

NRC Ukraine Quarterly Newsletter: March 2026



Foreword by Marit Glad, NRC Country Director in Ukraine

As we look back on 2025, it is hard to ignore how difficult the year has been for communities across Ukraine. Civilians have once again borne the brunt of the violence, with a steep rise in casualties, displacement, destruction of homes and infrastructure, and relentless uncertainty about what the future might bring. For the humanitarian community, the year was also marked by reduced funding. Yet amid all this, communities continued to demonstrate extraordinary resilience.

People found ways to adapt, rebuild, and support one another – often with very little. It has been both humbling and a privilege for the Norwegian Refugee Council to stand alongside them, providing assistance and protection where we can, and learning from their strength in the process. As we start implementing the 2026 humanitarian response plan, many Ukrainians once again face a winter of hardship. Repeated power cuts and continuing attacks on civilian areas are daily reminders of how fragile life remains for millions.

For NRC and our partners, this only reinforces why we are here, and why we must continue to stay and deliver. Our mission is not only to meet immediate needs, but also to enable people to live with dignity and agency – to support families as they rebuild schools, regain livelihoods, or make homes safe again. In an increasingly complex environment, our commitment to those most affected by the conflict remains unchanged.

The year ahead will require adaptability and persistence. It will also demand continued and strengthened collaboration with our local partners, who are critical to reaching communities effectively and ensuring that our assistance truly responds to local needs. The challenges are immense, but so is the dedication of our teams and the courage of the communities we serve. This edition of our newsletter offers a snapshot of that work.

Our main story highlights the remarkable achievements of NRC's Livelihoods and Food Security programme, which has supported thousands of households to regain income and stability through small businesses, vocational training, and agricultural projects. As this programme now comes to a close, we reflect with pride on its impact and on the partnerships that made it possible.

You will also find updates from other core areas of our work. From providing children displaced by conflict with access to safe, quality education, to ensuring families have shelter that can withstand another harsh winter – NRC staff and partners have continued to adapt to the evolving realities of this crisis.

Thank you to our staff, partners, donors, and Ukrainian authorities for standing with us and with those affected by the war. Your continued support is essential as we face another year of challenges and opportunities to make a real difference in people's lives.

Sincerely,
Marit Glad

Mariyam Ovsepyan, a farmer in Mykolaiv Oblast, showing her strawberry harvest. (Susan Detera/NRC)

SEEDS OF RESILIENCE:

Sustaining Lives Through Agriculture in Conflict-Affected Ukraine

Ukraine is a nation shaped by its land. For generations, families have relied on its fertile black soil not only as a source of income, but as a way of life — growing food, caring for livestock, and passing down farming traditions that sustain households and communities.

In rural areas, agriculture is deeply personal: it is how families eat, survive winter, and maintain dignity.

The full-scale war has fractured this foundation. Since February 2022, millions of Ukrainians have been displaced from their homes and land. Fields have been damaged or left untended, equipment destroyed, and barns reduced to rubble.

The constant threat of shelling, drones, and landmines has turned routine farming into a life-risking activity. For rural households, recovery is not only about returning home — it is about regaining the ability to grow food, sustain their families, and look beyond day-to-day survival.

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Rebuilding Food Security, One Household at a Time

In response to these challenges, the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), through its Livelihoods and Food Security (LFS) programme, has supported conflict-affected and displaced households across Ukraine to restore food production and livelihoods.

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“Planting in my backyard helps me not only to feed myself, but also to cope with loneliness.”



Hanna Pavliuk posing with her harvest.
(Susan Detera/NRC)

Through cash assistance for agricultural and livestock inputs and assets, NRC enables families to make their own choices – purchasing seeds, tools, livestock, and equipment that best suit their land, skills, and needs.

This approach does more than meet immediate food needs. It helps households regain control over their lives, rebuild productive capacity, and reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance – often in places where markets are limited, incomes disrupted, and insecurity persists.

Backyard Gardens: Food, Dignity, and Survival

In Shostka Raion, Sumy Oblast, life continues under the constant hum of drones and the threat of missile strikes. Repeated attacks on railways, warehouses, and power lines have weakened local economies and disrupted agriculture. Many households farm under fear, while others have lost access to storage, tools, or labour as family members join the military or flee. For vulnerable households – particularly elderly women, single parents, and displaced families – rising food prices and shrinking incomes have pushed survival to the brink.

Seventy-five-year-old **Hanna**, a widow living alone in Sobykh village, found strength in her small garden. “After my son and grandson joined the army, the war affected me deeply,” she says. “Working in my backyard helps me feed myself – and helps me cope with loneliness.”

