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D3.5. Final Strategy for the Competencies Ecosystem for PICTURES



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1 Executive Summary

In Europe, more than 588,940 individuals are currently imprisoned (Council of Europe, 2019). Every day, over 203,772 correctional practitioners work to ensure public safety while also supporting incarcerated individuals in their rehabilitation and reintegration processes. Correctional staff face increasingly complex challenges, including rising incarceration rates, resource constraints, and the need for rehabilitation-centred approaches. Despite all these challenges and being commonly referred as essential both in security and rehabilitation, prison staff often lack proper initial and continuous training. The PICTURES project responds to these challenges by introducing a Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy, aimed at establishing a new approach to correctional pedagogy, with a focus on integrating Vocational education and training (VET) and Higher education (HE) as research and development poles. It emphasises the importance of cross-sector collaboration, enabling state and civil society stakeholders to co-create sustainable and effective training models.

Through a Competencies Ecosystem that connects educational institutions with justice systems, this strategy introduces a framework never-before implemented at the European level. By addressing critical gaps in professional training and aligning these efforts with workforce needs, the project aims to support social inclusion, reduce recidivism, and promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of emerging adults.

The Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy represents a groundbreaking effort to professionalise the correctional workforce and align VET and HE systems with the needs of the emerging adult justice sector. By delivering policy recommendations, best practices, and collaborative mechanisms, this strategy sets a foundation for sustainable growth and resilience within the correctional sector. It creates an innovative, scalable model that addresses current challenges while preparing the sector for future demands, establishing PICTURES as a benchmark for correctional pedagogy across Europe.

Drawing from the D3.1 Synthesis Report, a comprehensive analysis conducted across the ten partner countries — Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Portugal, Romania, and Serbia — has revealed widespread gaps in workforce development. Findings from surveys, desk research, stakeholder consultations, and document analysis highlight persistent issues, including overcrowding, insufficient funding, staff shortages, high recidivism rates, and weak inter-institutional cooperation. Correctional practitioners often operate within outdated infrastructures, navigating fragmented policies that result

in inconsistent recruitment criteria, training structures, and professional development opportunities. Initial training varies significantly across countries, ranging from as little as 50 days to three years of university-level education, while continuous training remains limited or entirely absent (European Committee on Crime Problems, 2018). The content of existing training programmes also lacks cohesion and alignment with rehabilitation priorities, often reinforcing disciplinary control over pedagogical approaches.

Recognising these challenges, the Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy introduces an integrated Competencies Ecosystem, aimed at supporting the growth and resilience of the correctional sector by integrating innovative pedagogical methods with sustainable, competency-based frameworks. Building on the previous phase of WP3, the D3.2 report identified eight key occupational roles within the correctional sector — Educators, Healthcare Professionals, Legal Professionals, Prison Staff, Psychologists, Social Workers, Socio-Cultural Facilitators, and Technicians — each of which plays a critical role in supporting reintegration efforts. Rather than treating these roles in isolation, the strategy prioritises transversal competencies, ensuring that all practitioners, regardless of their professional background, develop common skills essential to correctional pedagogy. These competencies include socio-emotional intelligence, mental health awareness, trauma-informed care, crisis management, cultural competence, digital literacy, and sustainability-focused resilience.

By embedding these cross-sector competencies within all occupational profiles, the strategy fosters alignment with the sector's evolving demands, ensuring high-quality education and workforce collaboration. This pedagogy-first approach positions Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) institutions as research and development poles, ensuring that correctional practitioners receive training that is standardised, evidence-based, and aligned with real-world challenges. Rather than focusing solely on compliance and control, the strategy reframes correctional education as a tool for reintegration, equipping professionals with the skills necessary to support emerging adults and contribute to long-term desistance from offending behaviours.

The Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy delivers a coherent roadmap for systemic reform, culminating in the development of 15 policy recommendations and 20 inspiring practices. These outputs provide a practical foundation for competency-based learning, ensuring that policymakers, correctional institutions, and educational providers can align training efforts with workforce needs. Through structured capacity-building mechanisms, the strategy strengthens inter-

institutional collaboration, fosters professionalisation within the correctional sector, and ensures that practitioners are adequately prepared for the challenges they face.

1.1 Brief overview of the strategy's purpose and objectives

The PICTURES project (*Pedagogical Inclusive Education and Training System to Upskill Cross-Sector Practitioners Working with Minors and Emerging Adults in Correctional Systems*) is a forward-thinking initiative designed to address the urgent need for a structured, cohesive, and standardised approach to working with emerging adults (aged 18–25) in correctional settings. Emerging adults represent a vulnerable demographic with distinct developmental, social, and educational needs that require targeted interventions. This project introduces a Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy, which employs "pedagogy-first" practices to foster the growth and resilience of the emerging adult justice sector across Europe.

The core objective of this strategy is to professionalise correctional practitioners by aligning Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) systems with the specific needs of the correctional sector. The initiative culminates in the delivery of D3.5, a collaboratively developed document that includes 15 actionable policy recommendations and 20 inspiring practices. These elements provide a roadmap for capacity building in VET and HE, enabling them to serve as research and development poles for current and future efforts in emerging adult justice and the broader correctional sector.

Objectives

The Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy has been developed to achieve the following goals:

- **Introduce pedagogy-first practices** to professionalise practitioners and align their competencies with the needs of emerging adults in correctional settings.
- **Establish a Competencies Ecosystem** that supports workforce development through investments in VET and HE.
- **Provide a systematic mechanism** to connect state-employed justice practitioners with civil society employers, addressing skilled workforce needs through tailored training and development opportunities.

These objectives support the growth and resilience of the correctional sector by integrating innovative pedagogical methods with sustainable, competency-based frameworks.

Key Deliverables

The strategy includes key outputs designed to address sectoral needs and foster systemic improvements:

- **15 Policy Recommendations:** Actionable policies to strengthen the role of VET and HE as research and development poles supporting the correctional sector.
- **20 Inspiring Practices:** Showcasing innovative, scalable approaches to capacity building in correctional pedagogy and workforce development.
- **Mechanisms for Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Tools to connect state and civil society employers, addressing workforce needs through strategic investments in VET and HE.

These deliverables provide a cohesive, innovative, and practical framework for supporting correctional practitioners and aligning their professional development with sectoral priorities.

Scope and Vision

This strategy presents a new approach to correctional pedagogy, focusing on integrating VET and HE as research and development poles. It emphasises the importance of cross-sector collaboration, enabling state and civil society stakeholders to co-create sustainable and effective training models.

Through a Competencies Ecosystem that connects educational institutions with justice systems, this strategy introduces a system never-before implemented at the European level. By addressing critical gaps in professional training and aligning these efforts with workforce needs, the project aims to support social inclusion, reduce recidivism, and promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of emerging adults.

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1.2 Context of the competencies ecosystem development

The Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy was developed in response to the fragmented and unstructured professional landscape of practitioners working with emerging adults in correctional settings in Europe. Despite the significant potential for employment growth in this sector, practitioners come from diverse professional backgrounds, including education, social work, psychology, and justice, yet they lack a coordinated training framework and a common professional language. The absence of structured, standardised professional development has resulted in gaps in competencies, training inconsistencies, and a lack of alignment

between workforce needs and available educational pathways in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE).

