

## Press release

Current situation of Covid-19 pandemic significantly affects the activities within FORHEAL project, which is being implemented by three major forestry European universities and three universities from Laos. The measures taken to prevent the spread of the SARS-COV-2 virus have a negative impact, in particular on the international mobility of students or the organization of international meetings, which also form a substantial part of the FORHEAL project.

The overall aim of this ERASMUS+ project is to strengthen the forest-related higher education system in Laos, to improve domestic capacity to sustainably manage forests for the benefit of the people and the environment, while at the same time enabling Laos to effectively respond to the demands and opportunities of international processes such as the Agenda 2030 (SDGs) and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Project is coordinated by University of Helsinki, two other European universities (University of Freiburg and Czech University of Life Sciences Prague) and three Laotian universities (National University of Laos, Savannakhet university and Souphanouvong University) are also collaborating on the project.

The impacts of coronavirus outbreak on the project are especially very significant, because 2020 is the last year of the implementation and all project goals are to be met by the end of October.

Due to virus pandemic working life has changed a lot at project coordinator, the University of Helsinki. An exceptional situation was declared by the coronavirus management team of the University on 12 March. As part of the FORHEAL project, University of Helsinki had a plan to host two incoming staff from National University of Laos in between April to May. However, the University of Helsinki has cancelled all student and staff exchanges of which beginning date is between March 16 and May 31, 2020. The project will set new dates for staff exchange once the exceptional period over.

Czech University of Life Sciences Prague was the first organization in the Czech Republic whose employee was positively tested for the new type of coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. It occurred on March 01, 2020. All adopted measures have had the greatest impact on foreign cooperation, including mobilities of representatives of the Savannakhet University in Laos to CZU Prague through the FORHEAL project. The Czech University of Life Sciences Prague planned to host three representatives from Laos for several weeks, to improve their skills in forest resource planning, forest harvesting, silviculture, and forestry economics. The Lao representatives were supposed to work in tandem with Czech experts on improving the quality of higher education provided at the Savannakhet University for students majoring in study programs focused on forestry and forest-based bioeconomy. Nevertheless, CZU hopes to welcome the Lao in Prague, if the situation permits, and carry out all the activities planned for the mobilities.

The lockdown in Germany has so far affected the planned visit of a delegation from Souphanouvong University to ALU-Freiburg that was scheduled for May. The representatives of ALU-Freiburg sincerely hope to realize this visit as soon as possible, to discuss and initiate the effective incorporation of the contents of the courses provided by ALU-Freiburg into the curricula of Souphanouvong University.

During this unexpected circumstance, European project partners have organized virtual meetings with their Laos partner by using electronic tools if necessary.



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