *Sustainability & ESG* and *Governance & Policy* domains correspond to the **Governance** pillar, while *Digital & Technological* competence contributes chiefly to the **Environmental** pillar through resource efficiency and low-carbon learning design (European Commission, 2024; ENQA, 2015)⁵³.

To render this linkage operational, the CORE-ED Competency Framework aligns each ESG pillar with specific competence domains developed under WP3.2 and validated through WP4. The matrix below summarises the correspondences and the intended reinforcement in day-to-day practice across pedagogy, institutional management, and technology use.

Table 2 - Link between CORE-ED competences and ESG dimensions

ESG Dimension	Linked CORE-ED Competence Domain(s)	Illustrative Reinforcement in Practice
Environmental	Sustainability & ESG Competence	Integrates ecological literacy and resource efficiency into programme design and facilities management; supports low-carbon practices in learning environments.

⁵³ European Commission. (2024). *EQAVET Indicators for Quality Assurance in VET and CBHE Implementation Guidelines*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://eqa-vet.ngai.eu/qa-indicators>

European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). (2015). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Brussels: ENQA. <https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>

Social	Pedagogical; Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)	Embeds inclusive, learner-centred methods and SEL to foster trust, motivation, and reintegration; safeguards equitable participation.
Governance	Governance & Policy Competence	Strengthens ethical leadership, QA (PDCA), transparent decision-making, and rights-based implementation aligned with ENQA/EQAVET.
Cross-cutting	Digital & Technological Competence	Ensures digital inclusion, accessibility, data ethics and GDPR-aware practice; supports ESG transparency through responsible ICT.

This alignment positions ESG as both a policy reference and as a competence-based driver of professional behaviour and institutional improvement, further detailed in Sections 5.2–5.6.

5.2 Structure of Competencies

The CORE-ED Competency Framework is organised around five thematic domains that collectively define the professional and ethical profile of educators, trainers, and staff working in correctional and juvenile settings. These domains are interconnected and aligned with the ESG values, ensuring that every aspect of sustainability (environmental, social, and governance) is expressed through clear and applicable competences.

1. Pedagogical Competence

Pedagogical competence forms the base of correctional and juvenile education. It involves the capacity to design, implement, and evaluate learning processes that respond to the diverse needs of incarcerated individuals. Educators are expected to apply inclusive and differentiated teaching methods, create psychologically safe learning environments, as well as integrate vocational, life, and digital skills into their practice. This domain draws on the *European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (2019)⁵⁴ and the *Council of Europe's European Prison Rules* (2020), which affirm education as a vital element of rehabilitation. At its core, pedagogical competence is the ability to guide learning that fosters reintegration, self-efficacy, and ethical awareness.

2. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) Competence

⁵⁴(2019). *Key competences for lifelong learning*. Publications Office.



Social and Emotional Learning competence reflects the social dimension of ESG integration. It encompasses empathy, communication, emotional regulation, and relational intelligence, which are essential qualities for working within the sensitive and complex environment of correctional institutions.

Professionals must demonstrate respect, active listening, and non-judgmental communication, supporting learners' motivation and emotional resilience. This domain aligns with UNESCO's *Social and Emotional Learning Framework* (2021)⁵⁵ and the *Council of Europe's Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (2016)⁵⁶, both of which emphasise emotional literacy and interpersonal skills as prerequisites for inclusive and democratic learning. In correctional settings, SEL competence enables educators to balance authority with compassion, creating trust-based relationships that promote behavioural and cognitive change.

3. Digital and Technological Competence:

Digital competence supports the ability to use technology for pedagogical, administrative, and rehabilitative purposes within secure environments. It includes the responsible use of digital tools, the management of online learning platforms, and the integration of digital content into educational programmes.

This domain follows the *European Commission's Digital Competence Framework for Educators* (DigCompEdu, 2017)⁵⁷, which defines six areas of digital proficiency, from professional engagement to digital content creation. In correctional contexts, digital competence also entails understanding security and ethical considerations, ensuring that technology is used responsibly and in line with institutional rules. It directly contributes to the governance dimension of ESG, as digital transparency and sound data management strengthen institutional accountability. It further encompasses fundamental principles of

⁵⁵ UNESCO. (2021). Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/>

⁵⁶ Council of Europe. (2016). Competences for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/education/competences-for-democratic-culture>

⁵⁷ European Commission. (2017). DigCompEdu: European Framework for the Digital Competence of Educators. https://joint-research-centre.ec.europa.eu/digcompedu_en



data ethics and compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)⁵⁸, promoting lawful data handling, informed consent, and respect for privacy as integral elements of institutional accountability.

4. Sustainability and ESG Competence:

This domain reflects the environmental and governance pillars of the CORE-ED Model. It refers to the ability to integrate sustainability principles (environmental awareness, social responsibility, and ethical decision-making) into both educational and institutional practices.

Professionals are expected to promote sustainable lifestyles, implement environmentally conscious measures such as energy-saving and recycling initiatives, and engage learners in critical reflection on sustainability and social justice. The domain aligns with the *EU GreenComp* (2022)⁵⁹ and UNESCO's *Greening Education Partnership* (2022)⁶⁰, which define sustainability competence through four core areas: *embodying sustainability values*, *embracing complexity in sustainability*, *envisioning sustainable futures*, and *acting for sustainability*. In correctional education, ESG competence empowers professionals to serve as ethical role models, demonstrating integrity, accountability, and stewardship in environments where trust is essential to rehabilitation. In correctional education, ESG competence empowers professionals to serve as ethical role models, demonstrating integrity, accountability, and stewardship in environments where trust is essential to rehabilitation.

