

# India Opens Doors for Ukraine-Returned Medical Students: But How?

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War does one thing better than anything else – that is to disrupt the lives of ordinary people. It has been almost three months since the war started between Russia and Ukraine, but the worst affected are common people, and the safest are the leaders leading the war. In times of war, everyone wants to see their people safe and close to them. As a result, different nations started evacuating their nationals from the affected country. Similarly, India also decided to save its citizens residing in Ukraine from the tragic outcomes of the war.



Family and friends of Indian students near the Russian embassy, demanding the evacuation of stranded Indian students. (Reuters Photo)

It was estimated that almost 20000 Indian citizens were living in Ukraine, and out of those, around 18000 were students. The Indian government acted efficiently and introduced 'Operation Ganga' on 27th February, precisely three days after the Russians invaded Ukraine. Within a few days, most of the citizens were repatriated and safely taken to Romania, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and Moldova, from where they could finally return to India.

But what after that? Dying in war is tragic but getting your present and future disrupted because of war is far more devastating. It is always easier to be a martyr but challenging to be a survivor. During the pandemic, the world had tried its best to find alternatives to teaching, but one profession that couldn't cope exactly was medicine. We cannot deny that doctors can't be made online without any practical knowledge, you can teach them the science, but you can never teach them the art of healing on screen.

Most of the students that returned from Ukraine were studying medicine. So now, the biggest challenge is finding a way to accommodate these medical students, so they don't suffer because of the war. The students transferred first needed to be rehabilitated psychologically and then accommodated in suitable education options. All students are studying for different years, so the task becomes even more difficult.

## **Problems for the Indian Government**

Indian medical colleges already work with a strict seat count. Because of the latest endeavours by the government in the past few years to increase medical seats, recently, most colleges are functioning with a student count, which is far more than they can accommodate. Adding more students will only derange the student-teacher ratio. So do we have a place for these students? Can we find a way to provide them with education? It is not easy.

But, our government is trying its best to make them feel at home and safe. The students who completed their degree but are yet to do their one-year internship can continue it in India without any problem at various medical colleges. But how to let a second-year student, for example, join any Indian medical college? Ukrainian medical colleges are based on the American medical system, while our Indian colleges follow the British medical system. So what we are taught in the initial years is different from what students learn in Ukraine.

The subjects might differ, but the topics and the timeline for teaching these subjects are also very different. The medical course in Ukraine is six years and a year of internship, while the Indian medical course is 5.5 years, including a one-year internship. So bringing the students to college is not the only problem; the main problem is making the colleges suitable for these students. The NMC has to discuss and find a way to accommodate the variation without disrupting the usual.

Another concern raised by the experts is that introducing these students might dilute our education system, although this reason does not have a firm ground in the long run. The students who have been allowed to do their final internship in India are also supposed to give the license exam to be able to practice in India, just like they were supposed to provide earlier.

## **What can be done?**

We are not left with many options seeing the country's vast differences and seemingly limited resources. We know that admitting students to colleges will not solve anyone's problems. So, where to start?

As experts say that introducing these students might lead to dilution of our medical system, a bridge course can be presented that can teach the necessary topics and connect the knowledge gap of students returned from Ukraine. This bridge course can be conducted after assessing the actual knowledge of these students through tests. For example, to determine how much a student from a Ukrainian college knows at the end of the third year as per Indian standards, a test can be made on the basics of subjects taught in the first three years in India. This can give us information about theoretical and practical knowledge gaps to create a bridge course.

After completing the bridge course, a student can give another qualification test and join an Indian college. The screening and training can be done at one institution, but finally, the students can be admitted to different colleges across India. In simple words, the government must ensure proper knowledge and psychological rehabilitation of the students because only that is how we can prevent our medical system from getting affected.

Another option that has been discussed but is more tiring and time-consuming is introducing a parallel course for these

students based on the Ukrainian system, which will be run in Indian colleges. The loopholes with this idea are that it is very labour-intensive as professors would have to take care of the teaching. We will need to train professors accordingly. The exams also need to be conducted separately, and finally, we need to continue these courses till the students don't get back to their college or till they don't complete their courses, making it even harder.

The students would have to give a licensing exam to be able to practice in India. The only students that had joined the Ukrainian colleges this session can be transferred to our colleges without much need of training or rehabilitation but again, on what basis will we allot the colleges.

Admitting students to colleges of different countries that follow the same curriculum also stands. Still, any decision of this sort will have a lot of international political repercussions, and we are aiming to find the best solutions. So this option seems to be entirely off-the-table.

## **What is the final decision?**

Our options are not easy to implement, and even if our government works in full force, it will take six months to develop a system and implement it. So, students are called to wait. We have been hit by war intent on causing damage. The government is trying to ensure it is not significant.

Unfortunately, the students might have to miss a year. Still, with the enthusiasm and responsibility our country has been working to accommodate the students, we will soon find a way. The students are expected to wait for the conditions to improve in Ukraine and for the Indian government to start working towards a solution.

The government has a massive job at hand to welcome the Indian students back from Ukraine and ensure that the war does not

severely jeopardise their futures. In addition to this, they need to ensure that the students studying in India are also not compromised. They have to form a new system, a system to adjust to the needs but does not affect any student. It is a mammoth task, but surprisingly, we have tackled it worse.

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### **Featured Image Source:**

1. PTI

### **References:**

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