To address these challenges, this strategy introduces a structured Competencies Ecosystem, which defines the essential competencies for practitioners, aligns training pathways with workforce demands, and serves as a foundation for the policy recommendations and best practices that will follow. By providing a systematic approach to professional development, the Competencies Ecosystem ensures that correctional practitioners are equipped with specialised knowledge and skills, fostering sector-wide professionalisation, sustainability, and resilience.

Through the analysis of correctional job role profiles and sectoral challenges, ten key competencies have been identified as essential for practitioners working with emerging adults in prison settings. These competencies form the foundation for policy recommendations and inspiring practices, which will be detailed in the following sections:

- **Soft Skills Development:**
Practitioners must develop empathy, communication, active listening, and conflict resolution skills to build trust-based relationships with emerging adults. This is crucial in correctional settings, where many young individuals have a history of trauma and disengagement from education.
- **Specialised Knowledge in Adolescent Psychology and Criminology:**
Understanding cognitive development, risk-taking behaviours, and desistance theories enables practitioners to tailor interventions that align with the unique developmental needs of emerging adults.
- **Technology Integration in Correctional Education:**
Digital tools can provide secure learning environments, supporting the re-engagement of incarcerated young adults with education and vocational training. This is essential for bridging the digital divide and preparing them for reintegration into society.
- **Trauma-Informed Practices:**
Many emerging adults in correctional settings have histories of abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence. Practitioners must be trained to identify trauma responses and apply supportive interventions to create a safe learning environment.
- **Interpersonal and Inter-Institutional Collaboration:**
Correctional practitioners operate in a highly fragmented system involving state justice employers, social services, educational institutions, and civil society

actors. Training must equip them with the skills to coordinate support networks and promote cross-sector collaboration.

- **Continuous Professional Development and Recognition of Prior Learning:**
Given the absence of structured career progression in correctional pedagogy, the ecosystem introduces self-assessment tools, micro-credentialing, and ESCO-based validation mechanisms to ensure lifelong learning and career mobility.
- **Legal and Human Rights Knowledge:**
Practitioners must navigate justice sector regulations, procedural requirements, and human rights frameworks, ensuring their interventions align with ethical and legal obligations.
- **Crisis Management and Security Protocols:**
Correctional settings require de-escalation techniques, emergency response training, and risk management strategies to ensure both practitioner safety and rehabilitative approaches remain intact.
- **Cultural Competence and Diversity Awareness:**
Given the multicultural nature of European correctional populations, practitioners must develop cultural sensitivity and the ability to tailor interventions to diverse socio-cultural backgrounds.
- **Restorative Justice and Reintegration Approaches:**
Correctional pedagogy must move beyond punitive models, incorporating restorative justice frameworks that promote accountability, conflict resolution, and community reintegration.

These ten core competencies form the basis of the Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy and serve as a guiding framework for the policy recommendations and best practices that will be introduced in the following sections. The identified competencies address existing gaps in training, workforce alignment, and professional development, ensuring that practitioners receive targeted, structured, and research-driven training that supports their roles in the rehabilitation and reintegration of emerging adults.

By aligning VET and HE systems with these competencies, the strategy establishes a coherent and scalable professional training model that strengthens sector-wide knowledge exchange, workforce mobility, and pedagogical excellence. The upcoming policy recommendations and inspiring practices will provide actionable guidance on how to implement these competencies in practice, ensuring that practitioners, employers, and policymakers are well prepared and aligned with the real demands of the correctional education system across Europe.

2 Introduction

The Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy introduces a pedagogy-first approach to address the pressing challenges faced by correctional practitioners working with emerging adults. By integrating Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) as research and development poles, the strategy establishes a structured framework for professionalisation, ensuring that training mechanisms align with sectoral needs. It provides a mechanism to connect state-employed justice professionals with civil society organisations, addressing workforce gaps and enhancing collaboration between key stakeholders in the correctional sector. This represents a pioneering initiative to establish a Competencies Ecosystem, a system that has not yet been implemented at the European level, ensuring that correctional practitioners have access to standardised, high-quality training pathways that foster long-term capacity building and institutional resilience.

The justice system, as a key employer, faces significant workforce-related challenges. Correctional practitioners, including educators, social workers, healthcare professionals, psychologists, legal professionals, prison officers, and socio-cultural facilitators, operate in complex environments that require multidisciplinary expertise. However, training structures vary considerably across Europe, leading to disparities in recruitment, professional development, and competency alignment. While some Member States offer short, fragmented training programmes, others have university-level education for correctional professionals, highlighting the lack of cohesion in professional development standards. The absence of systematic lifelong learning opportunities further exacerbates the issue, limiting the ability of practitioners to adapt to evolving correctional policies and rehabilitation-focused practices.

To address these gaps, the Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy introduces a Competencies Ecosystem that establishes clear professional training pathways, ensuring that VET and HE institutions play an active role in shaping the correctional workforce. Through this approach, correctional professionals will gain transversal skills that apply across different roles, including socio-emotional intelligence, trauma-informed care, cultural competence, mental health awareness, digital skills, and sustainability-focused resilience. By embedding these competencies within all occupational profiles, the strategy ensures that practitioners receive holistic training that goes beyond disciplinary control, reinforcing rehabilitative and reintegrative approaches.

The strategy is structured into eight key sections, each contributing to the development of a cohesive, evidence-based framework for professionalisation. It begins with an analysis of the justice system as an employer, identifying skills shortages, sectoral constraints, and emerging challenges in correctional settings. The strategy then outlines the role of VET and HE institutions in addressing these deficiencies, reinforcing their position as catalysts for pedagogical innovation and capacity building. Through participatory research methods, extensive stakeholder consultations, and sectoral analysis, the strategy delivers 15 policy recommendations and highlights 20 inspiring practices, providing scalable solutions for training reform and workforce alignment.

The Competencies Ecosystem is designed to integrate VET and HE institutions into the correctional sector through structured, research-driven learning pathways. This includes ECTS credit recognition in higher education, EQF-aligned competency mapping in vocational training, and the introduction of micro-credentials that facilitate lifelong learning and career mobility. These mechanisms ensure that training is standardised, evidence-based, and applicable to real-world correctional contexts, fostering sustainability and innovation in workforce development.

Aligned with European policy frameworks and global development objectives, the Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy contributes directly to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The strategy supports SDG 4 (Quality Education) by promoting inclusive, accessible, and competency-based learning opportunities for correctional practitioners. It advances SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by professionalising the correctional workforce and creating structured employment pathways. Through its emphasis on rehabilitation, reintegration, and cross-sector collaboration, it also contributes to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), ensuring that correctional practices are aligned with human rights principles and long-term social reintegration strategies.

The Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy establishes a new benchmark for professional training in the correctional sector, reinforcing the role of VET and HE institutions as drivers of sustainable workforce transformation. By embedding a competency-based, pedagogy-first approach, the strategy ensures that justice professionals receive structured, research-backed, and transferable training, equipping them with the necessary skills to support emerging adults, enhance institutional practices, and contribute to systemic reform across Europe.

2.1 Background and rationale for the strategy

The background and rationale for the *Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy* within the PICTURES project stem from the need to professionalise practitioners working with emerging adults in correctional settings. Currently, the justice system across Europe lacks a coherent and structured pedagogical framework tailored for correctional practitioners, leading to fragmented professional training and inconsistent approaches to education and rehabilitation.

