

# Question time: The impact on third countries of Russia's war on Ukraine in relation to the 'Black Sea Grain Initiative' agreement

Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine triggered fears of an unprecedented global food crisis, adding to the devastating impact of the war. A swift response by the international community, including the United Nations–Türkiye-brokered Black Sea Grain Initiative, has been instrumental in unblocking Ukrainian food exports and stabilising the markets. Combined with the EU solidarity lanes launched in May 2022, more than 25 million tonnes have been exported. On 17 November, Russia confirmed, *in extremis*, the extension of the initiative for four more months, after weeks of uncertainty and contradictory messages.

## Impact of the war on third countries' food security

Russia and Ukraine are [key agricultural players](#), accounting – before the war – for around 34 % of global wheat exports and nearly 12 % of food calories traded globally, and with Russia also being the largest exporter of mineral fertilisers. The [military blockade](#) of the Black Sea ports brought Ukrainian exports (95 % of which were shipped by sea) to an almost total halt between March and mid-August 2022. This supply shock, coupled with record price levels for energy and basic commodities, led several nations to adopt export restrictions, fuelling market shocks and speculative operations. The resulting severe unpredictability in global food supply had a [serious impact](#) on non-EU countries that rely heavily on basic commodity imports, with strong dependence on supplies originating in Russia and Ukraine. These [include](#) a number of countries already experiencing [severe food crises](#), such as Yemen, Sudan, Nigeria and Ethiopia. In addition, net food-importing developing countries (NFIDCs) are vulnerable to global [market disruption](#) provoked by the conflict. The increased costs of fertiliser, energy, seeds and pesticides also trigger rising prices for local production (or a production [decrease](#)); staple food prices have dramatically increased, notably in [eastern Africa](#). Higher prices and shortages also seriously [affect food assistance](#) to fragile countries. The Un Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that Russia's war on Ukraine risks raising the number of undernourished people in 2022-2023 by [7.6 to 13.1 million](#), mostly in the Asia-Pacific region (6.4 million), followed by Sub-Saharan Africa (5.1 million) and the Near East and North Africa (0.96 million). These figures might be higher, warns the [World Food Programme](#) (WFP), as the conflict and blockades are [prolonged](#).

## Impact on maritime logistics and connectivity

The war [impacted](#) maritime logistics and connectivity. Grain prices and shipping costs have been on the rise since 2020, due to the pandemic, and the war in Ukraine has [exacerbated](#) this global trend, reversing a temporary decline in shipping prices. UNCTAD reports that, between February and May 2022, the price paid for the transport of dry bulk goods such as grains increased by nearly [60 %](#).

## Black Sea Grain Initiative: State of play

The UN–Türkiye brokered [Black Sea Grain Initiative](#) (BSG), agreed on 22 July 2022 by Russia and Ukraine (through separately signed [agreements](#)), aims to facilitate safe navigation from Black Sea ports of export vessels containing grain, related foodstuffs and fertilisers. The implementation of the BSG is facilitated by a [Joint Coordination Centre](#) (JCC) based in Istanbul and including representatives of the four parties. Cargo ships are guided from the Black Sea ports into international waters, avoiding mined areas, through a safe maritime corridor. Ships are inspected by the JCC, which monitors the safe passage of ships and possible deviations from this corridor. Since the signature of the agreement, the [total tonnage](#) of grain and other foodstuffs exported from the [three Ukrainian ports](#) is over 11 million tonnes, through a total of 941 [voyages](#) (470 inbound and 471 outbound), as of 17 November 2022. [Over 25 %](#) of the cargo has reached low and lower-middle income countries. The BSG does not specify the destination of the exports, since food exports remain in the hands of commercial operations. It has nevertheless allowed [the WFP to ship grain](#) from



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Ukraine for the first time since the beginning of the war, and has made a key contribution to settling markets and lowering global prices, as well as liberating storage space for the next harvest. According to [UN estimates](#), it has indirectly prevented some 100 million people from falling into extreme poverty.

