

La guerra de Ucrania: más tensión al sistema alimentario mundial y riesgo de revueltas sociales

Resumen:

Nos advierten que avecina una grave crisis alimentaria y económica que no solo va a agravar las situaciones de hambruna de las poblaciones afectadas por los conflictos sino que también puede fomentar la aparición de disturbios civiles e por el precio de los alimentos, principalmente en países que son importadores netos de alimentos.

La guerra de Ucrania está resaltando las graves deficiencias estructurales de un sistema alimentario mundial cada vez más tensionado por factores como la desigualdad económica, la pandemia de COVID-19, el cambio climático y la globalización.

La resiliencia del sistema alimentario mundial es cada vez más difícil de lograr. A corto plazo, urge evitar el aumento de la hambruna en regiones frágiles y evitar revueltas sociales por el aumento del precio de los alimentos. A medio y largo plazo, es necesario llevar a cabo una profunda transformación del sistema alimentario mundial.

Palabras clave:

Ucrania, alimentos, inflación, fertilizantes, hambruna, revueltas sociales.

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Introduction

Rising food, fertiliser and fuel prices as a consequence of the conflict in Ukraine, coupled with the climate crisis, raise fears of a perfect storm, or rather a cyclone, that could wipe out the expected post-pandemic economic recovery, as well as the achievement of the 2030 development goals.

The risk of a global food crisis stemming from the war in Ukraine has highlighted the vulnerability of the global food system, which affects developing and food-importing countries most acutely. The looming severe food crisis is not due to a problem of availability but of accessibility. Enough food is produced to feed the world, but it is not produced where people urgently need it¹.

The war in Ukraine has spotlighted the serious structural deficiencies of a global food system increasingly strained by factors such as economic inequality, globalisation, the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. The current increase in food prices is not a novelty, but rather the confirmation of a trend that has been building over the last few years.

In this inflationary environment, countries will find it increasingly difficult to provide humanitarian aid to countries in need and to provide subsidies to mitigate the rising prices of food and necessary inputs such as fertilisers. International organisations warn that a serious food and economic crisis is looming, the consequences of which could lead to social unrest in the most vulnerable countries and aggravate situations of famine among conflict-affected populations.

The global food system under stress

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the price of the main foodstuffs in the last year has increased by an average of 29.8%, the highest figure since this index was first used in 1990². Almost half of this increase has occurred since the start of the war in Ukraine, indicating that the looming food and economic crisis has a

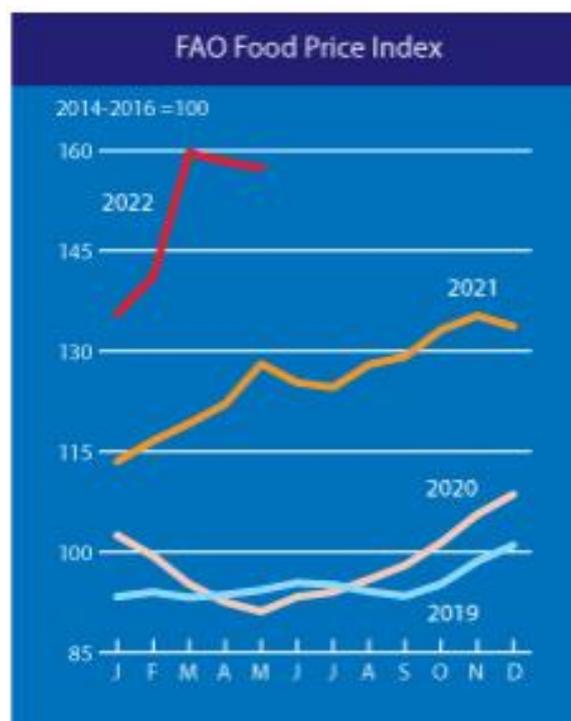
1 <https://www.dw.com/en/ukraine-war-increases-global-food-insecurity/a-61206423>

2 <https://www.fao.org/worldfoodsituation/foodpricesindex/en/>

cyclical component that will keep food and fuel prices at historic levels until at least the end of 2024, according to the World Bank³.