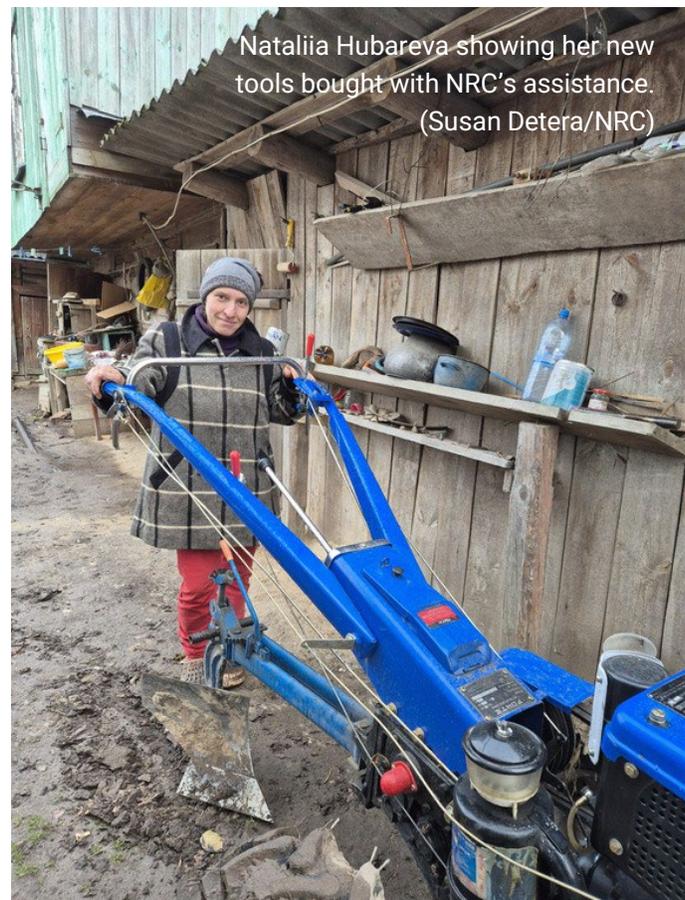
For **Nataliia**, a displaced mother of two, safety did not bring stability. After fleeing Kharkiv, she moved from a collective shelter to rented housing, only to be forced out by rising costs. Eventually, she settled in Sobykh village, where a small plot of land offered a chance to survive – but without tools or resources, even that felt impossible.

“Flour and sugar became so expensive. Even vegetables we could no longer afford,” she recalls.

What unites these women is a shared goal: to restore their backyard gardens and secure food for their families. Backyard gardening has long been part of everyday life in Ukraine. Families traditionally grow vegetables, keep poultry, and preserve food for winter.

According to a recent World Food Programme (WFP) assessment, the primary reasons households cultivate land or keep livestock are overwhelmingly for self-reliance rather than profit:

- 55% do so because they lack money to buy food,
- 27% because food is unavailable in local markets,
- 22% to access healthier, fresher food,
- 12% to build reserves for the future,
- and only 11% for selling to earn income.

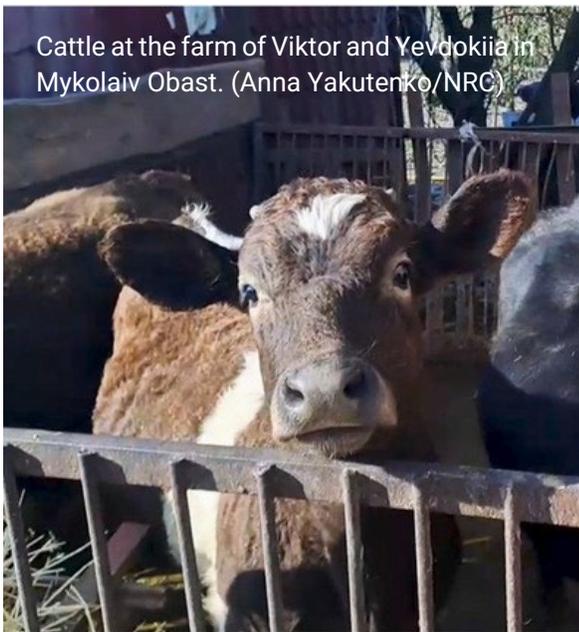


Nataliia Hubareva showing her new tools bought with NRC's assistance.
(Susan Detera/NRC)

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Greenhouses and backyard gardens now glow at night like quiet beacons of resistance.

During the war, this practice has become a critical survival strategy. With disrupted incomes and limited access to markets, backyard gardens often provide the only reliable source of fresh food. Yet years of conflict have eroded this safety net – tools lost, seeds unaffordable, and safe land increasingly scarce.



Cattle at the farm of Viktor and Yevdokiia in Mykolaiv Obast. (Anna Yakutenko/NRC)

Through its implementing partners, NRC provides cash assistance for agricultural and livestock inputs for household subsistence – enabling households with small plots to grow food or raise animals primarily for their own consumption.