Emerging adults, defined as those between 18 and 25 years old, constitute a distinct demographic with unique needs. However, the treatment of this group within correctional systems varies widely across European countries. Some nations integrate young adults into the juvenile system, while others categorise them alongside older incarcerated individuals, leading to disparities in legal treatment, rehabilitation efforts, and training for professionals working in this space. Reports from the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control (HEUNI) indicate that this group is overrepresented in the justice system, comprising 10% of the general population but 21% of the prison population. Additionally, emerging adults receive more custodial sentences than older individuals and have higher recidivism rates.

Despite these challenges, there is no comprehensive European-wide pedagogical training system specifically designed for correctional practitioners. The current landscape of vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) lacks targeted competency frameworks for correctional pedagogy. Many professionals — ranging from educators and social workers to prison officers and psychologists — work with emerging adults without specific training in correctional education. This results in a workforce that operates under outdated models of discipline and control rather than rehabilitation-centred, pedagogy-driven approaches.

The PICTURES project directly responds to these gaps by creating a structured Competencies Ecosystem that integrates VET and HE institutions as research and development poles. The *Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy* introduces mechanisms to build capacity within correctional education, align training opportunities with workforce needs, and foster collaboration between state employers in the justice system and civil society organisations that operate as external service providers. This initiative ensures that correctional professionals gain access to standardised, high-quality training pathways that strengthen institutional resilience and enhance the effectiveness of rehabilitation efforts.

Moreover, investing in the professionalisation of correctional staff aligns with broader European Union objectives, such as reducing recidivism, promoting social inclusion, and improving reintegration outcomes. The strategy facilitates cross-sectoral cooperation by bridging gaps between different stakeholder groups,

including policymakers, training providers, and correctional institutions. By doing so, the project contributes to the European Pact for Skills initiative, ensuring that corrections-related professions are better recognised and supported within lifelong learning frameworks.

Through a combination of policy recommendations, inspiring practices, and competency-based frameworks, the strategy sets a foundation for long-term improvements in correctional education. It aims to professionalise the sector while aligning training systems with the realities of correctional work, ultimately ensuring that all practitioners, regardless of their background, possess the necessary skills to support emerging adults in their rehabilitation and reintegration processes.

2.2 Description of the justice system as an employer, its needs, and gaps

The justice system operates as a complex employer, encompassing a diverse workforce that includes correctional officers, social workers, psychologists, healthcare professionals, educators, legal experts, and administrative personnel. These professionals work across public correctional institutions, probation services, and community reintegration programs, forming a multi-disciplinary workforce responsible for maintaining security, rehabilitation, and reintegration services. However, systemic deficiencies persist, affecting workforce recruitment, retention, training, and professional development. Structural challenges, inequalities in employment conditions, and a misalignment between workforce needs and available Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) opportunities exacerbate the sector's difficulties. These gaps not only weaken workforce resilience but also hinder rehabilitation efforts, increasing risks of recidivism and institutional instability.

Needs of the Justice System as an Employer

The justice system requires a skilled, well-trained, and professionalised workforce capable of handling the increasing complexity of correctional environments. The demand for competency-based training, structured career pathways, and workforce retention strategies is more pressing than ever. Correctional institutions must prioritise staff well-being, equitable employment conditions, and continuous professional development to create a more resilient, motivated, and competent workforce. The sector needs investments in VET and HE pathways to ensure that justice professionals receive training aligned with evidence-based correctional pedagogy, equipping them with the skills necessary to support rehabilitation, social reintegration, and humane detention conditions. Furthermore, justice sector

employers must address issues of workplace discrimination, gender inequality, and career stagnation to create inclusive and sustainable employment structures.

➤ Employment Challenges and Workforce Gaps in the Justice Sector

One of the fundamental challenges facing the justice system as an employer is the increasing complexity of prison work, exacerbated by understaffing, overcrowding, and limited professional development opportunities (Vereycken & Ramioul, 2019). In many European jurisdictions, prison services struggle to attract and retain qualified personnel, leading to high turnover rates and staff shortages, which further strain institutional capacity. Limited investment in human capital, budgetary constraints, and inconsistent recruitment policies result in a fragmented workforce where professionals often lack access to structured career development pathways.

Correctional professionals report excessive caseloads, inadequate psychological support, and increasing risks of burnout, especially when dealing with vulnerable inmate populations, including individuals with mental health disorders and histories of trauma (Liebling et al., 2012). Despite growing recognition of the importance of rehabilitative and reintegrative approaches, many prison systems continue to prioritise disciplinary and security-focused training over holistic, evidence-based correctional pedagogy. Training curricula remain outdated and insufficiently tailored to contemporary correctional challenges, resulting in a workforce that is underprepared to address the complex social, psychological, and rehabilitative needs of incarcerated individuals (Penal Reform International, 2015).

Beyond operational constraints, correctional professionals frequently perform roles beyond their formal training, particularly in mental health support, conflict mediation, and restorative justice initiatives. However, access to lifelong learning opportunities, in-service training, and competency-based professional development remains inconsistent across European correctional systems. Without structured upskilling pathways and access to accredited educational opportunities, justice professionals face career stagnation, job dissatisfaction, and limited prospects for mobility within the sector.

➤ Systemic Gaps and Inequalities in Employment Conditions

The justice system also struggles with inconsistencies in employment conditions, career progression opportunities, and workforce well-being. Correctional professionals across Europe experience varying degrees of job security, contractual stability, and professional recognition. Some correctional staff benefit from stable employment contracts with comprehensive benefits, while others face precarious, short-term contracts that limit long-term career stability and progression. These

disparities contribute to inequalities in professional motivation, workforce retention, and institutional performance.

A key structural gap in correctional employment is the absence of standardised competency frameworks and professionalisation mechanisms. Unlike other public service sectors, where career advancement is linked to formal qualifications, structured training pathways, and accredited learning, the correctional workforce often lacks access to nationally or internationally recognised certification systems. The absence of competency-based accreditation processes and recognition mechanisms limits opportunities for career mobility, cross-sector transitions, and workforce specialisation.

Moreover, gender disparities and racial inequalities persist across correctional employment structures. Research highlights gender-based discrimination, workplace harassment, and structural barriers to leadership as significant challenges for women in correctional employment (Singh Bui & Fossii, 2008). In many prison environments, women remain underrepresented in senior leadership roles, with career progression often hindered by implicit biases and workplace hierarchies (Lambert et al., 2007). Similarly, ethnic minority correctional staff face discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, leading to underrepresentation in managerial positions and higher rates of workplace exclusion (Penal Reform International, 2015). Addressing these inequalities is essential to fostering a more inclusive, diverse, and resilient correctional workforce.

2.3 Overview of the role of VET (Vocational Education and Training) and HE (Higher Education) in addressing these gaps

To address systemic workforce challenges within the European justice sector, the Competencies Ecosystem for PICTURES proposes a strategic alignment between correctional employment needs and structured educational pathways offered by Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE). By establishing clear professionalisation pathways and competency-based learning models, this strategy ensures that correctional professionals receive high-quality, standardised training tailored to the evolving demands of the sector.

By positioning VET and HE institutions as research and development hubs, the justice system can benefit from structured capacity-building mechanisms that enhance workforce capabilities and create sustainable employment models. The lack of structured professional development within correctional employment has long contributed to high attrition rates, skills mismatches, and inadequate training provision, limiting the sector's ability to deliver humane and effective rehabilitative services. The Competencies Ecosystem for PICTURES aims to bridge these gaps by

establishing formalised training structures that integrate correctional pedagogy with broader European educational frameworks.

