



21 Mar 2022

Article type: Publication

Page: 24

Canberra Times, The

Readership: 246000

AVE: \$2305.85

This copy is licensed by Copyright Agency for the purposes of a Press Clipping Service. Any reuse of this article must be licensed: www.rightsportal.com.au

page 1 of 1

Why the Ukraine crisis will ripple far beyond Europe

NADINE
HADDAD



THOUSANDS of lives are lost, more than 3 million refugees flee for their lives and cities and neighbourhoods are turned to rubble. The human suffering in Ukraine has horrified the world and spurred into action humanitarian agencies. The need of the innocent and the vulnerable is there for all to see.

But this crisis will cause waves of need and deprivation in corners of the world far from Europe, in places you had probably never even considered, pushing the world's hungriest further into crippling poverty. People like Linda, a woman I met 16 years ago in Iraq. Once a civil engineer, a prominent career woman, she became a refugee, too embarrassed to ask her local church for support, so she came to us, crying in our office for money to feed her children.

Or nine-year-old Syrian, Mariam. She lost both her mother, and the sight in her left eye after an attack on her village. Traumatized and alone, she did not speak for three months. My team managed to get her to one of our child-friendly spaces where she could

Ukraine and Russia produce nearly 30 per cent of wheat globally, but the conflict will disrupt new season's planting, and prices are already increasing ... This will be another shock to hungry families.

recover in safety.

Like Linda and Miriam are like many of those now fleeing Ukraine, women and children forced from their homes because of conflict in their own countries and now with little or no access to food. It is a form of suffering fuelled by conflict that is too often overlooked.

Conflicts are a key driver of food insecurity. The wider fallout of the crisis in Ukraine will be far-reaching and devastating, especially for countries dependent on food

imports and aid, such as Yemen, Syria and Afghanistan.

Ukraine and Russia produce nearly 30 per cent of wheat globally, but the conflict will disrupt new season's planting, and prices are already increasing because of a spooked market.

This will be another shock to hungry families, where bread is often the only staple keeping their children alive. It will push them over the edge. And as wheat is a staple in diets across the world, including in some of the most conflict-ridden countries, the flow-on impact could be devastating.

This war will send shock waves across 43 countries - including Yemen, Syria, Congo, Ethiopia and Afghanistan - where 45 million people are at risk of starvation, of which 580,000 people already live in famine-like conditions. That 45 million figure was 39 million just a year ago, and has risen due to the socio-economic impacts of COVID. Further shocks will be deadly.

The trouble doesn't end there.

The Ukraine crisis has magnified already rising fuel, fertiliser and freight costs, and is estimated to double or triple the prices of staple foods. Dramatically increased prices of bread, rice, pasta and cooking oil will force aid agencies, such as World Vision

and the World Food Program, to source wheat from elsewhere at greatly inflated prices. With the extreme funding shortages across many humanitarian responses, aid organisations may be forced to make the impossible choice - which hungry child eats and which does not.

Mothers in conflict zones, in Afghanistan and Yemen, have told me that the hardest thing they endured was not the violent war, the abuses and displacement, but watching their kids slowly perish from starvation and being helpless and voiceless.

The true test of our humanity will be if the international community stands behind these millions of children at the risk of a brutal death.

But what can Australia do? The government can commit emergency funds at the Afghanistan Pledging Conference in two weeks. It can also commit \$150 million to a famine prevention package.

Australia, along with the rest of the world, rose to the challenge of the Ukraine crisis - a true testimony of global solidarity and humanity. This solidarity must extend to any child who has experienced conflict. Even when their suffering is unseen.

¶ Nadine Haddad is World Vision Australia's senior humanitarian policy adviser.