



## JOINT PROGRAMME TO IMPROVE THE HUMAN SECURITY OF NGOBE AND BUGLÉ TEMPORARY MIGRANTS IN COSTA RICA AND PANAMA

A UNTFHS funded project implemented by IOM, UNFPA, UNICEF and UNDP

May 2013 – April 2016

### Beneficiary Stories

#### Background

The Ngöbe and Buglé, two indigenous groups originating in western Panama, are amongst the most vulnerable people in Central America. Widespread and persistent poverty, underpinned by low agricultural productivity and scarce opportunities for economic development, has taken its toll on these isolated groups. At the same time, lack of culturally adequate health care and insufficient drinking water and sanitation services, coupled with limited access to education, has had a detrimental impact on the survival, livelihood and dignity of the Ngöbe and Buglé people.

Subsequently, around 48% of the Ngöbe and Buglé people migrate on a seasonal basis to the coffee plantations in neighbouring Costa Rica. Seasonal migration, however, comes with its own challenges. Without official documentation, migrants endure poor labour conditions and low wages. They lack access to essential public services, and the disruption to their children's education has led to an increase in school dropout rates in favour of child labour.

#### Never been to school...

Eulalia Thomas has never been to school, due to the fact that she grew up on the banana plantation. After the banana plantation business went bankrupt, and no suitable jobs could be found in Panama, she migrated to Costa Rica to harvest coffee.

Her two children follow her on the frequent journeys along the coffee harvest season. She has never been to school, but she has hopes that *"my daughter can gain go to school and become a professional, a teacher ideally"*. She did not know that everyone, including migrant children, actually have a right to go to school. Discrimination towards indigenous children is rife and many schools will not accept children that are there only temporary and cannot finish the entire school year. This places children in a vicious cycle of repeating school years, not progressing in their education and finally abandoning school altogether.



The added value of the **joint programme to improve the human security of Ngobe and Buglé temporary migrants in Costa Rica and Panama** is that the Programme Team engaged with the educational authorities in both countries to ensure that migrant children are able to go to school. In line with migratory reality, this means 6 months in Costa Rica during the Harvest Season and 6 months in Panama during the raining season. Efforts are now underway to allow schools in Costa Rica and Panama to recognize each other's curriculum and certificates.

### Never seen a doctor...

Maria Bejarano has never been to the doctor. *“I was afraid of this man in his white coat. He might touch me and I feel very uncomfortable”*. Being in a locked room with a man who is not related to you is behavior that is not appropriate in Maria’s culture. Therefore, Maria never went to the doctor, even though she was constantly feeling very tired. Thanks to the **joint programme to improve the human security of Ngobe and Buglé temporary migrants in Costa Rica and Panama**, Maria was able to get in touch with a community health volunteer. This person was able to translate the medical jargon and methods into a culturally sensitive approach that connected with the world-view of the members of local community. He was able to convince Maria to take the medication required which cured her from the parasitical infection.



As a result of this intervention, Maria gained extra energy and now works as a cultural translator at the Walker House Health Clinic, where she teaches young girls and boys about contraception.