



THE ROLE OF CAREER COUNSELORS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Nicoleta Acomi¹, Ovidiu Acomi², Roxana Iancu¹

¹Constanta Maritime University, Faculty of Navigation and Maritime Transportation, 104 Mircea cel Batran Street, 900663, Constanta, Romania, e-mail nicoleta.acomi@cmu-edu.eu

²PhD Candidate, N. Y. Vaptsarov" Naval Academy, 73 Vasil Drumev str., 9002, Varna, Bulgaria, e-mail ovidiu.acomi@gmail.com

Abstract: Passing from school to the labour market requires support, advice, and guidance. The rapid advancement of technology in the maritime industry, the wide range of duties, and ever-changing job placement from ashore to remote sites or on board vessels, put many treats on the future employees. This article describes how career counselling is integrated into the process of supporting VET learners in making decisions about future careers in three European countries and how this process is perceived by learners.

The research comprised a literature review to reveal the approach with regard to career counselling and analysis of data collected with a survey questionnaire. The 88 responses emphasized learners' views regarding the career counsellor's actual role and provided an understanding of their expectations for making the transition toward the labour market. The questions addressed groups of people that decided to continue their studies and get a job and those undecided. Participants explained the motivator factors for making the career choice, the main sources of career information, and their expectations from the future job. This article explores the extent to which the professionals and counsellors would contribute to making the decisions and the types of interaction that are expected to produce positive results and engagement.

The results indicate that teachers and parents are currently contributing to making the final career decision. Even though, the input of professionals is highly expected by all groups of participants. Respondents emphasized that challenges, dynamism in the workplace as well as the variety of tasks are those factors that would make them stay in a job. The authors concluded that to be effective, the career counselling of young learners needs to be enriched with job-specific insights provided by professionals. The research conclusions draw up the VET learners' main expectations that can be used to guide further career counselling activities.

Keywords: blue career, counsellor, guidance, mentor, vocational education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The old ideal of retiring after many years with one company and taking home a pension is passing into history. According to a 2019 Bureau of Labour Statistics survey of baby boomers, the average number of jobs in a lifetime is 12 (BLS, 2019). The worker's age impacts the number of jobs they held in various lifetimes. Workers held an average of 5.7 jobs during the six years when they were 18 to 24 years old, declining with age in such a way as many workers aged 45+ held an average of 1.9 jobs (Doyle, 2020).

Undoubtedly, appropriate guidance can help young people to understand their learning needs and career preferences based on their strengths and talents. For this reason, in the early 20th century, career guidance and counselling started to emerge in several countries around the world (Gysbers, 2008). The conventional approach to career counselling relies on the interpretation of test results and the suggestion of a few specialities by a career counsellor. The studies demonstrate that a

successful learning path might be aided by receiving enough information about the profession (CEDEFOP, 2021).

The transition from using tests in career counselling to help people construct future careers depends on career counsellors' abilities to make them describe who they really are by articulating their career lives in words (Hartung, 2013).

Nevertheless, the traditional style of career counselling based on the interpretation of tests and recommendations by career counsellors still prevails in several countries (Maree J., 2020).

Modern approaches in career counselling focus on helping people to construct their careers. Career construction counselling entails an interpersonal process of helping people design their lives through work and careers (Savickas, 2011).

Providing career construction counselling to people wanted to start a career in the shipping industry is challenging. There is a common complaint from shipping companies, that the new maritime entrants are



just not the right material for shipping. This is also borne out by the high attrition rate – the number of fresh entrants getting disillusioned about maritime careers, and eventually quitting shipping. The reason we are not able to retain people in the shipping industry is not the fault of the job itself, but more in the faulty method and manner of selection of learners for various maritime careers. A properly planned vocational guidance can help a lot to resolve this issue.

