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STUDY REPORT ON THE NEED FOR NON-FORMAL CAREER COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR YOUTH

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SOCIETY
AND ENTERPRISE
DEVELOPMENT
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About the project „Open Yourself for Career Skills“

The project aims to enhance non-formal career counseling services for youth by utilizing non-formal education methods, adapting to the need for digital transformation, and increasing innovative youth-work. This initiative seeks to address the evolving landscape of career guidance by integrating digital tools and methodologies to better serve young people's career development needs.

Objectives:

1. Strengthen non-formal career counseling. To reinforce the provision of non-formal career counseling services through non-formal methods, ensuring they are responsive to the digital era's demands.
2. Enhance digital inclusion. To leverage digital transformation in non-formal career counseling, making services more accessible and tailored to young people's needs.
3. Promote innovation in Youth-work. To introduce innovative approaches in working with youth, focusing on career guidance and preparation for the labor market.

Duration: 24 months (2024 September - 2026 August).

Partners and countries involved:

- Society and Enterprise Development Institute (Lithuania).
- Youth association Laiks Jauniešiem (Latvia).
- Secondary school Haaleitisskoli, Reykjanesbaer (Iceland).
- Regional youth association AMIGOS DE EUROPA (Spain).



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Introduction

Youth career counseling, particularly for school-age youth (ages 14-19), faces numerous daily challenges. In Lithuania, Latvia, Spain, and Iceland, Career counseling services provided in the context of basic education do not fully meet expectations in terms of Career counseling. Young people face complex and recurring decision-making situations in the field of Career development, but the existing counseling options do not adequately contribute to overcoming these challenges. In the current situation in the four countries surveyed, young people face inadequate feedback, limited access to individual counseling, and a lack of systematic Career counseling stages for young people of different ages. The research is based on a conceptual understanding of youth Career counseling as a process encompassing four key thematic areas: self-awareness, Career information, Career planning, and Career implementation. These themes provide a structured lens for both data collection and analysis, guiding the exploration of how Career counseling is experienced, delivered, and perceived by young people and youth workers across different national contexts.

This study aims to identify the situation in the field of youth Career counseling, the strengths and weaknesses of the services already provided, and to make recommendations on which areas need to be further strengthened through counseling in the context of non-formal education.

Research objectives:

1. To examine the concept of Career counseling, distinguishing it from the issue of vocational guidance;
2. After analyzing the details of the concept of Career counseling, formulate focus group research questions and conduct qualitative research to investigate which aspects of Career counseling could be strengthened and improved in the context of non-formal education by interviewing 25 youth workers and 25 youth representatives aged 15-19 in each of the four partner countries.
3. Based on the analyzed concept of Career counseling and the results of the qualitative research, conduct quantitative research by surveying 800 young people in the countries under study.
4. Present the conclusions of the study and recommendations on which areas of Career counseling should be strengthened through non-formal education providers.

1. Concept and issues of Career counselling

1.1. The concept of Career counselling and its relationship to Career guidance

Young people's readiness for a Career is understood as the ability to make Career decisions that directly contribute to their employability outcomes. Different researchers reveals that young people still have low levels of employability skills, their wages are not in line with their qualifications, and that young people's own (in) readiness for Career is not only linked to external factors such as school, parents, etc., but also to internal psychological factors that need to be taken into account to help young people acquire the skills they need for their future (Amat et al., 2022).

According to J. L. Swanson & C. D'Achiardi (2012), Career decisions can be made rationally, intuitively, or in response to the opinions of others, so the inability to specify educational or occupational choice may be due to three specific problems:

1. "Problems occurring before decision making, such as information deficit and identity diffusion.
2. The cognitive experience of trait indecision or the affective experience of choice anxiety.
3. Disagreements with others that inhibit the implementation of a Career choice" (Kelly&Lee, 2002).

By analyzing the interaction between these factors and how different participants/stakeholders contribute to Career choice decisions, M. Hadiyati and B. Astuti (2023), identifies the external factors that influence Career choices as those which are directly related to their family background and socio-economic status (financial aspects, parental experiences, parental support, etc.), and the internal factors as those which are directly related to their special knowledge and skills needed to enter the labor market, as well as their self-perception and other soft skills, which are typically less expressed in the content of formal education (Figure 1), hence the importance of the balance between formal and non-formal education becomes vital in this area. Also, elements of the individual systems, such as motivations, values, abilities, skills, gender, interests, health, and self-concept, must be included (Abkhezr & Gaderer, 2024).

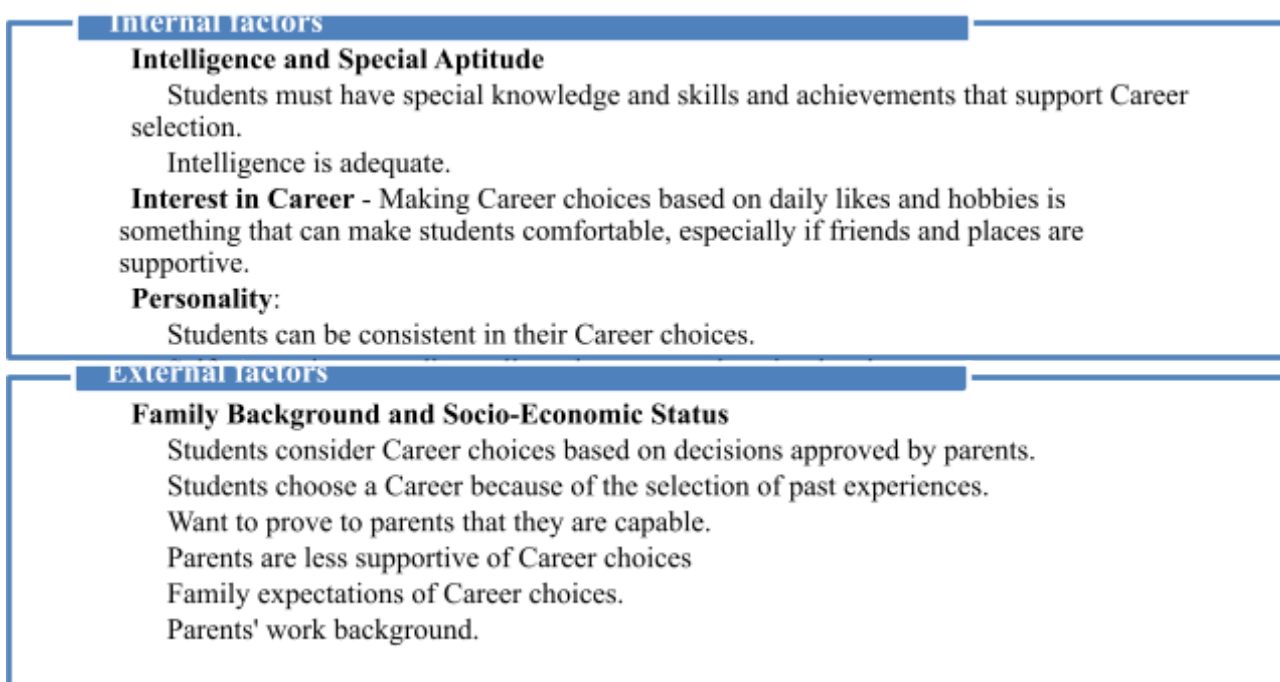


Figure 1. Combined Factors Influencing Students' Career Choices

Source: Hadiyati, & Astuti 2023, p. 610

In the context of services that are/can be provided to young people to fully develop their skills and ensure their successful integration into the labor market, it is necessary to first discuss the concepts of Career counseling, and Career guidance and how they contribute to the development of these skills (Table 1).

Table 1. Concepts of Career counselling and Career guidance

Career guidance	Career counselling
"The essence of Career guidance is understood in two ways: 1. As a system of planned work to prepare adolescents to make a conscious choice of a profession, 2. As a help to the personality to use the peculiarities of their individuality" (Jovaiša L., 1999, p. 85 cit iš Indrašienė et al., 2006, p.6)	„Career counselling refers to an interactive process in which the counsellor and counselee(s) are in a dynamic and collaborative relationship which is aimed at helping individuals to explore personal issues in Career and life planning (Australia Blueprint for Career Development, 2008, quoted in the HANDBOOK of CAREER COUNSELLING)
Activities that aim to "help people make a conscious choice of a Career according to their personal skills, abilities, and the requirements and needs of the labor market. Vocational guidance helps a person to develop his/her	"Career counsellors act as expert evaluators who can objectively measure the characteristics of a person (such as values, aptitudes, interests, etc.) that are necessary for Career decisions and help the person make the right Career choice (the

personal development, to develop a holistic and adequate self-image in the world of work, and to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to make a conscious and mature choice.” (According to the <i>Universal Lithuanian Encyclopedia</i>)	environment in which those characteristics can best be realized). The role of the counsellor is to help the client to better understand and make sense of his/her own Career situation, to identify the obstacles to Career development, and to learn how to build his/her Career more effectively.” (Aleliūnaitė, Lapinskas, 2014, p.28-29)“
A term that refers to a range of interventions, including career education and counseling, that help students apply their knowledge and skills in making career decisions (Engels et al., 1995).	Career counselling is recognized worldwide as a system that: - enables individuals to plan their education, training, and work; - helps educational institutions motivate individuals in taking responsibility for their own education and work; - contributes to the development of the local, regional, and national economy by developing the workforce (Kovacheska et al., 2024, p.13).

Another important factor is understanding why career counselling or guidance is needed, its purpose, how it helps achieve goals, and how it is reflected in daily activities. According to Hirschi & Koen (2021), taking into account the dynamic of today’s Career landscape, there is a need to discuss not only institutional but also personal actions to achieve the goals. Career self-management and individuals’ Career orientations can be understood as their preferences and attitudes toward forming and managing their Careers. It refers to the process through which individuals set, pursue, and assess Career visions and goals, often involving behaviors such as exploration, learning, and networking. Career orientations, in this case, shape how individuals approach their Careers and are key drivers of self-management, or they rely on the guidance of others.

Summarizing the views of these authors, it can be argued that career guidance is a much broader concept, encompassing the full range of services provided, including information, guidance on possible career choices, various types of group and individual self-awareness activities, and career counseling. The main difference between Career guidance and Career counselling highlights the following: Career guidance is a broader concept, focusing on helping a person to choose a Career according to his/her interests, abilities and market demand, while Career counselling is a narrower field, focusing on the relationship between the young person and the Career counsellor, aiming at self-knowledge, self-reflection and individualized decision-making. Thus, in career counselling, counsellors or other professionals seek to gather information about a person's

expectations, learning achievements, interests, strengths, and career aspirations, in order to advise on career choices (Dilytė-Kotenko, 2024, p. 111).

Changes in industry, technology, and the younger generation's expectations for jobs change the understanding of contemporary Career counselling. As P. Abkhezr & C. Gaderer (2024) point out, „the linear and hierarchical approach to Career counselling is being replaced with a more cyclical, reflexive, and contextual approach“, which has different objectives, working methods, and the accessibility and delivery format of consultations should change itself. The changing approach to these services is reflected in the evolution of the career counseling concept, allowing us to elaborate on the differences in the services provided.

According to R. Aleliūnaitė and E. Lapinskas (2014), in the **traditional conception of Career counselling**, the Career counsellor and his/her role is perceived as "active and directive, using qualitative and quantitative research and sources of Career information", while those counsellors who are engaged in psychological counselling are seen as the opposite - oriented towards the psychological process rather than the Career. This can distort the view of this activity, as it may lead to expecting the "right" answer about future career decisions by completing standardized tests or other tasks, thus seemingly reducing the personal responsibility of both the counselor and the counselee in decision-making.

Although these attitudes are still common in the contemporary concept of Career counselling, the concept of Career itself has undergone significant changes in the 21st century due to a number of factors (for example: the continuous emergence of modern digital technologies, emergence of new Careers/job positions, changes in the labor market, globalization and increased mobility, the rise of lifelong learning and increased amount of available information, etc.). Thus, according to M. Kovacheska et al (2024, p. 10), a Career is no longer understood as a single right choice, but the contemporary understanding of the Career concept implies that:

- „Everyone has a Career - it's not only the elite in society,
- Careers are dynamic and have their ups and downs,
- A Career is more than the work we do; it includes education, roles in society, family, and free time,
- The Career lasts almost a lifetime - it does not start with employment, nor ends with retirement”.

Accordingly, the modern (holistic) concept of Career counselling defines Career counselling as "a process of communication between a Career counsellor and a client, based on a professional relationship, which helps the client to resolve his/her Career difficulties and problems. The Career counsellor, working together with the client, clarifies, defines, and implements decisions related to

Career (work, training) and its integration with other areas of life" (Amundson et al., 2009; Patton, McMahon, 2006; Sampson et. al, 2004, cit. from Aleliūnaitė, Lapinskas, 2014, p.12-13).

The main area of Career counselling for young people today can be seen as the awareness of their needs and expectations for their life and Career development, the development of soft skills aimed at self-reflection and adaptation to their environment and its changes, and the activities of a Career specialist who accompanies and supports the young person in this environment of uncertainty in making Career-related decisions.

V. Germeijs & K. Verschueren (2007) state, that indicators for the quality of (Career) choice implementation (including choice actualization, choice satisfaction, adjustment in the chosen option, performance in the chosen option, and choice stability) can describe a Career decision-making process, different aspects of the quality of choice. However, this should be an ongoing process extending beyond school to analyze how it influences their study and work environments, how their values and goals change, and whether they experience satisfaction and maintain commitment to achieving their goals. ¹ According to this approach, the Career counselling process consists of the components of self-knowledge, exploration of Career opportunities (Career development), Career planning, and Career implementation, which include not only choices related to the field of occupation or education, but also aspects of Career education (coaching) (Table 2).

Table 2. Career counselling process

Component of Career guidance	Developed competences	Provisions
Self-knowledge	• To understand personality features relevant to Careers	• To know yourself better. To develop your reflexivity. To dare to take risks and to achieve • To explore yourself openly, to get feedback from others. Strive to see oneself realistically and positively.
Exploring Career opportunities	• Collect, evaluate, and use Career information • Explore employment opportunities • Explore learning opportunities	• To pursue personal Career management, use up-to-date and high-quality Career information. Aim to continuously assess and improve your Career exploration skills. • Take an interest in employment opportunities. Demonstrate openness to different forms of employment. Have a positive attitude towards self-employment. Aim to develop competencies in line with labor market requirements. Seek to appreciate the changing demands on employees.

¹ Germeijs, V., & Verschueren, K. (2007). High School Students' Career Decision-Making Process: Consequences for Choice Implementation in Higher Education. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 70(2), 223–241. <https://doi-org.skaitykla.mruni.eu/10.1016/j.jvb.2006.10.004>

		• To have a positive attitude towards one's own learning opportunities. Seek to continuously develop competencies for Career development.
Career planning	• Developing a vision for your Career • Making Career decisions • Developing a Career plan	• Seek to manage your personal Career in line with your Career vision. Seek to integrate all relevant personal and environmental factors when developing a vision of your Career. Demonstrate openness to a wide range of Career options. • Aim to make timely and informed Career decisions. Aim to develop Career decision-making skills. Seek to identify and evaluate personal and external factors that influence the quality of their Career decision-making. • Aim for Career planning. Evaluate how a Career plan contributes to the achievement of Career vision and goals. Seek to integrate personal and environmental changes into a Career plan.
Career implementation	• Manage personal finances • Manage the learning process • Manage the job search process • Getting settled in a job • Managing Career changes • Balancing your Career with other areas of your life	• Set personal financial goals. Have a positive attitude towards savings and investment opportunities. Keep records of income and expenditure. Aim to make rational decisions regarding financial expenditure. • Seek continuous learning and development. Seek to assess whether the competences acquired contribute to success in a changing environment and to the achievement of Career goals. To take responsibility for learning objectives and outcomes. • To seek to identify appropriate employment opportunities for themselves. To evaluate and improve the effectiveness of their job search process. To assess and improve their job search skills. Seek to use a variety of job search strategies and techniques in their job search. View job search as a purposeful activity that requires effort, time, and competence. Seek to learn from job search failures. • To take responsibility for job placement. Aim to continuously learn and improve by asking for feedback (from colleagues, supervisor) and by analyzing one's performance. Seeking to develop relationships in a new job. Demonstrate perseverance and resilience in the face of setbacks in different operational and communication situations in the new workplace.

Source: Valickas et al., 2014

According to B. Fickle (2024), the essence of coaching is a „personalized and collaborative process designed to support individuals in achieving success and satisfaction in the workplace. <..> at its core, job coaching aims to bridge the gap between an individual's abilities and the demands of

their job.“ However, the purpose of these activities is not only to identify needs and identify ways to achieve them, but also to be an ongoing, consistent process, helping the person to find their own answers to the questions that are relevant to them at the time, based on long-term relationships. So, “the counseling process, as an interaction between the counselor and the client, extends through several stages:

- establishing a relationship of trust between the client and the counselor,
- assessment of the situation regarding counseling,
- determination of goals, interventions, and drawing conclusions“ (Kovacheska et al, 2024, p. 15).

In this context, it is not enough for Career counsellors to be well equipped with supportive counselling tools such as learning and Career information websites, self-awareness or personality tests, etc., but they also need to know psychological counselling and to know how to "be there for them" (Aleliūnaitė, Lapinskas, 2014). National Career Development Association (1994, quoted in Crozier et al., p.25) also outlines competencies areas for Career counsellors, which emphasize not only the Career development theory knowledge, individual and group counselling skills etc., but also: skills to impact individuals and institutions effectively in the Career counselling and Career development process; to understand the qualities, needs and process specific to the Career development of various populations; supervision, skills in developing and accessing Career counselling professionals; knowledge of possible ethical and/or legal issues necessary to understand and conduct Career development research and evaluation.

When analyzing the implementation of Career counselling and its place in the context of Career guidance, it is not only the issue of the training of specialists that is of particular importance, but also the problem of accessibility of these services. In many countries, the provision of Career services to young people of school age (15-19) is dominated by general and vocational schools, but, in line with the insights of various authors already discussed (Aleliūnaitė ir E. Lapinskas (2014); Dilytė-Kotenko (2024); Kovacheska et al (2024); Hadiyati, & Astuti (2023), and others.) it can be stated that:

- If an educational institution has insufficient Career specialists and/or a traditional (non-holistic) approach to Career guidance, it focuses primarily on information services, while individual guidance and counselling services, which are at the heart of Career guidance, are fragmented or not provided.
- If pupils do not take personal initiative to contact Career counsellors, they are only provided with general information, and their individual needs remain unmet.

- The availability of these services through formal education is attributed to external factors (Figure 1), so the availability of these services may vary depending on the socio-economic status of the young person (e.g., urban/rural, fee/non-fee, private/public school, etc).

In order to better understand these potential risks, how they affect the availability of Career guidance services for young people and whether there are differences in practice between the countries chosen for this research, it is necessary to discuss in more detail the Career guidance systems and situation.

1.2. The overview of the Career guidance system/situation

An analysis of previous research on the Career guidance topic suggests that the theoretical background of research in this area is constructed under four main headings: theories of discourse, theories of governance, psychologically derived theories, and relational theories (Hooley et al., 2024). This means that the analysis of the Career guidance system could focus on:

- Understanding of Career guidance policy in different countries and reforms implemented based on the understanding of Career guidance concept;
- An analysis of how policy systems work and then explore the interplay of different actors within such systems of governance, drawing on stakeholder participation theories;
- Analyzing how individuals experience the impacts of policy;
- Social theories that could be used to understand Career guidance policy (Hooley et al., 2024).

The understanding of the Career guidance concept has already been discussed in the previous part of the study, and the purpose of this study is not to analyze the policies and reforms themselves, but to identify the main actors and the context in which these services are currently provided, so this study will elaborate on:

- the stakeholders involved in the provision of the service;
- service availability;
- requirements/regulations for service providers.

One of example of a possible Career counselling system illustration based on stakeholder involvement is given in Figure x. As in the analysis of all other public service, firstly, the focus should be brought to the recipient of the services - the pupil or student and his specific needs, then the organizer of the service and service provider (educational staff), shown on the other side of the picture, and their activities/performance should be analyzed.

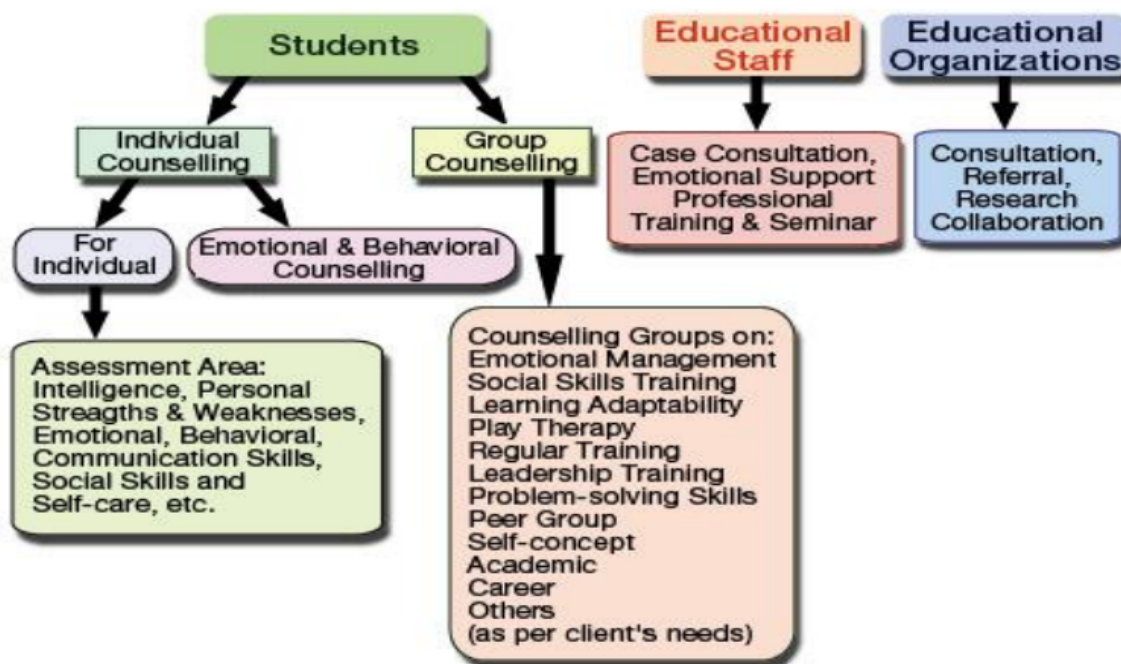


Figure 2. Framework of the Career guidance system

Source: Post et al., 2002, quoted in <https://bcmschools.org/upload/cmsimg/CareerHandbook.pdf>

Of course, given the specificity of this service, it must be stressed that the provision of the service and the quality of it depend not only on the organizer and provider of the service, but also on the initiative and involvement of the service recipient in the process of service provision. Other authors also point out that in this particular case: a) people have abilities and opportunities of making Career choice; b) their choices depend on their education, environment, social cultural influences, etc. c) we all are naturally presented with Career choice right from the early days of our life's; d) counsellors should pursue people to attain their Career goals, but not to makes decisions instead of them; e) Career decision making is something that happens throughout the life and can happen at any time and place (Post et al., 2002) and there is no “one right answer” how and what choices should be made.

Another important factor to consider is the regulatory environment in which this system is implemented. Since education as a public policy area is not regulated in detail by specific directives at the EU level, member states have a lot of freedom and autonomy in this area. However, they do set out general strategic guidelines and principles that member states should follow, and to promote changes in this sector through special programs designed for this purpose. So, European cooperation in areas such as education and training can therefore be seen as taking place at three levels:

- Level 1 includes Council of Ministers’ resolutions, conclusions and communiques, which set the general political direction.

- Level 2 involves the establishment of action programmes and instruments, through decisions and recommendations of the Council (and, after 1997, of the European Parliament), which provide the necessary financial support to implement Level 1 decisions through action programmes.

- Level 3 refers to pilot projects, exchanges and placements, study visits and studies/surveys carried out by practitioner-, researcher- and manager-level activities, usually part-funded by EU programmes.

It should be noted that although these levels refer to EU countries, based on Agreement on the European Economic Area (EEA), Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein (EEA members) participate in education-related programs (e.g., Erasmus+) on the same terms as EU countries, so it is likely that their strategic directions should be in line with the EU's strategic objectives, includes promoting lifelong learning and providing personalised support to help people transition to the next stage of their Careers (EEA, Protocol No.31).

When analysing Career counselling, the key ES documents that should be referenced are the Commission's consultative Memorandum on Lifelong Learning (EC, 2000), the Commission's Communication on lifelong learning (EC, 2001), and EU Resolutions on Lifelong Guidance (2004; 2008), these documents emphasised the importance of guidance in this respect and emphasised the key role of Career guidance in national strategies and gave an impulse to the development of further recommendations and for specific programmes in this area.

In addition to these early frameworks, more recent EU instruments have strengthened the strategic role of Career counselling. Notably, the Council Recommendation on establishing a Youth Guarantee (2013/C 120/01) and its reinforced version "A Bridge to Jobs" (Council Recommendation of 30 October 2020) explicitly underline the need for personalised guidance and counselling as part of measures to support young people's transitions into education, training, or employment. Moreover, the EU Youth Strategy 2019–2027 provides a comprehensive framework that links youth empowerment, mobility, and employability with Career guidance services. These initiatives are supported by the EU funding instruments such as the European Social Fund+ and Erasmus+, which provide the financial basis for member states to implement reforms in this area. In this way, policy instruments at the EU level not only establish common objectives but also provide the means to operationalize them in practice.

The implementation of such initiatives is facilitated by the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), a soft-law governance tool that does not result in EU legislation, but aims to spread best practice, and achieve convergence towards EU goals in policy areas such as education and youth policy, which fall under the partial or full competence of Member States (European Parliament, 2014). While not legally binding, the OMC ensures benchmarking, exchange of best practices, and

peer learning, thereby encouraging member states to align their national policies and improve the quality and accessibility of lifelong guidance. It also functions as a mechanism for mutual pressure, where countries are evaluated against commonly agreed targets and indicators, which increases accountability despite the absence of legal enforcement (Plant et al. 2016). Thus, the OMC helps to explain why youth Career counselling systems across EU member states display considerable similarities, even though education policy formally remains under national competence.

Taking into account the aspects of the EU and EEA countries' commitments analysed above, it should be noted that EEA countries participating in EU programmes do not formally bind themselves by EU recommendations or open method of coordination processes in the same way as EU Member States. Although they may voluntarily adopt EU strategic guidelines and participate in programme implementation with partner countries from the EU, national youth Career counselling policy is more dependent on national or local political decisions and initiatives by the institutions responsible for policy implementation. This regulatory difference helps to explain why differences in Career guidance systems between countries result not only from regional or demographic factors, but also from different legal and strategic systems within the EU and EEA context.

