



## The Ukraine War and the Bread Crisis in the Middle East



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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** War threatens the Middle East region's access to essential and highly needed resources. However, some countries are more vulnerable than others to food shortages and unrest. The present study investigates the impact of the Ukraine war and the bread crisis in the Middle East.

**Methods:** Search engines including PubMed, Scopus, Science Direct, and Google scholar were applied with keywords such as Ukraine, war, bread, crisis, Russia, and the Middle East to find related articles published up to 2022.

**Results:** The war in Ukraine was a full-scale crisis since the two countries involved in the war supplied 30% of the world's grain production. About 75% of the world's sunflower oil is also produced in Russia and Ukraine, which has caused the risk of a food crisis in the world and can increase the level of hunger and malnutrition in the Middle East, Central Asia, and its surroundings.

**Conclusion:** According to the mentioned cases, it can be said that there is not a very clear future for the Middle East countries in terms of food supply, which have been severely affected by the war in Ukraine in the current situation.

### 1. Introduction

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a massive invasion of Ukraine. Its western neighbor, marking a dramatic escalation of the Russia-Ukraine crisis that began in 2014. This invasion is the largest conventional military attack on European soil since World War II [1]. Russia's attack on Ukraine, which was initially thought to be a lightning attack with quick and tangible achievements, is gradually approaching several months, and of course, no definite end

can be imagined for it [2]. Although this war has primarily affected the lives of Ukrainian and destroyed the cities and infrastructure of this Eastern European country, its consequences are not limited to the borders of Ukraine [3]. Economically, Russia and Ukraine are the two main suppliers of wheat and commodities such as oilseeds, livestock, and poultry feed. On the other hand, Russia's special position in oil and gas exports means that the results of the Ukraine war are not only limited to this country but also its consequences affect regional and international aspects [4,5]. The war has



created major refugee and humanitarian crises in Europe not seen since the wars in Yugoslavia in the 1990s [6]. The economies of the 27 member states of the European Union and the Eurozone were on the path to growth and recovery after the coronavirus pandemic subsided when Russia's military invasion of Ukraine changed the situation [7]. War threatens the region's access to essential and highly needed resources however, some countries are more vulnerable than others to food shortages and unrest [8,9]. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has threatened food supplies across the Middle East and North Africa, a region where many countries rely heavily on imports, particularly of staples such as wheat. Food insecurity used to be a big challenge in the region due to climate change, lack of water, and the spread of Covid-19 [10,11]. Some countries in the region have more food security compared to other countries. Several countries in the Middle East were in dire straits when the war between Russia and Ukraine disrupted food supplies earlier this year [12]. For example, in Syria and Yemen, years of conflict and beleaguered economies have made it difficult for many residents of those two countries to afford food. Meanwhile, food prices in Lebanon have increased by more than 1,000 percent over the past three years, as the country's political and economic situation has descended into chaos and the Lebanese currency has fallen sharply against the US dollar [13]. Considering the importance of the subject of this research, it examines the impact of the war in Ukraine and the "bread" crisis in the Middle East.

## 2. Materials and Methods

Eligibility criteria and search strategy: Manuscripts that assessed the effect of the Ukraine war on the "bread" crisis in the Middle East, were included. Information sources: Keywords, including "Ukraine", "Russia", "bread", "Middle East", "consumption", and "behavior", in combination with the word "war" were used for searching English articles in PubMed, Scopus, Science Direct, Google scholar. All related articles from the beginning of the war to the end of July 2022 were included in this study. The inclusion criteria consisted of articles that reported any possible correlation between the Ukraine war and the "bread" crisis in the Middle East. The search strategy yielded 35 publications; first, the abstracts were investigated and the articles that were irrelevant to the title were excluded which resulted in a set of 17 articles. Subsequently, the references of the publications yielded by the search were reviewed to identify additional relevant articles (3 articles), and a total of 20 papers were included in the review.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The war between Russia and Ukraine, which together produce more than a quarter of the world's wheat, has pushed wheat prices to a 13-year high. An issue of its kind that has sounded the alarm in Middle Eastern countries, which are heavily dependent on imports of basic commodities, including wheat [14]. Russia and Ukraine are

major suppliers of wheat and edible oil to Middle Eastern countries such as Yemen, Lebanon, and Egypt. The outbreak of the Ukraine war has, in effect, caused these countries to face the fundamental challenge of rising food prices. This is especially true during the Corona pandemic, given that food prices were high for people in the Middle East even before the pandemic and the Ukraine war. It could indicate a widespread crisis in the near future in terms of a serious threat to the food security of the people in the Middle East. The Ukraine war could have repercussions even thousands of miles away from the battlefields [10]. In another part of the Middle East, Lebanon (which is considered poor in terms of access to food), the Lebanese people are making great efforts to buy more bread than they need, to avoid the potential harm of a sudden rise in the price of this important food. Lebanon simply has enough reserves to meet its one-month supply of wheat. The devastating 2020 explosion in the port of Beirut, which destroyed Lebanon's largest grain and grain storage facility, also caused serious damage to Lebanon. Although wheat imports in Lebanon, subsidies and the government keep bread prices low, bread has long been a luxury item of its kind for some Lebanese. Lebanese bakeries have long set rations for how many loaves of bread each citizen can buy, and in some cases have even set up a "black market" to buy more bread than a set [12,15]. Across the Middle East and North Africa, rising food prices, largely due to the Ukraine war and related developments, could send millions more into poverty than ever before. It should be noted that the Middle East region is particularly vulnerable to rising base food prices due to insufficient local production and high poverty rates. It should not be forgotten that the spark of the "Arab Spring" (in 2011) was initially ignited due to public protests against rising food prices [16]. Yemen, which is heavily dependent on food imports, supplies about 27% of its total wheat needs through imports from Ukraine and 8% through Russia. It should be noted that the nearly seven years of war in Yemen have greatly destroyed the country's economy, increased unemployment, and doubled food prices. That has plunged more than half of Yemen's 30 million people into hunger and poverty. Late last year, a lack of funding and resources forced the World Food Program to cut aid to eight million Yemenis, effectively facilitating a catastrophic crisis of "hunger" among the Yemeni people. Meanwhile, the prospect of a further rise in international wheat prices means that Yemenis are likely to be more vulnerable to a hunger crisis than ever before. This issue will undoubtedly have dire consequences for the ordinary people of Yemen. In this regard, the main issue is not the availability of food; on the contrary, the main challenge is the financial inability of the Yemeni people to buy and supply food [12]. Egypt, the world's largest importer of wheat, imports about 90 % of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine [17]. In this regard, the Egyptian authorities are watching the developments in Ukraine with great concern and are trying to minimize the possible effects of this war on food prices in their country. About a third of Egypt's 100 million people live below the poverty line (these figures are largely from the pre-Corona pandemic period). In this regard, the Egyptian government

has been trying for years to strengthen the purchasing power of the people in the "bread" debate by paying heavy subsidies [18-20].

#### 4. Conclusion

According to the mentioned cases, it can be concluded that there is not a very clear future for the Middle East countries in terms of food supply, which have been severely affected by the war in Ukraine in the current situation.

#### Authors' Contributions

Ameneh Marzban: Conceptualization; Project administration; Supervision; Validation; Visualization; Writing-review and editing. Shandiz Moslehi: Conceptualization; Data curation; Investigation; Writing-original draft; Writing-review and editing.

#### Conflicts of Interest

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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