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WAR IN UKRAINE: RECURRING FOOD CRISES EXPOSE SYSTEMIC FRAGILITY



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AUTHORS: Sofía Monsalve Suárez, Charlotte Dreger

CONTRIBUTING AUTHORS: Valentin Hategekimana, Emily Mattheisen, Sabine Pabst, Philip Seufert, Ana María Suárez Franco, Yifang Tang

EDITORS: Tom Sullivan

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“Ukrainian peasant farmers have been ignored and invisibilized for years, receiving no support at all from the government. However, they have been critical and now that there are so many internally displaced persons, we see how important they are to feed Ukrainians.”

Attila Szocs-Boruss, Romania

“There is a double standard distinguishing between conflicts due to economic interests. All conflicts should be treated seriously.”

Osamah Alfakih, Yemen

KEY MESSAGES

_ The international community must address structural drivers fueling hunger and malnutrition, as well as war, armed conflicts and widespread violence, in order to stop recurrent global food crises.

_ The UN response to the current food crisis is insufficient and flawed. The Committee on World Food Security (CFS) should lead the needed coordinated global policy response using a human rights approach.

_ A new global food security strategy must move away from deregulated markets, curbing speculation and building food reserves at multiple levels and giving priority to food from agro-ecological, small-scale food producers.

_ The right to food, based on human rights principles of dignity, self-sufficiency and solidarity – as recommended by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food – should form the basis of a new global trade agenda.

_ The international community should properly fund humanitarian responses in all countries facing emergencies and protracted crises, prioritizing support for small-scale farmers and fishers in order to rebuild and strengthen local food systems and food sovereignty.

INTRODUCTION

We were still struggling with the recovery from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic on the enjoyment of the right to food and nutrition when food price hikes hit new records and the Russian Federation started war and military invasion against the Ukraine at the end of February 2022.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine is causing tremendous suffering in the civilian population. UN Human Rights (OHCHR) estimates that about 2,345 civilians have been killed and 2,919 have been injured. Close to six million people have fled the country according to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), while an additional seven million have been internally displaced, agricultural infrastructure is being destroyed and food production is severely disrupted.

Besides the serious domestic implications for the right to food and nutrition of the Ukrainian population, the war also has considerable international implications for the enjoyment of this right in other countries, given the significant role that [Ukraine and the Russian Federation play as producers of wheat, maize, and sunflower oil, as well as fertilizers, in international trade](#). Particularly concerning is the situation in countries such as Yemen and Lebanon, which are highly dependent on wheat imports from Ukraine and Russia and were already facing tremendous challenges before the outbreak of the war.

Some media give the impression that this war is solely responsible for the current food crisis. The aggression against Ukraine is certainly an aggravating factor in the current world food security situation. But food prices were already skyrocketing before the beginning of the war. The [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\) Food Price Index](#) reached a new historical record in February 2022, at 21 % above its level a year earlier, and 2.2 % higher than its previous peak in February 2011. These high prices are endangering access to food for all those countries and people who cannot pay the bill. If it had not been for the war in Ukraine, the current food emergency would probably have gone largely unnoticed by most international media. We are not yet witnessing massive social unrest as we did during the financial crisis of 2007 to 2008 or in 2011 during the Arab Spring. Nonetheless, FAO forecasts estimate that the number of undernourished people may rise by 7.6 million by 2023, adding to the 811 million reported hungry in 2020. That is the “moderate scenario”. A “severe shock” scenario could affect an additional 13.1 million people – including 6.4 million in Asia-Pacific and 5.1 million in Sub-Saharan Africa.



So how do we define the current food crises, exacerbated by war and conflict? What are the main factors behind their recurrence? The aim of this report is to offer elements to answer these questions from the perspective of the right to food and nutrition and connected rights. Based on this analysis, we also preliminarily assess the UN's responses to the current situation. Finally, we present some recommendations to enhance those responses.

This report was compiled using an analytical framework and methodologies developed in the [People's Monitoring Tool](#). Interviews with small-scale food producers and other civil society actors in some of the countries most affected by the current multiple crises provide the key sources of information.¹ The report was also informed by debates at the United Nations Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the FAO.

HOW TO DEFINE THE CURRENT FOOD CRISIS?

At country level, the FAO has developed a framework for identifying “emergency types” and guiding action. Additionally, the FAO, alongside 15 other organizations, has been developing the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) – a classification system to determine the severity and magnitude of acute and chronic food insecurity, and acute malnutrition situations in a country, according to internationally-recognised scientific standards to aid decision-making and policy responses.

At global level, in contrast, there are no clear criteria for identifying a food crisis. The disruption of international supply chains simultaneously affecting several countries in different regions of the world seems to be so far the main criteria for declaring a “global food crisis”. The focus lies on keeping world trade flowing. From a human rights point of view, such a criteria is deeply unsatisfactory. In any case, it remains contested and subject to political debate, whether or not a particular problematic world food security situation can be declared a crisis which deserves a global response. The controversy in the UN Committee on World Food Security (CFS) over whether the impact of Covid-19 on food requires an internationally coordinated response illustrates this.

