

Renewing Black Sea grain deal critical for Africa, WFP boss says

By [John Irish](#)

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Failure to renew a UN-backed initiative that has enabled Ukraine to export grain from ports blockaded by Russia would be catastrophic as millions in Africa are on the cusp of famine, the head of the UN food agency warned on Saturday, 18 February.



Source: Vessels are seen as they wait for inspection under United Nation's Black Sea Grain Initiative in the southern anchorage of the Bosphorus in Istanbul, Turkey December 11, 2022. REUTERS/Yoruk Isik/File Photo

Negotiations will start in a week on extending the trade agreement, a senior Ukrainian official said on Friday.

"It's critical," World Food Programme (WFP) Director David Beasley told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of the Munich Security Forum.

"With all the crises we are facing around the world with climate change, droughts, flash floods, we can't afford the Black Sea Grain initiative to fall through at all," Beasley added.

The grain deal brokered by the United Nations and Turkey last July allowed exports from three Ukrainian ports.

The agreement was extended by a further 120 days in November and is up for renewal again in March, but Russia has signalled it is unhappy with some aspects of the deal and has asked for sanctions affecting its agricultural exports to be lifted.

Beasley said the current flow of goods and grains, which according to U.N. data has benefited the European Union, China and Turkey especially, was currently nowhere near where it needs to be.

He warned Moscow that shutting down the ports would be catastrophic, notably in Africa, where millions of people are facing famine. "Africa is very fragile right now. Fifty million people (are) knocking on famine's door," he said.

"Food prices, fuel costs, debt inflation and three years of Covid... the people have no more coping capacity and if we don't get in and get costs down then 2024 could be the worst year we have seen in several hundred years."

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