

ESG, THE FREE INSTITUTIONAL COURSES, AND WHAT KNOWING AND PRACTISING ADD BEYOND THE CERTIFICATE

What the frameworks require, what a certificate records, what practice shows, and a checked catalogue

ESG and free institutional courses

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Transparency: revision 2-C drafted with the assistance of Claude (Anthropic) from revision 1-G, itself drafted with the assistance of Grok (xAI). New facts checked against the sources listed in section 14 on 08/10/2026. Catalogue entries carry the check date of revision 1-G, 07/10/2026. Framework mapping follows the source post and is not an official crosswalk published by IFRS, GRI or the FSB.

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Source post: Milene Pardo-Figueroa, LinkedIn, about 30/09/2026, "I almost paid \$3,200 for an ESG certification".

Revision history

Entries are chronological. None is deleted. A change of layout is recorded here in the same way as a change of substance.

Revision 1-G — First English issue. Explains ESG, separates a free certificate of completion from third-party assurance, reproduces the ten-course list in the source post, and corrects it against institutional pages checked on 07/10/2026. Complementary free pathways added (OECD Academy, InforMEA, World Bank Open Learning Campus, GHG Protocol open webinars, Candriam Academy, EFRAG/ISSB primary texts). Margins set at 0.79 cm on A4. Running header from the body section. Footer “page X / Y”.

Revision 2-C — Subject taken up again to examine what knowledge and practice are worth independently of the certificate. New sections 5 (what a certificate records), 6 (worked Scope 1 and 2 case on published 2025 factors), 7 (three court and prosecutor files, Directive (EU) 2024/825, divergence of ratings), 8 (value-chain cap of Directive (EU) 2026/470) and 11 (six exercises). Section 3 updated for Omnibus I and the revised ESRS adopted on 03/07/2026; section 4 updated for the effective date of ISSA 5000. Former sections 5 to 10 renumbered 9, 10, 12, 13, 14 and 15; their catalogue content is unchanged and keeps the check date of 07/10/2026. Title and subtitle extended. Tables numbered. Layout: heading of page 2 put in English to match the language of the document; index rebuilt from the text extracted from the converted file, which corrects the entry “10. Acronyms ... 30” of revision 1-G; margins, running header and footer unchanged.

1. Purpose and method

This note explains Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) in operational terms, then lists short courses and certificates that can be taken without a tuition fee. It starts from a LinkedIn post by Milene Pardo-Figueroa (about 30 September 2026) which states that a commercial ESG certification quoted at USD 3,200 can be replaced by free courses from the United Nations, the World Bank and the OECD, mapped to GRI, IFRS, TCFD, the UN Guiding Principles and OECD responsible business conduct. The USD 3,200 figure is the author's statement. It was not re-priced.

Each title in that post was checked, where a stable page exists, against the provider's own catalogue on 07 October 2026. Durations and certificate fees on those pages do not always match the post. Where they differ, the institutional page is used. Complementary pathways were added only where the provider states that access is free. A course that is free to audit, with a paid certificate, is labelled as such. It is not presented as a free certification.

The framework tags in the source post (for example "IFRS S2, SBTi, GRI 302/305" next to a 90-minute climate primer) are a pedagogical map made by the author. They are useful as a reading order. They are not a crosswalk issued by the IFRS Foundation, GRI or the Financial Stability Board.

This revision keeps the catalogue and takes up the question the post leaves open: what a learner gains from the knowledge and from using it, whether or not a certificate is downloaded at the end. Sections 5 to 8 and 11 are new. They rest on one worked calculation with published 2025 factors, two court rulings, one prosecutor's decision, one directive applicable since 27 September 2026, two studies on learning and one on ratings. Sections 9 and 10 reproduce the catalogue of revision 1-G with its check date of 07 October 2026; prices were not read again.

2. What ESG is

ESG is a way of organising non-financial information that investors, lenders, customers and regulators use when they judge whether an organisation can keep operating. The three letters are not a single standard and not a rating.

Environmental covers how the organisation uses energy, water and materials, what it emits, how it handles waste, and how physical climate and nature loss can stop a project or a supply line. For an industrial or energy operator this is the measurable part: fuel, fugitive emissions, water abstraction, land disturbance, and the climate assumptions inside a 20-year asset.

Social covers the people the organisation depends on and affects: workforce health and safety, labour conditions in the supply chain, community consent, indigenous rights, diversity of treatment rather than slogans, and the human-rights due diligence now expected under the UN Guiding Principles. A fatality, a strike, or a blocked permit is a social fact with a cash consequence.

