

parlons graphiques

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The Impact of the War in Ukraine on Food Security

L'impact de la guerre en Ukraine sur la sécurité alimentaire

Die Auswirkungen des Krieges in der Ukraine auf die Ernährungssicherheit

The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) defines food security as the situation where people have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life at all times; in other words, people are free from hunger and malnutrition (FAO, 2000).

Food security has a number of pillars: it is about availability of, access to, use and stability of the food supply. In the 1970s, the focus of definitions of food security was mainly on food availability. Over time, the definition has been expanded to include aspects such as quality, nutritional value and access.

When analysing food security, it is important to distinguish between the availability of food and access to it. After all, a great deal of food insecurity comes not as the result of food shortages, but as a consequence of lack of access. Poverty is the main cause of limited access to food: people simply do not have the money to buy it. The quality of food can also be a major obstacle to achieving food security; people may have access to sufficient calories, but the nutritional value – in terms of micro and macronutrients – is lacking. In this article I consider the impact of the war in Ukraine on global food security.

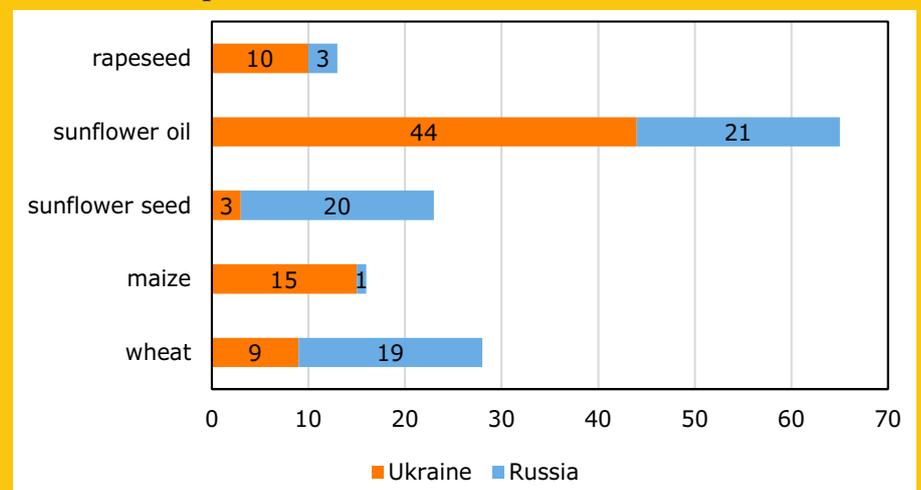
Ukraine is a major exporter of wheat (18 mtonnes), maize (27.9 mtonnes), sunflower oil (6.8 mtonnes) and rapeseed (2.4 mtonnes) per annum (2020 UN Comtrade, www.comtrade.un.org). It has a substantial share of international trade for these crops as shown in Figure 1. Russia is also a major exporter of wheat and sunflower seed and oil (Figure 1).

The largest importers of Ukrainian wheat are Egypt, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Turkey and Yemen. Russia exports its wheat mainly to Egypt and Turkey. These two countries are therefore heavily

dependent on both Ukraine and Russia together for their wheat imports (Figure 2) and have limited possibilities to expand their wheat production (Meijl *et al.*, 2022). All these importing countries also depend on food aid supplied through the World Food Programme (WFP). Ukraine is the largest supplier of food aid to the WFP.

As exports from Ukraine came to a halt following the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, countries were forced to source their wheat elsewhere, at considerably higher prices due to the disruption of supply.

Figure 1: Russia and Ukraine shares in global trade of wheat, maize, sunflower seeds/oil, and rapeseed in 2020 (%)



Source: UN Comtrade, International Trade Statistics database: <https://comtrade.un.org>