Concerning the current situation, the FAO Council convened an extraordinary session on April 8th to discuss the impact of the Russia's invasion of Ukraine on global food security. The statements made by the different countries during the session clearly show that there are competing ways of understanding the current crisis. Whereas some countries focused only on the impacts of the war domestically and internationally, others highlighted that there are other conflicts and other factors also heavily affecting food security. In an unusual step for FAO Council proceedings, the decision taken during this extraordinary session was not negotiated paragraph by paragraph. Two competing resolutions – one presented by 22 council member countries, with the support of 80 member countries including Ukraine, the European Union, UK and USA – and one presented by the Russian Federation were voted en

¹ Interviews were carried out between 22.03.22 and 24.04.2022 with: Mykhailo Amosov from Ecoaction in Ukraine, Atilla Szocs-Boruss from EcoRuralis in Romania, Osamah Alfakih from Mwatana for Human Rights in Yemen, Betty Tiominar from FIAN Indonesia, Nurul Alam Masud from KHANI Bangladesh, Ngone Ngom from CICODEV in Senegal, Muna Ahmed from the University of Kartoum in Sudan, John Ciza from FCPEEP in the DR Congo, Claire Améyo Quenum from Floraison in Togo, Augustine Mpawenimana from the Eastern and Southern Africa small scale Farmers Forum in Burundi, Heather Elaydi, Joseph Schechla and Ahmed Mansour from HIC-HLRN in Egypt, Hala Barakat, a freelance food researcher in Egypt affiliated with HIC, Jana Nakhal from the World March of Women in Lebanon, Mr. Stanford, a farmer from Kalwanyembe Ward, Mumbwa District in Zambia.

bloc- This meant that countries could only support, oppose or abstain. The first resolution was adopted and reflects the narrow approach of the impacts of the war in Ukraine without looking at other conflicts and wars. The discussion on the scope and the drivers of the current food crisis will hopefully continue in the CFS. Indeed, the CFS is the main UN mechanism to address global food crises. It was reformed in 2009 precisely as one of the major measures to respond to the global food crisis at that time. In contrast to the FAO, where the constituencies of people most affected by hunger and malnutrition are not allowed to input their views into intergovernmental deliberations, the CFS has the strength of convening a diverse set of views and actors to shape an understanding of the scope and drivers of the issues at hand. The CFS was mandated to promote policy convergence and coordination in order to eliminate hunger and contribute to the realization of the right to food for all. It has adopted policy guidelines and recommendations addressing structural drivers of the food crisis such as food price volatility, land grabbing, climate change, investments and protracted crisis but unfortunately CFS policy recommendations remain largely ignored.

The Civil Society and Indigenous Peoples Mechanism (CSIPM) of the CFS expressed its view on the current crisis in an Open Letter addressed to the CFS Chairperson:

“With the war in Ukraine, a new layer of global food crisis is unfolding and heavily impacting on food-dependent low- and middle-income countries and our constituencies, on top of the lasting effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, multiple conflicts and protracted crises, deep inequalities, and climate change. In our view, an Extraordinary Plenary of the CFS should be convened as soon as possible to address the new global emergency and bring together the views and demands of all concerned countries, communities, and actors for a globally coordinated policy response. Special space and attention should be given to those countries and populations most affected by the new crisis. Governments from food-dependent low- and middle-income countries, from countries with high rates of food insecurity and those hosting many refugees should have a leading role in this Extraordinary Plenary, in sharing their analysis and proposals, and drafting the conclusions.”

The CFS High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition framed similarly its briefing note issued on April 14th. It highlights the need for a globally coordinated policy response to address the immediate humanitarian crisis and to build food systems that are more resilient to diverse shocks that are becoming increasingly frequent.

FIAN International participated in the CSIPM deliberations around how to frame the current crisis. It fully endorses this view. Based on our work on the ground, we reaffirm that the constituencies most marginalized and affected particularly in the Global South are facing situations characterized by multiple shocks and intertwined systemic crises. It is urgent to further enhance and develop analytical and political approaches capable of dealing with multiple and interconnected crises, complexity and uncertainty. The African Centre for Biodiversity was one of the first organizations to try and understand these dynamics of multiple shocks and the deeper systemic forces shaping them. Grasping the interconnections between resource extraction and exploitation, ecological collapse, precarious livelihoods, dispossession, inequalities, social exclusion, political instability and conflict, financialisation, commodification, and crippling indebtedness have been at the centre of their analytical efforts.

This report builds on their work and takes into account the CFS Framework for Action in Protracted Crisis. It departs from the understanding that some combination of conflict, occupation, terrorism, man-made and natural disasters, natural resource pressures, climate change, inequalities, prevalence of poverty, and governance factors are often underlying causes of food insecurity and undernutrition in protracted crises. In this report, we cannot be exhaustive in applying this framework. Based on interviews conducted within a very short period, we focus our attention on two key issues: the increasing proliferation of wars and armed conflicts and their interplay with structural factors shaping food systems.

THE INCREASING PROLIFERATION OF WAR AND CONFLICTS

The last decade has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of conflicts. According to the UNHCR, the number of displaced people in the world is now roughly 80% higher than in 2010, while internal displacement has reached an all-time high. Although the Additional Protocols of the Geneva Conventions prohibit the attack and destruction of objects that are indispensable to the survival of civilian populations, war crimes targeting agricultural infrastructure are recurrent.