Governance covers who decides, who is paid for what, how conflicts are disclosed, how climate and human-rights risks reach the board, and whether reported numbers can be traced to a method. Weak governance is why two companies with the same emissions intensity can carry different capital costs.

The label entered mainstream finance with the 2004 UNEP Finance Initiative report *Who Cares Wins*, commissioned with the UN Global Compact, and with the Principles for Responsible Investment in 2006. It is not the same thing as corporate social responsibility, which was mostly voluntary narrative. It is not the same thing as the Sustainable Development Goals, which are a state-level agenda to 2030. ESG is the slice of that agenda that shows up in enterprise risk, disclosure and capital allocation.

Two confusions do most of the damage. The first is to treat an ESG score from a data vendor as a measurement. MSCI, Sustainalytics, S&P and others use different indicators and different weights; the same issuer can be a leader on one scale and a laggard on another (measured in section 7). The second is to treat a training certificate as evidence that an organisation performs. The certificate shows that a person finished a course. Performance is shown by data, a method, and, where the user of the data requires it, independent assurance.

3. Frameworks named in the source post

GRI, the Global Reporting Initiative, publishes modular standards for impact reporting. GRI 1 to 3 set the system and the materiality test. Topic standards cover energy (302), emissions (305), waste (306), diversity (405) and non-discrimination (406), among others. The standards are free to read. GRI Academy courses are a separate, generally paid, product.

IFRS S1 and IFRS S2 are the sustainability disclosure standards issued by the International Sustainability Standards Board. S1 requires disclosure of sustainability-related risks and opportunities that can affect cash flows, access to finance or cost of

capital. S2 is the climate standard and absorbs the architecture of the Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures: governance, strategy, risk management, metrics and targets. TCFD itself was disbanded in 2023; its work sits inside IFRS S2. The standards and the IFRS educational materials are free to read. That is not the same as a paid professional diploma.

The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011) set the corporate duty to respect human rights: a policy, a due-diligence process, and a remedy where harm occurs. OECD Responsible Business Conduct extends the same logic across environment, labour, bribery, consumer interests and disclosure, with a risk-based due-diligence method published in 2018 and sector guides after it. The Science Based Targets initiative is a validation scheme for corporate emission targets aligned with climate science; the guidance is free, the validation is not. The Basel Convention controls transboundary movements of hazardous waste; the plastics amendments are the reason a waste course sits in an ESG list.

In the European Union the binding layer is the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and the European Sustainability Reporting Standards. Both changed in 2026. Directive (EU) 2026/470, published on 26 February 2026 and in force since 18 March 2026, limits mandatory reporting to undertakings with more than 1,000 employees and more than EUR 450 million of net annual turnover. On 3 July 2026 the Commission adopted a delegated act revising the ESRS and a second one establishing a voluntary standard for undertakings outside that scope. Delegated acts pass through a scrutiny period of two months, extendable by two, before publication in the Official Journal; EY expects the revised ESRS to enter into force on 10 November 2026 if no objection is raised, with mandatory application from financial year 2027. EFRAG publishes the standards and implementation guidance free of charge. A learner in France or elsewhere in the Union should read ESRS beside IFRS S2, not instead of the primary legal text.

4. A certificate of completion is not assurance

The useful comment under the source post, from Rashid Mehr, draws the line that the post itself blurs. A free course with a certificate of completion teaches a framework. It does not verify that an organisation has implemented the framework, measured what it claims, or submitted the result to an independent tester. That second act is assurance, inspection or certification of a system, and it is sold by the testing, inspection and certification industry against ISO standards, ISAE 3000, ISSA 5000 and national schemes. The two products answer different questions.

ISSA 5000, issued by the International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board in November 2024, applies to sustainability information reported for periods beginning on or after 15 December 2026. From that date it replaces ISAE 3000 (Revised) and ISAE 3410 for these engagements in the jurisdictions that adopt IAASB standards.

The OECD states the same limit in its own FAQ: the Academy certificate is a certificate of completion, not a diploma and not an accreditation of competence. UN CC:Learn certificates are digital certificates of completion, sometimes free and sometimes invoiced at USD 15 to 30. Neither document is a charter, a licence to sign an ESG report, or a substitute for reading GRI 3 or IFRS S1.

