

## ‘People are hungry’: food crisis starts to bite across Africa

Signs of inflation-linked unrest are emerging, aid agencies warn

Andres Schipani in Nairobi and Emiko Terazono in London 5 HOURS AGO

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Ezra Ngala, an informal construction worker, is struggling to make ends meet in a slum in Kenya’s capital, Nairobi. “I am trying to survive,” he says while explaining that he cannot feed his wife and four-year-old son.

“For the past few months there has been a surge of people like myself going hungry. The government says that the war in Ukraine is the cause of all this.”

Steep rises in international food and fuel prices since the Russian invasion of Ukraine have left millions more Africans facing hunger and food insecurity this year, the UN, local politicians and charities have warned. The price rises have compounded economic problems caused by the coronavirus pandemic, sparking concerns of unrest in the hardest-hit countries. Swaths of [Africa](#) face an “unprecedented food emergency” this year, in part because of the war in Ukraine, the World Food Programme has said.

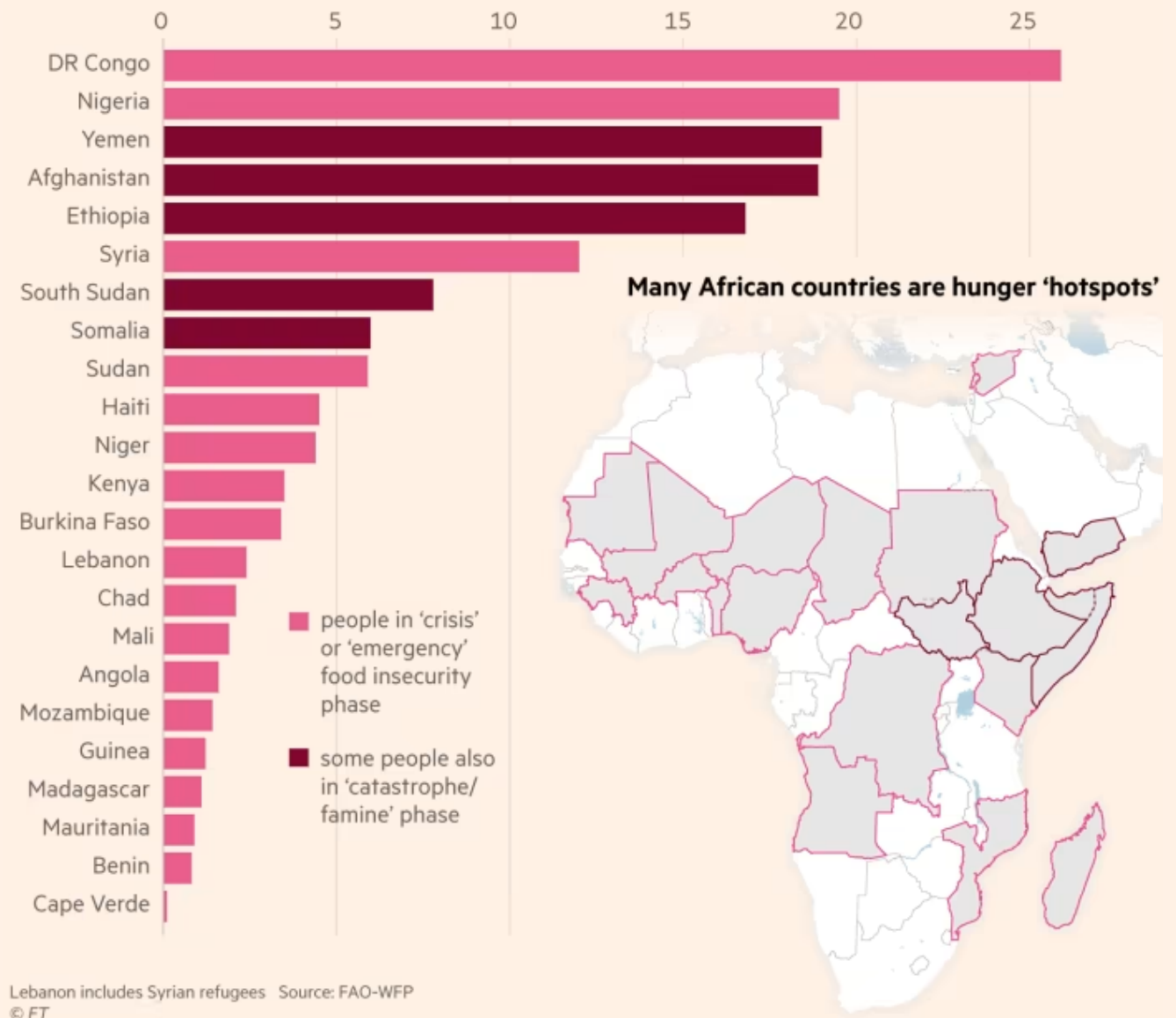
“The conflict in Ukraine [sparked a] global price hike of fuel, fertilisers and also edible oil and sugar and wheat particularly. This is bringing significant shocks to the system,” Ahmed Shide, Ethiopia’s finance minister told the Financial Times.