Through NRC’s cash assistance, households like Hanna’s and Nataliia’s were able to purchase tools, seeds, greenhouses, livestock and small equipment – restoring their ability to feed themselves with dignity.

“With the tools we received from NRC, we can now grow what we couldn’t afford to buy before,” Nataliia explains. Nataliia had previously received NRC’s Multi-Purpose Cash Assistance (MPCA) in 2022. “The cash helped us survive for a while, but the motor block (a two-wheel walk-behind tractor) can give us food continuously. Now we will always have potatoes and vegetables.”

Hanna, who lives on a modest pension, shared that she now saves money because she no longer needs to buy vegetables. “I have extra money now. That matters.”

Since 2024, NRC has supported 3255 households in Shostka, Kherson, and Kharkiv with cash for agricultural and livestock inputs for household subsistence – all of whom used the assistance as intended, primarily to produce food for household consumption.

Small-Scale Farmers: Keeping Local Food Systems Alive



Farmers from Mykolaiv, Viktor and Yevdokiia, next to their house. (Anna Yakutenko/NRC)

Small-scale farmers play a vital role in Ukraine’s food security, supplying local markets and sustaining rural communities. Since 2022, they have faced immense challenges: mined land, destroyed infrastructure, rising costs, and constant insecurity.

For **Viktor and Yevdokiia**, farmers in Mykolaiv Oblast, the war crept into every part of daily life. War or no war, their days began before sunrise – feeding animals, milking cows, tending their land. “You mow the grass, then hear shooting. You hide. When it’s quiet, you keep working,” Viktor recalls.

As fighting intensified, fear became constant. Yevdokiia remembers how even the animals sensed the danger. “My cow was so terrified she collapsed on her knees and couldn’t even walk into the barn,” she says.

The danger escalated until a munition struck their barn, injuring Viktor and destroying decades of work in seconds. Forced to flee, they eventually returned to find their land damaged and unsafe, and their livestock gone.



Viktor posing next to his “little helper” - a tractor he received NRC grant from LFS programme. (Anna Yakutenko/NRC)

Through NRC’s cash assistance for agricultural and livestock inputs for small-scale farmers, the couple was able to purchase new cows and a tractor – allowing them to restart production and reduce the physical toll of farming.

“I’m used to village life,” Viktor says. “I’m used to working. The city doesn’t appeal to me.”

For Mariyam, a farmer and mother of four, she faced displacement for the second time in her life. After her home and farm were destroyed in Kherson Oblast, her family started again in Odesa Oblast, risking their remaining savings on crops that failed due to extreme weather.

At one point, they returned to their home in Kherson under shelling to dig up carrots from abandoned fields – simply to find food to eat. A turning point came when NRC provided her with cash assistance to restore their farm. With the cash, the family purchased strawberry seedlings (expected to bear fruit this spring), an irrigation system, fertilisers, a cow, pigs, broilers, and chickens. Today, the couple earns income from livestock sales and egg production, while preparing for their first strawberry harvest.



Mariyam Ovsepyan showing eggs produced by the poultry bought with NRC assistance. (Susan Detera/NRC)

The grant has allowed them not only to reestablish farming but also to cover household needs and medical expenses for their children – three of whom live with disabilities.

“I hesitated for a long time, wondering if I could really start all over again. But my love for the land gave me the strength to take the risk.” she says. “Farming is my life, even after everything, I cannot imagine living without it.”

In 2025, NRC cash assistance enabled 56 small-scale farmers in Mykolaiv and Odesa oblasts to access essential agricultural and livestock inputs and assets.

Why Recovery Remains Central To Ukraine’s Future

Four years into the war, it is clear that recovery in Ukraine depends not only on rebuilding homes, but on restoring people’s ability to produce food, earn a living, and plan for the future. Backyard gardening and small-scale farming are not temporary coping mechanisms – they are essential pillars of food security, resilience, and dignity.

Through its LFS programme, NRC has supported thousands of households to reclaim these foundations. While this programme concludes in 2026, continued investment in the recovery of displaced and conflict-affected families remains critical. NRC remains committed to its mission through its other existing programmes and activities – season by season, harvest by harvest.



*The staff of NRC Ukraine visit a household of 69-year-old Olga who lives in Kharkiv Oblast. Thanks to the NRC support, she was able to purchase essential equipment for her farm like grain feed and a grinder for her poultry, as well as vital tools for her garden and home maintenance, including a wheelbarrow, a sprayer, a drill, and a trimmer.
(Inha Musiiuk/NRC)*