As this study focuses on the practices of four countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Iceland and Spain), the aspects discussed are better illustrated by a brief overview of the systems and requirements for service providers in these countries (Table 3). In all analyzed countries, the provision of the service and the requirements for service providers are defined at the national level. Their education policies seek to ensure that children (usually from a young age) were informed about aspects of Careers and that general education institutions would have the capacity to provide such services.

Table 3. Career guidance practices in chosen countries

	Availability of the service	Requirements for a specialist
Iceland	All pupils in both compulsory and upper secondary schools have the right to receive counselling upon demand, and most schools employ full-time professional counsellors.	Guidance practitioners must have a license from the Ministry of Education and Children to practice. In order to obtain such a license, they must have a master's degree in counselling from a recognized university in Iceland or abroad. Almost all counsellors are members of the Icelandic Educational and Vocational Guidance Association .

Latvia	From primary through upper-secondary education, both general and vocational schools provide Career education. Careers education at schools is integrated into subject lessons and class lessons and can be a topic for project week activities and field trips.	Currently, persons employed as Career counsellors in primary and secondary educational institutions are required to have a background in education with either a Master's degree in Career counselling or appropriate in-service training.
Lithuania	In the education sector, Career guidance (i.e., Career education, information, and counselling services) is provided by general education schools and vocational education and training schools. In general education schools, the guidance program is compulsory from the first grade. Career guidance is provided by the school's Career specialist, and additional sessions for primary school pupils are organized by the class teacher.	School Career specialists are required to: hold a teaching qualification or have completed a course in education and psychology; within one year of first taking up employment as a Career specialist, undertake a specific upskilling program; and have knowledge and skills described in the national regulations.
Spain	Schools and universities have their own guidance services. In Early Childhood Education, information and guidance are primarily focused on early detection of learning problems and providing solutions for addressing them. In primary and compulsory secondary school programs and baccalaureate programs, knowledge about professions is introduced, as well as programs specifically intended to generate increased interest in vocational training. Curricula include simulation-based learning as part of students' early training in trades and professions. The system at the school level contains: Multi-professional guidance teams, which work with students in pre-primary and primary education levels; specialized guidance teams for specific	Spanish guidance counsellors working for the public education sector are mainly psychologists or pedagogues (Master's degree) who have passed a competitive exam to become civil servants.

	disabilities; Guidance and Counselling Departments at all secondary, post-secondary schools, and many vocational education and training centers.	
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Source: <https://euroguidance.eu/guidance-systems-and-practice/national-guidance-systems>

Although all countries have specific programs targeted at disadvantaged groups, common guidelines for service provision are established at the national level by the ministries (responsible for education or social protection), and in all countries, services of the private sector are also available. The structure and centralization of the implementation of Career guidance services for pupils vary slightly. For example:

In **Iceland**, Career guidance is integrated into the school system, but the structure differs slightly from that of other countries. Career education is generally provided by teachers or school staff who take on this responsibility alongside other duties, rather than by dedicated Career counselors. There is a stronger focus on **practical learning experiences**, such as project-based tasks and personal development, rather than formalized one-on-one counseling. Additionally, cooperation with external partners (e.g., local businesses, higher education institutions) plays a growing role in Career awareness efforts, but services outside school remain limited and vary by region.

In **Latvia** and **Lithuania**, schools employ Career counselors to support students in their Career decisions and integrate Career guidance into the curriculum. They provide access to counseling services through dedicated staff and ensure cooperation with other institutions (for example, public employment services, universities, etc.). In Latvia, a national-level public provider of Career counseling services—the **Professional Career Counselling Centre**—also exists, increasing the overall availability and reach of such services.

Spain's Career counseling is unique in that, in addition to the Career guidance structures common to all countries, **local and regional governments** offer Career guidance and employment services tailored to the specific needs of their communities. While overall education policy is quite centralized, in this area, there is a strong emphasis on **regional autonomy** and adaptation to local contexts.

Another important stakeholder that should be discussed in this context is Youth Services and Local Youth Centers. Although they were not identified as the main current or potential providers of Career counselling service in analyzed countries, but analyzing their involvement in young people's lives, it is important to note that: 1. in some countries they are already implementing activities and

projects aimed at providing consultations and information provision on Career planning activities (e.g. Lithuania and Spain); 2. the activities of the centers are often targeted at young people with fewer opportunities who might not have access to other forms of Career guidance or who might need some encouragement/assistance to receive them. Therefore, further analysis should not be limited to services provided by state/municipal authorities, schools, and the private sector, but should include all potential stakeholders.

2. Study on the development of a Career guidance system

2.1. Methodology

In order to reveal the specific features of the object of the study in as much detail as possible, given the complexity of the topic under consideration, this study follows a triangulation approach by using mixed research methods and mixed data sources. Using a variety of research methods allows for a thorough evaluation of theoretical assumptions, the identification of existing barriers to Career planning, and the identification of ways to improve the system. Using multiple data sources for the same research area also ensures the reliability of the research data, enabling recommendations to be formulated based on objective information from multiple angles. Research design is provided in Figure 3.

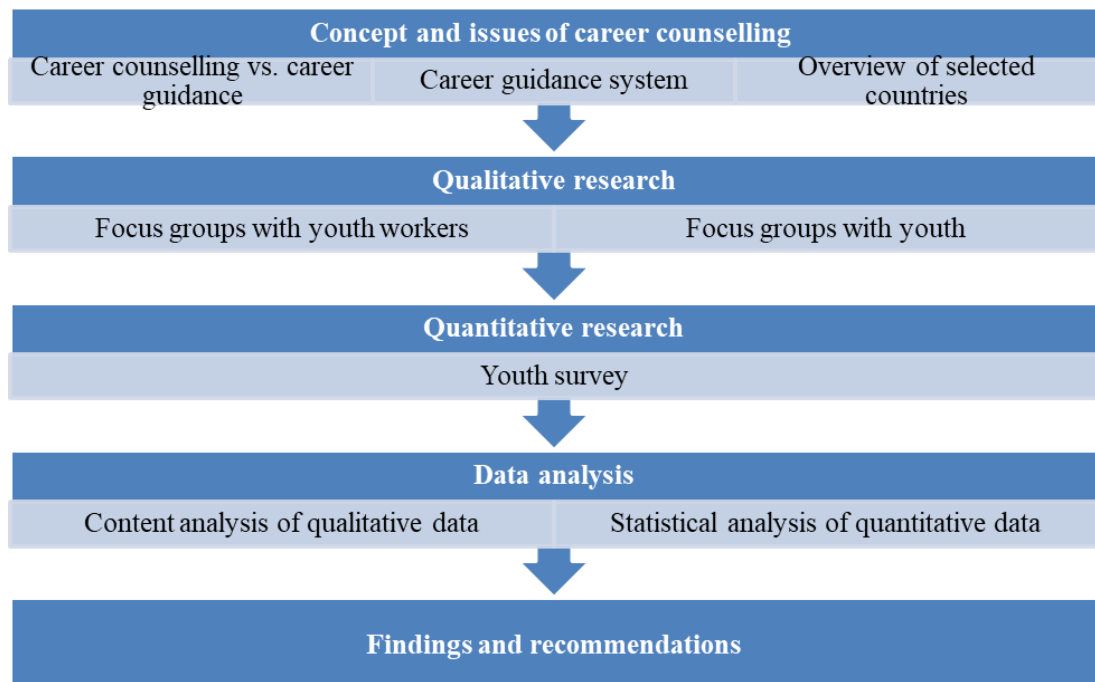


Figure 3. Research design

During **qualitative research**, data were collected and new knowledge about the context was gathered from the perspectives of different research subjects, enriching the research with new subtle insights that add depth to the study (Lindgren et al., 2020). This study uses the focus group method, which is particularly suitable for identifying and describing problems, analyzing them, and generating new ideas. Participants can respond to the views and insights of others by expressing their own opinions and listening to how others respond. These interactions can clarify the diversity of the issue at hand and find novel approaches to the problem under discussion. This generates information that is not readily available using other data collection methods (Patton, 2001). So basically, data gathered during focus groups not only provides an understanding of the subject under study but can help understand the interaction of different participants and generate new ideas (Gaižauskaitė & Valavičienė, 2016).

After collecting the necessary amount of data during focus group discussions, the **quantitative research** was carried out. The analysis of the answers using descriptive statistics and causal analysis methods enriches the research by enabling the researcher to generalize the results obtained in the researched context and detailing the elements of the research, as well as identifying connections or trends between them. (Polit & Beck, 2010). Due to the large number of respondents, data for the quantitative study will be collected via a questionnaire survey. The ethical and objective principles of the questionnaire survey, which were adhered to during its implementation, are as follows: voluntary participation of respondents; depersonalization of data; and clear presentation of the research purpose and object (Kelley, 2003).

Research instrument. The questionnaires for the qualitative and quantitative research are based on the concepts analyzed in the first part of the study, as well as on the important practical features of Career counselling and planning identified by the authors analyzed. The links between areas of research, methods used, and questions asked during the research are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Justification of the survey instrument

Theoretical Construct	Focus Group Question(s)	Quantitative Survey Question(s)	Source/ Author
1. Self-awareness (Knowledge of personal strengths, interests, values, goals)	• “Do you think you have enough knowledge in the area of self-knowledge?” • “Where have you gained more knowledge about yourself — Inside or outside of the school?” • “What activities/ consultations have	• Q5 & Q11: “Activities that help you get to know yourself better” • Q17: “Tasks to explore what I like, what I’m good at, and my values”	R. Aleliūnaitė, E. Lapinskas (2014); Dilytė-Kotenko (2024); Post et al., (2002); Engels et al. (1995); Hirschi & Koen (2021)

	helped you acquire this knowledge?"		
2. Decision-making process (Career-related reflection, evaluation of options, procrastination tendencies)	• “How do you make Career decisions? Do you consult others? Consider alternatives? Postpone?” • “What kind of counselling would help you decide better?”	• Q5 & Q17: “Understand how I make decisions” • Q16: “Step-by-step consultations,” “Second opinion,” “Feeling comfortable talking about Career”	M. Hadiyati and B. Astuti (2023); A. Valickas et al., (2014); A. Post et al. (2002)
3. Career planning (Setting goals, building a vision, mapping a plan)	• “Do you have enough knowledge about Career planning?” • “Have you created a plan for your next steps?” • “What support would help with planning?”	• Q5 & Q11: “Create my own Career plan or map” • Q17: “Set goals and plan next steps”	A. Valickas et al., (2014); Hirschi & Koen (2021); V. Germeijs & K. Verschueren (2007)
4. Career implementation & management (Taking concrete steps: experience, internships, skills)	• Not asked directly due to age relevance • Youth workers may refer indirectly to these issues	• Q5 & Q11: “Activities to help choose subjects or apply for internships” • Q17: “Contacting a Career specialist; task-based reflection”	A. Valickas et al., (2014); A. Post et al. (2002); V. Germeijs & K. Verschueren (2007)
5. Accessibility and delivery format of counselling (Location, format, frequency, group size, cost)	• “What do you dislike about current counselling inside or outside of the school?” • “What kind of counselling (individual, small group, app) would you prefer?” • “Does it matter where counselling takes place?”	• Q2–Q4, Q7–Q10: Use, setting, ratings of counselling formats • Q12–13: Awareness and willingness to access out-of-school counselling	A. Post et al. (2002); Hadiyati, & Astuti (2023); P. Abkhezr & C. Gaderer (2024); R. Aleliūnaitė, E. Lapinskas (2014)
6. Emotional readiness & support preferences (Stress, timing, perceived confidence, preferred sources of support)	• “How much stress/anxiety do you feel about Career decisions?” • “Who do you talk to about Career choices?” • “Has this discussion changed how you feel?”	• Q1 & Q6: Timing of key decision moments • Q15: Confidence in available information • Q16: Importance of guidance sources (teachers, peers, digital tools)	B. Fickle (2024); Hadiyati, & Astuti (2023); P. Abkhezr & C. Gaderer (2024).

Selection of respondents for the empirical study. When planning the qualitative research phases, a non-probability sampling technique was selected. This means that researchers intentionally select participants based on specific characteristics relevant to their study. In this case, the respondents were selected from a variety of backgrounds (different countries, regions and

schools) and represented different sides of the Career counselling process: approximately half of the participants were pupils from secondary schools, and the other half were Careers advisers working in schools or with young people.

The quantitative study did not aim to ensure a representative sample in each country; around 200 stakeholders of youth counselling services were surveyed in each selected country. This produced a large pool of data from which general conclusions about the characteristics of existing counselling systems could be drawn. The statistics and characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Survey sample

Research method		Country				Total
		Lithuania	Latvia	Iceland	Spain	
Focus groups with youth workers	Number of groups	4	6	2	4	16
	Number of participants	28	26	25	26	105
Focus groups with youth	Number of groups	3	5	4	3	15
	Number of participants	25	25	25	25	100
Quantitative survey		219	254	157	210	840

2.2. Results of the qualitative research

Analysis of youth focus groups: Lithuania

Question 1: In the study assessing Lithuanian young people's knowledge of Career counseling, most of the responses were related to experiences gained at school, such as working with counselors, taking tests, and participating in study fairs. Although young people identified self-knowledge as one of the most important aspects, their assessments of the tests varied, likely due to different personal experiences and varying opportunities available at different schools. Young people who sought private counseling or counseling outside of school mentioned tests as a helpful tool, and these young people also spoke positively about the work of school counselors.

Question 2: When discussing the first step in Career counseling—self-awareness—young people mention taking tests, both at school and online or privately, but emphasize that they do not trust school Career counselors in this regard due to outdated/ineffective measures, lack of quality feedback, and that they gain most of their self-awareness through activities outside of school and hobbies

Question 3: When searching for information about Career planning and self-awareness, young people emphasize the benefits of the internet, school consultations, and extracurricular activities. However, there is much information on the internet, it is challenging to select reliable sources, and the information on official websites (of higher education institutions and those aimed at young people) is difficult to understand and requires more time.

Question 4: Questions about Career planning and implementation were difficult for young people to understand. Even after these aspects were explained in more detail, they did not differ much from their existing knowledge about self-awareness, information gathering, and decision-making. Several participants mentioned Career planning tasks that were time-consuming, complex, and of little relevance due to the changing needs and opinions of young people over several years. The usefulness of the knowledge gained in the planning tasks was not particularly emphasized in the responses and varied greatly.

When asked if they know what to do from now on (question 5) to achieve their desired profession or Career, most young people responded that they are uncertain and do not know what to do. Therefore, the current counseling format does not offer sufficient opportunities to be fully implemented at this time. Currently, the focus is primarily on the stages of self-awareness and information gathering. In contrast, the remaining two stages – planning and implementation – are applied in a fragmented manner, mainly at the initiative of young people themselves.

Question 6: When asked who they consult about Career issues, most young people mentioned their family, parents, relatives, and friends, primarily older individuals in their immediate environment. They also seek information individually on the internet, through consultations, and so on. Several young people mentioned the usefulness of various study related fairs and events.

Question 7: Young people were much more active in expressing their opinions when asked about the negative aspects of counseling:

Regarding the current format – consultations in a classroom setting during free periods or class time – young people often feel uncomfortable during such consultations, especially when they want to ask personal questions and are unable to express everything that interests them. During the current sessions, there is no quality feedback on test results or the young person's opinion. Young people have little trust in school counselors, and they rarely like them. As a result, some young people avoid individual consultations. In contrast, others are unable to reach the counselor at school because he or she works at multiple other schools and does not respond to inquiries. Furthermore, if consultations of this kind were voluntary, most young people would probably choose not to participate.

Question 8: The study explores young people's opinions and knowledge about available counseling outside of school, revealing differing opinions: depending on the school or neighborhood, young people may be aware of the opportunities available outside of school, but they still use them less frequently than those who are aware of them. However, counseling outside of school would be beneficial for young people because they would have the opportunity to hear a second opinion, the environment would be less restrictive, they would be able to choose where they want to receive counseling, and counseling would be more accessible. In addition, both inside and outside of the school, counselors fail to communicate effectively that Career decisions are the sole responsibility of young people and that staff can only help, which makes young people feel that staff are unwilling to help, unfriendly, or incompetent in this regard. i.e., there is a lack of a "coaching" approach to the consultation format and so on.

Question 9: When young people discuss what they believe should be included in Career counseling sessions and what format these should take, the most common responses are lively, individual sessions and small groups (5-8 participants). These choices stand out because some topics are more personal and better discussed individually, while on other topics it is valuable to hear other people's opinions.

First and foremost, it is crucial to gain knowledge about understanding oneself and assessing what young people want and are capable of, only then can other steps be taken consistently. Self-knowledge and information are closely interrelated, i.e., much depends on the young person's hobbies and grades at school, as well as their teachers. If young people want to choose a specific Career path but are not strong in that field, dislike their current teachers, or are not adequately prepared and cannot be replaced, they may choose other directions. In such cases, additional information is needed, a different plan is required, and so on. In other words, in most cases, the path to a Career decision is not linear, but continuous, with constant returns, new opinions, and information, which presents an additional difficulty for both young people and employees, for whom the existing system does not have adequately trained consultants.

Opinions about mobile app: Opinions differ on the mobile app. Live contact is vital to young people, although not everyone dares to go to a consultation. The app serves as an additional tool for information dissemination and communication, albeit to a limited extent. There is also a prevailing opinion that Career counseling becomes less relevant in grades 11-12 because academic choices have already been made, and students need to focus on their grades. Still, it would be helpful for those who procrastinate, cannot make a decision, or change their minds.

Additionally, downloading the mobile app may be problematic, as there is a limited number of apps (7-10) that are used daily; therefore, the information should be duplicated on the website. The

app would be a valuable tool for consultants who lack sufficient knowledge about consulting, etc. However, due to the prevailing situation, where consultants working outside the school are only interested in this on an individual basis, dissemination of training or similar measures would be necessary.

Summary:

To sum up the analysis of Lithuanian youth, it can be concluded that different counseling topics are relevant to different age groups of young people:

9th–10th graders focus on self-awareness, subject selection, Career counseling, and exam preparation requirements. There is a more frequent return to the beginning of Career decision-making, and self-awareness is a subject that is often revisited.

Grades 11-12 focus more on Career planning, selecting a suitable place to study, investing in the necessary subjects, and developing other personal competencies.

Young people believe that the current format of Career counseling in schools, which often takes place in full classes and is irregular, does not provide much value due to the poor or low-quality feedback it offers. Young people believe that it would be more valuable to consult individually or in small groups, depending on the topic being discussed. It is also worth noting that, according to the Career counseling topics, Career planning and Career implementation are not considered clear and value-creating topics among the 14- to 19-year-olds surveyed. According to the responses received, the most relevant topics are self-awareness, information search, decision-making, and opportunities to learn about professions firsthand. The location of the counseling is important to young people; the opportunity to receive counseling outside of school is valuable. It is essential to create a safe atmosphere for young people during counseling, foster lively contact, and provide the opportunity to revisit the decision-making process from the beginning after gaining new knowledge and experience.

Analysis of youth focus groups: Latvia

Question 1: Young people mostly emphasized that when choosing a Career, the most important thing is to know what you like to do, try to get to know yourself, and assess what you are good at and what you are not good at. Then, look for information online or try to contact people working in those professions. Young people also emphasize that it is essential to understand that this decision is personal and that you should not expect others to take responsibility for it.

Question 2: Young people's opinions on self-awareness vary, with approximately half stating they understand their values, goals, and desires, while slightly more than a third are unsure of what they would choose in the long term. A large proportion agree that more investment is needed in the area of self-awareness to become more confident in their choices. Approximately one-fifth of the young people who participated in the survey reported that they had gained a deeper understanding of themselves through activities and experiences outside of school.

Question 3: Young people were asked whether they know where to find information about Careers, studies, etc. They mentioned Internet searches ("Google will save us all") and the opinions and answers of people already working in the profession ("from inside"). One of the essential sources of information is older relatives and acquaintances whose opinions they trust.

Question 4: Young people were vague about Career planning; one-fifth know about it, value it, and try to apply it, while the rest are familiar with it (There is always room for growth) or are unaware of it. The participants also highlighted the lack of support in this area.

Question 5: When asked whether they knew what to do from now on to get closer to their desired profession or Career, young people highlighted the importance of a CV and a letter of recommendation, as well as investing time in achieving better grades at school. Those who knew and those who did not know what to do were pretty evenly distributed. Among those who did not know precisely how to achieve what they wanted, some did not know but understood where to turn for help to find out more, while others did not know where to turn for help.

Question 6: Young people in Latvia most often consult with their family and relatives, friends, and teachers at school; some consult with others at school, while some do not talk to anyone. Therefore, there is no noticeable tendency to frequently use opportunities outside school, taking into account regional specificities.

Question 7: Young people responded fragmentarily to questions about shortcomings in the Career counseling system, with a significant proportion of responses relating to learning conditions and format: (You have to study many subjects that won't be useful in the future profession LAT_Yuth14; LAT_Yuth16; LAT_Yuth17); (shortage of (physics) teachers (Yuth22; Yuth23; Yuth24). It was also noted that young people need help in making decisions, but no details about what kind of help were provided.

Question 8: When discussing opportunities for additional consultation outside school, young people emphasize that this would be valuable to them because of the freer, more friendly environment, the transfer of more practical experience, other opinions, other perspectives than those

heard at school, and many agree with the idea that "for the love of God, make it free because I don't want to pay for it" (Yuth_7; Yuth_6; Yuth_8).

Question 9: Young people believe that Career counseling should be provided in small groups where discussions take place. It is also essential to have the opportunity for individual and informal counseling on self-awareness through various tasks or experiences. It would be valuable to include meaningful "games," such as "a profession simulation, given a real-life situation, and have to try it." It is noted that Career counseling would be valuable if it were not fragmented, but rather structured as a program lasting, for example, one year.

There was no additional opinion about the mobile app in the Latvian focus group discussions.

Summary – Career counseling topics in Latvia slightly differ from the methodological framework. At least the first two or three Career counseling topics — self-knowledge, Career information, and Career planning — are relatively well understood. However, young people in Latvia describe them in their own terms: getting to know yourself, knowing what you want, and making decisions about what to choose so that you know what to study. Additionally, there is no evidence of awareness regarding counseling opportunities outside of school. Moreover, the counseling experiences described by participants do not fully align with structured Career counseling. Instead, they are characterized as informal conversations — sharing opinions and experiences in a friendly, peer-based setting, rather than receiving guidance in a formal classroom environment.

Analysis of youth focus groups: Iceland

Question 1: Young people tend to make little use of Career counseling concepts, while eighth graders often emphasize whether the job is enjoyable, how much it pays, and how long it will take to learn. Ninth graders emphasize enjoying their chosen profession, while tenth graders primarily emphasize the importance of school grades and caring about themselves beyond their grades; a significant portion do not even think about this. Therefore, the young people surveyed are not very interested in their Careers. On the other hand, it can be assumed that the students surveyed are not very involved in counseling services or that these services are too narrowly focused.

Question 2: Young people's answers to the question of whether they have sufficient knowledge about themselves to make decisions related to their lives differ according to age – young people in the lowest eighth grade say that they have little knowledge about themselves, but hope to acquire it in time, while emphasizing that their opinions often change, so decisions are delayed. The responses and experiences of ninth-grade students stand out the most; they know themselves quite well, but most of them emphasize that they are only familiar with the presentations and study fair

for tenth-grade students. The prevailing opinion is that presentations should be held earlier, as the study fair is of poor quality and not well-suited for such a large number of visitors. Young people are unable to approach and talk to the speakers they want to see within the available time. Tenth graders agree with the problems raised regarding the study fair, but do not provide greater certainty, with two responses prevailing:

I know myself quite well, but I'm not sure if I'm ready to make that decision yet. (Yuth20; Yuth19;

We might change our minds later (Yuth15; Yuth16;

Question 3: Eighth graders receive information about professions and Career choices from their parents; currently, no such consultations are held at school. The question was supplemented with another question about where young people learned most about themselves, and the answers were distributed evenly between school and outside of school.

Ninth graders highlight acquaintances and family support as sources of information on Career issues, and a significant proportion do not know where to find such information. Most learn about themselves outside of school. "I can just be more me." (Yuth7; Yuth8; Yuth10; Yuth14; Both – is school and and outside (Yuth9; Yuth11; Yuth12; Yuth13;

Most tenth graders are unsure of where to find information about exams, studies, and Career planning. They learn most about themselves at school and outside of school.

In summary, in Iceland, young people have limited opportunities to receive Career counseling at school until the 10th grade. In 10th grade, counseling is based on subject selection and learning, so young people often receive most of their information and advice from their families and acquaintances. They learn more about themselves outside of school than they do in school.

Question 4 about Career planning also received a few responses. Eighth graders are unaware of this, but believe that it is imperative. Ninth graders also lack knowledge about Career planning and typically discuss it with their parents. However, this highlights the problems faced by migrant schools and families, as well as the fact that little attention is paid to this topic at school. Young people believe that school could offer them more than their parents' experience or connections, especially in jobs that create higher added value. It is likely that the region where the analyzed young people live and their schools lack the resources to successfully integrate children from migrant families into professional life, especially those from the area or smaller schools.

The answers to **question 5**, on what to do now to achieve what you want in the future, are similar across all classes, with the dominant response being to study at school and achieve good grades; however, what lies ahead or is part of Career counseling is unknown to them.

So the common conclusion here is that you all feel there should be more support or focus on helping you understand what you need to do — something that prepares you better for making decisions about what you want to do in the future? Drifu

Question 6 – Who do young people consult when making decisions? The primary responses in all classes were based on the immediate environment of young people – their families and friends. In the tenth grade, school counselors/advisors and internet searches stand out, but it remains unclear what topics are discussed in different sources.

Question 7 Young people were asked what they felt was lacking in this area and emphasized that no one talks to them about these topics in a meaningful way (eighth graders), and that they lack options for where to obtain such knowledge. Ninth graders emphasize that there are more opportunities to receive Career counseling services from 10th grade onwards, which means they have too little time to make up their minds and make the "right" decisions. Tenth graders emphasize that there is a lack of good teachers at school who would prepare them for further studies in grades 11-12 and beyond, which limits their choices.

Like with homework — right now we don't get much, and teachers say: "Be happy you don't get much homework!" However, when we reach upper secondary school, we'll have plenty of it. And I can't say I know how to manage lots of homework — how to study at home — because we've never had that much (Yuth21; Yuth16;

In question 8, when talking about opportunities for consultation outside school, young people emphasize that this would be very useful for them, even mentioning youth centers. Still, it is noted that most of them attend after-school activities at school. Therefore, a significant number of more active young people would have limited opportunities to reach other parts of the city or other towns to receive such counseling, so from a practical point of view, it would be better for them to receive counseling at school, but the format would be better suited to an informal, freer format with smaller groups. Therefore, an alternative outside the school would be handy. Still, opportunities within the school context should be strengthened in cooperation with colleagues outside the school.

In question 9, young people identify what counselling should be about – self-awareness, information, or Career planning. Therefore, it is natural that, given the lack of all these aspects, the prevailing responses suggest that all these topics should be addressed in a balanced way, including CV writing. Opinions on the size of the consultation groups vary, with small groups of 5-8 people dominating in grades 8-9. In contrast, grade 10 students require more individual consultations, although small groups are also mentioned. Young people in large classes do not want to be consulted on Career issues.