Prospective students, who seek to make their careers in the Merchant Navy, must have the necessary skill sets, to survive in the marketplace, over the long term. Today, the Maritime industry is going through a sea change, just as the rest of the industries worldwide. There is a new economic order, defined by new technology and globalization. Properly managed vocational guidance centres at least in the Metro cities, are vital, to face this challenge.

Working in the shipping industry can be rewarding because wages earned are normally above similar professions ashore. As in almost every area in life, there are two sides to the coin in the maritime. Even though the advantages outweigh for many people, career advisors recommend to those planning to work in this industry initial preparation for the challenges (Zeymarine, 2020).

Opportunities in maritime are both at sea, in ports or ashore in supporting maritime activity. At sea, the earnings and leave balance offer better terms and conditions than nearly all other sectors. Careers ashore in maritime are diverse. Transferrable maritime skill sets are in demand so all variety within the sector will attract a salary and terms and premium conditions. The greatest challenge for any maritime areas ashore is attracting maritime skill sets so service resettlement candidates are a desirable maritime commodity. (CTP, 2020)

Using interviews and drawings of scientists has proven some controversial aspects considering the ability of a student to gain a set of knowledge using different methods. Related research with school students has shown that their occupational preferences and career aspirations are strongly linked to their images of careers (Gottfredson 1981). This image is usually constructed by someone who is well-prepared to give advice and to contour the learners' base knowledge – such as a good teacher, or a mentor.

Being a mentor for someone eager to learn is something that gravitated around humanity for a long period now. Starting from the relationship established between Medici and Michelangelo or Freud and Jung, the concept of “mentor” and “student” had developed and acquired the words development, growth, evolution, realization, and knowledge.

The mentor plays an important role in initiating the process of career decision-making and guiding young people toward success. The mentor's performance is directly proportional to the learners' collaboration. It has weak effects on the productivity of non-collaborating learners, while for those who collaborate with their

mentor, there is a positive effect (Long & McGinnis, 1985).

The one who is guiding their students through the process of learning continues to influence the career with a positive effect on the mentor's performance on academic placement, an effect not found for non-collaborators.

Having a career in the blue industry is challenging and exciting and it provides a wide range of sectors from which students can choose. Longer term, careers in the global maritime industry provide seafarers with a plethora of opportunities and the education, training, and experience for a lifetime of gratifying challenges, whether at sea or onshore.

The blue economy includes all economic activities related to oceans, seas, and coasts. It covers a wide range of interlinked established sectors (e.g. shipping, offshore oil & gas, coastal tourism) and emerging sectors (e.g. offshore renewables, biotechnology). The blue economy is a priority of the European Union because it represents 3.5 million jobs with 174 billion Euro gross value added (EC, 2021). As for all industries, the blue economy sectors operate in cycles, with periods of highs and lows. During periods of low, people can hardly find a job. However, the sector cycles do not overlap, meaning that when the shipping is low, the offshore oil and gas may be high; as a result, there may be more job offers in oil and gas compared to shipping.

Career choice is a significant step in individual life and this study revealed the expectation of VET learners in terms of guidance in their careers. Taking into consideration the niche of the blue industry and the high level of remuneration expected in a short time, the authors decided to research to identify the motivator factor in choosing a career. Nevertheless, the career decision-making process is very complex and takes into consideration various internal and external factors.

The below research was conducted in three European countries to emphasize how the cultural background and education systems may impact the career decision process made by VET learners.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to address the right persons, the authors selected the relevant respondents as VET learners, which may have an interest in choosing a profession in the blue industry. Each participant received job cards presenting various careers from the blue industry. All career cards have the same structure presenting the general description of the job, the range of annual salary, the working program, the type of education and the competencies required for starting and getting a promotion in that career, opportunities for cross-sectoral mobility as well as links to relevant job platforms.

After studying the job cards, respondents were asked to answer a nine-question survey. The first two were filtering questions willing to further analyse if gender or nationalities lead to different expectations regarding

career guidance in the blue economy. The next seven questions were designed to understand the expectations of the next generation of employees, as well as the motivator factors for making the career choice. An open question was included to ensure space for written responses. The questions were included in Google form and the respondents received it together with the job cards.

