



Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Implications for Global Food Prices and Food Security

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine has impacts on [global food security](#). Since February 24, 2022, a humanitarian and economic crisis has unfolded in Ukraine, limiting Ukrainian exports of food and agricultural commodities, and affecting millions of people in Ukraine and the region, including more than [12 million recently displaced](#) (roughly a quarter of the population of Ukraine). In addition, in response to the invasion, the United States and other countries have imposed financial and trade sanctions on Russia, further affecting international trade patterns. Because Ukraine and Russia are among the world's leading exporters of certain food staples used in many countries, the effects of such disruptions on global food security are becoming apparent.

For more information on

- the humanitarian crisis, see CRS Insight IN11882, *Humanitarian and Refugee Crisis in Ukraine*;
- agricultural trade and production, see CRS Insight IN11894, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Implications for Agricultural Trade and Production*; and
- sanctions, see CRS Insight IN11869, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Overview of U.S. Sanctions and Other Responses*, and CRS Insight IN11871, *Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: New Financial and Trade Sanctions*.

Context and Current Status

Emergency Food Insecurity. In March 2022, to help meet domestic food needs, Ukraine banned exports of grain and other food products. [Stalled exports of Ukraine's current agricultural commodity stores](#), [disruptions in the April planting season](#), and a [reported prioritization of planting autumn harvest crops for domestic food use](#) are expected to have immediate and potentially longer-term agricultural implications, including for future harvests and livestock production. Although the U.N. World Food Program (WFP) and other humanitarian organizations are scaling up emergency food assistance [operations](#) in Ukraine and the region, access is limited within the country and food shortages are becoming evident with an estimated 18 million people suffering food insecurity.

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Global Food Imports. Russia and Ukraine are low-cost producers of wheat, and in typical years are responsible for approximately 30% of global wheat exports. Many low- and middle-income countries in [the Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and sub-Saharan Africa](#) rely on imported wheat from Russia and Ukraine to meet domestic food security needs. Some countries may replace disrupted Russian and Ukrainian wheat imports with higher priced wheat imports from other exporters. Others may choose to replace relatively higher priced wheat with less expensive commodities such as [rice](#). Countries that [subsidize supplies of wheat, flour, and other higher-priced food commodities](#) for their populations may see a reduced [ability to pay](#) for those commodities. Governments with food surpluses may consider options to make more [agricultural commodities available](#) for food use.

Global Food Prices. Since 2020, monthly average global food prices have been generally higher than in prior years for a variety of reasons, including [the Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\) pandemic](#), [drought conditions affecting agricultural production](#) in various countries, and [export bans](#) on certain food commodities. After the Russian invasion, global food prices increased to [record high levels](#) and additional countries imposed [export restrictions](#) on food commodities. Higher food prices and export restrictions reduce the availability and affordability of food for most consumers, with the most severe impacts for low-income consumers.

Many experts are concerned that increased food prices as a result of the invasion could further [erode food security](#)—specifically food availability and affordability worldwide—for millions of vulnerable people. Countries grappling with humanitarian crises (and with populations already at risk of widespread food insecurity) are particularly vulnerable to the daily impacts of reduced food availability and price shocks. [WFP reports](#) that 811 million people were already facing hunger at the end of 2021 (with 276 million of these facing acute hunger, an increase of more than twofold from 2019), and 44 million people in 38 countries were at risk of famine. Pandemic-related food supply chain issues, shortages, and price increases, as well as ongoing conflict, environmental change and natural disasters, and deepening poverty, have all contributed to food insecurity worldwide.

Key Policy Issues for Food Assistance

Global Emergency Food Operations. Prior to the Russian invasion, Ukraine was the largest single source of food for WFP, the world's largest humanitarian organization focused on hunger and food security. With production and export disruptions from the region, global food prices have increased. This may affect WFP global operations due to procurement challenges and delays, and as food becomes more expensive to purchase elsewhere. A simultaneous global surge in energy prices is also expected to increase WFP transport costs. In the short term, the disruptions from the Ukraine conflict are anticipated to extend most acutely to countries in the [Middle East and Africa](#) (such as Ethiopia, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen), which rely heavily on food imports from Ukraine and Russia, and where WFP has reduced rations as part of its cost-cutting measures. On April 27, 2022, USDA and USAID announced they intend to provide [\\$670 million in food assistance funding](#) to support existing emergency food operations in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, South Sudan, and Yemen. USAID is to draw down the full \$282 million in the [Bill Emerson Humanitarian Trust](#), and USDA is to provide \$388 million from the [Commodity Credit Corporation](#). On April 28, the Biden Administration requested [\\$33 billion in additional support for Ukraine](#), of which \$3 billion would respond to humanitarian needs, including global food insecurity among vulnerable populations. The United States and other WFP contributors may consider whether to provide additional resources to maintain food assistance levels as costs rise or reprioritize existing resources.

Development Food Assistance. Rising food prices, the rise in oil prices, and trade disruptions affecting the Eurasian region may also affect development assistance programs intended to prevent food insecurity over time. These developments may occur simultaneously, with a potential increase in the number of people in need of food assistance. Increased costs for food and fuel are likely to affect households' ability

to purchase food, particularly in lower-income countries, which may move those households who were marginally food secure prior to the increase in prices into a state of food insecurity. Resources once focused on longer-term food security through investments in agricultural development or nutrition education, for example, may be diverted to meet emergency needs, with long-term consequences. Food aid and commodity sales also directly support some development programs, whose capacity may be reduced by increased food and fuel costs.

Potential Issues for Congress

Congress may consider a number of policy options in response to increasing food prices and rising global food insecurity, including

- conducting regular oversight of emergency food assistance activities, including by monitoring how the executive branch allocates food assistance appropriated by Congress, and assessing whether such activities are sufficient to meet increasing needs and U.S. foreign policy objectives;
- considering the global food security implications of the wide range of U.S. responses to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and how and if responses can be calibrated to reduce food security impacts;
- [engaging with the Biden Administration](#) to reduce supply limitations and global trade barriers for food and agricultural commodities; and
- considering ways in which the United States could increase support to governments in lower-income countries to help address growing food insecurity.

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