

The Russian-Ukrainian War and Its Impact on Arab food Security

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Introduction

The challenges of the global economy are increased between the repercussions of the Covid-19 pandemic, and an unprecedented inflationary wave that intensified in the wake of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis. The continuous of this war raises fears of an outbreak of a food crisis in several Arab countries, which depended for their imports of grain - especially wheat - on Russia and Ukraine; Due to the low prices in these two countries. Consequently, these countries turn to other countries to import these crops, such as: the United States or Canada and also the countries of Latin America, which leads to raising their prices, due to the distance, especially since the price of oil is high, which is reflected in the cost of transporting goods between countries. The end of food security for Arab countries.

How will the Arab countries be affected by the Ukraine-Russia war

The Arab countries collectively import 60% of their grain needs from Russia and Ukraine, in addition to France and Romania. But Russia and Ukraine have a special international weight in supplying Arab countries with grain, given their low price in both countries. Most of the Arab countries, in which bread is a staple food, depend mainly on wheat imports from Russia and Ukraine. In 2020, for example, Arab countries alone acquired about 35.3% of Russia's total exports, and about 42.1% of Ukraine's total exports. The following is a review of the reasons why some Arab countries are affected by each country separately:

Egypt: It is the largest importer of wheat in the world, and the second largest importer from Russia, and has purchased 3.5 million tons of wheat until mid-January 2021. In 2021, Egypt imported about 50% of wheat from Russia and 30% from Ukraine.

Yemen: Is more threatened by a crisis in its nutritional status than it is. Because it gets half of its grain needs, and more than a third of its wheat needs from Russia and Ukraine.

Lebanon: Lebanon imports between 600 and 650 thousand tons annually, 80% of which are from Ukraine, and the rest from Russia and other countries, in addition to the current stock being sufficient for only a month and a half.

Morocco: depends on Ukraine to provide 19.5% of its wheat needs, while it gets 10.5% from Russia.

Tunisia: It imports about 60% of its wheat from Ukraine and Russia, and it has enough stocks until June 2022, and prices there have risen to the highest level in 14 years.

Algeria: The second consumer of wheat in Africa and the fifth importer of cereals in the world, the stock is sufficient for at least six months.

Sudan: 46% of its wheat imports come from Russia, while it does not import Ukrainian wheat.

Gulf countries: There may not be any impact on their food security, as they have the ability to absorb a higher cost of imports if they rise thanks to their financial capabilities.

Procedures taken by some Arab countries to maintain food security

Tunisia: It sought to secure a new financing program from the International Monetary Fund, which will likely lead to reduced subsidies for commodities such as flour and sugar, as well as electricity for a large number of families.

Egypt: Bread selling prices have been raised. Egypt tends to buy wheat from other suppliers, especially Romania. According to the government's assurances, it has sufficient strategic stocks until the end of 2022. The export ban on "gravel and crushed beans, lentils, wheat, and flour of all kinds, as well as pasta of all kinds", for a period of 3 months, starting from March 11, 2022.

Algeria: Bakeries raised the prices of subsidized bread.

Morocco: Flour subsidy allocations increased to 350 million euros, and customs duties on wheat imports were suspended. A plan was also announced that would see a cut in subsidies for low-cost sugar and wheat flour starting in 2022.

Saudi Arabia: It has launched a working capital financing program (for existing projects only) with one billion riyals to import barley, soybeans and yellow corn in cooperation with 4 local banks with the aim of enhancing food security and strategic stocks of these commodities, without administrative and financial costs. Companies were also exempted from the financial costs of financing to encourage them to invest in food.

The conclusion of the above is that the Russian-Ukrainian crisis represents a serious, existential and direct threat to Arab food security, which calls for urgent solutions to reduce the consequences of this crisis. Perhaps the first lesson learned from this crisis is to expedite the establishment of the Arab Common Market in order to enhance food security for all countries in the region, by investing in joint Arab agricultural projects, given the presence of huge Arab financial surpluses, vast Arab arable lands, and distinguished Arab resources and experiences in several areas are linked in one way or another to the food production process, and they lack only integration in this regard. On the other hand, Arab countries must diversify their food import sources, especially wheat.

The following are some of the procedures that Arab countries should take to reduce the effects of the Russian-Ukrainian war:

1. **In the short term:** the need to diversify the sources of food import, and to find alternatives to Ukraine and Russia. And start negotiations with other countries on new contracts to supply wheat.
2. **In the long term:** consider options to reduce the gap between domestic supply and demand, such as:
 - Increasing production of local wheat by expanding the area of arable land,
 - Modernizing farming systems and improving water management practices,
 - Adapting the farming system to address impending water shortages and the threats of climate change.
 - Reducing the high rates of bread consumption and waste.
 - Paying attention to agricultural projects that support the establishment of the pillars of food security and the settlement of the local industry; In order to achieve food self-sufficiency.

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