



Global Gendered Impacts of the Ukraine Crisis

on Energy Access and Food Security and Nutrition



United Nations



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Market women in Abuja, Nigeria sell cassava flour. Mixing cassava flour with wheat flour is one way to cope with high wheat prices and shortages due to the Russia-Ukraine war.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres stated unequivocally that “the war’s impact on food security, energy and finance is systemic, severe, and speeding up.” The war in Ukraine has had devastating impact on women and girls worldwide, widening gender gaps and increasing rates of food insecurity, malnutrition and energy poverty. This brief reviews the available evidence of that impact, recommending urgent attention to its consequences for women and girls. It is complementary to the briefs produced by the UN Global Crisis Response Group on the consequences of the war in Ukraine and the global response and recovery. Its findings underline the global impacts on gender equality and women’s rights that have been compounded by climate change, environmental degradation and the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating further entrenched inequalities and human rights violations.

The cost-of-living crisis has acutely threatened women’s livelihoods, health and wellbeing and stymied progress on the Sustainable Development Goals. It has been propelled by the war’s disruptions of oil and gas supplies and staple food commodities, including wheat, corn and sunflower oil, alongside the skyrocketing food, fuel and fertilizer prices. The Joint Coordination Centre of the Black Sea Grain Initiative has begun to authorize the departure of ships carrying grain from Ukrainian ports, with the first leaving on 1 August. This is expected to help mitigate these disruptions. Nevertheless, the crisis has exacerbated the gender gap in food insecurity, reversed progress on access to modern energy and caused a return to use of unhealthy biomass for fuel for cooking and heating. Alarming increases in gender-based violence, transactional sex for food and survival, sexual exploitation and trafficking, child marriage with girls forced to leave school, and women’s and girls’ unpaid care and domestic workloads to provision households and communities are further endangering women’s and girls’ physical and mental health. These are being documented in Ukraine and in food-insecure and energy-poor conflict, crisis and humanitarian settings worldwide.

Systemic, gendered crises require systemic, gendered solutions. Gender equality considerations remain largely missing from discussions on the Ukraine crisis and more gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data are needed to inform and shape the response. ‘Business as usual’ will

not achieve a global recovery. Fossil-fuel-based agriculture and energy are simply no longer viable in the face of the environmental, economic and social risks that threaten the planet and the lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of women and girls - and of all people.

It has never been more urgent to adopt gender-responsive, climate-resilient and sustainable food and energy systems that have women and girls at their centre. This means ensuring women’s and girls’ voice, agency, participation and leadership in the decisions and policies that are being developed at all levels to address food insecurity and energy poverty in Ukraine and across the globe, and particularly in crisis, conflict and humanitarian contexts.

The achievement of food security, adequate nutrition, energy access and renewable energy for all, requires the creation of fiscal space for gender-responsive investment and funding. This includes measures such as windfall taxes on oil and gas companies. Phasing out fossil fuel subsidies would allow funds to be reallocated to gender equality and social protection for all, to ensure food availability and energy access through diverse, tailored measures for women and girls.

Renewed global solidarity and feminist multilateralism are urgently needed to support all crises-affected peoples and realize everyone’s rights to food and an adequate standard of living. Partnerships between governments and civil society can scale up gender-responsive sustainable agriculture and agroecology as alternatives to industrial agriculture, with proven benefits for communities and environments. This brief’s recommendations provide the essential measures that we must take to achieve the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

All conflicts, from Ukraine to Myanmar to Afghanistan, from the Sahel to Yemen, exact their highest price from women and girls. The stakes could not be higher. As a global community we must rise to the challenge.



Sima Bahous

UN Women Executive Director

FOREWORD

In *The Unwomanly Face of War*, the Nobel-laureate Svetlana Alexievich writes: “Women’s war has its own colors, its own smells, its own lighting, and its own range of feelings. There are no heroes and incredible feats; there are simply people who are busy doing inhumanly human things. And it is not only they (people!) who suffer, but the earth, the birds, the trees. All that lives on earth with us. They suffer without words, which is still more frightening.”

Unrelenting climate change disasters, two and a half years of COVID, and six months of war in Ukraine give ample proof to Alexievich’s statement. At times when there is great suffering, women and girls suffer differently. Crises have gendered impacts and must therefore have gendered solutions. Ignoring this increases inequality, making gaps that were already too wide get wider, and reduces resilience, because we are worse off after every crisis. This, that by now should be patently obvious to all, is still dangerously overlooked.

This urgent UN Women brief on the ‘Global Gendered Impacts of the Ukraine Crisis’ directly addresses the problem. This document is rich with real-world examples of how the war in Ukraine, and its global impacts on food, energy and finance, is affecting women and girls around the world. From its effects on school-aged girls who are at risk of dropping out and child marriage, to the personal and physical challenges of the estimated 265,000 Ukrainian women who were pregnant when the war broke out; from the women small-holder farmers struggling to pay for energy and fertilizers, to the millions of women and girls who in the face of hunger will eat last and least in the household; from the lasting suffering inflicted by the extremely alarming growth in gender-based violence in the context of war, to COVID-related increases in gender gaps likely prolongation and deterioration in the context of yet another major cost-of-living shock. This brief highlights once more that this “crisis...

deepens and aggravates pre-existing structural inequalities” which overwhelmingly and disproportionality affect women in all dimensions – including in food, energy, and finance. Fair, sensible, and critical policy solutions are offered accordingly.

This document cements the collaboration of UN Women with the UN Global Crisis Response Group on the War in Ukraine (GCRG), set up by the UN Secretary-General to address the multi-dimensional nature of this crisis. UN Women has been a critical ally in the GCRG’s work, which has highlighted in its research the effect of the crisis on women and girls around the world. This brief goes a step further, curating, consolidating, and adding new research to this important body of work.

In the context of the start of the 77th Session of the UN General Assembly, I urge all policymakers and member states to read and heed the call of this important document. The war in Ukraine is producing profound impacts far from its borders, and women and girls are at the frontline. Their problems might be invisible to many, but they are very real to them.

Alexievich argued that suffering without words is the most frightening of all. This report seeks to address that silence, the persistent invisibility of women’s and girls’ particular needs and challenges and their exclusion from decision making processes, which deepens their vulnerability around the world. Suffering with words is no less painful — but it cannot longer be ignored. The world must act with haste.