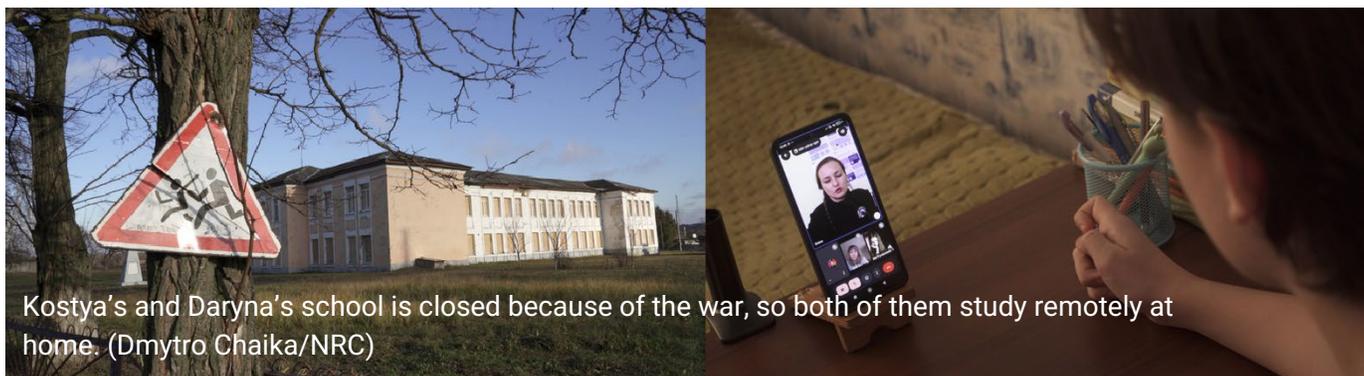
What is going on in the field?



14-year-old Kostya from Yampil, Sumy Oblast, in his room. Kostya's house was damaged during multiple air strikes. (Dmytro Chaika/NRC)

Restoring the Sense of Home

14-year-old **Kostya and Daryna** live in Yampil, Sumy Oblast, just 30 kilometers from the frontline in Ukraine. Like many teens, they have hobbies that bring them joy and a sense of normalcy. Kostya enjoys computer games with his friends, listening to music, riding his bike, and occasionally drawing characters from his favourite anime film, Blue Lock, a football sports drama. He's shy about sharing his sketches, calling them "amateurish."



Kostya's and Daryna's school is closed because of the war, so both of them study remotely at home. (Dmytro Chaika/NRC)

Daryna in her pink room at her grandma's house. The girl lives stays with her grandmother Tetiana every weekend. (Dmytro Chaika/NRC)



Daryna also loves arts and crafts, and anime. She spends her weekends at her grandma Tetiana's house, where she has turned one of the rooms into her own pink sanctuary. It's filled with paintings, collages, and plaster figures. Unlike Kostya, she proudly shows all her favourite drawings by name: Nezuko from Demon Slayer, Kaneki Ken from Tokyo Ghoul, and many more.

"I like drawing because it helps me distract myself," Daryna says.

"Distract from what?" I ask.

"From all of the worries," she replies.

Daryna showing her drawings. (Dmytro Chaika/NRC)



Those worries became painfully real last year. Three heavy aerial attacks struck Yampil, leaving home of Dasha grandmother's, Tetiana, and Kostya's house damaged.

"All the windows were gone and the roof was damaged," Tetiana, 67, recalls.



Daryna on her way back home to her mother's place after visiting her grandmother. (Dmytro Chaika/NRC)

"The first time it hit, I almost fell from the blast wave while coming out of the house. During the third strike, debris from the nearby water tower pierced the roof. If it weren't for NRC, I would have had to save my pension for ages to fix everything. I've lived here for over 40 years – where would I go? Your own walls are the dearest to the heart."

Kostya's home was also badly affected: doors, windows, and the ceiling were damaged.

"I heard a loud whistle and just managed to shout, 'Everyone – to the corridor!' The ceiling started cracking and dust fell on our heads," Olena, his mother, remembers. Broken doors and windows let in the freezing winter cold, forcing Kostya, his mum, and his grandpa to rent a room nearby temporarily. Life was complicated further by online schooling. Their local school had been hit by a missile in 2022 and had not reopened since, and before that, the global pandemic had kept them from studying in person. Now, their bedrooms serve as classrooms for online lessons, doubling as spaces for both study and rest.

Kostya admits he sometimes feels shy and unsure speaking to people after years of learning online. "I am very afraid of saying something wrong," Kostya shares. I assure him that it's normal – and he is not alone. Thanks to NRC, both homes have now been repaired.



Kostya plays with a family husky Kaira (Dmytro Chaika/NRC)

Tetiana's roof and windows were fixed, and Kostya's doors, ceiling, and windows were restored. Families can finally return to safe, warm homes, where children have their own spaces again.