In an area stretching from northern Kenya to Somalia and large parts of Ethiopia, up to 20mn people could go hungry in 2022, the UN’s [Food & Agriculture Organization](#) has said, due to the worst drought in four decades, exacerbated by the fallout from the war in Ukraine. More than 40mn people in the Sahel and west Africa this year face acute food insecurity, according to the FAO, up from 10.8mn people three years ago.

Before the war, Russia and Ukraine accounted for a double-digit share of wheat imports in more than 20 sub-Saharan African countries, including Madagascar, Cameroon, Uganda and Nigeria, according to the FAO. Eritrea relies on those two countries for all of its wheat imports.

## Conflict and weather extremes drive acute hunger in 'hotspot' countries

Number of people (mn) in acute food insecurity, 2022 or latest



Even those countries not reliant on imports from Russia and Ukraine have been hit by rising prices.

Responding to the trend, the World Bank on Wednesday said it had approved a \$2.3bn programme to help countries in eastern and southern Africa tackle food insecurity.

The IMF forecasts that consumer price rises in sub-Saharan Africa will rise by 12.2 per cent this year — the highest rate in almost two decades. In Ethiopia, food prices rose 42.9 per cent in April on the same month a year earlier.

There are concerns that higher [food prices](#) could fuel unrest in poorer countries, where food

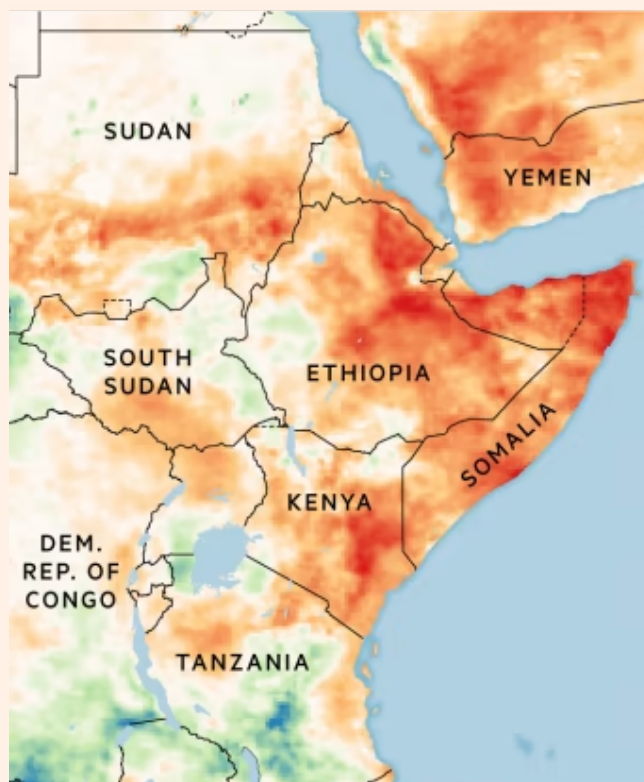
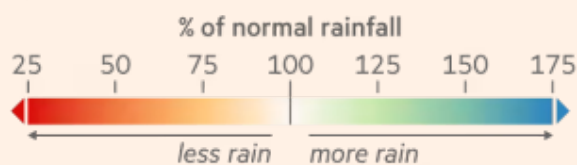
counts for a higher part of daily spending than in developed countries.

During the 2007-08 food crisis, which was caused by a spike in energy prices and droughts in crop-producing regions, about 40 countries faced social unrest. More than a third of those countries were on the African continent.

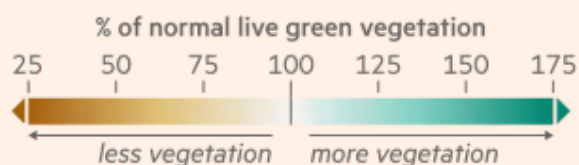
Even before the Russian invasion in late February, the pandemic had already hit economic growth on the continent. “Africa was already struggling with food insecurity,” said Wandile Sihlobo, chief economist at the Agricultural Business Chamber of South Africa. “These African countries had diminished ability to cushion their population from food price fluctuations.”