The war in Ukraine has triggered an immediate and historic rise in food and fuel prices. First, the accessibility of food to foreign markets has been reduced because Ukraine and Russia are both among the world's leading exporters of certain agricultural products and, in the case of Russia, also of fertilisers. And second, sanctions and export restrictions on fuels have led to a reorganisation of energy markets and a consequent escalation of the energy market.

Source: FAO Food Price Index. Data on prices as of 3 June 2022.



In 2021, Russia and Ukraine were among the world's top three exporters of wheat, maize, rapeseed, sunflower seeds and sunflower oil. Ukraine supplies around 10% of the world's wheat, 13% of its barley, 15% of its maize and more than half of its sunflower oil⁴. For its part, Russia also ranked as the world's leading exporter of nitrogen fertilisers, the second leading supplier of potash fertilisers and the third largest exporter of phosphorus

³ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/food-security-update>

⁴ <https://www.agrodigital.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/guerraucraniac.pdf>

fertilisers. This high concentration as global suppliers has exposed commodity markets to increased vulnerability to the effects of war and rising price volatility.⁵

While Ukraine accuses Russia of attacking its agricultural production and infrastructure, which will prevent future harvests, there are millions of tonnes of grain in Ukrainian ports waiting to be shipped. According to EU figures, Ukraine is currently storing around 40 million tonnes of grain, half of which will have to be exported by the end of July to make room for the new harvest⁶. An additional 50 million tonnes of grain are expected with the next harvest, but there is only space to store 50% of this amount⁷.

Before the war, Ukraine exported up to 5 million tonnes of grain per month through Black Sea ports. This route is currently unusable, and transport is having to be rerouted towards the EU by rail, road and land waterways for further export to world markets. However, exports are not taking place at the necessary pace, mainly due to container capacity and infrastructure problems, including different track gauges⁸.

The EU has made it a priority to get agricultural products out of Ukraine so that they can be on the markets and so avoid a food crisis. To this end, in early June, the European Commission presented its plan for enhanced logistical support to redirect Ukrainian export cargo by organising "solidarity channels"⁹.

In April, Ukraine exported only 1.2 million tonnes of grain. The aim is to reach a minimum of 3 million tonnes of exports per month, and ideally 4 million tonnes. Only then can sufficient storage space be secured for the next harvest¹⁰. A bumper harvest is expected in less than two months, putting additional pressure on already tight logistics¹¹.

Moving agricultural products out of the country despite the logistical challenges has become a priority¹² and an increasingly urgent necessity as the days go by and the harvest begins in Ukraine. There is also a risk that grains may be disappearing from

5 Report: The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the current conflict 25 March 2022 Update

6 <https://www.railvolution.net/news/solidarity-with-ukraine-railways-keep-up-aid-efforts-and-welcome-support-for-trade-routes>

7 <https://www.agriculture.com/news/crops/27-million-tons-of-grain-planned-for-export-stuck-in-ukraine>

8 <https://www.fastmarkets.com/insights/three-reasons-ukraines-railway-grain-movements-are-still-only-reaching-55-of-potential>

9 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/infographics/how-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine-has-further-aggravated-the-global-food-crisis/>

10 https://transport.ec.europa.eu/news/european-commission-establish-solidarity-lanes-help-ukraine-export-agricultural-goods-2022-05-12_en

11 <https://www.fastmarkets.com/insights/ukraine-companies-put-grain-trade-on-hold-as-focus-shifts-exporting-stocks>

12 <https://www.fastmarkets.com/insights/ukraine-companies-put-grain-trade-on-hold-as-focus-shifts-exporting-stocks>

Ukrainian soil. According to some sources, Russia may be "stealing"¹³ some of the food cargo stored in the ports and diverting it to its territory, where Russian buyers are waiting for the goods¹⁴.

The consequence of this is that cereals are not reaching their destination countries and there is a worrying price increase in fragile regions. For example, in Cameroon, bread prices have risen by 40%¹⁵, and supply is not regular. This rise comes on the heels of the 20-30% increase in food prices in West Africa over the last five years¹⁶. The option of finding new suppliers could be a feasible solution, but there is currently the serious problem of the shortage of shipping containers to bring in food supplies from elsewhere¹⁷.