5. What a certificate records, and what it leaves out

A certificate of completion records one event: on a given day a registered person passed a set of quizzes at the provider's threshold, 70 or 75 percent on the courses listed in section 9. It is silent on what that person retains a month later and on whether the method has ever been applied to real data. Both gaps have been measured in settings close enough to be informative.

Retention first. Roediger and Karpicke (2006) had university students learn a prose passage under three schedules of four sessions: four readings; three readings and one recall test; one reading and three recall tests, without feedback. Five minutes after the last session the group that had only read recalled the most, 83 percent of the idea units against 71 percent for the group tested three times. One week later the order was reversed: 40 percent for four readings, 56 percent for three readings and one test, 61 percent for one reading and three tests. The readers had gone through the passage 14.2 times on average and the tested group 3.4 times. The tested group kept 1.5 times what the readers kept, for a quarter of the exposure. Asked at the end of the learning phase to predict their recall a week later, the readers gave the highest estimates and the tested group the lowest.

The schedule of a self-paced course with a quiz at the end of each module is the first one: read, then pass the same evening. It gives the strongest impression of mastery and, in this experiment, the weakest recall after a week. The experiment used short passages and students; it did not measure professional skill, and its transfer to a ten-hour finance course is an inference.

Completion next. Reich and Ruipérez-Valiente (2019) analysed all the courses run by MIT and Harvard on edX from 2012 to 2018: 5.63 million learners and 12.67 million registrations. More than half of the registrants never opened the courseware. In 2017-18, 3.13 percent of all registrants completed their course. Among those who had paid for the verified certificate the figure was 46 percent, 15 times higher. The study does not establish whether paying produces the persistence or whether persistent learners are the ones who pay. In either reading the certificate is associated with reaching the last module, which is a real function and a different one from proving competence.

There are also situations in which the document itself is what is asked for: a vacancy that names it, a tender that scores training records, a professional-development log, a training budget that reimburses on proof. In those situations USD 20 or USD 30 buys the proof, and section 9 says where the price is displayed. Outside them the question becomes what the learner can do the following month. Sections 6 to 8 answer it with a calculation, with decided cases and with a right written into a directive.

6. A worked case: one site, one year, several answers

Take a temporary industrial site, a drilling pad or a construction yard, over one year. It burns 40,000 litres of diesel in generator sets and buys 600,000 kWh from the grid. Both quantities would come from invoices. The site is hypothetical; every factor below is published and referenced in section 14.

Scope 1. The UK government conversion factors for 2025 give 2.66155 kg CO₂e per litre for 100 percent mineral diesel and 2.57082 for the average pump blend containing biofuel. Scope 1 is 106.5 t CO₂e with the first factor and 102.8 t with the second. The gap of 3.6 t (3.4 percent) is decided by one line of the fuel delivery note. The same table gives 0.62409 kg CO₂e per litre for extraction, refining and transport of the fuel: 25.0 t for this site, which belongs to Scope 3, category 3, and does not appear in a Scope 1 and 2 total.

Scope 2. The GHG Protocol Scope 2 Guidance (2015) asks for two figures wherever contractual instruments exist. The location-based figure applies the average intensity of the grid that delivers the electricity. The market-based figure applies the factor attached to the contract: zero for consumption covered by cancelled guarantees of origin from wind, solar or hydro; the supplier's factor where one is disclosed; failing both, the residual mix, which is the national mix once the tracked attributes have been removed. The Association of Issuing Bodies publishes production and residual mixes for Europe each year. Table 1 applies its 2025 values to the same 600,000 kWh in three countries. The production mix stands in for the grid average; a reporter would take the factor published for its own jurisdiction.

Table 1. Scope 2 of the same purchase in three countries, 2025 factors (AIB), with Scope 1 at 106.5 t CO₂e

Country	Production mix, g CO ₂ /kWh	Residual mix, g CO ₂ /kWh	Scope 2, location-based, t	Scope 2, market-based, no instrument, t	Scope 2, market-based, 100 % GOs, t	Scope 1 + 2, lowest to highest, t
France	13.70	17.11	8.2	10.3	0.0	106.5 to 116.7
Spain	105.99	238.28	63.6	143.0	0.0	106.5 to 249.4
Poland	605.72	726.96	363.4	436.2	0.0	106.5 to 542.6

One meter reading yields 0, 8.2, 10.3, 63.6, 143.0, 363.4 or 436.2 t. Added to Scope 1, the site reports between 106.5 and 542.6 t, a ratio of 5.1. Each figure is admissible as long as the method is named beside it. In Spain the market-based figure without an instrument is 2.25 times the location-based one. For Germany the AIB table gives 304.94 and 701.47 g per kWh, a ratio of 2.3, with 3 percent of national consumption left untracked.