5. Governance and Policy Competence:

Governance competence ensures that professionals understand the legal, ethical, and administrative frameworks that underpin correctional and educational systems. It includes knowledge of institutional procedures, policy compliance, quality assurance, and the rights and responsibilities of both staff and learners. This competence aligns with the *EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive* (2022) and

⁵⁸ European Commission. (2016). *Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council (General Data Protection Regulation – GDPR)*. Official Journal L 119/1. Available at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj>

⁵⁹ European Commission. (2022). *GreenComp: The European Sustainability Competence Framework*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC128040>

⁶⁰ UNESCO. (2022). *Greening Education Partnership: Getting Every Learner Climate-Ready*. Paris: UNESCO. Available at <https://www.unesco.org/en/greening-education-partnership>

the *ENQA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (2015), both of which promote transparency, participatory management, and evidence-based decision-making. In practice, governance competence allows educators and managers to take an active role in institutional development, engage in continuous improvement, and uphold fairness, accountability, and respect for human dignity. It is further aligned with the continuous improvement cycles defined by the ENQA ESG and EQA-VET frameworks, ensuring that governance processes follow the established Plan–Do–Check–Act logic that underpins European quality assurance systems (ENQA, 2015; European Commission, 2024)⁶¹.

Together, the five domains form the structural backbone of the CORE-ED Competency Framework. Each domain connects with the others, ensuring that correctional education professionals function as holistic practitioners: educators who combine teaching expertise with ethical leadership, environmental awareness, digital adaptability, and emotional intelligence.

This integrated design affirms that sustainable correctional pedagogy depends on both technical proficiency and human depth. It anchors the rehabilitative mission in competence, accountability, and compassion, positioning education as a transformative force for individuals and institutions alike.

5.3 Horizontal and Transversal Competencies

While the five core domains define the professional identity of educators and practitioners within correctional and juvenile education systems, the CORE-ED Competency Framework also recognises a set of horizontal and transversal competencies that support effective practice across all roles. These competencies extend beyond specific job functions and reflect the holistic, values-based philosophy of the CORE-ED Model. They ensure alignment between personal growth, institutional culture, and the wider goals of ESG integration.

⁶¹ European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). (2015). *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG)*. Brussels: ENQA. <https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>
European Commission. (2024). *EQAVET Indicators for Quality Assurance in VET and CBHE Implementation Guidelines*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://eqa-vet.nqai.eu/qa-indicators>

The transversal competencies draw conceptually from the *European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning* (2018) and are reinforced by the *OECD Key Competencies for Sustainability* (2023)⁶², which highlight systems thinking, anticipatory competence, and collective responsibility. Within the CORE-ED context, these transversal competencies bridge the technical and ethical dimensions of education, turning professional practice into a driver of social and institutional transformation.

Critical and Reflective Thinking: Correctional educators work in complex, emotionally charged, and often unpredictable environments. Critical thinking enables them to analyse problems objectively, identify assumptions, and make informed, evidence-based decisions. Reflective thinking complements this capacity by encouraging ongoing self-evaluation, helping educators assess their actions and attitudes in relation to ethical, pedagogical, and social standards. Both dimensions align with UNESCO's *ESD 2030 Roadmap* (2020), which recognises reflection and critical awareness as key elements of responsible citizenship and transformative learning.

Systems Thinking and Futures Literacy (GreenComp):

Complementing critical and reflective thinking, systems thinking and futures literacy extend the educator's capacity to understand how environmental, social, and institutional factors interact over time. Systems thinking enables practitioners to identify interdependencies within correctional education (for instance, how facility management, staff wellbeing, and learner motivation create a connected ecosystem). Futures literacy, as defined by the *EU GreenComp Framework* (2022)⁶³ cultivates the ability to anticipate long-term outcomes and design learning processes that remain relevant in evolving social and environmental contexts. Together, these competencies encourage professionals to act with foresight, adaptability, and strategic vision, transforming correctional education into a forward-looking and resilient system.

Communication and Collaboration: Teamwork is essential to sustainable correctional education. Teachers, correctional officers, psychologists, social workers, and community partners must communicate clearly and coordinate interventions that balance individual needs with collective objectives. Communication competence involves clarity, empathy, and adaptability across different audiences and contexts. Collaboration requires respect

⁶² OECD. (2019/2023). *OECD Learning Compass 2030 / Key competencies for sustainability*. <https://www.oecd.org/education/2030-project/>

⁶³ European Commission. (2022). *GreenComp: The European Sustainability Competence Framework*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/13286>

for diversity, constructive conflict resolution, and shared accountability. These competencies embody the “co-agency” principle of the *OECD Learning Compass 2030*, which views collective responsibility as equally important as individual expertise in building equitable and sustainable systems.

Ethical and Intercultural Awareness: In multicultural and high-stress environments, ethical and intercultural awareness is fundamental. It involves understanding human rights, gender equality, cultural diversity, and the responsible use of authority. This domain reflects the *Council of Europe’s Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture* (2016), which connects intercultural sensitivity with civic participation and ethical reasoning. Practitioners are expected to uphold fairness, integrity, and empathy as guiding professional norms—values that resonate with the governance dimension of the ESG model.