The online survey was available for four months and it closed with 88 responses. The responses were analysed and the findings are presented in the next section. The research envisaged qualitative analysis and the results are limited to the country area and VET schools from which the responses were collected.

The responses were collected from 43 VET learners from Romania, 24 from Turkey, and 21 from Spain with the below distribution (Figure 1), aged from 17 to 27.

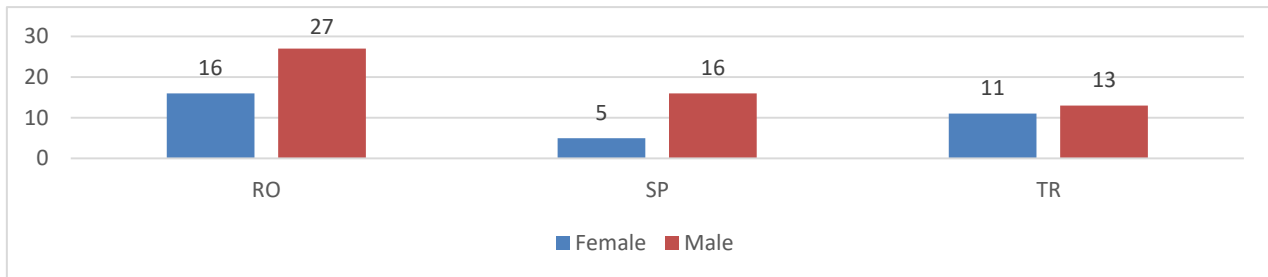


Figure 1 Distribution of respondents per country

3. MAIN FINDINGS

The first question addressed VET learners committed to choosing their future careers. More than half of the respondents confirmed that once they graduate from VET school, they would continue their

studies at university. The responses analyzed in a country context, reveal that only 10% of the VET graduates from Spain would continue at the university and only 2% of graduates from Romania would choose to join a course to become specialized in a certain field (Figure 2).

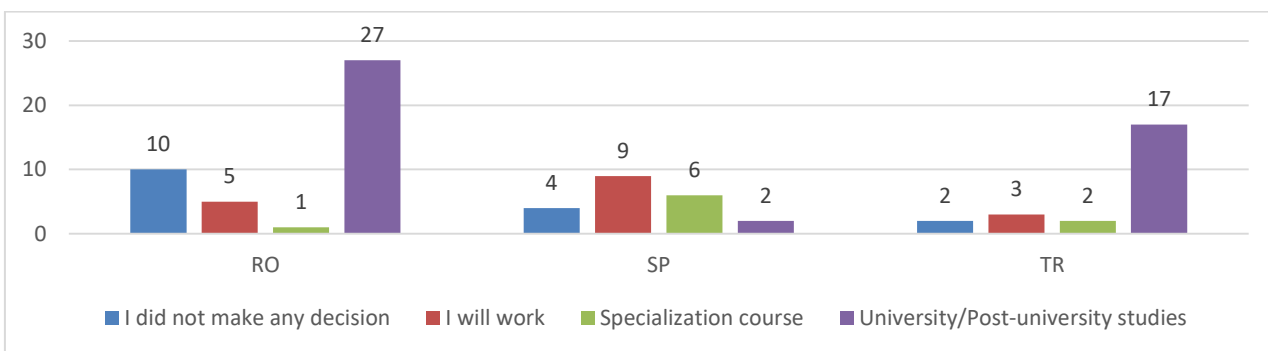


Figure 2 Next step after the VET school

Respondents were asked to indicate who is the person that provides them with information about the career to choose. Most of the respondents with a slightly equal percentage confirmed that parents and teachers guide them regarding their career prospects. Only 13% of VET learners are guided by a career guidance counsellor. About a quarter of the respondents confirmed that they are not receiving any information about the

career. Regarding career guidance in the national context, it is a strong influence of Romanian parents in the career decision-making process, while in Turkey the teachers are those guiding the VET learners to a greater extent (Figure 3).

