

CONCERNS FOR FOOD SECURITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND TÜRKİYE

When Russia's invasion of Ukraine resumed after a hiatus of many months, it prompted the European Union and 17 other countries to cut off relations with Russia and Belarus. Most of the goods and food that people in the West use now come from foreign plantations and factories. The length of the war will significantly affect the extent to which it disrupts global food supplies and the intensity of the resulting food crisis. A symptom of this movement, and a warning against over-reliance on Russian energy supplies, is the European Political Community. While the article's focus is on the potential impact of the war between Russia and Ukraine on food supplies throughout the world, it also serves to remind readers that there is more to a crisis than a shortage of Russian oil and gas.

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Introduction

A study shows that the ‘business-as-usual’ scenario would entail by 2050 an increase in world population by more than 50 percent, a doubling of food requirements, and a continuing inequality in the sharing of resources.¹ This estimation was made prior to a food price crisis in 2008, recent climate change adjustments, and the current bottleneck in the affordable and reliable food supply. Food security is a pressing issue due to the fragility of the food supply structure at both the local and global levels, but an acute scarcity of food to access.

Despite being vulnerable to a political crisis and moving in the opposite direction of sustainable development goals, food security is understudied as a pressing issue due to “abundant” assumed food access. Food insecurity was introduced to legal frameworks in the 1970s, yet acute food insecurity associated with climate change by reducing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases urged governments to take climate change seriously in the last decades.²

Food security is a global issue that is inextricably linked to commercial agriculture and international trade, as one-third of all accessed food is thrown away in households. Civil war, rapid population growth, and increased internationalization of global food markets have all had an impact on many countries’ food security.³ Mittal argues that rising cereal prices result from Western biofuel policies, which blame developing countries for the food price crisis.⁴

Four core values define food security: sufficiency of food for an active, healthy life; access to food and the entitlement to produce, purchase, or exchange food; security in the sense of balancing vulnerability, risk, and insurance; time and the variability in experiencing chronic, transitory, and cyclical food insecurity.⁵ According to UNDP, food import dependency is another current aspect of this definition that indicates the ratio of a country’s food imports relative to the food available in a country for internal distribution.⁶

After several months, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine resumes, prompting the European

¹ Anne Fremaux, *After the Anthropocene Green Republicanism in a Post-Capitalist World* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): p. 243.

² Tim Lang and Michael Heasman, *Food Wars* (London: Earthscan, 2004): p. 231.

³ Stephen J. Scanlan, “Food Security and Comparative Sociology,” *International Journal of Sociology*, Vol 33, No. 3 (2003): p. 101.

⁴ Anuradha Mittal, *The 2008 Food Price Crisis: Rethinking Food Security Policies* (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development G-24 Discussion Paper Series, No. 56, 2009): p.5.

⁵ Lang and Heasman (2004): p. 92.

⁶ United Nations Development Programme, *New Dimensions of Human Security* (UNDP Human Development Report, 1994): p. 26-27.

Union, along with 17 non-EU states, to isolate Russia and Belarus from European politics and international organizations. Western countries now import most of the goods and food they consume from foreign plantations and factories.⁷ The scale of the war's impact on the global food supply, and the severity of the subsequent food crisis, will largely depend on the duration of the conflict itself.^{8,9} The European Political Community is an example of this process and a reminder of the risks of relying on Russian exports and the political ramifications of Russia's isolation.

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Nevertheless, this article aims to remind readers that there is more to a crisis than a lack of Russian oil and gas and how the Russia-Ukraine conflict may affect the global food supply.

Global agricultural trade is a component of food security that, in comparison to the energy crisis, receives little attention today. Food security is a common thread connecting all 17 SDGs, from Goal 2 on “zero hunger” to agricultural security, to ensure food supply due to the interconnected economic, social, and environmental dimensions of food systems.

This paper investigates existing food security theories and sketches current dynamics as they interact with contemporary issues.