A second finding appears when the two factor tables are opened side by side. The diesel factor is expressed in CO₂ equivalent and includes methane and nitrous oxide. The AIB values are direct CO₂ from generation: no other gases, no grid losses, no life cycle of the plants, as the AIB report states on its third page. Adding the two columns therefore mixes two bases, and the size of the mismatch grows with the carbon content of the grid. The remedy is to draw both factors from one national inventory source. After this step, a published Scope 2 figure that does not say which gases it covers reads as incomplete.

A design decision. The same arithmetic applies to a choice of equipment. Suppose the load carried by the generators moves to the grid. Diesel holds 9.93 kWh per litre on a net basis (same UK table). At an assumed electrical efficiency of 35 percent the 40,000 litres deliver about 139,000 kWh, at 766 g CO₂e per kWh generated. Table 2 sets the 106.5 t of the generators against the emissions of the grid for the same energy.

Table 2. Moving 139.0 MWh from diesel generators (106.5 t CO₂e) to the grid

Country and Scope 2 method	Grid factor, g CO ₂ /kWh	Emissions for 139.0 MWh, t	Change against the generators
France, location-based	13.70	1.9	–98 %
Spain, location-based	105.99	14.7	–86 %
Spain, market-based, residual mix	238.28	33.1	–69 %
Poland, location-based	605.72	84.2	–21 %
Poland, market-based, residual mix	726.96	101.0	–5 %

The connection lowers the reported figure in every row, by 98 percent in the first and by 5 percent in the last. A sentence stating that electrification cut emissions by 86 percent is exact for Spain under the location-based method and for no other row. The efficiency is an assumption and the result is sensitive to it. At 30 percent the generators emit 894 g per kWh and the last row becomes a reduction of 19 percent. At 40 percent they emit 670 g per kWh and the last row becomes an increase of 8 percent. In Poland, under the residual mix, the sign of the result depends on a number that a load test of the generator sets would supply.

The factors carry a date. The European Environment Agency reports that electricity generated in the Union emitted 11 percent less per kWh in 2024 than in 2023. The European attribute mix of AIB went from 536.9 g per kWh for 2024 to 468.4 for 2025. A falling Scope 2 line in a company report can therefore come from the grid. The rule is moving as well: the Scope 2 Guidance is under revision, and in the consultation feedback summarised in August 2026 the proposal to match certificates with consumption hour by hour received little or no support from 70 percent of 909 respondents.

The case used two invoices and three public tables. It produced five things a reader can now look for in any report: the Scope 2 method, the source and year of each factor, the gases covered, the treatment of upstream fuel, and the assumption on which a claimed reduction turns.

7. Where the knowledge has decided an outcome

KLM, Amsterdam, 20 March 2024. The District Court ruled on 19 advertising statements challenged by the foundation Fossielvrij under the Dutch rules on unfair commercial practices and found 15 of them misleading. The reasoning bore on precision and proportion. Several statements were vague and general. Others gave what the court called an overly rosy picture of sustainable aviation fuel and reforestation, measures which in its words only marginally reduce the negative environmental aspects. The airline had withdrawn the campaign and no injunction was granted.

DWS, Frankfurt, 2 April 2025. The public prosecutor fined the asset manager EUR 25 million. The firm had presented itself as a leader in ESG investing and ESG as an integral part of its corporate identity. The prosecutor found that this picture was not, or not completely, matched by the organisation, and wrote that statements in external relations must not go beyond what can actually be implemented. The firm accepted the fine. The US Securities and Exchange Commission had sanctioned the same conduct in September 2023 with USD 19 million. The allegations originated with the firm's former head of sustainability.

TotalEnergies, Paris, 23 October 2025. The Judicial Court examined statements on the group's French consumer website. It held that the stated ambition of carbon neutrality by 2050 and the description of the group as a major player in the energy transition were misleading commercial practices, because the page did not set out the continued oil and gas investment in the group's own scenario. It ordered their removal within one month under a penalty of EUR 10,000 per day and the publication of the judgment for 180 days. It dismissed the complaints concerning gas and biofuels. The group noted that most of the claims had been rejected and stated that it would not appeal.

