

# Recipe for Response: What We Know About the Next Global Food Crisis, and How to Fight it

For the [811 million](#) people around the globe living in hunger, the effects of the conflict in Ukraine represent another deeply alarming threat to their food security. Women, children, and other marginalized groups, who disproportionately bear the brunt of hunger crises, are especially vulnerable. **Without urgent humanitarian action, we risk letting millions more people reach the brink of famine.**

## No Calm Before the Storm

The genesis of the present hunger crisis goes back farther than February 2022 and is due to a combination of global and localized factors. Globally, climate change has compromised agricultural livelihoods and led to displacement, especially in regions like the Horn of Africa and Central America's Dry Corridor, where farmers struggle to produce yields that meet the needs of local markets. The global economic fallouts associated with COVID-19, and inadequate social safety nets, have led to record unemployment and growing poverty—especially for women and women-led households ([UN Women 2021](#))—so that even where food is available, high prices put basic items out of reach for many. Armed conflict is also driving food insecurity, for example by making it difficult for farmers to cultivate their lands, or damaging or disrupting vital agricultural infrastructure—such as transportation, storage and distribution sites—and reducing access to markets and assistance.

Women and girls are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity and related shocks. Gender norms and roles mean that women are often responsible for their households' food security, including shopping for and preparing food, yet they might also be the ones to eat “last and least” in their household. Women are also more likely to be excluded from decision-making when it comes

to addressing hunger in their communities ([CARE 2020](#)). These types of gendered imbalances hurt entire communities: in a 2021 assessment in Sudan, CARE found that 82% of people living in female-headed households reported recently skipping a meal, compared with 56% of people living in male-headed households.

In other words, **there was already an urgent need to mobilize a robust, gender-sensitive humanitarian response to food insecurity** before the current Ukraine armed conflict began in February 2022.



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## What's Changed

The conflict in Ukraine is having grave effects on global food security. Widespread reporting has highlighted the importance of Russia and Ukraine as suppliers of cooking oils, fertilizer,

fuel, and grain ([Reuters 2022](#)). The sudden, multi-level disruption to these key agricultural supply chain inputs has pushed up global food staple prices. Price hikes and diminished food supplies are devastating for communities that were already experiencing food insecurity crises, and risk jeopardizing the food security of millions more.

While robust data on the precise effects of the Ukraine conflict is still being collected and analyzed, existing evidence reveals the places we need to watch. In these areas, women are particularly likely to be negatively affected, since they already subsist on smaller diets of less nourishing food. In Afghanistan, where at least 23 million people are facing crisis-level food insecurity or worse, wheat imported from Russia makes up a significant part of the national diet ([USIP 2022](#)). In a 2021 CARE assessment, men in Afghanistan were three times more likely to report having a balanced diet than women ([CARE 2021](#)).



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We also know that women report increased rates of violence when they are facing humanitarian crises, such as famines ([IRC 2015](#)). The risk of intimate partner violence

rises, as does the likelihood that women and girls are forced to engage in high-risk coping mechanisms like transactional sex or early marriage ([CARE 2021](#)). In addition, the scarcer that food becomes, the more vulnerable women are to sexual exploitation and abuse ([CARE 2021](#)).

### **The Risks of Inaction**

Without humanitarian and development interventions to provide flexible assistance to people experiencing acute food insecurity, the shocks from the Ukraine conflict will deepen poverty and increase hunger around the world, especially for women, girls, and other vulnerable groups.

As the supply shocks affect agricultural and non-agricultural markets, unemployment and prices will rise. This will leave people with lower income and fewer resources to access food, especially in countries like Afghanistan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and Yemen, which relied heavily on Russian and Ukrainian imports. The threat of soaring fertilizer and fuel prices will be particularly challenging for those whose rural livelihoods were already precarious, such as small-scale producers. Finally, as food insecurity worsens, protection risks grow for women and girls, leading to a higher chance that they experience displacement, GBV, and loss of livelihoods.

Despite these well-known gendered risks, global food security plans consistently fail to acknowledge women ([CARE 2021](#)). Even key early warning tools like the IPC still fail to collect data on gender, complicating the challenge of providing effective, gender-sensitive food security interventions around the world.

## **Recommendations:**

***There will be deadly consequences for people living in hunger if we don't respond now to global food insecurity. Donors, states, and the humanitarian community must come together to massively scale-up solutions to halt famine in the hardest-hit regions like the [Horn of Africa](#), and improve anticipatory action wherever crisis looms.***

### **To Donors:**

1. Do not divert aid from pre-existing crises to address the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine.
2. Scale-up flexible aid to organizations—including women-led organizations—that are already working to respond to hunger in their communities.
3. Fund humanitarian assistance appeals overall to address the "secondary" impacts, such as heightened protection risks and population displacement, of the food insecurity crisis.
4. Increase targeted assistance – such as health, GBV, and livelihoods programming and associated funding – toward the most vulnerable populations, including women-headed households, pregnant and lactating women, and children under 5 years.
5. Tailor assistance modalities to particular contexts, considering cash, voucher, in-kind food assistance, or humanitarian agricultural support to increase resilience to global market disruptions.

### **To States:**

1. Facilitate safe, unimpeded humanitarian access to all communities in need.
2. Redouble efforts to end conflict through peaceful means, including the leadership and participation of women and girls.
3. Mitigate the humanitarian impacts of sanctions on key sectors, including financial access and commercial imports/exports of food and fuel. Where possible, keep international trade open and diversify imports.
4. Promote social safety net programs to help households deal with increasing food prices and ensure that women and girls have equal access to programs.
5. Help small-scale producers cope by investing in domestic food production through the promotion of agroecological practices, efficient fertilizer use, renewable energy and the empowerment of women producers.

### **To the Humanitarian Community:**

1. Improve the design and implementation of early warning systems by making them gender sensitive.
2. Ensure that all food security analyses and response plans consider the particular challenges that women and girls face, as well as how their unique experiences position them to find solutions to global hunger.
3. Enhance contingency planning and pre-positioning before the onset of a crisis where possible.