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EXPANDING VENEZUELAN'S VOICES IN COLOMBIA: A CASE STUDY WITH FEMALE LEADERS

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To the daughters of Venezuelan migrants:

“Your voice is your sovereignty”

Free – Rupi Kaur

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To Lila, my most precious friend, my world is better because you're in it.

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Resumo

Este estudo revela algumas experiências migratórias de mulheres venezuelanas e os fatores estruturais sociais que influenciaram a que estas se tornassem líderes nas suas comunidades recetoras, na Colômbia, analisando como as suas vozes ressoam nos processos de integração.

Mais do que vítimas dos seus contextos, as mulheres migrantes são agentes-chave de mudança e importantes contribuintes do desenvolvimento humano. Neste sentido, o reconhecimento dos seus direitos deveria ser uma das prioridades das políticas migratórias, ao invés de reforçarem relações de género desiguais, que poderão colocá-las ainda mais em risco. É fundamental considerar a agência das mulheres nas abordagens de género da literatura sobre migração e na agenda do desenvolvimento. A falta de representatividade das vozes e das experiências de liderança das mulheres migrantes venezuelanas, agravada pelas formas como a interseccionalidade influencia as suas experiências, contribui para que haja uma sub-representação das mesmas em diversas esferas. Para colmatar esta lacuna, examinou-se a viagem das mulheres venezuelanas desde a sua experiência migratória até se estabelecerem na Colômbia e se tornarem vozes nas suas comunidades de acolhimento, a partir das suas narrativas. Os resultados revelaram como as mulheres lidam com as suas histórias complexas e se convertem em líderes sociais, ultrapassando barreiras diárias e lutando para ajudar as suas comunidades, e forneceram provas de conquistas que as suas vozes alcançaram. Como contribuição final pretende-se identificar lições aprendidas com a participação de mulheres venezuelanas em papéis de liderança social na Colômbia, identificando os pontos centrais em reflexões futuras nos estudos de género e das migrações.

Palavras-chave: Migrações, mulheres venezuelanas, liderança social, Colômbia, género, interseccionalidade, empoderamento feminino

Abstract

This study foregrounds Venezuelan women's migratory experiences and the social structural factors which influenced the becoming *lideresas* in their settlement communities in Colombia, and how their voices resound in integration processes. More than victims of their contexts, migrant women are key agents of change and are relevant contributors to human development. In this sense, recognizing their rights should be the priority in international migration policies, rather than reinforcing unequal gendered power relations, which will put them even more at risk. It is key not to lose sight of women's agency when addressing gender in migration literature and in the development agenda. The lack of theoretical frameworks representing the voices and leadership experiences of Venezuelan migrant women, compounded by the various ways intersectionality changes the experience, contributes to its underrepresentation in several spheres. To address this gap, I examined Venezuelan women's journey from their migratory experience to settling in Colombia and becoming voices for their communities in the host country, from their narratives. Eight Venezuelan and three Colombian social leaders were interviewed, and data were analysed through thematic analysis. Findings showed how women deal with their complex histories and become social leaders, overcoming daily barriers, and struggling to help their communities, and provided evidence of some achievements their voices have accomplished. The lessons learned from the participation of female Venezuelans in social leadership roles in Colombia, and key observations might generate fruitful insights for migration and gender studies.

Keywords: Migration, Venezuelan women, social leadership, Colombia, gender, intersectionality, women empowerment

Glossary of terms

CEM - Centro Emergencia Mujer

CORPRODINCO - Corporación de profesionales para el Desarrollo Integral Comunitario

ELN - Ejército de Liberación Nacional

ESMAD - Escuadrones Móviles antidisturbios

FARC–EP - Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia–People’s Army

GBV - Gender-Based Violence

HRD - Human Rights Defenders

HRW - Human Rights Watch

INDEPAZ - Instituto de Estudios para el Desarrollo Y la Paz

IOM - International Organization for Migration

IRC - International Rescue Committee

LGBTQI+ - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and intersex

MMLVC - Movimiento de Mujeres Lideresas Venezolanas en Cartagena

MVRC - Movimiento Venezolanos, Retornados y Colombianos

NGO - Non-Governmental Organization

PEP - Permiso Especial de Permanencia

PEP - Special Stay Permit PPT Temporary Protection Permit

R4V - Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela

SGBV - Sexual and Gender Based Violence

SIVIGE - Sistema Integrado de Información sobre Violencias de Género (Colombia)

UN - United Nations

UNFPA - United Nations

UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

WHO - World Food Programme

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The current chapter provides the context in which this thesis developed. It starts from the motivation for the study, explaining how the idea for the theme occurred, its relevance and background, to briefly understand the phenomena that have pushed women to migrate from Venezuela to Colombia in recent years, their reception in the host country, and the processes through which they become social leaders. The chapter goes on to identify the initial question, as well as the objectives and the methodology.

1.1. Background overview

Involuntary or forced migration is a relatively recent phenomenon in the life of the Venezuelan population. Historically a receiver of migrants, Venezuela got stuck between a promising development towards modernity that never completed itself, and the negative balance of the present, which pushed millions to leave their beloved homeland, most of them in a vulnerable situation. In what is the second-largest migration crisis worldwide (R4V, 2021), many are undocumented and half of those who leave are women and girls (Migración Colombia, 2022).

Colombia has become their main intra-regional destination with statistics pointing at 2.5 million migrants and refugees that have settled in Colombia by August 2022¹. In this new migratory flow that intensified with Venezuela's economic crisis from 2014 onwards, most migrants² take irregular and dangerous routes (trochas³) on foot⁴, and remain in border areas largely affected by armed conflict – which have higher levels of multidimensional poverty – before continuing their paths and settling.

These situations pose a considerable threat to human rights and are exponentially higher for vulnerable groups such as women and girls, who are exposed to dangers and threats during the migratory process and struggle to access their basic rights when they arrive in host countries.

¹ R4V.info. It is estimated that migration from Venezuela to Colombia is higher as many migrants may never formally register due to fear of deportation. It is also important to note that many of the numbers stated in this dissertation will probably be obsolete due to constant change.

² Due to the unclear status of Venezuelans in Colombia, for purposes of the dissertation, the generic term “migrants” includes both refugees (whom the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 defines as “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion”), economic migrants, and returnees (Colombians previously settled in Venezuela, mainly to escape the Colombian internal conflict, who have returned in recent years).

³ Trails in Spanish. The word refers to the clandestine crossing between Colombia and Venezuela.

⁴ Migración Colombia Infografía

Many are deceived and face situations of Gender Based Violence (GBV), human trafficking, exploitation, and discrimination, and fight to survive each day in a new country.

Nonetheless, they take the risk with the aim to find work, food, better healthcare, stability, and overall better living conditions, for themselves and their families.

In Colombia many face daily struggles, due in part to a lack of support from governmental institutions and other phenomena such as discrimination and prejudice. However, this does not necessarily mean that they are deprived of coping mechanisms that can lead to a positive adaptation. Migration may expose women to new vulnerabilities, but it can also open doors for them to improve their lives. Few studies are available about these joint phenomena in migratory contexts, and how women reinforce their position in the host communities to overcome hardships in the household, and in social life. This shift in gender roles may have a significant impact on how integration is perceived and experienced.

While studies have shown that migration experiences are different for men and women (Piper, 2005) and that migration and gender are indisputably connected, they also indicate that this link is highly contextualised (Timmerman et al., 2018). It can both change or reinforce previously established gender roles.

In the quest for information and their basic rights, some women have the opportunities and the will to redefine their roles by embracing leadership positions and helping themselves, their families, and their communities to improve their livelihoods in Colombia. They become social leaders, voices for other Venezuelan women, activists for the needs of their communities, and central actors working as intermediaries between residents, local government, and nongovernmental organisations

These women are the centre of this dissertation.

As a permanent social and economic matter for Colombia, it is vital to amplify studies on these migratory realities, observing them through a gendered and intersectional lens to understand how Venezuelan women convert into social leaders to expand their communities' voices, achieving important changes to improve their integration to Colombia.

Thus, this dissertation has a threefold purpose: first, to explore how migration has affected their lives, and the hardships encountered upon arrival to Colombia; second to understand the process of becoming *lideresas* and the work that they do; and third, to shed light on the relationship between their leadership and their role in facilitating integration processes for other female Venezuelan migrants.

The dissertation was divided into five chapters: 1) Introduction; 2) Venezuelan women in Colombia: challenges and opportunities; 3) Methodology; 4) Findings, and 5) Conclusion.

Starting from the relevance of the object in the study, the first chapter exposes how and why the initial question was built, explaining the goal of the study as well as its main objectives and contributions. The second chapter goes through literature review, analysing key topics such as gender and migration, intersectionality, discrimination, the methodologies followed by distinct authors, and their relevance to the dissertation. The Methodology chapter explains the approaches followed, and the interviews where the aim is to meet the previously established objectives. The results of these interviews are registered in the following chapter. Finally, it draws conclusions built from narratives of the past and present that were interpreted in the light of conceptual frameworks of social leadership, making a critical review, by comparing the results with the findings of previous studies.

It analyses Venezuelan women's processes of becoming social leaders in Colombia, from their lived experiences, aiming to access the integration of Venezuelan women through a combination of data analysis and literature review, and in-depth semi-structured interviews with Venezuelan female leaders in Colombia, therefore contributing to a critical discussion on contemporaneous migrations and intersectionality.

Moreover, this research also intends to add to the empirical studies of the feminization of migration studies, evaluating how their presence in local, national, and international decision-making is crucial.

1.2. Motivation for the study

In September 2021 the researcher moved to Venezuela, for a month, and then to Colombia from October of the same year to February 2022, to do an internship in GENFAMI - Fundación para el Desarrollo Integral en Género y Familia. During these five months the presence of Venezuelans in all spheres of public life were very much present: from the grocery store to the beauty salon, from La Guajira to Medellín. Women, in particular, were seen performing tasks in irregular jobs to make ends meet to support them and their families. In informal conversations it became clear that many arrived by foot, crossing the border through dangerous roads to find better living conditions and to escape poverty in Venezuela, and found themselves in difficult situations due to the lack of income, of housing and of institutional support. Misinformation regarding their rights and the fear of deportation renders them in vulnerable positions, and with scarce places to turn to, they seek help inside their communities, where leaders have an important role.

While travelling around Colombia, and during the internship in GENFAMI, the researcher had the opportunity to get closer to social leaders, while observing and participating in the development of projects from humanitarian aid organisations and governmental institutions to support accessing their basic rights in conflict-affected areas⁵. In all, social leaders have been shown to play an important role in the efforts to improve migrant peoples' integration. In particular, female leaders working with Venezuelan women.

Lideresas, the word in Spanish for female leaders, come from an intersectional position, as women and as migrants. But through the hardships they face, their agency excels as they strive to improve their living conditions, by searching for information about their rights, participating in training, and engaging in entrepreneurship to empower themselves and pass it on.

These experiences gave them the tools to support other women - Colombians, Venezuelans, and returnees⁶ - by creating safe spaces to sensitise, inform, capacitate, and empower them. Side by side with governmental and non-governmental institutions, both national and international, they work to reduce vulnerabilities and achieve necessary social change in their communities.

After months of experience in the field, and research, it became clear that researching the processes by which these women become the voices of their communities could result in a relevant study in gendered literature, for migrant women to improve their integration processes and living conditions in host countries.

1.3. Relevance and background

Once known as a prosperous country in Latin America, with high levels of attractiveness to foreigners, Venezuela went from being a net migrant-receiving country to a country that expelled a large volume of its nationals (Osorio & Phelan, 2019). Like the referred authors, this dissertation defends that Castles and Gzesh's (Castles, 2003) conceptualization apply to Venezuela's case. They suggest that the displacements of people caused by development projects or forced to escape poverty should be categorised as forced migration.

