

WAR FUELS FOOD CRISIS

Three compounding crises—conflict, COVID, and climate change—are giving rise to another: hunger.

FOOD PRICES ROSE 23 percent in 2021, ending several years of relative price stability, in part because extreme weather hurt harvests and energy costs climbed. Then came Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in late February, sending prices to an all-time high by disrupting commodity flows from two of the world’s largest exporters of wheat and other staples.

The invasion idled Ukraine’s once-busy Black Sea ports and left fields untended, while curbing Russia’s ability to export. The two countries account for a quarter of global exports of wheat and a fifth of barley and maize, and more than half of sunflower oil. They provide about an eighth of all calories traded in the world.

Importantly, food prices are rising along with, and because of, other major global economic challenges. Inflation is on the rise, and the pandemic continues to snarl supply chains, while climate change threatens production across many of the world’s agricultural regions, with more drought, flooding, heat, and wildfires.

Beyond disrupting food production and shipments, primarily from Ukraine, war also dents global food output through its effects on fertilizers, which already cost more because of rising energy prices. Russia and Ukraine are large producers of potash-based crop nutrients, and war has sent costs soaring.

What’s more, prices for natural gas, key to making fertilizer, have also jumped because of the war. Together, these factors are likely to keep food prices elevated into next year because crop yields will be reduced if less fertilizer is used and what’s grown will cost more to produce.

Protectionism, too, is a major concern. Many countries are halting shipments of grains and cooking oils, possibly in response to fears of social unrest. Nearly two dozen have turned to export restrictions so far, according to the International Food Policy Research Institute. This combination of conditions contributes to a grave outlook for global hunger.

All-time high

Global food prices had been relatively stable for several years, before shooting up on account of extreme weather and pandemic-related disruptions and surging further to reach a new record in March 2022 following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

(real food price index; 2014–16=100)

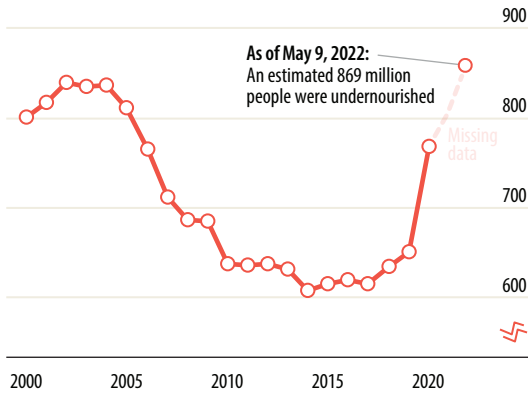


Source: United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO).

Undernourishment levels—the number of people who can't meet long-term food consumption requirements—rose dramatically by about 118 million people in 2020 after remaining largely unchanged for several years.

Two decades undone

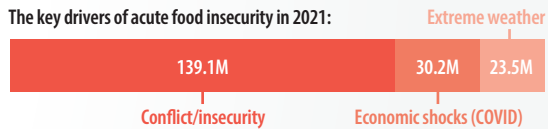
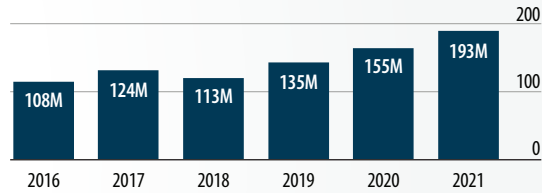
The number of people without sufficient food consumption is back to where it was in the early 2000s. (undernourishment, millions of people)



Source: UN FAOSTAT and World Food Program. Note: 2000–2020 is annual data from FAOSTAT. The dot for May 9, 2022 is an estimate from the World Food Program's HungerMapLIVE.

Acute hunger levels—the number of people unable to meet short-term food consumption needs—rose by nearly 40 million last year. Conflict was the primary driver of this, with 139 million people facing food crisis levels or worse across 24 countries in 2021. Now, Russia's war in Europe's breadbasket is adding to the risk of hunger and starvation for many millions more. **FD**

Before the war, 193 million people were already acutely food insecure across 53 countries.

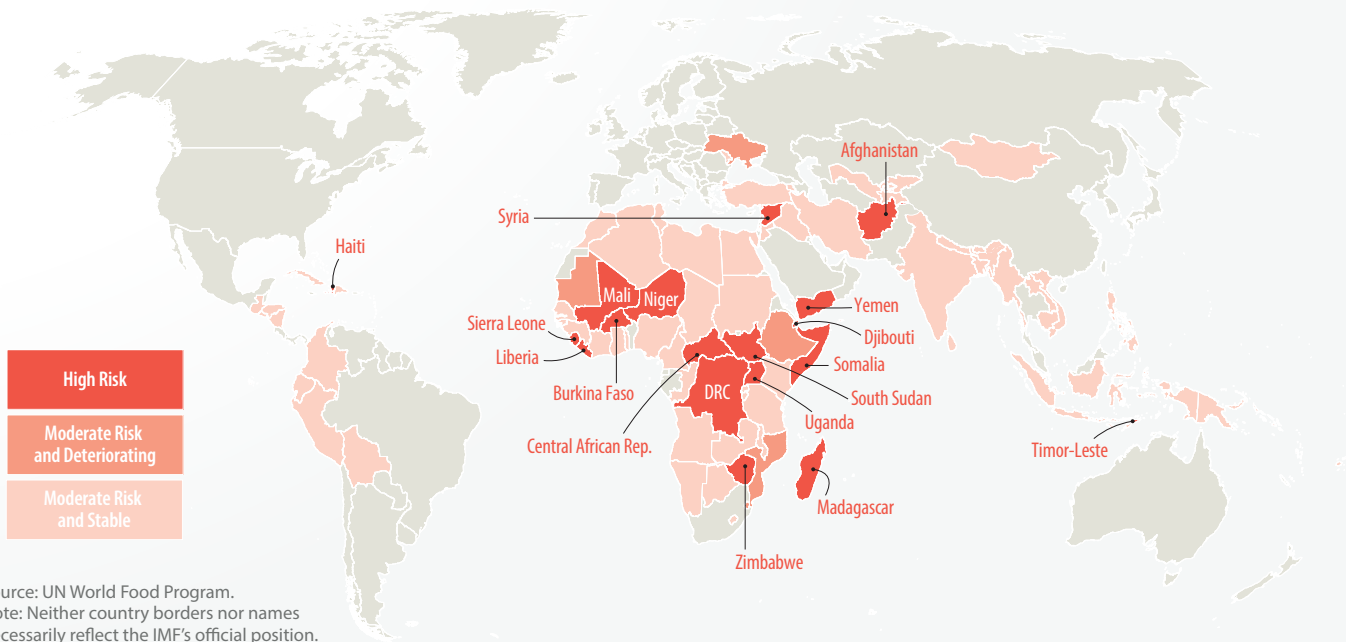


Source: UN World Food Program. Note: Factors can overlap. Data are based on the predominant driver.

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Hunger hotspots

As of May 9, 2022, there were 24 countries considered at high risk or moderate risk and deteriorating according to the World Food Program's HungerMapLIVE. (risk tiers based on the prevalence of insufficient food consumption and households using crisis-level food-based coping strategies)



Source: UN World Food Program. Note: Neither country borders nor names necessarily reflect the IMF's official position.