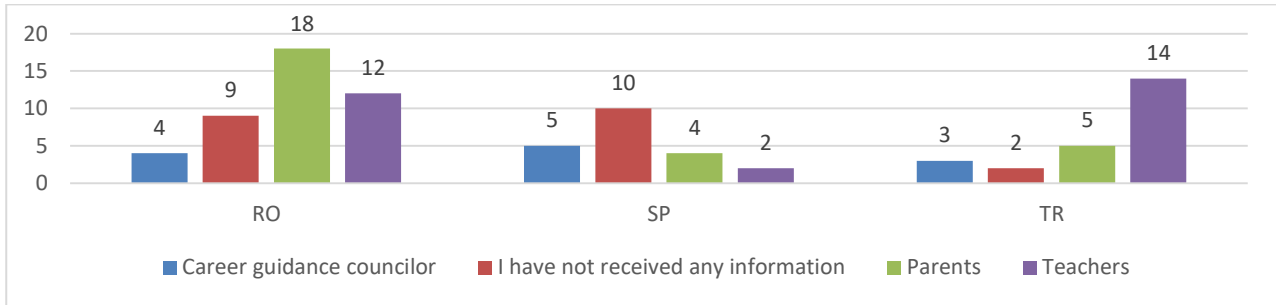


Figure 3 VET learners guidance

Willing to understand what the main channels are providing VET learners information for making the career decision, it resulted that more than 80% of respondents are being influenced by talks on career

prospects or their interest in a particular profession. Only a few respondents admitted that they will base the decision on the information received from the career guidance counsellor or mass media (Figure 4).

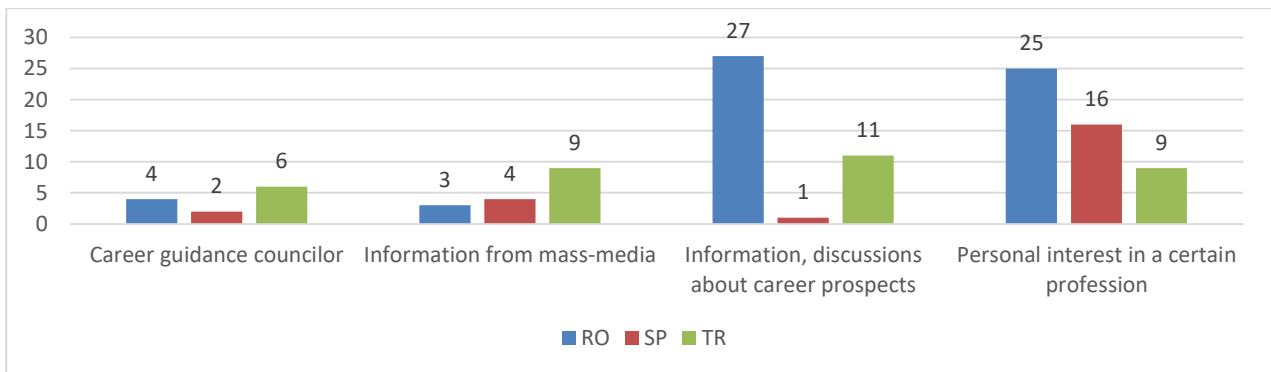


Figure 4 Channels of information for career decision

The next question revealed the expectations of the VET graduates from their job. Most of the respondents choose the monthly income, as the dominant factor that influences them in choosing their future profession. Only a few responses showed interest in reaching positions that offer career advancement. More than 30% prefer to choose a career that offers more job opportunities.

Analyzed in a national context, it resulted that the VET graduates from Spain were not interested in fast career advancement and that none of the respondents from Turkey was interested in having enough free time for other things (Figure 5).