There are also differing opinions on where consultations should take place. Young people in grades 8-9 say that it does not matter to them, but those in grade 10 say that it would be better at

school. They have ideas about what this should look like, but these ideas are rather primitive because they do not receive quality services and are unaware of any alternatives. There are no comments about the app or stress.

In summary, young people in Iceland are not supported by a structured four-area Career counseling system. They are only introduced to basic Career-related topics in the 10th grade, and even then, through limited activities. Initiatives such as book fairs are perceived as insufficient, primarily due to poor organization, overcrowding, lack of time, and environmental discomfort. Furthermore, many young people are unaware of counseling opportunities available outside of school. Even when they are aware, there appears to be a lack of time or capacity to engage with such services during the week. This may reflect broader structural or regional challenges that constrain access to Career support beyond formal education settings.

Analysis of youth focus groups: Spain

In **question 1**, young people emphasize that when choosing a profession and making Career choices, the most important thing is to know yourself, including what you like, your hobbies, and what you are naturally good at. This type of information is closely related to the stage of self-discovery, which is the first topic in Career counseling.

Question 2 on young people's knowledge of self-awareness stands out. Although young people mainly associate this with Career choices, they say that they know too little about themselves and feel the need to devote more time to this aspect. Only one-fifth say that they have assessed their needs and understands what they want to achieve in the future. Young people also say that they get most of their knowledge about themselves from their families.

Question 3 about finding information and possible consultations at school and outside school is not well known among young people; answers are fragmentary, suggesting that they might look on the internet or at school.

Questions about Career planning for young people are also not well known; they are aware of the process and that they should develop it, but the majority of those who responded to this question do not know how to do so.

Question 5: What should be done now to gain the necessary experience and achieve desired Career opportunities is also problematic for young people. They point out that they find it challenging to make decisions, that teachers might be able to help, and that only a minority are aware of opportunities outside school, at one center. (where Kiko works)

Question 6 aims to assess where young people turn to and with whom they communicate regarding Career issues. The most common response is that they consult with their family and spend some time searching individually on the internet, as well as talking to teachers or staff involved in extracurricular activities.

Question 7 aims to identify the current problems with Career counseling services that young people consider inadequate. The services currently available at school or online are of poor quality, lack feedback, and are very abstract and impersonal.

Question 8. Young people's opinions on the importance of having the opportunity to seek advice outside school are unanimous. Everyone agrees that this is essential due to the lack of pressure and informal environment. Young people need individuals who are knowledgeable about Career counseling and genuinely want to help them plan their future, which is currently not being done effectively in the surveyed region.

Question 9 specifies the nature of the consultations and what they should cover. Young people emphasize that all Career counseling topics should be covered, as there is a lack of information on many of them. However, the most important thing is to start and continue learning about oneself and to obtain information about exams and admission to studies. Most young people prefer individual consultations (*Because if you go with someone else, you may get influenced by that other person*), and a fifth would find it attractive to consult in small groups of up to 8 participants. Young people did not support the options of online, apps, and in-class consultations.

Opinions about **mobile apps** suggest that they can be engaging and even fun to use. However, the ability to ask personalized questions or explore broader possibilities is often limited. Still, for beginners, these apps can serve as a useful starting point for exploring and learning basic concepts. Their value would increase significantly if the consultation experience could be personalized — either through more adaptive app features, online interaction, or live consultations.

Summary. Young people in Spain emphasize that self-knowledge is crucial when making Career choices, yet many feel they know too little about themselves and rely primarily on family input. Awareness of available Career information and counseling, especially outside of school—is low, with fragmented and uncertain responses. While youth recognize the importance of Career planning, most do not know how to approach it and struggle with decision-making. Current Career counseling services are perceived as low-quality, abstract, and impersonal, lacking the support young people need. There is strong agreement that access to informal, personalized guidance outside of school is essential. Most youth prefer individual consultations and are cautious about group, online, or app-based formats, though they see potential value in mobile apps as introductory tools if made more interactive and personalized. Overall, the findings suggest that Career support

systems in the region have room for improvement — particularly in terms of communication, accessibility, and collaboration across different counseling channels.

Analysis of youth workers' focus groups: Lithuania

Question 1: In the first question, youth workers were asked to describe in their own words what youth Career counseling looks like in their current work with young people. In this case, workers most often pointed out low motivation among young people. A significant proportion of young people also make decisions based on their 12th-grade exam results. Salaries in the chosen field are also important to young people. It is also noted that providing quality feedback to young people during large group counseling sessions can be challenging, highlighting the value of individual meetings.

Question 2 asks youth workers to assess whether they have experience in counseling young people on issues related to self-awareness. The responses indicate that self-awareness is a prevalent issue among young people and is vital to them, but it isn't easy to articulate, especially in class-sized counseling sessions. Because a lot of time is spent during these sessions on providing information about opportunities and the concept of entrance exam scores. However, although young people receive this type of counseling at school, not only self-awareness but also understanding of how competitive scores are calculated is problematic. There is also a prevailing opinion among young people that Career decisions are "made for life," which leads to them being made prematurely and poorly. Employees also note that there is a prevailing attitude among young people that the consultant should give them a "clear and correct answer" as quickly as possible about the choices they need to make, which creates another problematic situation – specialists in schools and outside schools often avoid taking responsibility, so feedback, advice, and counseling tend to be rather general. It should be added that the implementation and shadowing services provided in Lithuania do not have the intended impact due to the low involvement of employers in this process and the lack of motivation among young people. In this context, individual counseling is also highly relevant, partly because young people often do not feel comfortable discussing this topic in large groups, and better quality counseling on this topic is achieved through individual work with them.

Question 3 Youth workers highlight the continuity of Career counseling activities as a key aspect of providing information to young people. This makes it possible to move on to Career planning. However, staff describe this process as complex and point out that it is more effective in individual consultations or with more motivated young people who are actively searching, exploring, and planning. In this context, it is also noted that consultations with large groups often fail to create the expected value.

In the case of Lithuanian youth workers, more detailed questions about Career counseling (**question 4**) and implementation (**question 5**) are not explicitly addressed, as workers associate these more with information provision and emphasize that self-awareness and Career decision-making are the responsibility of young people. This highlights that the final stages of Career counseling are not currently very relevant or adequately fulfilled.

Question 6 covers the topic of youth workers' competencies in Career counseling, which employees working outside schools in Lithuania identified as problematic because it requires individual efforts to gather knowledge, which is a considerable challenge, especially for young professionals, especially given the already extensive range of topics covered in youth work and the fundamentally inadequate remuneration for the work.

The answers to **question 7** on the main problems in youth Career counseling partly repeat the points made in previous questions, such as youth motivation, the lack of quality counseling for large groups, poor continuity of counseling in schools, and the significant importance of involving parents in the process. However, this is better in individual cases in the regions. Furthermore, young people living further away from the district center have fewer opportunities to access this service adequately.

In **question 8**, youth workers express their opinions on how to strengthen existing youth Career counseling services in regions outside of schools. Opinions vary, with a significant proportion of workers (especially those working in schools and government agencies, such as Career or employment services) not wanting to integrate youth Career counseling into non-formal education fully. Others believe that it would be beneficial for young people because of the second opinion, live contact, and the possibility of smaller group consultations. Youth centers could become a one-stop shop for consultations. However, it is emphasized that such counseling could not be very detailed due to the lack of competence of these employees. More frequent cooperation between formal and non-formal education specialists and other state institution employees should be initiated and encouraged to provide young people in the regions with more opportunities to receive Career counseling services.

Summary. Essentially, the current counseling provided by centers outside of schools is limited, and staff often avoid taking responsibility due to a lack of knowledge; however, they attempt to share their experiences and offer general advice on how to navigate Career paths and decisions. Currently, young people continue to face challenges related to self-awareness and information seeking. Career planning is more common among motivated young people who have invested more time in these processes, while Career realization remains an unfulfilled goal. Consultations should be strengthened both outside and inside schools, for example, by making them

more structured, but given the best results of counseling in small groups or individually, and the prevailing shortage of Career specialists in more remote regions, counseling outside schools should be strengthened and made accessible to all.

Analysis of youth worker focus groups: Latvia

Question 1 explores what youth counseling entails in a typical day and whether it is essential and relevant. The answers begin by emphasizing that Career counseling is beneficial to young people. It is necessary to identify young people's abilities and interests during these consultations, as they often lack awareness of their capabilities because they lack encouragement.

Question 2. When discussing self-awareness in Career counseling, youth workers also emphasize the importance of devoting time to understanding what interests young people, and thus helping them clarify and understand themselves. Some of the participants mention that they use tests in their work, while others point out that they have no experience in helping young people to get to know themselves. (They mainly rely on information found online, university websites, and their experience/knowledge).

Question 3. Not all youth workers who participated in the survey had experience in informing young people about Career decisions and choices. In the context of this question, they were unsure where to direct young people or where to look for information themselves. The other part of the informants knew precisely where to refer young people to find the information they needed.

Question 4. Youth workers in Latvia have little experience in Career planning, and some believe that it is unnecessary and irrelevant for young people aged 15-18. Most say that they rely on their own experience in their work, and only a few have advised young people on Career planning.

Question 5. Remains unaddressed as it is understood as part of Career planning.

Question 6. Latvian youth workers acquire Career counseling knowledge primarily through individual efforts, participating in training, searching the Internet, and expanding their contacts with those who possess greater expertise in this field. Young people are also divided, and different issues and problems arise for less motivated and less privileged individuals, so a fairly individualized approach is needed.

Question 7. Several shortcomings in the field of Career counseling for young people have been identified. Firstly, attention is drawn to the services currently provided in schools, where the information (methods) available is somewhat outdated, there are not enough specialists to provide this service to a high standard in the region under study, and those who are available lack the motivation to devote time to young people. The tests and methodologies available are also questioned, as young people consider them a waste of time due to concerns about manipulation and

inconsistencies. It is noted that today's young people do not trust the results of tests and do not make decisions based solely on them; instead, they place more importance on hearing about the experiences of others or on gaining experience in the field themselves.

Question 8. Proposals for improving youth counseling are based on creating appropriate spaces for young people where they feel safe, receive live counseling, and can deepen their knowledge through various means. The participation of specialists or students in small-group consultations on areas of interest to young people is considered necessary.

Question 9. In the opinion of youth workers, it is vital to use different measures in non-formal education and extracurricular activities: small group counseling, individual conversations, and shadowing measures.

Summary. Youth workers in Latvia agree that Career counseling is beneficial for young people, particularly in helping them identify their interests and abilities — which are often underdeveloped due to a lack of encouragement. However, not all youth workers feel prepared to support self-awareness or Career decision-making, with some relying mainly on personal experience or information found online. Many have limited experience with Career planning and express uncertainty about how to guide young people, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Structural challenges are also evident, including outdated tools, a shortage of motivated specialists, and skepticism among youth toward traditional tests. Youth workers stress the need for more personalized and practical approaches, such as small-group or individual counseling and shadowing opportunities. To improve engagement, they propose creating safe, youth-friendly spaces where live interaction is prioritized over impersonal formats. Overall, the findings suggest that while youth workers are committed, the current support systems require better resources, updated tools, and clearer communication strategies to meet young people's evolving needs.

Analysis of youth worker focus groups: Iceland

Question 1, explores what youth counseling entails in a typical day and whether it is essential and relevant. Icelandic youth workers emphasize the importance of supporting young people in their self-understanding and Career decision-making. They highlight the need to start counseling early to help young people recognize their responsibility in shaping their own Career paths. The focus is primarily on building trust and offering emotional support, which youth workers see as foundational to any further Career-related conversations.

Question 2. Youth workers express partial preparedness to support young people in self-awareness area. While some mention the importance of helping youth clarify their interests and needs, few have access to structured tools or training. The emphasis remains on maintaining trust

and understanding the individual context of each young person, rather than implementing systematic self-awareness methods or tests. Online resources and personal experience are often used instead.

Question 3 addresses youth workers' ability to provide Career-related information. Most participants admit to not knowing where to find reliable, updated Career information. They rely on internet searches using a "trial and error" approach and express frustration over the lack of centralized resources. There is a strong desire for someone to compile relevant information in one place to simplify access and reduce the individual burden on both youth and youth workers.

Question 4 focuses on Career planning. Youth workers in Iceland tend to have a limited understanding of this stage, often reducing it to CV writing, job-seeking, or making decisions about studies. Broader planning processes, including long-term goal-setting, skill development, or contingency planning, are less commonly mentioned. Many workers rely on their own intuition or life experience rather than formal methods or training in Career planning.

Question 5 considers Career implementation. Youth workers do not clearly separate this stage from Career planning and generally offer limited or vague responses. Most associate implementation with prior decisions and preparation but do not describe specific strategies, support tools, or steps that would help youth transition from planning to action.

Question 6 asks how youth workers improve their own skills in Career counseling. Most say they rely on self-directed learning: reading online, drawing from personal experiences, or consulting colleagues. There is no indication of structured training or professional development programs specific to Career counseling. Youth workers also point out the need for more tailored approaches when working with less motivated or socially disadvantaged youth, underlining the importance of individualized support.

Question 7 identifies structural gaps and challenges in the Career counseling system. Participants highlight the lack of centralized tools and services, outdated or absent resources in schools, and the fragmented nature of Career events like fairs. Young people are expected to search for information themselves, often without knowing where to begin. Youth workers also report that young people do not trust test results and prefer to hear authentic experiences from others or gain experience directly, rather than rely on abstract tools or impersonal methods.

Question 8 examines attitudes toward Career counseling outside of school. In contrast to other countries, Icelandic youth workers largely believe that the school is the most effective setting for counseling. They stress that students trust school staff and view the school as a "safe space." In

smaller towns, there are few or no youth centers or alternative spaces where counseling could take place, limiting the perceived value of services outside the formal school setting.

Summary. Youth workers in Iceland view Career counseling as a valuable opportunity to support young people in self-discovery and decision-making, but their efforts are constrained by limited training, unclear methods, and a lack of centralized resources. Many rely on personal experience, informal advice networks, and online searches, as formal tools and structured guidance are largely absent. The concept of Career planning is often reduced to basic job preparation, and Career implementation remains an underdeveloped area. Trust and personal connection are seen as essential, with schools recognized as the primary and safest environment for effective counseling. Overall, the findings suggest that while youth workers are motivated to help, the existing support system would benefit greatly from clearer frameworks, professional development opportunities, and integrated resources tailored to the Icelandic context.

Analysis of youth worker focus groups: Spain

Question 1 explores how youth workers define Career counseling and whether they consider it relevant in their daily practice. More than half of the respondents emphasize that Career counseling is essential for young people. They associate it with guiding youth toward understanding their future possibilities, supporting them in choosing a Career path, and enabling informed decision-making. Their descriptions reflect a somewhat informal, coaching-based interpretation of Career counseling that emphasizes personal guidance over rigid procedures.

Question 2 focuses on youth workers' readiness to support young people in Career matters. While most report having experience with counseling youth, their self-assessed preparedness varies significantly. Approximately one-third feel confident and well-prepared, another third acknowledge partial readiness but believe they still need skill improvement, and a final third feel underprepared and in need of significant professional development. These differing perceptions suggest an uneven landscape of competencies and training access across youth workers in Spain.

Question 3 assesses youth workers' ability to advise on educational decisions, such as subject choices and exam-related matters. Most respondents indicate that they have experience advising youth in this area, and more than half report knowing where to find the relevant information. However, this knowledge is often based on personal initiative rather than institutional support or standardized tools.

Question 4 examines youth workers' involvement in Career planning. The topic is perceived as only relevant to a subset of highly motivated young people. Only about a quarter of the respondents report having provided Career planning support. This suggests that more complex

topics like long-term planning are addressed only after foundational topics such as self-awareness and information seeking are well developed.

Question 5 on Career implementation follows a similar pattern. The majority of youth workers had little to share, suggesting this stage is rarely addressed. This gap may reflect the limited capacity of current counseling practices to support youth beyond early exploration and decision-making.

Question 6 investigates how youth workers acquire their knowledge of Career counseling. Most describe an informal and self-directed approach — relying on personal experience, independent research, online sources, books, and occasional training or peer consultation. Systematic training opportunities remain scarce, leading to highly individualized knowledge-building processes.

Question 7 highlights systemic shortcomings in current Career counseling practices. Workers describe services as too theoretical and generic, with minimal practical relevance. The lack of tools, resources, and contextualized content limits the ability to personalize guidance or support youth in taking concrete action. Workers express the need for more dynamic, resource-rich, and practice-oriented support systems.

Question 8 explores proposed improvements to Career counseling. Suggestions vary widely, reflecting the fragmented nature of existing services. Proposals include bringing in professionals from various fields to share real-world experiences, establishing local Career guidance centers, and integrating modern technologies such as AI-supported chat platforms to enhance interactivity and personalization.

Question 9 focuses on recommendations for non-formal educational approaches. Youth workers emphasize the importance of advisory sessions with professionals, video-based content (tutorials and guides), and downloadable Career planning tools such as maps or step-by-step pathways. These suggestions highlight the need for more interactive, multimedia-based, and youth-friendly formats that can supplement formal guidance structures.

Summary. Youth workers in Spain generally recognize Career counseling as essential and view it through a flexible, supportive lens that prioritizes personal development and informed decision-making. However, the field is marked by inconsistent training, uneven preparedness, and limited access to structured tools or institutional support. More advanced topics like Career planning and implementation are rarely addressed, particularly among less motivated youth. Current counseling services are seen as overly theoretical and lacking in practical value, prompting calls for modernization through real-world engagement, AI integration, and local support structures. Overall,

the findings point to a need for more comprehensive, interactive, and context-sensitive approaches to Career counseling in both formal and non-formal youth work environments.

Summary of the qualitative study:

This qualitative research revealed several important commonalities in how Career counseling is perceived and experienced across the four participating countries. For young people, the most prominent and personally meaningful Career counseling topics are self-awareness and information-seeking, especially among students aged 14–16. These are often the starting points for reflection, and they are returned to repeatedly throughout adolescence. Although the topics of Career planning and implementation are formally present in many systems, they are far less familiar to young people. Most participants admitted to not fully understanding what planning and implementation mean in practice. These stages tend to emerge only for highly motivated youth or those who actively seek additional guidance — others are left to figure it out alone.

One of the strongest shared preferences across countries is the format in which counseling is delivered. Individual and small-group consultations are mentioned most positively, especially when they allow for two-way interaction, personal feedback, and opportunities to ask sensitive or personal questions. Large classroom-based sessions, by contrast, are often seen as uncomfortable or ineffective, especially if they offer generic information without personal relevance.

Another key insight is that young people value hearing from professionals in their fields of interest. Practical, real-world exposure — whether through conversation, observation, or simulation — helps to clarify ideas and raise motivation. While such opportunities exist in some schools or regions, they are often not systematic and depend heavily on the initiative of individual staff or projects.

When it comes to counseling outside of school, experiences and possibilities differ. In Lithuania, Latvia, and Spain, young people express interest in such services — often pointing to the value of a more relaxed atmosphere, the possibility to receive a second opinion, or more flexibility in choosing a counselor. In Iceland, however, these opportunities are either unavailable or considered impractical due to local conditions (e.g., distance, lack of centers, or cultural preference for school-based services). In Iceland, schools are perceived as safe and familiar spaces, and strengthening in-school support is prioritized.

In all countries, young people's main sources of support remain their family, friends, and close personal networks. While many do use school-based resources, their trust in counselors varies. A common issue in Lithuania, Spain, and Latvia is a lack of continuity and feedback — young people often feel they are not heard, or that counseling is too impersonal. Some mentioned not attending

consultations at all, either due to discomfort or limited access (e.g., counselors working across multiple schools).

On the **youth workers'** side, there are also common trends. A significant number of specialists working outside of schools develop their counseling skills informally, through self-study, online research, or by consulting more experienced colleagues. Those working in schools are more likely to have access to structured training, but here too, capacity and quality depend on the resources of individual schools and municipalities.

Different institutional contexts shaped how youth workers viewed their role. In Lithuania, there was a stronger belief that schools should be the main site of counseling, and that outside services should remain more informal or optional. In Latvia, workers were more open to strengthening regional non-formal counseling services to increase access for youth in remote areas. In Spain, workers from youth centers noted that services outside school are often well-developed, but collaboration between actors remains fragmented. In Iceland, both workers and young people recognized that while school is the main site for counseling, it is still underdeveloped — with support often limited to basic information, leaving deeper topics like decision-making, self-reflection, or goal setting unaddressed.

During the discussions, several structural limitations also became evident. In particular:

Career planning and implementation are mentioned far less often than self-awareness or information-seeking. These topics seem less accessible or are not viewed as concrete steps in the process.

Counseling formats are often not adapted to young people's developmental needs or readiness — for example, older students often lack support at the stage when their decisions become most critical.

Geographical disparities affect both young people and staff, especially in rural regions, where access to qualified counselors or external services is significantly limited.

Finally, institutional collaboration is weak in many contexts. While individual workers may be motivated, they often lack a clear referral system or shared platforms across schools, municipalities, youth centers, and employment services.

Still, there are encouraging signs. Youth workers across countries noted that they had gained new ideas and connections during this research, and many expressed interest in improving cooperation between formal and non-formal actors. The study also helped identify recurring challenges, which will serve as the basis for formulating clearer, better-targeted survey questions in the next phase of the Open4Skills project.

2.3. Results of the quantitative study

To validate and generalize the insights gained from the qualitative phase of the research, a quantitative survey was developed and administered to young people in four participating countries. The focus group discussions revealed key areas of importance — such as self-awareness, Career decision-making, planning, and the preferred formats for receiving support — that were then used to formulate the structure and content of the survey questions. Particular attention was paid to ensuring that the survey could assess the availability, relevance, and accessibility of Career counseling services both within and outside school settings, as well as young people’s awareness of different support formats, such as mobile apps or informal counseling channels. In this way, the quantitative survey builds upon the narrative accounts and lived experiences collected in the qualitative phase to provide a broader picture of youth needs and behaviors.

The survey used a 5-point Likert scale to assess agreement with statements about Career counseling. The scale was interpreted as follows: 1.0–1.8 – disagree; 1.9–2.4 – partially disagree; 2.4–3.4 – neutral; 3.4–4.2 – partially agree; 4.3–5.0 – agree. Given the sample sizes — Lithuania (n = 219), Latvia (n = 254), Iceland (n = 157), and Spain (n = 210) — mean score differences of 0.15 to 0.2 were considered potentially meaningful in comparative interpretations, even without formal significance testing. This threshold allowed the analysis to reflect relevant shifts in perception across countries. The structured questions covered multiple dimensions of Career guidance, including decision-making readiness, preferred consultation formats, use of digital tools, and awareness of counseling services outside school. The following section presents these findings in more detail and provides a cross-country view of shared tendencies and notable differences in youth perceptions.

Results of quantitative research

The demographic criteria of the respondents participating in the survey, based on the questions formulated in the questionnaire, reflect the categories of respondents used in the further analysis, according to which the insights and trends are presented in the descriptive statistical analysis of the questionnaire survey questions.

Indicator		Lithuania	Latvia	Iceland	Spain
		Percentage	Percentage	Percentage	Percentage
Gender	Male	35%	10%	45%	37%
	Female	61%	26%	50%	51%
Age	14 y/o	9%	4%	45%	12%
	15 y/o	22%	17%	40%	13%

	16 y/o	28%	20%	8%	23%
	17 y/o	24%	16%	5%	22%
	18 y/o	13%	21%	-	12%
	19 y/o	4%	21%	3%	14%
Q1 Made future Career choices		56 %	67%	34%	91%
Q2 Participated in the Career consultation		58%	45%	20%	46%
Q12. Aware of out-of-school counselling		50%	45%	24%	62%
Q13. Willingness to seek counselling outside school		43%	69%	37%	69%
Q14. Participates in out-of-school activities		60%	57%	47%	77%
Q15. Prepared to decide on studies/Career		33%	30%	26%	45%

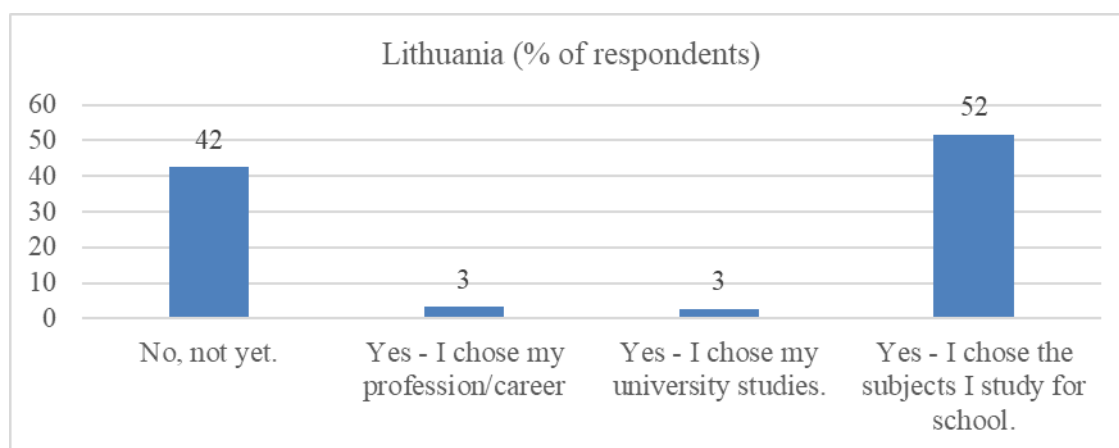
More girls participated in the survey in the countries surveyed. Still, overall, the distribution of participants by gender is pretty similar, except for the survey participants in Latvia, where two-thirds did not agree to disclose their gender. In terms of age distribution, Lithuania has slightly fewer participants in the 14-19 age group, Iceland has a very low number of participants over the age of 15, and Latvia has the lowest number of participants in the 14 age group. In Spain, the distribution of participants is even across all age groups.

The distribution of respondents among those who have already made Career decisions varies: only one-third of Icelandic respondents have made decisions. In contrast, 91% of Spanish respondents have already made Career decisions. In Lithuania and Latvia, the distribution is quite similar, with about two-thirds of the survey participants. Among all countries, the highest number of respondents who participated in Career counseling came from Lithuania (58%). In comparison, the lowest number came from Iceland (20%), with similar numbers in Latvia and Spain (45% and 46%, respectively).

Question 12 of the quantitative survey questionnaire, which assesses whether respondents are aware of opportunities for Career counseling outside school, is relatively similar across countries: Lithuania 50%, Latvia 45%, Spain 62%, except for Iceland, where only 24% of respondents are aware of this Information. 69% of respondents in Spain and Latvia who participated in the survey would like to participate in Career counseling outside of school, compared to 43% in Lithuania and 37% in Iceland. The lowest percentage of respondents participating in activities outside school among the countries surveyed is in Iceland (47%). In comparison, the distribution in Latvia (57%) and Lithuania (60%) is similar, with the highest percentage of respondents in this category in Spain (77%).