➤ VET and HE as Catalysts for Workforce Development in Correctional Justice

VET and HE institutions play a pivotal role in the standardisation and professionalisation of correctional careers, providing structured curricula that align with European educational quality frameworks, such as the European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) and the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET). These frameworks ensure that correctional training follows evidence-based, competency-driven models, equipping professionals with the necessary skills, knowledge, and accreditation to improve employment conditions and foster professional mobility.

By developing competency-based frameworks that align correctional job roles with the European Qualification Framework (EQF) levels, VET and HE institutions ensure coherence in skill recognition across different European jurisdictions. In the next phases of the PICTURES project, micro-credentials and accreditation mechanisms will be introduced, allowing correctional professionals to acquire specialised competencies in trauma-informed care, digital literacy, intercultural communication, and resilience-focused approaches. These qualifications ensure that correctional staff can adapt to emerging sectoral challenges, engage in continuous professional development, and access career advancement opportunities.

The integration of micro-credentialing and modular learning approaches allows justice professionals to upskill without disrupting their daily operational responsibilities. Flexible training modalities, including hybrid learning environments, online modules, and work-based training, enable lifelong learning and career development, ensuring that professionals remain equipped to handle increasingly complex correctional environments. By embedding learning technologies and digital education resources, the strategy expands access to high-quality training, particularly for professionals working in understaffed or resource-constrained facilities.

➤ Bridging the Gap Between VET, HE, and Correctional Employers

A major challenge in the current justice sector employment landscape is the disconnect between correctional institutions and educational providers, which limits opportunities for knowledge transfer, collaborative learning, and cross-sectoral engagement. Many correctional professionals enter the workforce without formal education in correctional pedagogy, and existing training structures are fragmented,

inconsistent, and insufficiently adapted to the realities of contemporary correctional work.

The strategy seeks to bridge this gap by fostering partnerships between correctional employers, academic institutions, and civil society organisations, ensuring that training programs are directly informed by labour market needs, human rights frameworks, and correctional workforce realities. This collaboration will provide:

- Multi-level VET and HE curricula development, ensuring that correctional professionals receive progressive, structured learning experiences that align with best practices in rehabilitative justice.
- Competency-based assessment and certification mechanisms, enabling professionals to obtain formal qualifications through national and European accreditation systems.
- Knowledge-sharing initiatives, creating platforms for cross-sectoral engagement, inter-professional learning, and research-based innovation in correctional education.

By leveraging ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications, and Occupations) classifications, correctional pedagogy training will be mapped to labour market needs, fostering greater professional recognition and employability.

Promoting Lifelong Learning and Professionalisation

One of the key objectives of WP3 is to create sustainable professionalisation pathways for correctional professionals, ensuring ongoing skills development, career progression, and knowledge enhancement throughout their careers. This pedagogical approach promotes:

- Lifelong learning initiatives, supporting continuous professional development (CPD) pathways that enable correctional professionals to acquire new qualifications and upskill in response to sectoral needs.
- Work-based learning models, integrating practical, hands-on training within correctional environments, ensuring that learning outcomes are directly applicable to real-world correctional settings.
- Accredited training programs, ensuring that professionals can access recognised educational credentials that contribute to career progression, workforce stability, and institutional resilience.

By embedding these approaches within the Competencies Ecosystem for PICTURES, the strategy elevates correctional employment into a structured, professionalised,

and resilient field, capable of addressing current and future justice sector challenges.

3 Objectives of the Strategy

The *Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy* within the PICTURES project is designed to guide the professionalisation of correctional practitioners by aligning Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) with the specific needs of the correctional sector. The strategy underscores the importance of pedagogy-first practices, advocating for structured, competency-based training pathways that support the growth and resilience of correctional professionals. By providing policy recommendations and best practices, the strategy serves as a reference framework for investments in VET and HE, promoting a systematic, research-driven approach to workforce training in correctional settings.

3.1 Build capacity in VET & HE institutions and research poles

A core objective of the strategy is to strengthen VET and HE institutions as research and development hubs that support correctional workforce professionalisation. Currently, the absence of a coordinated education framework tailored to correctional employment has resulted in fragmented training provision, inconsistent skill development, and limited opportunities for career advancement. The strategy highlights the need for greater investment in these institutions to ensure that justice professionals receive standardised, evidence-based training aligned with workforce needs.

To achieve this, the strategy emphasises:

- **Integrating correctional pedagogy with rehabilitative and reintegrative** approaches, equipping professionals with competencies beyond security and control measures.
- **Developing accreditation frameworks** that align correctional training with European educational standards, ensuring structured, transparent learning pathways.
- **Implementing Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) mechanisms**, enabling professionals with field experience to obtain formal qualifications without having to start from zero.
- **Expanding digital and hybrid learning environments**, increasing access to flexible, high-quality training, particularly in understaffed or resource-limited facilities.

By reinforcing institutional capacity in these areas, the strategy positions VET and HE institutions as key actors in building a qualified, resilient, and well-supported correctional workforce.

3.2 Foster collaboration between state justice employers and civil society stakeholders

The justice sector functions within a fragmented institutional landscape, where state correctional employers and civil society organisations often operate independently, despite serving the same population of incarcerated and reintegrating individuals. This lack of coordination and structured collaboration limits opportunities for knowledge-sharing, workforce development, and rehabilitative innovation.

The strategy highlights the importance of fostering partnerships between public correctional institutions and civil society stakeholders, ensuring better coordination in training and capacity-building efforts. To achieve this, the strategy advocates for:

- **Joint training initiatives** that integrate state-employed and civil society professionals, fostering mutual learning and cross-sector cooperation.
- **Knowledge-sharing platforms** that facilitate dialogue, best practice exchange, and sector-wide learning in correctional pedagogy.
- **Community-based training models** that strengthen workforce connections with post-release reintegration services, ensuring continuity of care and support.
- **Public-private partnerships** that align workforce training with real-world rehabilitation needs, bridging the gap between theory and practice.

By promoting structured collaboration, the strategy envisions a more cohesive, interdisciplinary approach to correctional workforce training, where cross-sector engagement enhances professional development, knowledge transfer, and overall rehabilitation efforts.

3.3 Strengthen skills alignment for the correctional and justice sectors

A persistent challenge in correctional employment is the misalignment between workforce training and sectoral demands. Many justice professionals receive outdated or inconsistent training, with a strong focus on security and discipline, rather than rehabilitative and pedagogical approaches. This skills gap limits professional mobility, career progression, and the effectiveness of correctional institutions in achieving their rehabilitative goals.

To address these issues, the strategy advocates for competency-based education models that ensure:

- **Correctional job roles are mapped to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)**, ensuring clarity in skill recognition across different European jurisdictions.
- **Micro-credentials and modular learning approaches** provide flexible opportunities for professionals to upskill in areas such as trauma-informed care, digital literacy, intercultural communication, and resilience-focused practices.
- **Sector-wide forecasting of future skills needs**, ensuring that VET and HE institutions continuously adapt curricula to reflect evolving correctional challenges.
- **Competency validation mechanisms**, ensuring that training programs produce measurable, practical outcomes aligned with the justice sector's workforce needs.

By reinforcing the alignment between training provision and employment demands, the strategy supports structured career pathways, competency-based qualifications, and sector-wide skills standardisation to enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of correctional workforce development.

4 Methodology

The Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy employs a participatory, evidence-based methodological approach, integrating stakeholder engagement, cross-sectoral collaboration, and empirical data collection to inform policy recommendations and best practices. This methodology ensures that the strategy reflects the realities of correctional employment, enhancing workforce training and education through Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE). The approach prioritises pedagogy-first practices, fostering sector-wide resilience and professionalisation.