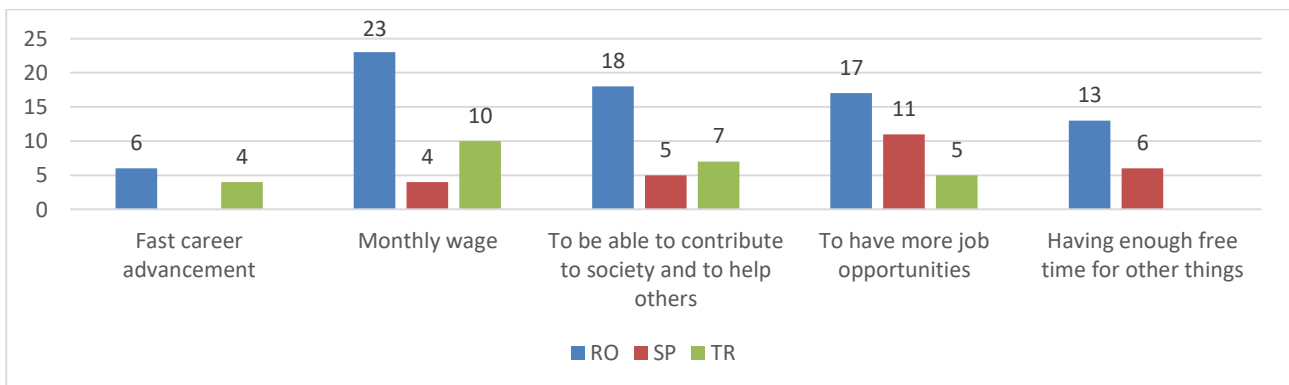


Figure 5 Expectations from the job

The next question addressed the job cards presenting the careers in the blue industry. Upon reading the job cards, the respondents were requested to express opinions about the completeness or missing information. The blue career job cards in the blue economy included job descriptions, medium salary, work schedule, the education and skills needed for career advancement, opportunities to work in related sectors, and links to relevant professional associations. 98% of the respondents consider that the information is sufficient for making an informed decision. Those considering that

some more information is needed were invited to indicate what they would like to find in a job card. The responses were mainly related to the monthly income.

The last question of the survey invited the respondents to express their thoughts about their willingness to gather and find out more about blue careers. By far, most respondents confirmed that they would like to meet professionals to discuss future careers. In the national context, the respondents from Turkey showed a great interest to receive information from their VET teachers (Figure 6).

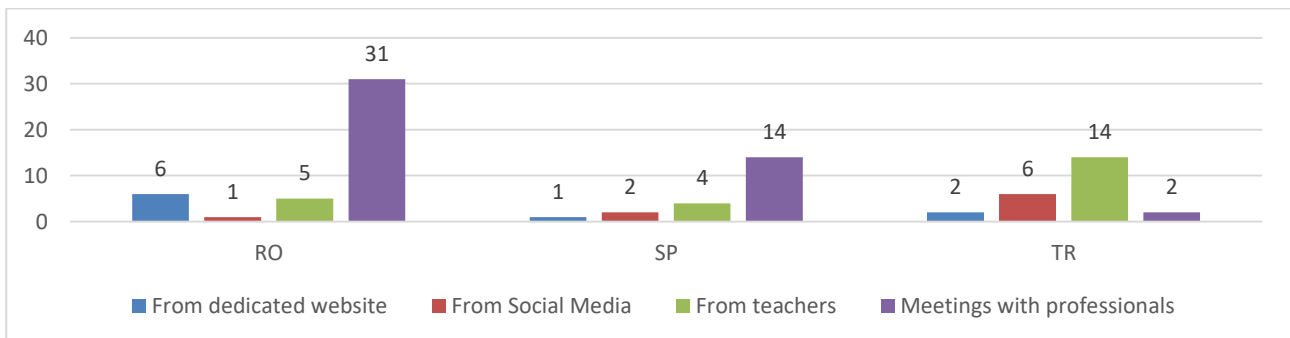


Figure 6 Preference to find more about blue careers

4. ANALYSIS OF THE RESPONSES

The research aimed at understanding the preferences and expectations of VET learners about the support needed for making an informed decision about their future careers. From this perspective, the study analyzed who and in which direction they are guided, the job expectations as opposed to the type of educational background and gender, and a very important aspect for increasing the quality and relevance of career

