

Strategy of the Career Center of the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Rijeka 2021 – 2025

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1. MISSION AND VISION OF THE CAREER CENTER

The Faculty of Economics and Business at the University of Rijeka was among the first higher education institutions in the Republic of Croatia to recognize the need to connect students with employers even during their studies. For this reason, in the 2012/2013 academic year, the **Career Development Office** was established with the main goal of enabling students to gain practical knowledge, skills, and work experience.

In 2016, the Office changed its name to the **Career Center** and, through a wide range of activities and projects, strives to prepare students for the needs of the labor market. Today, the Career Center, through internship programs, thematic workshops and lectures, study visits, panel discussions, career weeks, and numerous other events, collaborates with more than 150 employers from Croatia and abroad. It is important to emphasize the coordination of the **Professional Internship** course, introduced in 2011, which enables undergraduate and graduate students to gain their first work experience during their studies.

For many years, the Faculty of Economics in Rijeka has been monitoring and analyzing changes in the international environment and the labor market, continuously implementing improvements in its study programs and other curricular and extracurricular activities, in accordance with its own vision and mission.

In September 2021, the **Vision of the Career Center** was adopted: *The Career Center connects students' potential with opportunities in the labor market to help them develop their careers and thus contribute to the creation of a sustainable society.*

Mission of the Career Center:
In cooperation with the community, we organize and implement activities aimed at the continuous acquisition of practical knowledge and career development of the EFRI community, with the goal of increasing their competitiveness in the labor market.

The results of such efforts are more than evident – the majority of graduates from the Faculty of Economics and Business in Rijeka find employment in leading positions within their fields shortly after graduation, thereby contributing to the economic and social development of the City of Rijeka, the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County, and the Republic of Croatia. An important segment of the Career Center's work is its cooperation and maintenance of relations with the **ALUMNI community**, whose achievements significantly enhance the perception of the Faculty as a leader in science, higher education, and business in the region.

2. ANALYSIS OF KEY DOCUMENTS

Modern economic developments, driven by dynamic changes in the labor market and globalization processes, are confronting higher education systems with new challenges and trends that demand continuous adaptation. One of the key elements of success and competitiveness lies in the implementation of lifelong learning programs and the continuous and systematic development of human potential.

The importance of investing in education and career development has also been recognized in strategic documents.

EU policies encourage the continuous development of skills that are needed and used in the workplace (*Skills, Qualifications and Jobs in the EU, CEDEFOP, 2015*). Employers who compete within the same industry and generate demand for the same or similar occupations significantly influence the content and level of skills required of their employees to perform their work. The promotion of highly skilled work and organizational practices that increase job complexity fosters the development of positions that involve greater employee autonomy, learning, and discretion in tasks, requiring the cultivation of higher levels of skills to perform them.

In its document titled *A New Skills Agenda for Europe: Working Together to Strengthen Human Capital, Employability and Competitiveness*, the European Commission, in the third section titled *Stepping Up the Pace*, highlights the need to encourage and develop:

1. More partnerships in work-based learning and vocational education

Work-based learning, such as internships, has proven to be a springboard for good jobs and for the development of skills relevant to the labor market, including transversal and soft skills. Therefore, it is necessary to develop partnerships between higher education institutions and the business sector to unlock this potential for students. Successful initiatives include those that involve labor market stakeholders in education and training and, in this and other ways, help young people gain access to their first employment opportunities. Collaboration with companies and research institutes can stimulate curriculum development, mobility programs, and access to research and industrial infrastructure for practical training in real-life environments.

¹ Skills, qualifications and jobs in the EU: the making of a perfect match? Evidence from Cedefop's European skills and jobs survey, Cedefop Reference series 103 Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2015, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop), 2015 CEDEFOP, ISSN: 2363-216X, https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3072_en.pdf

² Europska Komisija, 2016, A NEW SKILLS AGENDA FOR EUROPE, Working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness, {SWD(2016) 195 final}, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0381>

2. **More support for student mobility**

The document emphasizes the need to encourage student mobility. Data show that young people who study or receive training abroad find employment much faster than those without international experience. They adapt more quickly to new situations and handle challenges more effectively. Student mobility in higher education already has a long-standing tradition. By 2015, more than 3 million EU students had participated in the Erasmus program.

3. **More work-based learning**

The majority of Europe's workforce over the next two decades already consists of adults today. They need continuous education to upgrade their skills and take advantage of new career opportunities. According to EUROSTAT (2015), on average, only 1 in 10 adults participates in organized education — most often those with higher skill levels and employees of large companies. Therefore, it is essential to develop a culture of continuous learning and professional development beyond formal education, starting already during higher education.