4.1 Description of the participatory approach taken

A participatory methodology was fundamental in shaping the *Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy*, ensuring that stakeholders across the correctional sector actively contributed to its development. The approach sought to integrate diverse perspectives, including state-employed justice professionals, civil society organisations, academic institutions, and policymakers, creating an inclusive framework for correctional workforce development.

The participatory methodology included the following key elements:

- **Desk Research**
 - A review of existing policies, best practices, and competency frameworks in correctional education across Europe.
 - Identification of challenges in professional training and employment conditions for correctional practitioners.
 - Mapping of relevant European initiatives, aligning correctional education with policy trends in lifelong learning, vocational training, and higher education.
- **DACUM (Developing a Curriculum) Workshops**
 - Conducted at national levels to analyse competency gaps in correctional workforce training and prioritise educational investments.
 - Participants included correctional officers, educators, psychologists, legal professionals, and social workers.
 - Structured to align sectoral needs with competency-based education models and European standards.
- **Stakeholder Consultations**
 - Series of structured interviews and focus groups with professionals working in correctional institutions.
 - Engagement with training providers, policymakers, and community reintegration specialists to ensure multi-sectoral perspectives.
- **Questionnaires and Surveys**
 - Conducted with students, correctional staff, educators, and professionals involved in criminal justice.
 - Designed to assess training needs, workforce challenges, and employment barriers.
- **International Webinar**
 - Facilitated cross-national exchange of experiences in correctional settings across Europe, professional training, and skills development.
 - Brought together European stakeholders to contribute insights on professional training needs and competency frameworks.

Through multi-level engagement, this participatory approach ensured that the *Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy* prioritises evidence-based, sector-relevant, and sustainable workforce solutions.

4.2 Criteria for selecting policy recommendations and inspiring practices

The selection of policy recommendations and inspiring practices was based on a rigorous evaluation framework, ensuring their relevance, sustainability, and scalability. Each intervention was assessed using the following criteria:

1. Alignment with Correctional Pedagogy Principles

- Prioritises education-first approaches to professionalise correctional staff.
- Integrates rehabilitative and reintegrative strategies within training frameworks.

2. Addressing Workforce Capacity and Training Gaps

- Supports competency-based education aligned with correctional workforce needs.
- Ensures training meets the evolving demands of correctional institutions and justice sector employment.

3. Promoting Cross-Sector Collaboration

- Strengthens synergies between VET, HE institutions, and correctional employers.
- Encourages public-private partnerships to enhance learning opportunities and professional development.

4. Supporting Professional Mobility and Accreditation

- Links training programs to European Qualification Framework (EQF) levels.
- Includes recognition of prior learning (RPL) and micro-credentialing mechanisms to support career progression.

5. Ensuring Transferability and Scalability

- Showcases innovative models of correctional education that can be adapted to various European contexts.
- Aligns policy recommendations with European justice sector reforms and workforce strategies.

The selected policies and best practices ensure that investments in vocational and higher education contribute to long-term workforce resilience and enhanced correctional sector professionalisation.

4.3 Data collection and analysis methods used

A mixed-methods research approach was employed to provide a comprehensive and multidimensional understanding of correctional workforce needs and training requirements. The methodology combined qualitative and quantitative research to ensure a robust, data-driven foundation for policy recommendations.

Data Collection Methods

- **Desk Research & Preliminary Mapping**

- Analysis of research reports, policy documents, and training frameworks related to correctional education.
- Identification of best practices in vocational education and higher education curricula for justice professionals.
- **Needs Assessment & Sectoral Analysis**
 - Mapping roles, responsibilities, and professional skills gaps in the correctional sector.
 - Evaluating current training provisions and their alignment with workforce demands.
- **DACUM (Developing A Curriculum) Workshops**
 - Engaged professionals across different correctional roles to map job tasks, competencies, and training needs.
 - Established a structured methodology for competency-based education models in correctional training.
- **Stakeholder Engagement & Validation Workshops**
 - Structured interviews with prison educators, justice professionals, and policymakers.
 - Workshops to validate findings and ensure alignment with national and European policy trends.
- **International Webinar and European-Level Synthesis**
 - Collaborative sessions to evaluate, refine, and harmonise competency frameworks with vocational and higher education standards.
 - Facilitated discussion on justice sector skills needs and the role of correctional pedagogy in workforce training.

➤ Data Analysis Techniques

The methodology employed multiple data analysis techniques to ensure a rigorous, evidence-based framework for correctional workforce professionalisation:

- **Content Analysis**
 - Thematic coding of stakeholder interviews, focus group discussions, and policy documents.
 - Identification of key themes in correctional pedagogy and professional training frameworks.
- **Comparative Analysis**
 - Cross-national comparison of correctional training models and workforce structures.
 - Identification of common skills gaps and challenges in correctional workforce development.
- **Quantitative Analysis**
 - Statistical evaluation of survey responses on training participation, professional mobility, and skills development needs.

- Mapping competency frameworks to EQF levels for standardisation across European jurisdictions.

This data-driven approach ensures that the *Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy* is empirically grounded, sector-responsive, and aligned with workforce needs.

5 Policy Recommendations

The Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy outlines 15 policy recommendations aimed at strengthening vocational education and training (VET) and higher education (HE) to support current and future work in emerging adults' justice and the correctional sector. These recommendations reflect sectoral needs, align with European Union priorities, and are consistent with the Pact for Skills initiatives.

5.1 Summary

The policy recommendations presented in this strategy aim to strengthen the correctional education framework by aligning national and European priorities with best practices identified across the 10 partner countries. These recommendations build upon existing policies and strategic frameworks in correctional education, employment reintegration, and justice reform, with a particular emphasis on addressing the specific needs of emerging adults within the correctional system.

The 15 policy recommendations focus on key areas such as vocational education and training (VET), rehabilitation and reintegration mechanisms, professional capacity-building for correctional staff, inter-agency cooperation, and the adaptation of existing justice policies to improve outcomes for young adults in custodial settings. Each recommendation has been developed in response to national needs assessments, sectoral analysis, and stakeholder consultations conducted as part of the project.

These recommendations align with EU priorities for education, justice reform, and social inclusion, particularly under the European Skills Agenda and the Pact for Skills Initiative. By reinforcing education-first approaches, competency-based training, and cross-sectoral collaboration, the policies contribute to the broader European objectives of enhancing employability, reducing recidivism, and fostering social reintegration for individuals leaving the correctional system.

The recommendations also ensure cross-national policy coherence by integrating evidence-based approaches to correctional pedagogy, ensuring that emerging adults receive structured education and training opportunities that support their reintegration into society. The following section presents each of the 15 policy

recommendations, outlining their objectives, implementation strategies, and expected impact.

5.2 Detailed Policies

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Strategic Guidelines for Dealing with Prisoners with Violent and Extremist Behavior (2020-2025)

- **Policy Recommendation:** Establish clear institutional roles in preventing radicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration within correctional facilities. Strengthen inter-agency cooperation through the Action Plan.
- **Objectives:** Improve legal regulations, enhance staff training, develop cooperation mechanisms, and strengthen post-release support.
- **Expected Impact:** Reduce extremism and violence in prisons, improve staff competencies, and increase social acceptance of former inmates.