Rebeca Grynspan

*UNCTAD Secretary-General and Coordinator
of the Global Crisis Response Group Task Team*

INTRODUCTION

Following months of speculation, the world woke up on 24 February 2022 to the news of war between Russia and Ukraine. The effects have been devastating. After six months, nearly 7.3 million people have fled Ukraine¹ and 7.7 million are internally displaced, most of whom are women and children.² This exacerbated an existing crisis due to conflict in eastern Ukraine in 2014, when more than 1.5 million people, two thirds of them women and children, were already internally displaced and suffering from impeded access to health care, housing and employment.³

Beyond the humanitarian impact in Ukraine, the damage of the war is being felt on a global scale including critical impacts on food systems and energy supply and affordability. Russia's and Ukraine's key roles in global markets for energy and staple food commodities (wheat, corn, sunflower oil, among others) have led to record price hikes of essential food and energy derived from crude oil and natural gas.⁴ As [Figure 1](#) shows, since January 2022 food prices are up over 50 per cent while crude oil is up over 33 per cent.⁵ New research shows that local communities across Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East have been hard hit by skyrocketing prices propelled by the war.⁶ The spike in energy prices over the past two years is the biggest since the 1973 oil crisis, while the jump in food prices is the highest since 2008,⁷ disproportionately affecting women's and children's food security and nutrition and exacerbating women's energy poverty. Even prior to the war an estimated 44 million people were already at the brink of famine due to the COVID-19 pandemic and impacts of climate change and conflict.⁸

Globally, approximately 733 million people, disproportionately women and girls, still lack access to electricity and 2.4 billion people still lack access to clean cooking, to the detriment of their health and the environment.⁹ During the pandemic, these figures worsened, as household budgets declined and families returned to using less clean fuels and technologies, again mostly affecting the health of women and girls.¹⁰ Given the devastating impacts of the war in Ukraine on energy production, distribution, prices and access, it is expected that the gender gap in energy poverty will continue to widen in developing countries, which are at risk of being priced out of energy markets, perpetuating gender inequalities in education, employment, health and rights, among others.¹²

The cost-of-living crisis has led to more people experiencing hunger, energy poverty and economic instability with gender-differentiated impacts. Even in times of peace, women around the world tend to be more food insecure than men, but amid conflict and crises, entrenched gender inequalities mean

that women and girls often eat less and last and their nutritional needs may be side lined, deepening hunger, malnutrition and poverty.¹³

Because the humanitarian crisis of any war further deepens and aggravates pre-existing structural inequalities, including gender inequalities as well as human rights violations, the implications for women and girls in Ukraine and beyond are an urgent concern. Trends over the past eight years show that the Ukrainian crisis will have divergent impacts on women and men, girls and boys, with distinct and disproportionate impacts on marginalized groups, such as women-headed households, older women, gender-diverse persons, people with disabilities and minorities, including Roma people.¹⁴

Yet, gender equality considerations are largely missing from discussions on the Ukraine crisis despite women performing vital roles in the immediate humanitarian response.¹⁵ This brief delves into the impacts of the war on women's and girls' food security and nutrition and energy access in Ukraine and globally and draws out key recommendations for different actors, including policymakers, for adopting gender-responsive and human-rights based crisis response and recovery measures critical for achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

NEARLY 7.3 MILLION

**PEOPLE HAVE
FLED UKRAINE AND**

7.7 MILLION

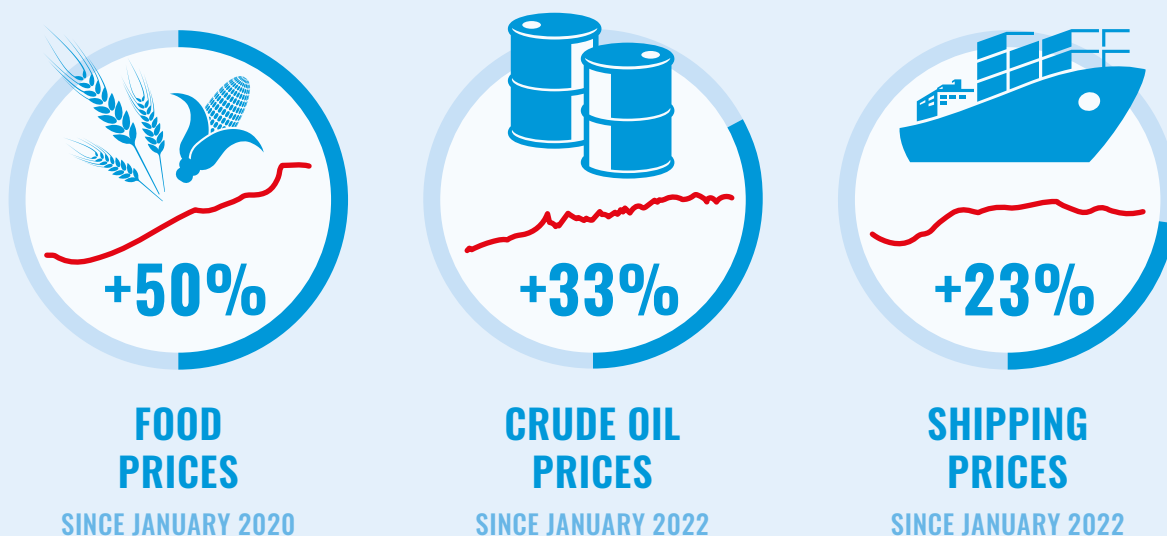
**ARE INTERNALLY DISPLACED,
MOST OF WHOM ARE**

**WOMEN AND
CHILDREN**



Figure 1

PULSE OF THE GLOBAL CRISIS



Source: Global Crisis and Recovery Group. 2022. [Brief No. 3, Global impact of war in Ukraine: Energy crisis](#). August.

Note: Food prices are based on the FAO food price index and shipping prices are based on the Clarksons Research sea index.

