



Inclusive Education for Displaced Children

South Wollo Zone, Ethiopia, May 2023-April 2025

Case Studies

Zubair



Selima, mother of 7-year-old Zubair, speaks with quiet determination. Born with cerebral palsy, Zubair's early years were defined by immobility and uncertainty. Selima devoted herself entirely to his care, leaving little room for her own needs. When conflict broke out in 2019, their lives unravelled. The family fled Oromia in 2020, carrying both emotional and physical burdens. "In September 2020, after many ups and downs, walking, hunger, and thirst, we came to Amhara," says Zubair's mother.

Their arrival at the Mekane-Eyesus IDP camp marked a turning point. Local support and humanitarian aid gave Selima the first glimmer of stability. But it was the organization *Berhan Lehetsanat* (BL) that truly changed their trajectory.

BL provided Zubair with a wheelchair, enabling him to move independently for the first time. The impact on Selima was equally profound, she mentioned that she was able to understand that her child is no less than anyone else. And thus, now she can work again. "This is a big change for me." Through psychological counseling, Selima learned to see beyond her son's limitations to his potential. BL's consistent visits offered not just aid but dignity. Their support restored agency to a mother who had lost everything but her will to keep going.

Zeyneba



At just sixteen, Zeyneba has lived through more trauma than most experience in a lifetime. She was born and raised in Wollega until she turned twelve. During their time there, her family relied mainly on farming and agriculture for their livelihood.

But interethnic conflict broke out in 2013, and her parents were killed. Zeyneba and her siblings were forced to flee their home and seek refuge in Amhara, eventually arriving at the Mekane-Eyesus camp.

But survival was only the beginning. Zeyneba recalls that she became very sick, and was diagnosed with stress-induced illness, before her journey of healing could begin.

What sets Zeyneba's story apart is her fight to reclaim her identity through education. BL stepped in at a critical moment—providing not only food and medical help but also school supplies and counseling. With renewed stability, she returned to school and found a purpose.

Now, Zeyneba dreams of becoming a doctor. Her transformation is not only physical but psychological. Her happiness is visible, her social connections growing stronger. In a place often defined by loss, she has rebuilt herself piece by piece.

Ketemaw



Ketemaw's silence as a young boy was not from fear, but due to a hearing impairment that was misunderstood and went unaddressed for years. His father admits they didn't know what to do, "believing it was just a natural thing, that would not change," he recalls.

One problem after another emerged until, in 2019 when Ketemaw was 11, ethnic conflict erupted in Wollega, forcing his family to leave and seek refuge in Amhara Region where their forebears had lived. They arrived at the Mekane-Eyesus IDP camp feeling extremely uncertain about the future.

The 2023-25 BL/DDP/EOF project, we are glad to say, has made a big difference.

Thanks to Sign Language training, inclusive education support, and parenting workshops, Ketemaw's home life has been transformed. His father has become his advocate, rather than a disciplinarian: "Now, I guide instead of scolding him."

In addition to psychological support, BL offered essential food assistance that was vital during a period when humanitarian deliveries were scarce and unreliable. And, with the educational materials received from BL, Ketemaw is currently attending school where his needs are better understood and catered for.

Four months of assessments show consistent attendance at Ketey Primary School. Asked about his dreams for the future, Ketemaw eagerly responds: "I want to be a teacher. Through the support of teachers, I have learned so much, and I see many children like me who struggle to be understood."

Iman



Iman's journey began with two battles: one literal, and one within her own body. Born with mobility issues, she couldn't stand or walk until age five. The loss of her family members and the trauma of displacement overwhelmed her mother Asya, leading her to miscarry another pregnancy.

"In 2021," she says, "my life was shattered when my brother and several relatives were assassinated by armed groups in Oromia. As the violence escalated, we fled our home," Asya recalls.

The family sought refuge in the Amhara Region, where they were assigned to the Mekane-Eyesus IDP camp near Haik.

The combination of grief and external stress create huge challenges for families in conflict-affected regions. But Asya regained some hope as the local community, authorities, and organizations extended support, helping the family acclimatize to their new environment amid the chaos.

As part of our project, DDP's partner *Berhan Lehetsanat* provided physiotherapy, counselling, and a safe space for Iman to play and grow. "She walks now," her mother says with awe, something she never thought she would see.