Case Management Manual for Violent and Extremist Prisoners

- **Policy Recommendation:** Implement structured case management to improve reintegration outcomes and reduce recidivism.
- **Objectives:** Improve documentation processes, strengthen inter-agency coordination, and enhance psychosocial support for inmates.
- **Expected Impact:** Increased employment rates of ex-prisoners, enhanced training for correctional staff, and lower recidivism.

Bulgaria

Integrated Inter-Institutional System of Information Sharing

- **Policy Recommendation:** Develop a digitalized system for tracking inmate progress and inter-agency information sharing.
- **Objectives:** Improve coordination between penitentiary and social institutions, enable tailored rehabilitation programs.
- **Expected Impact:** Increased resocialization outcomes and reduced recidivism.

Provision of Innovative Educational and Vocational Training for Illiterate Adults

- **Policy Recommendation:** Train correctional staff in specialized education methods for illiterate emerging adults.

- **Objectives:** Develop targeted educational programs, introduce visual and practical learning techniques.
- **Expected Impact:** Improved employability of ex-prisoners and increased effectiveness of correctional education.

Croatia

National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) Reforms

- **Policy Recommendation:** Expand community-based social services and professional training to support reintegration.
- **Objectives:** Strengthen employment services, provide psychosocial counseling, and reduce institutionalization.
- **Expected Impact:** Increased social inclusion and reduced disparities in regional correctional services.

Courts of the Republic of Croatia - Education of Prisoners and Juveniles

- **Policy Recommendation:** Implement individualized rehabilitation strategies, including risk assessments and tailored educational plans.
- **Objectives:** Reduce recidivism, improve prison conditions, and strengthen psychosocial support.
- **Expected Impact:** Enhanced rehabilitation outcomes and increased public confidence in correctional institutions.

Greece

Mechanism for Individualized Post-Release Monitoring

- **Policy Recommendation:** Establish a structured follow-up mechanism for ex-prisoners' reintegration.
- **Objectives:** Monitor employment and educational pathways, optimize vocational training.
- **Expected Impact:** Improved long-term reintegration and reduced recidivism.

Employer Incentives for Hiring Former Prisoners

- **Policy Recommendation:** Introduce tax benefits and quotas for companies employing ex-prisoners.
- **Objectives:** Strengthen employer engagement and increase job placement opportunities.
- **Expected Impact:** Reduced social stigma and improved employment rates.

Italy

Caivano Decree (2023) - Alternative Sentencing for Emerging Adults

- **Policy Recommendation:** Promote community-based sentencing and restorative justice.
- **Objectives:** Reduce prison overcrowding, prioritize social reintegration.
- **Expected Impact:** Lower rates of emerging adults in prisons and increased participation in social programs.

Integration of Cultural Mediators in Correctional Institutions

- **Policy Recommendation:** Institutionalize the role of cultural mediators in correctional facilities.
- **Objectives:** Improve communication with foreign inmates, support staff training.
- **Expected Impact:** Enhanced prison conditions and improved reintegration outcomes.

Montenegro

Strategies for the Execution of Criminal Sanctions (2023-2026)

- **Policy Recommendation:** Implement human-rights-based correctional reforms.
- **Objectives:** Strengthen rehabilitation programs, improve prison infrastructure.
- **Expected Impact:** Improved institutional capacity and reduced prison overcrowding.

North Macedonia

Post-Penal Program for Reintegration (2022-2025)

- **Policy Recommendation:** Establish structured pre-release support and resocialization programs.
- **Objectives:** Reduce recidivism, increase inter-agency coordination.
- **Expected Impact:** Increased successful social reintegration rates.

Portugal

DGRSP Continuous Training Program for Correctional Staff

- **Policy Recommendation:** Expand specialized training in restorative justice and correctional pedagogy.

- **Objectives:** Improve staff competencies, align education with correctional needs.
- **Expected Impact:** Stronger alignment between correctional systems and VET institutions.

Romania

Scaling Accredited Vocational Training in Correctional Facilities

- **Policy Recommendation:** Expand industry-aligned vocational certification programs.
- **Objectives:** Increase inmate participation in training and job placement support.
- **Expected Impact:** Higher employability and lower recidivism rates.

Serbia

Development of Specialized Education Programs for Correctional Staff

- **Policy Recommendation:** Strengthen correctional staff training through evidence-based learning.
- **Objectives:** Improve professional capacities and introduce trauma-informed practices.
- **Expected Impact:** More effective rehabilitation programs and improved justice sector efficiency.

6 Inspiring Practices

The Inspiring Practices presented in this strategy highlight innovative, effective, and scalable approaches to professionalisation in the correctional sector. These practices demonstrate how education, vocational training, and reintegration efforts can be effectively structured to meet the needs of emerging adults in correctional facilities.

These practices offer concrete examples of programs that align with vocational education and training (VET), higher education (HE), and workforce integration. They also serve as reference points for the Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy, ensuring alignment with broader rehabilitation policies and reinforcing evidence-based methodologies within correctional settings.

6.1 Overview

The selection of Inspiring Practices within the Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy reflects a commitment to identifying and disseminating effective, scalable,

and sustainable approaches to professionalisation in the correctional sector. These practices have been carefully chosen based on a structured evaluation methodology, ensuring their relevance to vocational education and training (VET), higher education (HE), and workforce development within correctional settings. They provide a roadmap for aligning training systems with the needs of emerging adults, supporting their rehabilitation, and fostering long-term social and economic reintegration.

Selection Criteria

The identification of 20 Inspiring Practices was guided by a series of key criteria that ensured their applicability and potential for transferability across different correctional systems. Each practice was assessed based on:

- **Effectiveness in Delivering Measurable Outcomes:** Demonstrated impact on rehabilitation, reintegration, and educational attainment among emerging adults in correctional environments.
- **Potential for Transferability Across Different Justice Systems:** Adaptability to various national contexts with modifications that respect local policy and institutional frameworks.
- **Sustainability and Long-Term Institutional Integration:** Capacity for long-term adoption, supported by institutional frameworks and funding mechanisms.
- **Alignment with Competency-Based Training Models:** Reinforcement of key pedagogical competencies, supporting the professionalisation of correctional practitioners.
- **Innovation in Pedagogy, Vocational Training, and Reintegration Support:** Introduction of new teaching techniques, digital tools, and trauma-informed approaches to education.
- **Stakeholder Collaboration and Cross-Sector Engagement:** Strong partnerships between correctional facilities, education providers, civil society organisations, and employers to support reintegration.

Building on Proven Models

The Inspiring Practices incorporate successful approaches from related fields, reinforcing their relevance and applicability. Many of these initiatives draw from:

- **Juvenile justice education models,** where structured pedagogical interventions have reduced recidivism and fostered skill development.

- **Workforce reintegration programmes**, focusing on equipping marginalised populations with vocational skills for meaningful employment opportunities.
- **Community-based rehabilitation models**, ensuring emerging adults have access to structured post-release support.
- **Restorative justice frameworks**, promoting accountability, personal development, and community reintegration.

Integration into the Competencies Ecosystem

The Inspiring Practices contribute directly to the Competencies Ecosystem, offering concrete mechanisms for:

- Enhancing vocational and educational training within correctional facilities.
- Strengthening professional development pathways for correctional practitioners.
- Fostering cross-sector collaboration between education, justice, and employment services.
- Promoting equity and inclusion within correctional education systems through trauma-informed and needs-based approaches.