IMPACTS OF THE WAR IN UKRAINE ON FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION

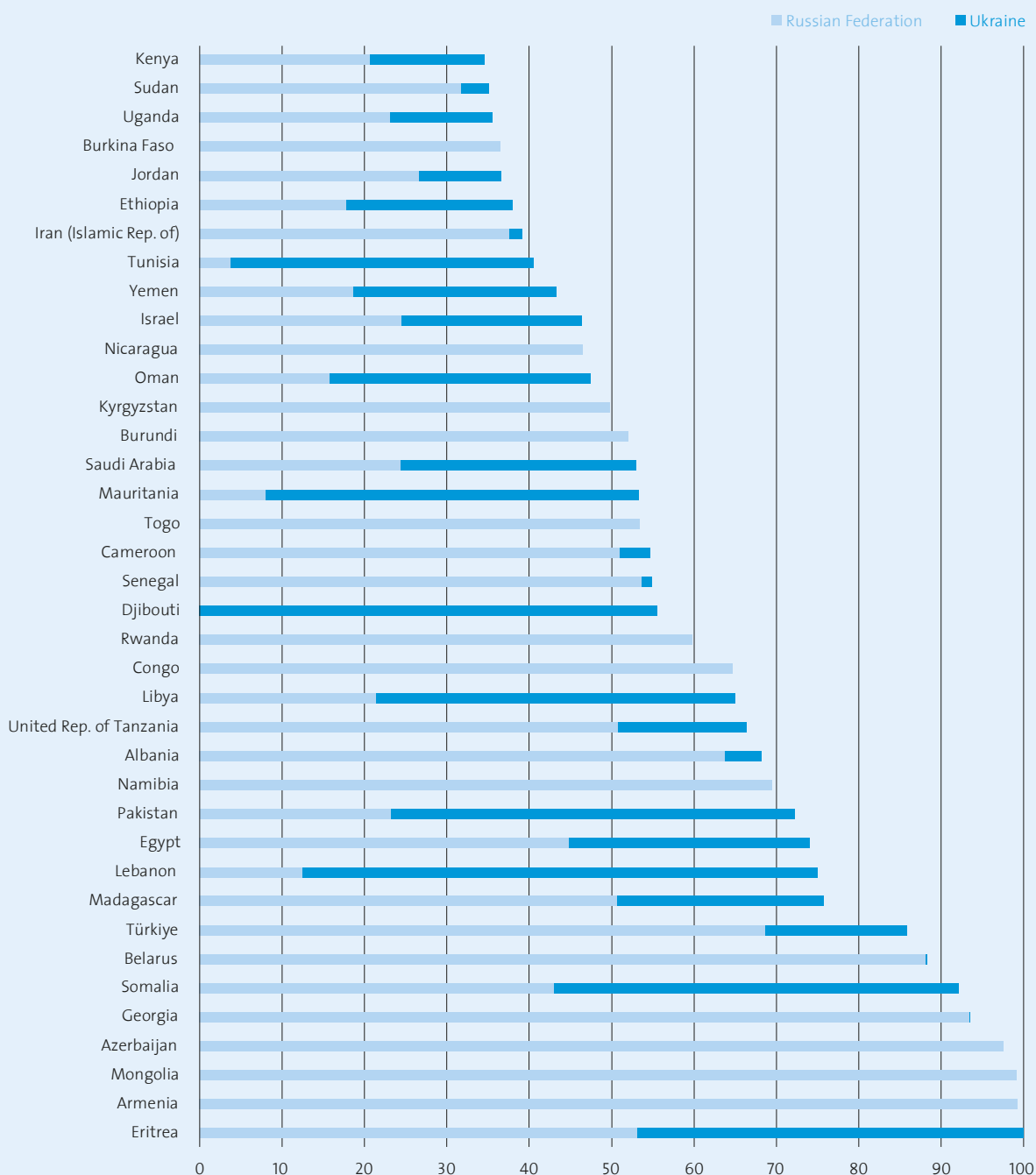
The interlinked climate, environmental and COVID-19 crises coupled with conflicts in Ukraine and elsewhere are among the most important drivers of food insecurity and hunger.¹⁶ Russia and Ukraine are key players in global markets for staple food commodities and energy. The war has disrupted exports, which means a large portion of the world's wheat, corn and barley remains in Russia and Ukraine, while an even larger portion of the world's fertilizers, critical for productive agriculture especially in soil-depleted countries, remains in Russia and Belarus.¹⁷

Figure 2 shows the reliance of countries across the world on Russian and Ukrainian grain exports before the war; over 90 per cent of wheat in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Eritrea, Georgia, Mongolia and Somalia was imported from Russia and Ukraine,

making these countries highly vulnerable to food insecurity. Furthermore, Ukraine is a major source of wheat for the World Food Programme (WFP), which assists 115.5 million people in more than 120 countries.¹⁸

Figure 2

WHEAT IMPORT DEPENDENCY, NET IMPORTERS, 2021 (%)



Source: FAO. 2022. Information Note: [The importance of Ukraine and the Russian Federation for global agricultural markets and the risks associated with the war in Ukraine](#). 10 June.

And the disruptions are not only immediate but will be felt over the long term. It is estimated that 30 per cent of Ukrainian farmland will not be harvestable because of infrastructure and land destroyed by the war.¹⁹ As the country is likely to miss the critical 2022 planting season, and without regular access to fertilizers,²⁰ the war may have long-term and dire consequences on global food security and nutrition. This is further exacerbated by the millions of Ukrainians fleeing the country or joining the front lines, leading to a shortage of labour in the agriculture sector.²¹

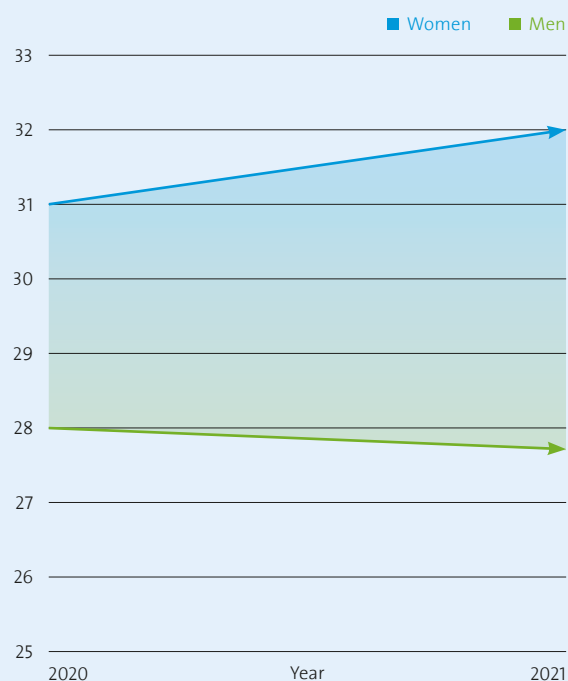
The increased pressure on resources and food access beyond Ukraine's borders will have disproportionate impacts on less developed countries.²² The Black Sea basin, a global hub for trade, was closed to commercial exports, disrupting food supply to countries that depend on Ukraine's agricultural production.²³ The Joint Coordination Centre of the Black Sea Grain Initiative has begun to authorize the departure of ships carrying grain from Ukrainian ports, with the first leaving on 1 August, which is expected to help mitigate these disruptions.²⁴