⁵ According to Colombia's Victims Unit, between 1985 and 2021, armed conflict in the country affected millions, including through displacement, confinement, recruitment, abuse, and sexual violence (COALICO 2021; UN SC 08/12/2021). The 2016 Peace Accord between the Colombian government and the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) guerrillas ended a five-decade-long civil war. However, conflict and violence continued, fuelled by drug trafficking and confrontation among a complex constellation of actors, including left-wing guerrilla Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), not part of the Peace Accord, FARC's dissident groups and former paramilitary right-wing groups turned into drug cartels. Instability in Venezuela, with whom Colombia shares a porous border further complicates the conflict outlook (IISS, 2022, March)

⁶ A returnee is a person who returns to the country where they were born, usually after they have been away for a long time. In this case it refers to the Colombians that migrated, most to flee the armed-conflict in Colombia. By 2020 it was estimated that the country was hosting nearly 845,000 Colombian and binational returnees (R4V, 2020)

Though this humanitarian crisis scenario was predictable for several reasons, international governments and institutions were unprepared for the challenges of another massive immigration flow (Osorio & Phelan, 2019), that intensified from August 2015.⁷

This specific situation, and the lack of preparedness with a solid protocol to receive, give asylum, and protection to migrants make the situation of irregular migrants even more difficult. As the primordial host country of Venezuelan migrants⁸ Colombia has seen the numbers of people crossing the borders in the past years grow exponentially. The grand majority does so with irregular status (Migración Colombia, 2020), which renders them more vulnerable to difficulties in finding a job or a house, especially women.

Paret & Gleeson (2016) argue that migration provides a lens through which to understand key dynamics around inequality, adding that “moments of agency, whether individual or collective, help us to understand how social change happens”. Like the authors, this thesis supports that migrants’ precarious position becomes simultaneously a motivating and constraining factor. Going through Venezuelan *lideresas* narratives allows observing their ability to act within structural conditions, since the day they decide to leave Venezuela. But more importantly, it sheds light on how they engage in both individual initiatives to guarantee their families’ safety and secure a livelihood, and in collective agency moments that affect their communities. These efforts impact how Venezuelans access their rights and influence their integration into Colombia. Venezuelan migrant women organise in different arenas of social life in order to access information and aid, receive training that will strengthen them as workers, and connect with their communities.

In March 2020, the Colombian government announced a 6-point plan focused on “protecting the vulnerable migrant population (...) by facilitating their incorporation into the social fabric of the country” (Global Compact on refugees/UNHCR, 2020). In 2021, President Ivan Duque officialised an important decision to regulate their migratory status through the Estatuto Temporal de Protección para Venezolanos (ETPV) allowing them to access health care and apply for formal jobs, granting them temporary protected status for ten years. It was a historic decision and led many to initiate their regularisation processes, at unprecedented speed

7 Woolly Edson Louidor (2018) investigation started in this date that marks a shift in migratory patterns between both countries, when Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro decided to close the borders with Colombia

8 Colombia’s geographical proximity allows migrants to cross the borders by land, which is the only solution for undocumented and poor people

and scale⁹. *Líderes* and *lideresas*¹⁰ were applauded for their role in strengthening these integration mechanisms and capitalising resources for their wellbeing¹¹.

When it comes to women's rights, newly elected president Gustavo Petro¹² campaigned on a platform that promised to prioritise women and the dangers they face in areas of conflict. For Venezuelans there are two positive outcomes of these promises. First, because one of the measures is the reinforcement of the peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC)¹³ and Ejército de Liberación Nacional (ELN), which could change data that show that armed groups target primarily refugee women and girls from Venezuela for human traffick (UN); and secondly, if unpaid domestic labour is finally recognised, it will protect migrant women of common labour exploitation.

Still, hardships for the Venezuelan migrant population living in Colombia remain high, particularly women and girls. According to Migración Colombia (2022), 49% of the 1.7 million Venezuelan migrants in Colombia are women and girls, 90% of whom survive in their host country on less than a minimum wage a month (IOM, 2021). Their vulnerabilities are exacerbated from the moment they start their migration process because they are exposed to threats such as trafficking, GBV, labor exploitation, and abuse of power that manifests in sexual assault, among others. In Colombia, they face a lack of access to sexual, reproductive, and mental health services, care, and justice (Feminicidios Observatory Colombia, 2018), a situation that is worsened by misinformation in public services.

Calderón-Jaramillo et al. (2020) concluded that “migrants tend to be more exposed to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) due to the normalization of such forms of violence in the Colombian and Venezuelan cultures”, which are even more complex in the border regions. In fact, in areas where the law appears to do little for those who need help, guerrillas and armed groups impose their own rules on the residents, the *pendular*¹⁴, and the migrants in transit. In such a context, some studies have proven that literacy¹⁵ is a powerful self-protection tool for women (Aprillia, 2021), whether it's financial, health regarded or social, especially

9 According to data from Migración Colombia (2022), in less than a year, more than 1.74 million Venezuelan migrants in Colombia completed the pre-registration process (RUMV), and more than one million completed the biometric registration, fundamental steps for the regularisation process.

10 It refers to male and female leaders. In Spanish, there are different words to distinguish both, but for this dissertation purpose, the word “leaders” used hereinafter will refer to both.

11 Innovations for Poverty action (IPA), March 2022

12 A former M19 rebel, and the first left-wing candidate to win presidency, in 2022

13 In 2016 a peace accord with the Forzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia (FARC) was signed

14 *Pendulars* are migrants that cross the borders regularly

15 Beyond its conventional concept as a set of reading, writing, and counting skills, literacy is now understood as a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, creation, and communication in an increasingly digital, text-mediated, information-rich, and fast-changing world (UNESCO)

when considering that they tend to lack knowledge of their rights, fear the authorities, and may not be well organised as a group (Kuwar, 2021).

When the first situation applies, they may represent the individual social capital, whose actions of systems affect the community social capital (Durstun, 2003a). Lin (2003) described social capital as a set of information, services, affective bonds, and other resources accessible to an individual or collective because of their belonging to certain interaction networks, highlighting the resources that individuals and communities can collectively mobilise to achieve social improvements (Reyes, 2013).

This thesis observes from the lived experiences of these women. The ones that overcome the hardships by looking for information, engaging in capacity building, and using their learnings for the benefit of their communities.

1.4. The goal of the study

While prior investigation regarding migratory flow has focused mainly on the exodus in situations of war, there are more and more studies in the literature regarding gendered migratory patterns from Venezuela to Colombia (Calderón-Jaramillo et al., 2020).

But even though gender is becoming more visible in literature, the leadership processes of Venezuelan women in Colombia and their impact on their livelihoods and of the migrants' communities remain a topic to be explored.

Being a social leader in Colombia has been rising as a concerning matter, related to a structural issue in which voices that oppose the ruling logic are quite often persecuted and even silenced or killed¹⁶. Consequently, falling into a revictimization cycle is a problem that affects victims, survivors but also social leaders, especially women (*lideresas*). To survive in the context of the armed conflict, female leaders draw new ways, places, and conditions for their voices to be heard, and to find a place as political subjects.

This thesis intends to analyse them under a gender and intersectional approach. It seeks to explain how women that have converted themselves into community leaders build support networks to help Venezuelan migrant women. Through a recount of the work they developed, and using the most effective communication methods to reach their community, this study aims at understanding their contributions to effective changes.

¹⁶ BBC (2022). The Ombudsman Office reported the deaths of 145 community leaders and human rights defenders in 2021. In <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-59984858>

This dissertation is therefore focused on adding to the research on collaborative efforts in immigrant communities in Colombia.

Investigating Colombia's history, it is clear that many voices revolted against the social problems that existed in the country throughout the past decades. Many risked and even lost their lives in doing so. These people have played an important role in the country's political scenery, as well as in the media, which has, as well, been successively persecuted and threatened. The risk is still real, but the voices continue trying to make themselves be heard. In a society that remains patriarchal and *machista*, and where armed groups perpetuate GBV, female leaders are emerging as important communication agents and as support systems to Venezuelan migrants (Gibbs, 2007).

The courage of those who fight for better living conditions, particularly focusing on Venezuelan migrants, was an inspiration to research more about the role of female community leaders, as forced migration continues to be a catalyst of increased vulnerabilities.

In migratory contexts, gender roles change, being more equitable for some women, and harmful for others. This thesis is based on the former. On women who, despite the difficult contexts in which they live, from being victims to survivors, and from being survivors to leaders. They become defenders of other women and protectors of their communities. They struggle to achieve feminist results and claim their rights in contexts of armed conflict and a system of multiple exclusions.

Starting from the socio-political context in Venezuela and its impact on the increase of migratory movements towards Colombia, this investigation aims to understand how women help themselves overcome integration-related issues.

In line with the literature review and field research, the goal is to analyse from Venezuelan *lideresas* in Colombia's perspectives, how their leadership processes influence the integration of other women.

1.5. Initial question

TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE VENEZUELAN FEMALE MIGRANTS BECOME VOICES FOR THE CONCERNS OF THEIR COMMUNITIES IN COLOMBIA? HOW DO VICTIMS OF COMPLEX HUMANITARIAN CONTEXTS BECOME SOCIAL LEADERS, AND HOW IS THIS LEADERSHIP PROCESS EXTENDED THROUGH FORMS OF COMMUNICATION THAT BECOME AGENTS OF CHANGE, HOPE, AND INTEGRATION TO OTHER WOMEN WHO FLED THE VENEZUELAN CRISIS?

This research explores how gender norms change during and after migration from Venezuela to Colombia, resulting in women becoming community leaders in the host country, as both a coping mechanism for themselves and their families as well to support their communities, and

the ways in which the work that they develop with Venezuelan migrants, helps them in their recovery processes and in achieving better livelihoods.

It observes from the point of view of female leaders: how they have become leaders, how they have managed to reconcile their recovery processes with their role as leaders and how helping Venezuelan migrants and refugees translates into their role as women in a patriarchal society.

The path to answering the initial question will also go through understanding what challenges leaders face while moving in Colombian society, which risks can limit them, and the precautions they take to make their voices heard. This includes acknowledging their strategies to mobilise and communicate with others, and the formulas that each of the interviewees has found to be able to disseminate, involve, connect, strengthen, and network with other women.

By focusing on the existing tensions, complexities, and lifestyles of these women, this study aims to show how violence converges into everyday life, influencing their political, spatial, and social realities, while also problematizing the cultural politics of their ways of expressing themselves.

Having female leaders and their work with Venezuelan migrants as the central concern of this thesis, it proposes to draw conclusions by observing how community-based approaches impact inclusion processes. Therefore, it intends to contribute to the empirical literature on its efficacy by addressing pressing methodological concerns such as the emergent nature of qualitative research and understanding the experience of others.

Finally, it adds to the need to consider gendered approaches in migratory politics, and to ensure participation, by giving women a voice and opportunities for leadership in social and political spaces.

1.6. Methodology

Gender and migration are still widely looked at through the protection concerns lenses. Issues such as empowerment and leadership to achieve positive integration seem to be overlooked in the literature. Therefore, ethnography was used as a bridge to build empirical knowledge of women's life stories, deepening knowledge of their field of action and influence.

With the purpose of finding commonalities and patterns on the *lideresas* narratives, qualitative methodology was adopted, considering its potential for producing rich, in-depth, and nuanced analysis (Zapata-Barrero, 2018), by emphasising words and individuals' stories rather

than numbers (Bryman, 2012). More importantly, it draws the lines to better understand “the voices of social actors and immigrant groups, especially the ones who lack means of participation and representation in mainstream society and politics” (Zapata-Barrero, 2018).

While living in Colombia between October 2021 and February 2022, therefore geographically close to potential participants for the research, there was the intention to observe *lideresas*' activities and personal interactions. However, the participatory research through the adoption of participant observation was limited due to Covid-19 pandemic restrictions, and the electoral period, limiting the researchers' in-person access to the interviewees. It was possible to observe some situations while collaborating with GENFAMI, and while travelling to several districts of Colombia, but there was the need to engage in virtual observation of the *lideresas* social media pages and to go through a review of existing documents as secondary sources of data.

To select the participants a snowball sampling method was applied to reach *lideresas* in different regions of Colombia. They were firstly contacted either in person, or by WhatsApp, and they received a presentation sheet (Annex C) about the thesis and the interviews. The individual semi-structured interviews followed a guide and script (Annexes A and B) as primary data to achieve in-depth results, by reconstructing the interviewees' perceptions of events and experiences related to their migratory and their leadership experiences (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). They were conducted through video-calls, due to distance restrictions, and centred around three main topics: (a) migratory path; (b) becoming a leader, and (c) expanding women's voices through the leadership processes.