The war in Ukraine has lit the spark that could ignite the flames of a new food crisis of catastrophic proportions. In some countries, the food insecurity situation was already acute due to conflict situations, pandemics and adverse weather events due to climate change. Resilience to the challenges facing the global food system is either non-existent or increasingly difficult to achieve.

The number of people in need of food assistance in the West African region, including Nigeria, Mali, Burkina Faso, Chad and Niger, has increased very significantly in recent years. Between 2007 and 2022, the number of food insecure people in this region has increased from 7 million to 27 million. Unless emergency measures are taken, this figure could rise to 38 million by June¹⁸. Conflict, climate change, unsustainable resource use and now the war in Ukraine are among the main causes. In the Horn of Africa, estimates show that the situation is likewise worrying. According to the UN, some 16 million people may be facing severe hunger in this region because of persistent drought¹⁹.

This situation suggests that we are facing a new food crisis similar to the one that occurred in 2007. J. M. Sumpsi qualified this crisis as global, multifactorial and long-lasting²⁰. As events unfold, the food crisis generated by the war in Ukraine could have the same

13 <https://es.euronews.com/2022/05/01/ucrania-denuncia-que-rusia-ha-robado-toneladas-de-trigo-poniendo-en-riesgo-la-seguridad-al>

14 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/06/07/grain-export-blockade-russia-ukraine-africa/>

15 <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-moscow-black-sea-5fbafb9ea7403a5071f696f66c390180>

16 <https://www.savethechildren.es/notasprensa/africa-occidental-se-enfrenta-su-peor-crisis-alimentaria-en-diez-anos-mas-de-27>

17 <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-moscow-black-sea-5fbafb9ea7403a5071f696f66c390180>

18 <https://www.fao.org/3/ni554es/ni554es.pdf>

19 <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/somalia-new-data-show-how-drought-in-the-horn-of-africa-is-driving-up-acute-hunger/en>

20 J.M. Sumpsi. "Volatility in agricultural markets and the global food crisis "Strategy Paper 161: Food Security and Global Security, 2011, IEEE.

characteristics. Its global character is motivated by sectoral dependence on the world economy. By the end of 2021, the supply crisis caused by the pandemic also began to affect food. The price of sugar increased by more than 53% per month in September and the price of meat is growing at an annual rate of more than 25%²¹.

Furthermore, higher fuel prices result in an inflation of agricultural costs because they affect the entire production process, from fertilisers to packaging and transport. As one moves up the food chain, other problems emerge. High energy prices are creating inflationary pressure on all costs that will eventually be passed on to consumers. Additionally, a high oil price facilitates the economic viability of biofuel production by increasing the amount of land devoted to non-food uses, reducing supply and increasing the price of food.

The food crisis we are currently experiencing is also multifactorial. In addition to external factors such as those derived from the war in Ukraine, there are also structural factors in the agri-food sector itself, such as reduced supply because of poor harvests due to climate change and an increased demand for food, which have led to a reduction in food stocks. Changes in dietary patterns in high-growth countries such as China have increased the demand for meat, milk and eggs, which also means an increased demand for livestock staples such as feed and oilseeds²². To these changes must be added the shift in the assets of investment and pension funds in the wake of the 2007 economic crisis. Financial and real estate assets were replaced by agricultural futures markets, which have since shown an upward trend.

The narrowing of the gap between supply and demand for agricultural products has been decreasing since the end of the 20th century. As a result, stock levels are increasingly low, among other reasons due to the high cost of storage, developments in transport and the increase in the number of exporting countries. Consequently, markets are becoming smaller and more volatile, and any external effect that has a major impact on supply or demand can significantly affect food price increases. Some experts believe that the narrow margin between supply and demand was the main cause of the 2007 food crisis²³.

21 <https://www.eleconomista.es/economia/noticias/11443957/10/21/La-nueva-fase-de-la-crisis-de-suministros-golpea-a-los-alimentos-habra-escasez-y-subidas-de-precios.html>

22 CE161

23 CE161 Averting [Food Crisis | THISDAYLIVE](#)

Protectionist measures to ensure domestic consumption add to higher food prices and can lead to food crises. In 2010, Russia and Ukraine had very low crop yields because of drought and fires, and both opted for a wheat export ban. This, together with the decline in corn production in the US, triggered another food crisis just as the 2007 crisis seemed to be coming to an end. However, the drought was not the only cause of the price increase. The steady upward trajectory observed in this period was also due to speculation and the conversion of corn into ethanol²⁴.