4. **More opportunities for the recognition of non-formal and informal learning**

People should be able to use the full range of their skills throughout their careers or for further learning. Increasingly, people acquire and develop skills outside formal education and training systems — through work experience, in-company training, digital resources, or volunteering. These skills can be validated through identification and documentation, assessment, and certification, leading to partial or full qualifications. European directives encourage the development of systems for recognizing these competencies, and employers ultimately value acquired competences more than formal qualifications.

However, the responsibility for competence development does not lie solely with employers. The new European **Framework of Key Competences for Lifelong Learning** (2019) introduced a competence called *"Personal, social and learning to learn competence."* This complex competence encompasses aspects related to personal career management skills and is defined as:

"The ability to reflect upon oneself, to effectively manage time and information, to work constructively with others, to remain resilient and manage one's own learning and career. It includes the ability to cope with uncertainty and complexity, to learn how to learn, to maintain physical and emotional well-being, as well as physical and mental health, and to lead a health-conscious, future-oriented life, showing empathy and managing conflict in inclusive and supportive contexts."

(Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, European Union, 2019, p. 11)

The **LifeComp** framework (Sala et al., 2020) further elaborates competences in the area of *"personal, social, and learning to learn."* Personal competence includes self-regulation, flexibility, and well-being; social competence includes empathy, communication, and collaboration; and the learning-to-learn competence involves a growth mindset, critical thinking, and learning management. This competence develops throughout life — through formal education, work and personal experiences, as well as unstructured and spontaneous learning. Its development depends on the professional context, general social climate, the

quality of educational institutions, and personal engagement and motivation to develop one's own competences.

European initiatives have been integrated into Croatian strategic documents. In Croatia's **Strategy of Education, Science, and Technology (2014)** titled *New Colours of Knowledge* (Government of the Republic of Croatia), particular emphasis is placed on the autonomy of higher education institutions, which includes assuming responsibility for the successful outcomes of the educational process. However, the same strategy stresses the need for continuous learning and professional development within the context of lifelong learning, recognizing the possibility of expanding competences already during study, as well as the fact that a completed level of education must be continuously upgraded.

Lifelong learning refers to all activities of acquiring knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values throughout life, with the aim of adopting or expanding them within the framework of personal, civic, social, or professional development and engagement. This comprehensive concept covers learning in all stages of life and in all forms — including formal education (early childhood, primary, secondary, and higher education, as well as adult education and training), non-formal education, and unintentional, unorganized, and spontaneous acquisition of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values through informal means. Lifelong learning forms the foundation of personal development and enables individuals to navigate and continually adapt to changing circumstances in their personal lives, workplaces, and communities.

The most important principles of lifelong learning for an individual are:

- the opportunity to acquire, improve, and/or expand knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values,
- the opportunity and need to develop personal potential during different stages of life.

⁴ Sala, A., Punie, Y., Garkov, V. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence, EUR 30246 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg, 2020, ISBN 978-92-76-19417-0, doi:10.2760/922681, JRC120911., <https://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/handle/JRC120911>

⁵ Vlada RH, MZOS,

<https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/Strategija%20obrazovanja,%20znanosti%20i%20tehnologije.pdf>

Agency for Vocational Education and Training and Adult Education (ASOOO), Lifelong Learning Week, EU ESF Project, <http://www.cjelozivotno-ucenje.hr/cjelozivotno-ucenje/>

- the opportunity to access different forms and content of learning to fulfill personal aspirations and develop abilities,
- the right to have knowledge and skills acquired in various environments and types of learning recognized.

The outcomes of lifelong learning should primarily guide the realization and development of personal potential and serve as an important element of active citizenship. In addition, they should enhance individual employability, i.e., increase competitiveness in the labor market.

The 2014 Strategy of Education, Science, and Technology identified and defined five goals applicable across the entire education spectrum, regardless of whether learning occurs in formal or non-formal settings. The first of these goals focuses specifically on building a system for identifying, encouraging, and developing individual abilities and potential, as well as strengthening services for lifelong personal and professional guidance.

In 2006, the European Parliament and the Council of the European Union adopted the **Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning**. This Recommendation requires Member States to:

“develop the provision of key competences for all within lifelong learning strategies, including strategies to achieve basic literacy, and make use of the document ‘Key Competences for Lifelong Learning – European Reference Framework’ (2006/962/EC).”

Since its adoption, the Recommendation has served as a key reference for the development of education, training, and learning aimed at acquiring competences.