In none of the three files were the published emission figures at issue. Each decision measured the distance between a sentence and the method, the organisation or the plan behind it. That distance is what the frameworks of section 3 describe: GRI 3 for what is material, IFRS S2 for what a target must disclose, the OECD guidance for what a process must contain. A person who has read them and has tried once to support such a sentence with a figure, as in section 6, sees the distance before publication.

Directive (EU) 2024/825, applicable since 27 September 2026. The test applied by those courts is now written into Union consumer law. The directive adds to the practices that are unfair in all circumstances: a generic environmental claim such as "green" or "eco-friendly" without recognised excellent environmental performance; a claim about a whole product or business that concerns only one aspect of it; a claim of neutral, reduced or positive impact on greenhouse gas emissions that rests on offsetting. It treats as misleading a claim about future environmental performance that is not backed by clear, objective,

publicly available and verifiable commitments in an implementation plan. Whoever drafts a product sheet, a tender answer or a paragraph for a website in the Union works under these four tests.

Ratings. On the investor side the reading skill has been quantified. Berg, Kölbel and Rigobon (2022) compared the ESG ratings given to the same companies by six agencies. Pairwise correlations ran from 0.38 to 0.71, with an average of 0.54. The authors decomposed the disagreement: 56 percent came from measuring the same attribute with different indicators, 38 percent from covering different attributes, and 6 percent from weights. They also detected that an agency's overall view of a firm influenced its scores on individual categories. The decomposition gives a user two questions to put when two ratings of one issuer differ: was something else measured, or was the same thing measured otherwise.

8. A right that works only if someone knows the standard

Directive (EU) 2026/470 replaced the 2022 criteria (two of three among 250 employees, EUR 50 million of turnover and EUR 25 million of balance sheet) with a double threshold of 1,000 employees and EUR 450 million of turnover. One practitioner estimate puts the undertakings in scope at about 5,000, against about 50,000 before. The legal obligation to master the standards has narrowed in that proportion. The same directive gives a new position to the undertakings that left the scope.

An undertaking with no more than 1,000 employees that belongs to the value chain of a reporting company is a “protected undertaking”. It may refuse any request for sustainability information that exceeds the content of the voluntary standard. The reporting company must indicate which of the items it requests exceed that standard and must inform the supplier of its right to decline. Contractual clauses to the contrary are without effect. The supplier's own declaration of its size is sufficient unless it is manifestly incorrect.

Take a supplier that receives a customer questionnaire of, say, two hundred lines. Once the directive is transposed, the right to answer only the lines covered by the voluntary standard exists. Using it requires one person in the firm who has read that standard closely enough to sort the two hundred lines into those inside and those outside. No certificate enters at any point. The skill is the knowledge of one short public text, applied to a spreadsheet.

The protection has a counterpart. Where a protected supplier declines, the customer may complete its report with estimates. A supplier whose real figures are better than the sector average used for the estimate has an interest in providing them, and it can know this only after computing them as in section 6.

9. Courses in the source post, checked

The post lists ten courses and one extra title, Environmental Governance on InforMEA. Official durations below replace the post where they differ. Certificate status is the status printed on the provider page on 07 October 2026. UN CC:Learn has not updated every course page and the public catalogue in lockstep: a page can still say “certification (free)” while the catalogue lists USD 20. The certification tab at enrolment is the controlling screen.

Table 3. Courses named in the source post, status on 07/10/2026

Course	Provider	Official load	Certificate on 07/10/2026	Entry point
Net Zero 101: What, Why and How	UN CC:Learn / UNU-IAS	1.5 h, English	Free, if each module quiz is at least 75%	unccelearn.org course id 185
Introduction to Sustainable Finance	UN CC:Learn (PAGE, GIZ, SEB)	10 h on the course page; post said about 3 h	Course page: free. Catalogue line: USD 20. Confirm at enrolment	unccelearn.org course id 139
Responsible Business Conduct	OECD e-learning Academy	Post: 1.5 h. Academy is modular	Free certificate of completion. Not a diploma	oecd.org RBC Academy
Plastic Waste and the Basel Convention	UN CC:Learn	3 h on the catalogue; post said 2 h	Catalogue: USD 20	unccelearn.org catalogue
Gender Equality and Human Rights in Climate Action and Renewable Energy	UN CC:Learn	6 h on the catalogue; post said 1.5 h	Catalogue: USD 20	unccelearn.org catalogue
Green Fiscal Policy	UN CC:Learn	2 h; post said 0.5–1 h	Course page text: free after 70%. Catalogue: USD 20	unccelearn.org course id 112
Climate and Disaster Risk Screening	World Bank Open Learning Campus	Post: 2 h. OLC lists it as a document course	Access free after registration. A separate completion certificate is not stated	worldbank.org/en/olc/course/57943
RBC for institutional investors	OECD e-learning Academy	Post: 1.5–2 h	Same free completion certificate as the RBC Academy	oecd.org RBC Academy

