

## Ukraine

### Ukraine and Russia sign UN-backed deal to restart grain exports

Shipping of millions of tonnes from blockaded Black Sea ports could avert global food crisis

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Ukraine infrastructure minister Oleksandr Kubrakov, UN secretary-general António Guterres, Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Turkish defence minister Hulusi Akar at a ceremony agreeing the deal to export grain.  
*Photograph: Ozan Köse/AFP/Getty Images*

[Daniel Boffey](#) in Brussels, [Ruth Michaelson](#) in Istanbul, [Isobel Koshiw](#) in Kyiv and [Andrew Roth](#)

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Ukraine and Russia have signed a UN-backed deal to allow the export of millions of tonnes of grain from blockaded Black Sea ports, potentially averting the threat of a catastrophic global food crisis.

A signing ceremony at Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul was attended by the UN secretary general, António Guterres, and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Turkey's president, who had played a key role during months of tense negotiations.

Guterres said in remarks at the ceremony that the deal would open the way to significant volumes of food exports from Ukraine and alleviate a food and economic crisis in the developing world. He said “the beacon of hope was shining bright in the Black Sea” and called on [Russia](#) and Ukraine to fully implement the accord.

In Kyiv, there is deep scepticism about Russia's intentions but Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Ukraine was trusting in the UN and Turkey to police the agreement.

The aim of the deal is to secure the passage of grain and essential goods such as sunflower oil from three Ukrainian ports, including Odesa, even as the war continues to rage elsewhere in the country. The UN had warned that the war risked mass malnutrition, hunger and famine.

The arrangement also seeks to guarantee the safe passage of Russian-made fertiliser products, essential for ensuring future high yields on crops, amid efforts to ease a global food crisis provoked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

UN officials said they hoped preliminary shipments of grain could begin as soon as Saturday, with the hope of reaching prewar levels of export from the three Ukrainian ports – a rate of 5m metric tonnes a month – within weeks.

According to UN officials, under agreements signed by Russian defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, and Ukrainian infrastructure minister, Oleksandr Kubrakov:

- A coalition of Turkish, Ukrainian and UN staff will monitor the loading of grain on to vessels in Ukrainian ports before navigating a pre-planned route through the Black Sea, which remains heavily mined by Ukrainian and Russian forces.
- Ukrainian pilot vessels will guide commercial vessels transporting the grain in order to navigate the mined areas around the coastline using a map of safe channels provided by the Ukrainian side.
- The vessels will then cross the Black Sea towards Turkey's Bosphorus strait while being closely monitored by a joint coordination centre in Istanbul, containing representatives from the UN, Ukraine, Russia and Turkey.

- Ships entering Ukraine will be inspected under the supervision of the same joint coordination centre to ensure they are not carrying weapons or items that could be used to attack the Ukrainian side.
- The Russian and Ukrainian sides have agreed to withhold attacks on any of the commercial vessels or ports engaged in the initiative to transport vital grain, while UN and Turkish monitors will be present in Ukrainian ports in order to demarcate areas protected by the accord.

Guterres said brokering such a deal between two warring countries was “unprecedented” and that it would “bring relief for developing countries on the edge of bankruptcy and the most vulnerable people on the edge of famine”.

“And it will help stabilise global food prices, which were already at record levels even before the war – a true nightmare for developing countries,” he added.

“Specifically, the initiative we just signed opens a path for significant volumes of commercial food exports from three key Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea – Odesa, Chernomorsk and Yuzhny..”

Kubrakov said the agreement was made possible thanks to the Ukrainian military’s defence of waters off Ukraine’s Black Sea coast. In June, Ukraine pushed Russian forces from Snake Island near Odesa. Ukraine claimed Russia had planned to use the island to launch a land invasion.

The agreement would help boost the Ukrainian economy, he added. “More than 20m tons of grain have been in warehouses since last year,” he said. “If the president’s team did not manage to move this issue from a dead end, Ukrainian farmers would question the very need to sow fields for the next year.”

The agreement is the product of months of constant and difficult negotiations between UN officials, including Guterres, and leading Russian and Ukrainian officials, who first broached the issue in April.