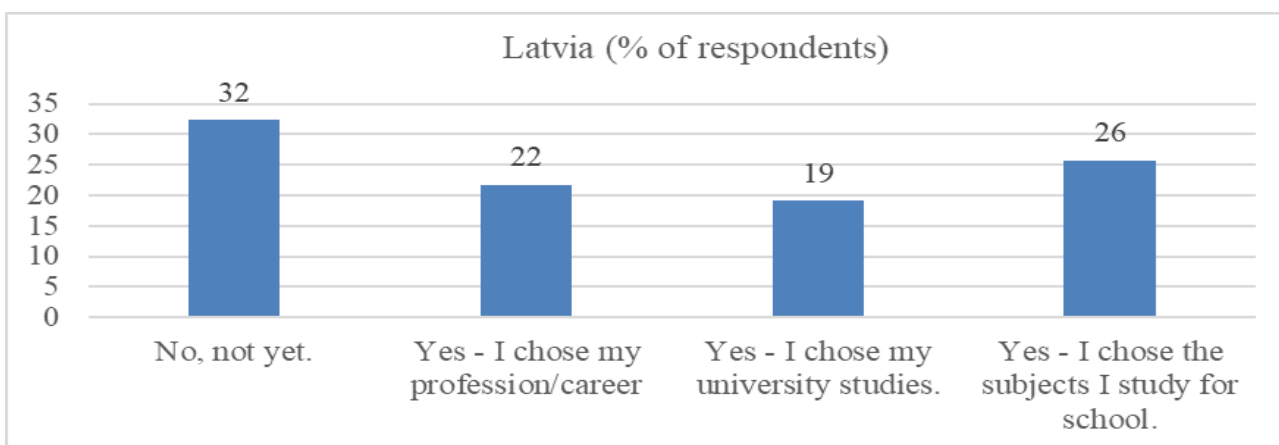
Among all categories of respondents, the lowest distribution was among those who believe they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions: the lowest in Iceland (26%), Latvia (30%), Lithuania (33%), and Spain (45%). It is therefore likely that around half of young people have not participated in Career counseling when making Career decisions, and an even larger proportion believe that they do not have sufficient knowledge to make such decisions.

Question 1. Have you already had to make choices about your future (like what you want to study or what profession you want to have)?



Of the respondents who participated in the survey, 93 (42%) have not made any Career decisions, while 126 young people (58%) have made Career decisions. In general, Career decision-making, such as choosing subjects to study (52%), is linked to the age of the respondents, i.e., 16-year-olds choose subjects in 10th grade, and only a few exceptions choose not only subjects, but also a Career (3%) or university studies (3%) earlier. Most young people who have not made any Career decisions are under 16 years of age, while those who have made such decisions are 16 years of age and older.

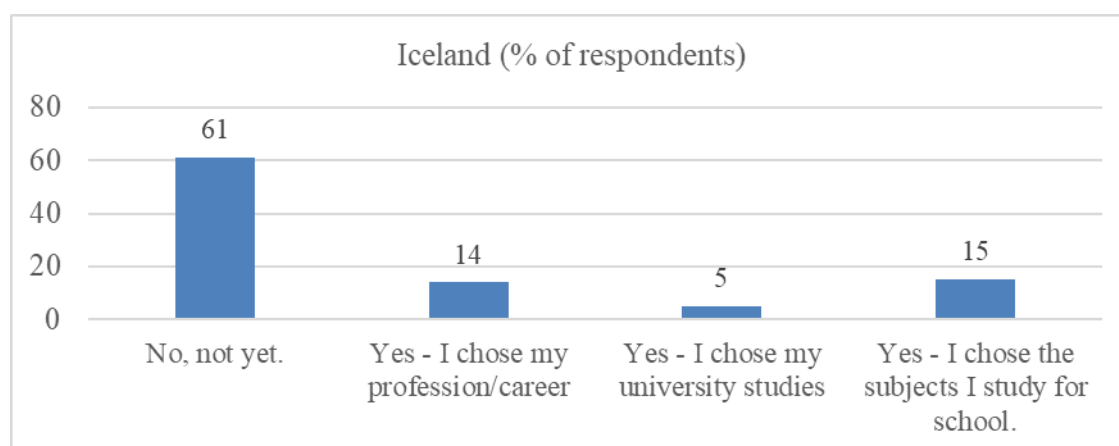
Among respondents who did not make a decision, 40% did not seek advice, while 60% did. Among those who made a decision, 43% did not seek advice, while 57% participated in Career counseling. The respondents' decision-making on Career issues is not strongly related to whether the respondent is inclined to seek advice outside school: 61% of those who have made decisions are among those who are inclined to seek advice, and 57% are among those who are not inclined to do so. Similar trends are observed among other categories of respondents, due to the dominant factor of 10th grade and 16 years of age.



67% of respondents from Latvia say they have already made Career decisions, with 26% choosing subjects to study at school, 19% choosing further studies after leaving school, and 22% saying they have decided on their profession. 33% have not yet made such decisions. The distribution of respondents in Latvia according to decision-making is not linked to age, with around 30% of all age groups having not made a decision.

Among respondents who have made Career decisions, 56% did not consult a Career specialist, while 44% did participate in such consultations. A similar distribution is observed among those who have not yet made a decision: 52% did not consult anyone, while 48% did. A more detailed analysis shows that respondents' opinions about the consultation they received are not linked to whether or not they made a decision. Since only 48% of Latvian respondents agreed to disclose their gender, this suggests that only 12% of boys and 36% of girls who participated in the survey have made Career choices.

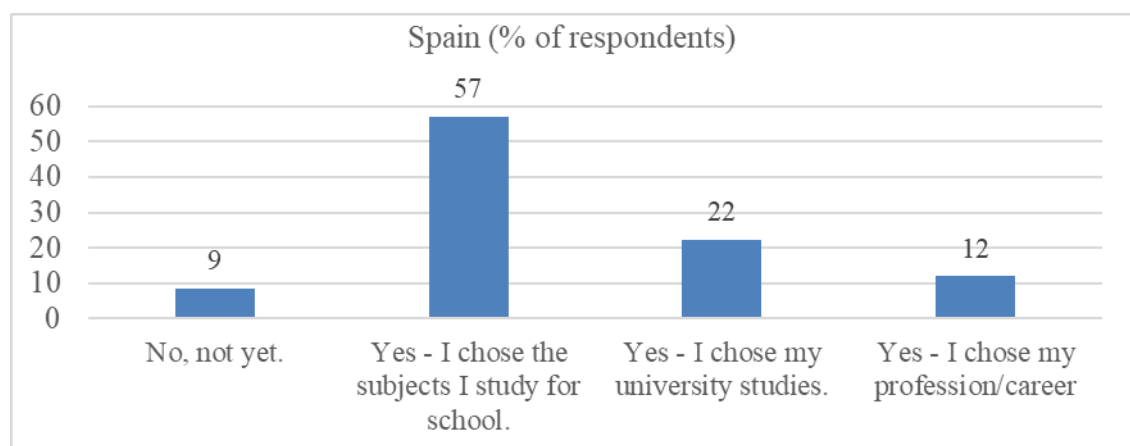
Among Latvian respondents who have already made Career decisions, 42% believe they have sufficient knowledge, 35% are not confident in their knowledge, but among respondents who have not yet made decisions, 72% rate their knowledge as poor, 21% are unsure, and only 7% believe that they have sufficient knowledge to make decisions.



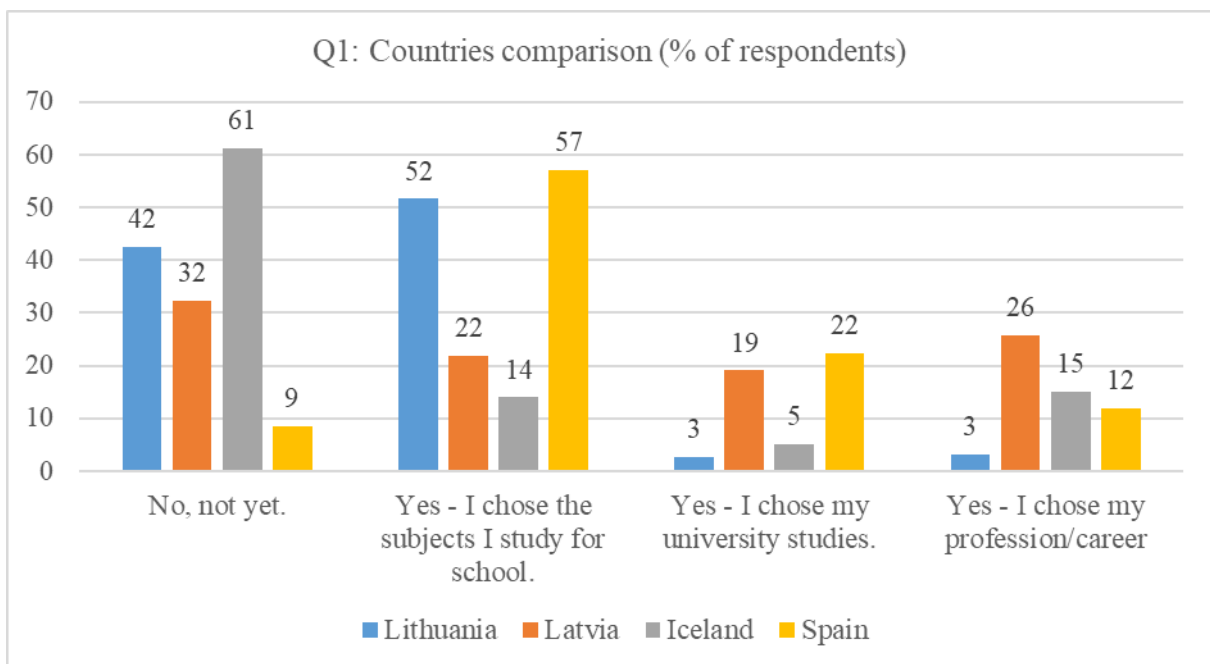
The majority of respondents in Iceland are under 16 years of age, with only seven respondents older than 16, so only the responses of respondents aged 14-16 can be evaluated according to the age category. Therefore, considering Career decisions and age groups, it can be observed that only one-third of respondents have made Career decisions.

According to gender distribution, Career decision-making is similar in both groups, with slightly more (14%) boys having made Career decisions than girls.

70% of respondents who had Career counseling have made Career decisions, while among those who did not have counseling, 27% have made decisions. This may be related to the fact that decision-making typically occurs in the 10th grade, while no Career information sessions are offered in schools prior to that year (as indicated by the qualitative research findings).

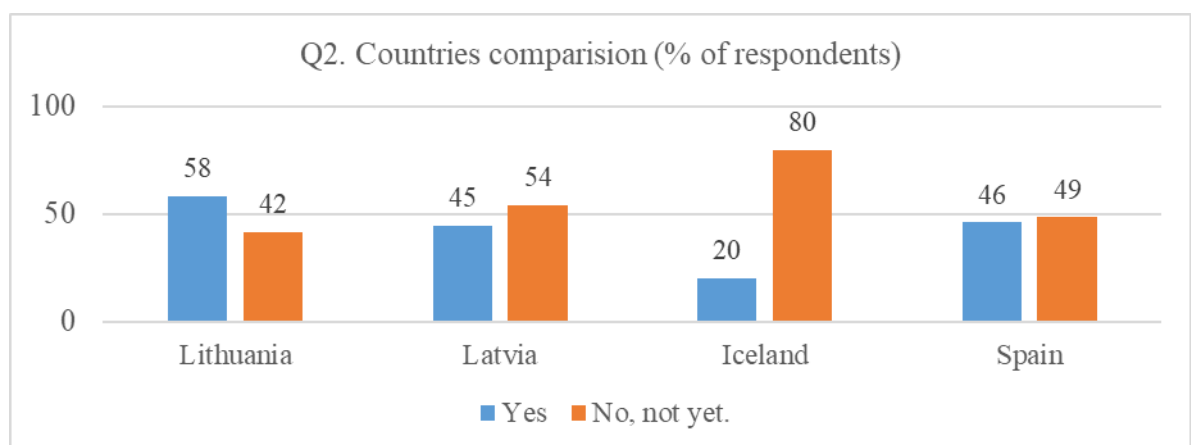


91% of respondents in Spain say they have already made Career decisions: 57% have chosen school subjects, 22% have already decided on further studies, and 12% have decided on their profession. Only 9% of respondents have not made a decision. By age group, 80% or more of respondents in all categories have made Career decisions. The analysis of respondents' answers to the first question by category is quite biased, with more than two-thirds of respondents who have made a decision distributed regardless of whether they participate in extracurricular activities or not. Such trends are due to the very high percentage of Career decisions among Spanish survey participants.



Thus, when comparing the survey data from the four countries in the context of the first question, it can be noted that Iceland stands out in that most of the survey participants have not made a Career decision. Still, this situation is due to the low participation of young people aged 16 and above. In Lithuania, the respondents' decision-making stands out according to age: almost all those over 16 have made Career decisions, while in Latvia and Spain, Career decisions are made less frequently with age.

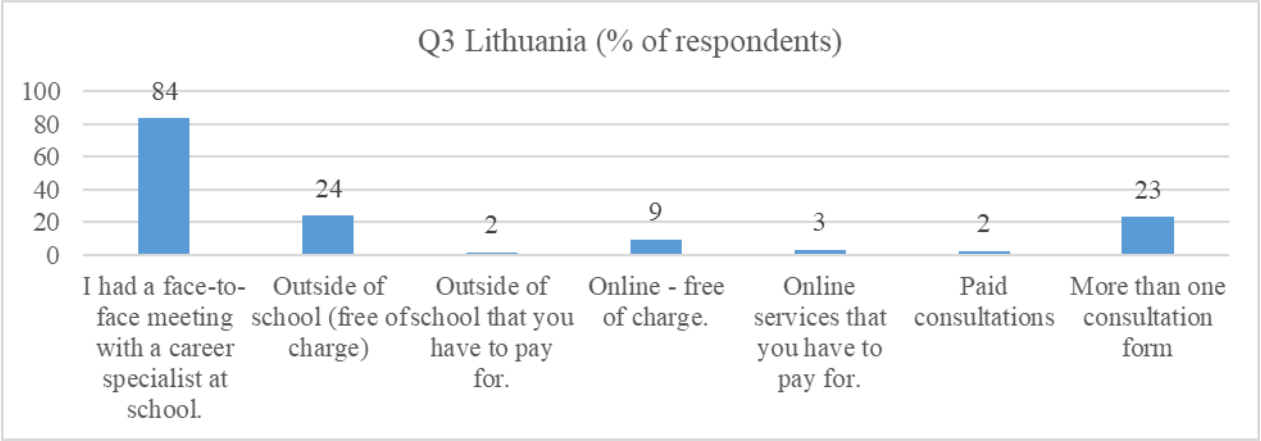
Question 2. Have you spoken to a Career specialist about your Career choice?



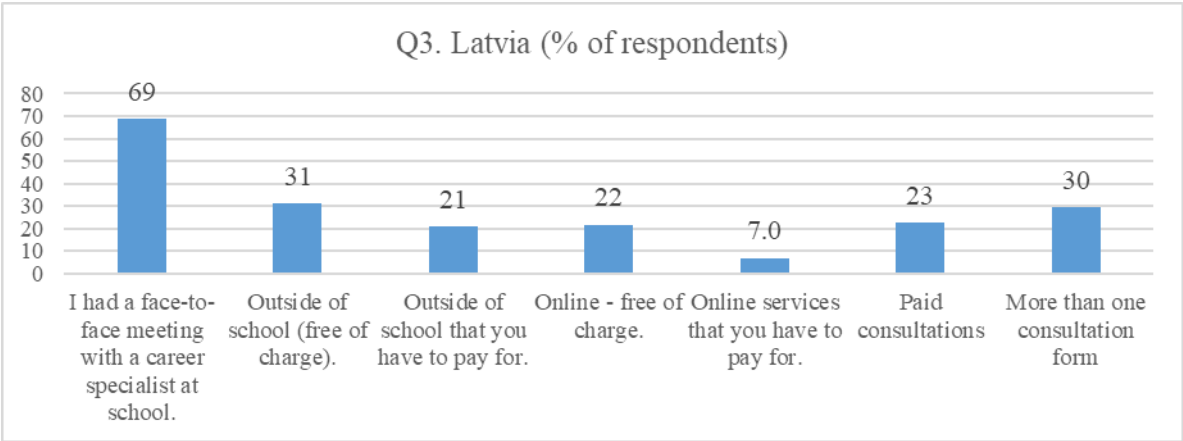
In **Lithuania**, 58% of respondents have had Career counseling, while 42% have not. Among **Latvian** respondents, 54% have not had Career counseling, 45% have, and the percentage of respondents who did not answer is unknown. 80% of survey participants in **Iceland** have not participated in Career counseling, while 20% have. Of the 210 respondents in **Spain**, 49% have not participated in Career counseling, 46% have participated, and 5% are not yet interested in this topic.

In summary, in the regions surveyed, respondents from Lithuania participated most in Career counseling, while the results from Iceland, Latvia, and Spain were quite similar.

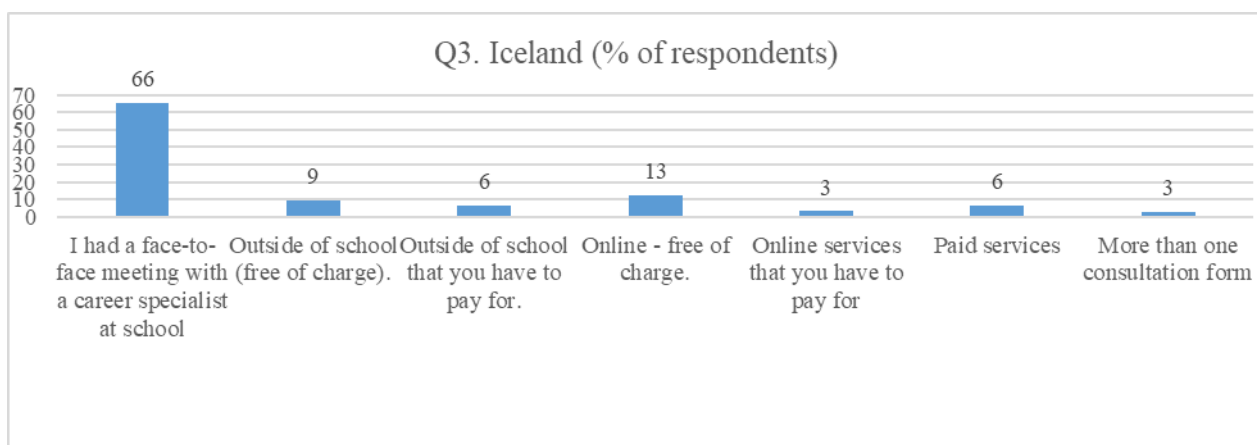
Question 3. If you’ve met with a Career specialist or counselor, where did the meeting take place?



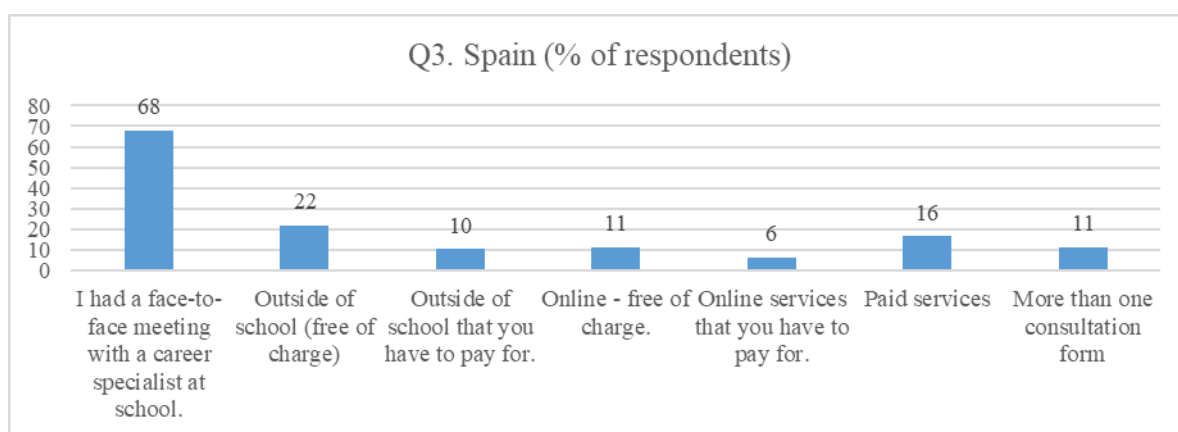
In a Lithuanian survey, 58% of respondents who participated in Career counseling had Career counseling at school (due to ambiguity, it is possible that respondents emphasized counseling at school rather than personal counseling), 24% of respondents received free counseling outside of school, and 23% of respondents sought knowledge on Career issues in more than one form (mostly five forms of counseling).



In Latvia, out of the 45% of respondents who participated in Career counseling, 69% had counseling at school, 31% had free counseling outside of school, 21% had paid counseling outside of school, 22% had free online Career services, 7% used online services for a fee, and a total of 23% participated in Career counseling for an additional cost. As many as 30% of respondents who participated in counseling used more than one form of counseling (most used four forms).



In Iceland, 20% of respondents participated in counseling, of which 66% received this service at school, 9% outside school free of charge, 6% outside school free of charge, 13% online free of charge, 3% used online paid services, and a total of 6% of respondents who participated in Career counseling in Iceland used paid services, with only one respondent using more than one form of counseling.

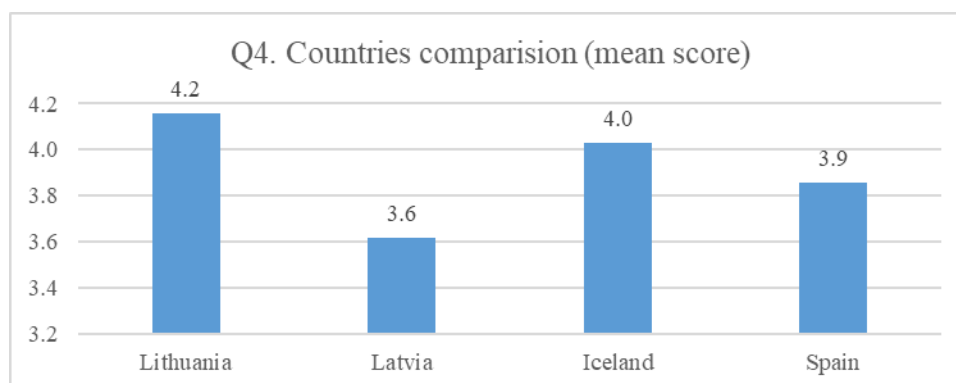


In Spain, among respondents who participated in Career counseling (46%), 68% participated in counseling at school, 22% participated in free counseling outside of school, 10% paid for counseling outside of school, 11% participated in free online counseling, 6% participated in paid online counseling, and 16% of young people who participated in counseling used paid services. 11% of respondents consulted more than one form of counseling (mostly 4).

In summary, the results of the analysis of question 4 show that young people receive most of their counseling at school, the number of respondents who seek counseling outside school varies, with the lowest number among all countries in Iceland (due to the service infrastructure in the region surveyed and the context of migrant families). Latvian respondents consult online most often on Career issues, 22% compared to the average of 11% in other countries. Paid services are chosen by the fewest survey participants, especially in Lithuania and Iceland, while paid services are used the most in Latvia. More than one form of consultation is used by more than a third of respondents

who participated in the consultations (30% in Latvia). The lowest percentage is in Iceland, with only one respondent.

Question 4. If you've ever had a Career consultation, how would you rate it?



In **Lithuania**, among respondents who have already participated in Career counseling, the assessment of the counseling itself is very favorable: mean 4.2. Respondents who believe that they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions rate the counseling very favorably (mean 4.5), but those who think that their knowledge is insufficient rate it significantly lower (mean 3.4). The quality of counseling affects not only the evaluation of the service but also the self-assessment of practical knowledge acquisition. The assessments of gender, age, and other categories of respondents do not differ and correspond to the general table.

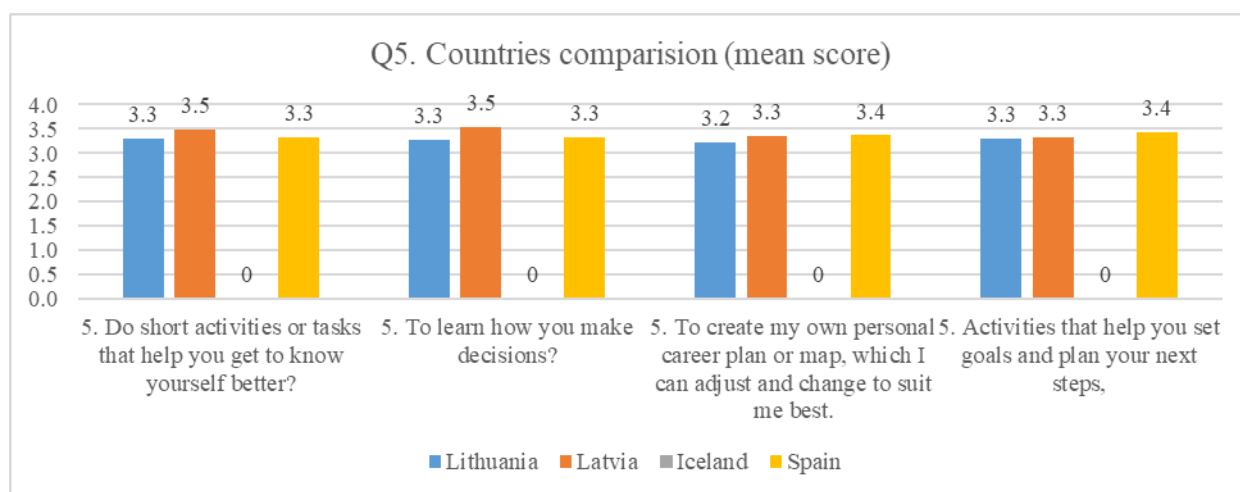
Respondents in **Latvia** who had Career counseling rated it as somewhat applicable (mean 3.6). According to the distribution of Career counseling assessments by age group, there are no significant differences, with the average varying between 3.3 and 3.9, with young people aged 17 and older standing out, and 19-year-olds rating the counseling highest. Since few respondents agreed to disclose their gender in the survey (31 out of 257), this category of respondent assessment is not very informative. Respondents who believe they know how to make Career decisions rate the quality of counseling significantly higher, 4.3, compared to 3.1. (It is possible that the assessment of counseling is better among respondents who have more knowledge because they have attended free and paid counseling outside school. This is because the number of respondents who have received personal counseling at school is similar.)

Respondents who participated in Career counseling in **Iceland** rate the services they received very highly (mean 4.2). Respondents who have activities outside school rate counseling more favorably (mean 4.3) than those who do not have activities outside school (mean 3.9). Respondents who believe they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions also rate the counseling they participated in more favorably (mean 4.5) than those who think they lack the knowledge to make Career decisions (mean 4.2). There are no differences in assessments based on age or gender.

