

# Joint Programme to Improve the Human Security of the Ngöbe and Buglé Temporary Migrants in Costa Rica and Panama



UN Trust Fund for Human Security



## Fast Facts

**Country:** Costa Rica and Panama

**Duration:** February 2013 – January 2016

**Implementing UN Agencies:** IOM; UNFPA; UNICEF; UNDP

**Other Implementing Partners:** Ministries of Health, Agriculture, Labor and Social Welfare; local indigenous associations; local municipalities

**Budget:** \$3,567,180.63 (UNTFHS: 2,657,954.63 Others: 909,225)

**Key Words:** Indigenous groups; migration; community empowerment; health; education

## BACKGROUND

The Ngöbe and Buglé, two indigenous groups originating in western Panama, are among the most vulnerable people in Central America. Widespread and persistent poverty, driven 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.

Added to these enduring old threats, new challenges are further compounding the human security of these groups. Among these, intermittent floods and droughts as a result of climate change are threatening the already low agricultural productivity of these areas with significant impact on malnutrition and food security. In addition, an increase in copper mine and

hydroelectric developments are threatening the indigenous ways of life and present a source of conflict with authorities and non-indigenous communities.

Subsequently, around 48% of the groups have migrated from Comarca Ngöbe-Buglé, their autonomous indigenous area, with many migrating on a seasonal basis to coffee plantations in neighbouring Costa Rica. Seasonal migration, however, comes with its own challenges. Undocumented and unprotected, 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. Consequently, there is an urgent need to develop a comprehensive cross-border solution that can be tailored to the unique situation of these mobile indigenous populations.

## PROGRAMME OVERVIEW

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

In response to this complex situation, the goal of the project is to improve the human security of Ngöbe and Buglé migrant populations. To achieve this goal, the project aims to: (i) empower and strengthen the capacities of migrant families to achieve minimum living standards through self-sufficient food production and marketing of surplus produce; (ii)

improve health, personal, economic and political security through enhanced coverage and effective access to public, as well as community-based social, health and labour services along their migratory route; and (iii) create the necessary social, institutional and legal conditions and policies to promote and protect the human security of the Ngöbe and Buglé migrants.

## BENEFICIARIES

The project will benefit more than 10,000 Ngöbe and Buglé migrants along their migratory routes in-between Panama and Costa Rica. Government officials and civil society organisations will also be engaged in the project's capacity building activities.

## APPLYING THE HUMAN SECURITY APPROACH

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The unique situation of the Ngöbe and Buglé migrants requires cross-border partnerships that can address the specific root causes of their vulnerability in Panama as well as the multiple human insecurities they face across the border in Costa Rica. To this end, as a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach, human security provides a collaborative framework that brings together the expertise of UN agencies, Government ministries, the private sector and civil society organisations. For example, in Panama the project is working to improve food and economic security through crop diversification, improvements in crop production and the provision of upgraded food storage facilities. In addition, efforts are made to improve access to health care and provide educational training that is tailored to the cultural needs of the indigenous groups. Meanwhile, in Costa Rica, activities are aimed at improving working conditions for seasonal migrants and reducing child labour while maintaining the provision of health care, education and access to justice.

Moreover, to ensure that the project meets the particular needs of a mobile and indigenous population, activities have been developed in close consultation with the Ngöbe and Buglé communities as well as public institutions and civil society

organisations on both sides of the border. Subsequently, the project promotes the first 'bi-national' action plan to ensure continuity between public services provided in Costa Rica and Panama. For example, to ensure that Ngöbe and Buglé children complete their education, curriculum and materials are adapted to their migration patterns. Moreover, culturally sensitive and linguistically appropriate health care is provided along the migration route of the Ngöbe and Buglé communities.

The sustainability of this framework however rests on the empowerment of vulnerable migrants and the long-term capacity of local authorities to protect seasonal migrants. To this end, the establishment of 'Migrant Orientation Centres' provides migrants with essential information on their rights and their access to public services as well as advisory assistance on safe migration and registration requirements. Meanwhile, capacity building workshops and technical guidance are developed for public service providers on the promotion and protection of indigenous rights, cultural sensitivity and inter-cultural service provision and planning. The combined impact of these elements aims to improve the human security of the Ngöbe and Buglé temporary migrants in Costa Rica and Panama.