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The shrapnel of the Ukraine-Russia conflict also hurts in Africa and the Middle East

In a globalized system such as the current one, a bomb on Kiev, Mariounpol or Donbas will immediately produce significant consequences in Cairo, Beirut, Tunisia or Rabat.



The medium-term shortage of basic grains in the Middle East and Africa hovers overhead as a worrying threat. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine generates collateral damage of very different kinds thousands of kilometers from the theater of operations.



In Africa as a whole and the Middle East, 45 countries import at least a third of wheat from Ukraine or Russia and 18 of them are supplied at an average of 50%. Keystone.

In Africa and the Middle East as a whole, 45 countries import a third of the wheat they consume from Ukraine and Russia and 18 of them up to 50%, according to figures from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). This is the case, among others, of Burkina Faso, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Yemen and Eritrea (a country that depends 100% on Ukrainian wheat).



The United Nations warns of a global famine if the Ukrainian Russian conflict continues. Displacement camp in Yemen. WFP Photo

The current war situation impacts supply chains and the prices of agricultural products and their derivatives are rising rapidly.

"Collateral" damage of geopolitical repercussion

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) warned in the third week of March, from its headquarters in Rome, about the impact of the war on many countries that depend on the import of basic grains (<https://www.ifad.org/es/web/latest/-/el-conflicto-en->

[ucrania-ya-esta-afectando-a-la-seguridad-alimentaria-en-la-region-de-oriente-proximo-y-africa-del-norte-y-se-extendera-rapidamente-advierete-el-fida](#)).

In its analysis, IFAD argues that rising prices of essential food, fuel and fertilizers, along with other side effects, are dramatically affecting poorer rural communities.

Examples are not lacking. Due to the conflict, in Somalia – where 3.8 million people are suffering from severe food insecurity – the cost of electricity and transport rose substantially as a result of the sharp rise in fuel prices. This has repercussions for many smallholder farmers, who, as a result of the unpredictability of the rains and the ongoing drought, depend for their survival on irrigation agriculture systems based on low-power diesel engines.

In Egypt, which imports 85% of its wheat from Ukraine and 73% of its sunflower oil from Russia, the prices of both products and their derivatives have also exploded.

Some 22 per cent of families in Lebanon now suffer from acute feeding problems. The country buys up to 80% of the wheat it consumes from Russia and Ukraine. However, it can only store enough for a month because its largest silos were destroyed by the monumental explosion that occurred in the port of Beirut in August 2020. Such fragility and rising prices will have disastrous consequences for the most vulnerable sectors of the Lebanese population.

As for the countries of Central Asia – which rely heavily on monetary remittances sent by migrant workers – they too have been severely affected by this war. Due to the devaluation of the ruble, for example, remittances in that currency that arrive in Kyrgyzstan, vital for the families of these migrants, and that represent 31% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of that country, from one day to the next have lost a lot of their value.

Between famines and social protests

The crops of Ukraine, a traditional European breadbasket, and Russia, which has developed its agriculture considerably in recent years, represent 20% of the world trade in maize and 34% of wheat, whose price on March 8 of this year exceeded the barrier of 410 euros per ton, compared to just over 300 euros in September-October 2021.

According to an analysis published on March 22 by the Swiss daily *Le Courrier*, cereal prices have already exceeded those they had at the beginning of the Arab Spring and are

more expensive than those that triggered the hunger revolts of 2007-2008 (<https://lecourrier.ch/2022/03/21/vers-un-retour-des-emeutes-de-la-faim/>). The

article *Return to the Time of the Food Riots*, by journalists Benito Pérez and Tahar Yacine, argues that many Arab and African countries will lose out from a protracted conflict between Ukraine and Russia.



In Egypt, the price of bread has soared by 50% since the conflict began. It is the world's largest importer of wheat and is supplied by 85% of the two countries currently at war. The Government, despite the fact that the country has a reserve for three or four months, is studying the possibility of increasing the price of bread subsidized so far for low-income sectors. Undoubtedly, a risky political gamble not seen since the "bread riots" of 1977. With the aggravating factor that other products, such as sunflower oil (three quarters of which is imported from Russia and Ukraine), transfer the uncontrolled increase in international prices to the domestic.