Globally, prices of food, particularly wheat – and hence bread – corn, sunflower oil and barley, and fertilizer soared in the first quarter of 2022 and although they have begun to stabilize in the second quarter, low-income households remain disproportionately affected by this cost-of-living crisis. For example, wheat prices surged 30 per cent in the first quarter of 2022, while fertilizer prices are projected to increase by almost 70 per cent in 2022.²⁵ The conflict is severely limiting access to food for millions of the most vulnerable people around the world. In 2022, an estimated 345 million people across 82 countries are facing acute food insecurity or are at high risk, an increase of almost 200 million people from pre-pandemic levels, and 50 million people are facing emergency or worse levels of acute food insecurity across 45 countries.²⁶ This comes on the back of a widening gender gap in food insecurity, which grew from 1.7 per cent in 2019 to more than four per cent in 2021, with 31.9 per cent of women moderately or severely food insecure compared to 27.6 per cent of men; thus globally and across regions, women are more food insecure than men²⁷ (see Figures 3 and 4). In 2022, the number of food insecure women assisted by the World Food Programme has nearly doubled.²⁸

Acute hunger levels and famine-like conditions have been driven by a toxic combination of factors, including lingering pandemic impacts, extreme weather and climate shocks,

Figure 3

PREVALENCE OF MODERATE OR SEVERE FOOD INSECURITY (%), BY SEX

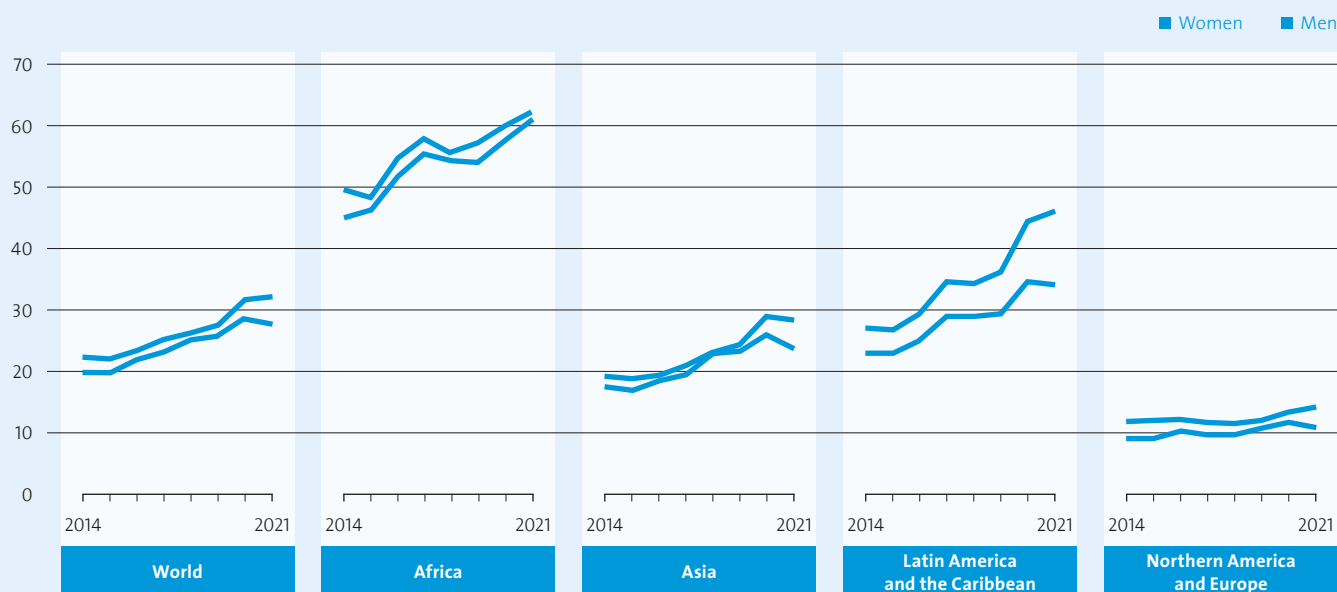


Source: Data calculated based on [UN Women Sustainable Development Goals dataset](#) (2020) and the [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World](#) (2022).

increasing number of conflicts, transboundary pests and difficulties reaching people in need, especially given reallocation of donor funding to the Ukraine crisis.²⁹ Oil price shocks have exacerbated food price volatility and increased food prices. The repercussions of turbulent energy markets on food security are associated with the key role fossil fuels play in agricultural production and distribution, such as natural gas being critical to produce nitrogen-based fertilizers.³⁰ Spiralling energy prices thus drive food price inflation globally.³¹ Compounding these factors, especially for the countries suffering the brunt of the Ukraine crisis, are austerity and fiscal consolidation measures required as conditionalities for lending from international finance institutions, along with the windfall profits accruing to the fossil fuel industry.³²

Figure 4

PREVALENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY HIGHER AMONG WOMEN THAN MEN, GLOBALLY AND ACROSS REGIONS



Source: FAO data from FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO. 2022. [The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2022. Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable](#). Rome.

Note: Data refer to the prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity.