Implementation and Scaling

The integration of Inspiring Practices within the Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy requires:

- **Policy Alignment:** Embedding practices within national and institutional policies for sustained investment and adoption.
- **Capacity Building:** Providing ongoing professional development for practitioners.
- **Evaluation and Continuous Improvement:** Establishing mechanisms for assessing impact and adapting interventions.
- **Cross-Sector Collaboration:** Strengthening partnerships between justice professionals, civil society organisations, and educational institutions.

6.2 Detailed Practices

Bosnia and Herzegovina

1. Specialist Training for Juvenile Justice

- This training program is designed for judges and prosecutors involved in juvenile justice. It includes theoretical sessions on juvenile criminal law and practical visits to correctional institutions to enhance their understanding of criminal proceedings involving minors.

2. Visit to the Penitentiary by the Serbian Orthodox Church

- A rehabilitation initiative that incorporates spiritual guidance for inmates. Representatives from the Serbian Orthodox Church visit correctional facilities to provide counselling and support, aiming to promote personal transformation and reduce recidivism.

Bulgaria

3. Enhancing the Capacity of Prison Staff

- This program focuses on improving the training of correctional officers, emphasizing rehabilitative approaches and strengthening prison management practices through professional development.

4. Rehabilitation of Inmates in Preparation for Release

- A structured rehabilitation plan targeting vulnerable groups within the prison population. It provides psychological support, educational programs, and vocational training to facilitate reintegration.

Croatia

5. Education of Prisoners and Juveniles

- An initiative designed to improve educational opportunities for incarcerated individuals, focusing on literacy, vocational training, and formal education programs within correctional facilities.

6. Moto#R - Motivation and Empowerment for Resocialization

- A structured program that uses mentorship and career development planning to support incarcerated individuals in their transition to society, helping them build self-confidence and professional skills.

Greece

7. Integrated Inter-Institutional System of Information Sharing

- A digital platform that facilitates communication between justice and rehabilitation services, ensuring that inmates receive consistent support throughout their incarceration and reintegration.

8. Provision of Innovative and Up-to-Date Educational and Professional Training

- Focuses on enhancing the education of inmates, particularly illiterate adults, by providing tailored literacy and vocational training to increase employability.

Italy

9. Collaborative Cross-Sector Training and Education Programs

- This initiative develops integrated education programs combining vocational training, higher education, and research-based learning to improve correctional workforce skills and inmate rehabilitation.

10. Strengthening Continuous Training for Professionals in Correctional Settings

- A professional development strategy aimed at equipping correctional staff with advanced training in restorative justice, rehabilitation, and alternative sanctions.

Montenegro

11. System of Alternative Sanctions and Probation

- A legal framework supporting the transition of offenders from incarceration to reintegration through probation programs, community service, and personalized rehabilitation strategies.

12. Improving the Protection of Human Rights of Detained and Imprisoned Persons

- Focuses on monitoring prison conditions and ensuring compliance with international human rights standards to protect inmates from mistreatment

North Macedonia

13. The State of Post-Penal Assistance and Resocialization

- A comprehensive post-release support system that helps former inmates reintegrate into society through employment assistance, counselling, and housing support.

14. Analysis of Awareness About Probation Among Convicted Persons

- A research-based initiative assessing inmates' understanding of probation and identifying gaps in knowledge to enhance educational programs on alternative sentencing.

Portugal

15. Continuous Training for Social Reintegration Technicians and Prison Guards

- A structured training program designed to upskill prison guards and social workers in modern rehabilitation techniques, including trauma-informed care.

16. EDUPRIS - Education, Training, and Lifelong Learning for Juveniles and Young Adults in Correctional Justice

- A comprehensive education strategy that integrates vocational training, higher education, and skill development for incarcerated youth.

Romania

17. Support for Research Centers and Collaboration with Universities for Evidence-Based Policy Development

- Strengthens the connection between academic institutions and correctional facilities to develop evidence-based rehabilitation policies.

18. Education on Financial Literacy and Employment Opportunities

- Aims to improve inmates' financial knowledge and job readiness, reducing their likelihood of reoffending by equipping them with essential life skills.

Serbia

19. System of Alternative Sanctions and Probation

- Implements alternative sentencing models such as house arrest, community service, and addiction treatment to reduce prison overcrowding and promote rehabilitation.

20. Mentorship Programs for Reintegration of Former Offenders

- A structured mentorship initiative that pairs former inmates with trained professionals who guide them through the reintegration process, ensuring sustained support and skill-building

7 The Competencies Ecosystem Framework

The Competencies Ecosystem Framework is a structured approach designed to professionalise correctional education by establishing a cohesive and competency-driven training system for professionals working in correctional settings. This framework is fundamental to ensuring that vocational education and training (VET), higher education (HE), and workforce development strategies are aligned with the evolving needs of correctional pedagogy.

By integrating competency-based training models, institutional cooperation, and evidence-based professionalisation pathways, the ecosystem enhances the capabilities of correctional practitioners, reinforcing their role in rehabilitation, social reintegration, and justice administration.

The framework is designed to be scalable, adaptable, and transferable, allowing correctional institutions across different jurisdictions to standardise training requirements, facilitate cross-sector collaboration, and ensure long-term sustainability of competency-driven education for correctional staff.

The Competencies Ecosystem Framework is built upon three core pillars:

1. **Competency-Based Training & Professionalisation** – Ensuring that training is structured, accredited, and aligned with key correctional education principles.
2. **Intersectoral Collaboration & Institutional Integration** – Establishing clear links between VET & HE institutions, correctional facilities, policymakers, and civil society organisations.
3. **Sustainability & Workforce Adaptation** – Embedding the framework within national correctional strategies to ensure continued professional development and career progression opportunities.

This integrated approach guarantees that correctional professionals are equipped with the necessary skills, methodologies, and pedagogical tools to contribute effectively to rehabilitative and reintegration processes in correctional systems.

7.1 Detailed description of the ecosystem, its components, and

mechanisms

The Competencies Ecosystem Framework is structured around three interdependent components, which form the basis for standardised, competency-driven correctional training.

1. Competency-Based Training Structure

This component focuses on formalising training pathways for correctional professionals by integrating evidence-based pedagogical principles into their education. It includes:

- **Development of core competencies** for professionals in correctional settings, ensuring they meet structured training standards.
- **Accreditation of training programs** in line with national and European qualification frameworks.
- **Implementation of modular, competency-based curricula** that allow practitioners to specialise in areas such as offender rehabilitation, restorative justice, and trauma-informed care.
- **Integration of digital learning methodologies** and blended learning approaches to support accessible and continuous professional development.

2. Multi-Stakeholder Engagement & Institutional Integration

This component ensures that training initiatives are aligned with institutional needs and that professionals receive structured support throughout their career progression. It includes:

- **Collaboration between VET & HE institutions**, correctional facilities, and justice administration bodies to ensure cohesive professional development pathways.
- **Development of knowledge exchange platforms** where academic institutions, correctional practitioners, and policymakers co-create best practices in correctional pedagogy.
- **Strengthening inter-institutional communication channels** to align training outcomes with workforce demands and justice sector policies.
- **Establishing mentorship programs and professional supervision structures** to guide practitioners through training and career development.

