



Hunger fallout: How the G7 can prevent the war in Ukraine from escalating the global hunger crisis

Executive summary

The devastating impact of the war in Ukraine is being felt by crisis-affected communities around the world. People living in low-income, food import-dependent countries already impacted by conflict, COVID-19 and climate change are now suffering from the ripple effects of food supply chain disruptions, skyrocketing food prices and rising inflation.

Drawing on the IRC's work in food insecure contexts, this report outlines how the ripple effects of the war in Ukraine are compounding a pre-existing hunger crisis, and how the G7 and wider international community can prevent the war from pushing other vulnerable communities closer to famine.

A hunger fallout

In March 2022, G7 Agriculture Ministers expressed concern over the implications of the war in Ukraine for food security worldwide. Ukraine and Russia are major global suppliers of energy, food and fertilisers to some of the world's most food insecure regions (see Table 1). Disruption to Ukrainian supply chains, coupled with export restrictions, have caused prices of essential commodities to rise sharply. With limited fiscal capacity and reserves, these crisis-affected regions are unable to mitigate the inflationary impact on their populations.

German

Image: © IRC/Badghis, Afghanistan. A farming family from Abkamari left their home when a severe drought left them little alternative. They received cash from the IRC to cover food, medical expenses and partly pay back debt accumulated over the past years.

Action to end the hunger crisis

The invasion of Ukraine is drawing much-needed attention to weaknesses in our global humanitarian, political systems and food systems. Unless these systems are reformed, political inertia and inaction in the face of food insecurity and violations of the rules-based international system will continue to cause millions to go hungry and force them to adopt negative coping strategies.

To prevent the war in Ukraine from escalating the global hunger crisis, the IRC is making four urgent calls to the G7 and international community:

1. Don't forget other crises: protect and increase funding to prevent acute hunger and famine
2. Scale up proven interventions to mitigate the hunger fallout from the war in Ukraine
3. Fix the broken food system
4. Strengthen humanitarian diplomacy and end impunity

Through swift and coordinated action, the G7 can save lives, build the resilience of crisis-affected communities and preempt future shocks. Priority actions must include combining humanitarian aid – focused on cash transfers and gender- and climate-sensitive interventions addressing malnutrition and food security – with anticipatory approaches and diplomatic efforts to ensure humanitarian access and the upholding of international humanitarian law.

As the G7 ministers and leaders meet in 2022, they have an opportunity and a responsibility to address the global hunger crisis and prevent the war in Ukraine from pushing crisis-affected communities closer to famine. G7 plans for a Global Alliance for Food Security is a promising step, particularly when coupled with commitments to implement existing and new initiatives such as the [Global](#)

[Network Against Food Crises](#) and the UN Secretary General appointed [Global Crisis Response Group on Food Energy and Finance](#). The solidarity that G7 members have demonstrated in response to the invasion of Ukraine must now be matched with urgent action to address the hunger fallout in other parts of the world.

Food insecurity

- [811 million](#) people are hungry.
- Before the war started, [276 million](#) people in 81 countries were acutely food insecure.
- [44 million](#) people are suffering from emergency levels of acute food insecurity globally – a classification indicating they are highly vulnerable to famine – a rise from 34 million in 2021.
- Over half a million (570 000) people were in Catastrophe facing starvation and death in 2021 in four countries (Ethiopia, South Sudan, Yemen, Madagascar).

Ukraine impacts

- The World Food Programme (WFP) estimates an additional [47 million](#) people could become acutely food insecure due to the war impacts.
- As of May 5, 2022, the [Agricultural Price Index](#) is up 41 percent compared to January 2021. Maize and wheat prices are 54 percent and 60 percent higher, respectively.
- Fertiliser prices surged in March, up [nearly 20 percent](#) since January 2022 and almost three times higher compared to a year ago.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine and attacks on civilians have shocked the world. In the space of 11 weeks, the war in Ukraine forced 6.2 million people to flee the country and displaced a further 7.7 million inside Ukraine – a total of almost one-third of the total population. The conflict has decimated civilian infrastructure with the destruction of business centres, hospitals, schools, residential buildings, water stations and electricity systems. The International Criminal Court has opened an investigation into possible war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. Investigations by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe found "...clear patterns of [international humanitarian law] violations by the Russian forces in their conduct of hostilities". Most concerning is that while what is happening in Ukraine is abhorrent, it isn't unique. Globally, violations of international law have become the brutal new standard of warfare. The war in Ukraine is indicative of the current 'Age of Impunity' where the laws of war are continually broken and perpetrators rarely held to account.