counselling: the preferred sources of information that can help VET learners in making the decision.

The results showed that the majority of those guided by parents and teachers (64%) are willing to follow university or post-university studies. About half of those respondents that did not receive any information about the career, said that they did not decide yet about the following steps. The other half would prefer to work, to follow university or post-university studies (Figure 7).

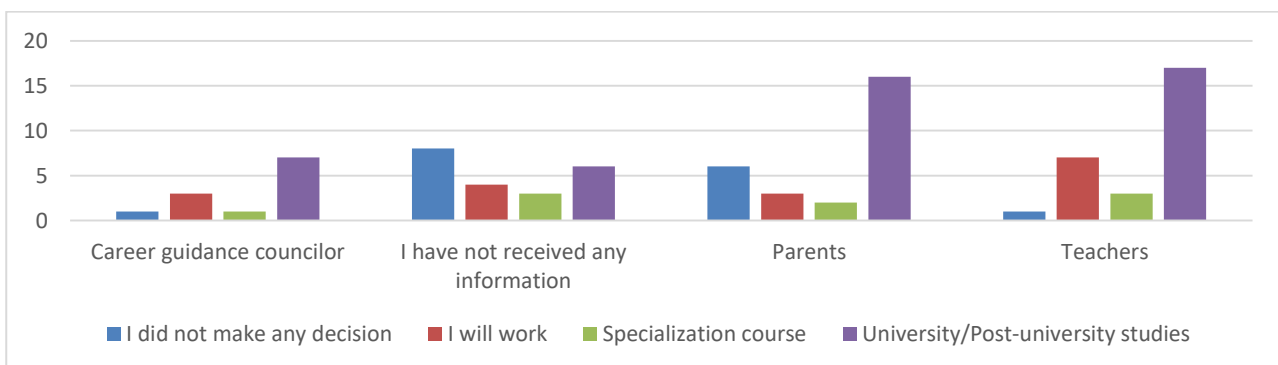


Figure 7 Decision and guiding

Among the expectation, various intrinsic and extrinsic factors are contributing to their choice. Among these: to be interesting, varied, with social prestige and admired by others as well as salary. Those respondents that mentioned that they will work after graduation,

prefer jobs that are dynamic, offer work stability, and the possibility to learn. None of those that expressed their willingness to work immediately after graduation, they do not expect admiration, prestige, or creativity. Those respondents that would like to continue their studies are

equally motivated by jobs that are dynamic, by salary, and careers that allow continuous learning. Less interest

was shown in social prestige and admiration of others (Figure 8).