Our interventions have enhanced Iman's physical abilities and boosted her emotional wellbeing. Her family feels hopeful for her future and ongoing recovery. In a year, Iman will be ready to start school, opening a new chapter full of growth and learning opportunities. It's a story of slow, painful victories. Iman's physical milestones reflect deeper healing and show how targeted, patient support can renew hope for broken families.

Muhammad



Born blind in one eye, Muhammad has always lived in an uncertain world. His father Ahmed was unsure whether Muhammad would recover, and couldn't take him to the hospital to find out, because of the escalating conflict in Wollega, Oromia.

When Muhammad was three, it reached a point where the family had to leave, and they made the difficult, dangerous, exhausting journey to Amhara – with a small child – in September 2022.

When the family finally reached the IDP camp in South Wollo, survival was the priority. But Ahmed acknowledges the support from our project with *Berhan Lehetsanat*, including psychosocial counselling, food assistance, play equipment and educational materials.

After several months of assessment, Muhammad's development accelerated. He began preschool, learned to interact with peers, and gained confidence.

His father reflects that the comprehensive support has empowered his family to navigate their ongoing challenges with a greater sense of hope. We wish Muhammad and his parents all the very best, after all the fear and instability of his early life.

Hikma



Fourteen-year-old Hikma has never known a life without struggle. Born with intellectual and speech disabilities, her early childhood was marked by confusion and isolation. When conflict erupted in her hometown, Hikma's cries of fear while in hiding reflected the dangers her family had faced, and threatened to bring more upon them.

The family fled to the Mekane Eyesus IDP camp, carrying with them not just physical exhaustion, but psychological scars. When our partner *Berhan Lehetsanat* (BL) started work on the project Hikma's father registered his daughter for support services although he didn't know exactly what to expect, or that new hope might ensue.

Through BL, Hikma began receiving psychosocial counselling tailored for children with special needs. Her parents were trained in how to create an emotionally nurturing environment, something they had never experienced themselves. Toys from BL weren't just playthings—they became tools for healing. Hikma is smiling, playing and communicating a lot more.

With appropriate educational materials and learning tools, and support for her teachers and parents, Hikma began school for the first time. Now she can recognize letters and numbers, and participates in group play with her peers at the Child-Friendly Space established in the settlement. Like Hikma, her parents exude happiness and the sense of a brighter future.

Tesfa Getachew



Tesfa's journey began with upheaval. At just 13, he experienced the trauma of war—watching family members die, and being forced to leave everything behind. He was in grade two when the conflict hit, ending his education and uprooting his life. The journey to safety was brutal. Tesfa's family endured long walks, starvation, and days of despair. On arrival in Amhara, they were settled in an IDP camp where conditions were difficult. Still, Tesfa never lost his inner spark.

It was through our project with *Berhan Lehetsanat* (BL) that his path shifted. Tesfa received food assistance from BL, and psychosocial counselling that helped him process grief and regain emotional stability. With educational materials and support, he returned to school and caught up quickly—he's now in the fourth grade.

Tesfa is impressively focused. "One day, I will be a doctor to support my community," he says. Food aid helped sustain him physically, but the educational support fed his ambitions, and toys returned a taste of lost childhood. Tesfa is not just recovering—he's rising. Integrated humanitarian support has played a part in his ability to survive trauma, have a vision of change—and work actively towards it. "I am ready to study hard and engage with the sciences," he says.

Amarech Berhan



Raised in a farming family, Amarech was never actually guaranteed a full education. But in 2021, when she was 11, violence shattered her life, claimed that of several relatives, and drove the family from their home.

They reached the IDP camp with nothing. Amarech had dropped out of education, and hunger took precedence over homework, but her determination never left her. Then *Berhan Lehetsanat* arrived to start our project for displaced children.

The psychosocial support offered by BL played a crucial role in helping Amarech and her peers integrate into the local community. She was encouraged to express her fears and reconnect with other children.

She said they have been able to adapt to their new environment and engage with the community. Educational supplies meant Amarech could return to school. Now in fourth grade, she excels in her studies and acts as a role model for other displaced girls. "From poverty and grief to holding books and dreaming again—this is the biggest change in my life," she says.

Amarech's story goes beyond mere recovery to encompass rediscovery. An inability to afford school supplies forced her to drop out, but thanks to the educational material support provided through the project, she has reclaimed her identity and ambitions through education. Amarech reflects on the transformation: "This is a big change for me, coming out of all that poverty and reaching this level." Overall, she reminds us that even in the face of crisis, opportunities must still exist. Supporting displaced youth is an investment in resilience.