The devastating humanitarian impact of the war is not limited to Ukraine and the surrounding countries. Global reliance on food and other commodities produced in Ukraine and Russia mean that crisis-affected populations outside of Europe – already reeling from the impacts of conflict, COVID-19 and the effects of climate change – are facing a dire situation.

compounding the challenges of ensuring the world's most vulnerable can access the food and services they need, and undermining progress towards previous G7 commitments.




As G7 leaders prepare to gather in Schloss Elmau, they must commit to resolute political and humanitarian action to respond to the drastic rise of food insecurity and hunger worldwide. G7 plans for a Global Alliance for Food Security is welcome in this regard, particularly where this coordinates with and builds on other initiatives launched by international organisations and international financial

institutions, and mobilises vital funding for food insecure countries. G7 leaders have the opportunity to build on this momentum and commit to roll back the trends of impunity towards violations of international humanitarian law and access restrictions that have come to characterise so many of the world's conflicts.

Now is the moment for the G7 to take action and couple diplomacy with vital financing for proven food security interventions and anticipatory action to overcome the threats of hunger, malnutrition and famine.

As some of the most food insecure regions, Afghanistan, Yemen, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel are among the parts of the world that will be particularly impacted by increases in food prices and supply interruptions resulting from the war in Ukraine. They are also contexts where any further shortfall in humanitarian funding and diplomatic attention will significantly worsen hunger, malnutrition and food insecurity, particularly for women, children and other vulnerable groups.

Afghanistan

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Major drivers of food insecurity

Supply disruptions are compounding pre-existing challenges to food imports. Following the Taliban's seizure of power in August 2021, the international community moved to isolate the new de-facto authorities through freezing access to an estimated US\$ 9.5 billion in foreign reserves and halting all development assistance. At the same time, sanctions against some of the individuals now forming the new Taliban-led Government created barriers for humanitarian funding to enter the country. This approach is now contributing to acute humanitarian suffering and an effective grounding of the country's public and private banking systems, leaving banks unable to facilitate international transactions, including for aid delivery and food imports. As a result, the country is now experiencing a colossal liquidity crisis, driving prices beyond the reach of ordinary Afghans.

Despite humanitarian and some commercial exemptions to the sanctions regime, a pervading reluctance by banks to engage in transactions involving Afghanistan continues to limit both essential imports and humanitarian operations. Imports into Afghanistan declined by 47 percent in the second half of 2021 relative to the same period in 2020. Without further clarity on sanctions, alongside diplomatic efforts to revive Afghanistan's ailing economy as well as support to the central bank, millions of Afghans will continue to suffer from some of the most severe levels of food insecurity in the world.

Yemen

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|  | Number of acutely food insecure people: 19 million |
|  | Number of children under 5 suffering from acute malnutrition: 2.2 million |
|  | Total percentage of food imported: 90 percent |
|  | Percentage of wheat imported from Ukraine or Russia: 46.3 percent |

Yemen's hunger crisis





More than seven years of protracted conflict, a devastated economy and a fractured political system have left 23.4 million Yemenis in need of humanitarian assistance, including 19.1 million currently requiring food assistance – an increase of 2.9 million since last year. Since 2020, humanitarian appeals for Yemen have seen shortfalls of more than US\$2 billion at each pledging conference, with the 2022 appeal more than US\$3 billion underfunded nearly halfway through the year, in stark contrast to fundraising for Ukraine. In January 2022, these persistent funding shortages forced the World Food Programme to halve food rations for 8 million Yemenis. At the same time, an economic crisis has left 15.6 million Yemenis in extreme poverty and undermined the delivery of critical public services, hindering Yemenis' capacity to meet their needs.