The report on the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World has stated over the past years that the majority of undernourished people live in countries experiencing conflict. War, occupation, conflict and violence are increasingly becoming drivers of hunger in a context of interconnected crises, on top of the structural causes of hunger (see below). In fact, in many cases it is not possible to separate the structural causes of hunger from the structural causes of conflict so that there is a circular relationship between hunger and conflicts. FIAN supported last year the efforts of the CSIPM to monitor the implementation of the CFS Framework for Action in Protracted Crisis in about 30 countries. In this report, protracted crises are characterized not only by their longevity, but also by their complexity. Endurance of crisis drivers and impacts, shifting drivers of crisis, intermittent periods of intense crisis and relative calm, weak governance and challenges to resolution are key features of protracted crises. While sanction regimes, conflict, occupation and war, displacement and refugee flows, continuous or recurrent environmental disasters, cyclical financial crises, epidemics and pandemics are some of the contexts where protracted crises are likely to emerge.



Being highly topical, we are looking in this report into the current situation of the right to food and nutrition and connected rights, primarily in Ukraine, Yemen and Egypt. For this, we requested the views from people living in those countries.

Ukraine

In an interview with Mykhailo Amosov from the environmental support organization to peasant farmers, Ecoaction in Ukraine on March 28, 2022, he reported that fields are mined so that it is impossible to harvest and sow. According to his estimates, about [30% of arable land will be affected](#). Food gathering activities in forest areas are also impossible due to mines. Logistic chains have been destroyed or disrupted. The Russian army bombed refineries so that lack of fuel is another major concern for peasant farmers. He also reported that there are no shortages of food as of now. Despite the lack of governmental support for peasant and family farming over the last years, these producers are currently able to sell food to neighbours and internally displaced persons moving from cities to rural areas.

He further explained that all online state services in Ukraine, including the digital land cadastre, are currently turned off. This measure was taken in order to protect against Russian hacks. This means that organizations like Ecoaction cannot monitor what is going on in terms of land transactions. Mr Amosov reports that people in occupied areas need to ask the Russian military for permits to access fields, even though they are the owners of the land. In the context of rethinking agriculture and the role of peasant farming in Ukraine, securing sufficient land for small-scale producers will become a key issue for reconstruction.

Attila Szocs-Boruss, a peasant farmer and president of Ecoruralis in neighbouring Romania, reported in an interview that earlier in the war Russian troops bombed tractors in occupied areas. They later changed their strategy and permitted Ukrainian peasants to cultivate their fields, under the condition that they sign mandatory contracts. Under these contracts, all of the production will go to Russia. Szocs-Boruss, who is a member of the coordination committee of the European Coordination of Via Campesina, also pointed to shifts in Ukrainian policies aimed at retaining crops under future contracts, which would breach current contracts with agribusiness companies. He said that Ukraine cancelled some agricultural contracts and that it is unclear whether this will have legal consequences. Finally, he reported that small-scale farmers had started to occupy some land belonging to foreign owners or investors who have left Ukraine.

In a [Euractiv article](#), Mr Szocs-Boruss said that while rural households use only 12% of Ukrainian farmland on farms ranging in size from less than one hectare to over 100, they contribute as much as 52.7% of the gross domestic agricultural output. Ukrainian small farmers now make up as much as 98% of the country's total harvest of potatoes, 86% of vegetables, 85% of fruits, and 81% of milk. He further estimates that there are about four million people engaged in agriculture, many of them small farmers. He added that the Russian army has targeted big farmers and their agricultural infrastructure, whereas it is much harder to target and damage dispersed smaller farms, which shows the massive resilience they have in times of war.

This observation seems to corroborate the [FAO's assessment](#) that large-scale farming has borne the brunt of destruction or damage of objects and infrastructure necessary for food production and distribution, such as farms, water systems, irrigation works, markets, mills, food processing and storage sites.

Yemen

Yemen is highly dependent on wheat imports from the Ukraine and Russia. During an interview Osamah Alfakih, Advocacy Director of Mwatana for Human Rights observed that food prices have been rising along with fuel prices. As of now, the direct impacts are unclear but he fears that access to food may further deteriorate. In his view, the main problem is that Yemen does not feature prominently on the radar of the international community so that the conflicting parties waging war there can act with impunity.

According to the [FAO and WFP](#), Yemen is one of the world's worst hunger hot spots. In June 2021 an estimated 16.1 million people were expected to experience a food crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) with levels of acute food insecurity, including 5 million people in emergency (IPC Phase 4) and approximately 47, 000 in catastrophe (IPC Phase 5). The main reason for this tremendous suffering is the war between the Ansar Allah (Houthi) armed group supported by Iran and the coalition led by Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The coalition is supported by Jordan, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan and Kuwait with the support of the US, UK and France and the consent of the Yemeni government.

When asked about the impacts of the conflict on small-scale food producers, Mr Alfakih highlighted the report produced by Mwatana and Global Rights Compliance (GRC) in 2021 entitled [Starvation Makers. The use of starvation by warring parties in Yemen](#). Both organizations documented in this report how Ansar Allah's widespread and indiscriminate use of landmines has instilled fear in the farming population, preventing them from accessing agricultural land.

Furthermore, airstrikes by the Saudi/UAE-led coalition on farms, water facilities and artisanal fishing boats have destroyed, damaged and/or rendered useless grazing and agricultural areas, as well as irrigation works, livestock, foodstuffs, water infrastructure, fishing boats and fishing equipment.

“Airstrikes on fishermen, in particular, instilled fear in the fishing population, preventing them from fishing at their pre-existing capacity” (P. 17).

The report also documented Ansar Allah-imposed restrictions on humanitarian relief actions and restrictions on humanitarian organizations' operations. Diversion and redirection of humanitarian aid to Ansar Allah-loyalists constituted effective refusals to consent to humanitarian relief action and to allow and facilitate the passage of impartial relief action. Restrictions were so severe that they forced the World Food Programme (WFP) to suspend its operations in 2019 and again in 2020.