Habiba Muhammad Ahmed



Habiba's life changed the day her father, a militiaman, was killed by a roadside bomb in 2021. Suddenly, her world collapsed. Forced to flee, Habiba and her family faced hunger, exhaustion, and the trauma of displacement.

"The devastating loss forced my mother to send my siblings and me to another district called Kiremu for our safety," she says. They faced many hardships as the conflict escalated, and crossed into the Amhara region in September 2021.

"The Amhara Regional Government welcomed us and relocated us to the Mekane-Eyesus IDP camp in Tehuledere Woreda, Haik town, South Wollo Zone," she said.

At the IDP camp, the family encountered scarcity—but also support. *Berhan Lehetsanat* (BL) intervened with targeted aid. Habiba, an orphaned adolescent, was given access to counselling, which helped her to grieve, manage stress, and rebuild her sense of self. She expresses gratitude that there are people bringing the care and resources people need to move forward. Habiba received food support and, perhaps most importantly, the chance to return to school. "The educational materials have allowed me to resume my studies, and I am now in the second grade. This is a big change for me, as I have come so far from my previous situation," she said.

Over four months of research, Habiba's resilience revealed itself to be far from passive. She is determined to grow and give back. Her journey reflects a profound lesson: healing isn't just about recovery, but about redefining one's role in the world. With every step, she chooses hope—and inspires others to do the same.

Suleiman



Suleiman's early years were defined by loss. His mother disappeared when he was just four years old, and was later found dead, a victim of the conflict in Oromia. After that, his grandparents took on the responsibility for raising him. "I vividly remember the day she went missing; people searched everywhere for her. Sadly, they later found out she had been killed," he said.

At age six, he and his grandparents fled the violence, walking for days without food. They arrived at an IDP camp with nothing but the grief they were carrying. His father, who also lives in the camp, works tirelessly as a labourer to provide. Suleiman says: "Life in the IDP camp is difficult, but we are grateful for the support we receive from local people, the government, and organizations."

Suleiman says that *Berhan Lehetsanat* has provided more than just relief—it provided a sense of purpose. Food support, psychological counselling and education material have been essential. "The support I have received from *Berhan Lehetsanat* has been life-changing, essential resources that have had a significant impact on my wellbeing."

Suleiman found comfort in toys that helped him smile again, the counselling that helped release trauma, and school materials that reopened the door to education. He now attends third grade. What's striking is how Suleiman speaks about the future. "I believe I will achieve great things by studying," he says quietly but confidently.

Awol



Awol was only 13 when his father was killed. He fled Wollega, navigating a harrowing journey to Amhara. During this time, the war not only interrupted his education but also robbed everything from him, especially his father's guidance and support. "The pain of losing him still lingers, and the memories of our life before the conflict feel very distant, but still vivid."

As violence escalated, his family made the difficult decision to flee in September 2021. The journey was fraught with hardships: long walks under the scorching sun, battling hunger and thirst. The regional government placed him in the Mekane-Eyesus IDP camp, where support from BL helped him return to school. Counselling gave him tools to process trauma; food and school materials gave him stability.

Despite many challenges, he found hope. For a while, it worked. Awol was thriving—until aid deliveries stopped with the USAID cuts and he had to drop out to support his mother as a daily labourer. "I've had to make the tough decision to stop my education and take on a day job to support her. This has been heartbreaking for me," he says, but he can't abandon his family. His story shows the precarity of life for displaced people. Awol says that if food aid restarts, he will study again.

Zebura



In 2021, Zebura lost both her parents tragically to a militant attack when she was just seven. She and her siblings wandered into an area under the control of *Shene* militants. “Once inside, we faced a terrifying situation: some fighters declared that we would be killed,” she remembered.

Luckily, they were rescued thanks to a kind stranger and a determined relative. After 20 days completely isolated, they found a broker who could help them escape.

Their eventual arrival at the IDP camp was the first time safety seemed real. “Although our past is filled with pain, we find comfort in the community around us and the hope for a better future,” she said.

Zebura noted the psychological rehabilitation, toys, and educational equipment provided by *Berhan Lehetsanat*. She started school, found a sense of belonging, and dreams of becoming a doctor. “I want to study and achieve great things,” she says.

Despite unimaginable trauma, Zebura’s ability to hope again is a testament to what consistent support can do. With the tools and encouragement provided, Zebura is not only focused on her studies but is also motivated to make a meaningful difference in the world.