The OECD-FAO report "Agricultural Outlook 2021-2030" indicates that import and export restrictions could have detrimental effects on global food security and nutrition, as well as on farmers' livelihoods²⁵. For example, the Indian government has changed its wheat export policy to impose an immediate restriction on all activities in a move that has led to domestic chaos²⁶.

In terms of durability, the World Bank has estimated that the effects of the Ukraine conflict on the global food situation will last until 2024²⁷. In addition to the consequences we are currently experiencing, it will be difficult to sow future crops on Ukrainian soil and, if this were possible, to place them on agri-food markets whose insurance has skyrocketed due to the high risk of loss. It is also estimated that 20-30% of the winter harvest will not be harvested due to the conflict. Russia, for its part, may also face supply problems as a result of sanctions, mainly in seed and pesticide imports. The consequences would be fewer harvests, with lower yields, which could further aggravate the world's food supply.

It will take years for Western countries to redirect their supply chains towards their allies. Meanwhile, fertiliser and food prices will be more volatile with an upward trend. The result will be an increase in the number of people facing poverty and food insecurity. If the conflict continues, the FAO estimates that the number of undernourished people will increase from 8 to 13 million in 2022/2023, mainly in the Asia Pacific region, sub-Saharan Africa and North and East Africa²⁸.

24

<https://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2012/09/20/161501075/The%20world%20is%20currently%20within%20the%20range%20of%20conditions%20in%20which%20the%20tiniest%20spark%20can%20lead%20to%20riots%20%E2%80%94%20the%20kind%20including%20recent%20anti-American%20attacks%20in%20Libya%20and%20riots%20in%20Egypt%20and%20across%20the%20region>

25 <https://www.fao.org/3/cb5339es/cb5339es.pdf>

26 <https://www.fastmarkets.com/insights/unbelievable-india-sparks-chaos-as-government-limits-wheat-exports>

27 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/agriculture/brief/food-security-update>

28 FAO report: "The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for Global agricultural markets and the risk associated with the current conflict, March, 2022.

Fertilisers: concentration and disruption

Since the end of World War II, the process of agricultural intensification and industrialisation, known as the Green Revolution, has radically transformed traditional agricultural practices to increase productivity and feed a growing world population. Fertilisers are a basic pillar upon which this agricultural revolution is based.

Fertilisers are crucial for agricultural production and, according to the International Fertilizer Association (IFA), their global demand increased by 6.3% in 2021. This is much higher than the 2% per annum recorded since 2015²⁹. One explanation for this rise is that in recent years, governments have sought to develop domestic agriculture to boost self-sufficiency and reduce dependence on global supply chains. This is the case, for example, in China where the government had ordered its companies to stop selling fertilisers to other countries to preserve domestic supplies for their intensive use in agriculture. These creeping steps, which began in the summer of 2021, were already forcing farmers around the world to leave fields fallow long before Russia invaded Ukraine³⁰.

The high fertiliser prices at the end of 2021 - 78.6 % higher, according to the IMF - were partly due to supply-side tensions that had been building since 2020. Plant closures and supply stoppages because of the pandemic disrupted production worldwide. In addition, the severe storm in February 2021 disrupted US production, especially in Texas, which is a key producer of ammonia, a nitrogen-based fertiliser compound. What is more, sanctions against Belarus by Western powers on several products, including fertilisers, have contributed to a decrease in supply in some markets. Notably, Belarus accounted for around 20% of global potassium-based fertiliser exports in 2019 and 2020.

Between January 2021 and January 2022, Russia's fertiliser exports increased by 189% to USD 1,530 million, while imports decreased by 13.2%³¹.