The analysis of the data was conducted with a mixed deductive and inductive approach, considering that some categories were set following the initial literature review, and others emerged during the analysis. To avoid bias derived from the predefined concept-driven coding, the research remained flexible by creating new codes that arose from the qualitative data. That way, it was possible to connect theory and existing literature while keeping attention not to miss new themes. Considering that all themes were equally important for the results, the researcher opted by structuring them in a flat coding frame. With the main categories chosen, data analysis was performed to complement the findings.

The Results chapter finalizes with a section about observed realities in Colombia, which added to the insight on the life of migrant Venezuelan women in their hosting country.

CHAPTER 2

Venezuelan women in Colombia: challenges and opportunities

Para los venezolanos, la diáspora que hemos sufrido durante los últimos tiempos constituye una novedad, un fenómeno social insospechado pocas décadas atrás. Nos agarró de sorpresa, sin aparente aviso previo, y aún hay quienes guardan la secreta esperanza de que pueda ser revertida. Nada indica que hayamos asimilado todavía lo que significa para nuestra forma de vida, nuestra manera de relacionarnos y nuestra propia existencia, haber pasado de ser un generoso país de inmigrantes a un convulsionado país de emigrantes. Pasaje de ida: 15 escritores venezolanos en el exterior - Silda Cordoliani (2013)

2.1. Overview of the chapter

The literature review focuses on several themes that provide deeper information about Venezuelan migrants settling in Colombia, starting from the migratory context.

This previous research was relevant to understand the factors that inhibit the integration of Venezuelan women in Colombia, contributing to the need to pursue relevant information by themselves, to access their rights.

On a first approach, it took under consideration keywords such as Discrimination, Gender, and Intersectionality, to better understand previous studies and the state of the art regarding Venezuelan women's experiences when transitioning to Colombia. Secondly, it explored the "becoming" of social leaders, what contributed to that path, and how they put into practice the work of helping in the hosting communities.

The literature review and state-of-the-art focused on the following topics: (a) the socio-economic situation of Venezuela and the migratory reality of its population from 2014; (b) the redefinition of gender roles in migratory processes; (c) the leadership processes of Venezuelan women in Colombia.

2.2. Humanitarian crisis and migratory context

By 2020 it was estimated that between 500 and 700 people were leaving daily through irregular routes from Venezuela to Colombia (OAS, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic increased the daily struggles of Venezuelans and by August 2022, the UNHCR reported that 6,8 million Venezuelans had left their country, making it the largest

external displacement in Latin America's history, and the second largest in the world, behind Syria (Annex D).

Mobility has been a characteristic of human beings for as long as there have been records, from primitive times to the present day. This example – like so many others related to migration – can be explained by the micro-sociological theory of the push-pull model (Lee, 1966), which puts on the same side of the coin the factors that drive people away from their countries of origin, such as political instability, natural disasters, desertification, famine, and the aspects that attract them to a given destination, such as job opportunities and better living conditions, a theory to which Ravenstein's Migration Law (1885) has greatly contributed.

However, to better understand the origins of large migration movements, there is a need to look at disruptive events before the events that caused the migration in themselves (Massey, Douglas, et al, 1993). The Venezuela-Colombia case is a very particular one. This crisis distinguishes it from others due the lack of a mass conflict. When inquired regarding the reasons to leave, Venezuelan men and women state the political situation as the first, followed by lack of access to food, cost of living, unemployment, and insecurity (HRW, 2022).

The rapid influx of Venezuelans was a result of the humanitarian crisis triggered by the economic collapse that began in 2014, deteriorating living conditions for many of its 28 million inhabitants. Hyperinflation in Venezuela is the highest in the world, at 1.37 million percent in 2018, (Reuters 2018), hitting a rate of 686.4% and a four-year bout by the end of 2021 (Reuters, 2022, January; Central Bank). Limited earnings for Venezuelan families¹⁷, and shortages of food, medicine, and healthcare resulted in an increase in maternal and infant mortality in 2016, compared to 2008 (Bello et al. 2017). The lack of acknowledgement of the crisis, and refusal to accept humanitarian aid, where more than 7.7 million people still need immediate humanitarian assistance (USAID, 2022, September), led millions to flee to neighbouring Colombia.

Historically, migration is not a new phenomenon in Colombia (UNHCR, 2019). In 1971, Colombians represented 30% of the foreign-born population living in Venezuela, many of whom traditionally settled in the border states of Táchira, Mérida, and Zulia (Kritz, 1975). Its external migration flow from 1980-2000 was one of the biggest in Hispanic America, a period in which Pellegrino (2000) considered the regional flow toward Venezuela to be part of “the continuation of an ancient regime based on economic reasons and culturally oriented practices”.

¹⁷ A minimum monthly salary was 18000 VES, the equivalent to €2, 12 in January 2019, and it has increased several times since then. As of March 2022, it's the equivalent of €15, according to wageindicator.org

Also, forced internal migration has grown in the past decades because of internal conflicts caused by illegal armed groups (UNHCR, 2019).

On the other side, Venezuela went from being a country of immigrants to a country of emigrants in a very short period (Dávalos and Grundberger in Pachas Vargas, 2018, p.8). Venezuela has a history of being attractive to millions of immigrants, especially from 1946, when the Romulo Betancourt government adopted a strong pro-immigration policy, after which the country received the majority of the 50000 that arrived between 1936-1948 (Kritz, 1975), and a million more in the next decade. After the oil economy boom during the 70s, Venezuela received many Colombian and Latin American migrants, primarily female, that rose to 3.4 % of the total population (Belbueno, 2003).

While Colombia has been committed to its integration policy (UNHCR, 2022), it had never experienced a major inflow of external migrants or refugees before the Venezuelan migrant exodus began, which may explain how this has provoked distortions in the entire governance system of an unprepared country.

Today, Venezuelan migrants may be considered the second largest minority group in Colombia, after Afro-Colombians, and women represent almost half of that minority.

The Colombian government has made efforts to support Venezuelan migrants through a set of measures that have received international appraisal – as was the case of the ETPV and of regulations to protect them in violence cases (Zulver & González, 2022) – but in practice, migrant women struggle every day with the lack of legal documentation that will provide them a paid job, of healthcare and of protective measures in situations of victimisation.

The refugee and migrant crisis of Venezuela are characterised by highly gendered dynamics that have had serious effects on the health and welfare of all those affected, particularly women, girls, and LGBTIQ+ people¹⁸.

In July 2022, Amnesty International published its latest report on how Colombia and Peru are failing to ensure Venezuelan women their basic rights, to a life free of violence and discrimination¹⁹. They face a variety of protection risks as they leave Venezuela and head to Colombia in search of a temporary or permanent destination, where they are exposed to multiple forms of violence in public spaces, at home, and at work. Widespread xenophobia limits their access to basic services, including housing and employment, and they are unable to reach justice

18 CARE (2020, June). An unequal emergency: CARE Rapid Gender Analysis of the refugee and migrant crisis in Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela

19 Amnesty International, 2022

and health services, due to the existence of stereotypes related to their gender, nationality, and gender identity, among others.

The hypersexualized perception of Venezuelan women and adolescent girls leaves them particularly vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. The levels of cases of intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and harassment – including by authorities -, as well as early unions, sexual exploitation, and survival sex to access basic goods and services, are concerning. Even more so considering that many migrant women suffer in silence due to feelings of shame and fear of repercussions, including deportation, as well as disbelief in the system. This represents an additional threat to sexual, and reproductive health, due to exposure to sexually transmitted infections, and the lack of accessible contraception, prenatal care, and family planning options.

In addition to this, some groups within this migratory flow face even higher risks, including indigenous populations, adolescent girls, and pregnant and breastfeeding women, among others. The lack of knowledge about how and where to seek assistance, and the limited availability of migrant-sensitive services, can stand in the way of their integration. Community leaders often bridge these gaps between the migrant population and their rights.

In a paper published in March 2022, Innovations for Poverty Action Colombia identified that community leaders have played a key role in the regularisation process of Venezuelan migrants, stating that they have been so important that it seems to have advanced more quickly in areas where the leaders had a stronger presence (Guerrero, N.L., Méndez, A.M., 2022). Through specific communication strategies and tools adjusted to each communities' circumstances, the leaders collect and disseminate information, and provide technical assistance to the communities, helping them improve their livelihoods.

According to a UN report published in January 2021, 162,000 *caminantes* (migrants travelling on foot) passed through Colombia last year. And according to the Integrated Gender Violence Information System (SIVIGE), as of December 2020, the foreign group reporting the highest number of cases of violence was Venezuelan women. Actions were taken and safe spaces were built in border areas and on the Pacific side to support them. There are also reports of more than 350 women trained as community leaders, in 2019, to identify and mitigate risks of gender-based violence and support prevention and response actions. They were able to serve more than 4,000 Venezuelan migrants, indigenous women, Afro-descendant women, victims of the Colombian armed conflict, and local women at high risk of GBV (UN Colombia, 2021). Cases such as these highlight how the presence and action of community leaders can result in stronger communities, and the achievement of basic human rights for affected populations.

Therefore, in this complex context where several phenomena converge, the literature shows how the combination between context and migratory patterns, gendered and intersectionality dimensions, and the lack of structural support in Colombia, leads Venezuelan women to convert into social leaders, amplifying the voices of their communities. By doing so, they invest in their integration processes, to help themselves, their families, and their community.

It is, therefore, essential to consider a gendered and intersectional approach to better understand how these migratory movements influence Venezuelan women in Colombia.

2.3. Gendered dimensions of migratory movements

Though migration is “both a gendered and a gendering process” that changes gender relations (Szczepanoková, 2006), initial contemporary migration studies have missed specific gender characteristics of migratory movements (Montenegro-Martínez et al. 2011). This was, in part, due to a patriarchal bias, that did not include the needs of women in decision-making policies.

As the new millennium approached, international agendas started turning their attention to the feminization of migration, introducing it in migration studies (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000). The United Nations Population Division estimates that, from 2000, 49 percent of all international migrants were women or girls and that it had reached 51 percent in certain regions, as is the case of Latin America and the Caribbean. There was, therefore, the need to recognize the importance of gender issues in international migration (Benería, Deere, and Kabeer, 2012) because hierarchical social relations related to gender shape the migration experiences of all migrants.

Conflicts inherently affect women and girls differently and gendered inequalities are exacerbated by the ongoing crises. This made it crucial that gendered dimensions of humanitarian emergencies had to be recognized in policy and institutional contexts, and Venezuela’s case is no exception.

Demographic studies of recent years reveal that more women and families of lower socioeconomic status are leaving Venezuela (Amnesty International, 2019), a condition that exposes them more to threats during and after migration, such as different forms of SGBV, and higher vulnerabilities compared with those that men encounter (Calderón-Jaramillo Et al, 2005). Studies have shown how feminised migration processes are influenced by shortages of provisions in their home countries, and how many women seek jobs in the “casualized welfare sector” when arriving in their host countries (Kofman et al. 2000), but also how their motivations and expectations differ and influence migration processes (Szczepanoková, 2006)

In migration studies, gender is also a key factor in the attribution of social meaning (Stockard & Johnson, 1992), because it is culturally connected to behaviours, rights, and obligations that certain cultures believe to be appropriate for men and women (Wade & Travis, 1999). In both Venezuelan and Colombian cultures, this has rooted implications in women's roles as caretakers, in domestic work, and in finding a job, a situation that intensifies in poorer neighbourhoods and in border areas.

Zulver & Idler (2020) argue that there is a gendered border effect in the Colombian-Venezuelan borderlands, adding that "the very factors that coalesce to produce this effect exacerbate existing gendered power dynamics, particularly as these relate to gender-based violence", but they reiterate the importance of looking to women's agency in these processes, as focusing on sexual violence can lead to a masculinist and securitising response to women's experiences. Dagano & de Stefani (2020) state that the situation in which a given person is immersed will influence more or less compellingly his or her choices. For this reason, what is considered to be a "vulnerable individual" may turn out to be a resilient agent, who needs be provided with autonomy and freedom.

Therefore I intended to give a quick look at the catalysts of vulnerability first, to understand them and focus instead on the coping strategies and women's mobilizational agency and empowerment.

2.3.1. Discrimination and xenophobia as catalysts of vulnerability

When analysing the process of incorporating migrants into receiving societies, the term "acculturation" plays an important role. According to Berry (2005), it involves changes in social structures, institutions, and cultural practices, but also at an individual level, involving a change in a person's behavioural repertoire. In this perspective, "integration" is the keyword, which refers to "an interest in both maintaining one's heritage culture while in daily interactions with other groups (...) and to participate as an integral part of the larger social network" (Berry, 2005).

