

Finn Church Aid briefing paper: The international impact of the war in Ukraine from refugees to food safety

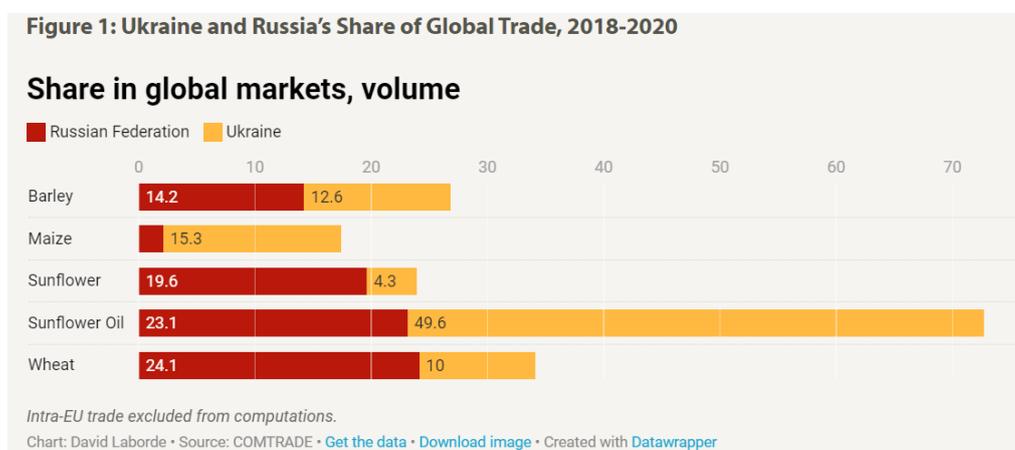
Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has immense consequences on European security policy. However, in the background there are other global effects possibly even larger in scale. This paper analyses this wider context from the perspective of the work of Finn Church Aid.

- The consequences on international relations are wide-reaching and visible in Syria as well as African geopolitics. On the one hand, the condemnation drawn from the international community indicates that this doesn’t only concern “the West”; on the other, rising nations such as China, India, and South Africa have refused to condemn the attack.
- Russia’s attack on Ukraine is about to cause a global food crisis, which will hit vulnerable countries particularly hard, as their food security has already been undermined by the Covid-19 pandemic and climate crisis.
- The potential reallocation of, and cuts on, humanitarian aid and development funding lead to a risk of widening insecurity and instability.
- Finn Church Aid is particularly concerned about the consequences of the food crisis on the education of children and young people, as the pandemic has already increased the number of school dropouts as well as learning loss.
- The increasingly tense international situation brings new urgency to partnership-building in developing countries and, for example, African states.
- Investing in education, livelihood, conflict prevention, peace work, and genuine partnerships is the most effective and affordable form of crisis management.

Weakening food security and the threat of hunger crisis

Finn Church Aid is particularly concerned about the impact of the war on global food security. Ukraine and Russia are significant producers of grain, food products, and fertilisers.¹

The global food security situation has already been difficult prior to the war. For example, in East Africa and the Horn of Africa the widening hunger crisis caused by climate change affects millions of people.² Production chains of foodstuffs have been beleaguered due to the Covid-19 crisis and the rise of food prices, which began in the early days of the pandemic.