For the purposes of this Recommendation, competences are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes, whereby:

- a) **Knowledge** consists of existing facts and data, concepts, ideas, and theories that support understanding of a particular area or topic;
- b) **Skills** are defined as the ability and capacity to carry out processes and apply existing knowledge to achieve results;
- c) **Attitudes** describe readiness to act or respond to ideas, people, or situations, as well as the associated mindset.

Key competences are those that all individuals need for personal fulfillment and development, employability, social inclusion, and active citizenship. They are developed within the framework of lifelong learning, from early childhood to adulthood, through formal, non-formal, and informal learning. All key competences are considered equally important; each contributes to

⁷ Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2006 on key competences for lifelong learning (2006/962/EC)

⁸ Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018/C 189/01), dostupno na: <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-5464-2018-ADD-1/hr/pdf>

successful life in society. Competences can be applied in various contexts and in different combinations. They overlap and intertwine; aspects important for one area will strengthen competence in another area. Skills such as critical thinking, problem-solving, teamwork, communication and negotiation, analytical skills, creativity, and intercultural skills are part of the key competences.

The **Reference Framework** identifies eight key competences:

- literacy competence,
- linguistic competence,
- mathematical competence and competence in science, technology, and engineering,
- digital competence,
- personal and social competence and learning competence,
- citizenship competence,
- entrepreneurship competence,
- cultural awareness and expression competence.

New Skills for New Jobs: Action Now is an EU-level initiative aimed at creating a bridge between education and training (including internships) and the business world. Its main goal is to help guide the choice of education and training programs for jobs in which people want to develop.

To achieve this, four priorities were proposed, requiring the commitment and involvement of governments, local authorities, employers, education and training providers, and individuals themselves. These priorities are:

1. **Investment in skills must be massive and smart** (stronger incentives are needed for both individuals and companies to invest in skills)
Suggested actions for massive and smart investment include prioritizing counseling and motivational support services for individuals and improving their quality; publicly communicating available training and courses; and supporting the further development of employer networks for the exchange of information and best practices in skill development and utilization.
2. **Closer alignment between education, training, and the business world** (innovation and interaction are needed)
To achieve this priority, greater collaboration is required between education and training providers, employers, and professional bodies. It is also necessary to

⁹ New Skills for New Jobs: action Now (report) 2010 godina,
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=568&langId=en>,
http://ec.europa.eu/education/focus/focus2043_en.htm

adapt pedagogy and training and assessment methods to align more clearly with learning outcomes. Labor market needs analysis, as well as defining and implementing appropriate learning outcomes, should be a priority in institutional leadership and strategy, as well as in information management and quality assurance at the institutional level.

3. Development of the right set of skills (to encourage initiative rather than mere reproduction of acquired knowledge, and to adapt to the needs of employers and learners)

To develop the right set of skills, it is necessary to integrate key competences that foster creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship, and citizenship in schools, higher education, and initial and continuing vocational education and training. It is also essential to develop and provide tools for individual self-assessment. European indicators should be developed to measure levels of transversal key competences. Quantitative targets should be set (e.g., access to entrepreneurship education or digital literacy) and data provided to monitor progress.

4. Better anticipation of future skills needs (through improved labor market information, development of early-warning systems, and openness to global talent)

To better anticipate future skills needs, potential collaborators (statistical offices, employment agencies, research organizations, etc.) should be involved, and good practices in the use of labor market information should be created and disseminated. Comprehensive systems for tracking graduates' success in the labor market should be developed and incorporated as part of quality criteria for education and training institutions.

The European document **New Skills and Jobs in Europe: Pathways Towards Full Employment** highlights that the most needed skills in the EU labor market are measurement (forecasting) skills and so-called “soft skills” (interpersonal skills, linked to process innovation and the expansion of IT technologies). It also identifies seven dimensions of job quality: employment security and ethics, income and employment benefits, working time and work–life balance, job security and social protection, social dialogue, skills development and training, and workplace relations and work motivation.

¹⁰ EU dokument: New skills and jobs in Europe: Pathways towards full employment (dokument 2012), ISBN 978-92-79-25973-9, doi:10.2777/10431, https://epale.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/new-skills-and-jobs-in-europe_en.pdf

The thematic objectives of the **Operational Programme Efficient Human Resources 2014–2020** are:

1. promoting sustainable and quality employment and supporting labor mobility;
2. promoting social inclusion, combating poverty and all forms of discrimination;
3. investing in education, training, and vocational education for skills and lifelong learning;
4. strengthening institutional capacities of public authorities and stakeholders, as well as effective public administration.

Within these thematic objectives, priority axes have been elaborated: high employment and labor mobility, social inclusion, education and lifelong learning, smart administration, and technical assistance.