In the context of high levels of discrimination, spatial segregation of immigrants, and economic exclusion, integration may be extremely and highly stressful to achieve (Rudmin, 2006). The treatment of Venezuelan migrants may be associated with the theory that the crisis shapes native attitudes toward migrants (Chatruc, M.R., Rozo, S.V., 2022).

Goldin et al (2011), refer to discrimination as the hostility and social exclusion experienced by migrants because of their position as outsiders to the receiving cultures, adding that xenophobia is an attitude of discrimination that can lead to violence or direct attacks derived

from misconception and fears about migration's long-term contribution and social dynamics. Both the principles of equality of rights and the right to non-discrimination are underlined in The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UN). Despite of it, Colombia has a problem with "persistent structural and historical discrimination", which results in high levels of poverty and social exclusion (UN 22 Jan., para 16). While minorities such as afro-Colombians and indigenous people have been widely affected over the last decades, Venezuelans have become the newest victims of hostilities from Colombians.

In fact, the Migrant Acceptance Index²⁰ suggests that natives worldwide have become less accepting of migrants, and discrimination situations multiply. Colombia in particular reports one of the biggest declines going from 6.13 in 2016 to 3.98 in 2019. The same report states that "many of the countries leading the global downturn have been on the receiving end of the mass exodus of Venezuelans fleeing the humanitarian crisis in their country", adding that in Colombia "the percentage of residents who said migrants living in their country was a good thing dropped from 61% in 2016 to 29% in 2019"²¹.

There are several explanations for these numbers, although logic points to a combination of factors. Negative perceptions about migrants can be explained through the theory of group conflict, according to which "adverse economic contexts and with high presence of immigrants increase intergroup competency for limited goods and immigration perception as a laboral economical threat" (Cea, 2016, p.131, in Restrepo-Pineda and Jaramillo, 2020).

The first wave of Venezuelan migrants was well received in Colombia, in part because Venezuela had received many Colombians during the oil boom period (Romero, 2010). In a time when Colombians were fleeing a drug-fueled guerrilla war, Venezuela encouraged the settlement of immigrants (Massey et al. 1998, 211). On the other hand, it may be associated with the socio-economical level of the first diaspora, mainly middle and upper-class professionals (De Corso, 2020). After 2014 the social condition of the immigrants was different. Most were underclass workers, including returnees, connecting the characteristics of a second exodus as part of a "new Cold War narrative" (De Corso, 2020). Additionally, there are important factors such as the deterioration of Colombia's economy, political turmoil, and the Covid-19 pandemic²², that may have contributed to the shift of attitude.

20 Gallup (2020)

21 The Evolution of the Migrant Acceptance Index from the Gallup report was collected in 140 countries between 2016 and 2019

22 During the coronavirus pandemic, unemployment has risen and 3.6 million Colombians were pushed into poverty. Colombians have taken to the streets to demand that the government do more to reduce high levels of inequality (BBC, 2021)

Chartruc & Rozo (2022) examine how the crisis affects native altruism and attitudes towards migrants and distinguish between positive responses as the empathy channel and negative responses as the resentment channel. The results of their study support the validity of the resentment channel whereby natives resent migrants during an economic crisis. In fact, although efforts from the Colombian government have been made to provide assistance, Venezuelans suffer from discrimination from natives in many situations of their day-to-day, including in institutional organizations.

Additionally, media coverage and political actors perpetuate prejudice stereotypes that influence public opinion (Migration Portal, 2020). As a mediatized recent example, when inquired by Blu Radio whether undocumented Venezuelans would receive vaccinations for the coronavirus, former president Ivan Duque answered negatively, to avoid a “call to stampede, where everyone crosses the border to be vaccinated” (France24, 2020). The statement sparked feelings of exclusion for the 56% of Venezuelans living in Colombia with irregular status (Migración Colombia, 2020) and sent a message that they were no longer welcome in Colombia, amid a health crisis.

Barbara Perry (2001) argues that “members of the subordinate groups are potential victims *because* of their subordinate status”, becoming subjugated due to their difference, which results in the “othering” of certain minority individuals. The structural and institutional discrimination that they experience, affects all aspects of their lives (Perry as cited in Walters, 2014), contributing to negative experiences in integrating into their host country.

Venezuelan migrant women are subject to the xenophobic and patriarchal norms of Colombia, and struggle to escape situations of violence (Lee, S., Piper, N., 2013) or are pushed to move to other places, falling into new cycles of re-victimization (Barja Coria, J., 2019). Both Colombia and Venezuela follow a framework known as *machismo*, whereas women are the primary caregivers with limited control over resources and decisions (Murfet and Baron, 2020).

Though lawmakers in Colombia passed a bill in 2015 imposing sentences for hate crimes against women (Reuters, 2015), and more recently ordered creating new regulations for the identification and protection of trafficking victims, highlighting migrant women (Zulver & González, 2022), Colombian data suggests that not only do the levels of impunity remain high but there is a lack of confidence in the police (Unidad para las Víctimas, 2021)²³.

23 As an example, Sisma Mujer stated that 90% of reported cases of sexual violence filed in 2020 did not progress from the initial stage, and NGO Temblores underlined they received 132 reports of sexually violent acts committed by the police between 2017 and 2021.

Additionally, Amnesty International released “Facts and Figures GBV against Venezuelan refugee women” and the numbers revealed that 24,1% of women have experienced discrimination or have been unfairly treated because they are Venezuelan refugees, more than half of which happened in the street; 82% of women working reported difficulties in obtaining paid work, and of those, only 16% had a written contract.

These situations justify that victims tend to keep silent or turn to more trustworthy sources. Other than the fear of backlash such as deportation, there is a generalized misbelief in state institutions due to negative experiences of discrimination. When local state authorities should be entitled to play a key role in the restorative framework, the opposite often occurs, transforming them into secondary perpetrators of the traumas of hate victimisation (Walters, 2014).

There are many reports of the lack of basic needs for Venezuelan migrant women: UNFPA (2020), reported a shortage in hygiene products, as well as sexual and reproductive health care, maternal health care, and contraceptives (Kohan & Rendon, 2020).

The lack of documentation and limited awareness about their rights (Murfet & Baron, 2020) renders them more vulnerable to exploitation or facing the need to turn to sex work as a survival mechanism (Holloway et al., 2022). This situation worsened as the pandemic increased the responsibilities for women as caregivers (CARE, 2020).

The levels of discriminatory manifestation have different consequences, going from affecting the mental health of migrants, to physical violence with severe outcomes. Regarding the first, a study concluded that “perceived discrimination is an important factor when considering mental health outcomes among Venezuelans in the USA and in Colombia”, suggesting that gender differences influence the relationship between discrimination and PTSD (Vos et al. 2002). Regarding the second, a more recent investigation about the death of 83 Venezuelan women in Colombia, between January 2018 and December 2019, concluded that the majority were victims of femicide, 34,4% were victims of uncategorized murder and 6,6% were victims of hate, and intolerance crimes, although most probably this rate is higher. Of the violent deaths, 10% were minors, and most of them did not complete university studies, one of the world patterns of femicides (WHO, 2022). In a culture where machismo is a structural issue, migrant women are the most vulnerable group to hate crimes (Walters, 2014), and they deal with the absence of the state in investigating and sentencing as well as a lack of protective measures (Amnesty International, 2022).

Consequently, the cycle of violence may drive them to situations where they are not treated like victims but like criminals, both by the welcoming state and by the communities, exacerbating their marginalisation in the hosting country.

In Colombia, as in Venezuela machismo is rooted historically and culturally, contributing to traditional and stereotyped vision of gender roles, reflecting in work opportunities, unequal incomes, and unbalanced dynamics in the household. However, migration has also affected responsibilities. Whether because men have left ahead looking for better opportunities, or because they decided to leave alone, many women find themselves converted into the leaders of their homes, because they become both the main caregivers as well as the providers for their children.

2.3.2. An intersectional approach

A key concept in migration and gender literatures, intersectionality is described by McCall (2005) as “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations”, adding that it is one of the most important theoretical contributions that women’s studies have made, especially when looking at it through Nash’s (2008, in Bastia, 2014, p.238) perspective that migrant women are fast becoming the new “quintessential intersectional subjects”. This has happened due to an increase of migration studies that started to look from a feminist perspective, and then from a gendered one.

Collins and Bilge (2020) working definition describes intersectionality as power relations that build on each other and work together; and that these intersecting power relations affect all aspects of social work. An interesting example of their work was that of Marielle Franco, one of the most outspoken Brazilian activists and politicians of her generation, with a strong grassroots and social media mobilising presence that made her an effective advocate for the rights of black women, youth, and LGBTQ people. It underlines intersectionality’s significance as an analytical tool for movements of social justice (Collins & Bilge, 2020).

A gendered intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 2004) recognizes how the combination of factors such as race, gender, age, religion, and nationality, shape the way in which women experience discrimination, contributing to the complexity of their situation in migration realities. It also understands how every woman’s experience may be unique, excluding common misconceptions of the reality of discrimination as it is experienced by individuals (L’Hereux-Dubé, 1993).

Through gender studies looking glass, intersectionality overlays multiple features of disadvantage and exclusion, often with contextual origins (McCall, 2005), but migration

studies, on the other side, developed cursory approaches to diversity and intersectionality (Bürkner, 2012). Both are relevant for the present study.

While negative features must be taken into consideration in gender and in migratory studies, so does reuniting structural and agency-related views on social inequality. Bürkner, (2012) defended that focusing on intersectionality could solve “one of the fundamental problems of migration research: how to reconcile structure and agency without promoting cultural essentialism”. Going through intertwined levels of what represents structure and agency – cultural symbols, identity building – the author suggests that by means of social practice, individuals define their positions and roles within specific social context, using relevant identity constructors. Winker and Degele (2009) add that they also reinforce or mitigate the influence of specific symbolic representations, and they sustain or challenge social structure. Their theory that intersectional analysis should focus on context-dependent or even situational discrimination was therefore applied to the present research considering the relevance of crossing these dimensions to understand how women redefine their roles in migratory contexts and influence their surroundings. As migrants move from one place to another, they also create new possibilities, for themselves, the people who are ‘left behind’ as well as those they encounter on the way to and at their destinations (Bastia, 2011).

Applying these notions to Venezuelan migrants, on the one hand one should consider how the intersection of gender and xenophobic prejudice affects Venezuelan women, emerging in forms of violence before, during, and after migrating to Colombia (Calderón-Jaramillo et al, 2020). Deprived of their rights, due to a lack of information, misinformation, or situations of exploitation in the hosting communities, from an intersectional approach, their inequalities are amplified due to gender, visible minority, immigrant status, and economic status (Crenshaw, 1991). On the other hand, an article by McIlwaine and Bermudez, (2011 in Bastia, 2014) used intersectionality to analyse migrant political participation in London, concluding that among Colombians, working class women are more likely than working class men or middle-class women to be involved in politics. The authors argue that working class women are much more likely to challenge gender regimes than middle class women or working-class men, who are least likely to be involved in politics given their greater desire to return to Colombia.

The first perspective should be useful to analyse the findings regarding the arrival and reception in Colombia, and how that affected these women’s agency. The second represents an interesting example of positive agency applied to coping mechanisms among less economically favoured migrant women.

2.3.3. From coping to adaptation

It is proven that the impact of crisis and migration are not the same for men and women. They have different needs and different coping mechanisms to adapt (Watts and Serrano-García 2003) and understanding such gender nuances will allow defining patterns and directions of the mobility of genders (Piper, 2005).

In fact, several refugee studies have highlighted women's capacities in situations of hardship (Reyes, 2013). They demonstrate female refugees' agency in establishing new livelihoods in the place they settle, and rather than assuming a passive victim attitude, they actively look for ways such as seeking job opportunities and fighting to regularise their situation in the host country. These coping mechanisms developed to face adversities take the form of strengths and resources toward adaptation, and they seem to be more effective when collaborative efforts are stronger, both within communities and between communities and local governments (Drivdal, 2016).

Additionally, when looking at economic status and the need for humanitarian aid, which influence collaborative efforts, some studies indicate that places with low intervention rates of social welfare, don't necessarily result in bad coping mechanisms, "due to the interaction of protective factors such as social networks, previous contact with migration realities and a strong sense of meaning of life based on their migratory project" (Hernández and García-Moreno, 2014).