## Ongoing drought in eastern Africa will exacerbate the food security situation

Seasonal rainfall accumulation, Mar-May 2022 compared with 1981-2010 average



Normalised difference vegetation index, May 26-Jun 2022 compared with 2012-2021 average



Source: USGS Famine Early Warning System  
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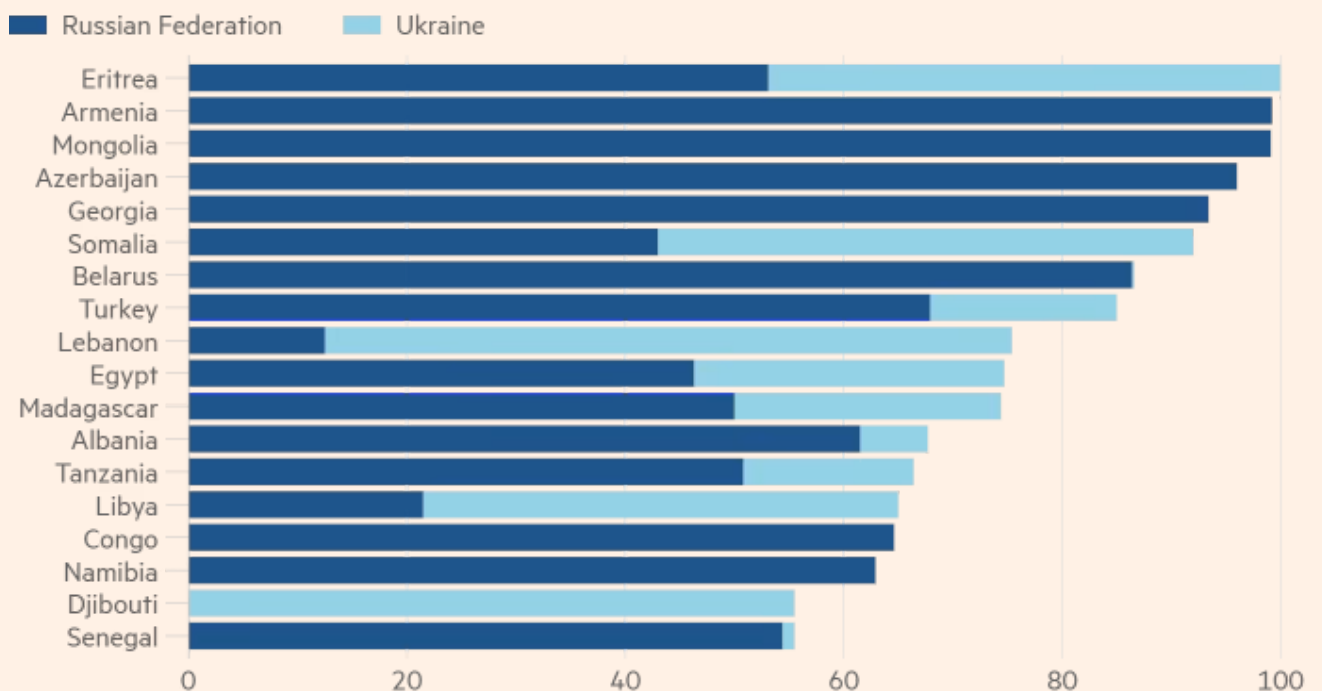
There have already been some signs of unrest. Landlocked Chad declared a food “emergency” earlier this month. In Uganda, six activists were arrested for protesting against higher food prices at the end of May, according to Amnesty International. The rising cost of food has since May spurred street protests in Nairobi under the hashtags #LowerFoodPrices and #Njaa-Revolution — meaning “hunger” revolution in Swahili.

“People are hungry, the reality is that people cannot afford to keep up with these rising prices. You wake up every day, and prices are rising,” said Lewis Maghanga, a local campaigner on the cost of living.

Jackline Mueni, who bakes cakes for weddings and birthdays in Nairobi, is feeling the pinch. “Things are just getting bad,” she said, adding that in the three years she had been in business this was by far the worst time. “In the last three months, food prices have really rocketed.”

## Countries dependent on wheat from Russia and Ukraine

Share of wheat imports (%)



Source: FAO  
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In May, the price of edible oils jumped more than 45 per cent from a year ago in Kenya, while flour increased 28 per cent, according to the World Bank. “This is the worst time ever. I was very comfortably making money, recovering expenses and making a profit. I was selling an average of five cakes a day. Now, one or two, if I am lucky,” said Mueni.

Even Nigeria, an oil producer and a member of Opec, has been hit by international food and fuel prices. Africa’s most populous country exports crude oil but relies on fuel imports. It is also a large food importer, especially of grains. The price of bread in Lagos has risen from 300 naira (\$0.72) before the pandemic to 700 naira this year, according to Chibundu Emeka Onyenacho, analyst at emerging markets bank Renaissance Capital.

“If you’ve suddenly moved to 700 [naira for a loaf of sliced bread], that’s putting pressure on anyone that is being paid the [monthly] minimum wage of 30,000 naira,” said Onyenacho.

He added that the price of wheat flour meant that in rural areas, people blended it with flour made from cassava, a cheap root vegetable, because they were “willing to compromise” on quality to cut the cost of products eaten daily, such as bread.

Back in Kenya, rising fuel prices mean construction worker Ngala spends roughly half his salary on fuel prices. As a result, some dishes have become unaffordable.

“We cannot afford basic things like cooking oil and maize flour,” he said, the latter to make local staple *ugali*, a cooked maize-flour dough. “There are people who can’t afford even one meal a day.”

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