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## **European Eastern University**

### **A survey on satisfaction from studying in Lublin among students from Eastern Partnership countries**

#### **Abstract**

As part of the project called European Eastern University, co-financed from the EU funds under the Erasmus+ Programme, research has been carried out involving a group of foreign students from the Eastern Partnership countries studying in Lublin. It comprised two complementary pieces of research. The first was qualitative research based on in-depth interviews. Twenty students took part in the study. The second part was quantitative research performed by means of interview questionnaires and involved 150 individuals. The research was carried out from April to May 2015.

The aim of the research was to determine the level of satisfaction of the students from the European Partnership countries who had decided to study in Lublin. Moreover, the research will be useful in the preparation of the educational, social and standard of living package beneficial to the well-being of foreign students coming to Lublin. Thanks to the above-mentioned, a programme of studies dedicated to this group can be formulated.

The qualitative research involved students from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine, while students from Belarus (41,2%) and Ukraine (57,5%) and two persons who did not provide their country of origin, took part in the quantitative part. A slight majority of women (57.5%) to men (42.5%) was present within this group. In addition, the participants represented the majority of Lublin's universities - the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin, the Lublin University of Technology, Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, the Medical University, the University of Economics and Innovation, the Higher School of Social Sciences, the Higher School of Entrepreneurship and Administration and the Higher School of Social and Natural Sciences. The



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majority of the participants were involved in studies at the first level of classification of studies (Bachelor and Bachelor in engineering studies), far fewer individuals surveyed were taking Master's Degree studies (29.4%), and the least numerous group comprised doctoral students (5.2%).

According to the qualitative research, before the students from the Eastern Partnership countries attempt to apply for studies in Lublin they come across information on such a possibility. The source of such information is usually the people from their immediate environment. For this reason it is worth ensuring that the current students from the Eastern Partnership countries are ambassadors of the idea of studying in Lublin during their stays at home. They should be encouraged to actively promote studying in our city (the so-called 'word-of-mouth marketing'), which gives a real chance of an increase in interest in studies among the citizens of the European Partnership countries. Official meetings and the assistance of State institutions in these countries has less significance and limited impact.

The key incentive encouraging foreigners to study in Lublin is their awareness of possible financial support. Expanding the current opportunities in this field for students from the Eastern Partnership countries and disseminating information on the options for receiving financial support during university education are the most effective tools when it comes to increasing the number of EP students in Lublin.

Foreign students are satisfied with Lublin's educational package and in general have a favourable opinion of the various aspects of their relations with higher education institutions. Those who are dissatisfied account for no more than 10% of all respondents, most of whom expressed positive or highly positive opinions. All in all, this might indeed form an optimistic picture, but it needs to be borne in mind that the continued arrival of new students depends on whether this good opinion of Lublin is supported by word of mouth.

In general, the surveyed students from the Eastern Partnership countries find Lublin a city which offers them good living and studying conditions. Not only can they find here venues and friends to spend their free time, but they will receive help in emergency situations. The students also view the city's cultural resource as very interesting. Furthermore, they feel safe here and are satisfied with the work of the local administrative bodies in charge of matters related to their stay in



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Poland, as much as with the public transport, which they use on a regular basis. The students declared that there were no barriers for them to freely pursue their religious and spiritual values, and this also makes Lublin a good place to live. In their view, the problems they encounter in daily life do not stem from their foreign origin or locals' prejudiced attitudes, but are typical, though negative, aspects of living in a city.

As regards their plans for the future, most EP students are planning to continue their education in Poland (including in Lublin, as declared by more than half of them) or to seek employment in one of the EU Member States. While opting for jobs in line with their university education, the students also took other options into account. Interestingly, returning to their home countries was the least mentioned scenario for most respondents - this is because taking up studies abroad is for many people the first step to leaving their country for good.

To sum up the quantitative research, it should be noted that dividing the respondents by gender revealed only a few, insignificant, differences in their opinions. And so, women are slightly better in communicating with the teaching staff, whereas men raise the problem of allegations by Polish students who claim that their colleagues from Eastern Partnership countries are provided with better accommodation and living conditions. The only statistically significant difference in opinions about the city concerns the ease of access to basic healthcare, which men see as easier.

More differences emerge if the respondents' countries of origin are taken into consideration. These regard the attractiveness of dormitories to EP students and access to job opportunities offered by the Academic Career Centres. In some of respondents' statements differences between various nations were not evident, but oscillated around the threshold of statistical significance. This is apparent in opinions on the kindness of Polish students, the ease of contact with the staff of the Academic Career Centres, and the attractiveness of the universities' sports-and-leisure infrastructure. In all these areas, the opinions expressed by Ukrainian students were more favourable than those by their Belarusian colleagues.

The students also differed in opinions about their universities across selected aspects, which might serve as an indication of the criteria where, according to Belarusian and Ukrainian students, certain universities are lagging behind and where there is room for improvement. This is the case



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especially with issues such as the attractiveness of university programmes and majors, the availability of information on scholarships and the criteria of admission to internships, assistance in enrolling on vocational training, admission to international exchange programmes, the services of the Academic Career Centres, contacts with the teaching staff, the conditions in which tuition is provided, the ease of handling administrative matters at the university, and relations with other students.

The research shows that the welcoming attitude towards students from the Eastern Partnership countries is limited, in terms of the reactions of the general public. A survey among the students of the College of Enterprise and Administration (WSPiA) in Lublin indicated that the favouritism shown by the College to foreigners met with a negative reaction from Polish students, who probably felt discriminated against. In consequence, foreign students at the WSPiA, more often than at other universities, report hostile behaviour in contacts with their Polish colleagues. Social acceptance is therefore an important element in the process of developing a strategy of openness to students from abroad.

An important aspect to be considered in a strategy for educating EP nationals in Lublin, as revealed by the survey, is their strong inclination against returning to their home countries. This requires establishing a clear goal - is university education in Lublin intended to serve as an instrument for changes in the Eastern Partnership countries or should it rather be leveraged to remedy the current demographic deficit in Poland? As results from the survey show, the former goal is not being pursued at the moment. Foreign graduates should therefore be encouraged to return to their home countries, for instance by making financial support for EP nationals dependent on whether they declare their intentions to return.

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