This dissertation highlights the role of social networks and adds capacity building processes as an important part of the adaptation, as multidimensional processes that involve multiple community actors within social structures (Jung and Choi, 2013). They are often a powerful tool of empowerment, adding technical skills that enhance value to women in the labor market, and important information regarding their rights in the host country.

Co-development policies aimed at involving migrants as active actors of development are seen as having potentially an empowering impact on women through promoting their financial independence and enabling them to exercise their rights more effectively (Council of Europe 2004). This needs to be translated into a concrete rights-based approach to development that includes the mainstreaming of gender and rights perspectives into all migration interventions (Timmerman et al., 2018).

2.4. Migrant women's agency: from victims to agents of change

If (an individual) contacts with its neighbour and with their neighbours, there will be an accumulation of social capital that can immediately satisfy their social needs and can have enough potential for a substantial improvement of life conditions of the entire community. (Hanifan, 1916, p.130, in Woolcock, 2020)

Both these authors, as well as Reyes (2013), have shed important light into the relevance of the concept of social capital in individual and community resilience. Though they applied it to other contexts, it was pertinent to use it within this framework where there is also a claiming access to certain resources (Bourdieu, 1985, in Reyes, 2013, p.23), and achieving certain benefits from the social structure. Kindler adds the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness (Putnam, 2007), concepts that fit in the migratory frame to which this study refers to. As Ager and Strang (2008) this thesis avoids the assumption that integration and social cohesion can be achieved through social connection alone, and supports its contribution to a connective tissue, which influences positive outcomes.

It's these same positive outcomes that should be reinforced in international migration policies. They derive from women's agency as a practice of resilience. Although they often result of women's location at the intersection of multiple axes of disadvantage and discrimination as female migrants, looking beyond the "victim" category, they can be visionary and organised forces for change within their destination and origin countries, leading change from their multiple identities (Women in Migration Network, 2017). This view defends that rather than "protecting" migrant women through gendered policies that exacerbate feelings of discrimination and xenophobia, migration policies should guarantee them autonomous and independent status and promote integration, committing to implement the Committee on the elimination of discrimination against women (CEDAW) General Recommendation 26, envisioning a "gender-sensitive, rights-based policy on the basis of equality and non-discrimination (...) to facilitate access of women migrant workers to work opportunities abroad, promoting safe migration and ensuring the protection of the rights of women migrant workers [ensuring that] International migration can be an empowering experience for women²⁴.

²⁴ It requires states to "formulate a gender-sensitive, rights-based policy on the basis of equality and nondiscrimination to regulate and administer all aspects and stages of migration, to facilitate access of women migrant workers to work opportunities abroad, promoting safe migration and ensuring the protection of the rights of women migrant workers (articles 2 (a) and 3)". para.23(a) In doing so they can ensure that "International migration can be an empowering experience for women: women may leave situations where they have limited options for ones where they exercise greater autonomy over their own lives, thereby benefiting themselves as well as their families and communities.

Research has shown that, in migratory contexts, women often become the main providers for the family and are usually more willing to accept any job offered to meet their family's needs (Franz, 2003). It also shows that while they earn less than men, the average remittance amounts they send are the same as or even greater than those of men, implying that they tend to remit a larger portion of their earnings than do men (UN Woman, 2020).

They also appear to show greater resilience and adaptability than men because they maintain household and childcare routines (Szczepanikova, 2005), and are more prone to search for and use financial and social services available, as well as use social networking skills to gain extra sources of support (Franz, 2003).

This represents women's capacity, as newcomers, to reconstruct themselves in new contexts according to their interests, values and needs. Acculturative integration implies a self-construction process (De la Mata and Cubero 2003), which at the interpersonal level, is associated with positive social support and opportunities for participation, commitment, and mutual responsibility. At the intrapersonal level, integration is related to psychological well-being, control, competence, and autonomy (Ramirez et al, 2010).

An important empowerment and integration tool is peer support. On the first instance to secure feelings of safety and exchange of experience, contributing to their psycho-social well-being, and secondly as a platform for advocating different initiatives and measures (Hrnjak, 2020). In fact, studies have identified that community engagement of migrants, in social leadership roles, is an important element in developing both individual well-being and cohesive multicultural receiving communities, and that the reasons for these commitments are both intrinsic and extrinsic (Taurini et al, 2017). The referred authors point out how their social action positively interferes in improving bicultural references, developing social relations with the locals, and strengthening bonds with compatriots, in increasing the abilities to deal with unjust social conditions where they settle and in decreasing prejudice.

In the complex context where Venezuelans settle in Colombia, they search for alternatives to integrate themselves in the host country, and while each process has its own particularities, migrants "acquire a shared mentality towards their incorporation and coexistence, for which positive intercultural relations must be generated, a matter that is a mutual responsibility between the immigrants and the host society" (Sáez et al., 2020). Therefore, participation is an important way in which they generate solidarity, which may facilitate their integration. Ariño (2007, in Sáez et al., 2020), refers to action such as political advocacy, solution of shortcomings, aspects of identity and practice of sociality within the collective.

According to Barrera (2019) associative forms and community groups of Venezuelans have begun to emerge in Colombia, and they “allow exponential progress in the process of insertion of migrants in the host society and awaken a sense of national solidarity as integration strategies” (Sáez et al., 2020).

Two recent studies from IPA Colombia have shown how integration may be strengthened due to community and social leaders’ support. The first, published in September 2021 concluded that networks are a determining factor for migrants physical and emotional well-being during the first weeks in Colombia, and this “underscores the importance of strengthening community support networks of family, neighbours, NGOs and migrant organisations²⁵. The other, published in March 2022, referred to the important role social leaders had in the regularisation process of Venezuelan migrants.

Considering recent covid-19 pandemic, Zulver (2020) investigated how existing vulnerabilities for women social leaders have been sharpened, highlighting that women’s community work increases while state and institutional support decrease. This conclusion supports the idea that women’s leadership process is more relevant when the needs are higher. With the lack of institutional aid, communities reach out to them for help.

While the activities of migrants’ associations and their role in local community development remain an under-researched topic (Tamas, 2003), and the role of women in diaspora associations is unclear (Timmerman et al., 2018), this thesis proposes at shedding some light into these topics, focusing on the contribution of female leaders to Venezuelan women’s integration into Colombia.

²⁵ IPA Colombia (2021, September). <https://www.poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/publications/PEP-Brief-Spanish-Sept-21-2021.pdf>

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

As previously mentioned, this study is focused on understanding the role of female leaders in the integration processes of Venezuelan women in Colombia. Amplifying women's voices is deeply tied to methodological and ethical considerations (Pearce et al. 2011), therefore, this research starts with the migrant as the subjective author of their story that moves both temporally - from past to present - and spatially – from an old country to a new home. Reconciling the contradictions in both is a necessary cohesion to illustrate their integration into a new place (Arabindan-Kesson, A. 2019), and how their leadership processes in a new country unfolded.

Understanding the subjects' life history, by starting from their point of view, makes it central to interpreting the social actor's reality (Poupart, 2012). For that purpose, the choice fell onto the qualitative methodology, with the aim to produce circumstantial knowledge about the experiences, behaviours, social structures, or shared beliefs of a selected group of women, involving an interpretative and naturalistic approach to understanding the research subjects rather than predicting the outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Although it is a less controlled method and inherently subjective and sensitive to the biases of both researchers and participants (Tomaszewski, Zarestky, Gonzalez, 2020), it allows for a better understanding of individual experiences and shared phenomena.

The following chapter intends to justify the research design choices, specifying the type of research chosen, its philosophy and action plan, as well as the sampling strategy, detailing the data collection methods and analysis techniques, finalising with a description of the limitations and their impact on the study.

3.1. Research Design

Socially built processes are the starting point of the study, and better understood through the narratives of their participants, therefore a qualitative methodology was followed, mixed in its approach.

Based on the idea that interviews are central to the design of ethnographic studies (Zapata-Barrero and Yalaz, 2018), and in Castles (2012) theory that interviews have potential to untangle the “multi-layered links of global connectivity”, talking face-to-face with the subjects of this investigation was one of the primary purposes.

Therefore, and aiming to reach a better cultural understanding and interpretation (Wolcott, 2008), the researcher moved to Colombia for five months, to be closer to the migratory realities and the people in which this dissertation centres. It was possible, for this reason, to develop a more comprehensive insight into the studied phenomena (Patton, 1999).

This allowed the researcher to engage in field research, placing herself in the middle of the observer-participant continuum (Palys and Atchison (2014, p. 198) to complement some of the questions and topics - such as discrimination and xenophobia demonstrations - by observing them through a global dimension that cultural diversity requires.

But to better understand the history of Venezuelan migrants who arrived in Colombia between 2016 and 2019, and their path from the decision of leaving their home country to how they became leaders of their communities in the hosting country, analysing their narratives through interviews was key. The researcher followed a phenomenological approach, inspired by Welman and Kruger's (1999) words that "the phenomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of people involved".

When it comes to intersectionality, the life story approach seems to be the best to analyse it as a lived experience, because it lacks a specific methodology (McCall, 2005). The interviewees are therefore able to detail chronologically and biographically their migratory experiences, in relation to their identities and positions regarding ethnicity, class, or gender (Bastia, 2014).

With these purposes, eleven in-depth interviews with eight venezuelan *lideresas* and three colombian, took place between July and September 2022, using the standpoint method to start by the actualities of women's experience, with the aim to construct knowledge from women-centred perspectives (Smith, 1992, 2005). However, geographical constraints did not allow for the face-to-face interviews to take place, and were therefore replaced by video-calls.

The interviews followed a semi-structured path, in a flexible style as described by Byrman (2012) with a starting question common to all, and with a support script (Annex B) based on the literature review to guide the following (Annex A) but allowing the subjects to speak freely, maintaining flexibility in how and when the questions were put and at the same time see how each interviewee understood the topics under discussion and could respond (Edwards, R., & Holland, J. 2013). The time of the interviews varied, with the longest extending to more than two hours, and the shortest 30 minutes. The average of the interviews took between 50 and 60 minutes, and all participants were previously asked for their consent to be interviewed, to be recorded, and to have their information used in the present dissertation (Annex A).

Their realities were observed subjectively, with an interpretivism eye, focusing on the essence of the participant's lived experiences (Flood, 2010), seeking to build knowledge by understanding their unique viewpoints and the meaning attached to those viewpoints (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

3.2. Sampling strategy and participants

Considering that social reality is shaped by human experiences and social contexts, it became clear that the best way to study it would be within its socio-historic context by reconciling the subjective interpretations of its various participants. For that purpose, in-depth interviews were conducted with a sample previously defined as small, to focus on description, so that their experiences would be presented as richly and as accurately as possible (Morse, 1991).

The researcher defined the sample as between ten and fifteen women. For this research's purpose, eleven women were interviewed, eight of Venezuelan origin, all of them migrants that crossed the border by land between 2016 and 2019, and three Colombian nationals, strongly engaged with the integration mechanisms of the Venezuelan population. They are settled in different areas of Colombia, which adds to the research by giving a more diversified representation of life in several districts in which La Guajira, Atlántico, Nariño, Soledad, Bolívar and Valle del Cauca are included.

The constitution of the sample followed the criteria of the non-probability sampling technique, starting with participants from the immigrant population already known to the researcher and identified as credible and relevant testimonies by other participants from the same population. The inclusion criteria were: agreeing to participate in the study, being at least eighteen years old²⁶, and having been living in Colombia for more than a year.

The women contacted have been recognized as leaders by their peers, and by national and international organisations (such as Genfami, Derecho a no Obedecer, Artemisas, OIM, UNHCR), have collaborated with them, are part of leaders' networks, and in some cases have founded their own NGO's. They were first approached due to their presence and work in these associations, either because the researcher had the opportunity to know them personally while they were working, or because they were recommended as credible *lideresas* and voices for their communities. They were contacted personally, by email, and in most cases via WhatsApp – an important and effective communication tool in Colombia, especially where connectivity is an issue. All the women who answered the researcher's contacts replied affirmatively to giving

²⁶ They were aged between 27 and 53 at the time that the interviews took place

an interview. And all gave their permission to use the interview for the dissertation purpose, using their original names. Still, to protect their privacy, the researcher decided to change their names.