The confluence of these factors means that we cannot go back to business as usual in the global response and recovery. Fossil-fuel-based agriculture and energy are no longer viable given the constellation of environmental, economic and social risks and unsustainability that threaten the planet and the lives, livelihoods and wellbeing of people. The need to adopt sustainable and climate-resilient food and energy systems and approaches has never been more urgent. Such approaches include a gender-responsive sustainable energy transition and climate-resilient agriculture—an integrated approach to managing cropland, livestock, forests and fisheries and addressing the interlinked challenges of climate change and achieving food security³³—and agroecology, an innovative sustainable agricultural approach that supports climate-

resilient livelihoods and is rooted in ancestral knowledge, practices and techniques for sustaining food and nutrition provision through diversified and balanced diets.³⁴

Overall, these approaches must make gender equality and women's rights and empowerment central to ensuring that response and recovery measures for food security and nutrition work for the benefit of all. Concerted efforts by all stakeholders are required to overcome the structural barriers to gender equality and the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination that women and girls face everywhere, and the prevailing unequal relations of power among genders in the household, community, institutions and society more broadly.

WOMEN'S FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION IN JEOPARDY

The crisis has had a profound impact on women's food security and nutrition, in Ukraine and globally. Similar to trends around the world, Ukrainian women are primarily responsible for food security and nutrition within their households and make up a sizeable proportion of the agricultural labour force, playing a key role in food production.³⁵ Prior to the war, some 48 per cent of women were in the labour force. In agriculture, forestry and fisheries, men accounted for 69.6 per cent of all formal employees³⁶ while women were more likely to work informally in these sectors.³⁷ Only 20 per cent of farming enterprises in Ukraine were headed by women, who generally undertake the manual labour needed for cultivation, planting, weeding, harvesting and processing.³⁸

Women are often limited in their capacity to contribute to agricultural production and rural economies.³⁹ Ukrainian women face multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination in accessing key productive resources such as land, credit, agricultural inputs and services, and are more likely than men to be in precarious, part-time, seasonal and low-paying jobs when engaged in rural wage employment.⁴⁰ Ukrainian women often work without remuneration on family farms and perform a disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic work within households.⁴¹ With a 22 per cent gender pay gap and 32 per cent pension gap, women in Ukraine are more vulnerable to the impacts of war, given these income disparities and their unequal access to finance, resources and services.⁴²

Women-headed households in Ukraine were already more food insecure prior to the war, with 37.5 per cent of women-headed households in conflict-affected areas experiencing moderate or severe levels of food insecurity compared to 20.5 per cent of male-headed households.⁴³ Rapid gender assessments carried out during the pandemic in 2020 showed that women were more likely than men to express concerns about food affordability and basic household expenses. Moreover, households in vulnerable situations, for example, those including older women, single mothers, women living with disabilities and workers in informal employment, were more likely to express greater concerns about food security and the cost of living.⁴⁴

Women in Ukraine who are caring for children and the elderly, especially in areas of active combat, face extreme shortages of essential medicine, healthcare and financial services and the funds to procure basic items, including much-needed

baby food and formula. Moreover, humanitarian food distribution is not able to adequately meet the specific dietary needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women, newborn babies and infants.⁴⁵ Rural women in the territories occupied by the Russian military are increasingly unable to perform agricultural work due to high insecurity and lack of resources;⁴⁶ meanwhile, they are rising to the challenge to accommodate and feed internally displaced people, multiplying their unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities.⁴⁷

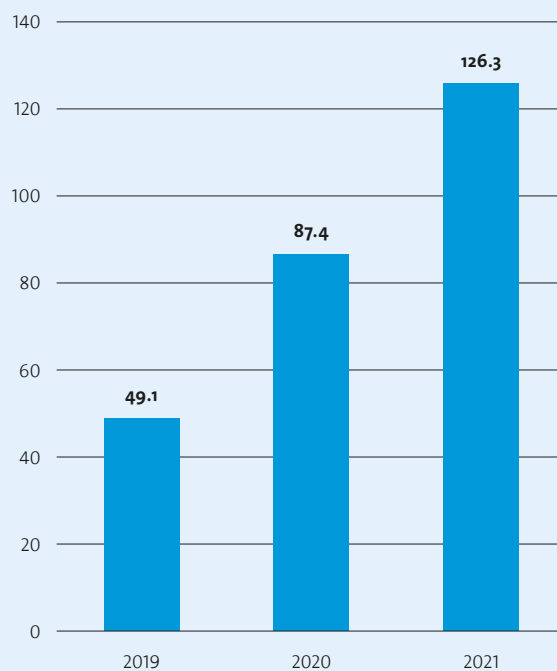
The war and its impacts on food systems globally, including food production, prices, availability and access, are intensifying barriers to realizing women's right to adequate food.⁴⁸ Amid conflict and crises, entrenched gender inequalities often lead to women and girls eating less and last, as a negative coping mechanism, deepening hunger, malnutrition and poverty.⁴⁹ A rapid gender analysis of the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine showed that women have reduced their own food intake and have started to save food to give it primarily to children, older and sick people, while spending their savings on food when and where it is available.⁵⁰ This is consistent with contexts of food insecurity elsewhere, for example in Somalia, men report eating smaller meals but women skip meals altogether⁵¹ and in Lebanon at the onset of the pandemic, 85 per cent of women were eating smaller portions, compared to only 57 per cent of men.⁵² Rising food insecurity is directly linked with increases in women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work for food provisioning, preparation and processing, often at the expense of their physical and mental health and wellbeing,⁵³ and is also associated with worsening anaemia among women.⁵⁴

The violation of the right to adequate food impinges on the enjoyment of other human rights, such as to health, water, an adequate standard of living and to live a life free from violence. In situations of conflict and food insecurity, women and girls are more likely to face gender-based violence, including an increased risk of domestic violence and intimate partner violence.⁵⁵ Further, such situations can oblige women and girls to engage in transactional sex, that is, to exchange sex for food or money to buy food; they are more likely to be sexually exploited and abused and/or trafficked in search of employment or food, exposing them to associated risks, including unintended pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections and HIV, among others.⁵⁶ Desperate families often resort to desperate measures, pulling their daughters out of school to commit them to child, early and forced marriage as a means of obtaining dowry or bride-price income.⁵⁷ The number of children at risk of dropping out of school has increased from 1.1 million to an estimated 3.3 million children in just three months in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia, and child marriage rates have more than doubled in the last year in parts of drought-stricken Ethiopia, leaving young girls to face the prospect of a life of poverty, compromised sexual and reproductive health and domestic violence.⁵⁸ Child marriage is prevalent across conflict-affected countries and humanitarian settings, increasing up to 20 per cent during conflicts while the highest rates are found in fragile states.⁵⁹ It has significantly increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic,⁶⁰ and is expected to become even more pervasive in the wake of the Ukraine crisis. While women in Ukraine have been at heightened risk of trafficking in persons, including for purposes of sexual exploitation and prostitution, and subject to conflict-related sexual violence such as rape, “the ripple effects of this conflict are also being felt by women and girls in other warzones around the world, who risk becoming ‘*forgotten victims of forgotten conflicts*’,” as resources and world attention are diverted elsewhere.⁶¹