Table 3. Courses named in the source post, status on 07/10/2026

Course	Provider	Official load	Certificate on 07/10/2026	Entry point
Advancing sustainable development in practice	UN CC:Learn, as named in the post	Post: 1–2 h	Not reconfirmed as a live free-certificate page on 07/10/2026	Search the UN CC:Learn catalogue
Mastering National Adaptation Plans: from Start to Finish	UN CC:Learn	3 h, English and French; post said about 2 h	USD 20 after 70% on all quizzes, three attempts	unccelearn.org course id 141
Introduction to Environmental Governance	InforMEA, UNITAR and UNEP	About 2–3 h	Free joint certificate on successful completion, platform-wide rule	elearning.informea.org

Net Zero 101 is the cleanest match to the post. It is a three-module primer from the United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability, affiliated to UN CC:Learn, free of charge, with a free certificate if each quiz scores at least 75 percent. It teaches climate science and citizen-level action. It does not teach IFRS S2 disclosure, a Science Based Targets submission, or GRI 302 and 305. Those tags in the post are a study plan, not the syllabus.

Introduction to Sustainable Finance is the substantive finance course on the same platform: instruments, integration methods, global initiatives and regulation, built with PAGE, GIZ and SEB, updated in 2021. The course page still describes a free certificate after four quizzes at 70 percent. The public catalogue line checked the same week prices the certificate at USD 20 and states a 10-hour load. A shorter sibling, Introduction to Sustainable Finance Taxonomies (course id 160, about 3.5 to 4 hours, English, Spanish and French), is marked free-certificate on its own page and is the better match if the aim is the EU taxonomy logic.

The OECD e-learning Academy on Responsible Business Conduct is the item that survives the fee check without ambiguity. Registration, courses and the certificate of completion are free. The FAQ says the certificate does not evaluate competence. The Academy covers the OECD due-diligence guidance and the investor modules that the post splits into two lines. Registration sits on the OECD learning system; the public entry page is the RBC topic page of oecd.org.

Plastic waste, gender and human rights, and national adaptation plans are real UN CC:Learn courses. On 07 October 2026 the catalogue prices their digital certificates at USD 20. Mastering National Adaptation Plans states the rule on the course page itself: pass every quiz at 70 percent or more, then pay USD 20 to download the certificate. Treating these as free certifications repeats the post and contradicts the provider.

Green Fiscal Policy is the ambiguous case. The course page still tells the learner to pass one quiz at 70 percent and download the certificate, with no price in that paragraph. The catalogue flags the same course at USD 20. Until the certification tab is opened, the free-certificate claim should not be repeated as fact.

The World Bank item is a free screening method, not a polished classroom course. The Climate and Disaster Risk Screening tools are open to registered users and are designed for an early look at physical risk on a project or a policy. That is closer to TCFD risk management than most of the short UN primers. A certificate of completion is not part of the published course card.

InforMEA, the UN portal on multilateral environmental agreements, hosts free self-paced courses on environmental governance, biodiversity, chemicals and waste, climate, and oceans. The platform rule is that a learner who finishes a course syllabus can download a certificate, in several cases issued jointly by UNITAR and UNEP. A longer free pathway groups five courses toward a diploma in international environmental law and governance. Course pages move; the stable entry is elearning.informea.org.

10. Complementary free pathways

The post is a good short list and an incomplete map. The additions below are limited to providers that state free access. Where the certificate is paid, that is said once, in the row, and not softened.