Unfortunately, the contacts made in some of the most remote areas in Colombia such as Arauca took some time to reply and were left out due to timing issues. The research would be more complete with these testimonies, from important border areas, which led the research to support itself in testimonies from organisations that work closely with female leaders, and/or participate in giving them specific training.

3.4. Data collection & analysis

The field research was collected between October 2021 and February 2022 in different districts of Colombia, but mainly in Bogotá, Medellín, Buenaventura, La Guajira, Cartagena, and Santa Marta. As support to the interviews, during the months the researcher lived in Colombia, observations and reflections were registered by taking notes on a paper notebook when available, and on a digital notebook, when important events needed to be registered unpredictably. The researcher maintained the interactions as little as possible, as to not interfere with the observed realities.

The selected method for the interviews was videoconference, a useful approach to collecting qualitative research data about phenomena that cannot be directly observed (Irani, 2019). The choice was based on the geographic distance between the interviewees and the researcher, and the lack of feasibility of doing the interviews in-person, which have been perceived as the gold standard because they represent a natural encounter where the interviewer communicates and builds rapport with participants while observing their body language and the environment (Irani, 2019). However, the video conferencing tools offer many opportunities, including a cost-effective and convenient alternative to in-person interviews (Gray, Wong-Wiley, Rempel & Cook, 2020), especially with interviews of different areas of Colombia, some of them of remote access, dangerous access, and where in-person interviews could represent a personal security issue. Video-conferencing tools such as Zoom, Google Meets, and sometimes WhatsApp allowed a real-time conversation with visual and verbal interactions of receiving and sending information (Archibald, Ambagsherr, Casey & Lawless, 2019), and were, therefore, the main means of data collecting. Simultaneously, the researcher took field notes about the interaction and expressions of the interview, to include relevant details for the transcription (Esin et al., 2014; Reissman, 2005)

The interviews were listened to and transcribed verbatim for analysis, and read to get a sense of the whole, trying to overcome the language and accent barriers that happened during the interviews, and identified the most relevant units for the objectives of the research following Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) research method guide. This is useful to categorise the data and identify recurring themes. The then transformed meaning units are the basis to describe the structure of the experience.

After the initial observations, the research followed a deductive type, with an established set of theories emerging, and building onto it with collected data, as a confirmatory study in approach (Butler, 2014). For organisation purposes, the data was arranged in categories, starting with the first cycle of codes to create an organisational scheme (Bingham, & Witkowsky, 2022) - such as name, age, place of birth, and current location - and then sorted into categories based on the research questions, to better reflect on the broad topics of the study. After this process, the research proceeded to an inductive analysis that connects the findings with the previous literature review. It has been discussed whether a thematic analysis is a method in its own right (Braun & Clarke, 2006) or complementary to others, and which was based on the latter that this research unfolded.

3.5. Methodological limitations and their impact

The following paragraphs describe the problems and limitations found, explaining how they were mitigated or resolved, and how they impacted the research.

The first two barriers to qualitative research were given at the very first stage, during field research. The first one was the electoral period and a warning that it would be difficult to talk to many of the *lideresas* due to exposure issues, as well as accessibility which became more difficult due to the covid-19 pandemic. In July 2022 after the electoral campaign was finished and a new president was elected, the interviews began.

The second issue was a concern confirmed by some of the interviewees. In speaking with vulnerable populations about work that they do voluntarily despite one of their biggest expectations is to find a job and earn money to support their families, the question of whether some of the answers would be biased, as a means of achieving some sort of aid, as the inclination to ask the question ‘What’s in it for us?’ and feelings of being over-researched arose (Clark 2008).

However, in the conversations with the interviewees, it became clear that their main objective in participating was, in fact, having their voices heard, and that their testimonies and life stories would reach beyond Colombian and Venezuelan borders and provoke some kind of impact.

Data collection constraints such as connection issues and schedule were also an issue. The researcher was in a different time zone than that of the subjects at the time of the interview, which limited the times in which the interviews could be done. Adding to this there were some connectivity issues. The interviewees rescheduled often due to connectivity malfunctions, lack of internet, problems with the phones, or with the video call app. These constraints were easily overcome with a lot of flexibility, but they took a toll on the researcher's time and delayed the research path.

A cross-language barrier derived from the researcher being of Portuguese nationality and the interviewees Colombian and Venezuelan. Although they all spoke Spanish, the different dialects and expressions had an impact on the data interpretation, and its transcription and translation to English, which took more time than expected. The researcher trusted in her advanced knowledge of Spanish and in the support of a translator, taking the risk that it could threaten the trustworthiness of cross-language qualitative research and subsequently, the applicability of the translated findings to participant populations (Edwards, 1998).

While the research aimed at diversity in age and geographic location, the small sample size inevitably implies that this study is not representative of Venezuelan migrant women in Colombia as a whole. This also makes it impossible to draw broad conclusions about the findings, although they stayed aligned with the objectives of the research.

There was also a matter of data saturation on certain topics, with participants echoing each other. However, as other interviews took place new information on other topics emerged, justifying the need for further interviews.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

This chapter reports the results of the research. After a brief presentation, the analysis will continue with the findings that occurred from field observation and the eleven interviews with the eight Venezuelan social leaders in Colombia, and three Colombian who work with them.

Their stories differ in many ways, from their background to their migratory experience, but it was the similarities found among them that this study focused on. They represent the core of the phenomenon of Venezuelan women that become social leaders in Colombia.

A discussion of the results closes the chapter, comparing them with findings from other scientific articles and research found pertinent to this dissertation.

4.1. Results

As a subject-centred study, it was important to start by identifying commonalities through a coding system, without, however, losing the depth of the experience. To complete the data gathering, the researcher took a descriptive phenomenological approach to better understand the participants' lived experiences through their own narratives (Creswell 1998; Giorgi 1975) and divided them into the main themes that emerged from their stories:

1. The migratory experience
2. Intersectionality and discrimination in Colombia
3. Overcoming hardships and becoming a leader
4. Social leadership in action: Expanding women's voices
5. Challenges of leadership processes in Colombia
6. Expectations for the future

4.1.1. The migratory experience

The starting point of the subject's life stories was set on their migratory experience, from what led the interviewees to decide to leave their home country, to the experience of crossing the border and arriving in Colombia. After a short mutual introduction and registering the answer to the basic biographical data, the interview had as a starting question: "Can you please describe your migratory experience?".

This initial question was a way of asking them to narrate their life stories without rigid structured questions, aiming at making them feel more comfortable from the start while simultaneously providing valuable information regarding the important events that shaped their lives in the previous years. Pseudonyms are used to protect their privacy, following the principle

of doing no harm, and direct quotations are included to allow the participants' voices to be heard and make their feelings explicit (Sandelowski, 1994, p.480). The majority of the respondents was working when they decided to leave Venezuela, and all stated economical and health care reasons for leaving in search of better life conditions.

Norah (41) was a lawyer in Venezuela making around 50.000 pesos a month²⁷. She left the country she loved for the first time to Colombia alone in August 2017, a “necessary sacrifice” according to her. With borders closing things became more difficult and alternative routes were taken, exposing migrants to hardships they had never faced:

We had to go through the trochas. So, on the trail, yes it was dangerous because they could rob you, they could kill you, they could take your merchandise, they could even rape you. It was terrible because we were in indigenous territory, there is no law there. We are in their land, with its own laws, its own customs. So, we had to pray to God from the moment we entered until we came out, to come out alive.

Emily (34) is a mother of three, born in Táchira. She worked in hospitals for 11 years, but the close contact with extreme realities such as malnutrition in children made her and her family decide to leave in 2017 before it would get to them. She had a passport and was lucky enough to take the road to the border with her kids, two of whom also had documents.

Patricia (26) was born in Maracaibo in the Wayuu ethnic group, but the lack of food, and of a job pushed her to leave Venezuela in 2016, taking the dangerous *trochas* route at night. She arrived to the north of Colombia and slept in a square with her younger child and lived off handouts from the passers-by. Selling candies in the street her husband managed a clay house for them to live, the place where she was at the time of the interview, in what appeared to be a humble neighbourhood. Having a place to stay enabled the family to meet more people, and through networking, they managed to find irregular jobs in family homes: “some of them wanted to help and others not”, she stated.

Daria (35) was born in Maracaibo, in the Zulia state of Venezuela. A Geosciences Engineer specialising in Geology, she was working on an alternative energies project in a groundwater study and decided to leave in search of better pay to send to her family that stayed in Venezuela. She left her home country when she was 32, not with Colombia in mind (although she has Colombian nationality) but Peru, where her husband was waiting and where she stayed for six months until life conditions became too difficult to bear. Her migratory journey was not an easy

²⁷ The constant devaluation of the Venezuelan Bolivar makes it difficult to correspond a value in other currencies, but 50.000 Colombian pesos corresponded, at the time of the interview to €11,46 (conversion made with bportugal.pt on the 03.08.2022)

one. She had to walk for a day because the indigenous population had closed the Panamerican road and was frisked by the guerrillas in search of money. She arrived walking to Colombia, helped by indigenous people and by the group she joined at the beginning of the journey so that nobody would be left alone.

Mari (53) is a mother of four raised in Maracay where she was a teacher and now lives in the border town. She is now a social worker and a community leader, although she does not like to be called that. She left Venezuela in 2016 because of the lack of acquisitive power and health care, her family was struggling and her pay as a teacher was not enough.

Belia (47) is a mother of four raised in Maracaibo. She left Venezuela because both she and her husband lost their jobs, and when their older child fled to Colombia to escape recruitment with the Guardia Nacional, the rest of the family decided to follow. On 19 March 2019, they took the irregular routes, a tortuous path for two days according to her, where they had to pay to pass, heard shootings, and saw girls taken out of the cars who would probably be victims of abuse.

Eva (40) is a mother of two born in Caracas, and she admits she decided to leave Venezuela ignoring the social crisis the country was going through. Her difficulties and confrontations had happened during her five years working as a teacher when her issues with the government's system led her to withdraw and follow a career in tourism: "when you don't adjust to the regime, you are inserted in a database that makes it harder for you to access certain things". She went on to work in the Hospitality business, and following the incentive of a co-worker, Eva took a vacation from her work to make some extra money in Colombia. When she arrived at the border on 23 October 2017, she soon realised the situation was worse than she thought:

I arrived in Cucuta and saw a big line, and I wondered why there were so many people travelling (...) look, I was so involved in my own world that I hadn't realised that the country's situation was this bad... I mean people talked about a crisis, but I had money.

The sight of so many people crossing the border was not an immediate reflex to the troubled situation most of them found themselves, in a way that leaving the country was a desperate and last resource decision: "I saw all those people and thought how they are travelling so much if they say they don't have money, I mean, I was so ignorant, so ignorant."

According to Eva, the trip to Bogotá was awful from the first moment and when she arrived in Bogotá, the girlfriend that was supposed to be there waiting for her had left for Medellín. Eva waited some days, trying unsuccessfully to find work, due to the lack of legal papers to do so, until meeting the man that would connect her to the job she went there after, starting what she describes as her “real hell”.

Gracia (48) is an economist with education and social work running in her family, but her interest extends to cooking, a pleasure that she also explored professionally in Venezuela. Like Eva, she went to Colombia with a friend because of a job offer and realised they had been deceived when they arrived in an area where guerrillas were very active. She jokes about it: “I always say I was saved because I am ugly”, but she admits that they were kidnaped and escaped with a lot of luck, crossing the dangerous area of the jungle, by the river, and then hid in a car until they arrived in Pasto. They heard after that the car they were going to take back to enter Venezuela was hijacked, robbed, and people killed... so they stayed, bought a phone, rented a car from a lovely lady that helped them, and looked for a job.

Other than the eight Venezuelan *lideresas* interviewed, the researcher found it important to add to the study the testimonies of Colombian women working in migration projects. They are also community leaders collaborating on projects related to the migrant population and important additions to the research as testimonies to the Venezuelan leader’s work and to the topics of the interviews.

Ana is a sociologist, part of a project of communication strategies to promote social and cultural integration among migrants, refugees, returnees, and their host communities, to combat xenophobia. Their work is focused mainly on strengthening advocacy and citizen participation, through a school that gives training to women leaders and information on migrant and migration issues in their neighbourhoods.

Liliana (27), is from Norte Santander and has been working in social projects for over five years, mainly in capacity building projects, citizen mobilisation with both Colombians and Venezuelans to promote social and cultural integration among the migrant population:

When we work with vulnerable populations, we need to have some previous skills to do no harm, because these people want to be listened to.