In **Spain**, respondents who have participated in Career counseling rate this experience quite favorably (mean – 3.9). There are also no noticeable differences in the respondents' assessment of whether they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions (4.0 and 3.9). Respondents' assessments of counseling vary somewhat by age, with participants aged 14 and 19 rating it highest (means: 4.2 and 4.0) and respondents aged 15-16 rating it slightly lower (3.6 and 3.8). There are no differences in the assessment of counseling by gender.

So, to sum up question 4, the evaluation of counseling experience is positive in all countries, with the best ratings in Lithuania and the lowest in Latvia. The primary factor influencing the review is whether the young person gained the necessary knowledge to make Career decisions during the counseling. It should also be noted that young people who participated in the survey in Latvia are mainly looking for different forms of Career counseling. Still, they rate its quality as the lowest, possibly because the services offered do not meet the needs of young people.

Question 5. If you've had a Career consultation, did you find it useful? For example, did you learn something about yourself, discover Careers or study options, or learn how to plan your future?



According to respondents who participated in the survey in **Lithuania**, all four Career counseling topics were only partially helpful during the counseling sessions. The mean varies between 3.2 and 3.3. Respondents who would agree to receive counseling outside school on the topics presented rate them more favorably (mean varies between 3.4 and 3.5) than those who would not choose counseling outside school (mean varies between 2.6 and 2.9). The respondents' activities outside school have no impact on this question. Respondents who believe that they have gained sufficient knowledge from the consultations they have participated in evaluate these consultation topics more favorably (3.7–3.9) than those who say that they do not have adequate knowledge to make decisions (mean 2.6–3.0). There are no significant differences in the answers to this question by gender or age.

Among the respondents who participated in the **Latvia** survey, opinions on which topics were most valuable were neutral, with responses ranging between 3.5 and 3.3. The issues of goal setting and subject choice were rated slightly lower than the topics of decision-making and self-discovery methods. Due to the problem of gender disclosure among Latvian respondents, it is not possible to strictly determine the usefulness of the topics discussed in the consultations. Still, it can be partially assessed that these topics are more useful for boys and self-discovery (3.2 vs. 2.9) than for girls. By age distribution: Self-awareness is rated slightly higher by older young people, learning to make decisions seems most important to 14- and 19-year-olds, and Career planning seems most valuable to 14-year-olds. Activities that help to set goals and choose subjects to study are also considered most valuable by 14-year-olds.

In summary, these topics are rated highest by 14- and 19-year-olds, with the rest falling within a similar positive neutral range of 2.9 to 3.6. Respondents who believe they know how to make decisions rate all topics higher than those who think they do not. Latvian young people stand out in terms of their assessment of consultation topics, according to whether they would participate in consultations outside school, as those who would not participate rate the topics slightly better than those who would attend consultations outside school - Self-awareness 3.6 and 3.3; How to make decisions 3.9 and 3.3) (but this may be due to the much smaller number of respondents who are not interested in this area)

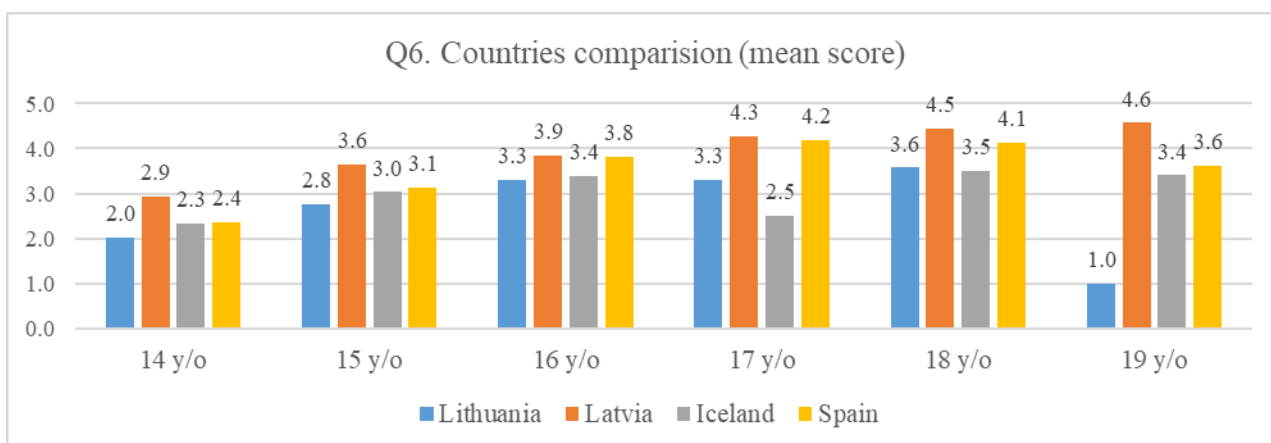
Respondents who do not have activities outside school rate the proposed counseling topics higher than those who do, especially decision-making, Career planning, and activities that help you set goals. Respondents who believe they know how to make Career decisions rate all Career counseling topics better (mean varies between 3.6 and 3.9) than those who think they do not (mean varies between 3.1 and 3.5), with the most significant differences in the topics of self-awareness and decision-making.

In the **Icelandic** survey, these topics could not be assessed due to data collection issues.

Respondents from **Spain** are neutral about the four main topics of Career counseling, with average scores ranging between 3.4 and 3.2. Respondents who would not seek or recommend counseling outside of school rate the counseling topics less favorably than those who have a positive attitude toward counseling outside of school. It can be observed that respondents who believe they do not have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions rate the counseling topics lower (mean varies between 3.0 and 2.7) than those who think they have enough knowledge (mean varies between 3.7 and 3.5). A trend can be observed that the older the respondents participating in the survey, the more positively they evaluate all consultation topics.

So, to sum up the four main Career counseling topics that respondents rated in question 5, we can see that the average answers are similar. All topics are helpful during counseling. Differences in higher ratings by respondent category are noticeable among those who would like to participate in counseling outside of school and among those who believe they have gained sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions. It should be noted that in Spain, there is a difference between age categories, with older young people valuing the consultation topics more highly.

Question 6. When did you feel you most needed advice about your future?



Among the young people who participated in the survey in **Lithuania**, there is a tendency that the older the young person, the greater the need for Career counseling: among 14-year-olds, the need is less than it is among 15-year-olds, while 16-18-year-olds rated the need as neutral. Depending on whether young people have participated in Career counseling, those who have participated feel a greater need for counseling in all age categories than those who have not attended. A greater need (average of more than 4.30) is recorded among young people who had counseling when they were 18 years old.

According to the responses of respondents in **the Latvian** survey, it can be concluded that the older the respondents, the greater the need for counseling. While counseling was viewed neutrally among 14-year-olds, Career counseling became increasingly necessary among those aged 15 and older. There are no significant differences between young people who have participated in counseling and those who have not; the same trend prevails, namely that the older the respondent, the greater the need for counseling. Essentially, the indicators converge from the age of 16. Respondents who consider their knowledge insufficient for making Career decisions require more counseling across all age categories than those who believe their knowledge is sufficient.

Among young people in Latvia who would recommend counseling outside of school and those who would not, there are no significant differences in this regard; the same trend prevails, namely that the older the respondent, the greater the need for counseling. Essentially, the indicators

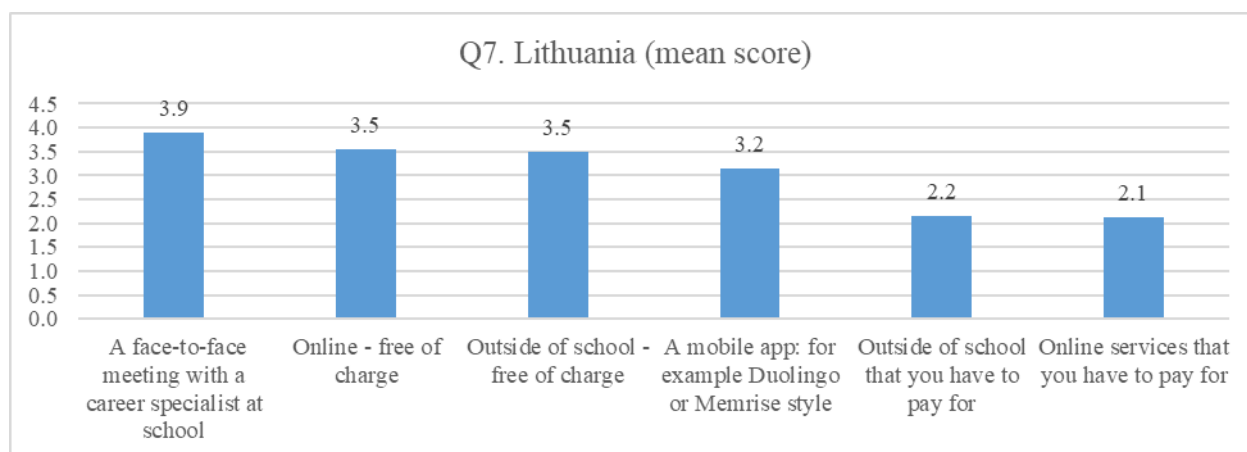
converge from the age of 16. In terms of gender, it can be observed that girls need more counseling than boys in all categories.

Based on the responses of participants in the **Icelandic** survey, a similar trend can be observed, namely that older young people have a greater need for counseling. Still, due to the uneven distribution of respondents in terms of age, this is not reflected in the data analysis.

It can be observed that respondents in **Spain** aged 14-15 had a neutral need for Career counseling, but for those older than 16, the need increases and continues to grow with age. From the age of 16, respondents who did not participate in Career counseling felt a slightly greater need for counseling than those who did.

In summary, the need for counseling among young people aged 14 to 19 is growing and remains an essential issue until they start their studies after leaving school. This trend suggests that this issue is relevant to young people in different ways between the ages of 14 and 19. However, by trying to involve them in this topic as early as possible, it is possible to create better conditions for them to acquire the knowledge they need to make Career decisions and reduce the impact of negative emotional needs, which in the quantitative study were recorded as an increase in need, and qualitative research as an increase in stress levels before making Career decisions, especially before the age of 16 or 10th grade.

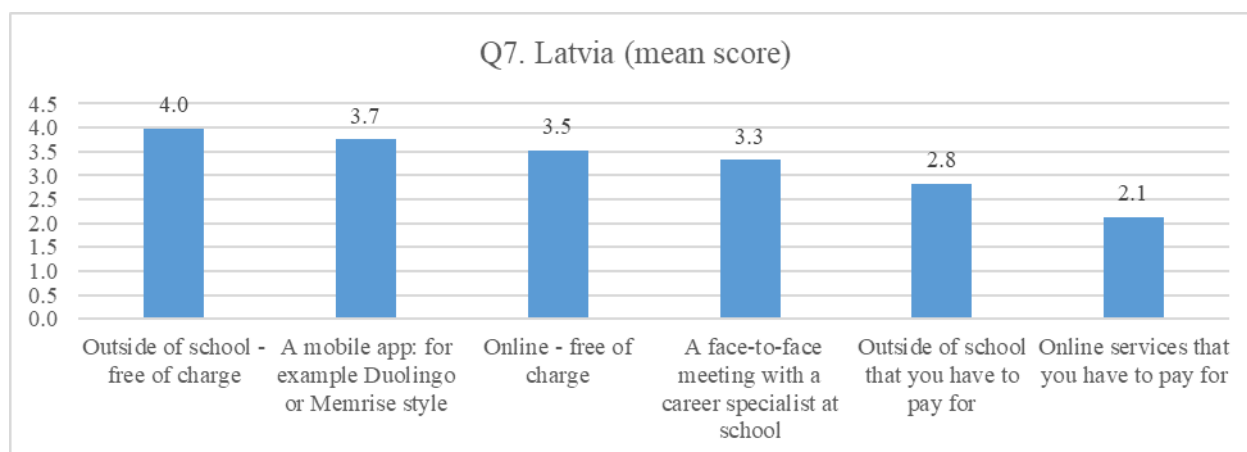
Question 7. Where would you like to get advice about your future?



When asked to rate the possible forms of counseling, respondents in Lithuania rated paid services the lowest—they would not like this option. They rated personal counseling at school the highest, with online counseling and live counseling outside of school as their second choices. Survey participants who had participated in Career counseling rated the personal counseling format more highly than those who had not received Career counseling. Young people who would go to counseling outside of school and recommend it to their friends rated all forms of counseling much more highly. The most highly rated consultations are those held at school, outside school, and

online, free of charge. Those who would not attend or recommend consultations outside of school rate them poorly, with a score of 2.3 (those who would recommend them score 3.9).

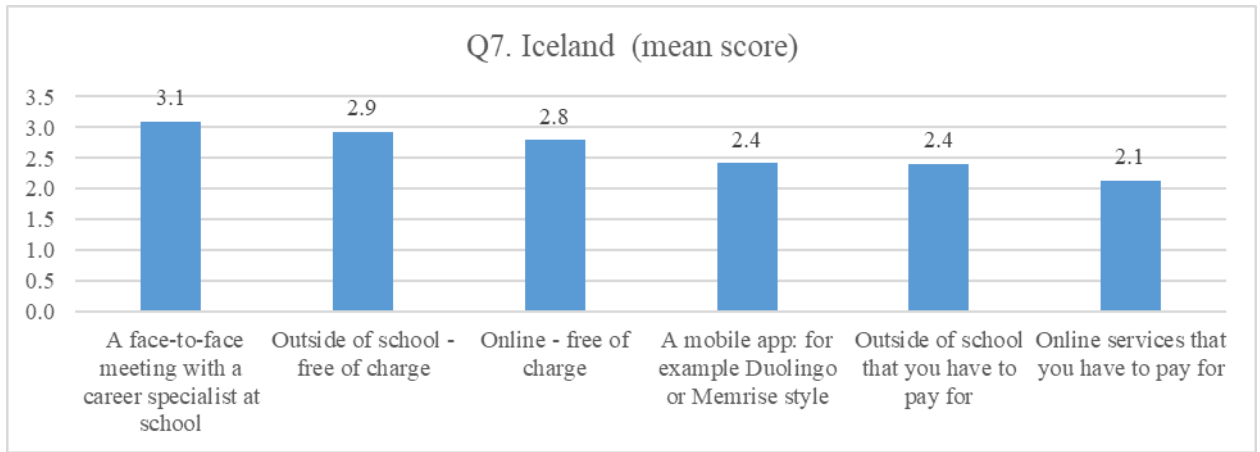
Career counseling outside school is most highly valued by 14-year-olds, with little difference in the ranking and value of responses from other age groups: 15- and 16-year-olds rate other forms of counseling less highly than 17- and 18-year-olds. Young people aged 15-18 would prefer free online counseling to counseling outside of school. In other respondent categories, the responses are in line with the overall results for the country.



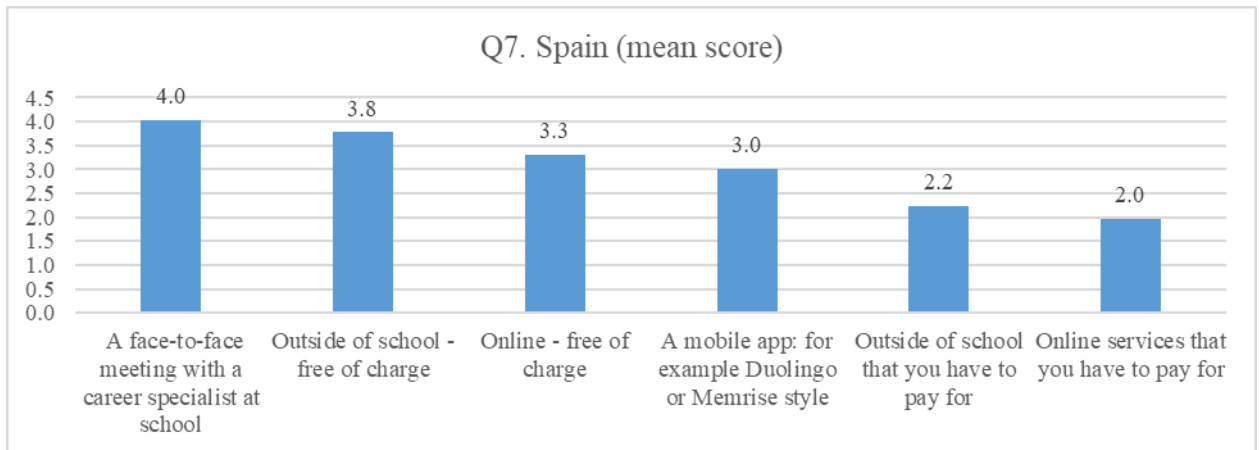
Respondents in Latvia, when asked where they would find it most convenient to receive Career counseling, ranked free services outside of school highest, followed by mobile interactive applications, then online free of charge, face-to-face, and paid services.

There are noticeable differences between respondents who would seek counseling outside of school and recommend it to friends and those who would not: the ratings of those who would agree to participate in such counseling are higher (mean variates between 4.15 and 2.0 versus 3.8 and 2.5). According to the highest-rated form of consultation, both groups of respondents choose free consultations outside school. However, further responses differ, e.g., respondents who would find consultations outside the school are more likely to rank apps second (mean 3.9). In contrast, those who do not want to consult outside the school prefer a face-to-face meeting with a consultant at the school (mean 3.7).

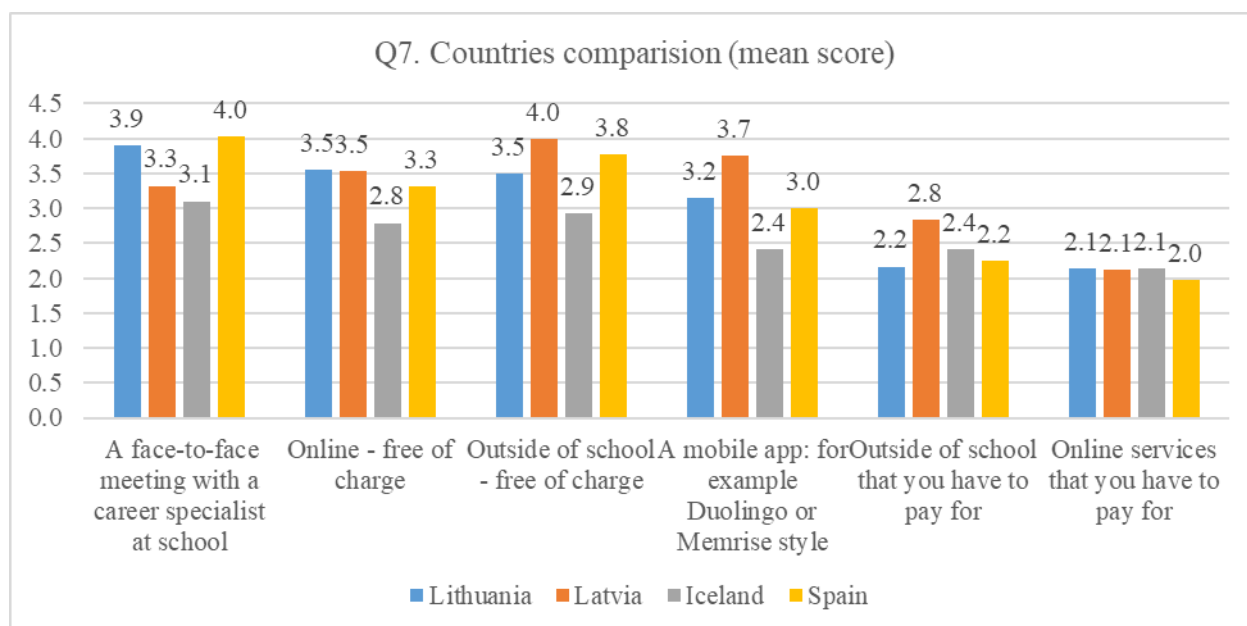
Among respondents who believe that they do not have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions, the ratings for all responses tend to be higher in the Latvian survey (these respondents believe that all topics and forms are of greater value to them in the context of Career counseling). Still, the order of responses does not differ from the overall distribution in both groups. Looking at how people rated where they'd get counseling based on their age, it's worth noting that young people aged 16 and up value mobile apps and online counseling more than face-to-face meetings. In other categories, the answers are mainly consistent with the overall results for the country.



Respondents in Iceland would prefer to receive counseling in person at school (mean 3.1), online free of charge (mean 2.9), and free of charge outside of school (mean 2.8) as their second choice. Mobile apps and paid services outside school are viewed more negatively by young people.

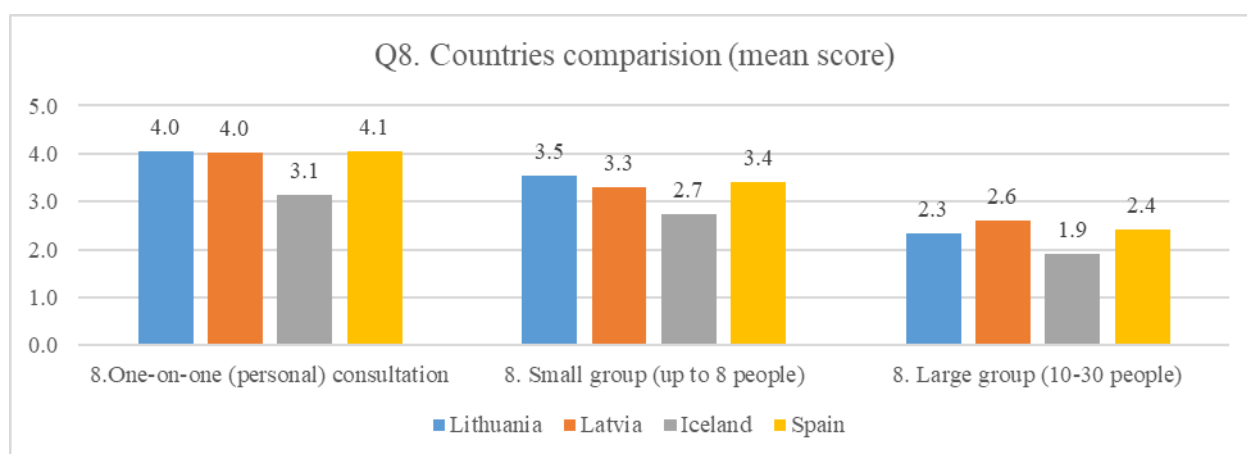


According to respondents, the most convenient way to receive Career counseling in Spain would be in person at school (mean 4.0) and in person outside of school (mean 3.8). Compared to the first two, online free of charge (mean 3.3) and mobile application (mean 3.0) are rated slightly lower. Paid Career counseling is not acceptable. The distribution of respondents' answers among the more detailed categories coincides with the table of overall question averages.



Thus, paid services are viewed rather negatively among young people in all countries surveyed. Attitudes toward the usefulness of mobile applications vary, with Spain and Lithuania viewing them rather neutrally, Iceland more negatively, and Latvia more positively. These differing results are likely to be due to differences in the attitudes of the regions surveyed and in the investment made in providing additional opportunities for young people to seek Career advice at school and outside school, i.e., apps may be equated with other free and paid web pages and applications of the same format that are based on tests of questionable usefulness, and young people who do not trust or value the usefulness of these tests are cautious in their assessment of the effectiveness of apps. Free online consultations are more highly valued in Lithuania, Latvia, and Spain, but the evaluation is neutral in Iceland. Young people most value live counseling at school or outside school, but there are differences in where they find it most useful. In Latvia, the possibility of counseling outside school is rated slightly higher, while in Spain, counseling at school is rated higher. In Lithuania, the difference is not significant, but there is more support for personal counseling at school. In Iceland, counseling at school is rated more highly. In contrast, opinions outside school are neutral, probably due to the lack of such counseling opportunities, which means that young people have no basis for comparison.

Question 8. What group size would work best for you when getting advice or support?



Young people from **Lithuania** believe that personal consultations would be most useful to them, while small group consultations are slightly less valuable. Extensive group consultations are not very useful. The responses to other categories of questions are distributed identically to those in the overall analysis. It can be noted that individual consultations are rated more highly by more active respondents, those with more knowledge, and those who have already attended consultations, and partly by girls. In terms of age groups, the opinions of 14-15-year-olds stand out from the rest, as they find small group Career consultations more useful, while 16-18-year-olds find individual consultations more useful.

Respondents **in Latvia** believe that individual consultations best meet their needs, while consultations in small groups are less helpful, and consultations with a class size are partially useless. This trend persists across all categories of questions, with only slight differences in ratings. There is a tendency for those who would attend and recommend consultations outside school to rate the responses analyzed in this question significantly more favorably. The same applies to those who have and do not have the knowledge to make Career decisions. It should be noted that those who are unfamiliar with meeting formats rate all meeting formats significantly better.

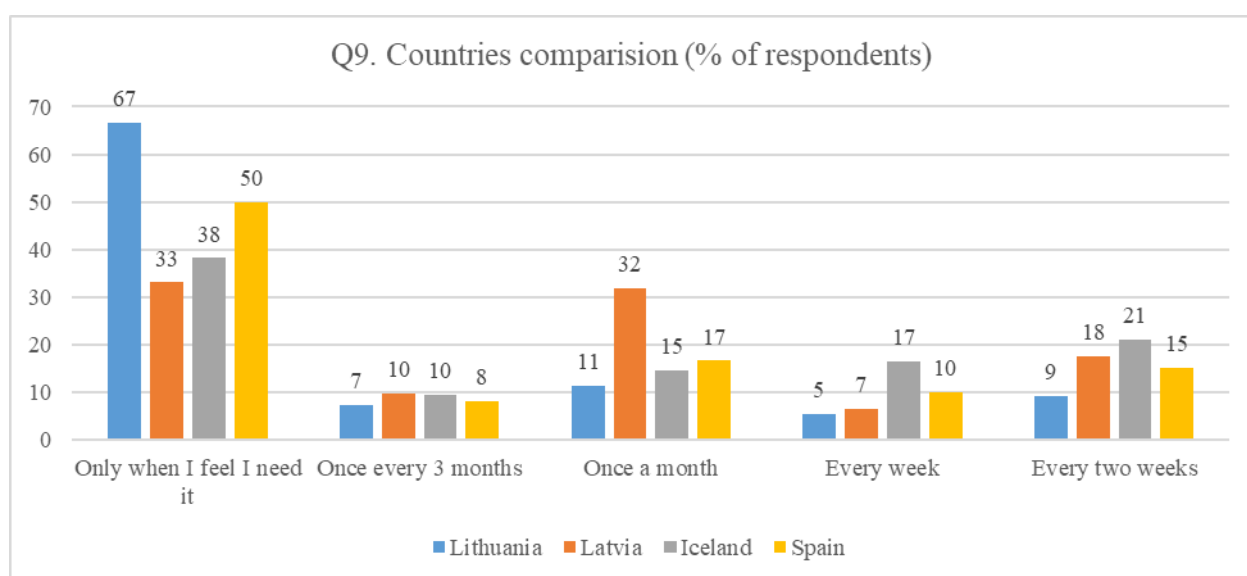
The respondents who participated in the **Icelandic** survey would benefit most from personal face-to-face meetings with a Career counselor. At the same time, small groups were rated slightly lower, and class-size consultations were rated as partially applicable. These general results are also reflected in the breakdown of respondents according to whether they had participated in counseling or not, whether they would go and recommend others to seek counseling outside school, whether the young people who participated in the survey have activities outside school, how they assess their knowledge for making Career decisions, and by gender and age.