At the global level, disruptions to food supply, soaring food prices and limited access to fertilizers are having a cascading effect on women’s and girls’ food security and nutrition, as reflected in [Figure 5](#). The impacts are even more acute for older and indigenous women, women of African descent, gender-diverse persons, persons with disabilities and those living in rural and remote areas, based on trends observed in the COVID-19 crisis and other conflicts in a changing climate.⁶² The war in Ukraine, like all crises and conflicts, shines a light on the urgent need to rebuild the broken global food system. Partnerships between governments and civil society are needed to scale up gender-responsive sustainable agriculture and agroecology as alternatives to industrial

Figure 5

HOW MANY MORE WOMEN ARE HUNGRY THAN MEN (in millions)



Source: FAO validated data as found in CARE. 2022. [Food Security and Gender Equality: A synergistic understudied symphony.](#)

Note: Data reflect women ages 15 and above.

agriculture, with proven benefits for communities and environments as well as enabling women’s participation and leadership. Investing in diversification of food crop production for local, national and regional markets and redressing women farmers’ unequal access to resources and technologies are critical for improving women’s livelihoods and ensuring food security for all.⁶³

Nevertheless, despite the growing evidence of the disproportionate impact on women and girls, responses to the war have not adequately addressed their needs and priorities nor drawn upon their participation, decision-making and leadership. Policy responses and action, as well as long-term recovery solutions, need to fully reflect the voice and agency of women and girls globally as important actors for food security and nutrition, including as peasants and smallholder farmers, pastoralists, fishers, food and agricultural workers, the landless, consumers and urban food-insecure people.⁶⁴

IMPACTS OF THE UKRAINE WAR ON ENERGY

The war has gravely threatened the supply of and access to energy for all, causing price spikes in already volatile energy markets. Russia is a key player in the global oil and gas market as the world's largest exporter, the second-largest producer of natural gas and one of the world's top three crude oil producers.⁶⁵ Increasing fuel transport costs, which were already one of the major causes of inflation in African countries in 2021,⁶⁶ are the result of Russian delivery shutoffs and replacement energy supply now dependent on ships and other modes of transport; this is likely to have longer-term global impacts.⁶⁷ The harsh consequences of high energy prices will not be equally felt within and between countries, as the high cost of imported energy reduces the purchasing power of developing countries and households in vulnerable situations.⁶⁸

Steep hikes in oil and gas prices are being passed on to consumers at fuel pumps and in homes, threatening the fragile post-pandemic recovery of the global economy. The disruption to Russia's oil supply could potentially keep oil prices high, deepening inequalities between countries since costlier oil might benefit some oil-exporting countries, while net oil-importing countries, such as 38 out of 45 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, will potentially experience negative economic shocks.⁶⁹ Energy prices are expected to increase by more than 50 per cent in 2022 and will not ease fully until at least the end of 2024.⁷⁰ It is projected that if energy and fertilizer prices do not come down in 2023 as expected, food prices may continue to soar.⁷¹

Critically, the significant increase in oil and gas prices may lead to investments being poured back into the extractive sector and fossil fuel-based energy generation, risking a reversal of the transition to decarbonization and sustainable energy sources documented over the past 5 to 10 years.⁷² Some regions are actively seeking alternatives to Russia's oil and gas; the European Union, for example, has recently published a plan in line with their climate ambitions to reduce dependence on Russia's natural gas.⁷³ Overall, however, the war reveals the vulnerability of the world's energy security when tied directly to oil and gas, creating an impetus for other regions to accelerate the transition to cleaner, sustainable energy systems, reduce reliance on fossil fuel and advance the Sustainable Development Goals.

Current industrial agriculture is highly dependent on massive inputs of costly, fossil fuel-dependent chemical pesticides, fertilizers, electricity, machinery and transportation.⁷⁴ High global energy prices have a direct impact on food production and distribution, increasing food insecurity around the world. These factors, together with the very high carbon footprint of the war, aggravate the climate crisis and pose an increasing threat to the planet.⁷⁵ While US\$423 billion annually is spent on fossil fuel subsidies,⁷⁶ and an estimated annual US\$540 billion globally in government support to agriculture,⁷⁷ these funds could be usefully reallocated to finance gender-responsive sustainable energy transitions and more sustainable food systems which could yield significant benefits for all, but especially for the livelihoods and resilience of women and girls.⁷⁸

IMPACTS OF THE WAR ON WOMEN'S ENERGY ACCESS

The war's deleterious effects on energy production, distribution, prices and access not only slow down progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals but have concomitant disproportionate impacts on gender equality and women's rights and empowerment. Soaring costs of oil and gas have had significant impacts on women's and girls' energy poverty and already unequal access to energy.⁷⁹ Indeed, the reversal in the trend of improving energy access was well noted before the war started. The economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic caused many in developing countries—a large number who have only recently gained energy access—to lose it because of inability to pay, among them 15 million sub-Saharan Africans.⁸⁰ The pandemic also meant that many people could not pay for modern fuels, including for clean cooking.

