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Many foreign uni students struggle to arrive in Finland as term begins

Universities in Finland say international students can defer their studies by a semester owing to the Covid-19 crisis.

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Manushi Bashini, a student at Oulu University, said that having an extroverted personality has made it difficult to adjust to remote learning. Image: Paulus Markkula / Yle

Many international and exchange students are facing problems arriving in Finland as the autumn semester begins.

Students with spots at Finnish universities coming from outside the EU have encountered severe delays in accessing residence permits as the pandemic has shuttered many Finnish consulates.

In some cases, students need to travel to another country to visit a Finnish consulate—something also made more difficult now owing to travel restrictions between states. For Sri Lankan students, the nearest Finnish consulate is in India, which is now home to one of the fastest-growing coronavirus caseloads of any country.

Manushi Bashini began her international business studies at Oulu University (OU) last year and has not been back to her home country of Sri Lanka since the crisis began. She told Yle many Sri Lankan students with study places in Finland are unsure of what will happen to them.

Universities offer flexibility

Far fewer international students will be on campus as the new term starts, according to **Saana Finni** from Oulu University's admissions office.

OU said it acknowledges the challenges facing foreign students and has responded by extending deadlines for tuition fees and giving students more time to secure paperwork which may have been held up due to the virus.

A legislative change this year also grants international students the possibility to report themselves absent for the fall term. There are no figures available yet indicating how many students will choose to defer their studies because of the pandemic.

Mai Truong will soon enter her second year at Oulu University, where she is working towards a degree in educational technology.

She told Yle that not being surrounded by teachers and students has made it challenging to stay motivated during distance learning.

University years are usually a socially active time in young people's lives, but get-togethers have now mostly gone online.

Dennis Neumann is a German exchange student who recently arrived in Oulu to study computer science. For him, arriving in Finland was relatively easy, saying he was now mainly concerned with the social aspect of the prevailing situation.

"I hope coronavirus doesn't dampen the mood of my exchange," Neumann said.

Distance learning at OU is scheduled to continue through October.

Sources Yle

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Krista Kiuru said the action plan will address baseline, accelerating and spreading phases of the epidemic.

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The cabinet is also proposing that travellers be eligible for state compensation for cancelled travel packages.

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The university is trying to ensure that everyone who attended the traditional event for medical students gets tested.

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