Respondents **in Spain** would prefer face-to-face consultations (mean 4.1), followed by consultations in small groups (mean 3.4). The assessment of consultations in classes is somewhat negative (mean 2.4). In this question, such response trends prevail in all categories among survey

participants from Spain. These general results are also reflected in the breakdown of respondents according to whether they have participated in counseling or not, whether they would go and recommend others to seek counseling outside school, whether the young people who participated in the survey have activities outside school, how they assess their knowledge for making Career decisions, and by gender and age.

Summarizing the eighth question, it can be noted that trends in the number of consultation participants are similar across EU countries, but significantly lower among young people in Iceland. However, the distribution of consultation participants remains identical in all countries surveyed—one-on-one personal consultations are rated highest, followed by consultations in small groups of up to eight people. In contrast, consultations in large groups are rated as somewhat unhelpful for young people on this topic in all countries.

Question 9. How often do you think it would be helpful to attend Career consultations?



Most respondents **in Lithuania** (67%) believe that consultations are most useful when needed, while the remaining third believe that consultations should be held monthly or more frequently. Young people who think that they do not have enough knowledge to make Career decisions are more likely to agree with a regular consultation schedule than with consultations on demand (54%). More regular consultations are also more popular among 14-year-olds (58%).

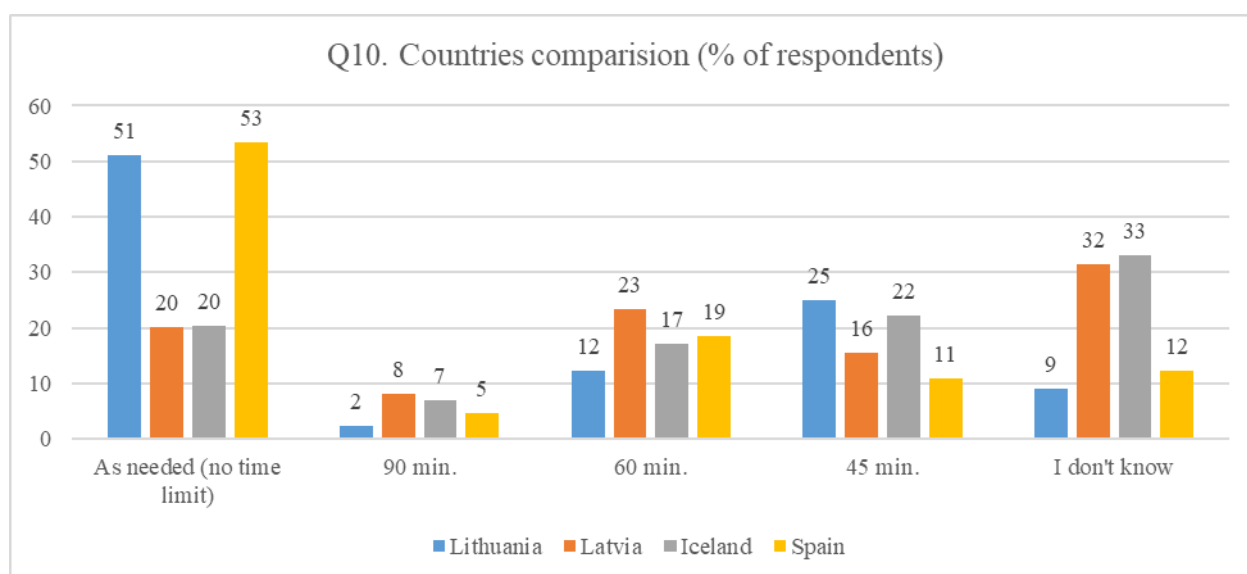
32% of respondents **in the Latvian** survey say that consultations should be held once a month, 33% believe that consultations should be held as needed, 18% believe that they should be held every two weeks, 7% believe that they should be held every week, and 10% believe that they should be held every three months. Thus, the majority of respondents consider it necessary to have Career counseling at least once a month. The responses do not differ significantly across other categories of respondents and are consistent with the overall table.

39% of respondents **in Iceland** believe that Career counseling should be provided on an as-needed basis, 17% would like it to take place weekly, and 21% every two weeks. Once a month—15%. Once every three months—10%. Thus, 53% of respondents would like to have fixed monthly or more frequent counseling sessions. Respondents who believe they lack sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions would like to have more frequent, fixed Career counseling sessions. It is noteworthy that 14-year-old respondents are more likely to want more frequent Career counseling than 15-year-old respondents and older.

Survey participants **in Spain** most often chose the frequency of consultations according to need (50%), while 40% opted for a fixed schedule: weekly (8%), every two weeks (15%), once a month (17%).

In this context, responses indicating free choice and counseling on demand dominate in all countries, most notably in Lithuania (67%) and Spain (50%). Other choices reflect a consistent and regular approach to Career counseling among young people. The smallest proportion of respondents in all countries would like them to take place infrequently, every three months. Young people who support regularity would like counseling to take place regularly, at least monthly.

Question 10. How long do you think a consultation should work best for you?



Respondents' opinions **in Lithuania** on the duration of consultations also vary, with 51% believing that consultations should not be limited in time and should last as long as necessary. 25% believe that they should last 45 minutes, and 12% believe that they should last 60 minutes. Only 42% of young people who have not had consultations believe that they should last as long as necessary, 28% believe that they should last up to 45 minutes, and 17% believe that they should last up to 60 minutes. There is also a difference between respondents who consider that they do not have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions: 46% would like a fixed time (36% would like no

fixed time), and there is also a difference between men and women: 49% of men prefer a fixed time to no fixed time (43%).

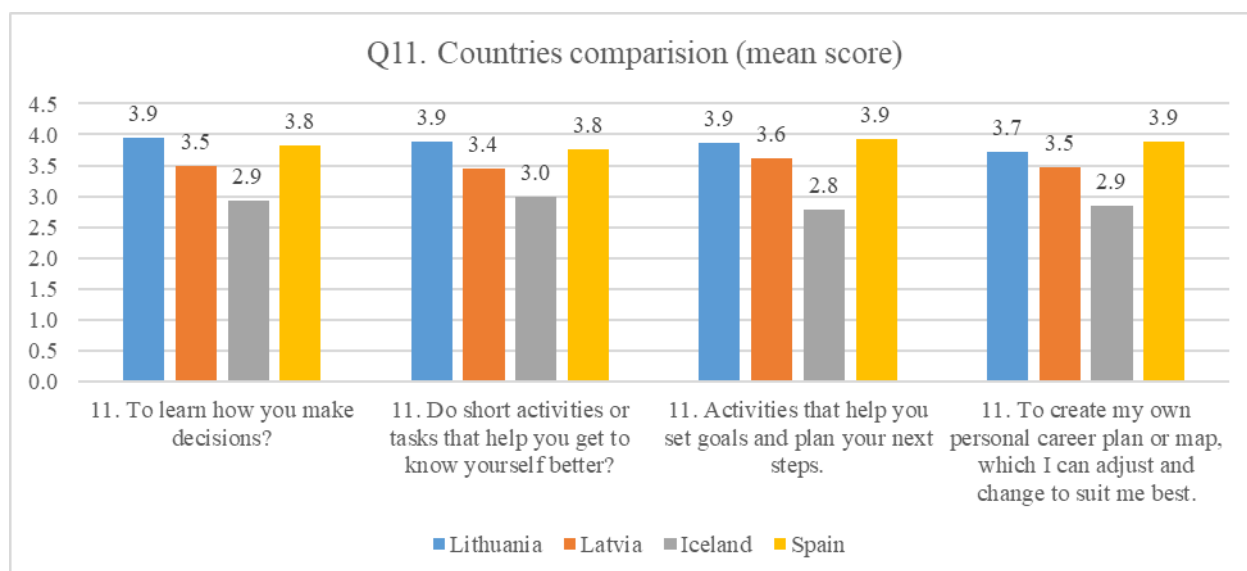
Depending on the duration of the consultation, the responses of respondents in **Latvia** vary considerably: duration according to need - 20%; 45 min – 16%, 60 min – 23%, 90 min – 8% (fixed time in total – 47%), 32% have no opinion on this issue. Thus, there is a prevailing need for consultations for a fixed duration. Respondents who have participated in consultations are broadly divided into two groups: 12% believe that consultations should last as long as necessary, and 12% believe that they should last 60 minutes. 8% believe that they should last 45 minutes. Most respondents who have not participated in consultations do not know how long a consultation would be most useful for them or choose between 45 minutes (8%) and 60 minutes (11%). Similar trends are observed in other respondent groups.

Respondents in **Iceland** tend to prefer fixed consultation times (47%), 20% believe that consultations should last as long as necessary, and one third have no opinion on the length of consultations. 45 minutes – 22%, 60 minutes – 17%, 90 minutes – 7%. Respondents' experience with Career counseling in Iceland is associated with a more favorable opinion of fixed consultation times. Respondents who would choose counseling outside of school and recommend it to friends believe that fixed consultation times are more important. The youngest respondents are slightly more likely to believe that counseling should be at fixed times (14 years old - 50%; 15 years old - 39%). The general trends in responses to this question prevail in other respondent groups.

Based on the responses of respondents in **Spain** to question 10, it can be concluded that the majority believe that the duration of consultations should not be fixed but should be based on need (53%). The distribution of respondents between fixed consultation lengths is as follows: 45 min. - 11%, 60 min. 19%, 90 min. 5%. The choice of a fixed consultation time is also related to the view that consultations should take place regularly. A significant proportion of respondents who choose consultations as needed also believe that the duration should be as required. This choice may be because respondents have extracurricular activities outside of school.

In summary, in Lithuania and Spain, slightly more than half of the respondents believe that the duration of consultations should not be fixed but should last as long as the young person needs. In Latvia and Iceland, this choice is similar to the fixed time proposals (60 min. and 45 min.), but one-third of respondents have no opinion on this issue. About one-third of respondents believe that consultations should be for a fixed duration, up to one hour.

Question 11. Which consultation topic do you think would be most useful to you?



Overall, all four proposed topics are considered equally relevant to **Lithuanian** respondents, with the topic of personal Career planning receiving a slightly lower rating. The same trends are observed in other categories of the analysis. Significantly higher ratings were given to these topics by those with knowledge (4.1-4.0) than by those without expertise (3.6-3.4). Respondents aged 14 rated decision-making more highly than self-awareness.

Among respondents surveyed in **Latvia**, when assessing which consultation topics would be most valuable to them, the ratings for all four topics were very similar, between 3.5 and 3.6, so no significant differences can be identified in the overall table. All topics are important. Still, it should be noted that the topic "Activities that help you set goals and plan your next steps..." received a slightly higher average rating than the others (by ≥ 0.12 , which is a significant difference among the 254 responses, but not a major one). There is a noticeable difference in the topics between respondents who have not participated in the consultation; they place more emphasis on the topic "Activities that help you set goals and plan your next steps..." (3.8) and rate self-awareness topics lower (3.4). Among respondents who participated in Career counseling, the usefulness of the topics does not differ, with all topics rated as somewhat applicable (average score of 3.4–3.5). There is a difference in the assessment of topics between different age groups: 14-year-olds rate all topics above average (4.0-4.5). At the same time, 19-year-olds rate all topics the lowest, but the distribution of topics is consistent with the overall distribution. A trend can be observed whereby the older the young people, the lower their assessment of the usefulness of the topics, and the younger they are, the higher their assessment.

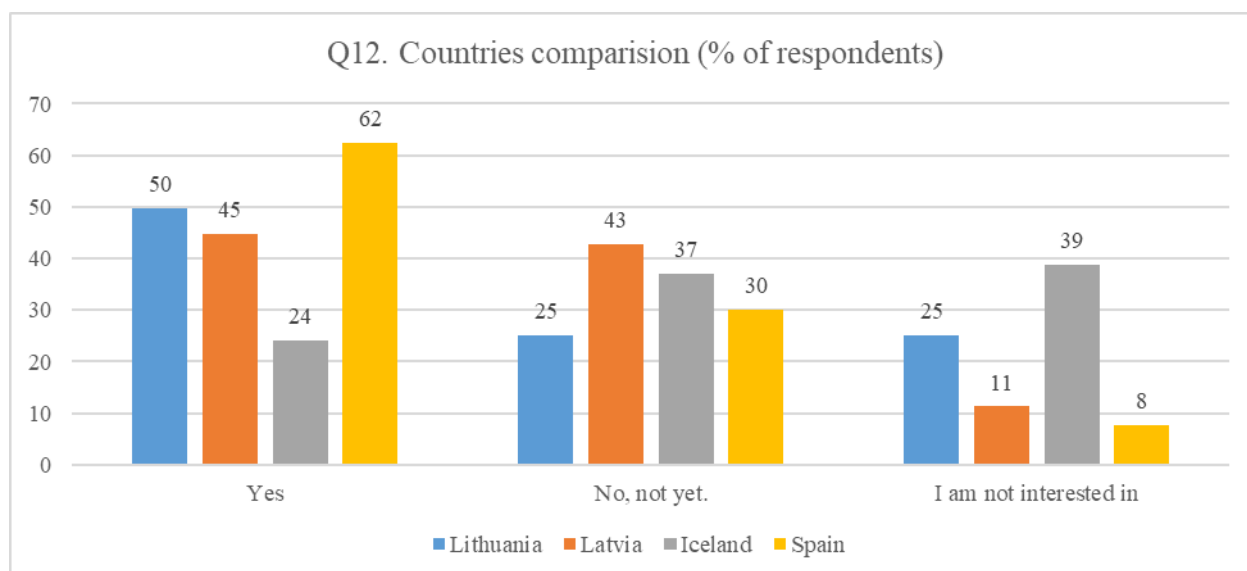
The responses of respondents **in Iceland** regarding which Career counseling topics would be most useful were distributed neutrally, reflecting the different nature of youth Career counseling in Iceland, where young people mainly receive information-based counseling. The average response

varied between 3.0 and 2.8. Therefore, there is no significant difference between the consultation topics presented. There is a noticeable difference in the assessment of topics among respondents who would like to participate in counseling outside of school—in their opinion, almost all topics would be partially helpful (>3.4). 3.7 - Activities that help you set goals and plan your next step; 3.6 - To learn how you make decisions? Do short activities or tasks that help you get to know yourself better - 3.4; To create my Career plan or map - 3.3. It can therefore be interpreted that young people expect to receive targeted, systematic services in consultations outside school. Respondents who would not like to consult outside school rate the topics 2.8 - 2.7.

According to respondents who participated in the survey **in Spain**, all consultation topics are partially valuable (mean 3.9-3.8), with differences in their averages varying by only 0.1, so it is not possible to single out any that are more important. Respondents who did not participate in the consultations rated all consultation topics more positively: means between 4.1 and 3.9, while those who participated rated them 3.9-3.6. Respondents who rate consultations outside school positively also rate the topics of the consultations as more critical (means vary between 4.1 and 3.9 versus 3.4-3.2). Activities outside school and sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions do not differ from the general trend in the question. The older the respondents, the more critical the topics of counseling are: only among 16-year-old respondents, self-awareness is considered slightly more important than other counseling topics, while among different age groups, this topic is somewhat less relevant.

Therefore, Career counseling topics are considered partially valuable for all countries, except Iceland, where all topics are viewed more neutrally. The usefulness of topics varies between different categories of respondents in other countries, with differences observed between respondents under the age of 16 and those who believe they do not have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions.

Question 12. Are you aware that counseling is available outside of school?



The distribution among respondents who are aware, unaware, and uninterested in **Lithuania** is equal across all question categories, with a few exceptions. The overall distribution is that about 50% are aware that there are opportunities for counseling outside of school, 25% are unaware, and 25% are uninterested. The most significant exception is 14-year-olds, of whom 31% know about counseling opportunities outside school, 26% do not know, and 42% are not interested in this topic.

Among respondents in **Latvia**, 45% are aware that there are opportunities to seek advice outside school, 43% are unaware of this, and 11% are not interested in this issue. Among young people who have participated in counseling, 64% are aware that there are opportunities to seek advice outside school, and 36% are unaware of this. Among respondents who did not participate in counseling, 69% are unaware that there are opportunities for Career counseling outside of school, and 31% are aware but have not yet taken advantage of them.

74% of respondents who know that it is possible to seek Career advice outside school, and 81% who do not know would participate and recommend others to seek advice outside school. 69% of respondents who have activities outside school know that there are opportunities to consult on Career issues outside school, while 51% of those who are unaware of these opportunities attend activities. Young people who have activities outside school are more likely to find out about counseling outside school and to make use of it.

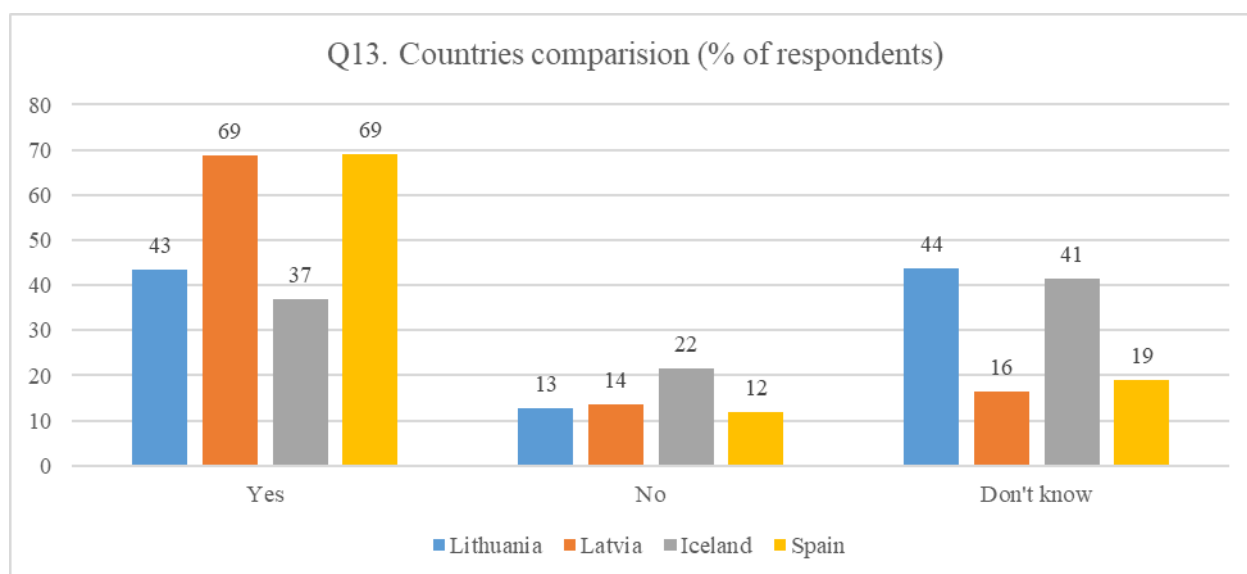
Based on the distribution of respondents' answers by age group, there is a tendency for younger survey participants, i.e., those under 16, to be less aware of the possibility of seeking counseling outside of school than respondents over 16. There is no difference in the distribution of responses by gender.

In Iceland, 39% of respondents say they are not interested in Career counseling, 37% are unaware of opportunities for counseling outside of school, and only 24% say they are aware of such

opportunities. However, according to other categories of respondents, the answers to this question do not differ, i.e., young people are more unaware of counseling opportunities than they are aware of, regardless of their activity at school or outside school.

Respondents **in Spain** who have had Career counseling are more likely to be aware of opportunities for counseling outside school (56%) than those who have not had counseling (30%). These trends are characteristic of all categories of respondents, i.e., respondents who are active outside school, who would like to receive counseling outside school, and who believe they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions, are more likely to be aware of opportunities for counseling outside school, which is expected due to their greater personal activity.

Question 13. Would you consider going for counseling outside of school, and would you recommend it to your friends?



Respondents' answers **in Lithuania** on whether they would choose counseling outside school and recommend it to a friend are distributed as follows: 43% know about it and would recommend it, 13% do not know about it or would not recommend it, and 44% are not interested in this topic. Young people who are involved in activities outside school are more aware of and interested in this topic than those who are not. The opinion of 15-year-olds differs from other age groups: only 35% are aware of and would recommend such counseling outside school.

69% of respondents from **Latvia** would participate in and recommend consultations outside school. 14% say the opposite, and 16% are not interested in this topic. There is no difference between those who participated in Career counseling and those who did not, and between those who participated in consultations outside school and those who did not. There is no difference between

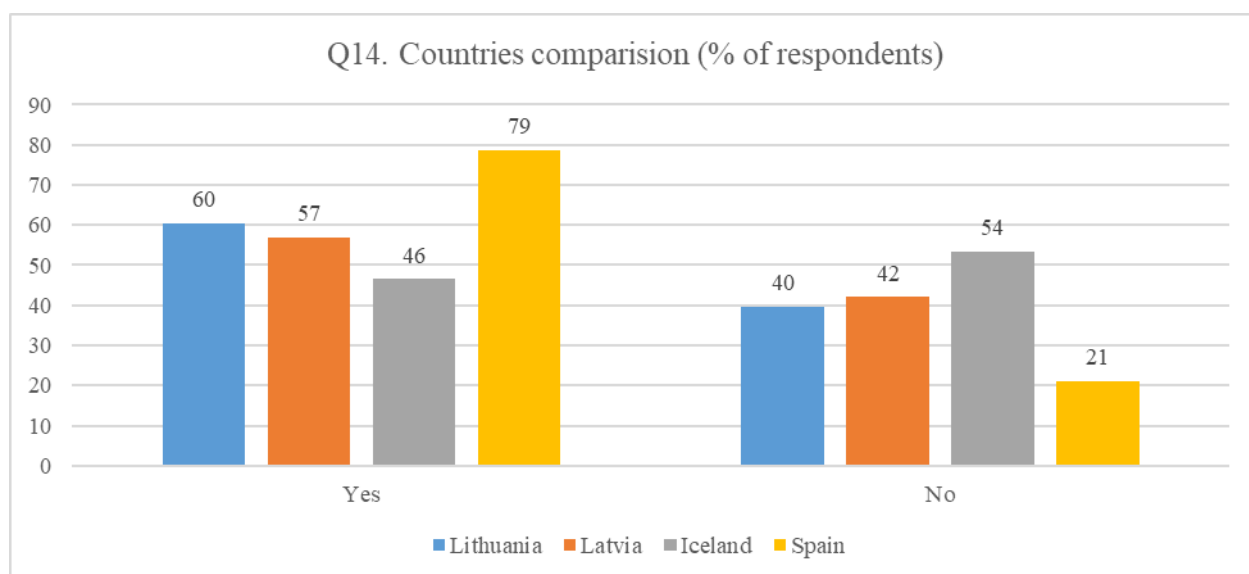
those who have activities outside school and those who do not agree to participate in consultations outside school. Respondents who say they know how to make Career decisions would recommend counseling outside school to others (11%). In comparison, those who would not do so (7%) are outnumbered by those who do not have sufficient knowledge to go to counseling outside school (34%) and those who would not go (4%).

In Iceland, 41% of respondents say they are not interested in Career counseling outside of school. 37% say they would like counseling and would recommend it to others. 22% disagree with this proposal. 47% of respondents who have activities outside school believe that counseling outside school would be helpful and would recommend it to others, and only 29% of respondents who do not have activities outside school believe this. It can be noted that 48% of respondents who do not have extracurricular activities say they are not interested in Career counseling. In Iceland, Career counseling is becoming increasingly important for older young people every year, and they would be more willing to seek counseling outside of school.

69% of respondents in **Spain** would like to participate in Career counseling outside of school, 12% would not, and 19% are undecided. Respondents who have activities outside school more often (84%) say that counseling outside school would be helpful to them, while only 56% of respondents who do not have activities outside school view counseling outside school positively.

The highest number of respondents who would like to participate in Career counseling outside school is in Latvia and Spain (both 69%), while in Lithuania and Iceland, about one-third of respondents (43% and 37%) are interested. Still, in the latter country, most respondents also say they have no opinion on the matter.

Question 14. Do you attend any clubs, volunteer, or go to a youth center outside of school?



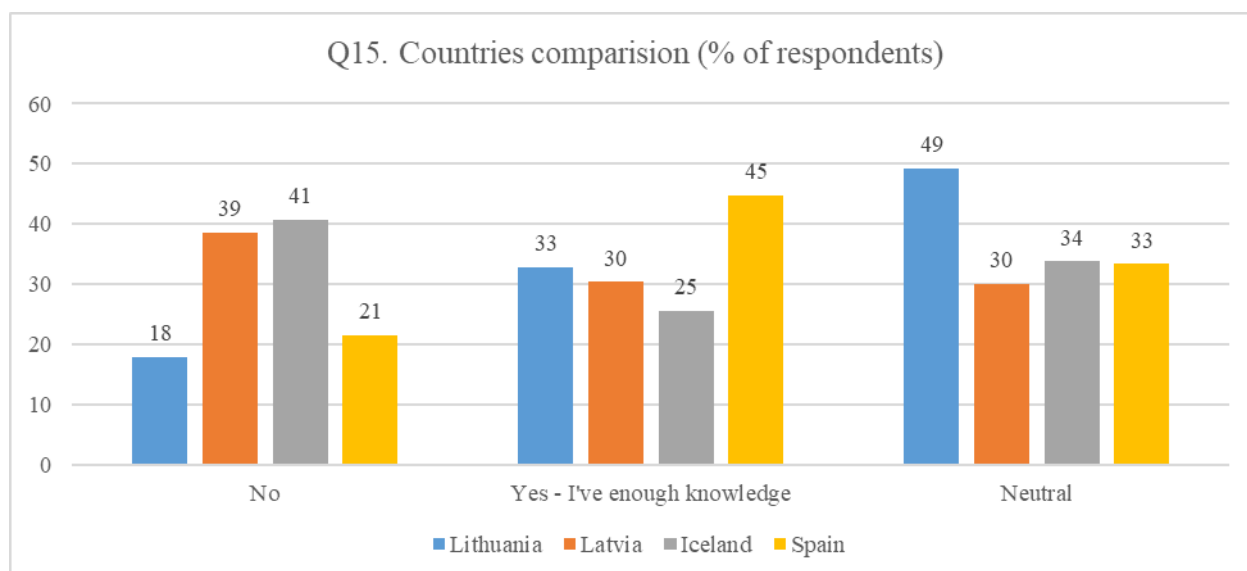
60% of survey participants **in Lithuania** are involved in activities outside school, while 40% are not. Young people who are engaged in activities are more likely to seek advice outside school and are more likely to believe that they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions. No differences from the general table are observed in other categories of respondents.