According to the World Health Organization, 3.2 million people worldwide, disproportionately women and children, die prematurely every year from illnesses attributable to household air pollution caused by cooking and heating with inefficient and polluting fuels and technologies,⁸¹ compromising sustainable development and entrenching gender inequalities (see Figure 6). Rising energy prices and concomitant energy poverty mean a return to use of biomass for fuel, with disproportionate impacts on women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic workloads, health and livelihoods.⁸² Even before the current crisis, households in sub-Saharan Africa spent from one to five hours per day collecting fuelwood for cooking, heating and lighting,⁸³ and women in South Asia spent up to 20 or more hours per week collecting biomass for use with polluting and inefficient stoves,⁸⁴ arduous tasks that are physically draining and linked to musculoskeletal injuries in addition to taking precious time away from other livelihood, educational and leisure activities.⁸⁵

In Ukraine, with the onset of the war and ensuing widespread crisis, electricity disruptions have stymied access to water and to information and communication technology services. Many households, and women and girls in particular, have had to resort to wood and other biomass fuel for cooking and heating and to collecting water from rivers and streams.⁸⁶

These effects have been particularly negative for single mothers and women-headed households – in Ukraine women comprise more than 70 per cent of heads of households – especially those with less diversified sources of income

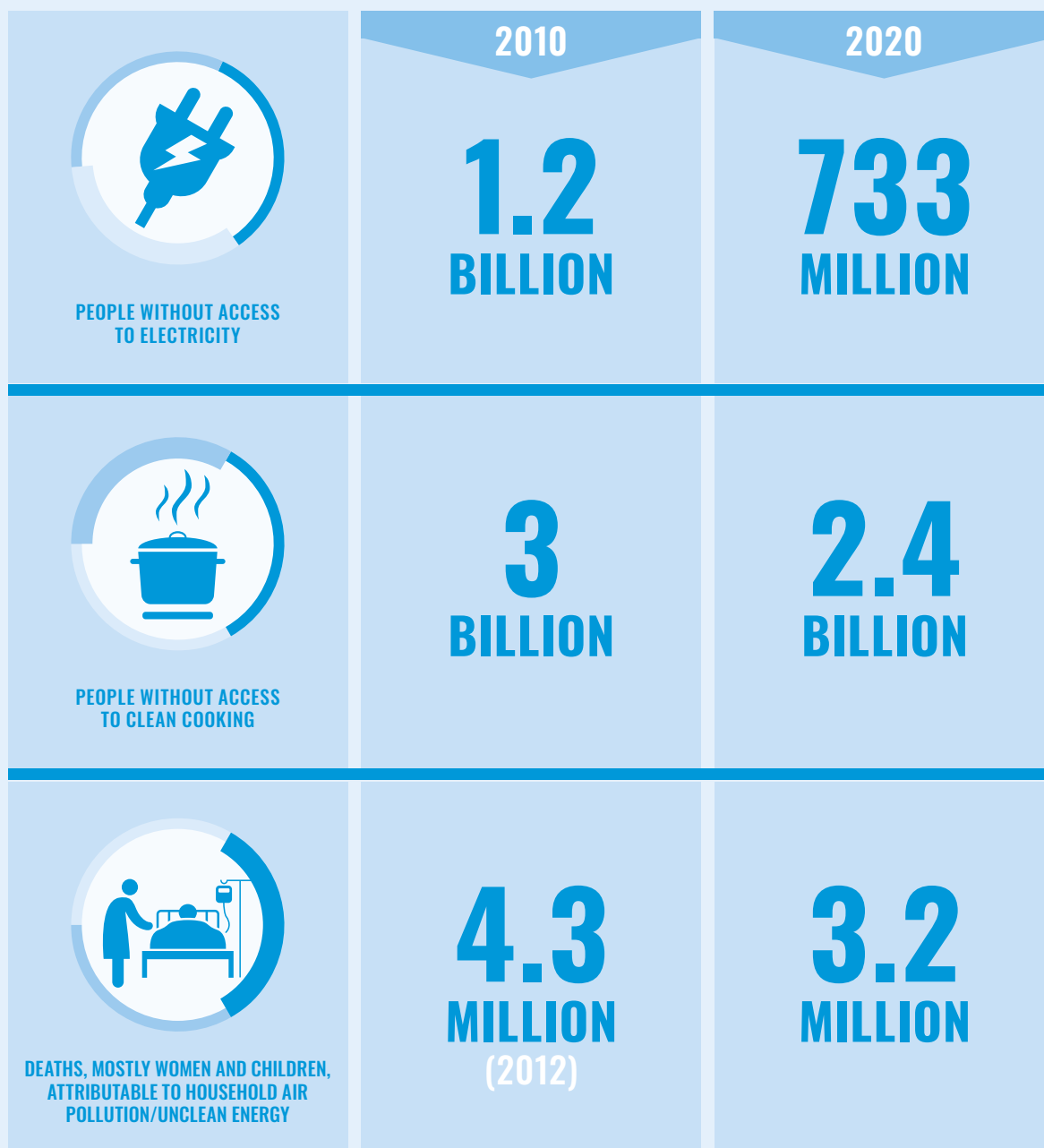
or that are dependent on one income.⁸⁷ In Europe, some estimates show that living in energy poverty was more likely to affect women and single-parent families because of their lower average income, which is the case in Ukraine where women make up 92.2 per cent of single parents.⁸⁸ Of the 5.6 million European households experiencing a lack of access to modern energy services in 2017, it was estimated that 38 per cent were women-headed households.⁸⁹

The impacts of the war on energy supply, infrastructure, transport and public safety and security in Ukraine have also limited women's access to public services, on which they depend more than men do, given their responsibility for household provisioning and wellbeing. In Ukraine, women constitute two thirds of those in need of state benefits and social support, in particular older women relying on pensions.⁹⁰ Thus, the disruptions caused by the war in banking services and access to finance (e.g., ATMs, remittances and cash transfers) disproportionately affect women.

Of particular concern is the impact of energy supply disruptions on access to healthcare services for women in Ukraine and beyond. About one billion people worldwide are served by healthcare facilities without reliable electricity.⁹¹ Such disruptions paired with high energy price surges encourage hoarding, potentially affecting backup generators intended to supplement the strained power supply to healthcare facilities. This compromises both emergency and routine medical care, putting at risk the estimated 265,000 Ukrainian women who were pregnant when the war broke out,⁹² and millions of women globally.

Figure 6

SNAPSHOT OF GLOBAL ENERGY POVERTY



Sources: IEA, IRENA, UNSD, World Bank, WHO. 2022. [Tracking SDG 7 – The Energy Progress Report 2022](#). World Bank, Washington, D.C.

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Sky-rocketing oil and gas prices could also provide the misleading justification for renewed development of extractive projects worldwide, with their well-known negative impacts on gender equality and women's empowerment.⁹³ Such projects potentially compromise women's agency as well as their land and resource rights and tenure security, leading to the loss of women's livelihoods.⁹⁴ Pollution caused by extractive industries can also deplete food and water resources, increasing unpaid care and domestic workloads for women responsible for the food security and nutrition of their families and communities.