Although Russian fertilisers were not affected by the sanctions, trade has been restricted. Russia is using its fertiliser production capacity as a bargaining chip to ease sanctions imposed by Western powers because of the invasion of Ukraine. Russia's trade ministry

²⁹ <https://api.ifastat.org>

³⁰ <https://www.piiie.com/blogs/realtime-economic-issues-watch/chinas-recent-trade-moves-create-outsize-problems-everyone-else>

³¹ <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateral-product/fertilizers/reporter/rus>

recommended this month that producers temporarily suspend fertiliser exports because of new risks associated with foreign logistics companies over costs, safety and insurance premiums on the Black Sea route.

With the war in Ukraine, supply will fall faster than demand for fertiliser in 2022/23, which will keep prices high and lead to self-sufficiency policies and changes in the supply chain. In addition, high shipping costs for freight and raw material inputs such as natural gas will increase costs for producers³². In the case of nitrogen fertilisers, energy accounts for 70-80% of the production cost.³³

The main consequence of this increase in fertiliser prices will be a reduction in fertiliser use stemming from problems of accessibility at affordable prices, which will result in lower crop yields in 2023 either through reduced use or reduced sowing. This will further stress the global food system and is a key factor in the emerging food crisis.³⁴

Danger of riots due to rising food prices

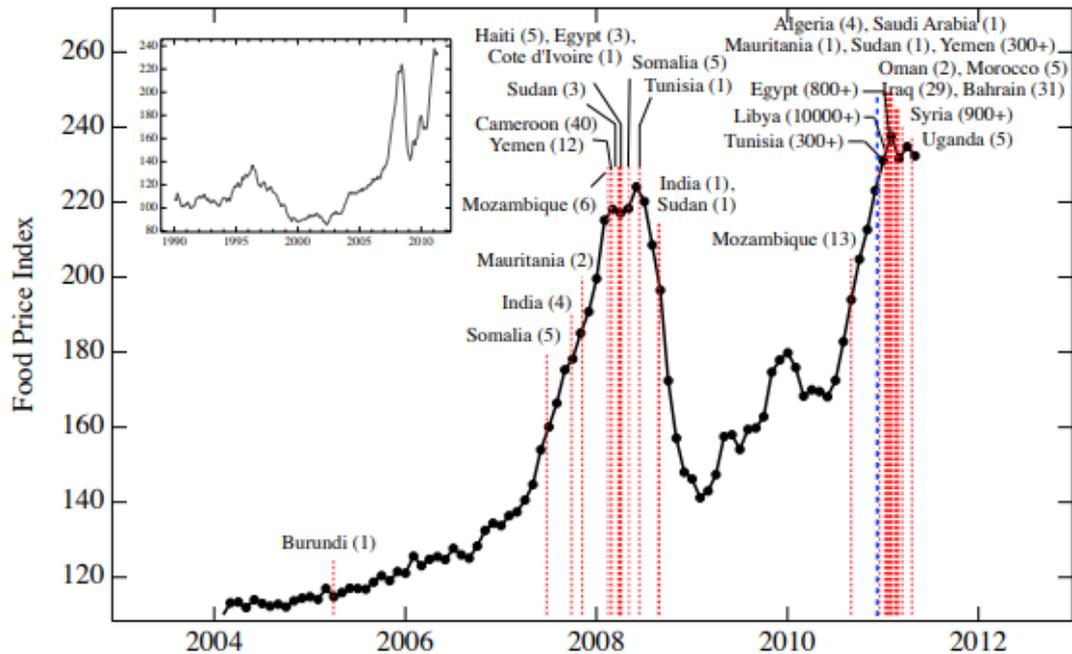
The role that food crises can play in triggering conflict is a topic of growing interest in academia. One of the most relevant studies in this regard is the one conducted at the New England Complex Systems Institute, which links FAO food price indices from 2004 to May 2011 with the occurrence of riots³⁵. As the graph shows, there is a correlation between social instability and food prices.

³² <https://es.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/05/23/por-que-los-altos-precios-del-gas-afectan-al-precio-de-los-alimentos>

³³ https://www.idae.es/uploads/documentos/documentos_10418_Fertilizacion_nitrogenada_07_e65c2f47.pdf

³⁴ <https://news.agropages.com/News/NewsDetail---42559.htm>

³⁵ LAGI, Marco, BERTRAND, Z. and BAR-YAM, Yaneer: The food crises and political instability in North Africa and the Middle East, England Complex Systems Institute, London, 2011.