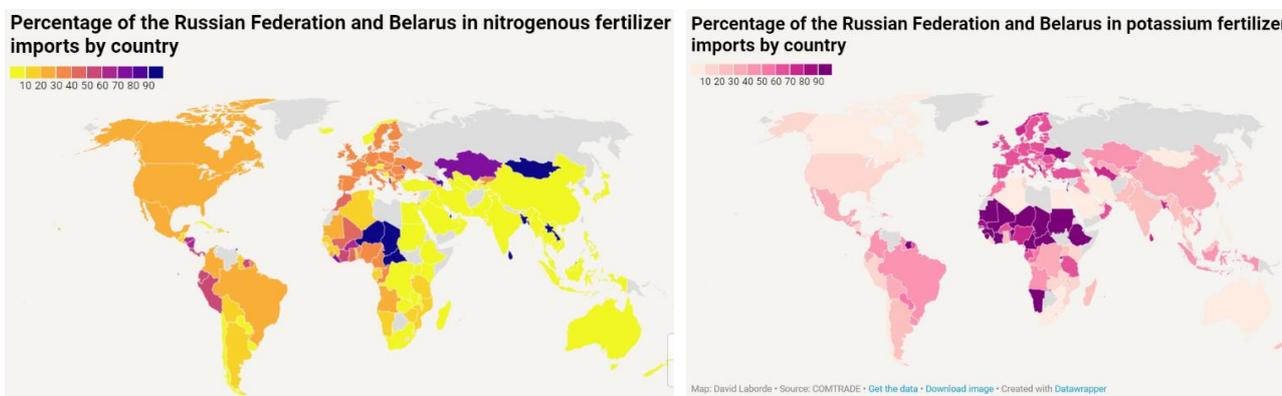


¹ <https://www.ifpri.org/blog/how-will-russias-invasion-ukraine-affect-global-food-security>

² <https://www.wfp.org/news/13-million-people-facing-severe-hunger-drought-grips-horn-africa>

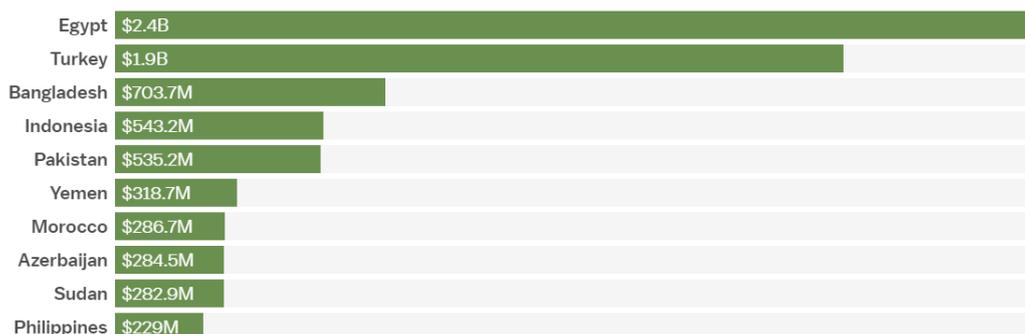
The Food Price index by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) hit a record high in February³, and the price of, for example, wheat has likewise risen rapidly. Many countries with otherwise vulnerable food security situations are dependent on wheat imports from Ukraine and Russia. For example, Lebanon, a country in a deep crisis, imported half of its wheat from Ukraine in 2020.⁴

Russia is also a big producer of fertilisers: its share of the world’s nitrogen fertilizer market is 15%, and in potassium fertiliser exports it is 17%. In potassium fertilisers, Belarus’ share of the global market is 16%. As a countersanction, Russia is considering halting its fertiliser exports; and the sanctions will also hit exports either way.⁵ On top of challenges in exports, the rise of the price of natural gas used in producing potassium fertilisers will make the prices of fertilisers climb even higher.



Top importers of wheat from Russia and Ukraine

Imported value in 2020



Source: International Trade Centre



³ <https://www.fao.org/newsroom/detail/fao-food-price-index-rises-to-record-high-in-february/en>

⁴ <https://www.vox.com/future-perfect/2022/2/27/22950805/russia-ukraine-food-prices-hunger-invasion-war>

⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/ukraine-crisis-russia-fertilizers-idNL2N2V71JG>



In Finland, it would be important to rapidly consider how to react to the situation both nationally as well as from the perspective of food security in developing countries. Good, ambitious international solutions are currently needed. At the same time, channelling the funding targeted at the private sector in developing countries to strengthen food security especially through small and medium-sized local companies should be considered. Many SMEs in developing countries have a huge potential to increase their efficiency and productivity if suitable support is available.

The impact of the food crisis on education

The food crisis has various effects on education, too. The pandemic has caused a significant learning loss in several developing countries where the opportunities to offer remote teaching have been limited. For example, in Uganda, one of Finn Church Aid's largest countries of operation, schools were closed for two years.

Now the likelihood of not returning to school or dropping out has further increased. In poor households living off small-scale farming, children and young people are needed for work and making a living. Girls are at particular risk of dropping out of school, as growing poverty leads to increasing numbers of child marriages and teenage pregnancies.