The initiative was initially envisaged to last for 120 days, until 19 November 2022, with an extension by default if none of the parties objected. At the end of October, following an alleged drone attack by Ukraine on the port at Sevastopol (Crimea), Russia [suspended](#) the agreement 'indefinitely', causing serious [concern](#). Under Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's personal [mediation](#), President Vladimir Putin agreed to the continuation of the deal, without altering the initial conditions but obtaining security reassurances, as well as a commitment that the UN will work to ensure that Russian food and fertiliser exports 'can also expeditiously reach global markets, in accordance with the [Memorandum of Understanding](#) with the Russian Federation, also signed on 22 July'. The continuation of the deal, however, was [not a guarantee](#) that the Russian side would agree to its extension beyond 19 November, and for weeks the Russian side played with the uncertainty, trying to obtain additional advantages.

Leaders of the G20 (meeting in Indonesia in November 2022) strongly [urged](#) the parties to renew the initiative. On 17 November, the [Russian Foreign Ministry](#) confirmed it did not object to extending the Black Sea grain deal for 120 days, without alterations, [indicating](#) in a brief statement that [the second aspect](#) of the deal – the elimination of obstacles to the export of Russian agricultural products – should be resolved within that period, and that any attempts to use the humanitarian corridor in the Black Sea 'for provocative military purposes will be resolutely suppressed'. Two additional conditions put forward by the Russian side, namely the re-connection to the SWIFT system of the state-owned Russian Agricultural Bank ([Rosselkhozbank](#)), and the reopening of a key ammonia export pipeline, were discarded. The same fate befell the modifications proposed by Ukraine, namely [expanding](#) the scope of the agreement to include two more of its seaports, and extending the duration of the agreement for a year.

The *in extremis* renewal has been [welcomed](#), with a sense of relief. However, it creates a new deadline in March 2023 for extending the deal again, giving Moscow's further leverage to threaten to quit the agreement and demand concessions on Western sanctions.

### European Union position

The March 2022 [Versailles Declaration](#) agreed by the EU leaders urged the European Commission to present options to address rising food and input prices and enhance global food security in the light of Russia's war, and since then food security has remained at the top of the agenda. The Commission swiftly presented a package of measures in the 23 March 2022 [communication](#) on 'Safeguarding food security and reinforcing the resilience of food systems', covering EU and international initiatives, and has continued to enhance its [response](#) by maintaining agricultural production, increasing humanitarian support, facilitating open trade and effective multilateralism. On 12 May 2022, the Commission launched the EU '[solidarity lanes](#)' initiative, facilitating the export of blocked Ukrainian agricultural products to third countries through alternative EU road, rail and water corridors. As of 12 November 2022, [15 million](#) tonnes of grain, oilseeds and related products had been exported via these corridors. The EU has also [welcomed](#) the renewal of the BSG.

### European Parliament position

The European Parliament has firmly condemned Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, notably in its resolutions of [1 March](#), [8 June](#) and [6 October](#) 2022. In its 24 March [resolution](#), the EP called for an 'urgent EU action plan to ensure food security inside and outside the EU in light of the Russian invasion of Ukraine', including safe food corridors to and from Ukraine to deliver aid and goods (later implemented as solidarity lanes), and warning against speculative behaviour on the food market. It also proposed that the EU budget's emergency aid reserves be used to increase support to the World Food Programme. In its 19 May 2022 [resolution](#) on 'the fight against impunity for war crimes in Ukraine', the EP called for 'investigations into alleged pillaging and destruction of food storage facilities by Russian forces and their proxies, as well as a meaningful assessment of their global impact, in particular on food-importing developing countries'. Furthermore, the EP held a plenary [debate](#) on 6 July 2022 on 'Facilitating export of Ukrainian agricultural products: key for Ukrainian economy and global food security'.

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