Source: LAGI, Marco, BERTRAND, Z. and BAR-YAM, Yaneer: The food crises and political instability in North Africa and the Middle East, England Complex Systems Institute, London, 2011.

A World Bank report published in 2014 identified 51 violent events involving deaths, injuries, arrests and property damage related to food in 37 countries in the period between 2007 and 2014. From their study, three types of food disturbances were established. Type 1 often take place in urban settings and are directed against governments and other public authorities, even if those in power are not directly to blame for the rise in food prices. This is typically the case in situations where there is already an undercurrent of unrest due to grievances such as high poverty rates and income inequality. The Arab Springs is one such example.

Type 2 food disturbance are related to food supply and lack of accessibility, and are more common in times of severe shortages. The third type of event indicated in the report involves farmers and farm workers rather than consumers and focuses on structural issues such as competition for land and water sources. The latter type is also more likely to become a long-term social movement.³⁶

³⁶ <https://www.foodsecurityportal.org/blog/exploring-link-between-food-prices-and-violence>

In terms of the likelihood of one type of conflict or another, a scientific study published in 2019 indicates that the likelihood of riots and protests following a price increase is 39% higher, and 25% higher for conflicts over control of land.

These studies demonstrate something that has been known intuitively since antiquity. Throughout history there have been a series of events that corroborate the phrase "no peace on empty stomachs"³⁷. Most conflict prevention early warning systems therefore consider food insecurity as a catalyst for instability³⁸.

Whether as a catalyst or a trigger, a population suffering from food insecurity is very prone to revolt to express its discontent. The risk of these protests ending in conflict increases depending on the country's political and economic situation.

In ancient Rome, the strategy of "bread and circuses" was used to appease the people and prevent their revolt. The French Revolution also had its origins in a lack of food. The 19th century saw flour riots in the USA, and more recently, and the subject of many studies, there have been the 2007-2008 food riots in Africa³⁹ and the 2011 Arab Springs⁴⁰.

The origin of the 2007-2008 crisis can be traced to food price increases caused by a "perfect storm" of factors: poor harvests, low stocks, export restrictions, and so on, followed by a period of relatively high price volatility⁴¹. Add to this the lack of social coverage and other compensatory policies and revolt is almost guaranteed, as happened in Guinea and Mauritania in 2007 and Haiti in 2008.⁴²

In 2007, rising food prices became a national concern in China as it was seen as a potential source of social unrest among the poorest people due to the rising cost of living. The price of pork increased by 30%, as did the price of eggs. The Chinese government had to put measures in place to control inflated food prices by boosting production, maintaining market elements of supply and demand, increasing the supply of pig feed

³⁷ Phrase derived from the Nobel Peace Prize winner Norman Borlaug's announcement: "World peace cannot be consolidated if there are empty stomachs and human misery".

³⁸ P.Yuste. "Hunger and Conflict" EC 161. "Food Security and Global Security", 2011 IEEE

³⁹ The Impact of Food Prices on Conflict Revisited

⁴⁰ <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/20/food-price-spikes-and-social-unrest-the-dark-side-of-the-feds-crisis-fighting/>

⁴¹ <https://www.oecd.org/agriculture/entendiendo-el-sistema-alimentario-global/como-alimentamos-al-mundo-hoy-en-dia/>

⁴²

https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Poverty%20documents/FPW_May%202014_final.pdf

and providing financial assistance to poor families in an effort to maintain social stability. Even the use of state meat reserves to curb further price increases was considered.⁴³

In the case of the Arab Springs and particularly in Syria, droughts, high food prices and the withdrawal of government fuel subsidies led to public discontent that resulted in a serious civil war with global implications.

Research and history therefore show that price increases in populations most vulnerable to food insecurity can lead to conflicts, with unpredictable consequences. This is a cause for concern at international level because of the current situation in Asia, the Middle East and the African continent.⁴⁴ The share of imported calories in total consumption stabilises at around 20%, although with differences between regions. For example, it is expected to reach up to 64% in the Middle East and North Africa region.⁴⁵

In Iran, citizen complaints about the high prices of cooking oil, bread and dairy products, which in some cases have increased by more than 300%, started via social media. Protests subsequently erupted in various cities after the government enacted a series of subsidy cuts, leading to a harsh government crackdown that resulted in four deaths. President Ebrahim Raisi announced that instead of general food subsidies, cash would be deposited in the accounts of Iranians⁴⁶.