Prior to the war in Ukraine, the affordability of food in Yemen had severely declined, with the average cost of the minimum food basket having increased by a staggering 119 percent in areas controlled by the Government of Yemen in 2021 alone. One in three displaced households are headed by women, which makes them particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, violence and increases their challenges to accessing humanitarian assistance. Persistent malnutrition already afflicts 2.2 million children under the age of five, has left 45 percent of Yemen's children stunted, and an estimated 1.3 million pregnant and breastfeeding women are projected to experience acute malnutrition.

Effects of the war in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine threatens to severely exacerbate food insecurity across Yemen just as the number of Yemenis at risk of experiencing famine-like conditions is set to rise to 161,000 people. Yemen is a heavily import-dependent economy. 90 percent of its cereals are imported, with 46.3 percent of its wheat coming directly from Ukraine and Russia. Similarly, nearly all fuel – vital for the distribution of goods – is imported, leaving Yemen at acute risk from global price increases. The war in Ukraine had already driven the price of wheat, Yemen's primary import, to record levels in March, a 19.7 percent price increase since February, which follows on the heels of a -1.2 Td(ffood insecEffeCpnpto ha.-0.0bom Ud tthe price of wheat, Y)14isig Y9.

Somalia and the Horn of Africa

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|  | Number of acutely food insecure people: 6 million |
|  | Number of children under 5 suffering from acute malnutrition: 1.4 million |
|  | Total percentage of food (cereals) imported: 90 percent |
|  | Percentage of wheat imported from Ukraine or Russia: 92 percent |

The Horn of Africa's hunger crisis

Climate disaster, conflict and displacement are leading to surging hunger and famine risks across the Horn of Africa. Communities in this region are now facing the driest recorded conditions in over 40 years, one of the worst climate-induced emergencies seen in recent history, with over 13 million people facing acute food insecurity in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia. In Somalia alone, six million people are expected to go hungry during April to June 2022.

Drought-induced displacements are also increasing; 671,000 people were displaced in February 2022. Women and children are most affected by the crisis and in dire need of life-saving assistance. Drought has increased the risk of gender-based violence as women and girls travel further to collect water and child marriage practices are already on the rise as people resort to negative means of coping and girls are being forced to drop out of school.

In a bid to save their critical livestock assets from a lack of pasture due to the drought, pastoralists are coping through feeding livestock on the already limited cereal stocks, putting more pressure on the limited cereal stocks and increasing risk of starvation, especially for children and women.

Effects of the war in Ukraine

The Horn of Africa is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of the war in Ukraine on rising wheat and oil prices and supply chain disruptions. This region imports around 90 percent of its wheat from Ukraine and Russia, with wheat and its products accounting for one-third of average national cereal consumption in the region. Somalia imports 92 percent of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine.

Cereal prices across the Horn of Africa were already high before the crisis in Ukraine, due to the combined effects of macroeconomic challenges and drought. In Somalia, sorghum prices in Baidoa and Dinsoor, located in the sorghum belt, surged by 55 and 105 percent between October 2021 and January 2022. These prices were higher than levels observed during the 2017 drought and the 2008 global food price crisis, and approaching 2011 record levels, when famine was once

The Sahel

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Box 1: Innovative anticipatory frameworks to address child malnutrition

Anticipatory action is a mechanism to prepare or arrange financing in anticipation of a crisis to enable a better response. By doing so, the impact of a disaster, such as an extreme weather event, can be mitigated and people be protected from its worst impacts. While we can only predict the onset of a humanitarian crisis about half of the time, we know that lean seasons and regularly occurring diseases like malaria lead to predictable increases in risk of acute malnutrition for children under 5.