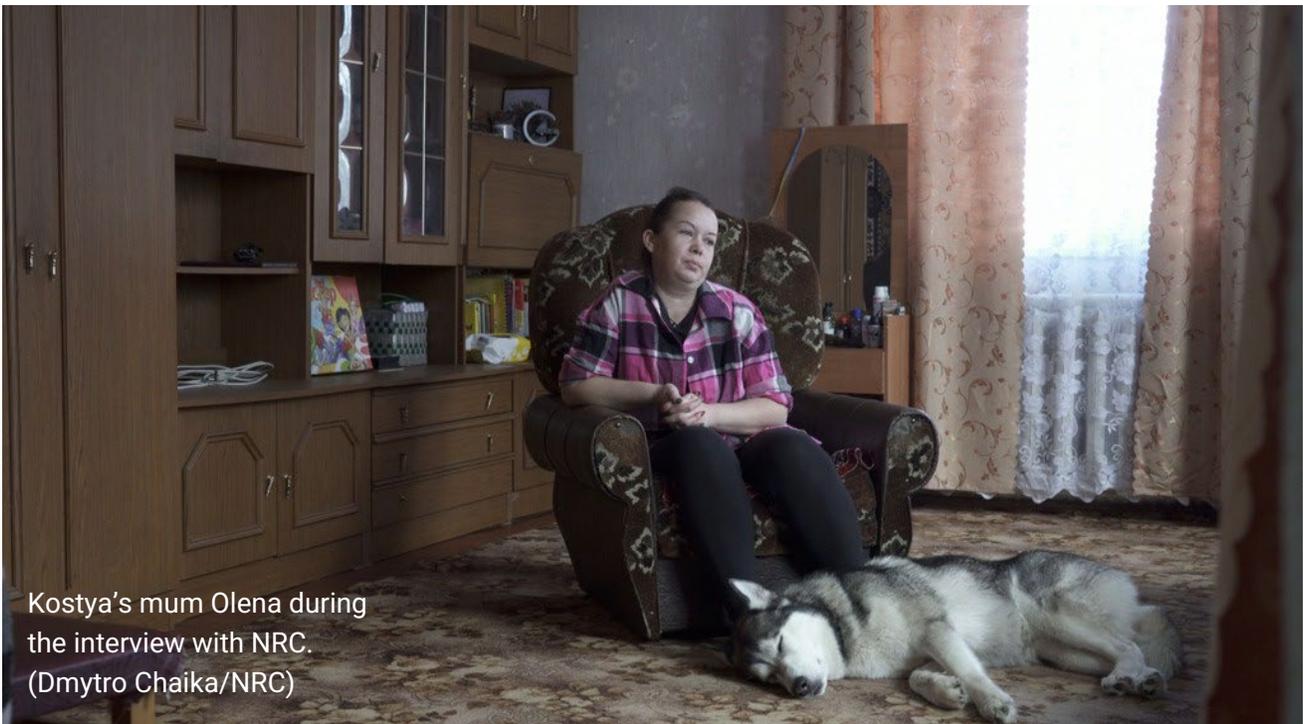
Daryna's grandmother Tetiana in front of her house. (Dmytro Chaika/NRC)

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“We used to sleep in one bed, all 3 of us,” Kostya recalls of his time away from home. Now, he is happy to be back to his own neat room. “It's a place where I can relax, I just feel very calm when I am here,” Kostya says.

Olena pets their dog, Kaira, curled up beside her, while checking her phone for air alerts every few minutes. Despite the calm, drones still fly overhead most nights. So for Kostya and Daryna, the biggest dream remains simple yet profound: “For the war to end.”



Kostya's mum Olena during the interview with NRC. (Dmytro Chaika/NRC)

In the field

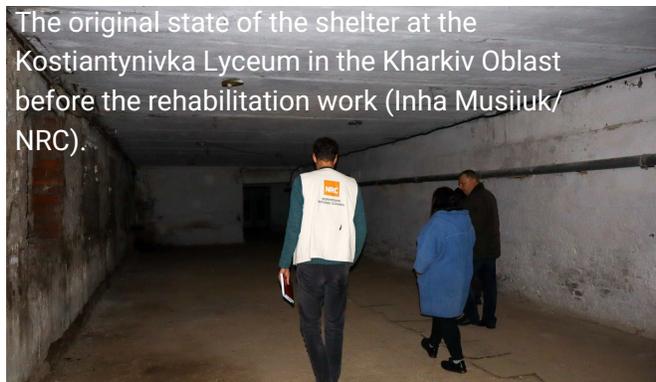
Svitlana, a primary school teacher at the Kolomak Lyceum in the Kharkiv Oblast engages with children during a lesson (Inha Musiiuk / NRC).

Restoring Safe Learning Spaces and Strengthening Resilience in Eastern Ukraine

For children in Ukraine, the familiar ring of the school bell has been replaced by the chilling wail of air-raid sirens.

Years of full-scale war have deeply affected the Ukrainian education system. Many schools have been damaged or destroyed, while constant shelling and safety concerns have forced children to study online for prolonged periods. For many hromadas, a school is not just a place for learning, it is the beating heart of the community—the only space where children can feel safe, socialise, and dream about a future beyond the horizon of the war.