“Mwatana and GRC conclude that members of the Saudi/UAE-led coalition and Ansar Allah used starvation as a method of warfare.” (P.17).

Mr Alfakih urged the international community to push parties to reach a political agreement in Yemen. This would not solve all problems but would at least create minimum conditions to stabilize the situation. The necessary financial resources to guarantee the humanitarian response plan for 2022 have not been secured. This is all the more urgent in the light of increasing food import prices. He sees a double standard distinguishing between conflicts on the basis of economic interests and said that all conflicts should be treated seriously.



THE STRUCTURAL CAUSES OF HUNGER AND MALNUTRITION: NOT A PRODUCTION CRISIS

The dominant narrative of the response to food price increases and rising levels of food insecurity fuelled by the war in Ukraine calls for a ramping up of agricultural production and for markets to be kept open. This narrative completely ignores that hunger has been rising since 2014, despite food production being at a record high. Even for grains and wheat, the most important food exports from Ukraine and Russia, global production is at a very high level and [there is no global food supply shortage yet](#).

However, food prices have risen and food insecurity has become more critical in different parts of the world, especially in countries in the Middle East, North Africa, the horn of Africa and South East Asia that are dependent on wheat and fertilizer imports. So, what are the causes of this?

Reliance on global value chains and marginalization of local food production

The dominant food system with its global value chains and corporate concentration makes our societies vulnerable to food insecurity. The Covid-19 pandemic was already a wake-up call and the effects of the war in Ukraine show even more clearly, how extremely vulnerable global supply chains are to shocks. The highly concentrated global division of food production is contrary to local and national food sovereignty and therefore to resilience in times of crisis.

The historical roots of dependency on imports of staple foods in many countries in the Global South date back to British-dominated colonialism. It has been compounded by US-dominated strategies during the Cold War (e.g., export of “surplus” food from the US to postcolonial states as food aid to ensure loyalty, selective industrialization through the green revolution, structural adjustment programs) and [heavily influenced by neoliberal policies since the 1990s](#). At the same time, exports also cause hunger. During colonialism, [India exported food to England while people starved](#). And today, Zambia, for example, has more than enough production of maize, the primary staple food, for domestic consumption but [exports of maize are rising strongly, while about 1.58 million people are estimated to face acute severe food insecurity](#).

In the interview with Mr Amosov from **Ukraine**, he complained that government policies used to focus almost entirely on industrial, large-scale farming for export. Only farmers with 500 ha and above have more chances to get state support. Furthermore, peasant farmers depend on agribusiness because it controls the country’s agricultural infrastructure. This means, for example, that agribusiness has grain silos and peasants do not, so many peasants see themselves forced to sell harvests to agribusiness firms at very low prices, because they lack storage facilities.

As a result of import dependency, over more than a century, dietary preferences have shifted towards Western consumption models in a lot of countries. This homogenization has led to a displacement of local varieties resulting in a rapid decline of agrobiodiversity at a global scale and is leading to growing levels of malnutrition. Dependency on cheap food imports (from highly subsidized industrial production in the Global North) has discouraged and discriminated against local food production.

Jana Nakhal from the World March of Women reports that **Lebanon** has been going through an economic collapse and has no strategic reserves of grains and other staple foods. The country is heavily relying on wheat imports from Ukraine, although experiments show that it soft wheat could be grown locally. Since the war started, the state has been limiting the selling of wheat flour to bakeries. The price for bread has increased and it is often unavailable.

Mr Alfakih from **Yemen** stressed that in the medium-term, once major hostilities have ended in the country, a national strategy to lower dependency on food imports would be needed. Therefore, international donors should provide stronger support to artisanal fishers, small-scale farmers, micro businesses and all those involved in food production in order to restore their livelihoods, local markets and reconstruct their food systems.

Egypt

Egypt is one of the largest grain importers in the world and bread constitutes a central part of the national diet. According to Hala Barakat, an Egyptian food researcher, government subsidies for wheat flour and bread, including a ration card system, have been the state's main social protection measure. However, it has been inefficient in helping the poor and an increasingly unsustainable drain on the country's public finances and its foreign reserves. With the war in Ukraine, the subsidies have been reduced.

Furthermore, according to interviewees from HIC-HLRN, small farmers in **Egypt** have to compete with military farms, which receive support and can sell their produce far cheaper.

At the same time, the current crisis is leading some to rediscover alternatives to wheat and to increased support for local agriculture in some countries.

Over the last five years, Egypt has seen an increase in the price at which the government buys wheat from farmers. This development has become very relevant now, as it has incentivized local wheat cultivation and reduced dependency on imports from 80 % to an estimated 60 % according to Hala Barakat. However, an [article published March 17 in Mada Masr](#), reports that with the war in Ukraine, the government is obliging local farmers to sell at least 60% of their wheat production at a fixed price to the government in order to maintain the supply of subsidized bread. While the government price has been higher than the market price in the past, global price spikes for wheat have pushed it below market prices. At the same time, the amount of wheat per area that is foreseen by the government from local food production is possibly too high to be fulfilled due to lack of soil fertility, according to farmers. The Egyptian government has also established wheat silos since 2014 and storage capacity has increased significantly. This indicates that there are plans to keep importing huge amounts of grains, as the local production would not require long-term storage. According to Hala Barakat, the government plans to store key reserves for the whole region.