The most significant document is the **Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance and Development in the Republic of Croatia 2016–2020**. In this Strategy, the strategic priorities are defined as:

1. establishing a system for lifelong career guidance,
2. promoting lifelong career guidance aligned with labor market and economic needs,
3. ensuring the quality of lifelong career guidance services, and
4. raising awareness of the need for lifelong career guidance through the development of career management skills.

One of the objectives of the **Strategy of Education, Science, and Technology** is:

“To integrate lifelong learning and education policies with the goals of personal, social, economic, regional, and cultural development, as well as with employment and social welfare policies.”

The Strategy proposes measures aligned with the European Union strategies and objectives, with expected achievement by 2025.

The **Law on the Croatian Qualifications Framework** establishes and regulates the application of the Croatian Qualifications Framework, which plays a reformative role in the education system, including:

“education programs based on learning outcomes and aligned with labor market needs,

¹¹ Operational Programme Efficient Human Resources 2014–2020. <http://www.esf.hr/operativni-program/> | <http://www.esf.hr/europski-socijalni-fond/o-nama/>

¹² Strategy for Lifelong Career Guidance and Development in the Republic of Croatia 2016–2020, <http://www.kvalifikacije.hr/sites/default/files/documents-publications/2017-05/Strategija%20CPU%20i%20razvoja%20karijere%20u%20RH%202016.-2020..pdf>

¹³ Strategy of Education, Science, and Technology, <https://mzo.gov.hr/UserDocImages/dokumenti/Obrazovanje/Strategija%20obrazovanja,%20znanosti%20i%20tehnologije.pdf>

¹⁴ Zakon o Hrvatskom kvalifikacijskom okviru, <https://www.zakon.hr/z/566/Zakon-o-Hrvatskom-kvalifikacijskom-okviru>

transparent criteria for assessing learning outcomes, the development of criteria and procedures for evaluating and recognizing outcomes of non-formal and informal learning, strengthening and further development of lifelong learning, and ensuring the quality of acquiring all qualifications.”

In the **UNIRI Strategy 2021–2025**, the starting point is the University’s mission, which emphasizes that university lecturers, among other responsibilities, “prepare students for the jobs of the future and for civic responsibility.” One of the University’s core values is **innovation**, which involves understanding the importance of “sustainable development, community engagement, education aligned with labor market needs and future jobs, and knowledge transfer as pillars of societal trust in academic institutions.”

One of the University’s objectives in the area of **Learning and Teaching** is to “develop students’ practical competences,” measured by the share of ECTS credits of courses that include practical competences, or by the number of ECTS credits from professional internships relative to the total ECTS of the relevant study programs.

In the area of **Knowledge Transfer and Regional Engagement**, the University aims to “increase the scope of research, educational, and professional strategic partnerships with the local and regional community, the economy, and civil society, and to enhance the scope and intensity of the University’s regional impact through joint strategic interdisciplinary projects.” The goal is to expand collaboration between the University and the community through active engagement with industry and society to improve cooperation with society as a whole. Additionally, the University seeks to further strengthen cooperation with the business sector by providing opportunities for lifelong learning through educational programs for industry and the community.

Strategic action priorities include:

- **Strengthening collaboration with teaching and professional bases** by involving industry experts in the educational process;
- **Increasing allocations for employment and career development** of young talented researchers;
- **Enhancing the local and regional innovation ecosystem** in collaboration with the YUFE and YERUN networks and Step Ri, as well as through the implementation of the Innovation Arena, particularly developing the competences of academic staff and students in knowledge transfer, entrepreneurship, and key (especially digital) technologies;
- **Developing institutional instruments** to support, encourage, and reward the provision of professional services and projects, as well as the use of scientific infrastructure for commercial purposes in both the private and public sectors;
- **Increasing the number of professional bases** across all University units and the number of bachelor’s and master’s theses conducted in collaboration with the private and public sectors to enhance student employability.

All of the above indicates that the University of Rijeka strives to develop students’ practical

competences and, in doing so, build partnerships with industry and the community. Therefore, the objectives of the **Career Center** should support these University goals.

The importance of career development has also been recognized by the **Faculty of Economics and Business in Rijeka** in its **Development Strategy 2017–2025**. Within the area of **Education**, the strategic goal is: *“The Faculty of Economics in Rijeka ensures student employability through study programs based on learning outcomes.”* This highlights the role of the Career Center in enhancing employability, meaning that the Center’s objectives form an integral part of the Faculty’s strategic goals, as further detailed in the following section.