The Background of Food Security

With its definition of food security as the “objective” of ensuring that all people have physical and economic access to adequate safe, and nutritious food that always fits their dietary needs and food choices for an active and healthy life, the FAO was the first to establish the notion of food security in the international legal system in the 1970s.¹⁰ Food insecurity is directly or indirectly responsible for more than half

⁷ Scanlan (2003): p. 222.

⁸ European Parliament Research Service, *Russia's War on Ukraine: Impact on Global Food Security and EU Response* (2022): p. 3.

⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World* 2022.

¹⁰ Food and Agriculture Organization, *Food Security and Nutrition For All* (2023).

of all child deaths in the developing world.¹¹

The emphasis is on access as one of three components—food availability, access, and utilization—which refers to structural disruptions on the way to consumers, as well as globalization and inequality politics.¹² One of several discrimination theories on food insecurity is human-induced scarcity because of militarization and war affecting vulnerable populations.

Theoretically, food insecurity is associated with structural barriers and denials of access for various reasons, as well as allocation, rather than actual scarcity of food. Furthermore, importing grains and other food products does not guarantee food insecurity; rather, it indicates that the importer has access to food, which may be mitigated by affordable, consistent access. For example, food weaponization occurs in conflicts where hunger and deprivation last longer than the armed conflict phase, highlighting the vulnerable link between military agencies and the allocation of state resources for human well-being in the face of disruption of food security, political instability, or repression.¹³

Food import dependency is another supply measure: the ratio of a country's food imports to the food available for internal distribution.¹⁴ Although the term “dependence” implies otherwise, food imports demonstrate that a country can afford and obtain food on the international market. Thus, when considering availability measures, it makes no difference whether food is produced domestically or imported as long as it is available, accessible, and usable for survival.¹⁵ Agricultural imports, on the other hand, have an impact on domestic agriculture and food supply, resulting in dependency and implicit food security concerns¹⁶ as opposed to the material environment that provides food security as a human right and a sustainable development goal.

The Mediterranean Food Security Landscape

The top grain exporters are Russia and Ukraine, which account for 35 percent of total maize, wheat, and barley exports. The European Union learned from the 2008 global food price crisis, and while it is wary of another crisis that could exacerbate

¹¹ UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 1998* (1998): p.6.

¹² Food and Agriculture Organization, *World Food Summit Report* (1996).

¹³ Miles Wolpin, “Comparative Perspectives on Militarization, Repression, and Social Welfare,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 20, (1983): p.141.

¹⁴ United Nations Development Programme (1994): p. 26.

¹⁵ Jenkins et al. J. Craig, and Stephen I. Scanlan, “Food Security in Less Developed Countries, 1970-1990,” *American Sociological Review* Vol. 66 (2001): pp. 718-44.

¹⁶ Observatory of Economic Complexity OEC, Exports and Imports, Wheat, (2020).

it, food supply is a concern for the union, even though no food access crisis is imminent. Despite droughts in grain-producing countries and rising oil prices being the initial causes, increases in oil prices also augmented the costs of fertilizers, food transportation, and industrial agriculture. Thus, economic sanctions were imposed on Russia that did not specifically target the agricultural sector.

“The Russian invasion of Ukraine has increased food insecurity concerns across much of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.”

Türkiye is part of the FAO’s Central Asia region and faces the same challenges as the other countries in the region, including price increases of up to 45 percent and shortages of food, energy, fertilizer, and inputs such as seeds. This raises the prospect of reduced crop production, and some countries have lost significant export markets as a result.¹⁷

Governments have responded by providing incentives to increase the production of important staple crops to reduce imports, as well as by attempting to shorten supply chains and find new trading partners.¹⁸ The Open Balkan Agreement was referred to as a crucial tool in leveling access to grain, as was the Black Sea Initiative. In some countries, productivity has increased, which is a positive outcome.¹⁹

Industrial agriculture, with its disruption of ecosystems, threatens access to healthy, nutritious food and cultivable land across the Mediterranean region.²⁰ The Russian invasion of Ukraine has increased food insecurity concerns across much of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.²¹ Jordan, Yemen, Israel, and Lebanon are most at risk, as they rely heavily on imports of commodities, with significant shares from Russia and Ukraine.²² A global increase in food and agri-food input prices (fertilizers and energy) were already at record levels prior to the war.²³ Many commodities, including energy used for food supply, rely on natural gas, particularly for fertilizers,

¹⁷ Food and Agriculture Organization, *Regional Consultation Examines Food Security and Agricultural Production Risks*, 2023.