The original state of the shelter at the Kostiantynivka Lyceum in the Kharkiv Oblast before the rehabilitation work (Inha Musiiuk / NRC).



Due to the ongoing war, children in the Kharkiv Oblast, in the north-east of Ukraine, often study only in bomb shelters; without a shelter in the school, there is only online schooling. To restore access to education, NRC provides comprehensive education assistance to local communities by combining shelter rehabilitation and educational support.

In total, nine lyceums across the Kharkiv Oblast benefited from NRC's intervention.



Rehabilitated shelters at the lyceums across the Kharkiv Oblast (Inha Musiiuk/NRC).

Rebuilding Infrastructure for Safe Learning

The first priority of the project was the physical restoration of learning environments. In five schools, NRC directly supported the renovation of school shelters to meet safety standards, allowing children to move from virtual screens back to real classrooms.

In the Cherneshchyna and Berdyanka Lyceums of the Zachepylivka hromada, as well as in the small village of Bereka, students are gradually returning to blended learning. These schools underwent comprehensive renovations: walls, ceilings, and floors were repaired, electrical systems were updated, and new ventilation systems were installed.



NRC staff, alongside a representative of the Zachepylivka Village Council and partners SpivDnia and Bibliothèques Sans Frontières (BSF), in the rehabilitated shelter at the Cherneshchyna Lyceum, Kharkiv Oblast (Inha Musiiuk/NRC).

“Before the repairs, our buildings were unsuitable for in-person classes, and the shelters did not meet safety standards,” says Oleksandr, Head of the Department of Education, Youth and Sports of the Zachepylivka Village Council. “Now, we can safely resume blended learning. It means a lot for children who have had only online schooling for more than four years.”



A representative of the Zachepylivka Village Council interacting with students and NRC staff at the Cherneshchyna Lyceum, Kharkiv Oblast (Inha Musiiuk/NRC).

“When I was studying online, I missed my friends, but now everything is much better because we see each other almost every day,” mentions Ruslana, an eleventh-grade student at the Cherneshchyna Lyceum.

In Bereka, where there are no community centres or sports clubs, the school shelter has become the only social hub. “During online classes, it was so hard to get them to talk,” recalls Svitlana, the school principal. “Now, when lessons take place in the renovated shelter, they are eager to learn. Face-to-face communication gives much more than a computer ever could.”

Strengthening Psychosocial Well-being and Resilience

Beyond physical repairs, the project focused on the “invisible” wounds of war. In four additional schools, and as a follow-up to renovations in others, NRC activities focused on psychosocial support, child well-being, and coping with learning loss.

Through the Better Learning Programme (BLP), NRC provided teachers with tools to reduce stress and maintain a positive environment. Teachers are empowered to help children find their calm with simple stress-relief activities. Right in the middle of a lesson, the whole class might stand up together to take a deep breath, do a quick stretch, or practice a short mindfulness game. These small breaks help everyone feel more relaxed and ready to focus on their studies again.



A teacher at the Korotych Lyceum in Kharkiv Oblast facilitates BLP exercises during a lesson (Inha Musiuk/NRC).

At Bohodukhiv Lyceum No. 2, where a missile strike destroyed part of the building in March 2025, this kind of support is a lifeline. “The night of March 15th was the most terrifying of all. Four Shahed drones and four direct hits destroyed the school—a place that, until then, had been filled with children’s voices and lively activities in the shelter,” recalls Tamara, the school principal.



A school principal speaking with the NRC representative at the Bohodukhiv Lyceum in Kharkiv Oblast (Inha Musiuk/NRC).

“The strike caused deep trauma. Parents said that when the children heard the news at home, they cried and were deeply distressed,” Tamara adds. “These trainings helped us calm the children and gave teachers the tools to cope with their own stress.”

In the Lyceum, this emotional support comes to life through interactive play and creative activities. Teachers use tools like emotion cards and "attention exercises" alongside new learning kits which include tablets, flipcharts, and magnetic boards to make lessons more engaging and help students manage their feelings.



Children at the Kolomak Lyceum in Kharkiv Oblast are accomplishing exercises from the Better Learning Programme (BLP) during the lesson (Inha Musiiuk/NRC).

Reaching the Unreachable – Mobile Groups in Donetsk Oblast

While blended learning is becoming a reality in parts of Kharkiv, the situation in the Donetsk Oblast remains critical. In areas where the security situation makes any in-person schooling in buildings impossible, NRC has adapted its approach to ensure no child is left behind.



Footage of the mobile team working with children in Donetsk Oblast (Alina Ponomarenko)



Footage of the mobile team working with children in Donetsk Oblast (Alina Ponomarenko)

In these communities, mobile groups have become the primary bridge to education. These groups consist of dedicated educators who travel to reach children in their homes or local hubs, effectively replacing traditional teachers in a landscape where schools remain closed.