Among respondents in **Latvia**, 57% are involved in activities outside school, while 42% are not. Of those who have had Career counseling, 51% are engaged in activities outside school, while 49% are not. Among those who have not had Career counseling, 62% do not have activities outside school, and 38% do. Thus, there is a tendency for young people who have activities outside school to have greater opportunities for Career counseling. 71% of respondents who have activities outside school and 68% of those who do not would go to and recommend Career counseling outside school. Respondents who have activities outside school are likely to have more knowledge about Career decisions than those who do not have such activities.

In Iceland, 41% of respondents say they are not interested in Career counseling outside of school. 37% say they would like counseling and would recommend it to others. 22% disagree with this proposal. 47% of respondents who have activities outside school believe that counseling outside school would be helpful and would recommend it to others, and only 29% of respondents who do not have activities outside school believe this. It can be noted that 48% of respondents who do not have extracurricular activities say they are not interested in Career counseling. In Iceland, Career counseling is becoming increasingly important to young people every year, and they would be more willing to seek counseling outside of school.

79% of survey participants **in Spain** are involved in activities outside school, while 21% are not. 53% of respondents who have activities outside school have consulted on Career issues, and only 23% of young people who do not have activities outside school have consulted on Career issues. In Spain, after-school activities are linked to the opportunity to obtain more Information about Career counseling and to take advantage of it.

Question 15. Do you feel you have enough information to make decisions about your subjects, studies, or future Career?



In **Lithuania**, 33% of respondents believe they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions, 18% feel they lack such knowledge, while 49% remain neutral—indicating an awareness that improvements are needed to make more informed choices. Respondents who are aware of Career counseling opportunities outside of school tend to feel more confident in their Career decision-making abilities. This may suggest that more proactive young people—those who seek out external resources—benefit from broader exposure to guidance, resulting in a higher level of preparedness.

Notably, no significant differences were observed across age, gender, or willingness to receive counseling outside of school regarding perceived sufficiency of knowledge. However, young people who have previously participated in Career counseling and have already made important Career-related decisions are more likely to express confidence in their knowledge and ability to plan their futures effectively.

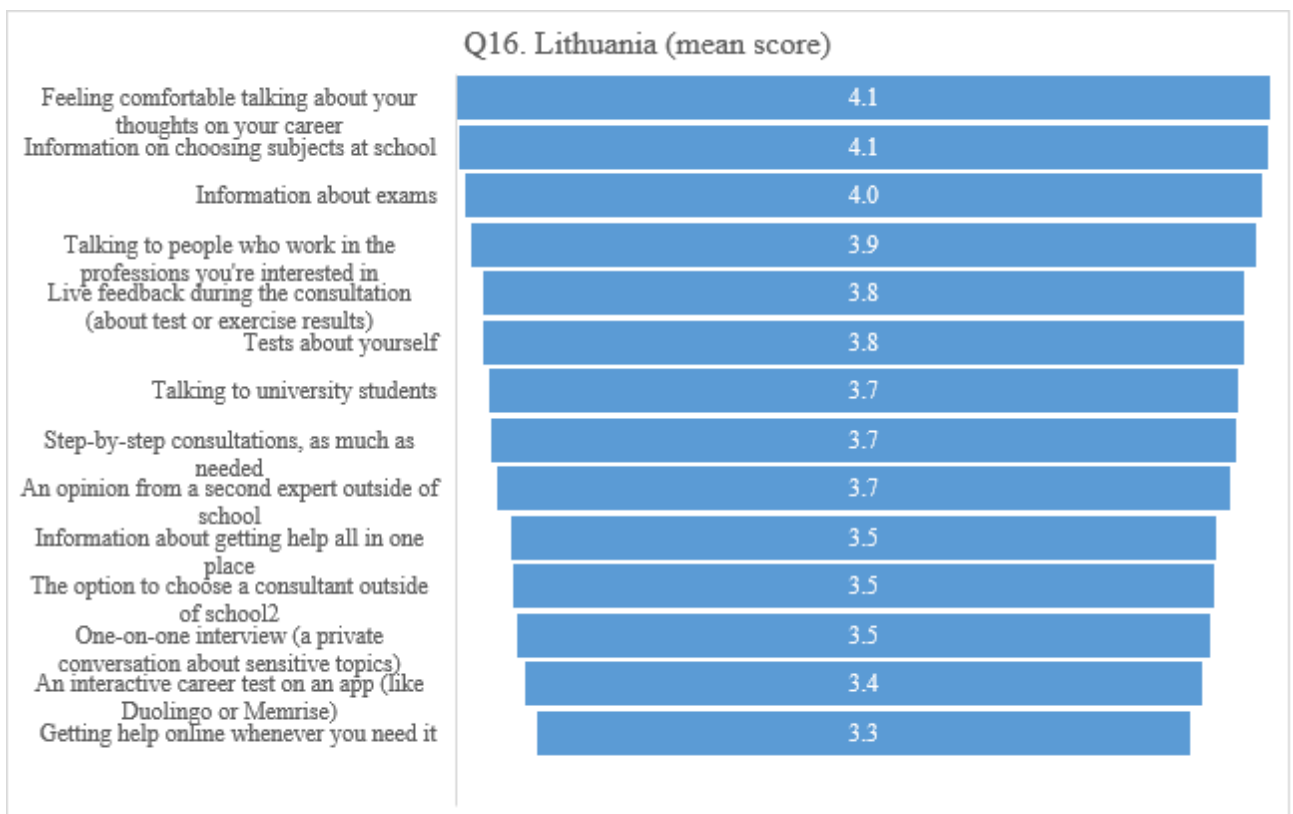
Among respondents surveyed in **Latvia**, 30% say they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions, 39% believe they lack knowledge about Career issues, and 30% of respondents rate their knowledge as neutral. Among respondents who have and have not received Career counseling, opinions on whether they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions differ: 51% of those who have received counseling believe they have enough knowledge, while only 33% of those who have not received counseling believe they have sufficient knowledge. 88% of respondents who say that they do not have enough knowledge to make Career decisions would seek and recommend counseling outside of school. (Among those who say they have sufficient knowledge, 36% would seek and recommend counseling). Those who participate in activities outside school and say they have enough knowledge to make Career decisions account for 63%. At the same time, those who do not participate in activities outside school but also believe they have

enough knowledge to make Career decisions account for 50%. Thus, extracurricular activities contribute to greater knowledge for decision-making. Respondents under the age of 16 are more likely to say that they do not have enough knowledge to make decisions than respondents aged 17 and older.

In Iceland, 41% of respondents say they are not interested in Career counseling outside of school. 37% say they would like counseling and would recommend it to others. 22% disagree with this proposal. 47% of respondents who have activities outside school believe that counseling outside school would be helpful and would recommend it to others, and only 29% of respondents who do not have activities outside school believe this. It can be noted that 48% of respondents who do not have extracurricular activities say they are not interested in Career counseling. In Iceland, Career counseling is becoming increasingly important for older young people every year, and they would be more willing to seek counseling outside of school.

45% of respondents **in Spain** believe that they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions, 21% say they lack knowledge, and 33% are unable to assess this issue. 57% of respondents who have participated in Career counseling say they have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions, and only 33% of those who have not attended counseling have enough knowledge.

Question 16. Who would help you make Career decisions?



Question 16 was designed to assess respondents' opinions on which of the proposed Career counseling topics would be most valuable to them. All 14 topics were rated as somewhat applicable (mean values vary between 3.3 and 4.1). In Lithuania, respondents rated the availability of a free and reliable counseling environment (mean 4.1) and Career information on subjects for study and final exams (mean 4.1 and 4.0) highest. Discussions with representatives of the profession of interest (mean 3.9), feedback during counseling (mean 3.8), and self-awareness exercises (mean 3.8) were the second most essential topics. The lowest ratings were given to opportunities to improve Career decision-making skills using interactive apps (mean 3.4) and online support (3.3) as needed.

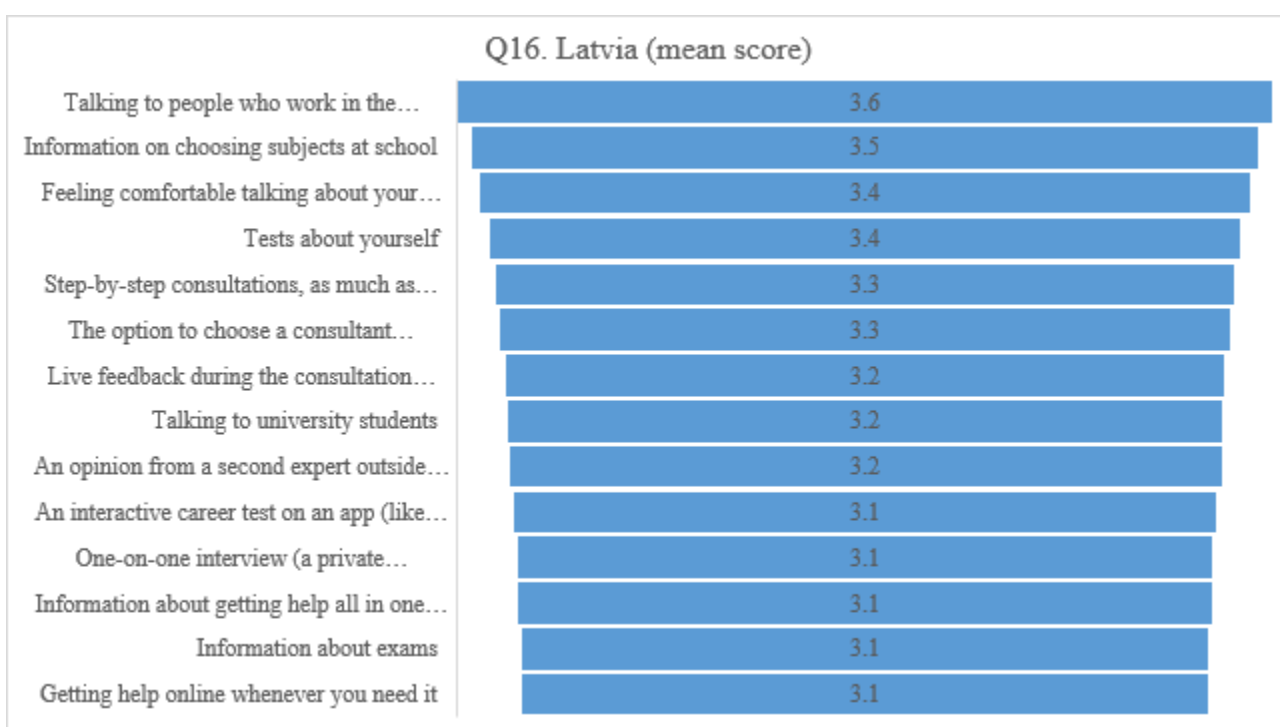
The responses to question 16 of the survey respondents in **Lithuania**, depending on whether they had Career counseling or not, differ in higher average values (among those who had counseling, as in the overall responses). The order of the questions remains the same. The distribution of responses to question 16, depending on whether the respondent would go to counseling outside of school and recommend it to a friend, differs significantly. First of all, the average response rating varies significantly, as in the general questions, with those who respond positively to this question scoring much higher. Secondly, there is a significant difference in the distribution of the topics themselves: young people who are not inclined to seek counseling outside school are more likely to highlight the need for Information about subject choices at school, Information about exams, while young people who are inclined to seek advice emphasize a safe environment for consultation, lively communication with representatives of professions that interest them, and, for example, feedback.

The distribution of responses according to respondents' involvement in activities outside school does not differ significantly from those who do not have such activities, in terms of response order. Those who are involved in activities, as in the general questions, evaluate the proposed responses more positively than those who are not engaged in activities. The distribution of respondents' answers to question 16 is quite similar, with a prevailing tendency for those with more knowledge to rate the answers to this question more positively, which is also noticeable in the context of this question. It can be observed that those who have knowledge rate conversations with people in their field of interest more highly than those who say they do not know (4.3 vs. 3.5).

Considering the distribution of responses to question 16 by age group, it can be observed that the overall trend in the average results remains more or less the same, with a few exceptions: 14-year-olds rate the opportunities to talk to representatives of professions they are interested in and the opinion of a second consultant outside school lower (13th and 14th place among 14-year-olds, compared to 4th and 9th place in the overall assessment). 15-year-olds rate the opportunities for

step-by-step consultations higher (5th place among them and 8th in the overall ranking). 15-16-year-old respondents rate the need for live feedback slightly lower than other age groups. Respondents aged 18-19 rate the opportunities for conversations with students and step-by-step consultations lower.

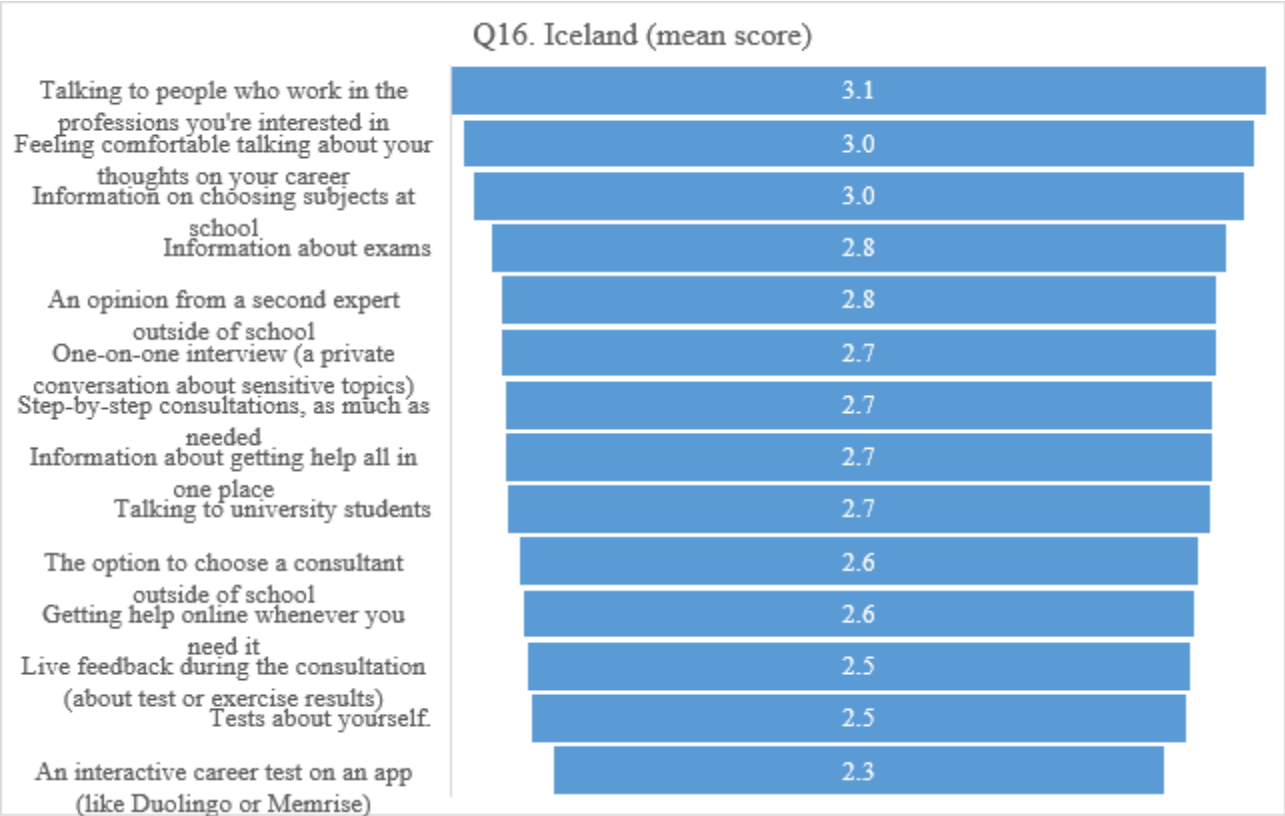
There is a slight difference between boys' and girls' assessments of question 16, as in the overall assessment, the average trends differ, with girls rating all the topics better than boys. However, boys rate the tests about themselves lower (10th place) than girls (5th place). The distribution of other responses is relatively similar.



When asked what would help them most in making Career decisions, respondents in Latvia selected Talking to people who work in the professions you're interested in (mean - 3.7) and Information on choosing subjects at school (mean - 3.5) from the 14 topics offered. The other 12 topics were rated between 3.4 and 3.0, which is a neutral rating. In this assessment, Tests about yourself and feeling comfortable talking about your thoughts on your Career are the highest (mean - 3.4), while Information about exams and getting help online whenever you need it are the lowest (mean - 3.0).

The distribution of topics and measures that would help to make better Career decisions among respondents who have had counseling and those who have not, the average scores and ranking are identical to the overall table. Girls and respondents who would not seek or recommend counseling outside of school rate conversations with university students more highly. The distribution among age groups is partly similar, with the 14-year-old age group standing out the

most, as they rate most topics significantly higher than the overall average, with interactive apps coming in third place (mean - 3.8).

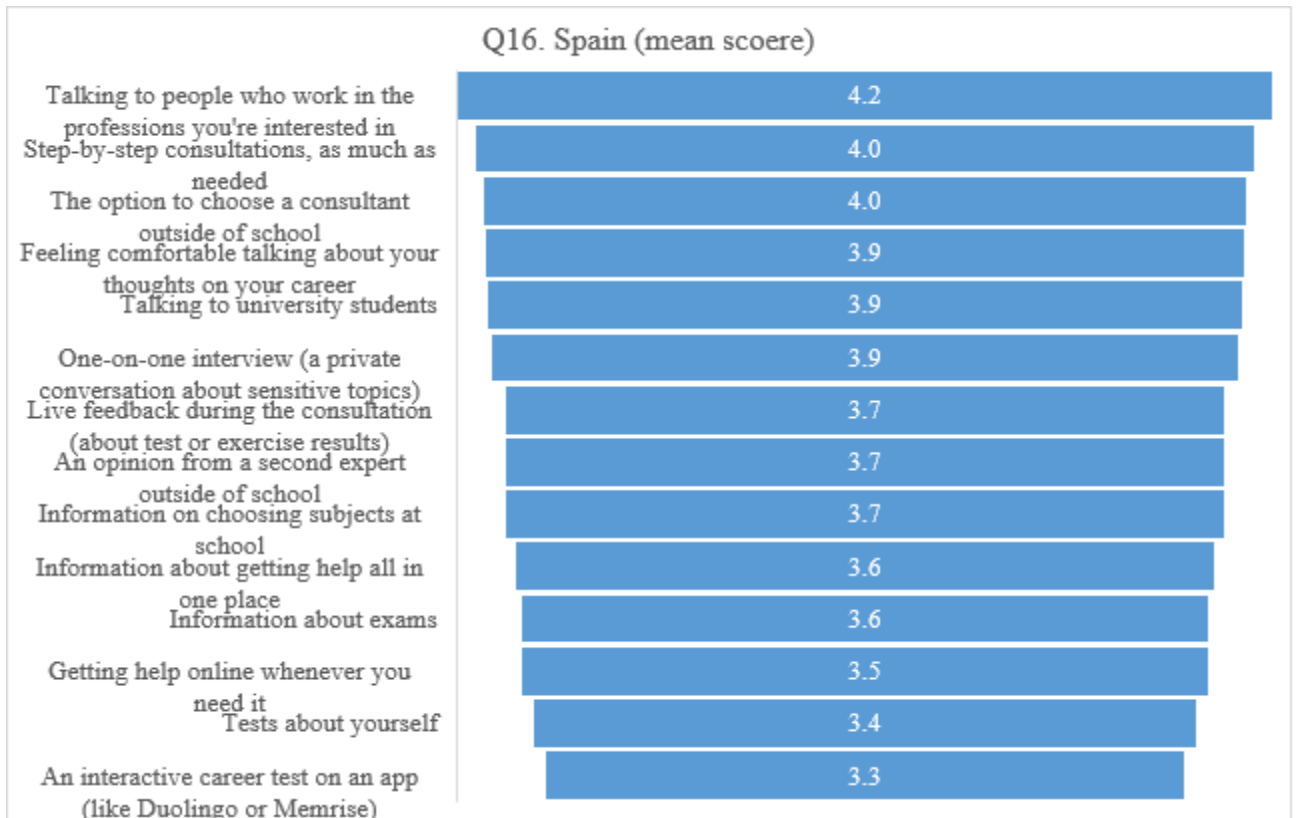


Respondents in **Iceland** rated all the measures that would help them gain more knowledge to make Career decisions as neutral (between 3.1 and 2.3). The least popular options were an interactive Career test on an app, self-assessment tests, live feedback during the consultation, and getting help online when needed. The most popular topics were discussions with representatives of the profession of interest and a friendly environment during the consultation.

There are noticeable differences between respondents who participated in Career counseling and those who did not: respondents who participated consider the opportunity to get a second opinion outside of school, conversations with university students, and the chance to consult outside of school to be more useful measures. Respondents who did not participate in counseling rate these topics lower, and their choices correspond to the overall distribution of measures, as 125 out of 157 respondents have not participated in Career counseling.

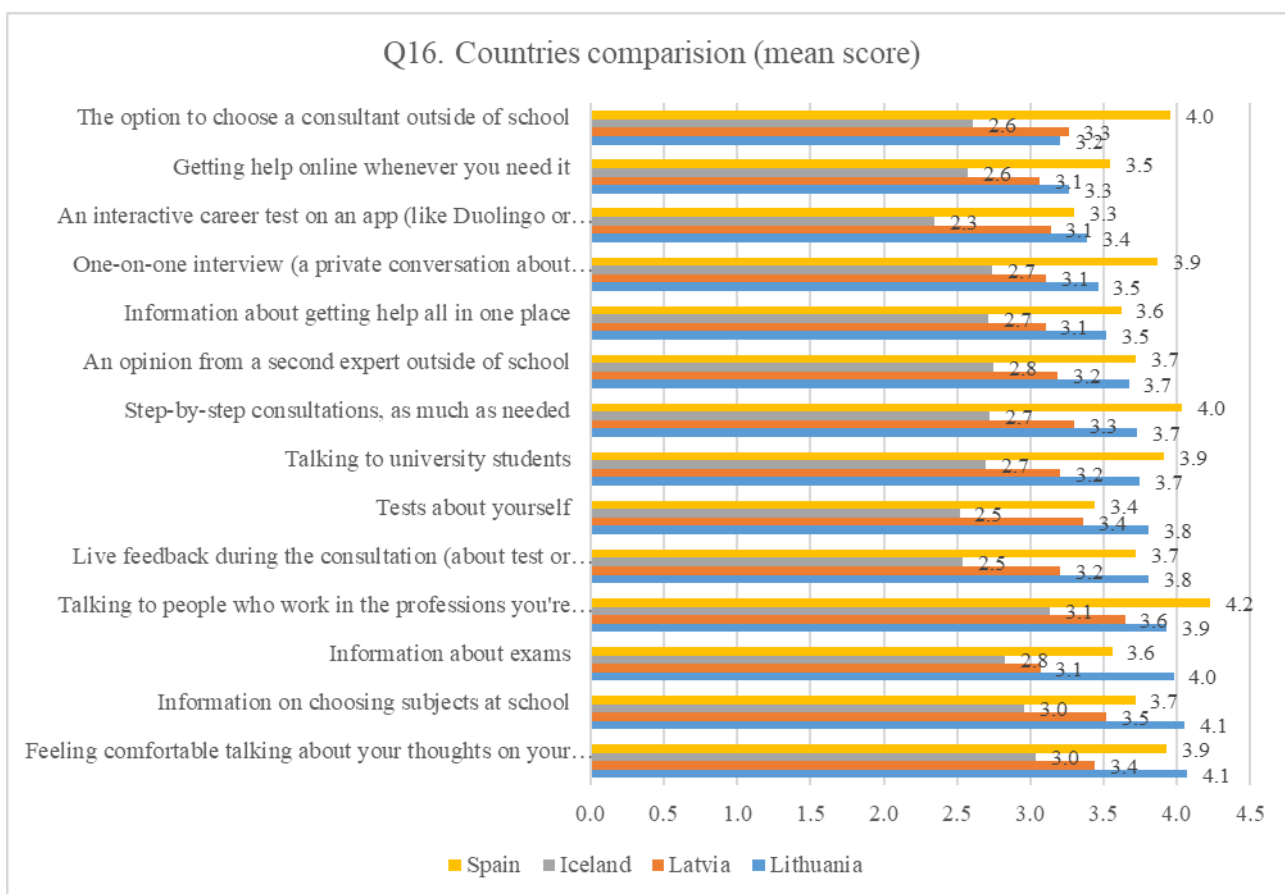
The measures proposed in this study received the highest ratings from respondents who would like to participate in consultations outside school (average rating of 3.7–2.9). However, the order of topics remains pretty similar to that in the general table, with the main differences being that these respondents are more favorable toward self-test and step-by-step consultations.

Respondents who claim to have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions also rate all the proposed measures better than the overall distribution of results (mean variates between 3.6 and 2.6). In this group of respondents, the assessment of personal consultation measures stands out (3.2).



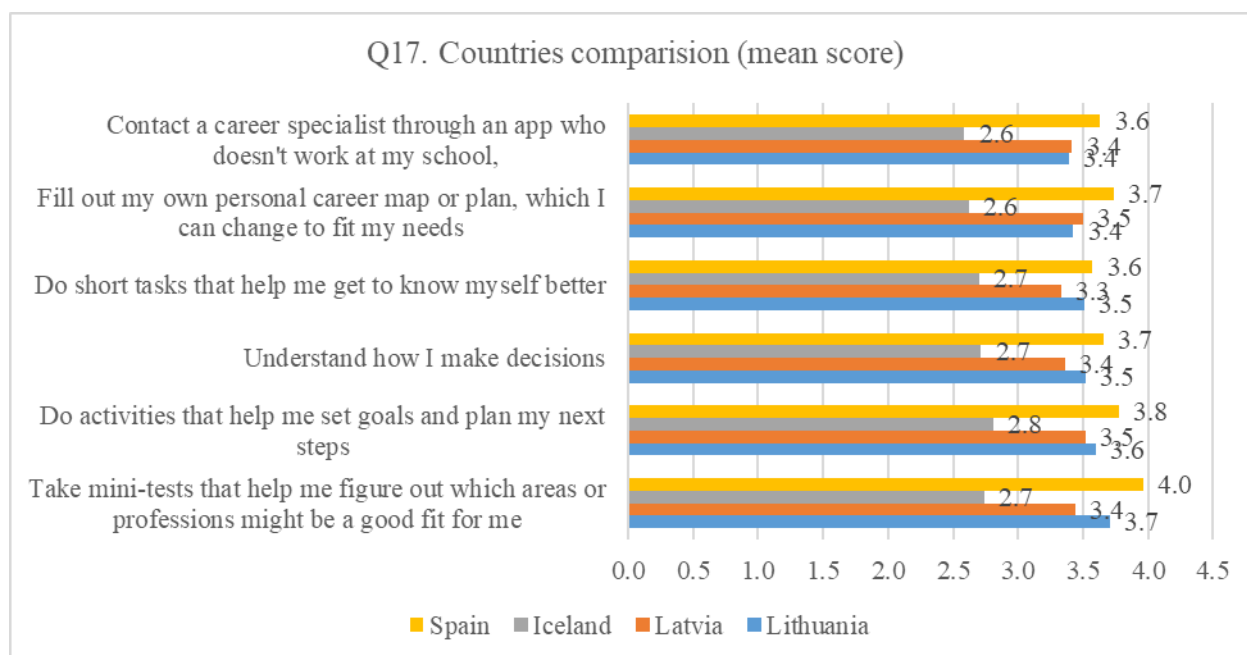
Of the measures presented in question 16, Spanish respondents rated the following as most helpful: Talking to people who work in the professions you're interested in (mean 4.2), Step-by-step consultations, as much as needed, The option to choose a consultant outside of school (both mean 4.0), while the lowest rated were An interactive Career test on an app (like Duolingo or Memrise) (mean 3.3) and Tests about yourself (3.4). Among respondents who did not participate in Career counseling, talking to people who work in the professions you're interested in was rated highest (mean 4.4). Other measures are distributed similarly to the overall table.