3. Sustainable Implementation and Workforce Adaptation

For long-term success, the framework includes mechanisms that embed competency-based training within correctional institutions, ensuring sustainability. These mechanisms include:

- **Institutional recognition of acquired competencies**, ensuring professional qualifications are integrated into national correctional career frameworks.
- **Systematic monitoring and evaluation mechanisms** to assess training effectiveness and adapt competency models to evolving correctional needs.
- **Long-term policy integration**, ensuring correctional pedagogy remains aligned with best practices in rehabilitation, reintegration, and alternative sentencing.
- **Continuous funding and resource allocation strategies**, ensuring the ecosystem is not dependent on short-term project funding but is embedded in national training budgets.

Together, these three components ensure that correctional practitioners are professionally trained and continuously supported, reinforcing their ability to contribute to effective rehabilitation, reduced recidivism, and social reintegration of incarcerated individuals.

7.2 Explanation of how VET & HE institutions connect with state and civil society employers

A key element of the Competencies Ecosystem Framework is its ability to connect Vocational Education and Training (VET) and Higher Education (HE) institutions with state institutions, correctional employers, and civil society organisations.

This connection is crucial for ensuring that correctional staff training aligns with:

- Institutional requirements for professionalisation.
- Labour market demands for competency-based qualifications.
- Policy-driven educational strategies in correctional pedagogy.

Key Connection Mechanisms

1. Competency-Based Curricula Development

- VET and HE institutions co-develop standardised training modules tailored for correctional staff.

- Courses integrate pedagogical expertise, rehabilitation methodologies, and justice sector requirements.
- Accredited training pathways ensure professionals gain nationally and internationally recognised qualifications.

2. **Structured Collaboration with Correctional Institutions**

- State correctional agencies work with educational providers to embed competency-based training into staff development programs.
- Correctional facilities host practical training placements, providing professionals with hands-on experience.
- Joint research initiatives strengthen the evidence base for correctional pedagogy practices.

3. **Cross-Sector Partnerships for Workforce Development**

- Employers align recruitment policies with competency frameworks, ensuring staff qualifications match sector needs.
- Civil society organisations support on-the-job training and community reintegration programs.
- Continuous professional development is supported through lifelong learning pathways and certification programs.

This interconnected ecosystem ensures that correctional professionals receive high-quality, competency-based training, equipping them with the skills needed to support offender rehabilitation and reintegration.

7.3 **Process flow and roles of key stakeholders in the justice and correctional sectors**

The Competencies Ecosystem Framework establishes a structured process flow that defines the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in the justice and correctional sectors.

Process Flow: From Competency Development to Professional Integration

Justice & Correctional Institutions

- Define training needs for correctional staff.
- Embed competency-based training into national correctional policies.

- Ensure on-site training and professional development opportunities.

VET & HE Institutions

- Develop structured competency-based curricula.
- Deliver training programs, workshops, and professional certifications.
- Support applied research in correctional pedagogy.

Employers in the Correctional Sector

- Align recruitment strategies with competency-based qualifications.
- Provide mentorship, supervision, and career progression pathways.
- Integrate competency-based learning into professional standards.

Civil Society & Reintegration Organisations

- Facilitate community-based training initiatives for correctional professionals.
- Provide support structures for offender reintegration.
- Engage in policy advocacy and research collaborations.

Government & Policymakers

- Integrate competency-based training within national correctional strategies.
- Secure long-term funding and policy support for professionalisation.
- Establish monitoring and evaluation systems to assess impact.

8 Conclusion

The *Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy* introduced through the PICTURES project represents an innovative, structured, and evidence-based framework aimed at enhancing the professionalisation of correctional practitioners across Europe. Through an ecosystem-based approach, the strategy bridges critical gaps between Vocational Education and Training (VET), Higher Education (HE), justice sector employers, and civil society stakeholders. By aligning competency-based training models with correctional workforce needs, it lays the foundation for sustainable capacity-building, ensuring that professionals working with emerging adults in correctional settings are adequately trained, well-supported, and equipped with transversal, rehabilitative, and reintegration-focused skills.

This strategy is not just a policy framework but a call to action for systemic transformation. It introduces concrete mechanisms for competency-based learning, lifelong professional development, and cross-sector collaboration, directly addressing workforce shortages, skill misalignment, and training fragmentation in the justice sector. By incorporating 15 Policy Recommendations and 20 Inspiring Practices, the strategy offers a scalable model that integrates education-first approaches, aligning correctional training with broader European workforce priorities, justice reforms, and rehabilitation-focused policies.

The impact of this strategy extends beyond training correctional practitioners — it strengthens the entire competency ecosystem, ensuring that emerging adults in the justice system have access to structured, pedagogy-driven interventions that support their social reintegration and long-term desistance from offending behaviors.

8.1 Recap of the strategy's importance and innovation

The *Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy* is a pioneering initiative designed to:

- Professionalise correctional practitioners by embedding structured, competency-based learning aligned with European educational and employment frameworks.
- Bridge the gap between VET, HE, and the justice sector, ensuring that correctional education meets real-world workforce demands.
- Introduce scalable, research-backed training models that strengthen rehabilitative and reintegration-focused approaches for emerging adults.
- Enhance cross-sector collaboration by connecting state-employed justice professionals, civil society organisations, and educational institutions, ensuring integrated, evidence-based training.
- Foster workforce sustainability and mobility, enabling correctional staff to gain transferable, accredited qualifications that support career development and institutional resilience.

The Competencies Ecosystem introduced in this strategy ensures that justice professionals receive holistic, continuous, and standardised training, moving beyond security-based models towards rehabilitation-centred correctional pedagogy. By leveraging micro-credentialing, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and EQF-aligned competency frameworks, the strategy ensures that justice practitioners across Europe are equipped to handle the complex social,

psychological, and pedagogical challenges associated with emerging adults in correctional settings.

Furthermore, the emphasis on trauma-informed, restorative justice, and digital competency-based training places this strategy at the forefront of European efforts to modernise correctional education, enhance workforce professionalisation, and reduce recidivism.

8.2 Call to action for stakeholders to engage with and support the strategy

For the *Correctional Pedagogy Competencies Strategy* to achieve its full potential, stakeholders across multiple sectors must commit to its implementation, expansion, and sustainability. This strategy is not a static policy document but an action-oriented roadmap for improving education, training, and professional development in the correctional sector.

To achieve lasting impact, key actors must engage in the following actions:

1. National and Local Governments:

- Adopt policy recommendations that integrate competency-based training within national correctional systems.
- Secure funding to ensure long-term investment in VET and HE-driven correctional education.
- Ensure alignment between justice policies and rehabilitative correctional pedagogy.

2. VET & HE Institutions:

- Strengthen partnerships with correctional institutions to co-develop training curricula and professional development pathways.
- Embed competency-based frameworks into correctional education and workforce training.
- Expand accreditation opportunities for correctional staff through micro-credentials and certification mechanisms.

3. Correctional Institutions & Employers:

- Embed competency-based learning within internal training structures for correctional professionals.

- Invest in ongoing professional development to align workforce needs with evidence-based correctional pedagogy.
- Strengthen employer engagement with VET & HE providers to facilitate professional mobility.

4. **Civil Society Organisations & NGOs:**

- Support cross-sector collaboration between justice professionals, educators, and reintegration service providers.
- Advocate for inclusive, rehabilitation-centered correctional policies.
- Participate in knowledge exchange initiatives to ensure best practices are implemented across different correctional contexts.

5. **European Commission & EU Institutions:**

- Integrate the Competencies Ecosystem into broader EU justice and skills development initiatives.
- Facilitate transnational exchange of best practices to ensure the scalability and adaptability of the strategy.
- Encourage Member States to implement competency-based corrections education as part of their workforce development strategies.

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