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Katerynivka underground school opening



Students and teacher at the opening of Katerynivka school in Kharkiv. Photo: LWF/ A. Zhuravel

Katerynivka, Kharkiv region — September 4, 2025. A newly rehabilitated underground school space has been opened in the bomb shelter of Katerynivka school, allowing 150 students to safely return to their studies. This is the final educational facility completed under the joint project of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) in Ukraine, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR), ACT Alliance, and the NGO Common Cause for People, in close coordination with the Kharkiv Regional State Administration and local authorities.

In partnership with UNHCR, and contribution from other funding partners like Diakonie ACT Austria (DAA), Neighbour in Need (NIN), ELCA and ACT Alliance, LWF rehabilitated safe and inclusive underground classrooms at the Kharkiv Vocational Railway Transport Lyceum, and in the schools of Pishchanka, Mykolo-Komyshuvate, Merefa, and Blyzniuky. Additional support included providing furniture and equipment for the school in Panyutyn, as well as developing an architectural plan for a facility in Kehychivka. All these educational spaces are located underground, ensuring both safety and access to learning for over 2,500 children in a secure, and dignified environment.



*Second grade students in their classroom at Katerynivka school.
Photo: LWF/ A. Zhuravel*

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine, since the beginning of the full-scale invasion 4,139 educational institutions have been damaged, with 394 completely destroyed.

“When we learned that our school had been selected for the rehabilitation of underground shelters, at first I could hardly believe it. It seemed impossible that we would not only receive a fully rebuilt shelter, but also modern furniture and equipment. On our own, we could never have done so much. Our gratitude to the Lutheran World Federation and UNHCR is boundless. For years, children have been waiting for a place where they can not only study but once again feel the joy of real interaction with classmates and teachers,” said Yurii Shukaliukov, Director of Katerynivka Lyceum.



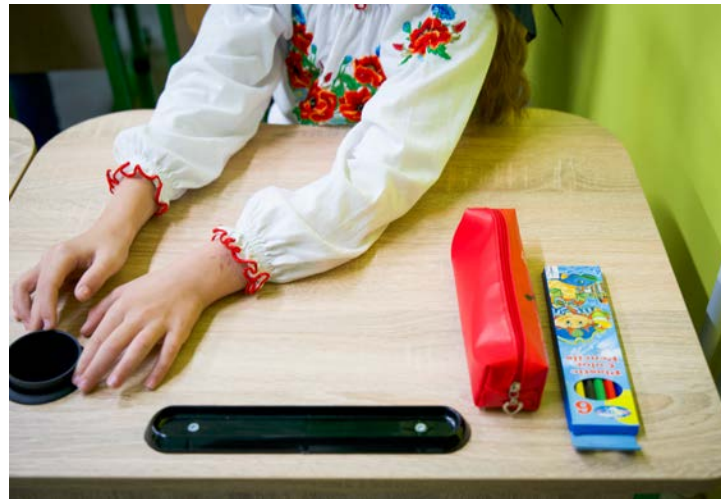
Barnabás Szatmári, Country Representative of LWF Ukraine; Richard Evans, Head of UNHCR's Kharkiv Office; and Yuriy Shulkov, Director of Katerynivka school. Photo: LWF/ A. Zhuravel

The new Katerynivka school space now includes four classrooms, an inclusive block for children with special needs, and modern lighting and ventilation systems. With a total area of nearly 300 square meters, it can accommodate 80 students at once, or up to 200 in shifts. Today, 150 students are enrolled at the school.

“I live in Katerynivka and started school last year, but I had never actually been inside it, all my lessons were online. I met my teacher only a few times and saw classmates occasionally in town, but we never studied together. When my mum told me that this year I would finally go to school in person and see my classmates every day, I was so happy! I’m especially excited to learn my favourite subject, Art, face-to-face with my teacher. And most of all, I’m glad I can spend time with my friends.” — Eva, 8 years-old student from Katerynivka Lyceum



*Second grade students in their classroom at Katerynivka school.
Photo: LWF/ A. Zhuravel*



*New furniture in one of the classrooms at Katerynivka school.
Photo: LWF/ A. Zhuravel*

“For a child, the world is often their school — the place where friendships are made and dreams for the future begin. Creating a safe, inclusive, and welcoming space for that world is one of the most meaningful things we can do together. This shelter is more than renovated walls and classrooms; it is a place where children can learn, grow, and laugh in safety. The future of Ukraine will be built in schools like this one, by children who today can study with dignity and hope,” said Barnabás Szatmári, Country Representative Lutheran World Federation in Ukraine.

“I come from Cambridge, a city where scholars from around the world have studied. Among them was Charles Darwin, who through persistence became one of the greatest scientists. This reminds us that even under the most difficult circumstances, perseverance and collective effort can achieve everything. Ukraine is a strong and self-resilient country, and we are proud to stand with you, supporting children who deserve a future,” said Richard Evans, Head of UNHCR’s Kharkiv Field Office.



School team, LWF Ukraine staff, UNHCR representatives, and local authorities at the opening of Katerynivka school. Photo: LWF/ A. Zhuravel



Engineer Sergii Kurylko with Yuriy Shulkov, Director of Katerynivka school. Photo: LWF/ A. Zhuravel

Underground schools are a lifeline. They save children's lives, protect their mental health through face-to-face interaction, bring hopes among the children for a better future, and safeguard an entire generation from the loss of education. Children are together again: learning, making friends, laughing. This is the face of hope.

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