Mykhailo Amosov from **Ukraine** observed a small transformation of crop rotation systems: more buckwheat and oats are now grown and less corn. This indicates a shift away from export crops to food crops for domestic consumption. However, he fears that the shift may be temporary and only because of the war. In any case, there is a discussion now around building food security in Ukraine, which includes diversifying production. He believes that the government will not easily give up its focus on exports but in any case, the current shifts may help to rethink agriculture and generate a debate on what kind of agriculture really serves the country. At the same time, he fears that small advances made over the past years, for example, regarding environmental standards and the process of transformation towards EU standards (e.g., the nitrate directive) may get lost due to pressures in the EU to produce as much as possible.

The dominant food system is not only characterized by the global trade of food but also agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, pesticides and seeds. Furthermore, industrial agricultural production and transportation heavily rely on fossil fuels.

The current situation with rising fuel prices is having a significant impact on international trade. According to the farming and food security organization KHANI in **Bangladesh**, finding alternative sources for imports (e.g. edible oil from Latin America instead of Ukraine) is not feasible because of transport costs.

Several interview partners, such as John Ciza from the Front Commun pour la Protection de l'Environnement et des Espaces Protégés in the **Democratic Republic of Congo** and KHANI from **Bangladesh**, report that rising prices of agricultural imports will affect local food production. Bangladesh for instance imports a large portion of potassium fertilizer from Russia.

Due to the sharp rise in fertilizer prices, peasants in Mumbwa District, **Zambia**, already used less fertilizer in the planting season from November 2021 to April 2022. This was especially the case with fertilizer dependent commercial maize. The local fertilizer price for Urea and CAN doubled and then tripled between November 2021 and April 2022. Peasants explained that they will not make any profit at all out of the maize harvest.

Fertilizer retailers also did not restock fertilizer because of the high price and reduced demand. As prices were already high before the planting season, local peasants had already started to diversify to products such as sunflowers and organic soy, which require little or no fertilizers. Peasants that planted the traditional maize gangkata could buffer the economic shocks.

Discrimination and human rights abuses

In a context of multiple shocks and intertwined systemic crises, war, occupation, conflict and violence are increasingly becoming drivers of hunger. Most people experiencing hunger do so chronically.

The reasons for hunger are political. People suffer from hunger because of lack of access to food, which is based primarily on inequalities in terms of income and access to natural resources such as land, water and seeds, as well as to markets.

Inequalities are a result of marginalization and discrimination. Violence against and discrimination of women and girls are among the foremost structural causes of hunger and malnutrition. Marginalization and even criminalization of peasant and Indigenous Peoples' seed systems cause a lack of food sovereignty and biodiversity and create dependency on external

inputs and indebtedness of small-scale food producers. About 80 percent of the world's farms are smaller than two hectares and operate on about 12 percent of the world's farmland. The [largest 1 percent of the world's agribusiness farms operate more than 70 percent of farmland](#). Lack of agrarian reforms and rising levels of land and water grabbing by agribusiness, governments, investment funds and other actors have led to an unequal distribution of resources and inhibited the production of locally available food.

In **Ukraine**, for instance, according to Mr Amosov, there is a growing concentration of land in fewer hands. Speaking about the potential impacts of the war on land tenure, he recalled that the Ukrainian moratorium on land transactions was lifted in 2020. In a study on the impacts of land concentration in Ukraine, [Ecoaction](#) concludes that this moratorium did not prevent agro-holdings from concentrating large tracts of land. They estimate that, as of 2020, approximately four million hectares of land primarily used for crop production were concentrated in the hands of investors. Since July 2021 there is a free land market for physical persons but Amosov's organization has only observed about 6,000 transaction movements, which is very little for a country like Ukraine. There is a land ceiling of 100 hectares for physical persons. However, this can be quite easily circumvented (e.g., several family members buying land). Legal entities will be able to buy land from 2024, which may see agro-holdings rushing to acquire land.

Further structural causes of hunger include the lack of regulation of transnational corporations to prevent adverse impacts leading to violations of the right to food and nutrition. These gaps allow impunity and expansion of abuses and violations of the right to food and food sovereignty related to diverse aspects of food systems. Clear global binding regulations are needed to prevent human rights abuses by agri-businesses and related corporations (including finance institutions and digital companies) along the value chains. These should hold corporate perpetrators liable when they harm people's right to food and nutrition and the environment and ensure people's access to justice and remedy. Such international regulations have to allow affected people and communities to claim their rights in the country where the controlling companies are based or have relevant operations or assets, as well as creating complaint mechanisms at the international level.

[Increasing repression and criminalization of social leaders, human and environmental rights defenders](#) particularly in the context of authoritarian governments is another factor that is structurally impeding the enjoyment of the right to food and nutrition. The increased militarization of state apparatus in many countries to give the military and/or the police the power to aid commercial interests is extremely concerning. Criminalization of dissent is evident and particularly worrisome in rural areas and towards Indigenous Peoples, where land and territorial conflicts arise from agrarian struggles, land grabbing, corporate investments, and development aggression. State and military occupation of land and territories have become increasingly prevalent.

Unilateral coercive measures can also severely affect the enjoyment of the right to food and nutrition of the population in countries such as Cuba and Venezuela. In a [statement dated 18 March 2022](#), the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food expresses concerns about the impacts of targeted economic sanctions against Russia on the most vulnerable people. He emphasizes that the effectiveness of sanctions should always be measured against the potential violation of people's human rights and humanitarian consequences.