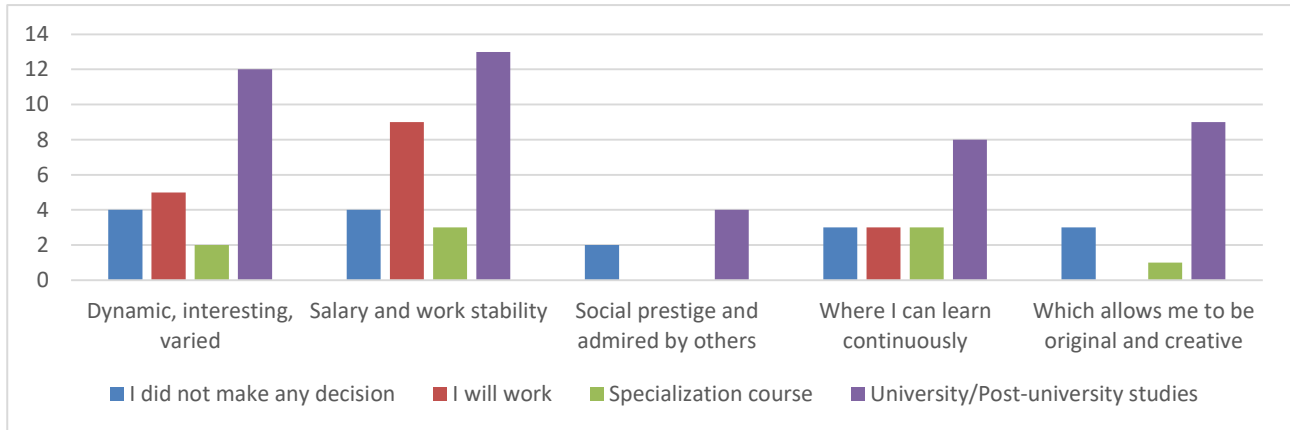


Figure 8 Job expectations

Taking into consideration that gender influences the preferences of respondents, the below emphasizes the expectations of VET learners at the beginning of their careers. The results show different approaches for males and females. It is noticed a similar interest for males for salary and work stability. About 50% of the female

respondents from Turkey choose salary as a priority, while none of the women from Spain considered salary and work stability as a priority. Moreover, about 50% of the male respondents from Spain choose as a priority a dynamic, interesting, and varied job, while none of them prefers original or creative jobs (Figure 9).

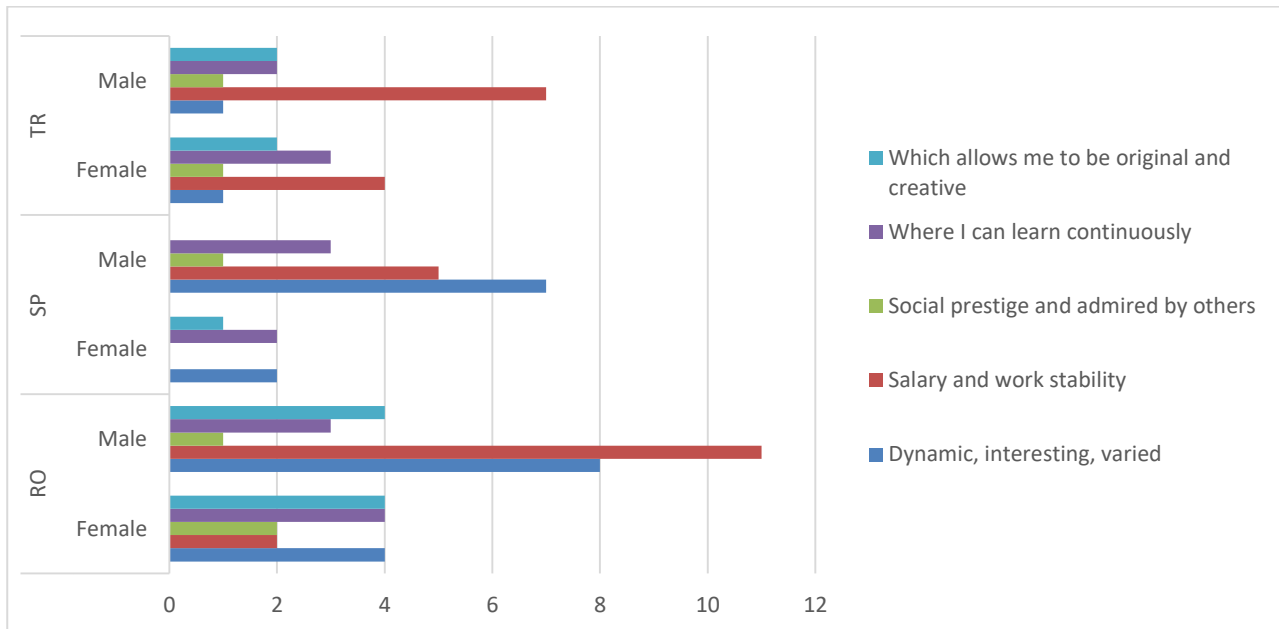


Figure 9 Influencing factors by gender

The large majority of respondents shows interest to meet a professional to guide them in their future career. 80% of those undecided would prefer to meet professionals for getting more information before making the decision. None of those respondents that