Digital and Information Literacy: Digital competence functions as a transversal literacy that supports both teaching and institutional accountability. Practitioners must be able to access, evaluate, and share information responsibly, manage digital learning environments effectively, and ensure data protection and privacy. These abilities correspond to the *DigCompEdu Framework* (2017), which defines ethical and pedagogical uses of technology as essential components of modern education. In correctional contexts, digital literacy acts as both an empowerment tool and a governance mechanism, advancing transparency, inclusion, and digital equity.

Adaptability and Resilience: Correctional professionals often face rapidly changing conditions, including policy shifts, resource limitations, and diverse learner profiles. Adaptability allows them to adjust to these challenges while maintaining ethical standards and professional stability. Resilience underpins wellbeing and long-term engagement, especially in environments where stress and emotional fatigue are common. This competence reflects the “transformative competence” of UNESCO’s *ESD 2030 Roadmap*, which emphasises the ability to respond creatively and constructively to uncertainty.

Taken together, these transversal competencies express the human-centred philosophy of the CORE-ED approach. They affirm that competence is not defined solely by technical skill but also by values, responsibility, and the ability to act with integrity, empathy, and foresight.

5.4 Competency Levels and Assessment

The CORE-ED Competency Framework can be organised into three progressive levels of mastery, following the logic of the *European Qualifications Framework (EQF)* and the *EQAVET*

standards⁶⁴. Each level reflects the development of knowledge, skills, and autonomy or responsibility, allowing for comparability across contexts.

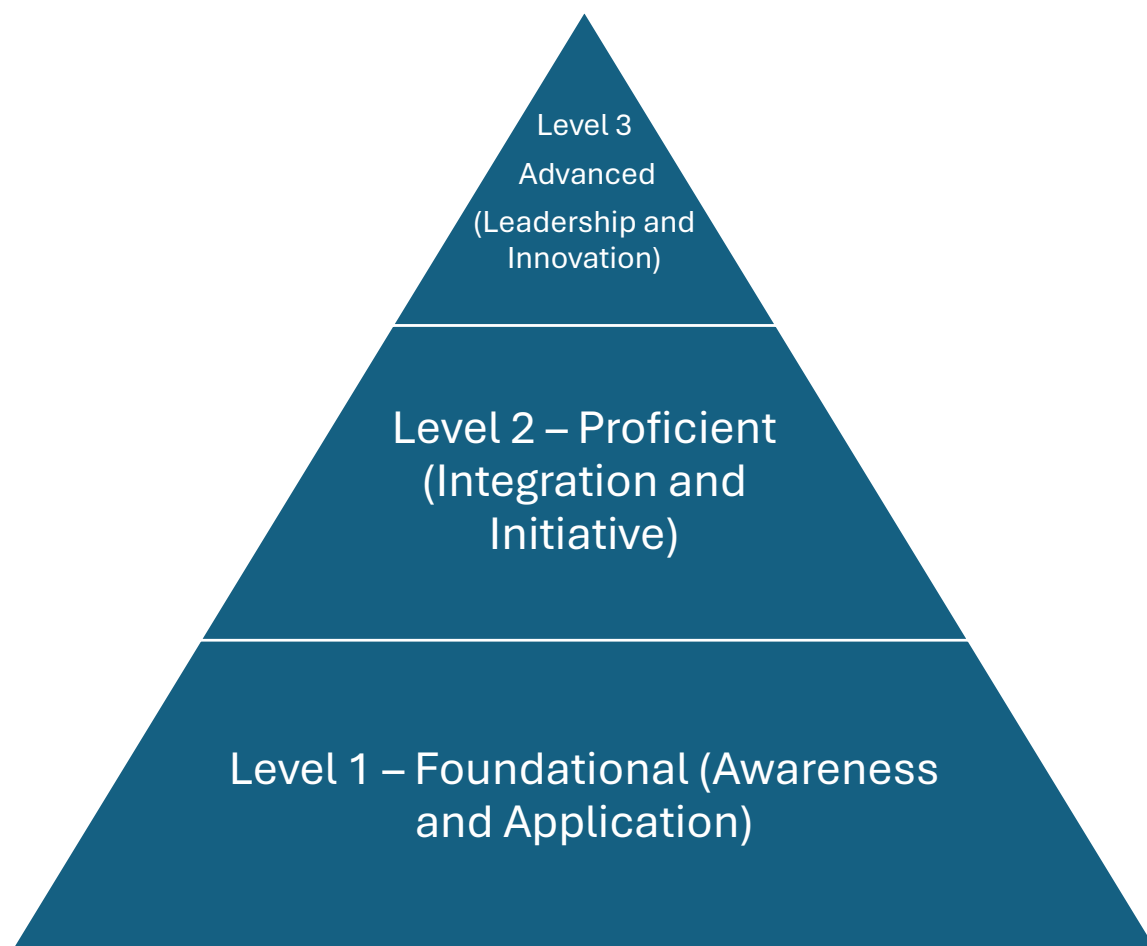


Figure 5 - Competency Levels Pyramid

Level 1 – Foundational (Awareness and Application)

At this level, practitioners demonstrate a basic understanding of ESG principles and their application to correctional education. They are able to apply fundamental pedagogical and ethical concepts under supervision and participate effectively in collaborative tasks. Evidence of competence includes participation in introductory ESG training, engagement in reflective exercises, and completion of supervised teaching or facilitation assignments.

⁶⁴ European Commission. (2024). *European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and EQAVET for Quality Assurance*.

<https://education.ec.europa.eu/education-levels/vocational-education-and-training/eu-policy-eqavet>

Learners at Level 1 typically include new educators, interns, or correctional staff taking part in initial training programmes.

