

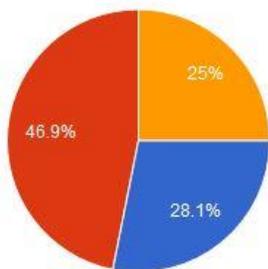
Survey about international students' friendships with Latvians



The amount of international students in Riga, both exchange and full-time students, is constantly increasing. International programs like ERASMUS expect the mobility of young people to help them to gain cultural awareness also through getting to know the locals of the host country. Do the international students in Riga really get to know Latvians? In spring 2017 a small survey was held aiming to see if international students have Latvian friends and if there is enough support by the universities.

31 student from 10 universities (most frequent - RTU 48%, LU 23%, RSU 13%) participated the survey. They represented 20 countries (especially Germany – 4 students and India – 5 students), 52% are females, 48% males.

Have you had a buddy, Latvian student, helping you in the university?

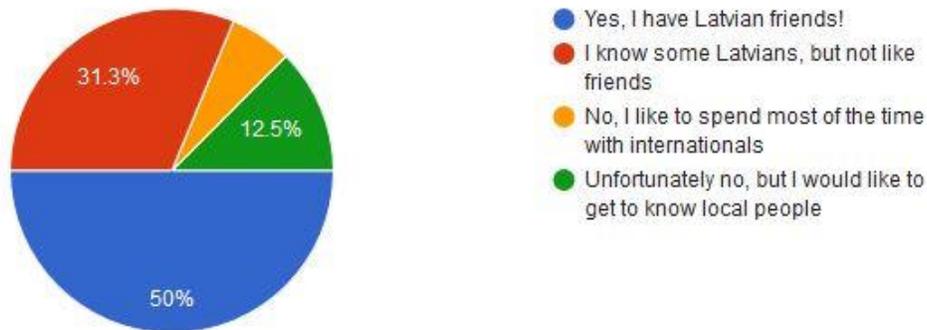


- Yes
- No
- Theoretically yes, but I haven't used that opportunity

Almost half of the participants of the survey said they haven't had a buddy and a quarter replied positively. Half of the students "provided with a buddy" for any reasons haven't actually used that opportunity.

Answering a question "**Did your university/ESN network provide any other program to become friends with any Latvian family or individual?**" only six students said "yes". Half of the respondents claimed to have no organized opportunities, others didn't know if there are any.

Have you become friends with some local people during your time in Latvia?



Nevertheless, half of the students managed to find "local friends". Actually, most of students having buddies, also claim to have Latvian friends. There is a minority of students (6,3%) who prefer not to spend time with local people but there are twice more (12,5%) of those who would like to get to know local people but were not successful in it. Approximately a third of respondents say they don't have deep relationships with locals although they know some.

Students reveal that it may be hard to approach Latvians because of the Nordic temper, tendency to keep existing friendships or an occupation with studies. E.g. a Turkish girl writes that "Latvian people are not open to be friends with foreigners. Latvian people are cold and prejudicial." A Norwegian full-time RSU student says that it is usually hard to approach Latvians, always in groups and he always seems like an outsider in their group. One Spanish medical student is sharing her positive view of Latvians: "Maybe Erasmus students tend to think that Latvian people are colder and distant, but actually they are really nice, and if I don't have close Latvian Friends is because I haven't been with them at class, and also because they are studying harder than Erasmus do, so they can't go out so often, and they already have their group of friends. But all Latvians that I have met, have shown interest in our Erasmus life and in how university works at our home countries."

So, can something be done in order to help internationals – those who want to - to be more integrated? Yes, we think there is free space for international student networks, student parliaments and non-governmental organizations to improve the opportunities to meet locals. This is one of the objectives for the project series "Welcome for internationals" financed by the European Union program "ERASMUS+: Youth in action", led by a youth organization "Latvijas Kristīgā studentu brālība" (LKSB, Latvian Christian Student Fellowship). We hope to help international students to get in touch with local people in Latvia – both young and older people – develop friendships, learn the local culture, develop communication skills and get the positive impression of our nation and country.

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08/10/2017