



Receipt

POLICY BRIEF

Storytelling food security



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Main messages

- Food security permeates a range of EU internal and external policies, underscoring its fundamental importance. Policy solutions require balancing (food) self-sufficiency and global trade, while preserving ecosystems and biodiversity in Europe and elsewhere.
- Food availability is not a major challenge within the EU as a net food exporter, but ensuring affordable access to food for all remains a persistent challenge. Contingency strategies for food supply and affordability need to be based on risk scenarios shaped by climate extremes in Europe and beyond.
- Stress tests are crucial for resilience planning, analysing price shocks in food baskets and nutrition. A storyline approach is useful to explore unintended impacts of well-intentioned policies that could weaken, not strengthen, food and farming system resilience.



Setting

Food security stands for the availability, stability, affordability, and safety of nutritious food for a healthy life. While in the EU, food availability is not a major concern. However, its affordability is, as well as the environmental sustainability of food and feed production.

Subsistence crises arise from a myriad of factors, including economic inequalities and poverty, trade restrictions and speculation-driven food stockpiling. Similarly, sustainable agriculture and global food supply chains encounter intricate trade-offs and delicate decisions.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine caused a worldwide disruption and shortage of certain cereals and fertilizers for developing countries. This exacerbated ongoing humanitarian needs and contributed to escalating food prices.

Global food trade has extensive environmental effects beyond Europe, as the demand for food, feed, and non-food agricultural products like biofuels often leads to environmental degradation in other regions. In response to these impacts and to address market distortions stemming from varying environmental standards, the EU implemented the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

The European Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response Mechanism¹ addresses unforeseen and significant events or risks disrupting EU food supply through advanced foresight, risk assessment, vulnerability analysis, and stress tests.



Insights from RECEIPT

The RECEIPT storylines evaluated climate risks on significant crops like soybean, oil palm, and cocoa in key breadbasket regions. The result shows over 44% of EU agricultural imports to be highly susceptible to drought². By 2050, drought severity in these production areas could increase by 35% from current levels.

Responses to crises such as pandemic lockdowns and export restrictions by specific countries to protect their markets have led to agricultural supply chain disruptions and localized losses³. Responses to crisis should guarantee food access for vulnerable households, avert trade restrictions, and foster global cooperation against climate risks and other global food security challenges.



Recommendations

Food and subsistence crises can propagate initial climate or other shocks across interconnected dimensions, such as political instability, social turmoil, migration, conflict, and economic volatility. Research showed that climate and short-term weather anomalies alone are not primary causes of food crises, past or future.

Storyline-based climate risk assessment provides valuable insights when challenges are framed and structured through robust and inclusive policy processes.

Assessing complex food production, distribution, and supply chain risks is challenging due to multiple intertwined factors. Stress tests, underutilized for resilience planning, could be pivotal by examining price shocks across comparable food baskets or nutritional aspects. The RECEIPT approach explores unintended impacts of well-intentioned policies that could impede rather than enhance food and farming system resilience, and provides useful inputs to climate stress tests and risk analyses.

1. EC, Commission Decision of 12 November 2021 setting up the group of experts on the European Food Security Crisis Preparedness and Response Mechanism 2021/C 461 I/01.

2. Ercin, Veldkamp, and Hunink, 'Cross-Border Climate Vulnerabilities of the European Union to Drought'.

3. Falkendal et al., 'Grain Export Restrictions during COVID-19 Risk Food Insecurity in Many Low- and Middle-Income Countries'.