In the case of Africa, the war in Ukraine has led to a sharp rise in energy and food prices that could undermine food security in the region, increase poverty rates, worsen income inequality and potentially provoke social unrest⁴⁷.

Since independence, African countries have opted for food imports substituting local production, which has led to a decline in agricultural production and a gradual increase in vulnerability to supply shortages, as well as to a widening balance of payments deficit, impeding their economic development⁴⁸.

In Africa, in the period 2018-2020, wheat imports from Russia accounted for 32% of the continent's total wheat imports, while wheat imports from Ukraine stood at 12%. For 25 countries, wheat imports from the two countries account for one third of the total, and for

43 <https://chinaeconomicreview.com/wen-inflated-food-prices-may-spark-social-unrest/>

44 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/05/20/food-price-spikes-and-social-unrest-the-dark-side-of-the-feds-crisis-fighting/>

45 <https://www.fao.org/3/cb5339es/cb5339es.pdf>

46 <https://www.al-monitor.com/originals/2022/05/nationwide-protests-iran-food-prices-increase>

47 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/28/imf-rising-food-and-fuel-prices-stoke-risk-of-unrest-in-africa>

48 S.S. Bery. "The food crisis and agrarian change in Africa: A review Essay. African Studies Review . Vol. 27 No. 2, 1984

15 of them the share is as high as 50%⁴⁹. Alongside this shortfall in wheat imports, the African Development Bank is also warning of a possible 20% drop in food production on the continent because farmers have to pay 300% more for their imported fertiliser⁵⁰.

Furthermore, unsustainable levels of debt in some sub-Saharan countries hinder the ability to cope with a food crisis because economic resources must be diverted to debt repayment. In addition, in 2022 economic growth will be below the 4.5% in 2021, with the IMF expecting a fall to 3.8% this year.⁵¹

What can be done?

Solutions to avoid a food catastrophe are feasible but not easy. First, the current tension in the world food system caused by the war in Ukraine must be unblocked. In the short term, there is an urgent need to prevent an increase in famine in fragile regions and to avoid social unrest due to rising food prices. Ideally, the conflict must end as soon as possible to allow products to be moved out of Ukraine to areas of need more quickly, and so that the next harvests in Ukraine can proceed with sufficient guarantees for investors. This would mean a decrease in the high insurance costs, which are currently soaring due to the lack of security in the country. As for fertilisers, Russia may potentially further restrict their export. Diversification to other producers is the solution to avoid leaving land fallow or a loss of crop yields.

The possibility of replacing wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine by promoting internal trade on the African continent is rather limited, due to the lack of adequate infrastructure and storage capacity and the lack of control over logistical chains.

In a joint communiqué, the heads of the World Bank, the World Food Programme and the World Trade Organisation have called for urgent action to address the food crisis. The communiqué sets out a number of proposals such as providing international aid in the form of grants and not imposing export restrictions on humanitarian food purchases by the UN World Food Programme. It also calls for safety nets to attend to the needs of the poor and support for small farmers facing higher input prices. The need to preserve trade openness and avoid restrictive measures, such as bans on food and fertiliser exports,

49 Report "The impact on trade and development of the war in Ukraine". UNCTAD, March 2022.

50 <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-moscow-black-sea-5fbafb9ea7403a5071f696f66c390180>

51 <https://blogs.imf.org/2022/04/28/africa-faces-new-shock-as-war-raises-food-and-fuel-costs/>

which would further aggravate the suffering of the most vulnerable people, is also established.⁵²

In addition to these emergency measures, the war in Ukraine has highlighted the need to transform a global food system that has been in crisis for many years. Globalisation, unsustainable resource use, population growth, global logistical constraints and global challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic have overtaxed the global food system. Today's world requires fairer, more resilient and equitable food systems.

