



A Safety Net for Students Abroad

This editorial is based on [“A Safety Net for Students Abroad”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 07/03/2022. It talks about the need for Indian students to study abroad.

For Prelims: HEFA (Higher Education Finance Agency), Indian Diaspora.

For Mains: Indian students - issues regarding higher education within the country, need to study abroad, challenges associated.

Indian students going abroad to study is not a new phenomenon. For decades now, **lack of quality education institutes in India** and **demand-supply gap** has been forcing many families to send their children abroad. The spotlight, however, has turned on these students with two recent events — the [Covid-19 pandemic](#) and [Russia’s war on Ukraine](#).

Unless the **education system in India is tailored to the needs of students**, they will continue to fly abroad. Indian institutes need to start providing students with more options for professional courses including technical, medical and others.

What is the Current Scenario?

- Currently, **7,70,000 Indian students are studying abroad** from 4,40,000 in 2016 which is a **20% growth**. On the other hand, the growth in the domestic region has been merely 3% when compared to the demand for education abroad,
- **India is the second largest source of international students** after China. Before the onset of the pandemic, the Indian students studying abroad were spending \$24 billion in foreign economies, which is around **1% of India’s GDP**.
 - The number is expected to rise to around 1.8 million by 2024 when the Indian students will be spending nearly **\$80 billion outside India**.
- To pursue a medical degree, Indian students have been heading out to **Russia, China, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and the Philippines** for about three decades now.
- Sushma Swaraj, former External Affairs Minister of India, referred to Indians abroad as **“brand ambassadors”**. The Prime Minister of India and U.K. have called **Indians in the U.K. the “living bridge” between both countries**.
 - The larger benefits of this Indian diaspora come in terms of **soft power, knowledge transfer and remittances** that come back to India.

What are the Causes of Studying Abroad?

- With more than half the Indian population under the age of 25, and **no Indian university in the world’s top 100**, it is natural that aspirational students would look to study abroad.

- In terms of medical degree, the **amount spent on living and the tuition fees are far more affordable** than paying for an MBBS seat in private medical colleges within India.
- There are **far more MBBS aspirants than there are MBBS seats in India**. As per data from the National Medical Commission (NMC), in 2021-22, there were **596 medical colleges** in the country with a **total of 88,120 MBBS seats**.

What are the recent crises faced by these Students?

- Amid the **recent Russia-Ukraine Conflict**, there have been cases of the unfortunate deaths of two Indian students (one died in shelling, the other suffered a stroke) in Ukraine.
 - Although there is chaos amid an external armed aggression, the **situation warrants serious interventions**.
 - It is estimated that around 20,000 Indian students were stranded in Ukraine.
- More recently, about 2,000 international students, mainly from India, have been affected after **three Canadian colleges shut down abruptly**.
 - As per the allegations, the colleges, which are now bankrupt, collected lakhs of rupees in fees, thereby **jeopardising the students' futures**.
- A similar incident happened during the pandemic when **Australia shut its borders to the thousands of Indian students** enrolled to study on its campuses.

What Steps Can Be Taken?

- **Role of Host Countries:** The Indian students are the consumers of higher education abroad, and guests of the nations they reside in. It is only natural then for **India to mandate protection of Indians abroad by ensuring that host countries take on this responsibility**.
- **Safety Net Through International Treaties:** The Indian government should proactively create a safety net for the international students. **International agreements that oblige host countries** to ensure the **welfare of Indian students during times of crises and contingencies** should be given paramount importance.
 - The trade agreements India is currently negotiating with the U.K. and Australia make for a great opportunity to do so.
- **Student Insurance Schemes:** Contrary to popular opinion, a considerable chunk of students who study abroad are not from wealthy families; they take expensive loans to finance their education.
 - The aspiration to secure a better exposure and future can render them prone to difficulties.
 - A **mandatory student insurance scheme** as well as responsibility for the welfare of students in the foreign country should be **incorporated into agreements to secure the interests of students** who also spend considerably in the host country.
- **More Public Sector Medical Colleges:** Creating more medical colleges will be beneficial for the country, if **access and availability can be ensured**.
 - However, this will not be possible by resorting to private enterprise only - the **State and Central governments can start more medical colleges**, as recommended by **NITI Aayog**, by **utilising district headquarters hospitals, and expanding the infrastructure**.
 - This way, students from the lower and middle socio-economic rung, who are otherwise not able to access medical seats, will also benefit.
- **More Investments in Higher Education:** Enhancing investment in higher education, **especially in research and development**, is urgently required to raise the standard of higher education in India.
 - **HEFA (Higher Education Finance Agency)** is a welcome step in providing finance to premier educational institutions for **creation of high quality infrastructure and innovation ecosystems**.
 - Taking measures to allow **foreign universities to set up campuses in India** will increase the inflow of foreign funding in India's Higher Education system and **reduce "Brain Drain" from India**.

Drishti Mains Question

Discuss the key challenges faced by the students in India to pursue higher education within the country and suggest the steps that can be taken to develop a better ecosystem for higher education within India.

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