Table 4. Complementary pathways, status on 07/10/2026

Pathway	Provider	What is free	What is not free	Entry point
UN CC:Learn catalogue	UN CC:Learn / UNITAR partners	Self-paced lessons	Many digital certificates, USD 15–30	unccelearn.org
UN SDG:Learn	UN system catalogue	Discovery and many course links	Certificate rule follows the host course	unsdglearn.org
InforMEA learning	UNEP / UNITAR	MEA courses and governance diploma pathway	Nothing material on the published free track	elearning.informea.org

Table 4. Complementary pathways, status on 07/10/2026

Pathway	Provider	What is free	What is not free	Entry point
OECD RBC Academy	OECD	Modules and completion certificate	The certificate is not an accreditation	oecd.org RBC Academy
Open Learning Campus	World Bank Group	Self-paced development courses after free registration	Some facilitated courses are restricted or paid	olc.worldbank.org
Corporate Standard and Scope 2 webinars	GHG Protocol / WRI	Recorded instruction on Scope 1 and Scope 2	Scope 2 certificate USD 30; Scope 3 course USD 600	ghgprotocol.org/e-learning-opportunities
IFRS Sustainability materials	IFRS Foundation / ISSB	S1, S2, guidance and educational texts	No ISSB professional diploma is issued for reading them	ifrs.org
GRI Standards	GRI	The standards themselves	GRI Academy and the certified training partner route	globalreporting.org
ESRS and implementation guidance	EFRAG	Delegated standards and guidance	Assurance of a report	efrag.org
Candriam Academy	Candriam	Sustainable-investing modules and an accredited completion path, including French	It is an asset-manager academy, not a public standard	academy.candriam.com
Selected UNITAR public courses	UNITAR	A rotating set on SDGs, climate negotiations, adaptation	Enrolment windows and certificate rules change by course	unitar.org
Alison sustainability titles	Alison	Course access, often ad-supported	The downloadable certificate is commonly paid	alison.com

Coursera, edX and FutureLearn belong in a different column. Audit or preview is often free. The shareable certificate is a paid add-on, unless a financial-aid grant is approved. University of Pennsylvania, Bocconi, Illinois, Oxford Saïd and Duke Corporate Education all have ESG or sustainable-finance courses on those platforms. They are good classrooms. They are not free certifications, and this note does not list them as such.

Primary documents remain the cheapest rigorous source, as several practitioners under the post pointed out. IFRS S1 and S2, the GRI topic standards, the OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct, the UN Guiding Principles, the GHG Protocol Corporate Standard, and the ESRS delegated act can be read without a gateway. A course is a map. The standard is the territory.

11. Practising without a fee: six exercises

Each exercise below uses a free source and ends with a document. The durations are estimates for a first attempt and were not measured. The first exercise can be run on a household, with one gas bill, one electricity bill and one fuel log; the steps are those of section 6.

Table 5. Six exercises, their free sources and what exists at the end

No.	Exercise	Free source	Duration	What exists at the end
1	Scope 1 and 2 of one real site, with both Scope 2 methods	GHG Protocol Corporate Standard and Scope 2 Guidance; national emission factors, or the DESNZ and AIB tables	Half a day	One page: activity data, each factor with source and year, two Scope 2 figures, gases covered
2	Reading the climate pages of a published report	A sustainability statement from the reader's sector; IFRS S2 or the ESRS climate standard as checklist	2 h	A list: Scope 2 method, factor sources, boundary, level of assurance, items required by the standard and absent
3	Testing three environmental claims	Directive (EU) 2024/825; a brochure or a website	1 h	Each claim classed as generic, whole-for-part, offset-based, future without plan, or supported
4	Due-diligence walk-through on one supplier	OECD Due Diligence Guidance for Responsible Business Conduct (2018), six steps	Half a day	For each step: what is known, from which document, and what is not known
5	Physical-risk screening of one project	World Bank Climate and Disaster Risk Screening Tools	2 h	The output sheet of the tool, with hazards rated and the assumptions entered
6	Sorting a customer questionnaire	The EU voluntary sustainability reporting standard (EFRAG page)	2 h	The questionnaire marked line by line: inside or outside the standard

The documents produced can be handed to a manager, a client or a recruiter and questioned line by line: which factor, which year, which boundary, which step is undocumented. The exchange that follows shows what the author of the worksheet

understands, on real data, in a few minutes.

The retention result of section 5 gives a schedule for the reading that goes with the exercises. After a module, close it and write from memory its definitions and one worked number, then open it again and compare. Repeat a few days later. In the experiment, three recalls after a single reading left 61 percent a week later, against 40 percent for four readings; the recalls took place within the learning session, and spacing them over days is an extension of the result, not part of it.

