



High-level Science|Business Widening Initiative event

“FOSTERING INNOVATIVE CAREERS”

**Organized by UNICA, University of Zagreb,
Science|Business and UNIC European University**

Hosted by the University of Zagreb

Thursday, 26 – Friday, 27 March 2026

Background and Rationale

In April 2024, former Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta presented a report to the European Council on the state of the EU's single market, including various proposals to make it “fit for purpose” in the 21st century.

Recall the **Letta report**: “One potential avenue for this exploration lies in the addition of a **fifth freedom** to the existing four, to enhance research, innovation and education in the Single Market. The fifth freedom entails embedding research and innovation drivers at the core of the Single Market, thereby fostering an ecosystem where knowledge diffusion propels both economic vitality, societal advancement and cultural enlightenment.”

While he called for several elements of the 5th Freedom of Knowledge, they are not discussed in equal terms in the EU institutions. Research and Innovation is on the focus of the discussions, while the role of European Universities is far less visible/audible.

From the **Draghi report** the most critical message is the urgency and **call for action**. The EU cannot lose time. The EU competitiveness cannot be restored with policies nor with investment to the industry, economy alone. It starts with the skilled workforce at all levels and all sectors. While the demography trend at global scale and the technology trend such as the Generative AI potential impact on white collar professionals is discussed as a threat, there are opportunities too. The transition all kind in of sectors require new talent at scale and this need investment to education and new distinctive competitive advantage is not given by research and innovation. To accelerate the return on investment depends on the deployment of new technologies and can be done by top level professionals in all segments of economy, but also in ministries, regional and local authorities. It is the case for energy, digital transition, the housing sector, the service sectors, and professional in the bottlenecks such as the authorization.

The conference will address the **pathways to improve innovative careers as critical element of transition of European economies and public services**.

Bringing together influential organisations from east and west, north and south, the debate will **explore the pivotal role of universities to secure the skilled talent resource across sectors both for economy and public services**.



Strategic Relevance

This conference is timely. The Commission Policy Work Programme will shape the 5th freedom, via several policies and draft legislative initiatives. While the ambition and the expectations are high, the freedom alone will not result in a change. It depends on the local university stakeholders' courage and ambition.



Objectives and expected outcomes

The conference aims to address the following **key objectives**:

- To **elaborate the role of universities** to support the EU ambition on competitiveness.
- To discuss the **evolution of the 5th Freedom for the Education**, and understand the **hindering factors**.
- To highlight the **opportunities for the talent** entering the labour market from universities.
- To support the articulation of a **Science|Business report** that reflects key recommendations and perspectives from the speakers and participants.

The **main outcome** will be a **report coordinated by Science|Business**, reflecting the discussions, insights and recommendations of key stakeholders. This paper will be disseminated broadly to inform the UNICA membership and the European level stakeholders.

Target audience

- EU institutions representatives
- UNICA members' representatives
- Members of the Science | Business Widening Initiative
- Stakeholders from European networks, partnerships, and infrastructures

Format

In person participation is encouraged.
However, **options for online attendance will be provided.**

Registration

Participation is free but registration is mandatory. Participants are kindly invited to register via the **form available at the [event webpage](#) no later than Friday, 13 March 2026.**

Venue

University of Zagreb,
Rectorate, Radoslava
Cimermana 88, Zagreb -
Hall A1 (ground floor),
University of Zagreb

Information and contact

- Further details and regular updates are available at the [event webpage](#)
- For any queries, please contact the UNICA Secretariat: office@unica-network.eu



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University of Zagreb | Thursday, 26 – Friday, 27 March 2026

DRAFT PROGRAMME (as of 22 Jan 2026)

Venue: University of Zagreb, Rectorate, Hall A1 (ground floor)

Address: Radoslava Cimermana 88, Zagreb

Thursday, 26 March

12:00-13:00	Registration & Welcome lunch
13:00-13:30	Welcome addresses
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jurica Pavičić, Vice-Rector for International and Inter-Institutional Cooperation, University of Zagreb • Edit Herczog, Chair, Science Business Widening Initiative • Representative of UNICA (TBC)
13:30-15:00	Session 1 Research careers in Academia
	<p>Chair: TBC</p> <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archie Clements, Pro-Vice Chancellor Research and Enterprise, Queen's University Belfast • Marcela Linková, Head, Centre for Gender and Science, Institute of Sociology, Czech Academy of Sciences • Simon Marti, Head of the Council for Doctoral Education, EUA • Miroslav Rajter, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb • Mostafa Moonir Shawrav, Executive Director, Marie Curie Alumni Association <p>Q&A</p>



15:00-15:30	Coffee break
15:30-17:00	Session 2 Careers in the public sector from local to European
	<p>Chair: TBC</p> <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manuel Heitor, Full Professor, Instituto Superior Técnico, Technical University of Lisbon • Goranka Lalić Novak, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb • Erwan Marteil, Head of Unit, Strategy and Policy - Prevention and Preparedness Capacity building, DG ECHO, European Commission (TBC) <p>Q&A</p>
19:30	Networking dinner (venue TBC)

Friday, 27 March

8:30-9:00	Welcome coffee
9:00-10:30	Session 3 Job creation
	<p>Chair: TBC</p> <p>Speakers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nina Begičević Ređep, Professor, Faculty of Organization and Informatics, University of Zagreb • Martin Kern, Managing Director, EIT (TBC) • Anna Krzyzanowska, Adviser - Startups and Scale-ups, Task Force on Startups and Scale-ups, DG RTD, European Commission (TBC) <p>Q&A</p>
10:30-11:00	Coffee break



University of Zagreb



11:00-12:30 **Session 4 | How to win the future?**

Chair: Edit Herczog

Speakers

- **Antoaneta Angelova-Krasteva**, Director, Innovation, Digital Education and International Cooperation, DG-EAC, European Commission (TBC)
- **Eszter Salamon**, CEO, Parents International
- **Gojko Bežovan**, Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Zagreb
- **Dipti Pandya**, Chair of the European Association for Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA); Director of Research, University College Dublin; Co-Chair, International Network of Research Management Societies (INORMS)
- **Q&A**

12:30-12:45 **Conclusions & closing**

12:45-13:45 **Farewell lunch**