The importance of development funding and humanitarian aid

Russia's war in Ukraine and the global impact of the crisis highlight the need to hold on to the commitments made by Finland and the EU to increase development funding to 0.7% of GDP. Already before the war, the global need for humanitarian aid was at a record level due to the pandemic, climate crises, and prolonged conflicts.⁶

The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) must be adhered to, and the funding targeted at promoting them should increase, not decrease. The concern is that due to the war in Ukraine, other crises receive less

⁶ <https://gho.unocha.org/>

attention and, at worst, less funding; this leads to increasing instability in other parts of the world as well. There are already signs that humanitarian aid for other crises is suffering as financiers reallocate their aid to Ukraine.⁷

The experience of Finn Church Aid stresses that investing in education, livelihood, conflict prevention, and peace-work, as well as genuine partnerships, is the most effective and cheapest form of crisis management.

As regards to Finnish development funding, the decreasing share of humanitarian funding (excl. the year of covid-19, 2020) should be noted. In 2017, 10% of development funding was spent on humanitarian funding, and the anticipated share in 2022 is 7%.

We also want to pay attention to how, in rapidly developing crises such as Ukraine at the moment, it's important to channel Finland's humanitarian aid through Finnish NGOs.

Multilateral rule-based system

The international community has widely condemned Russia's attack on Ukraine. This is important, because it shows that it's not just a conflict between Russia and "the West".



In the UN Security Council, Kenya addressed the meeting in a noteworthy manner. The representative of Kenya pointed out that the borders of African states have been drawn far away in the capitals of former empires. If Africa were to only look at their colonial past and try to build ethnically and religiously homogenous states, the entire continent would be destined for decades of war.⁸

The Security Council failed to pass a resolution condemning Russia's attack due to Russia's veto. China, India, and the United Arab Emirates abstained from voting. The Council nevertheless decided to call for an exceptional emergency special session of the UN General Assembly, where 141 countries voted in favour of the resolution⁹ condemning Russia's attack, 35 countries abstained, and only five countries voted against.¹⁰

The UN Human Rights Council decided to establish an independent commission to investigate human rights violations committed during Russia's attack.¹¹ This resolution was supported by 32 countries, 12 abstained,

⁷ <https://www.nrc.no/news/2022/march/burkina-faso-second-biggest-spike-in-displacement-since-crisis-began/>

⁸ <https://twitter.com/KenyaMissionUN/status/1495963864004976645>

⁹ <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/N22/272/27/PDF/N2227272.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁰ https://twitter.com/UN_PGA/status/1499067097711886340

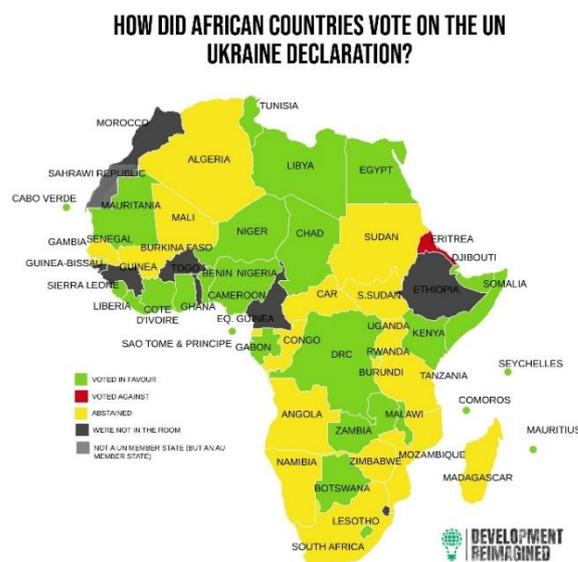
¹¹ <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/NewsDetail.aspx?NewsID=28203&LangID=E>

and only two countries voted against.¹² The decision taken by the Human Rights Council was notable also in the sense that the same council had previously voted to shut down the independent mechanism investigating human rights violations during the Yemeni Civil War. It is noteworthy that regional and rising powers China, India, and South Africa abstained from voting in favour of the UN resolutions.