12. A workable sequence

For an energy or industrial professional who needs to speak to lenders, permit authorities and contractors, the efficient order is short and cumulative. Start with Net Zero 101 so the climate vocabulary is stable. Move to the OECD Academy so due diligence is understood as a risk process rather than a policy poster, and run exercise 4 on one supplier. Take the free GHG Protocol Corporate Standard webinar and, if the certificate is worth USD 30, the Scope 2 webinar: purchased energy is where most operating sites actually account. Run exercise 1 on one site in the same week. Read IFRS S1 and S2 beside the ESRS climate standard, using the free IFRS educational material as the glossary, then apply exercise 2 to a published report. Use the World Bank screening tools on one real project so physical risk is a worksheet, not a slogan. Apply exercise 3 to the next external text that carries an environmental claim, and exercise 6 to the next customer questionnaire. Close with Green Fiscal Policy or the sustainable-finance taxonomy course if the work touches subsidies, carbon pricing or EU-aligned investment.

That sequence does not produce a marketable title. It produces six worksheets and a person who can open the right document, see what is missing in a report, and avoid paying several thousand dollars for a syllabus the issuing body already published.

13. Limits

Catalogues change without notice. A free certificate this month can be a USD 20 download next month, which is already visible inside UN CC:Learn. Course names in the source post are shortened; the official titles are used here where they were found. One title, advancing sustainable development in practice, could not be tied to a live free-certificate page on the check date and is left unmarked rather than invented. Catalogue entries were checked on 07 October 2026 for revision 1-G and not again for this revision.

The site of section 6 does not exist. UK fuel factors are applied outside the United Kingdom as a proxy. The AIB production mix is used as a grid average, which a national factor would replace. AIB values are direct CO₂ and the fuel factor is CO₂ equivalent. The generator efficiency of 35 percent is assumed. The purpose of the tables is to show how far the result moves with the method; they are not reference values for any site.

The decisions of section 7 are summarised from law-firm and press accounts cited in section 14; the judgments themselves were not read. The figure of 5,000 undertakings in section 8 is one practitioner's estimate. The publication of the two delegated acts of 3 July 2026 in the Official Journal was not confirmed on the date of this note, and the value-chain cap takes effect through national transposition. The two learning studies concern students, prose passages and university courses on edX; neither measured an ESG course. Nothing in this note is an offer of training, a ranking of providers, legal advice, or advice to drop a qualification that a named employer has written into a vacancy.

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UN CC:Learn. Introduction to Sustainable Finance Taxonomies.

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UN CC:Learn. Green Fiscal Policy.

<https://unccelearn.org/course/view.php?id=112&page=overview>

UN CC:Learn. Mastering National Adaptation Plans: from Start to Finish.

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15. Acronyms

AIB. Association of Issuing Bodies, which operates the European system of guarantees of origin and publishes the residual mixes.

CO₂e. Carbon dioxide equivalent, the sum of greenhouse gases weighted by their warming potential.

CS3D. Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive of the European Union.

CSRD. Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, the European Union directive that mandates sustainability reporting for undertakings in scope.

DESNZ. Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, United Kingdom.

EEA. European Environment Agency.

EFRAG. European Financial Reporting Advisory Group, technical adviser to the European Commission and author of the ESRS.

ESG. Environmental, Social and Governance.

ESRS. European Sustainability Reporting Standards.

FSB. Financial Stability Board, the body that convened TCFD.

GHG. Greenhouse gas.

GIZ. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit.

GO. Guarantee of origin, the certificate that attributes one megawatt-hour of electricity to its source.

GRI. Global Reporting Initiative.

IAASB. International Auditing and Assurance Standards Board.

IFRS. International Financial Reporting Standards, here the sustainability standards S1 and S2 issued by the ISSB.

ISAE. International Standard on Assurance Engagements.

ISO. International Organization for Standardization.

ISSA. International Standard on Sustainability Assurance.

ISSB. International Sustainability Standards Board.

MEA. Multilateral environmental agreement.

MIT. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

MOOC. Massive open online course.

NAP. National Adaptation Plan, under the UNFCCC Cancun Adaptation Framework.

OECD. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

OLC. Open Learning Campus of the World Bank Group.

PAGE. Partnership for Action on Green Economy.

RBC. Responsible business conduct, the OECD term.

SBTi. Science Based Targets initiative.

SDG. Sustainable Development Goal.

SEB. Skandinaviska Enskilda Banken.

SEC. Securities and Exchange Commission, United States.

TCFD. Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures, disbanded in 2023, architecture carried into IFRS S2.

UNEP. United Nations Environment Programme.

UNFCCC. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

UNGP. United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.

UNITAR. United Nations Institute for Training and Research.

UNU-IAS. United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability.

WRI. World Resources Institute, co-convenor of the GHG Protocol.

16. Index

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