The outbreak of the war in Ukraine, involving two major suppliers of food and agricultural commodities to the world market, posed multiple risks for global food security at a time when the world was on a recovery path from the COVID-19 pandemic. These risks, related to logistics, production, prices and energy, were mostly prominent in 2022 and have gradually and partially diminished as global markets adjusted and absorbed some of the impacts.

The war had an immediate impact on the capacities of both Ukraine and the Russian Federation to execute existing export contracts and conclude new trade deals. This was particularly the case for Ukraine, where the war initially caused the cessation of commercial shipping operations; the temporary suspension of activities by private grain and crushing operators; damages to inland transport, storage and processing facilities; and the introduction of licensing requirements or outright bans on exports of some products.

The loss of Ukraine’s maritime shipping capacity, which handles nearly 90 percent of offshore sales, had a significant impact on world markets and prices. Efforts to boost food exports using alternative routes provided some relief; however, the export capacity was constrained by infrastructural and logistical damages as well as limited railway, car availability and incompatible rail gauges at the borders. There was also an impact on neighbouring countries. The European Union’s “Solidarity Lanes”, introduced in May 2022, facilitated the exports of Ukrainian cereals and oilseeds but created challenges in the neighbouring countries, as the lack of sufficient storage infrastructure and onward transportation resulted in falling prices in domestic markets and sparked protests among farmers in these countries.

Moreover, the war caused a surge of export restrictions on food and fertilizers imposed by third countries to protect local markets. The scale of restrictions had surpassed that experienced during the global food price crisis in 2007/08 and further contributed to increasing food and agricultural prices.

The war and the disruptions caused to economic activities were particularly severe on Ukraine's agricultural sector, causing an estimated USD 10 billion in damages and USD 70 billion in losses, which have impacted the nature and scale of the country's agricultural activities.

The war could also impact Ukraine's agricultural production outlook for the years to come. This is of particular concern for wheat, considering that while in the occupied oblasts farmers primarily planted wheat; they shifted to sunflower seed and rapeseed in the government-controlled areas, which require fewer inputs and thus, have lower production costs.

Since 2022, FAO provided support to over 205 000 rural families and more than 12 000 small farmers, focusing on the most affected oblasts of Ukraine. Around 82 850 rural families received vegetable seeds and seed potatoes; over 6 600 received winter wheat seeds; over 46 000 rural families received animal feed; 7 300 rural families received one-day-old chicks and feed; more than 54 600 families received cash assistance; and around 27 500 families received vouchers to repair livestock shelters, purchase inputs or animal health kits. More than 5 500 farmers received 2 tonnes of either spring barley, spring wheat, spring peas, soybeans, or winter wheat seeds each to sow 10 hectares of land. Over 4 600 farmers received either seeds of sunflower or maize to sow 25-30 hectares of land. Over 1 800 farmers received grain storage sleeves or modular storage units; and around 90 agrifood processors have received power generators to support energy supply needs in areas near the frontline where power supply was disrupted. Furthermore, over 40 small-scale producers from western Ukraine have received matching grants to sustain production, improve efficiency and profitability, and ultimately strengthen national agricultural supply chains.
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