“For many children in Donetsk Oblast, these mobile units are currently the only way to receive knowledge, providing not only academic lessons but also a vital sense of normalcy and human connection amidst the isolation of war,” says Tamara Ishchenko, NRC Education Project Manager.



A portrait of a student from the Kolomak Lyceum, Kharkiv Oblast, during a lesson (Inha Musiiuk/NRC).

Education as a Path to Recovery

Across Eastern Ukraine, NRC’s education activities combine safe infrastructure, psychosocial support, and remedial classes to help communities recover. By ensuring access to safe learning spaces – whether in a renovated shelter or through a mobile teaching unit – the project helps children regain not just knowledge but also confidence and hope for the future.



Ihor Revenko and his team next to the building of the Mykolaiv branch of the Ukrainian Society of the Deaf (UTOG). (Anna Yakutenko/NRC)

When Sirens Can't Be Heard

Supporting Deaf People in Wartime Mykolaiv

As a child, Ihor, director of the Mykolaiv branch of the Ukrainian Society of the Deaf (UTOG), thought he was the only deaf person in the world. He went to a local school and didn't meet other people with hearing impairments until he was older. That early feeling of isolation later became the driving force behind his work.

"We know the problems of deaf people from birth to old age," he says. Since moving to Mykolaiv shortly before the full-scale war started, Ihor has remained in the city through shelling and uncertainty, dedicating himself to supporting hundreds of deaf and hard-of-hearing residents.



Psychology session for deaf people with a translation into sign language. (UTOG/Facebook)

"People should not feel left alone at home. They can come to the community center, spend time together, relax, maybe not think so much about the war, and just take a break from stress," Ihor explains.

Children participate in workshops, after-school activities, and developmental games. Adults and seniors join inclusive sports like bocce, volleyball, and outdoor ball games – activities that reduce stress and combat isolation during months of air alarms and uncertainty.

Group sessions with a certified psychologist offer deaf community members a place to process stress and emotions. In the long term, the psychologist will be trained in sign language, allowing for confidential one-on-one consultations without an interpreter.

"I have seen many cases during evacuations where psychologists worked with hearing people, but deaf people suffered because there was no communication. What can you do if someone doesn't understand what's happening? Stress becomes unbearable," Ihor says.

Accessible Information in Times of Crisis

UTOG Mykolaiv is an independent organisation that has long sustained itself by providing various services – including interpretation for authorities, institutions, and businesses. But when the full-scale war began, many official warnings and emergency updates were not accessible to deaf people. No one had ordered sign-language translations, yet the community urgently needed them.

Recognising this gap, UTOG stepped in voluntarily. Ihor and his team began producing sign-language videos of official warnings, evacuation announcements, and security updates, ensuring deaf residents could access lifesaving information at a critical time.

With NRC support, UTOG can now continue and expand this work – producing timely translations and keeping the deaf community in Mykolaiv informed and safe.



UTOG also provides the translation into sign language of the announcements for the local authorities. (UTOG/Facebook)

A New Chapter for UTOG Mykolaiv

To strengthen local leadership within the deaf community, the center is planning to renew and modernise its old Soviet-era building, which once served as a palace of culture.

Beyond communication and information, volunteers deliver hearing aids, hygiene kits, food, blankets, medical supplies, mobility aids, and even pet food. For those unable to leave home, assistance is delivered directly to their doors – sometimes even on birthdays or holidays to reduce loneliness.