Rates of child malnutrition are rising across the different contexts that the IRC works despite knowledge of how to

Recommendations for the G7 and international community

The overarching goal of the German G7 presidency is to jointly advance progress towards an equitable world. Addressing the unprecedented levels of hunger around the world and building a more equitable and sustainable food system are essential parts of this mission.

When the G7 meets in Germany in 2022, it has an opportunity and a responsibility to address the global hunger crisis and prevent the war in Ukraine from pushing crisis-affected communities closer to famine. The solidarity that G7 members have demonstrated in response to the invasion of Ukraine must be matched with urgent action to address the hunger fallout in other parts of the world. In addition to responding to the immediate effects of food insecurity and malnutrition, the G7 – working through multilateral mechanisms and with most-affected communities – must take coordinated actions to fix the broken food system and build countries' long-term resilience to future shocks.

1. Don't forget other crises: protect and increase funding to prevent acute hunger and famine

G7 members and other donors should:

- **Honour existing funding commitments for humanitarian crises** such as Afghanistan, Yemen, the Horn of Africa and the Sahel by fulfilling 2022 humanitarian response plans and addressing the funding shortfalls of humanitarian agencies affected by rising food prices.
- **Increase overall aid budgets** in line with the target of investing 0.7 percent of GNI in international aid, and show leadership by honouring humanitarian aid and development aid commitments, avoiding risks of reallocation and ensuring no one is left behind.
- **Provide anticipatory financing** to humanitarian contexts known to be dependent on Ukrainian and Russian wheat and other products, focused on climate resilience and tackling malnutrition.

2. Scale up proven interventions to mitigate the hunger fallout from the war in Ukraine

G7 members and other donors should:

- **Scale up gender and climate-sensitive food security interventions** in humanitarian contexts impacted by supply interruptions and increased food prices, as well as multi-year, flexible grants for humanitarian cash transfers to meet the expanded need of food insecure communities and malnutrition prevention and response programmes in high risk contexts. This requires coordination across humanitarian and development actors.
- **Invest in better disaster risk information and monitoring**, more predictable risk financing and other forms of anticipatory action designed in consultation with affected communities in line with Crisis Lookout Coalition recommendations.
- Increase support for long-term and inclusive **social protection programmes and safety nets** in countries affected by fragility, conflict and displacement to protect vulnerable populations from price spikes, while enhancing linkages between social protection and poverty reduction, food security and nutrition outcomes.

3. Fix the broken food system

G7 members and the wider international community should:

- Promote long-term and large-scale investments in **local, gender and climate-sensitive and diversified food production and seed systems**. Priority should be given to investments in agroecological approaches to reduce dependency on food, synthetic fertilisers and other input imports, and that increase sustainable resource and water management and access to land.
- Support crisis-affected countries to **improve post-harvest management and diversify processing value chains**, distribution networks and trade relationships.
- **Support the establishment of Global Alliance for Food Security** and a “Global Shield” against climate risks as proposed by Germany, working closely with vulnerable and affected countries to ensure their needs are met.

4. Strengthen humanitarian diplomacy and end impunity

G7 members should:

- **Prioritise diplomatic efforts to protect and expand humanitarian access in conflict settings** including through: strengthening existing monitoring and reporting mechanisms to enable effective and evidenced-based humanitarian diplomacy by G7 Members with influence over parties to conflict; where existing mechanisms are failing explore options to support the establishment of independent mechanisms to provide timely and robust reporting on access constraints in specific contexts; and take action to remove operational barriers, including restrictive counter-terrorism measures in domestic and international policies, through ensuring there are effective humanitarian exemptions.
- Use all mechanisms to **hold those responsible for international humanitarian law violations to account**, including those that exacerbate hunger and food insecurity and ensure existing international accountability mechanisms, including Commissions of Inquiry, have the resourcing and relevant expertise to effectively address the issue of denial of access or starvation as a weapon of war. At the national level, G7 Members should build commitment to international humanitarian law into all security partnerships and ensure investigation and accountability for any violations that do occur, States should support the suspension of the veto in the UN Security Council in cases of mass atrocities so that the Council can effectively respond to the world's most severe crises.

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