Geopolitics in Africa

In recent years, Russia has strengthened its diplomacy in African countries. President Vladimir Putin outlined Africa as one of the priority regions in Russian foreign policy already in 2019.¹³

Russia has also boosted its military presence in different parts of Africa. Soldiers of the paramilitary organisation Wagner are present in Mali and the Central African Republic (CAR), where Finn Church Aid operates. CAR is the only African state to officially recognise the independence of the “People’s Republics” of Donetsk and Luhansk. Russia’s diplomacy in Africa was evident in the aforementioned UN General Assembly emergency session vote; as many as 17 African countries submitted a blank vote, 8 countries abstained, and Eritrea supported Russia.¹⁴



The Africa–EU summit, held just before the tensions rose in Ukraine, bore meagre results. Russia’s attack further highlights the importance of cherishing international law, including in the actions of the EU countries, and building partnerships with developing countries, which together form a majority in the UN General Assembly. In this regard, Africa is the most important strategic direction for the EU, but success will demand a long-talked-about readiness for a genuinely equal partnership with African states.

Syria

The attack on Ukraine will have an impact on other crisis hotspots around the world – for example Syria. Russia is an important ally for the Syrian government, and its role was crucial in ensuring the Assad regime survived the civil war. However, Russia’s attack on Ukraine can have an impact on the current, very fragile situation in Syria.

¹² https://twitter.com/UN_HRC/status/1499696876601462789
¹³ <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-45035889>
¹⁴ <https://twitter.com/DevReimagined/status/1499129413572640768>

Currently, the humanitarian aid provided across the northern border of Syria is based on a resolution by the UN Security Council. Russia has long criticised the resolution, which has led to the number of border crossings being reduced to just one. The culmination of the situation in Ukraine might result in Russia using its veto power to block the new resolution. The current resolution remains in force until 10 July.¹⁵ Halting the cross-border humanitarian aid would have a devastating impact on the humanitarian situation in northern Syria.



Turkey’s decision to prevent Russian warships from passing through Bosphorus might have an impact on the maintenance of Russia’s troops in Syria.¹⁶ A new escalation in the situation in Syria could lead to a new increase in the number of refugees in the region.

The biggest refugee crisis in Europe since WWII

At the time of writing, two weeks after Russia’s attack began, it is clear that Europe is facing its biggest refugee crisis since World War II.

- During the Yugoslav Wars (1991–96), approximately 2.5 million people sought asylum in Europe.
- During the Syrian war (2011–16) 3.2 million asylum seekers arrived in Europe.¹⁷
- Since the beginning of Russia’s attack, over 4 million people have fled Ukraine to neighbouring countries.¹⁸

The economic crisis caused by the sanctions, increasingly tense political climate, and the urge to avoid having to go to Ukraine to fight might lead to Russians leaving the country on a large scale – there are some indications of this already.¹⁹

The EU’s decision to automatically grant temporary protection to Ukrainians is an important and significantly better policy than, for example, the one in place during the 2015 refugee situation.²⁰ Temporary protection means that Ukrainians have the right to work, education, healthcare, and social security without the bureaucracy of an asylum



¹⁵ https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/s_res_2585.pdf

¹⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/2/russia-cancelled-black-sea-passage-bid-warships-turkey>

¹⁷ <https://theconversation.com/how-the-spectre-of-yugoslavia-looms-over-eus-handling-of-the-refugee-crisis-79393>

¹⁸ Updated figures: <http://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>

¹⁹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/03/people-leaving-russia-ukraine-war>

²⁰ <https://www.unhcr.org/news/press/2022/3/6221f1c84/news-comment-unhcr-welcomes-eu-decision-offer-temporary-protection-refugees.html>

process. This helps integration and, for example, ensuring the continuity of children's education.

If there's a will, there's a way to act systematically even with large numbers of refugees. There are good examples of this approach in other large refugee recipient countries, such as Uganda. It's also good to prepare for a significant number of refugees staying in Europe permanently.

Globally it has also been noticed how differently Europeans view Ukrainian refugees in comparison to Syrians and Afghans. Both from within Ukraine and the border with Poland there have been signals of racist treatment of non-Ukrainian refugees.²¹ The EU member states must ensure the good treatment of all refugees coming from Ukraine and communicate this to the Ukrainian government.

There are tens of thousands of African and Indian students in Ukraine pursuing higher education to become, for example, medical doctors.²² The failure of these dreams has a huge impact not only on the individuals but also their home countries.

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²¹ <https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/juliareinstein/african-students-racism-ukraine-invasion>

²² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-60603226>