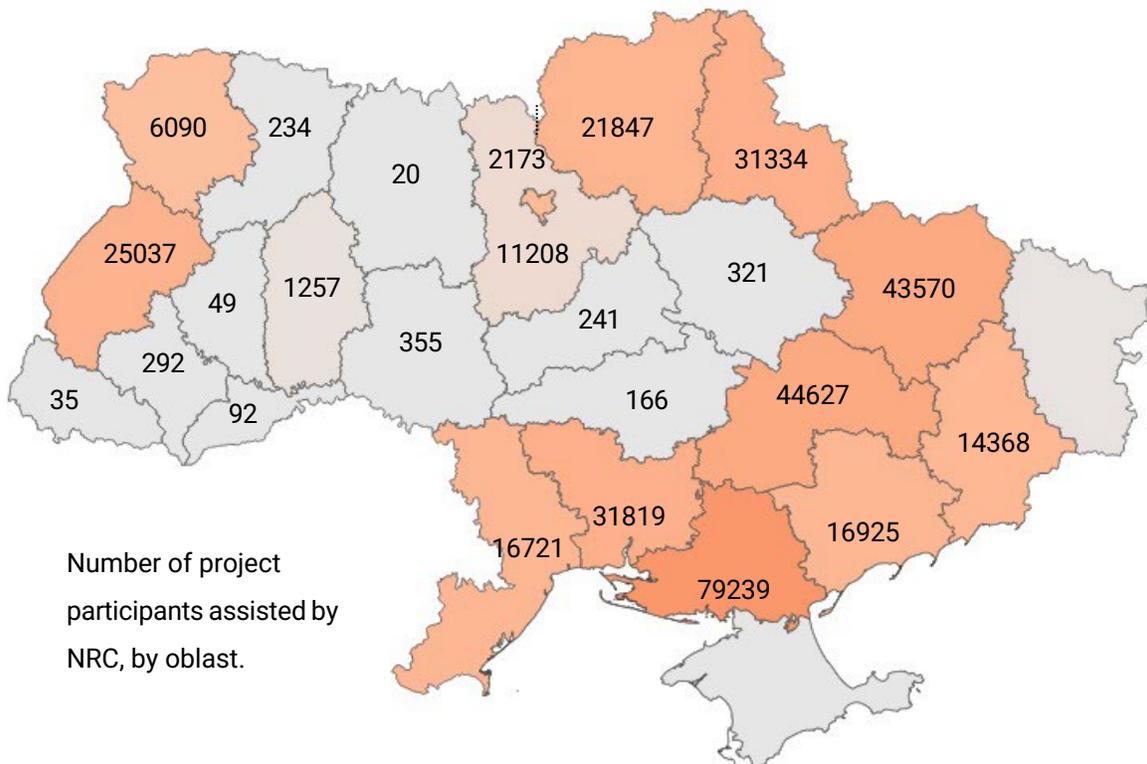
Ihor Revenko shows the space which is being rennovated on the second floor of UTOG centre. (Anna Yakutenko/NRC)

Their vision is to create a UTOG hub – a welcoming, accessible space for gatherings, workshops, and youth leadership development. This project, supported by NRC, builds on the leadership training that Ihor and his deputy Yulia completed in Moldova.



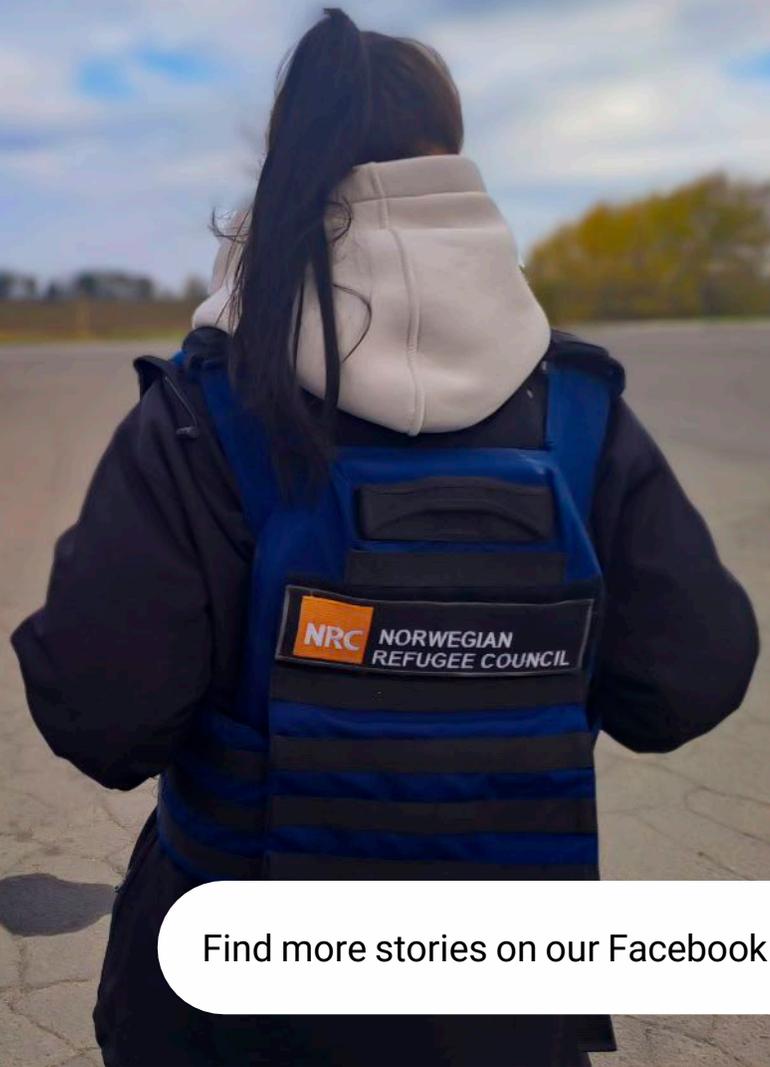
How many people has NRC Ukraine reached with humanitarian assistance so far this year?

More than **362,000** people received NRC's assistance in 2025.



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