Recurrent Food price volatility

Rising food prices and food price volatility disproportionately affects the purchasing power of the poor and have devastating consequences especially for import dependent countries. A lot of food dependent countries are highly [indebted](#) and have limited capacity to import food at higher prices or to put in place social protection programmes ensuring the access of all to food at higher costs, especially with the Covid-19 pandemic that has already required higher public spending. Furthermore, the lack of food reserves is an aggravating factor for many countries. According to interviews with HIC-HLRN, the MENA region lacks food reserves, as countries in the region were encouraged since 1990 to only hold basic reserves. This fact implies that food price changes cannot be bolstered.

As mentioned in the introduction, food prices were already on the rise before the war started. Food prices are not a reflection of the actual availability of food at a global scale. Many factors beyond food production impact prices. Among these we can highlight the following:

Prices are affected by the concentration of power in supply chains when production is limited to a small number of exporting countries and with an even smaller number of big companies or traders. For instance, [just eight countries account for 90% of the world's wheat exports, and just four countries account for over 80% of the world's maize exports](#) while just [four companies](#) control the vast majority of the global grain trade. This concentration implies that those countries and companies can take advantage of a crisis situation by dictating prices and by speculation, e.g., by holding back products in anticipation of higher prices, as happened in the [so-called tortilla crisis](#).

Although the Agricultural Market Information System ([AMIS](#)) was established by the G20 in 2010 to provide information on commodity stocks, prices and utilization, there continues to be a lack of transparency of global grain stocks due to geopolitical reasons and because significant grain reserves are held by private companies.

Another important aspect is the growing financialization of food and agriculture: Food and land are increasingly seen as financial assets from which money can be made and which undergo speculation practices.

Also, the non-food use of crops and the growing use of cash crops that can be used for different purposes according to market opportunities, are causing food price increases. There is a growing competition between feed and food on the one side (a lot of grains are used for industrial livestock, which is one of the major causes of environmental degradation), and between food and energy (food used as bioethanol or for creating biogas), on the other side.



There is a lack of market regulation: trade rules do not allow for the necessary policy space to respond to food price volatility. Furthermore, there are asymmetrical rules governing international markets, e.g., exporting countries can quite easily decide to tax or limit exports during a crisis whereas importing countries lose out. In general, global markets fail to absorb shocks and rather amplify them. This becomes clear for instance, when rich countries and big companies can buy up the market in times of crisis to secure their interests. Furthermore, [speculation is exacerbating current price spikes](#).

In conclusion, there is weak global food governance when it comes to preventing and mitigating future food price volatility.

An important question in this regard is who benefits from the higher food prices. It is also worth mentioning that industrial food production does not include externalities (e.g., negative impacts on the environment) in their final prices and that agricultural workers often lack living wages and basic social security. In this sense, higher food prices, if combined with strong social protection schemes to guarantee that the poorest sectors of the population have access to food, can help creating a virtuous circle to ensure better conditions for small-scale food producers and their agroecological production. The latter can contribute to better food for all, favouring local markets. This reduces environmental, social and health costs, normally paid by the most marginalized and disadvantaged people and communities.

Ecodestruction and climate change as inherent features of the dominant food system

Intensive industrial production of food that is dependent on external inputs (pesticides, fertilizers, machinery, fossil fuels, and increasingly digitalization) is a key contributor to climate change and biodiversity destruction and therefore unsustainable. [The FAO estimates that 31 per cent of human-caused greenhouse gas emissions, originate from the world`s agri-food systems](#).

Food systems are not only contributing to climate change but also heavily affected by it. According to the IPCC (2022), climate change – and the increased frequency and intensity of extreme weather – reduces food and water security and will increasingly put pressure on food production and access, especially in vulnerable regions. The report further states that sudden losses of food production and access to food compounded by decreased diet diversity have increased malnutrition in many communities, especially for Indigenous Peoples, small-scale food producers and low-income households, with children, elderly people and pregnant women particularly impacted

Rising oil prices have also disrupted food transport and food supply in rural areas. The shift in energy supply chains caused by the war in the Ukraine is also having impacts on local food systems. The EU intends to diversify its sources of energy away from Russian supplies. This has increased extractive activities, in particular coal, in countries like Colombia, causing irreversible damage to local ecosystems, food systems and people. A concrete case in point is the struggle of indigenous and afro communities in La Guajira desert against Cerrejón (Glencore) – one of the world`s largest open pit coalmines – over one of the last remaining water streams in the region.



PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RESPONSES

At national level, the FAO is currently attending to emergencies in [47 countries](#) including Ukraine and Yemen. In terms of responding to a global food crisis, the FAO does not have clear criteria for identifying such a crisis, as was mentioned above.