would like to follow a course for specialization expected to find information on a dedicated website. Interestingly, even though social media is part of the young generation's daily life, they do not expect to find useful

information for their future career on this platform (Figure 10).

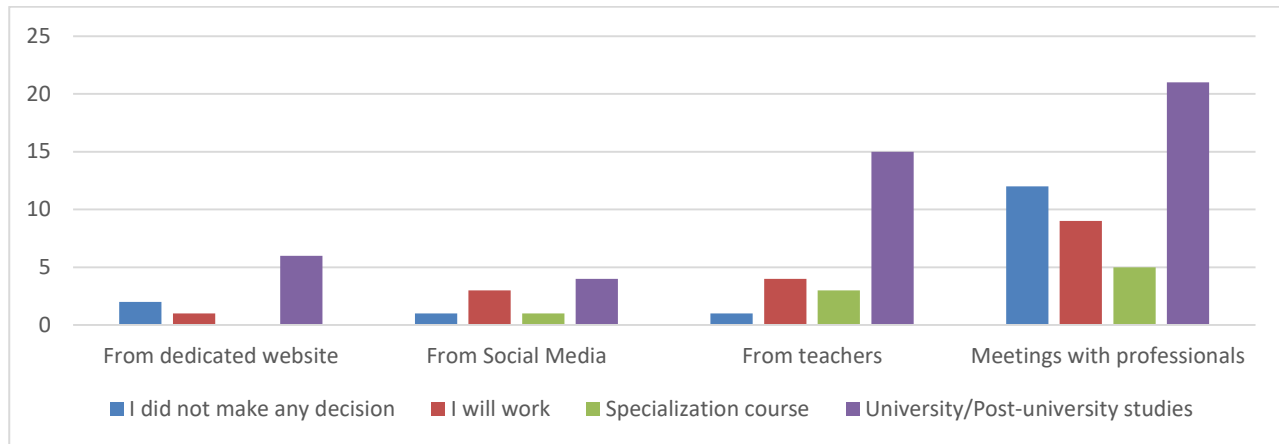


Figure 10 Preferred sources of information for making career decisions

5. CONCLUSIONS

A career plan is a strategy people continuously construct to control their learning and advancement throughout their working life. Its four stages are designed to help them visualize the steps they must take to accomplish their career goals and how to carry out these steps: identify skills and interests, explore career ideas, make a decision, and set achievable goals. The mission of mentors and career counsellors would be materialized if career centres possess the necessary materials to lead people down the correct path, one that is highly developed and constantly expanding. Although many nations strive to advance their ocean economy, success in these attempts is still difficult. Policymakers and educational institutions around the world must transfer a modest portion of their economies in the direction of a thriving blue economy on a global scale. And choosing the right audience for this action will improve the global problem of keeping the blue environment fully active.

6. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our special thanks to our partners from the international institutions for the knowledge, time, and efforts they provided throughout the entire process of collecting data for this project. Their useful advice and suggestions were really helpful to us during the project's completion.

The research was conducted during the ERASMUS+ Strategic Partnership project Career Guidance in Blue Economy, ID 2020-1-RO01-KA202-080397, <https://trainingclub.eu/beblue/> co-funded by the European Commission.

The authors especially thank the experts, maritime professionals, and survey participants for their valuable contributions.

7. DISCLAIMER

"The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein."

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