Level 2 – Proficient (Integration and Initiative)

At the intermediate level, professionals integrate ESG principles into their teaching, mentoring, or administrative work with increasing autonomy. They demonstrate initiative, adapt methods to meet learners' needs, and contribute actively to institutional sustainability efforts.

Examples of evidence include the design of inclusive lesson plans, facilitation of collaborative projects, or leadership of small-scale ESG initiatives within their departments. This level corresponds to experienced educators and practitioners who exercise professional judgment independently within established institutional frameworks.

Level 3 – Advanced (Leadership and Innovation)

At the advanced level, professionals show leadership in advancing sustainability, ethical governance, and pedagogical innovation. They mentor colleagues, evaluate institutional practices, and contribute to policy or curriculum development.

Evidence may include the creation of ESG-aligned educational programmes, participation in institutional quality assurance processes, or the design and delivery of professional training activities.

Level 3 aligns with management and coordination roles, reflecting full professional autonomy and strategic responsibility.

Each domain of the CORE-ED Framework can be expressed across these three levels, enabling flexible and personalised development pathways. For instance, an educator may reach Level 3 in Pedagogical and Social and Emotional Learning competences while maintaining Level 2 in Digital Competence. This modular structure supports targeted professional growth while maintaining coherence across the broader competency framework.

Assessment Approach

Assessment within the CORE-ED Framework is competence-based and evidence-driven, combining formative and summative components. It prioritises the demonstration of practical performance rather than theoretical knowledge alone.

Assessment tools include:

- Structured observation of teaching or facilitation practice
- Reflective journals documenting the application of ESG principles
- Peer and learner feedback surveys



- Portfolio-based evidence such as lesson plans, learning materials, or project reports
- Analytical tasks or policy briefs evaluating governance or sustainability issues

The assessment process aligns with the *EU Council Recommendation on Micro-credentials* (2022), allowing participants to receive formal recognition for discrete learning achievements. Each competence cluster can correspond to a micro-credential with defined learning outcomes, workload, and assessment criteria.

Competence assessment also serves an institutional purpose: aggregated results inform ESG performance reviews, continuous improvement processes, and professional development planning. In this way, assessment functions not only as a pedagogical instrument but also as a governance tool, linking individual learning outcomes to organisational growth.

All assessment activities will comply with the principles of fairness, transparency, and confidentiality outlined in the *ENQA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* (2015)⁶⁵. This alignment ensures the credibility and transferability of results within the wider European education and policy landscape.

To ensure that these transversal competencies are teachable, auditable, and portable across contexts, the CORE-ED Framework defines each as an observable behaviour within professional practice. This means that competencies are described through concrete actions (what educators and learners do) rather than abstract attributes. For example, *critical and reflective thinking* is observable when educators use evidence to adapt teaching strategies or facilitate problem-solving dialogues; *collaboration* appears through co-designed lesson plans or peer-mentoring activities; *ethical and intercultural awareness* is demonstrated by inclusive language, transparent decision-making, and respect for learner agency. Such behavioural descriptors make the competencies both measurable and transferable, enabling their inclusion in assessment activities, micro-credential modules, and institutional quality audits.

This operationalisation aligns with the competence-based approaches promoted by the *European Qualifications Framework* and *EQAVET*, which emphasise demonstrable learning

⁶⁵ ENQA, EUA, EURASHE & ESU. (2015). Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG). <https://enqa.eu/index.php/home/esg/>

outcomes, and with the *OECD Learning Compass 2030*⁶⁶, which defines “observable competences” as those that translate knowledge, skills, and attitudes into socially recognisable action.

5.5 Implementation and Training Pathways

The implementation of the CORE-ED Competency Framework follows a phased and modular pathway that enables both higher-education partners and correctional institutions to integrate competencies into their existing structures. The process is deliberately pragmatic, aligned with the resources and commitments outlined in the CORE-ED ACADEMY application, and designed to remain sustainable beyond the project’s duration.

Implementation is guided by the principle of progressive integration. Instead of replacing existing curricula, the framework builds on current teaching programmes, staff-development schemes, and institutional procedures, embedding ESG-aligned competencies within them. This approach maintains coherence with national regulations and institutional strategies while advancing sustainability, inclusion, and sound governance.

Implementation could be separated in three developmental phases, as mentioned below:

Phase 1 – Preparation and Capacity Building (Months 1–12)

Each participating institution carries out a diagnostic self-assessment using the CORE-ED ESG Toolkit to identify strengths and gaps in staff competences, learning resources, and governance practices.

Results inform tailored capacity-building programmes for educators, trainers, and managers. Training modules draw on the five competence domains and are delivered through a blended approach that combines in-person workshops with asynchronous e-learning on the project’s Virtual Learning Platform, in line with the *EU Digital Education Action Plan (2021–2027)* and the *EQAVET* continuous-improvement cycle.

Phase 2 – Integration into Curricula and Practice (Months 13–24)

The identified competences are incorporated into both formal and non-formal educational activities. Universities and partner institutions revise selected courses or modules

⁶⁶OECD. (2019). *OECD Learning Compass 2030: Concept Note Series*. OECD Publishing. https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/about/projects/edu/education-2040/concept-notes/OECD_Learning_Compass_2030_concept_note.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

to include ESG-related learning outcomes and assessment criteria, while correctional education centres embed competencies into vocational and life-skills programmes. Educators implement the new competences through small-scale, practice-based projects—designing inclusive lesson plans, creating peer-mentoring groups, or developing sustainability awareness campaigns within facilities. These activities serve simultaneously as training and assessment exercises, strengthening institutional ownership of the framework.