The FAO presented its approach to the current global crisis during the extraordinary session of its Council. This approach mixes measures attending to the emergency in Ukraine with measures for a global response. For the latter part, it focuses on keeping trade in food and fertilizers open by preventing the war from negatively affecting productive and marketing activities in Ukraine and Russia in order to enable them to meet domestic production and consumption needs, while also satisfying global demands. It advises states to avoid ad hoc policy reactions aimed at safeguarding domestic markets in the short term, which can have a potentially detrimental effect on international markets. Export restrictions are a case in point. Moreover, it recommends finding new and more diverse food supplies, meaning diversification of sources of food imports, to rely on existing food stocks, and to enhance the diversity of domestic production to ensure the supply of food necessary for healthy diets. Finally, it calls for a strengthening of global market transparency and dialogue, pointing to the G-20's Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS). Through its Rapid Response Forum, AMIS provides a unique platform for policy dialogue and coordination among members (which include the Russian Federation and Ukraine) in order to minimize disruptions and ensure that trade flows efficiently in order to meet global food demand. More recently, the FAO has added to its sets of recommendations a [Global Food Import Financing Facility \(FIFF\)](#) aimed at responding to soaring food import costs for low income and countries with food deficits; . It also made a specific recommendation on [Using Soil Maps to Promote Efficient Use of Fertilizers](#) based on the Ethiopian Soil Information System that uses digital soil mapping technologies to generate timely soil information and fertilizer type recommendations, intended inter alia to deploy precision agriculture tools.

The UN Secretary General put in place a [Global Crisis Response Group on Food, Energy and Finance](#) (GCRG) in March 2022. In his analysis, the war has severely affected food, energy and financial markets, sending commodity prices soaring to record highs. This may affect as many as 1.7 billion people in 107 economies, who are exposed to at least one of three risks – mostly in Africa, Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The GCRG aims to develop coordinated solutions to the interlinked crises in collaboration with governments, the multilateral system and the private sector. The goal is to help vulnerable countries avert large-scale crises through high-level coordination and partnerships, urgent action, and access to critical data, analysis and policy recommendations.

The first GCRC statements and briefs see the war against the Ukraine as the main cause of the crisis, and yet its framing of the problem makes clear that it is a systemic crisis. In contrast to the rather narrow FAO approach, the strong GCRG call to act collectively and to engage in multilateral fora to build a global response is highly relevant. Specifically on food, the [first GCRG brief](#) is in alignment with FAO recommendations to import-dependent countries to diversify their sources of food and fertilizers; as well as to ensure the proper functioning of international commodity markets, avoiding ad hoc policy responses such as export bans. It goes beyond the FAO's response though in several respects:

It recommends to countries with large food stocks to support countries in need but it does not specify how. Similarly, it seems to have an issue with hoarding of products, speculative movements, and panic buying but it does not say what to do about them.

It advocates focusing on adequate access for smallholder food producers to seeds, fertilizers and fuel but it does not elaborate how. The FAO says it is supporting smallholders in many countries facing emergencies, including Ukraine and Yemen. In the case of Ukraine, it is unclear whether FAO and other international aid programs are really reaching smallholders according to our interviews.

It suggests exempting purchases of food by WFP for humanitarian assistance from food export restrictions with immediate effect and ask members of the World Trade Organization to formally adopt this measure at the WTO's 12th Ministerial Conference to be held in June 2022.

It recommends governments in need to access emergency funds through the Crisis Response Window Emergency Response Financing (CRW ERF) through the World Bank's IDA19 and IDA20 financing, enhancing as necessary, using data from the UN system (e.g., WFP vulnerability analysis and mapping) to help establish priorities.

The FAO and the GCRG have framed the current global food crisis as a disruption of global trade due to a war involving two major agro-exporting countries. Their responses focus accordingly on ensuring a smooth functioning of international markets. This is certainly an important aspect of the current global food crisis but it is not the only one. Both responses have major shortcomings: they do not address food price volatility and its structural drivers; they reinforce large-scale industrial agriculture and a food security strategy based on global trade despite their proven vulnerabilities and failures. The GCRG is silent on war, conflict and protracted crises as major drivers of hunger. The FAO's response, in contrast, gives the impression that some conflicts and countries matter more than others depending on their role in global trade. From the point of view of the equal rights of all people and of nations large and small and from a human rights approach, which focuses on the marginalized and disadvantaged, this is unacceptable.

Particularly concerning is the FAO's recommendation related to maintaining dependence on industrial fertilizers. Instead of promoting agroecology and a transition out of fossil-fuel based fertilizers, the FAO is promoting a rationalization of fertilizer use through digital tools. Given the organization's growing funding by and collaboration with the corporate sector and the lack of transparency around this, the suggestions regarding fertilizer use combined with digital technologies poses a clear case of conflict of interests. In fact, the FAO has ongoing [partnerships with business associations promoting the interests of the fertilizers industry such as Croplife International, the International Fertilizer Association and the Syngenta group](#). Furthermore, it has received financial contributors [of \\$2.6 million \(USD\) by Croplife International](#) and [of \\$1.2 million \(USD\) by the Russian chemical company PhosAgro](#) in 2017 to 2018 and 2019, respectively.

Neither the FAO nor the GCRG are proposing any policy or normative changes aimed at addressing the structural drivers of the current global food crisis, particularly on issues of speculation on agricultural commodities, trade, tax justice and ecological destruction.

The systemic fragility and the failures of a world food security strategy based on deregulated trade and financial markets became clear already in 2007. Regrettably, no serious attempts to review this strategy have been made, despite the efforts of the CFS. Since its inception, the CFS has developed policy recommendations and guidelines aimed at overcoming key structural problems. The [CFS policy recommendations on price volatility for food security](#), for instance, made already in 2011 the case for improving transparency, regulation and supervision of agricultural derivative markets, as well as strengthening local, national and regional food reserves. Unfortunately, neither FAO nor the World Bank, WTO and agro-exporting countries have taken seriously CFS recommendations.