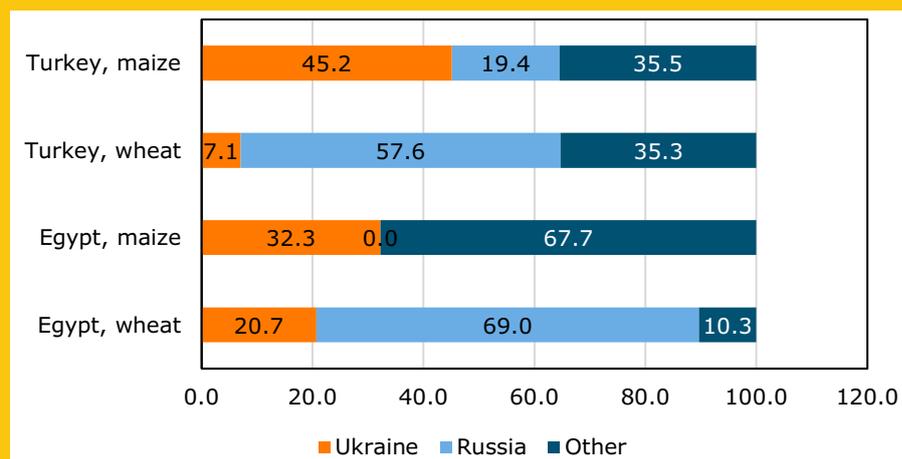
Global wheat prices have gone up sharply since the Russian invasion, as well as prices of other food products (Figure 3). Note that food prices have been on the rise for a longer period due to a combination of factors, such as Covid disruptions to trade, economic recovery from the pandemic in 2021, and product specific causes, including droughts and the large-scale outbreak of African swine fever in China. Sharply increasing energy costs since the second half of 2021 have also played an important role.

The FAO's latest estimate of the global stock-to-use ratios is 38.9 per cent for wheat and 24.4 per cent for coarse grains (FAO, 2022). A stock-to-use ratio of 20 per cent is regarded as a minimum for stocks to play their roles as buffers.

The real food security problem is that poorer countries simply lack the money now to buy cereals, due to sharp increases in prices. This is aggravated by current export restrictions imposed by several countries, such as India for wheat flour and Indonesia for palm oil, that lead to even tighter markets and hence higher prices.

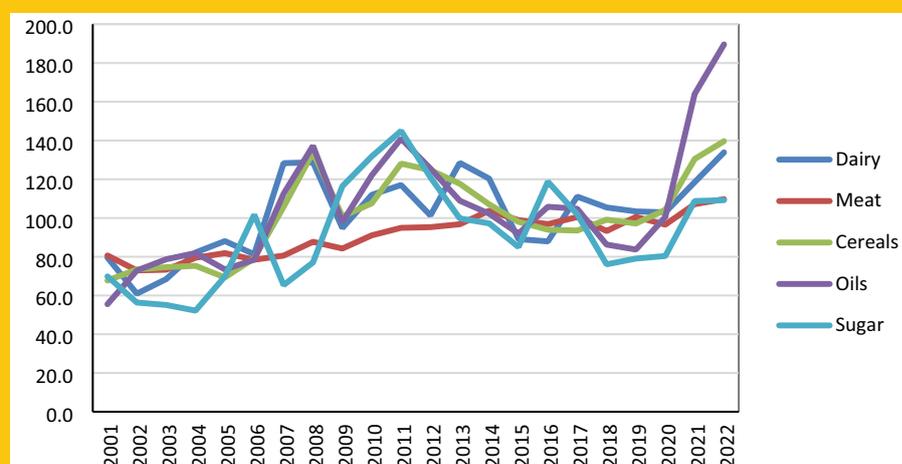
Currently, the war in Ukraine and the ensuing food crisis is primarily an issue of access to food for a number of countries highly dependent on imports from Ukraine. The Russia-Ukraine agreement, signed on 22 July 2022 and enabling exports of grain from a number of ports in Ukraine, may alleviate the situation if the exports reach the countries most in need. However, there is much uncertainty as the deal could be disrupted by Russia at any time.

Figure 2: Import shares of Ukraine and Russia in total imports of wheat and maize in Egypt and Turkey in 2020 (%)



Source: UN Comtrade, International Trade Statistics database: <https://comtrade.un.org>

Figure 3: Development of the FAO price index (2014–2016 = 100), for a number of commodities, January 2001–January 2022



Source: FAOSTAT.

In the next growing season, the crisis could become a wider spread issue of food availability if prices of energy and fertiliser inputs remain high. This could trigger farmers to use (much) fewer inputs, leading to lower output levels particularly in developing countries.

For the medium (6 months–2 years) to long term (>2 years), there is a

great deal of uncertainty about the impact of the war on food security. This involves both the direct consequences of the war and the consequences of sanctions being and yet to be imposed on Russia.

More than ever it is important that the international community works together to prevent any worsening of the food security situation.

Further Reading

- Berkhout, P., R. Bergevoet and S. van Berkum (2022). A brief analysis of the impact of the war in Ukraine on food security. *Wageningen Economic Research, Policy Document 2022-033*, The Netherlands: Wageningen.
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