Phase 3 – Consolidation and Quality Assurance (Months 25–36)

The final phase focuses on institutionalisation and continuous improvement. Each partner's quality-assurance board integrates the Competency Framework into its regular evaluation cycles. Data from assessments, participant feedback, and institutional self-reviews feed into continuous-improvement reports.

This ensures that the framework becomes an established reference for recruitment, staff appraisal, and curriculum design, mirroring the principles of the ENQA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (2015).

Training Modalities and Professional Development

Training under the CORE-ED Competency Framework uses a blended, modular format suitable for correctional environments. Modules correspond to the five competence domains and are designed for micro-credential accreditation in line with the *EU Council Recommendation on Micro-credentials* (2022).

Each module includes three components:

- a concise theoretical section introducing ESG concepts;
- a practice-based section involving real-world application; and
- a reflective section documented through portfolios or digital journals.

Educators, trainers, and correctional officers can complete modules progressively, accumulating credits toward professional certification or higher education recognition. This pathway connects non-formal and formal learning, enhancing employability and lifelong learning opportunities for professionals in the sector.

Institutional Support and Governance

Successful implementation depends on clear governance and strong institutional backing. Each partner designates an ESG Coordinator responsible for monitoring progress, liaising with management, and overseeing data collection for evaluation. Coordination among justice ministries, higher education institutions, and NGOs is maintained through the project's existing steering structure, ensuring alignment with national strategies and compliance with ethical standards.

The entire pathway embodies the principle of learning by doing: institutions build ESG-based governance as they apply it, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of capacity building, accountability, and sustainability.

5.6 Link to Policy and ESG Indicators

5.6.1 Institutional Governance and Coordination

Successful implementation of the CORE-ED Framework depends on clear governance and strong institutional commitment. Within each partner organisation, an ESG Coordinator is appointed to monitor progress, liaise with management, and oversee the systematic collection of data for evaluation. Coordination among justice ministries, higher education institutions, and civil-society partners is maintained through the project's steering structure, ensuring coherence with national strategies and full compliance with ethical and procedural standards.

The implementation process is guided by the principle of *learning by doing*. As institutions embed ESG-based governance practices into their everyday operations, they simultaneously cultivate the very competencies they seek to develop—accountability, transparency, and sustainable decision-making. This creates a self-reinforcing cycle of institutional growth, where capacity building and governance evolve together through applied learning and reflection.

Institutional governance mechanisms also embed the principles of *child-friendly justice (CFJ)* and restorative practice, ensuring that ESG compliance extends to rights-based treatment of children and young people in custodial and community settings.

5.6.2 Policy Alignment within the European and Regional Context

The CORE-ED Competency Framework functions not merely as a pedagogical tool but as a policy mechanism that translates ESG principles into tangible educational and organisational transformation. Its effectiveness is measured both through individual learning outcomes and through the broader institutional changes it inspires.

At the European level, the Framework contributes directly to key policy priorities, supporting the objectives of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals—particularly SDG 4 on Quality Education, SDG 10 on Reduced Inequalities, and SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions—while also aligning with the European Green Deal, the European Education Area 2030 Vision, and the EU Skills Agenda.

Regionally, it strengthens the implementation of the *Green Agenda for the Western Balkans* and promotes alignment of correctional education systems with the European standards set forth in the Council of Europe's *Revised Prison Rules* (2020). Through this alignment, the Framework serves as a bridge between European sustainability policies and the practical realities of educational reform in correctional contexts.

5.6.3 ESG Indicators and Measurement of Progress

To monitor progress in a coherent and comparable manner, the CORE-ED Framework introduces a set of indicators that reflect the environmental, social, and governance pillars of sustainability.

Environmental progress is captured through the number of correctional institutions implementing sustainability initiatives (such as gardening projects, energy audits, or recycling programmes), the proportion of staff and learners completing ESG-related training, and the overall reduction in paper and resource consumption resulting from digital learning practices. In practice, this also includes trackable measures already observed in partner contexts, such as the introduction of energy-efficiency and hygiene compliance standards within juvenile facilities (e.g. ventilation, lighting, sanitation and waste management requirements in closed and semi-open centres, as reported in Kosovo and BiH), as well as the systematic use of community-service sentences with an environmental component (park and public-space maintenance, small-scale gardening and urban clean-up tasks) as an alternative to custody.

Social progress is reflected in improved access and participation among underrepresented groups, including women, minorities, and young people, as well as in higher learner satisfaction and engagement. The formation of partnerships that promote reintegration and community engagement also acts as a measurable expression of social inclusion and collective responsibility. This dimension can be operationalised through indicators already emerging in the Synthesis Report, such as (i) the share of juvenile justice professionals who have completed specialised modules in child-friendly justice, trauma-informed communication, and rights-based interviewing of minors (e.g. mandatory child-track training for magistrates and induction training for probation and correctional staff reported in Albania and Kosovo), (ii) the percentage of facilities offering structured psycho-social and educational support rather than purely custodial regimes, and (iii) the availability of restorative and reintegration pathways (for example, mediation, family conferencing, and post-release mentoring rather than default custodial sanctions).