For its part, Algeria, the world's fifth largest importer of cereals (behind Egypt, China, Indonesia and Turkey), plans to import 7.7 million tons of cereals in 2022. Like the rest of the Maghreb nations, as the analysis of the Swiss daily life affirms, Algeria will not be able to escape the rise in food prices due to the blockade of exports from the Black Sea region and speculation in the stock markets. *Le Courrier* says that "Algerians hold their breath as the month of Ramadan approaches, the usual period of price increases despite all control measures." In the memory of that country are still present the riots of 2011 after the sudden increase in the cost of oil and sugar, an increase that very soon spread to other basic necessities. Unlike other countries without sufficient resources to recover losses,

Algiers is betting on cushioning this shock with the additional income it can receive from its gas exports.

The situation is no better in Morocco and Tunisia. According to Abdelkader Aloui, president of the Federation of Mills of Morocco, the country has a reserve of cereals for the next six months, thanks to the 50,000 tons of wheat it imported from Ukraine just before the outbreak of the war. Of course, Morocco is trying to diversify its purchases in Brazil, Argentina and Germany. However, local analysts do not rule out possible reactions of the most disadvantaged sectors of the population to the announcement of the increase in basic products.

Tunisia, for its part, could face major difficulties due to its low storage capacity and budgetary constraints. According to the Tunisian Reflection Group IACE (Arab Institute of Business Directors), the country is "very dependent on cereals as it imports 84% of what it consumes in common wheat, about 40% durum wheat and 50% barley." The Group acknowledges that "Ukraine was until now a privileged supplier, along with Canada and the European Union, and it will be necessary to review our supply policy, especially since the country suffers from a chronic problem in its storage capacity, limited to three months". In 2021, Tunisia imported 2.6 million tons of cereals out of the 3 million tons it needs to supply domestic consumption, demonstrating its productive fragility and extreme dependence on the international market.

A look from China

If the conflict between Russia and Ukraine drags on, a food supply crisis looms in many parts of the world and African countries will be among the hardest hit, the [website CHINA.ORG.CN](http://www.china.org.cn) said in an analysis earlier this week (http://french.china.org.cn/foreign/txt/2022-03/20/content_78118577.htm).f Particularly interesting analysis in view of China's growing presence on the African continent.

This official media characterizes the Black Sea region as the "breadbasket of the world" and notes that Russia and Ukraine supply 29% of world exports of wheat, 19% of corn and 80% of sunflower oil. The first signs of the impact of this crisis on the world economy are expressed in the increase at the beginning of March in the price of wheat by more than 40%, that of corn by 30% and those of soybeans by more than 25%.

According to this analysis, one of the reasons for this increase in costs has been the decision of the Ukrainian government on March 9 to ban exports of wheat, oats and other

staple crops to protect domestic consumption. At the same time, the escalation of Western sanctions against Russia discourages many buyers of Russian products.



From the world's barn to the battlefield

To further visualize the magnitude of the crisis specifically in the African context, the article quotes Modibo Mao Makalou, an expert from Mali, who stresses that 80% of trade between Africa and Russia, as well as 50% of trade between Africa and Ukraine, corresponds to wheat imports. In Senegal, a country that imports half of that grain from Russia, concern about bread is growing among the population. For several years the government has controlled the price of *baguette* bread with a maximum of 175 CFA francs (29 cents), but this could rise to 500 CFA francs (84 US cents) if the Ukrainian crisis persists. Like Senegal, Mali imports 70% of its food. In 2019, its food exports generated only 25 million dollars while its imports in that area represented 344 million dollars.



Much of Africa will suffer dramatic consequences if the Russia-Ukraine war continues.

FAO Photo

This analysis concludes with the consensus of various African specialists on the urgent need for endogenous solutions in order to ensure the continent's food sovereignty. Developing countries, particularly African countries, must embark on a process of structural transformation of their economies in order to have some autonomy in sectors such as health, education, food and technology.



[FAO warns of 'serious risks' to food security from war in Ukraine](#)

In short, the war conflict in the centre of continental Europe, which has been going on for more than four weeks, is rapidly changing not only the geopolitical logic of the continent but also the fabric of economic interdependencies between that region and others in the rest of the world. In a globalized system such as the current one, a bomb on Kiev,

Mariounpol or Donbas will immediately produce significant consequences in Cairo, Beirut, Tunisia or Rabat.

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