Danna (40) is a graduate of corporate management. She formalised her foundation in 2020, amid the Covid-19 pandemic, after several years of working with the Venezuelan population: “In 2017, in Cali, the Venezuelan population started to arrive... we saw them tired, with many children.” She decided to help in every way she could and eventually became an important trustworthy information source for many of them, and a representative of the migrant community in many spaces.

The interviewees all referred to leaving Venezuela for necessity, most of them by foot, through the *trochas*. Only one had the passport to cross through the official land border. Even so, they all stated the ordeals of the migratory process, walking for days, exposing them to several perils. Two of them were deceived with fake proposals of better jobs in Colombia. One was robbed, one suffered from GBV and slavery, and one from labor exploitation, but all of them managed to enter and eventually settled in Colombia where they now live.

4.1.2. Intersectionality and discrimination in Colombia

Feelings of discrimination and of xenophobia were a recurrent topic during the interviews, both when relating their migratory experiences, and in their day-to-day lives in Colombia. Although some interviewees stated that they felt like life was better now because people knew them, some still struggle in accessing their rights or finding a job, which they relate to discrimination. As Colombians working with migrants, Danna and Ana hear locals complaining about migrants, especially women:

They said that many migrants did not fit in with the dynamics of the barrio, so there was a very strong scheme, right? Well. That they are dirty, that they leave garbage, that the children keep things dirty

In some cases, this works as a barrier for Venezuelans to access their basic rights such as the information regarding their regularisation processes, and in some, put them even more in danger. Ana shared the story of a Venezuelan girl living in Cali who had been a victim of GBV by her partner, but due to the lack of information that could support her complaint, she went back to a revictimization place.

When Daria arrived to Colombia, she felt her integrity threatened by a taxi driver:

He started to offer me money and I realized that what he wanted, well, now I know what that is because at that time I had never heard of human trafficking, but I understood after being in this leadership process, that what the man wanted was to make human trafficking with me because he started to offer me money for

my body, to offer me better things, he wanted to take me to another place, then I understood that that was what he wanted with me. Not at that time

Gracia speaks of discrimination before questions about the theme were asked, and of the importance of knowing the laws so as not to become so vulnerable to threats and exploitation:

We started to work; we suffered xenophobia here. That's when I realized how important it is to know the laws where we are, so this path of leadership where I am starts here, learning about human trafficking, about the laws – the person in the hotel I worked threatened to have me arrested because I was Venezuelan

For six months of psychological abuse in her workplace, Gracia suffered constantly of criticism and discrimination because of her nationality, until one day she discovered she had rights. She started reading all she could and volunteered to help others in similar situations.

When escaping her kidnappers, Eva ran to the police, who pretended to help her and took her back to the place she was being held captive. The second time she escaped, she took matters into her own hands and admitted that every masculine face she met on the road felt like a threat.

When we speak about discrimination and xenophobia all women admitted having suffered from it. Eva explained that what happened to her could happen to any venezuelan like her:

He closed the door and that's where my first hell started. He said: "Welcome, this is where all Venezuelan girls arrive." I used to watch so many Colombian series, of Narcos, of human trafficking, but I thought it was just a series, I never thought it was literally like that.

Her words confirm the idea that many are deceived, and as she stated, she was not alone: "there were girls there, 14, 13 years old, and I thought about my daughter in Venezuela". She was made to use revealing clothes and informed about how much she should charge for a 20-minute job - the equivalent of 10 USD. The first time she went to a room with a Spanish client, she asked for help, but the daily abuse started there. She received one loaf of bread a day. The first time she escaped, a couple of weeks later she estimates, she ran to the police, who brought her back to the same place. On the day that she finally escaped, Evelin suffered one of the strongest abuses:

It was very harsh, very painful... I had a knife (...) I stabbed him in the chest and ran away (...) halfway down the stairs I returned for my passport and identity card."

GBV such as what Eva was a victim of are not uncommon in Colombia. Sex trafficking has increased during the pandemic and 90% of the foreign victims of trafficking in Colombia are Venezuelan women (UNODC, 2021). Like Eva and Gracia, many are lured into Colombia with fraudulent job offers (R4V, 2020), and like many of the interviewees, most of them have tried and failed, or were too afraid to make complaints about the abuse they suffered from. Lack of legal status deters many Venezuelan and foreign women from seeking justice in Colombia, and when they do report sexual violence and crimes they are rarely investigated and prosecuted, according to local women's organizations (Rendon and Kohan, 2020).

Eva mentions there is a difference of attitude between men and women in Colombia. While men comment on their good looks, she says that women hate them, due to the stigma of Venezuelan women stealing their jobs as well as their husbands:

It's difficult to change their mentality. If we are women, we should support each other.

She admits having lost jobs because of her Venezuelan accent and hiding her country's flag from the eyes of Colombian neighbours. But as times went by, things got better:

I used to be afraid to say it, but not anymore. I am proud to say we are Venezuelan, we work, and we get things done.

Belia knows the feeling of having doors shut to her face because of her nationality and being deceived and exploited in a job, but she took these experiences as a lesson. She still feels discriminated against, but not like when she arrived. Belia tried to help both Venezuelan and Colombians in her community, and dialogue and cooperation are now more positive.

Norah had her passport and entered the country legally. Nonetheless, renting a house was not easy, because they wouldn't rent to Venezuelans, so they had to join money between families to manage to rent a place to stay. Her arrival was difficult: "it was horrible, it was a time of crying blood tears." Finding a job as a lawyer was impossible so she managed to go to Bogotá to work in a family house. She didn't stay there for long because her boss, also a female lawyer, suspected Norah would rob her and fired her. With nowhere else to go she asked for help from a brother who was living in Soledad and started working in a bakery, "from six in the morning until ten in the night, making 20000²⁸ pesos".

²⁸ Around €4 a day, in bportugal.pt

Patricia also felt discriminated against in the family homes where she worked, for being Venezuelan, and Mari specifies that non-documented women are easily targeted and that discrimination and xenophobia are a constant threat to Venezuelans.

4.1.3. Overcoming hardships and becoming a leader

The path to becoming a *lideresa* was similar among all the interviewees. Necessity instilled enough curiosity in them to look for relevant information that could help them and their families. That led to leadership processes supported by NGO's and other relevant actors.

Danna first began working with the migrant population through her Facebook groups to look for information to help people she had met and others:

I found a post about this girl who had lost her children because she was in a traffic light begging, and I gave her my number and oriented her as to which authority she had to go and what she had to do, and she followed all the steps and managed to get her kids back. She published my phone number in one of these Facebook groups and one day I woke up with lots of messages on my phone.

After this, Danna was contacted by several Venezuelan leaders who included her in other groups, making her known to the migrant population. In 2018 Danna was pregnant and got more acquainted with the difficult access to health rights for the migrant population, so she started to search for organisations that could help Venezuelan women.

Patricia was also working in family homes when she saw that migrant people in other communities received benefits, as opposed to her neighbourhood because there was nobody to manage available aid. She approached the woman who is now the coordinator of the network *lideresas* in her town and volunteered to represent her community. They started the network together with other six women, and others joined, strengthening their power and their voices which became more and more recognized. She appreciates what the leadership process has done for her:

It has taught me many things I didn't know. I have been given many training sessions about my rights, and I didn't know anything about my rights. And, for being the spokesperson for my community (...) and I can help them.

The day after arriving where she now lives, on the 30th of November 2017, Eva was already looking for a job, with a CV she imprinted with the little money she had. She started working in a clothes store with people who helped her, and soon enough, she decided to start her own business selling home-baked goods and making Arepas to provide for herself. One day, calling home from the main square, she realized the place was packed with sexual workers:

I think God put me there because of what had happened to me. Nowadays I tell with pride what happened in Bogotá because it taught me that there are people with needs, and people who judge without knowing. I said to myself that I have work to do for these women.

Time went by until one night she decided to act. Borrowing money from friends, she made coffee with milk, and bread with cheese, and through the veil of being a Christian, she managed to approach these sex workers:

My anxiety led me to the idea of creating my own foundation, to help sex workers. You need to go to a doctor - I'll help you - you need condoms - I can get them. My husband didn't like me to go there, it was dangerous. They threatened me there and pointed a knife at my throat. Six months later I went back, and I realised that working with this population is tough, because their lifestyle is a habit (...) I met three generations of sexual workers, the grandmother, the mother, and the daughter, their work was a generational thing (...) and I knew that working with them would be very difficult.

In her town, Belia realised that Doctors without Borders was supporting a project with migrant children and suggested they would visit her community, to set up a friendly space for emergency education. Realising the lack of a leader, the choice fell on Belia due to her initiative, and she's been working as a leader since then, searching for organisations to help her community. She met other migrants and became the focal point of IRC for three years. With her first pay she bought a cell phone and started a WhatsApp group, and from there she started a network of leaders

In 2020, during community activities, a cooperation organisation realised that the population was empowered and contacted Danna suggesting she should start her own foundation. Supported by the same leaders – most of whom were still in an irregular situation to start the foundation themselves – Danna founded an organisation made by and for migrants.

Because, well, I am always representing migrants in all spaces, as a foreigner because they are all Venezuelans except me, but it has been very cool to be a spokesperson, and to achieve that empathy, that solidarity, the empowerment of women is something very, very important for them to know their rights, the routes of access to orientation and it has been like a support network. And well, at this moment we are around 55 women leaders, over 52 Venezuelan migrants and 3 Colombian migrants, and we are in the process. So the growth of the organisation, the leadership, is very important because we are able to reach the community, we are able to benefit and well, we are working.

For Emily, “to become a leader one just needs to want to help another person.” From day one, she kept interested in everything regarding the migrant population, and by searching for information, she became a multiplier of it, especially when it came to ensuring that mothers would regularise their children in Colombia to prevent them from begging or work.

That is why I always say that I can be that voice for others who cannot speak or who do not have the availability now, because they do not have the means to do many things when they arrive in the territory and face the realities that are lived daily in Colombia.

Though Cartagena local government has had issues with corruption, Emily feels they have been open to national and international projects of ensuring that migrant communities access their rights and information regarding gender-based violence, trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation offenses in such a tourist area:

This has allowed us to achieve cohesion with all these organizations that are deployed and to be able to bring these projects to the community and have people participate in them, both the migrant population as well as the returning population and the host population that also understands that xenophobia is a very particular situation, where what we do is to turn our backs on the migrants.

For Emily, communication is easier when they have a representative that shares the same culture, dialect, and manners, the trust issue arises among women of the same nationality, which she states is very valuable in every process.

In one of the houses she worked at, Norah met a woman looking for a female Venezuelan leader to represent her neighbourhood, and with her background in law, after a couple of interviews and evaluations by a psychologist, she became the leader in 2019.

Mari became a leader through Proinco. She noticed that NGOs were helping her community but not in a fair way due to the lack of representation of all groups. She started getting more involved, asking around how the NGOs work and offering her services as a former teacher:

As a teacher, I know what the census is, the data, that data collection and then I arranged to collect data in the community in four days. And that's where my work begins. After that, they referred me to IRC (...) And I am an advocate for women survivors of gender-based violence. In fact, it was very good, and now there are 50 because they added 40 more, but I am in the first 10, we were the first project.

Mari divides her time between her work with IRC, Proinco and prevention programs with the Health Secretary. From one organisation to the other, she is referred to and helps as much as she can. Mari explained that more than trusting the governmental system in Colombia, Venezuelan women trust the work that she does for NGOs because they provide more support. But she underlines the importance of having a representative of the community inside the NGO to represent them, and the cooperation that exists among leaders from different *barrios*:

In fact, we get together with all those leaders, then when something comes to me, I also must share it with them: "Look, we have to get together for this, we have to go to such and such a place", that's what we are here for. And there are Colombian and Venezuelan women leaders, and we unite.

Gracia's leadership process was, like many of the other interviewees, a matter of necessity. She looked for ways to empower herself through information because she knew that that would be the only way she could protect herself and help others that were living the same as her. She studied, did volunteer work, learned through capacity-building, and she met other people whom she was able to help:

We put together a small cooking school, and that allowed me to connect with children, displaced teenagers, and to open another window that I had never touched in Venezuela, which is the displacement process. We planted that small seed between the Colombian population and the Venezuelan, and it is beautiful because as we touch people, we gain their respect when they know that we are here to do good, we don't expect anything in return

4.1.4. Social leadership in action: Expanding women's voices

Almost every women leader interviewed referred to the importance of instilling information in their communities, creating awareness for the power of being informed, and of giving people the tools rather than making things for them, as "crutches" in Gracia's words. They also underlined the importance of collaborating, among communities, *lideresas*, and with NGOs, and governmental entities.