Governance mechanisms include the creation of ESG Committees within each institution, chaired by an ESG Coordinator and supported by a Data Protection Officer (one per partner) responsible for ethical oversight and GDPR compliance. Both roles are linked to the national steering bodies defined under WP2 and WP5. These committees can oversee the integration of ESG competences into training, curriculum design, and institutional management, ensuring coherence with national policy frameworks. Here, governance indicators can be further specified as: (i) whether restorative-justice content and child-friendly justice standards are formally embedded in national or in-service curricula for judges, probation officers, correctional educators, and social workers; (ii) whether annual continuous professional development (CPD) requirements on these topics are met (e.g. documented 20–40h CPD obligations for juvenile staff in Albania); and (iii) whether institutions report on compliance with ethical safeguards, including presence of specialised juvenile units, qualified staff, and child-sensitive procedures in line with Council of Europe child-friendly justice guidance.

These indicators are assessed using both quantitative and qualitative methods (combining statistical data, case studies, focus groups, and stakeholder interviews) to produce a multidimensional understanding of progress. Together, they link individual competence development with institutional reform, ensuring that educational transformation is both evidence-based and ethically grounded. All indicators are assessed with respect to their contribution to rehabilitation and reintegration, understood as the continuous process of restoring personal, educational, and social capacities of learners and supporting their safe return to society through education, vocational training, and community engagement.

5.6.4 Reporting, Benchmarking, and Continuous Improvement

The Framework's system of reporting and continuous improvement ensures that progress remains transparent and cumulative. Each participating institution prepares an annual ESG Performance Report that consolidates findings from training assessments, pilot activities, and stakeholder consultations. These reports support strategic planning and policy dialogue between the project consortium and national authorities, ensuring that lessons learned are shared and integrated at policy level.

Digital dashboards integrated into the project's Virtual Learning Platform provide an additional layer of transparency, enabling real-time monitoring and adherence to EU open-data standards. The data collected through these systems also serve as benchmarks for comparison across institutions, allowing partners to evaluate their progress relative to

consortium averages. This approach fosters peer learning, encourages regional cooperation, and exemplifies the participatory governance ethos outlined in the *ENQA Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance* (2015), where institutional integrity and innovation advance together.

When ESG reports reveal recurring gaps, such as, for example, uneven participation or low sustainability scores, the findings can be discussed within institutional ESG Committees and national steering meetings. Corrective measures then can follow: extra capacity-building sessions can be scheduled, curricula can be adjusted, and resource plans revised. In this way, accumulated data transforms from static figures to starting points of each improvement cycle.

5.6.5 Policy Outcomes and Long-Term Impact

By formalising ESG-aligned competencies and indicators, the CORE-ED Framework establishes a durable foundation for long-term policy impact. It promotes the integration of sustainability and ethics into correctional education policy, enhances professional mobility and mutual recognition of qualifications, and strengthens cooperation between education and justice ministries. Most importantly, it reframes social reintegration as a measurable and reportable dimension of sustainable governance—an outcome that positions correctional education as an active contributor to societal well-being. Policy uptake will be evidenced through the formal inclusion of ESG competences in national qualification frameworks, the continued operation of the four Regional Research Centres beyond project completion, and the endorsement of CORE-ED modules within ministerial training plans. These indicators ensure that sustainability is tracked through institutional commitments rather than assumptions.

Ultimately, the CORE-ED Competency Framework transforms a conceptual model into a living roadmap for educational reform. It demonstrates that the integration of ESG principles in correctional pedagogy is not merely aspirational but practical, measurable, and achievable. Through this process, correctional education becomes a catalyst for broader systemic change, fully aligned with Europe's vision of an inclusive, ethical, and sustainable future.

5.7 Operationalisation of ESG in Teaching and Learning

The CORE-ED Model translates ESG principles into everyday pedagogical practice through competency-based, reflective, and evidence-driven learning design.

Within *curriculum design*, ESG alignment could be achieved by embedding sustainability, social inclusion, and ethical governance across all learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Each module should integrate at least one ESG-related outcome (environmental awareness, civic responsibility, or participatory governance) evaluated through learner portfolios, or peer-reviewed projects.

Within *teaching and facilitation*, educators employ participatory and restorative methodologies (learning circles, dialogue-based reflection, problem-based learning) that promote accountability, empathy, and cooperation. Learner engagement tools (such as reflective journals, feedback dialogues, or digital progress trackers) could allow both staff and learners to monitor their personal and collective development against ESG competencies.

Within *assessment and quality assurance*, the ESG cycle follows the EQAVET PDCA logic: planning (setting ESG-linked outcomes), doing (implementing lessons and activities), checking (reviewing performance and feedback), and acting (continuous improvement). Institutions can adapt simple rubrics to measure environmental awareness, social engagement, and ethical decision-making, supported by ongoing educator self-evaluation.

Capacity-Building Roadmap for Educators and Managers

Table 3 - Capacity Building Roadmap

Competence Area	Example Focus	ESG Dimension
Pedagogical Design	Develop ESG-linked learning outcomes, assessment rubrics, and lesson plans.	Environmental + Social
Reflective Practice	Use self-assessment and peer-learning logs to evaluate inclusive and ethical facilitation.	Governance + Social
Digital and Data Literacy	Apply learning-analytics tools for ESG progress monitoring; ensure GDPR compliance.	Governance
Leadership & Change Management	Lead ESG Committees, mentor peers, and coordinate sustainability initiatives.	Environmental + Governance



This roadmap defines the professional competences required for educators and institutional managers to embed ESG principles effectively within correctional and juvenile-justice education. It also ensures continuity with future training and curriculum-development activities, maintaining the integrity of the CORE-ED ecosystem.