US officials had accused the Russian government of effectively “weaponising food” by taking Ukrainian grain hostage in order to reduce the effects of sanctions on Russian exports. Still, the US and EU have both reassured businesses carrying Russian agricultural goods that they are not violating sanctions ahead of the signing of the deal.

Senior UN officials said prior to the signing of the agreement that demining Ukraine’s coastline had not been seen as a viable option. Ukrainian officials expressed concerns that removing defensive mines from their coastline would increase their vulnerability to Russian attacks.

But the final text contains provisions for a potential minesweeping operation by an agreed party to check that the maritime route for the ships remains safe, as well as a potential search and rescue vessel in the Black Sea.

## Ukraine and Russia sign UN-backed deal to begin exporting grain from blockaded Black Sea ports

■ Russian-controlled territory ■ Russian advances ■ Areas where Ukraine has regained control  
● Ukrainian-controlled ports ● Russian-controlled ports



### Under the terms of the deal

**1**  
A coalition of Turkish, Ukrainian and UN staff would monitor the loading of grain onto ships and ensure they are not carrying weapons

**2**  
Ukrainian vessels would guide commercial vessels along safe paths through mined areas along the coast

**3**  
Vessels would be monitored by the same coalition as they cross the Black Sea towards the Bosphorus Strait

Guardian graphic. Source: The Institute for the Study of War with AEI's Critical Threats Project

UN officials emphasised that the deal to prevent attacks only included specific areas in Ukraine's ports covered by the grain agreement.

They added that they had engaged with the shipping industry and insurers to ensure the commercial costs of insuring the grain shipments does not become punitive, thereby raising the cost of the grain on the international market.

The details were finalised after [Erdoğan met Russia's president, in Tehran](#) earlier this week, officials in Ankara said. Turkey has the authority over sea traffic entering and leaving the Black Sea.

İbrahim Kalın, a spokesperson for Erdoğan, said the arrangement would be “critical for global grain security”.

Ukraine is the world's [fifth-largest wheat exporter](#) but exports have badly stalled since the war began, with about 20m tonnes of grain stuck in silos at Odesa close to the frontline.

The US state department said it welcomed the deal “in principle” and was focused on holding Russia accountable for implementing it.

Putin effectively called the deal a quid-pro-quo earlier this week, saying that Russia would “facilitate the exportation of Ukrainian grain, but we are proceeding from the fact that all restrictions related to ... the export of Russian grain will be lifted.”

While Russian grain exports were not sanctioned by the US, some shipping companies have avoided carrying Russian goods because of the financial and reputations risks involved.

Robert Mardini, director general of the International Committee of the Red Cross, said the deal was “nothing short of life-saving for people across the world who are struggling to feed their families”.

“Nowhere are the consequences felt harder than in communities already affected by armed conflict and climate shocks”, he said. “For example, our market monitoring, over the past six months has seen the price of food staples rise by 187% in Sudan, 86% in Syria 60% in Yemen, 54% in Ethiopia, as compared to the same time period last year.

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I write from Ukraine, where I've spent much of the past six months, reporting on the build-up to the conflict and the grim reality of war. It has been the most intense time of

my 30-year career. In December I visited the trenches outside Donetsk with the Ukrainian army; in January I went to Mariupol and drove along the coast to Crimea; on 24 February I was with other colleagues in the Ukrainian capital as the first Russian bombs fell.

This is the biggest war in Europe since 1945. It is, for Ukrainians, an existential struggle against a new but familiar Russian imperialism. Our team of reporters and editors intend to cover this war for as long as it lasts, however expensive that may prove to be. We are committed to telling the human stories of those caught up in war, as well as the international dimension. But we can't do this without the support of Guardian readers. It is your passion, engagement and financial contributions which underpin our independent journalism and make it possible for us to report from places like Ukraine.

If you are able to help with a monthly or single contribution it will boost our resources and enhance our ability to report the truth about what is happening in this terrible conflict.

Thank you.

**Luke Harding**

*Foreign correspondent*



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