Expanding access to clean and renewable energy would yield significant benefits for all, but especially for women and girls, by eliminating the household air pollution arising from the use of biomass for cooking and reducing unpaid care and domestic work. Sustainable energy also has the

potential to increase the productivity of small-scale farming, through powering agricultural equipment, irrigation and climate-resilient agriculture technologies that are being increasingly adopted by women farmers globally.⁹⁵ The sustainable energy transition would also support decentralized energy systems in areas not yet connected to national grids and create new green jobs for women in the renewable energy field.

In Ukraine and globally, only 22 per cent of the workforce in the oil and gas sector are women while they comprise 32 per cent in renewable energy.⁹⁶ Creating new jobs in the sector would improve livelihoods and promote gender balance in a male-dominated industry as well as support recovery from the war and advance the Sustainable Development Goals.

CONCLUSIONS

Continued global solidarity and urgent action by all stakeholders are required to respond to, halt and recover from the war in Ukraine and its global repercussions on gender equality and women's and girls' rights and empowerment. The world cannot afford to reverse progress on ending hunger and attaining universal access to sustainable energy, both of which are key to achieving gender equality and the Sustainable Development Goals. Hence, increased and coordinated efforts to stop the war must also reverse the dire gendered impacts on energy access and food security and nutrition in Ukraine and across the world, placing women and girls and their leadership and decision-making at the centre of response and recovery measures.

Donors have diverted billions of dollars of funding from critical humanitarian and aid projects to the Ukraine war and refugee efforts.⁹⁷ Investing in social protection and feeding their populations is beyond the reach of many governments, facing devastating debt and severely restricted fiscal space after more than two and a half years of the pandemic, as well as pressures from international financial institutions to pursue austerity and fiscal consolidation.

Renewed global solidarity and feminist multilateralism are urgently needed to support all crisis-affected peoples and protect everyone's rights to adequate food and an adequate standard of living by scaling up emergency food aid in the short term and overhauling food and energy systems and expanding gender-responsive public services and social protection for a more sustainable future.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Prioritize women's participation, leadership and decision-making

- Promote women's participation, leadership and decision-making in conflict response, recovery and peace-building by investing in and consulting extensively with women's groups and organizations on mitigating food insecurity and energy poverty, and building their capacity to design policies and programmatic interventions for recovery and a just peace.

Increase availability of gender statistics and sex-disaggregated data

- Collect, analyse, use and disseminate gender statistics, including sex-disaggregated data, and strengthen international and national capacities to create and build the evidence base for gender-responsive policy, planning and reconstruction measures, and to monitor gender-related impacts.

Promote and protect the right to food

- Establish and finance a Global Fund for Social Protection to help low-income countries to set up and maintain social protection floors and food availability to protect everyone's rights to adequate food and an adequate standard of living in the face of current and future crises, especially of women and girls who are always most affected.
- Tailor food assistance, with an emphasis on improving access to adequate and appropriate nutritional food to meet the specific needs of women and girls in situations of conflict and crisis and ensure access to information on this for all. Source food for food assistance programmes from women-owned and women-led farmers cooperatives and organizations for humanitarian response and public provisioning.
- Accelerate the transformation towards more equitable, gender-responsive and sustainable food systems, including by phasing out harmful fossil fuel and agricultural subsidies, investing in women's access to inputs, technologies and markets and strengthening local food systems and crop diversification to achieve food security and better nutrition for all.
- Promote and implement gender-responsive agroecological and climate-resilient agricultural policies, practices and programmes that reduce dependence on fossil fuel-based fertilizers and other inputs, particularly in the context of war-affected shortages and price spikes.
- Track the impacts of rising global food prices on women and girls, ensure interventions to reduce food insecurity are accessible to and benefit them and monitor and address gendered health impacts of food insecurity, such as anaemia and the malnutrition of children and pregnant women.

Ensure equal access to affordable and sustainable energy

- Promote a gender-responsive sustainable energy transition at all levels.
- Create fiscal space to achieve energy access and renewable energy solutions for all women and girls and their communities through windfall taxes on the largest oil and gas companies.
- Protect women and girls and their communities from bearing the brunt of escalating fuel and energy prices by taking action to reduce price volatility in energy markets and prevent hoarding.
- Phase out fossil fuel subsidies and reallocate funds to gender equality and social protection for all.
- Invest in decentralized sustainable energy solutions to serve people and communities that are still not connected to national grids.
- Provide sustainable alternatives to polluting and environmentally destructive fuels that have adverse health impacts on people, especially on women and children.
- Invest in time- and energy-efficient technologies that reduce women's and girls' unpaid care and domestic work.

Integrate an intersectional gender perspective in all humanitarian responses and social protection measures

- Expand gender-responsive social protection systems, including in-kind assistance and food packages, to alleviate the pressures of increasing food and energy prices on women and girls, especially for older, indigenous and Roma women, women of African descent, gender-diverse persons, persons with disabilities and those living in rural and remote areas.
- Ensure safe travel routes for refugees and migrants in humanitarian emergencies, taking into consideration the particular challenges, needs and priorities of women, girls and gender diverse peoples of different races, ethnicities and national origin.
- Invest in prevention, response and risk mitigation of gender-based violence exacerbated by the crisis in Ukraine and address the risks of sexual exploitation and abuse and trafficking as violations of women's and girls' rights and bodily autonomy that occur in contexts of food insecurity and energy poverty.
- Ensure that health care, including sexual and reproductive and mental health services, is provided to those subjected to sexual exploitation and abuse and trafficking in the context of food insecurity and humanitarian crises.

RESOURCES



[Global Impact of war in Ukraine on food, energy and finance systems](#)



[Global impact of the war in Ukraine: Billions of people face the greatest cost-of-living crisis in a generation](#)



[Global impact of war in Ukraine: Energy crisis](#)



[Rapid Assessment: Impact of The War in Ukraine on Women's Civil Society Organizations](#)



[Challenges encountered by young women affected by war in Ukraine](#)



[UN Women Ukraine: Five-month Update](#)



[UN Women and CARE Rapid gender analysis of Ukraine: Secondary data review](#)



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