6. Recommendations for Implementation

The successful adoption of the CORE-ED Model across correctional education systems requires a structured and context-sensitive approach. Implementation must reflect the institutional diversity of partner countries while maintaining alignment with European standards on quality assurance, social responsibility, and sustainable development. The following recommendations outline a practical roadmap for policymakers, correctional institutions, and educational authorities to guide the transition from conceptual framework to operational practice.

6.1 Strategic Guidelines

The introduction of the CORE-ED Model should be viewed as a phased transformation process, embedding ESG values throughout the design, delivery, and evaluation of correctional education.

Phase 1 – Preparation and Alignment

Institutions begin by conducting a baseline assessment of existing pedagogical practices, institutional policies, and staff competences against the ESG framework. This diagnostic step ensures that the model is tailored to national legislation, current curricula, and the realities of correctional settings.

Phase 2 – Pilot Implementation

Selected correctional institutions act as pilot sites, applying the CORE-ED Model within defined educational programmes. During this phase, the ESG-aligned competency framework is tested, learning outcomes are monitored, and assessment tools are refined.

Phase 3 – Institutional Integration

Following evaluation, the model is gradually embedded in institutional procedures, including curriculum development, quality assurance systems, and staff training frameworks. Ongoing peer learning among institutions supports cross-national consistency and mutual capacity enhancement.

Phase 4 – Policy Mainstreaming

Findings from the pilot and integration phases should inform policy updates and contribute to the establishment of national frameworks for sustainable correctional education. Collaboration with ministries of education and justice is crucial to institutionalising ESG principles at the system level.

The roadmap relies on three enabling conditions:

- Institutional commitment from correctional authorities and education providers.
- Multi-stakeholder collaboration, including civil society and research partners.
- Sustainable funding mechanisms integrating EU and national resources.

A proposed, simplified RACI matrix could clarify responsibility across implementation phases, ensuring coherence with the structure defined in the CORE-ED Application Form and transparency in partner accountability. The adherence to the proposed RACI matrix is not obligatory but could facilitate implementation.

Table 4 – Proposed implementation RACI matrix

Core-ED Key Action	Responsible (R)	Accountable (A)	Consulted (C)	Informed (I)
ESG Toolkit deployment and diagnostic self-assessment	WP3 Leader (IUS)	Project Coordinator (LRUS)	Partner 10 (ReadLab), all HEI partners	Ministries of Justice and Education
Development of training curricula and modules	WP4 Leader (LRUS)	Project Coordinator (LRUS)	WP3 Leader (IUS), all HEI partners	Correctional institutions and NGOs
Capacity-building and pilot training	WP5 Leader (MUA)	Project Coordinator (LRUS)	Regional Research Centres (WB countries), Partner 10 (ReadLab)	All partners + national authorities
Quality assurance and KPI monitoring	WP2 Leader (UC3M)	Project Coordinator (LRUS)	QA Board, ESG Committees (one per partner)	Entire consortium + EACEA
Dissemination and policy uptake	WP7 Team (LRUS + READLAB)	Project Coordinator (LRUS)	Partner 10 (ReadLab) for digital outputs, all partners for national channels	Stakeholders and policy bodies

6.2 Policy and Institutional Support

Policy coherence and institutional governance are central to the sustainable implementation of the CORE-ED Model. The model requires close cooperation among ministries responsible for justice, education, employment, and social inclusion, ensuring that correctional education is recognised as a component of the wider public education system. At institutional level, CORE-ED Steering Committees should be established to oversee ESG integration, quality monitoring, and continuous improvement. These committees should operate within existing quality assurance structures, applying the ENQA standards and the EQAVET quality cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation, and review.

Before any pilot data collection begins, each partner will complete a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) in accordance with GDPR (2016/679) Article 35⁶⁷, ensuring that all data processing is lawfully justified, risk-assessed, and approved by the designated Data Protection Officer. Where project activities involve minors or vulnerable learners, additional ethical safeguards must apply. Each partner institution should obtain prior approval from its national authority, ensuring compliance with Article 24 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*⁶⁸ concerning the rights of the child. Informed consent must be secured from legal guardians, and all participating staff should undergo child protection and safeguarding training. Data collected from or about minors must be anonymised at source, stored with restricted access, and processed only for educational and research purposes explicitly approved within the project's Data Management Plan. Institutional commitments should include (and be reflected through concrete institutional artefacts such as policy papers, strategic plans, and QA reports) the following:

- a) Adoption of ESG-based mission statements within educational policy documents and governance frameworks.
- b) Alignment of curricula with the CORE-ED Competency Framework, evidenced in course outlines and module descriptors.
- c) Inclusion of sustainability and reintegration objectives in institutional strategies and annual action plans.

⁶⁷ Regulation (EU) 2016/679 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data (General Data Protection Regulation), Article 35. *Official Journal of the European Union*, L 119, 4 May 2016, pp. 1–88. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32016R0679>

⁶⁸ *Official Journal of the European Communities*, C 364, 18 December 2000, Article 24. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A12012P%2FTXT>



- d) Creation of internal monitoring mechanisms, such as ESG dashboards or self-assessment reports, to track progress.

Policymakers are also encouraged to embed correctional pedagogy into national lifelong learning and digital inclusion strategies, ensuring access to education as a right in line with the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2⁶⁹ on the education of prisoners.

6.3 Capacity Building and Training

Systemic impact depends on the professional development of educators, administrators, and correctional staff. Capacity building should focus on ESG literacy, pedagogical innovation, and digital competence.