Part of the world is starving while in other parts food waste and obesity are rising to worrying levels. Humanitarian aid has increased considerably since the late 1970s, but this solution has proven not to be a long-term one.

Now more than ever, vis-à-vis the Russian-Ukrainian war, a transformation of the food system is needed⁵³. According to the FAO, this transformation must be based on four pillars: improved emergency assistance to agriculture; increased investment in agri-food systems and associated infrastructure (e.g., roads, warehouses, insurance, etc.); the promotion of innovation; and reduced food waste.

In the case of the EU, its 'Farm to Fork' strategy, launched in 2020, aims to improve agricultural sustainability and, more specifically, to reduce the use of chemical fertilisers by 20% by 2030 to help reduce carbon emissions. The EU aims to *transform the way food is produced and consumed in Europe to reduce the environmental footprint of food systems, strengthen their resilience to crises, and continue to ensure the availability of healthy and affordable food, including for future generations*⁵⁴.

The FAO⁵⁵ recently launched the Strategic Framework 2022-2031, aimed at improving production, nutrition, the environment and livelihoods in the post-pandemic phase. It sets out the need for measures to accelerate the transformation of agri-food systems.

In this context, Africa is a priority. The African Development Bank aims to provide farmers with certified seeds, fertilisers and the necessary support to reduce dependence on foreign imports to the tune of \$1.5 billion⁵⁶ to alleviate the current food crisis. The UN's

⁵²

https://www.worldbank.org/content/dam/Worldbank/document/Poverty%20documents/FPW_May%202014_final.pdf

⁵³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2590332222002056>

⁵⁴ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/policies/from-farm-to-fork/>

⁵⁵ https://www.fao.org/strategic-framework/en/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social+media&utm_campaign=faoknowledge

⁵⁶ <https://www.guineainfomarket.com/africa/2022/05/22/el-banco-africano-de-desarrollo-aprueba-un-mecanismo-de-1500-millones-para-evitar-la-crisis-alimentaria/>

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has also launched a Crisis Response Initiative to ensure that smallholder farmers in high-risk countries can produce food in the coming months to feed their families and communities, while also reducing the threat to future harvests.⁵⁷

It is estimated that the agricultural technology market will double from less than USD 17.5 billion in 2019 to more than USD 40 billion in 2027. Private capital investment in agricultural technology start-ups has grown by more than 50% annually over the last four years. However, it will take years to implement these technologies widely, and especially in low-income countries.

Conclusions

The rapid rise in food prices generated by the conflict in Ukraine is demonstrating that, while there is a cyclical component, the global food system has long been under structural stress, which means that any unforeseen event such as a pandemic, prolonged drought or conflict can have devastating consequences, especially for developing countries where people spend a high percentage of their wages on food.

Increasing fertiliser shortages will have short- and medium-term ramifications for the global economy because of their implications for the viability of future harvests. The world food supply has become hugely dependent on these products, whose market is characterised by a high concentration of exporters and whose price is very elastic to the rise in energy prices. This is yet another failure of the global food system.

Ukraine currently has approximately 20 million tonnes of cereals and sunflower oil ready for export. While exports have not come to a standstill, they are being carried out at a very low rate using rail transport. This is a huge challenge, making it essential to coordinate and optimise logistics chains, implement new routes and avoid bottlenecks as far as possible. Freeing up storage capacity is therefore the immediate priority.

Russia and the West blame each other for the looming food catastrophe. The former could export grains and fertilisers on condition that restrictions are lifted. The West, however, is using sanctions to pressure Russia into abandoning the war and to discredit

⁵⁷ <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2022/05/26/averting-food-crisis/>

Russia by holding it responsible for the food shortages stemming from the invasion. In the meantime, the food crisis is progressing, worsening and threatening to starve millions of people and increase the risk of social unrest, which leads to conflict.

The possibility of food price protests spreading around the world has set off alarm bells. Lessons learned from the 2007-2008 unrest and the Arab Springs show that a similar situation would have serious consequences for international security.

The conflict in Ukraine must end as soon as possible to prevent its effects from spreading to a point where the damage is irreparable for the already strained global food system.

And while awaiting peace, we need to be moving towards a new model of a more just and resilient global food system.

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