Respondents who would like to participate in Career counseling outside of school are much more favorable toward the measures proposed to help them acquire the knowledge necessary for making Career decisions. No differences in the ranking of responses to the 16 questions were observed in other respondent categories.



Summarizing the results of question 16 in all countries surveyed, the assessment trends for most topics are similar. In Iceland, all topics tend to be rated significantly lower due to the age and experience of the respondents. In Lithuania and Latvia, the ratings are relatively similar, with a few differences. In Spain, a significant proportion of the topics are rated higher. The highest-rated topics are: Talking to people who work in the professions you're interested in (mean 3.7), Feeling comfortable talking about your thoughts on your Career (mean 3.6), and Information on choosing subjects at school (mean 3.6). The lowest rated topics are interactive app (mean 3.0) and getting help online whenever you need it (mean 3.1).

Question 17. How useful do you think a mobile app for Career consultations would be for you?



The overall assessment of the topics covered by the application is not high according to **Lithuanian** respondents; it can be described as somewhat neutral. The distribution of average ratings for the topics is pretty even, with the possibility of contacting a consultant and the creation of a Career plan/map receiving lower ratings. In contrast, the mini-tests topic received the highest rating. Based on participation in Career counseling, it can generally be observed that those who participated rate the issues offered by the app more highly, but the order of preference does not differ from those who did not participate.

Respondents' opinions about the mobile app for Career counseling, based on whether they would participate in counseling outside of school, differ significantly from those who would not participate: the difference in averages is 1.6-1.3 points, the ranking is partly the same because young people who do not think that counseling outside school is useful rated all app categories equally poorly.

It is noticeable that respondents who are involved in extracurricular activities have a more favorable opinion of app topics. Still, the distribution of topics differs only slightly from those who are not involved. There is a similar trend that those with more knowledge have a more positive view of appso topics. The distribution of topics is very similar and corresponds to the overall distribution of this question. Throughout the survey, girls tend to evaluate the value of apps more positively, while boys rate Career planning lower than girls and lower than the overall rating for this question.

Considering the topics covered by the mobile app, the distribution of opinions by age group is quite similar, with respondents aged 16 and 18 rating this issue most positively, followed by other age groups. The trends in the ranking of topics are identical to the overall trends, but decision-making is more critical for 16-year-olds, 18-year-olds value self-awareness tasks more

highly. In contrast, 14- and 19-year-old respondents highly value the opportunity to contact a Career counseling specialist who does not work at the respondent's school.

Latvian respondents are slightly more positive about the topics covered by the proposed interactive app (mean values between 3.5 and 3.3). Do activities that help set goals and plan next steps, and fill out Career map or plan, which I can change to fit my needs (both means 3.5). The topic of self-awareness is rated lower (mean 3.3).

Respondents in Iceland have a neutral opinion of the topics covered by the proposed interactive app tools (mean varies between 2.8 and 2.6). This assessment is consistent with the opinion of Icelandic respondents throughout the study regarding the usefulness of innovative apps in the context of Career counseling. Among the five topics proposed, the topic "Do activities that help me set goals and plan my next steps" was rated slightly higher. At the same time "Contact a Career specialist through an app who doesn't work at my school, so I can discuss the tasks I've completed" was rated slightly lower.

Young people who participated in the consultation much more frequently highlighted the topic of "Do short tasks that help me get to know myself better" (3.2) and "Career plan development" (3.0), which were rated lower both in the overall context and among respondents who did not participate in the consultation. There is also a difference in opinion between respondents who have sufficient knowledge to make Career decisions and those who do not: those with adequate knowledge stand out in all topics except for the slightly lower rating of Take mini-tests that help me figure out which areas or professions might be a good fit for me (2.8), which is rated highest among those without knowledge. In essence, the distribution of topics between these groups of respondents is reversed.

Survey participants in Spain partially agree with all five interactive app content topics, with the highest rating given to Take mini tests that help me figure out which areas or professions might be a good fit for me (mean 3.7). In contrast, the theme Do short tasks that help me get to know myself better received a slightly lower rating (mean 3.4). Respondents aged 16 and older rate the proposed interactive app content themes more highly, but the order of the themes does not change across all respondent categories.

Quantitative survey summary

Career counseling trends and gender differences do not differ significantly in this study, young people across all countries demonstrate similar needs. However, as in the qualitative research, the quantitative study also reveals differences between age groups, with a tendency for younger people, up to the age of 16, to be more interested in self-awareness and Career information, while those

who are more decisive in this age group are more interested in initial Career planning topics. For older young people who have made more firm Career decisions, Information about studies, stress, time management, and concentration on learning and final exam results is more important.

However, it should be noted that Career counseling and the results of quantitative research are better understood as a cyclical process, in which young people, as they gain more knowledge and experience, can (and should) change their initial Career choices. This is evident in the results of the quantitative survey among respondents who are involved in activities outside school. These respondents have relatively more knowledge about counseling opportunities and additional opportunities to talk to people they trust about Careers that interest them, even if these people are not qualified Career specialists, as their life experience is valuable to young people.

When comparing the four Career counseling topics, all of them are considered valuable, but different groups of respondents rate them more or less favorably. The most support in the quantitative survey was expressed for individual counseling in a safe environment for young people. Group counseling is also valued, but this format is not considered the most appropriate space for young people to express themselves and discuss sensitive topics. Similarly, young people are roughly divided into two groups of opinion on whether consultations should take place on an as needed or regular basis; regularity should likely be maintained in small group discussions, while consultations on more sensitive topics should be provided on an individual basis as needed.

Young people are generally not very confident about various tests and their results due to their poor experience in this area. Quality feedback is also an essential part of Career counseling, and employees must be able to focus on the relationship and quality, not just quantity, where information topics dominate, which, according to the results of the qualitative study, do not create high added value for young people when making Career decisions. However, the topics of Information themselves are vital to young people, especially given the changing environment of final exams and study choices. In Lithuania and Latvia, opportunities to learn about possibilities for studying and working abroad would be appreciated.

Due to their experience with poor-quality Career and self-awareness tests, young people are somewhat neutral in their assessment of the usefulness of the proposed interactive mobile application. However, based on the results of this study, positive experiences, and positive feedback from young people, this tool could contribute to improving the quality of Career decisions made by young people, especially if it remains free of charge. Paid services are not a suitable alternative in the regions surveyed, with only a small proportion of respondents having received such services, probably on the initiative of active parents.

Findings

1. Youth Career counseling is understood as a continuous and partially individualized process between the counselor and the young person. Its purpose is to address four core topics: self-awareness, Career information, Career planning, and Career implementation. In practice, however, this process is often delivered linearly and seen as finite. While individual work is emphasized in theory, actual counseling frequently takes place in large group settings. Therefore, Career counseling should be approached as a broader and more nuanced support process—akin to a coaching model where the young person is guided step by step, with the option to return to earlier stages if necessary. It should not rely solely on information provision but instead promote deeper self-exploration and reveal a broader spectrum of possibilities.
2. To identify the existing situation in the Career counseling landscape across the four partner countries, a review of scientific literature and secondary statistical data was conducted. It revealed that, while the importance of counselor-young person interaction is recognized, in practice, this interaction is not always guaranteed. Structural limitations often stem from decisions at the municipal or regional level or from broader socio-economic trends within youth and their families. As a result, the quality and accessibility of counseling services vary considerably, both within formal and non-formal education sectors.
3. Focus groups involving 100 youth and 100 youth workers from Lithuania, Latvia, Iceland, and Spain revealed several key insights:
 - 3.1. Career counseling is primarily provided within schools. However, in Lithuania, Latvia, and Spain, older youth (ages 16–18) also have access to regional public institutions offering additional Career support. In Iceland, access is more limited and largely school-based.
 - 3.2. Both youth and youth workers agree that the quality of feedback during Career consultations is often lacking. This is due mainly to large group sizes and an overemphasis on delivering information, rather than methodical support for exploring all topics in depth. Feedback quality is often generalized rather than personalized.
 - 3.3. Career counseling is commonly perceived as a linear process. Young people expect quick and definitive answers, and youth workers may assume that decisions, once made, should remain fixed. As a result, the idea of revisiting earlier steps in the counseling process is undervalued, even though Career paths naturally evolve with experience.

3.4. Only a small portion of young people are aware that Career counseling services exist outside of school settings. This limited awareness is likely due to a lack of consistent cooperation and communication between formal and non-formal educational institutions.

3.5. Youth workers in Lithuania and Iceland tend to believe that counseling should be strengthened within schools, and they see the current development of external counseling services—often based on self-regulation—as sufficient. Young people, however, express a desire for additional options: a second opinion, more choice in selecting counselors, and a consultation environment that feels freer and safer.

3.6. In Spain and Latvia, both young people and youth workers support the expansion of counseling opportunities outside of schools. There is growing investment by individual specialists in these regions, and participants recognize the value of diverse counseling formats and professional autonomy.

3.7. Youth workers who provide Career counseling outside of schools in all four countries are mainly responsible for improving their knowledge and skills. Professional development opportunities are fragmented, often limited to sporadic training, isolated methodologies, and a variety of online resources.

3.8. Young people have mixed views on Career-related tests. While they are curious to receive personalized feedback, many question the usefulness of generic tests, which they feel can be manipulated or fail to reflect their true interests.

3.9. Both youth and youth workers agree that the relevance of counseling topics varies by age. Before the age of 16, the emphasis is on self-awareness, Career information, and some initial planning. After making school subject choices (usually in grade 10), older youth shift focus to exam preparation, study choices, and academic performance. This makes grade 10 a critical year for shaping Career paths.

4. A quantitative survey of 800 young people (aged 14–19) across the four countries provided additional insights:

4.1. Career counseling is generally accessible in the studied countries, but services in Iceland are notably less developed—especially outside of schools.

4.2. Respondents who are open to seeking help outside of school and feel confident in their decision-making abilities rate most counseling aspects more positively than those who do not.

4.3. The survey confirms qualitative findings: most young people prefer individual or small-group counseling sessions. Around half prefer on-demand consultations of flexible length, while fewer favor regularly scheduled sessions of a set duration.

4.4. Young people most value opportunities to interact with professionals from their fields of interest, as well as the ability to speak freely and safely in counseling environments. They also place high importance on receiving practical information about subject choices and final exams.

4.5. In-person consultations—whether within or beyond the school setting—are the most preferred format. Paid services, however, are viewed unfavorably, likely due to accessibility issues or limited perceived value.

Recommendations

Based on the theoretical and empirical research conducted, the following refined and targeted recommendations are proposed to improve youth Career counseling services in the context of non-formal education. To ensure practical application and relevance, they are divided into three sections: **recommendations for youth, recommendations for youth workers, and recommendations for digital tools and mobile app development.**

1. For Youth

1.1. Broaden Access to Career Counseling Services

Young people should have access to a diverse range of Career counseling opportunities, both within and outside of school settings. Expanding the network of counseling services beyond schools—including municipal youth centers, NGOs, and digital platforms—can help youth receive second opinions and explore varied Career paths in environments that feel freer and personalized.

1.2. Age-Appropriate Counseling Pathways

Career counseling should be tailored to specific developmental stages. Before subject choice (usually around age 16), the focus should be on self-awareness and Career information—the two most crucial themes across countries. These should be emphasized particularly in lower age groups. Career planning should follow, while Career implementation (e.g., job search strategies) was found to be the least addressed area and could be strengthened through targeted follow-up support.

1.3. Create Safe and Flexible Counseling Formats

Youth value consultations in private or small-group settings (up to 8 participants), where they feel free to speak openly and receive personalized attention. Group sessions for more general information can complement these, but sensitive and strategic Career conversations should remain individual or in small groups.

1.4. Real-World Career Exposure

Programs should be developed to allow youth to “test out” Careers—through job shadowing, mentoring, field visits, or participation in professional Q&A sessions. Firsthand experience builds confidence and helps young people make informed choices.

1.5. Improve Awareness and Visibility of Services

Young people must know where to go and who to contact for help. Information about Career guidance should be made more visible in schools, youth spaces, and online. National and regional youth portals or coordinated outreach efforts should support this.

1.6. Clarify Regularity and Format Preferences

Young people prefer a combination of flexible, as-needed consultations (especially for sensitive or complex topics) and regularly scheduled sessions for general support. Systems should offer both formats and allow youth to choose what fits them best.

1.7. Maintain Free, Inclusive Counseling Opportunities

Since paid services are rarely used and often inaccessible, public and NGO-based services should remain free of charge and accessible across various regions—especially for youth from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

2. For Youth Workers and Career Counseling Providers

These recommendations apply to youth workers involved in Career guidance both within formal education systems (e.g., schools) and in non-formal contexts (e.g., municipal youth centers, NGOs, or other youth initiatives), many of whom provide support without formal counseling qualifications but possess valuable experience in working with young people.

2.1. Invest in Systematic Professional Development

Youth workers outside of formal education often lack institutional support. Professional development opportunities should be accessible, high-quality, and continuous. These should cover personalized counseling approaches, youth engagement strategies, and the use of digital tools.

2.2. Create Shared Tools and Resources

A centralized hub with ready-to-use methodologies, templates, and toolkits would reduce fragmentation and support consistent delivery. It should be adapted to non-formal education contexts and easily accessible to all professionals.

2.3. Tailor Content to Youth Development and Themes

Workers should apply differentiated approaches based on the age and readiness of young people. Training should emphasize how and when to transition across counseling themes. Self-awareness and Career information should be prioritized, with Career planning offered selectively. Career implementation remains underdeveloped and should be strengthened through more practical, action-based approaches.

2.4. Facilitate Collaboration Across Institutions

Youth workers should actively collaborate with schools, municipal services, and private professionals. This improves service continuity, facilitates referrals, and allows for coordinated support.

2.5.Enhance Feedback Practices and Test Usage

Since youth expressed skepticism toward generic Career tests, professionals should use only well-validated tools and provide thoughtful, personalized feedback. Training in interpreting and delivering results should be emphasized.

2.6.Promote an Inclusive and Youth-Centered Counseling Culture

Youth workers should foster a culture that sees Career guidance as a flexible, cyclical process—where returning to earlier stages of decision-making is encouraged, not discouraged. Recognizing that Career paths are non-linear helps build trust and long-term engagement.

2.7.Clarify Counseling Frequency and Structure

Professionals should offer mixed models: short, frequent sessions for general planning and longer consultations for deep guidance. They should remain flexible and responsive to youths' evolving needs.

2.8.Co-Design with Youth

Professionals should involve youth in designing and refining Career services. Regular feedback mechanisms, focus groups, and participatory evaluation should be built into service provision to ensure relevance and responsiveness.

3. For Mobile App and Digital Tool Development

3.1.Design Youth-Friendly, Age-Responsive Platforms

Digital tools should feature a visually engaging, intuitive interface suited for teenagers (especially around age 16), with language and content tailored to their level of maturity and Career planning stage.

3.2.Integrate Core Counseling Themes with Priority Emphasis

The app must include interactive content on the four core themes: self-awareness and Career information (as primary content), and planning and implementation (as follow-up pathways). These should be available in modular formats so youth can revisit topics at their own pace.

3.3.Ensure Personalization and Valid Feedback

Users should receive personalized suggestions and summaries based on their inputs. Self-awareness exercises and tests should provide meaningful, credible outputs and avoid vague or overly general content.

3.4.Offer Professional Interaction Options

The tool should include a feature for contacting a Career specialist (ideally outside the user's school) or booking face-to-face/live chat sessions with certified professionals.

3.5.Promote Accessibility and Equity

The app should remain free of charge and accessible offline when possible. Special care should be taken to make it worthwhile for youth with limited access to formal counseling.

3.6.Connect to Real-World Opportunities

The app should link users to current events like Career fairs, volunteering openings, or workplace visits. Career maps or local opportunity databases allow users to explore realistic pathways.

3.7.Allow for Progress Tracking and Revisiting Topics

The app should include features to create, edit, and revisit a personal Career plan or map, helping users track their development over time and adapt to new goals or life changes.

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Annex

Focus Group Question(s)

For youth

Introductory questions for focus groups:

Your name? Have you already had to make Career decisions, i.e., choosing subjects, exams, what kind of jobs you are interested in - what you would like to do, where you could study, etc.? How much stress/anxiety do you think you are feeling right now in preparing to make these decisions? Say between 1-10?

You don't have to ask what school, age, or class you are from; they will say it individually if they want to. This is to avoid stereotypes—e.g., the youngest one, the one from somewhere else, etc.

Key questions

1. Share your knowledge and opinion on what you know about Career management, i.e., Career planning. What do you think it involves? What knowledge do you need to make Career decisions?
2. Do you think you have enough knowledge to make the right decisions for you - **in the area of Self-knowledge?**

Examples: what is important to me? What do I like or dislike? What do I succeed or fail at? What are my values and goals? Etc. What activities/consultations am I involved in at school or outside school? Have they helped/helped me to acquire this knowledge?

Check: where have you gained more knowledge about yourself? What would you like to do in the future? **E.g.,** at school; outside the school; equally at school and outside school.

3. Where do you think or know where you can find the information you need to help you learn about yourself to help you choose your subjects, studies, or profession?

For example, what choices do I consider when searching for Career information? Activities, professions, learning institutions, jobs? What activities/counselling are available at school or outside school? Have/would help you to gain this knowledge?

4. Do you have enough knowledge about Career planning, and is it useful/would it be helpful to you?

Examples: Consult with others; Decide on my own; Consider alternatives; Draw on experience; Procrastinate; Cannot finalize a decision; Avoid; Making and updating a Career plan;

Check: What activities/consultations in or outside school have helped/ would help you acquire this knowledge?

5. Do you know what to do from now on to get the experience you need to enroll where you want to study and get the job you want?

Examples: Applying and developing necessary generic competencies; what is Career success? What are the challenges along the Career path? What activities/counselling are available in school or outside school? Helped/help to acquire this knowledge?

To clarify if the first answers are unclear, Are the consultations listed only available at school, or can you consult outside school?

6. Who do you talk to/ consult about profession/Career issues?

Examples: Teachers, staff outside the school, counsellors, parents, friends, do you seek information individually, chatGPT?

7. What do you dislike about your current situation at school or outside school, in Career/professional counselling; in your choice of subjects at school; in your preparation for studies? Why?

8. Do you think counselling outside school would be more useful, and more interesting? E.g., with youth workers in youth clubs/centers? Why?

9. What should the consultation be about? **E.g.**, self-knowledge, information about exams and admissions, and how to plan choices.

What kind of counselling should it be? **E.g.** full class sizes of 20-30 people? Small group of 5-8 people; Individual consultation? Maybe a mobile app?

Does it matter where the consultation takes place? **E.g.** In school only; Outside school only; Would it make a difference?

For example, live/remote consultations, tests, interviews, individual consultations, and small groups of up to 6-8 people, does the size of the group not matter? You can call/write to a counsellor at any time. Meet people you know/ who are successful in the path you are interested in

At the end of the interview (if there is time and everyone is available, ask live; if there is no time, ask for a written response as feedback on the interview)

Ask:

1. Has the stress/anxiety you feel about your Career/professional choice changed in any way after this interview? Would the things that were discussed have reduced their stress and helped them to make better decisions and not procrastinate?

2. What makes you feel more stressed/anxious? Choices in the next 6-12 months? Choosing or changing the field of study if necessary (probably more than one year from now); Choosing a Career path (actions after and during studies - how to gain experience, choose an employer, etc.)

For youth employees

Introductory focus group questions:

I will ask you to introduce yourselves:

Your name? Seniority/experience working with young people? Do you work in or out of school? Have you given Career counselling to young people? Do you do a lot of such counselling?

Key questions for staff:

1. Give your views on your understanding of Career management/planning counselling, what it is about, and how relevant it is to the young people you work with.

2. Have you had any experience counselling young people in the area of self-discovery? To what extent do you think you are prepared to advise young people so that they can make the right Career decisions for them in the area of self-discovery?

Examples: what is important to me? What do I like or dislike? What can I or cannot do well? What are my values and goals? Etc.

3. Have you ever had to advise young people to help them find information about exams and study descriptions? Do you know where to look for information for young people on Career/profession information?

For example, when searching for Career information, what choices am I considering? Activities, professions, learning institutions, workplaces?

4. Have you had the opportunity to advise young people on Career planning? Is it relevant to young people of this age?

Examples: Consulting with others, Deciding on my own, Considering alternatives; Drawing on experience, Procrastinating; Can't finalize a decision; Avoiding, Making and updating a Career plan;

5. Have you had the opportunity to advise young people on Career implementation? Is it relevant for young people of this age? Help young people know what to do from now on in order to get the experience they need to get into the education and the job they want.

Examples: Applying and developing important generic competencies; what is Career success? What are the challenges along the Career path?

6. How do you get your knowledge about youth Career counselling?

Examples: Do you seek individual information, or is there a training series/program? What kind of training or information do you think would be most useful for you to help young people make Career decisions in the areas already discussed?

7. Identify the gaps in the Career guidance services currently provided to young people: what do you think is not being done well enough to meet the needs of young people, and why? Can you give examples?
8. What do you think should be done differently outside the school in the coming years (e.g., 1-3 years ahead) to improve the quality of services/counseling for young people? **E.g.,** a training program, a unified information website, the use of artificial intelligence - a robot assistant on a web page e.g., based on the above methodology? Mobile application for young people?
9. Which activities discussed during this discussion do you think would be more appropriate/better implemented in the context of non-formal education (outside school, free of charge)? Why do you think so?

Quantitative Survey Question(s)

1. Have you already had to make choices about your future (like what you want to study or what profession you want to have)?

Yes - I chose the subjects I study for school.

Yes - I chose my university studies.

Yes - I chose my profession/Career

No, not yet.

2. Have you spoken to a Career specialist about your Career choice?

Yes // No

3. If you've met with a Career specialist or counselor, where did the meeting take place?

Online - free of charge.

Online services that you have to pay for.

I had a face-to-face meeting with a Career specialist at school.

Outside of school (free of charge).

Outside of school that you have to pay for.

I did not take part in such a meeting.

4. If you've ever had a Career consultation, how would you rate it?

1 – Bad -> 5 – Good /// I did not take part in such a meeting.

5. If you've had a Career consultation, did you find it useful? For example, did you learn something about yourself, discover Careers or study options, or learn how to plan your future? Please rate this statement from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree):

Do short activities or tasks that help you get to know yourself better? For example, thinking about what you like, what you're good at, your values, and what you dream of doing.

To learn how you make decisions? For example do you consider several options, ask for advice, or postpone your decisions?

To create my own personal Career plan or map, which I can adjust and change to suit me best.

Activities that help you set goals and plan your next steps, like deciding which subjects to take or where to apply for internships or volunteering opportunities.

6. When did you feel you most needed advice about your future? Please rate from 1 (not needed) to 5 (very much needed).

14 years old; 15 years old; 16 years old; 17 years old; 18 years old; 19 years old;

7. Where would you like to get advice about your future? Please rate each option from 1 (Strongly Dislike) to 5 (Strongly Like).

Online - free of charge.

Online services that you have to pay for.

A face-to-face meeting with a Career specialist at school.

Outside of school (free of charge).

Outside of school that you have to pay for.

A mobile app (for example Duolingo or Memrise style)

8. What group size would work best for you when getting advice or support? Please rate each option from 1 (Not Useful) to 5 (Very Useful).

One-on-one (personal) consultation

Small group (up to 8 people)

Large group (10-30 people)

9. How often do you think it would be helpful to attend Career consultations?

Only when I feel I need it

Every week

Every two weeks

Once a month
Once every 3 months

10. How long do you think a consultation should be to work best for you?

As needed (no time limit) // 45 min. // 60 min. // 90 min. // I don't know

11. Which consultation topic do you think would be most useful to you? Please rate from 1 (Not Useful) to 5 (Very Useful).

Do short activities or tasks that help you get to know yourself better? For example, thinking about what you like, what you're good at, your values, and what you dream of doing.

To learn how you make decisions? For example do you consider several options, ask for advice, or postpone your decisions?

To create my own personal Career plan or map, which I can adjust and change to suit me best.

Activities that help you set goals and plan your next steps, like deciding which subjects to take or where to apply for internships or volunteering opportunities.

12. Are you aware that counseling is available outside of school?

Yes // No // I am not interested in

13. Would you consider going for counseling outside of school, and would you recommend it to your friends?

Yes // No // I am not interested in

14. Do you attend any clubs, volunteer, or go to a youth center outside of school? For example:

Yes // No

15. Do you feel you have enough information to make decisions about your subjects, studies, or future Career?

1 - I don't have // 5 - I have enough

16. Who would help you make Career decisions? Rate your answers from 1 (not important) to 5 (important).

Tests about yourself

Information on choosing subjects at school

Information about exams

Talking to university students

Talking to people who work in the professions you're interested in

One-on-one interview (a private conversation about sensitive topics)

Getting help online whenever you need it

An interactive Career test on an app (like Duolingo or Memrise)

Information about getting help all in one place

Step-by-step consultations, as much as needed

Feeling comfortable talking about your thoughts on your Career

An opinion from a second expert outside of school

Live feedback during the consultation (about test or exercise results)

The option to choose a consultant outside of school

17. How useful do you think a mobile app for Career consultations would be for you? (Similar to Duolingo or Memrise) Please rate from 1 (Not Useful) to 5 (Very Useful).

Do short tasks that help me get to know myself better (for example, think about what I like, what I'm good at, what my values are, and what I dream of doing)

Understand how I make decisions (for example, do I consider different options, ask for advice, or delay making decisions)

Fill out my own personal Career map or plan, which I can change to fit my needs

Take mini-tests that help me figure out which areas or professions might be a good fit for me

Do activities that help me set goals and plan my next steps (for example, choosing subjects, or where to apply for internships or volunteering)

Contact a Career specialist through an app who doesn't work at my school, so I can discuss the tasks I've completed

18. How old are you?

19. What is your gender?



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