¹⁸ Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023.

¹⁹ Food and Agriculture Organization, 2023.

²⁰ Andrea di Bernardo, *Climate Change and Food Insecurity: Unleashing the Promise and Potential of Agroecology in the Mediterranean*, IAI Commentaries Vol. 22 No. 58 (2022): p. 2.

²¹ Andrea di Bernardo (2022).

²² European Parliament Research Service, (2022): p. 2.

²³ European Parliament Research Service, (2022).

resulting in a basket of imports for multiple components of the food supply.

The financial crisis of 2008 sparked debates about food sovereignty and the search for alternatives to the commercial food supply, particularly in densely populated areas.

However, the focus was on a micro level, which boils down to individual food access, which is indifferent to several structural problems on a global scale and could only be addressed in tandem with climate change requirements. The importance of decentralization and the emphasis is given to developing a solid ecostate to orchestrate and elaborate needs structural changes at the local and global levels.²⁴

According to OEC data, the top cereal exporters in 2020 were the United States (\$20.2 billion), Russia (\$11.5 billion), and Ukraine (\$10.5 billion). Wheat exports in 2020 were led by Russia (\$10.1 billion), Canada (\$7.13 billion), the United States (\$7.04 billion), France (\$4.76 billion), and Ukraine (\$4.61 billion).

The grain export volume of European countries has been observed to be reduced. Given the distance between North America and the Mediterranean region, which is short of wheat production, Ukraine and Russia will continue to be major suppliers for the region in the 2020s, which is short of wheat production. Egypt (\$5.2 billion) and Türkiye (\$2.44 billion) were the top wheat importers in 2020 in the region.²⁵

A war, combined with price increases, threatens all vulnerabilities, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa. To avoid double risks, the EU and Türkiye are working together on a food security initiative that will allow the grain and other food exports from Ukrainian ports to be safely transported through the Turkish Straits.

The Joint Coordination Center, which brought together officials from Russia, Türkiye, Ukraine, and the United Nations, was established in July 2022.

The Russian Mission to the EU has declared that the initiative violates the agreed-upon destinations for the safe passage of grains for European countries and the United Kingdom.²⁶

Conclusion

Food security hinges on many factors, from farm to fork. Food trade, corporate

²⁴ A. Fremaux (2019): p.13.

²⁵ Observatory of Economic Complexity, Exports and Imports, *Cereals*, 2020.

²⁶ Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the European Union, *On the Black Sea Initiative for the Export of Ukrainian Food*, 2022.

control of food supply, food poverty, supply insecurity, unprecedented environmental damage from food production, and the role and purpose of technology are all factors that have environmental, economic, social, and political ramifications.²⁷

As Russia is a major player in grain exports and agricultural substances, it remains critical to food supply amidst a tense political environment that insulates it. Russia and Ukraine supply more than half of North African and Middle Eastern cereal imports. In contrast, Eastern African countries import 72 percent of their cereals from Russia and 18 percent from Ukraine²⁸, and possible armed conflict is a hazard in the way of national food supply, especially in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean.

Türkiye is a significant trade partner for both the EU and Russia. Following the resumption of the war in Ukraine, security concerns about the disruption of imported materials urged importing countries in particular. Against this backdrop, the Black Sea Grain Initiative, co-hosted by the EU and Türkiye, demonstrates the importance of multilateral solutions.

²⁷ Lang and Heasman (2004): p.5.

²⁸ Bernardo (2022): p. 3.