¹⁶ Development Strategy of the Faculty of Economics in Rijeka for the Period 2017–2025
<https://www.efri.uniri.hr/upload/Strategija%20EFRI%20.pdf>

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE CAREER CENTER OF THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS IN RIJEKA

The goals of the Career Centre arise from the objectives of strategic documents and the Strategy of the Faculty of Economics and Business in Rijeka, which aim to actively contribute to student employability through various activities that connect students with employers and enable them to gain practical experience. Based on the core mission of the Faculty, as well as the mission of the Career Centre, the fundamental goals of the Career Centre have been defined to reflect its strategic orientation. The defined goals are:

- 1. *Increasing the employability and competitiveness of students of the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Rijeka;***
- 2. *Networking target groups – students, employers, and alumni;***
- 3. *Creating a culture of early career development and management;***
- 4. *Building a network of potential employers;***
- 5. *Acting as a partner in the implementation of the best business ideas (student entrepreneurship);***
- 6. *Supporting self-employment through financial and professional assistance to student start-ups.***

To achieve these goals, the following section provides an overview of objectives with corresponding sub-objectives/tasks, indicators, target values, and responsible entities.

1. *Increasing the employability and competitiveness of students of the Faculty of Economics and Business, University of Rijeka*

Goal / Task	Indicator	Target value	Responsible
To develop and improve the system of Internships	1. Number of students participating in Internship 2. Number of companies offering Internship	Increase compared to the previous period	Vice-Dean for Economic Affairs, Career Centre
To develop a methodology for monitoring the employability of graduates of the Faculty of Economics and Business in Rijeka	Monitoring employability Employability index of alumni	Continuously every year Index created	Career Centre, ALUMNI
To organize and maintain educational workshops and programs for	Number of workshops held	9 workshops per year	Career Centre

the development of professional knowledge and skills			
To connect students and organizations through competitions	Number of collaborations in organizing competitions Number of competitions announced on EFRI official channels	4 competitions per year	Career Centre

2. Networking target groups – students, employers and alumni

Goal / Task	Indicator	Target value	Responsible
Connect students with employers through a portal designed for stakeholder information and communication	yes/no	Dostupnost portala	Career Centre
Publicly recognize the top 10% of students of the academic year on the website	yes/no	Information about the top 10% of students per study program published on the Career Centre's website	Career Centre
Develop a model for evaluating graduates by employers	yes/no	Employer evaluation model for graduates developed	Career Centre
Organize events aimed at introducing and connecting students with employers	Number of events organized and held	4 events per academic year	Career Centre /ALUMNI

3. *Creating a culture of early career development and management*

Goal / Task	Indicator	Target value	Responsible
To promote and make career development activities more accessible to students	Annual survey on satisfaction with Career Centre activities	1 survey per year Number of publications aimed at promoting activities	Career Centre
To organize student conferences	Number of conferences held	1	Career Centre
To organize study visits to organizations	Number of organizations visited (per year)	10	Career Centre, departments, professors
To involve students in ongoing EFRI projects	Number of students	25	Career Centre, departments, professors
To organize guest lectures by experts	Held lectures	2 lectures per semester	Career Centre, departments, professors, External collaborators

4. *Building a network of potential employers*

Goal / Task	Indicator	Target value	Responsible
Theses and graduate projects in companies	Number of projects	20 per year	Career Centre, departments, professors
To organize Career Weeks	Event	2 per year	Career Centre, departments, professors
To increase the number of partners involved in organizing professional internships	Number of collaboration agreements	Increase compared to the previous period	Vice-Dean for Economic Affairs, Career Centre, ALUMNI

To organize events aimed at directly connecting employers and students	Number of events organized and held	2 per year	Vice-Dean for Economic Affairs, Career Centre, ALUMNI
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5. *Acting as a partner in implementing the best business ideas*

Goal / Task	Indicator	Target value	Responsible
To systematically monitor and encourage students' entrepreneurial inclinations and intentions	Number of activities	10 per year	Career Centre
To develop students' business projects under faculty supervision	Number of projects	2	Professors
To develop a student entrepreneurship incubator	Incubator established Number of students	1 10	Career Centre

6. *Support self-employment through financial and professional assistance to students start-ups*

Goal / Task	Indicator	Target value	Responsible
To inform students about financial support and other opportunities related to self-employment	Number of publications related to promoting self-employment	Increase compared to the previous period	Career Centre, ALUMNI
To hold "entrepreneurial consultation hours"	Number of consultations held	2 per year	Career Centre

The achievement and monitoring of the stated goals and tasks will contribute to fulfilling the mission and vision of the Career Centre, and consequently support the objectives of the Faculty of Economics in Rijeka related to preparing young people for the labor market.