Training programmes should follow a train-the-trainer cascade model, enabling early adopters to mentor peers within their institutions. Key training elements include:

- a) Modules on ESG principles and their relevance to correctional education.
- b) Workshops on inclusive and restorative pedagogies.
- c) Hands-on training in digital tools, assessment methods, and learner engagement.
- d) Peer-learning activities that connect educators in correctional and mainstream contexts.

Knowledge-sharing will be supported by the CORE-ED Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), which will serve as a repository for training materials, best practices, and case studies. The use of open educational resources (OERs) and multilingual content will enhance accessibility and replicability across partner countries.

6.4 Monitoring and Evaluation

6.4.1 Purpose and Principles

Monitoring and evaluation stand at the heart of the CORE-ED implementation process, ensuring that the model remains credible, scalable, and continuously improving. The pro-

⁶⁹ Council of Europe. *Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the education of prisoners*. Adopted on 1 April 2020. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectId=09000016809e3e8c

cess is designed not merely as a form of administrative oversight, but as a dynamic system of learning and reflection that allows institutions to measure progress, identify challenges, and refine their practices in line with ESG principles.

6.4.2 Continuous Feedback and Shared Learning

Evaluation under the CORE-ED Model follows a continuous improvement cycle rooted in feedback and collaboration. Educators, learners, and administrators all contribute to the process, ensuring that evaluation is participatory and transparent. Data collection and analysis are standardised across participating institutions, enabling meaningful comparison while maintaining respect for contextual differences.

To uphold data integrity, all institutions should conduct periodic data-quality checks verifying accuracy, completeness, and consistency across indicators. These checks should include cross-validation between administrative and pedagogical data sources, traceable documentation of revisions, and anonymisation procedures where personal information is involved. The monitoring process should follow the *Plan-Do-Check-Act (PDCA)* cycle promoted by both ENQA ESG and EQAVET frameworks. During the *Plan* phase, institutions define clear indicators and targets; the *Do* phase concerns implementation and evidence gathering; the *Check* phase ensures systematic evaluation through validated data; and the *Act* phase translates evaluation findings into improvement measures and policy adjustments. Embedding this cycle within CORE-ED evaluation routines guarantees continuous enhancement of quality, transparency, and learner outcomes.

The results of these evaluations are meant to be shared among institutions to promote mutual learning, peer exchange, and adaptive development. In this way, evaluation becomes an instrument of collective growth rather than a one-time assessment.

6.4.3 Transparency and Reporting

Transparency is a defining principle of this approach. Institutions are encouraged to prepare annual ESG compliance reports inspired by the *EU Sustainable Reporting Standards (ESRS)*, documenting not only quantitative outcomes but also qualitative lessons learned throughout the process of CORE-ED implementation. These reports foster accountability, allow for the dissemination of good practices, and contribute to an evidence base that can inform future policy reform.

Through this ongoing cycle of monitoring, evaluation, and open reporting, the CORE-ED Framework ensures that its ESG-aligned pedagogy remains adaptable, credible, and firmly embedded within a culture of continuous institutional learning and improvement.

6.5 Sustainability and Long-Term Vision

Long-term sustainability rests on the full integration of CORE-ED values into correctional education systems and their alignment with both national and European policy frameworks. Achieving this requires a shared commitment to maintaining the model as a living structure rather than a static output. The process involves embedding CORE-ED standards into national accreditation and certification systems so that they are recognised as a reference point for quality assurance in correctional education. It also entails the creation of national and regional networks of CORE-ED institutions that can promote peer support and advocacy, helping to sustain momentum and ensure collective growth. Collaboration is another essential element of this sustainability vision. Building partnerships with higher education institutions, non-governmental organisations, and social enterprises opens the door to co-designed learning and reintegration pathways that reflect both local needs and broader European objectives. These partnerships can draw on existing EU funding mechanisms to support ongoing training, research, and cross-border cooperation.

Ultimately, the long-term sustainability of the CORE-ED Model depends on its capacity to turn correctional education into a genuine catalyst for social justice, environmental transition, and human dignity. By aligning with the ESG agenda and cultivating a culture of shared responsibility, institutions can transform correctional learning environments into spaces of empowerment and reintegration.



Figure 6 - Sustainability, Education, Reintegration



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7. Conclusion

The CORE-ED Model represents a methodological outcome but also embodies a shared vision of how education within correctional environments can evolve toward dignity, sustainability, and reintegration. By embedding the ESG principles across all layers of correctional pedagogy, the Model establishes a living framework that is capable of guiding institutions, educators, and learners toward cultures of responsibility, transparency, and human growth.

Its design has been intentionally holistic. The environmental dimension invites prisons and learning spaces to become agents of ecological awareness; the social pillar safeguards inclusion, gender sensitivity, and community reintegration; and the governance strand ensures that accountability, ethical management, and quality assurance are not administrative add-ons, but intrinsic parts of the learning process. Each of these elements converges to promote a renewed understanding of education as a transformative ecosystem.

The process that led to the CORE-ED Model, which is rooted in dialogue, evidence, and collaborative foresight, demonstrates that correctional education can serve as a microcosm of the green and just transition Europe envisions. Through the integration of the CORE-ED Competency Framework, the use of micro-credentials, and the establishment of ESG-driven indicators, the project provides concrete pathways for capacity building and long-term institutional change.

Looking ahead, the sustainability of CORE-ED will depend on collective commitment. As national authorities, educators, and civil society partners adopt and adapt its principles, the Model can expand beyond a project outcome to become a European reference for quality, ethical, and future-ready correctional education. In doing so, it supports the European Green Deal, the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Council of Europe's human rights vision, as it also redefines correctional learning as a realm of transformation.

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