Another important shortcoming of the FAO and GCRG responses relates to the right of the most marginalized and affected constituencies to shape them. The FAO does not have an institutionalized permanent mechanism for civil society organizations to present their views to FAO technical committees and governing bodies (with the exception of the CFS). The GCRG will be operating as a multi-stakeholder initiative in which CSOs can give their inputs. The lack of rules and clear procedures of the multi-stakeholder approach raise concerns about the effective participation of the most marginalized constituencies. Powerful actors such as northern governments, UN agencies and business associations tend to benefit most from this approach.



CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COORDINATED GLOBAL POLICY RESPONSES UPHOLDING HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE PRINCIPLES OF THE UN CHARTER

Regarding preventing, addressing and overcoming war and conflicts

It is time for the international community to look into the structural drivers that are fuelling war, armed conflicts and widespread violence. It is urgent to reverse the dramatic erosion of the principle in the UN Charter to refrain from use of force and to take effective collective measures for the prevention and removal of threats to peace. The aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine is the latest breach of this principle sadly preceded by other examples such as inter alia the Saudi Arabia - United Arab Emirates led coalition in Yemen and the United States of America against Iraq. We call on all states and the UN bodies and agencies dealing with security, human rights and humanitarian issues to:

- Bring an end to military invasion and hostilities in Ukraine, Yemen and all conflict-affected countries to avoid further harm to the civilian population, and search for conflict solutions which address structural drivers fueling hunger and malnutrition, as well as war, armed conflicts and widespread violence;
- Ensure the necessary funding for immediate humanitarian responses in all countries facing emergencies and protracted crises. Prioritize support for small-scale farmers and fishers not only as a matter of emergency, but as a key permanent policy to rebuild and strengthen local food systems. The CFS Framework for Action in Protracted Crisis and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and other people working in rural areas provide guidance on how to do this. Aid in the case of the Ukraine should reach farmers cultivating less than 100 hectares;
- Hold accountable all conflict parties, which have committed crimes related to the destruction of objects indispensable for the survival of the population and have used starvation as a method of warfare. In the case of Yemen, the UN Security Council should refer the situation to the International Criminal Court to conduct a full investigation into alleged international crimes committed by the parties to the conflict and into actors that may be complicit in them. In the case of Ukraine, there is a need for further investigation and assessment of the damages caused to small-scale and family farming;
- Improve monitoring and quick responses to food insecurity in protracted crises and emergencies, for instance, through enhancing existing systems such as the Famine

- Review Committee (FRC) of the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification process and FAO's Global Information and Early Warning System (GIEWS) to collect information and improve responses of relevant UN bodies and national authorities;
- Incorporate the CFS Framework for Action in Protracted Crisis into the work of organizations and networks, including the global Food Security Cluster (FSC) and members of the UN Interagency Standing Committee (IASC); FAO, IFAD and WFP at regional and country level; as well as relevant government ministries, especially those with mandates dealing with agriculture, environment, water, planning, foreign affairs, industry, transport, trade. A mechanism to monitor responses in protracted crisis should be set up based on this framework.

Regarding a transformation of food systems that tackles structural causes of hunger and malnutrition

The war in the Ukraine is an aggravating factor in the malfunctioning of the global industrial food system. It is necessary to recognize that we are in a systemic crisis in order to be able to find adequate responses to the structural causes of hunger and malnutrition. The Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, Michael Fakhri, reminds us that the way we respond to the current food crisis and related multiple crises will in effect transform our food systems for decades to come. We therefore call on States and UN bodies and agencies dealing with food systems to:

- Strengthen the CFS to lead the coordinated global policy response to the current food crisis. The CFS should:
 - Agree on criteria to identify regional and global food crises and improve existing mechanisms to tackle these crises using a human rights approach;
 - Ensure that the countries and populations most affected by multiple shocks play a major role in shaping responses;
 - Create an interface with the UN Security Council, UN humanitarian networks and the UN Human Rights System in order to address issues of food security in contexts of war and conflict;
 - Based on the CFS Global Strategic Framework, promote a new global food security strategy shifting away from deregulated global markets, trade and finances. Specific policy guidance should be developed to:
 - [Curb speculation](#);
 - Build local, national and regional food reserves, giving priority to food sourced from agro-ecological, small-scale food producers;
 - Agree on a [new trade agenda for the right to food based on the human rights principles of dignity, self-sufficiency and solidarity](#) as recommended by the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food.
 - Improve coordination of policy responses for intertwined crises particularly on food, finances, climate/environment. Debt relief for low- and middle-income countries in the Global South must be a priority in order to strengthen their capacity to provide public services, social protection systems and invest in food sovereignty and the transition of industrial food systems towards sustainable, healthy and just food systems.

- Address issues of conflicts of interest and corporate capture of the FAO – in particular by the agrochemical industry - and other UN agencies. Put in place a robust and comprehensive framework for corporate accountability for all UN bodies and agencies.
- Transform industrial food systems towards food systems based on agroecology and food sovereignty. In particular:
 - Phase out the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides;
 - Ensure access to and control over land and other natural resources for small scale food producers, including through redistributive agrarian reforms;
 - Conserve and restore agrobiodiversity in indigenous and peasant farming, fishing and livestock keeping systems;
 - Promote diversified diets, which are based on fresh, minimally processed and home-prepared food. Healthy and sustainable diets and the nutritional qualities of food are dependent on circular regeneration of soil fertility, on biodiversity, on pollution-free water bodies and overall healthy ecosystems.
 - Strengthen short distance supply chains and territorial food markets;
 - Ensure living wages and full respect of labor rights for all workers throughout food systems.

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