Danna also defends the need to be informed, to take hold of it, and replicate it, by teaching others. She is clear about the need to inform Venezuelans about their right, but also to create interchange spaces where Colombians can be more well informed and open to the migrants:

People are very grateful for that because we do not have the resources, but if we give them the tools, then we end up making things simpler. Like giving an address or looking it up on the internet, like saving a life, so that is where you say, well,

this is worth it for the number of children, for women, and many alliances have been generated with cooperation, many articulations that end up benefiting in a very important way the community and personal growth, one also grows as a human being in the family, and can be a spokesperson for the Community of how we Colombians are? (...) and when they speak badly of a Venezuelan I say no, but I know people who are super good, that is not true, then it is like making those spaces of cultural exchange.

She became a *vocera* for the Venezuelan community because most of them were in an irregular situation and couldn't start their own foundation, so she became their representative.

We do not solve their lives, but I believe that with the tools people are getting organised. We have achieved alliances for education and training for employment. We have helped in the regularisation process of all the documents, we have made alliances with Migration Colombia and well, that has created a network where we help in all senses.

Daria's example is one of how her voice is literally heard. She had gone recently to a GBV training in the prosecutor's office and took advantage of her position to make herself heard, accusing the officers of refusing to take Venezuelan people's complaints in the prosecutor's office.

But she does much more than that. With the support of UNHCR Daria started capacity building training for women, from learning how to make a CV to knowledge in Human Resources or Marketing, and with UNFPA, her organisation participated in educational processes to teach young girls a skill they would be interested in. They started with 20 Venezuelan and went on to include Colombian women as well, including victims of armed conflict, and after two months 90 girls graduated in these skills. Daria speaks proudly of this project, which was, in her words: "one of the most beautiful ones I have ever participated in, truly." Being a part of projects like these has more than just one purpose, according to her. While providing capacity building, the organisations involved are able to provide important information for Venezuelan migrants. They become aware of how to activate health routes and senior care and also where to go to obtain legal advice and documentation. They also receive information regarding GBV, through workshops that raise awareness of what characterises violence, whether at home or at work. For Daria, the next step will be providing important tools so that women can escape GVB cycles, by knowing their rights, their work, and their education, so that they can thrive on their own.

Norah knows all the Venezuelans in the neighbourhood where she lives. She helps women in her neighbourhood get access to sexual and reproductive health care and mental and physical care. She helps in the regularisation processes, on the access to aid from the organisations, and ensures that they are called when workshops and meetings happen. She is “the connection to channel the correct routes, making sure that they [women] are not lost.”

Ana gives the example of Siloé (Cali’s most dangerous neighbourhood), where leadership processes are still very few and the needs are immense, so something so simple as enrolling kids in school has many barriers because women don’t access information through the internet that easily, so community spaces and female leaders play an important role as information multipliers. She realises that female leadership in topics such as ethnicity, race, young people and children are big in Colombia, leaving the migrants in a second position, but she acknowledges that they are becoming more and more visible, and there is a strong mobilisation in the matter of restitution of rights from migrant women, especially when it comes to children and to health. She gives the example of an informal neighbourhood in Cali where she works with displaced women and migrants, and she says that these are the ones who speak the least because they don’t feel represented: “maybe because they are ashamed of their accent, or even because they are afraid of what they might say”.

Like other leaders, Eva believes that helping does not always have to include specific goods like giving money, housing, or food:

I don’t do that. Not anymore, because that is like giving them a warm water cloth. My focus is to teach people so that they can get things by their own means. There is nothing more beautiful than you saying, look at this, I worked for it.

She named her foundation after a Christian song, meaning exaltation or aggrandising the virtues of a person:

I said this is what I want, the basis of (the foundation) is to teach people that their hands are not to rob, for prostitution, to harm, but to build.

Eva’s kids are also connected to the foundation: “I always teach my kids to fend for themselves (...) because what comes easy, goes easy.” She is still trying to legalise her organisation that she is not allowed to register due to her nationality.

Belia resumes with the word “articulation” the work that leaders do. From education prevention to health conferences, to accessing dermal implants and sexual education, they keep their eyes open to the needs of the community and the protection and integrity of their children and teenagers:

We, the leaders, articulate the specific needs of each community. Then some organisation calls and asks me if I know of a leader of a community that has migrants and I articulate, I make them go there, talk directly with them, and well... I was the representative of the network of leaders since I was the one who founded the network.

Governmental organisations also access the communities through leaders like Belia. She exemplifies with vaccination requests, or when a health issue arises among children, she creates a chain of contact among the leaders to extend health brigades to more communities.

Patricia manages external aid and information, assuring that her community is being supported, and communicates their most urgent matters, such as issues with floods, house improvement needs, or food scarcity. She states that being a voice for her community means replicating information and knowledge and she gives special attention to incapacitated people and replicates important information she receives in capacitation courses, to raise awareness of the red flags and how to activate routes in GBV cases, family planning, migrants' rights, and health care.

Patricia also affirms that cooperation was important for her recognition as a leader. As part of a group of female leaders, she admits that: "Everything that arrived there was shared in all communities, and that's how we got recognition".

In her *fundación*, leadership is very participative, according to Danna. When she is invited to participate in conferences by NGOs or by the local government, for example, she is accompanied by migrants who will share their stories: "empowerment has made it possible for them to be listened to", she affirms "we open spaces for training, education, inclusion (...) it's like a support network". Emily founded a movement now composed by ten Venezuelan, Colombian, and returnee mothers' household heads that came together in 2019 to raise awareness for sexual and commercial exploitation of children and teenagers, and human trafficking. It also provides information regarding sexual and reproductive rights, GBV, and attention to the migrant population and it proposes to dignify by preventing xenophobia. With the help of other organizations, the movement did a community initiative to raise awareness to everyone in town, about sexual exploitation and human trafficking:

This year we placed more emphasis on having Colombian women, well, in order to dignify a little, also the xenophobia that many times they said was not for Venezuelan women, no, that is for Venezuelan women and we said, here we have to start changing the chip, we have to start changing the paradigms and we told a Colombian colleague, come, come closer, learn with us. Build with us what we do with the community so that they can see how beautiful it is, what we are giving and how we do it, because many people, sometimes think that they are giving us money from abroad that we are handling money and when they came in and saw that what we do is because we want to do it and because we have a vocation. Well, they decided to stay and I think that has been the most beautiful exercise.

Mari focuses her attention on women and children, as do most of the responses, in her opinion. She is a focal point to her community for important topics such as getting the permits, routes of attention, workshops, and medical days for Venezuelans:

It is worse for women and children. That is why most of the networks and responses focus on women and children, although today they are doing workshops for men, it is because of the mistreatment and so those workshops were given to women. (...) And then anything they ask me I will locate it. We have a safe space for them. (...) And of course, I came, I joined the community group and I summoned the communities that do the training workshops for women and for children and adolescents and so on little by little.

Gracia stated that social work runs in her blood, because she learned it from her mother, and although she did not look to become a leader and she believes that this is not work for everyone, she sees her work as an opportunity:

This was an opportunity life gave me, and I had the duty to speak because if we don't speak if we don't diffuse, we are hurting ourselves. A voice in silence makes no noise, says the proverb, and if you don't speak, you will never know what your right is. In this process, empowerment is the most beautiful word I have learned. We didn't use empowerment sentences in Venezuela, but we were fighters.

Gracia believes that feminism wasn't talked about in Venezuela, but that wearing "invisible masks" is not an option, neither is losing her ability to speak:

By learning a trade, we give a voice to other women in the community

Eva feels the same way as Gracia. They work together and join efforts to give women training and capacity building so that they can learn a trade and empower themselves. In Pasto, where she lives, leaders are mainly female:

I feel that the concept of leaders here is handled a lot by Venezuelan women because you don't see men leading anything, that is, because they are working, they are the ones who pay the rent, the electricity, the utilities, the house expenses, and the woman is the one who oversees the house expenses. [And women will go] to a meeting to see if we can get some help with health or food. So, it's always the women who move here in Pasto.

Eva and Gracia are a good example of cooperation among *lideresas*. They believe in supporting each other, and in beautiful alliances that have positive outcomes, and they complimented each other's work during the interview.

As a Colombian that is trusted among the Venezuelan community, Danna is an example of how interchange among both Colombians and Venezuelans can generate a wave of empathy and solidarity that will influence women's empowerment. Her organisation is now a growing support network that aggregates 55 *lideresas* – 52 Venezuelan and three Colombian – and that has brought opportunities for all, by giving them tools, and benefiting the entire community:

It's very interesting how these alliances and the coordination among leaders and other actors result in an amplification of women's voices. And it's not just female Venezuelan migrants, but Colombian women as well, because they all live in Colombia and these networks empower all (...) these corporations among leaders works well and makes everything better.

4.1.5. Challenges of social leadership in Colombia

When inquired about the challenges of their work, most leaders referred to the limitations of living in a patriarchal society, barriers in public policies, lack of information from public employees, and serious loopholes in the health and educational system. They represent obstacles to migrant women's accessing their rights in Colombia, which can lead them further into revictimization places. Personally, many talked about feeling threatened and avoiding the use of the word *leader* to prevent drawing too much attention to themselves, in a country where violence takes a serious toll on social and community leaders.

Danna believes that there is still a big lack of inclusion processes in Colombia, and despite the expectations of the new government opening doors for bigger inclusion and equality of minorities, the same people who discriminate against them will still be working at the same public entities:

Yes, there are inclusive events and fairs, but really, if this does not enter public policy, then the voices of migrants will not be heard. They will not receive the inclusion they need. There is also a lack of education on migration among public

officials because many times they are the ones who make more xenophobia. They don't know the processes because they still do not assimilate that Colombia has always been a country, that is, people have always migrated, and they have always left, but we were not receivers of migration, so there is still a lot of xenophobia.

This generates barriers that lead to a lack of trust, which leads to a revictimization, especially when there is GBV. She adds that moving in a patriarchal society is a limitation to migrant women because they feel the intersectionality of being a woman, migrant, and Venezuelan, and it can be worse if they have children or are pregnant. She exemplifies with common discriminatory questions that Colombians ask before hiring Venezuelan women, regarding their children, instead of evaluating their competencies in the first place. "Coming from a patriarchal society to another", as she puts it, "is complicated".

As for her own work, Danna has felt her life threatened:

Yes, in my life I have been threatened in several situations. I was at risk for helping the victims find the orientation channel to get them out, the aggressor knows that there is a person who is guiding them, so yes, I have been at risk several times because of different attitudes. Or you also see me at risk because some other vulnerable populations do not understand how, being locally generated, all this helps for foreigners and not for the community, although they can participate.

The simple fact of being Venezuelan is a limitation by itself in Daria's opinion. She shared the story of a couple of Venezuelan girls who were being sexually harassed by their landlord, and when she went with them to the prosecutor's office they were told that they don't accept complaints from Venezuelans.

She has experienced some clashes with other organisations, even referring to them as threatening situations, but Pasos de Migrante has managed to establish positive alliances. The first one, with an organisation recognized for its quality education, was directed at Venezuelan entrepreneurs, especially women who suffered from GBV who needed support to start their businesses:

And it was very positive because now we see women who go from having nothing, now they have their own business, they have a way to continue their entrepreneurship.

Emily settled in the north of Colombia, in a neighbourhood classified with *estrato* 2²⁹, and one of the most stigmatised neighbourhoods by violence, drug addiction, and unemployment in the city, and she feels that being a Venezuelan female leader has serious implications for her personal safety:

It's delicate, because if a leader here in his own territory is at a disadvantage if he gets up and holds the news and sees that in the year so many Colombian leaders were murdered, this opens up a little more for you to look at how the conditions are within the territory, so using the word leader here plays a very important role, and being a woman, you also have your own implications and even more so when you are a migrant

She recognizes the need to be cautious and prevents the use of the word *leader*, but she is also aware that there are many factors that limit Venezuelan women's voices. Talking about GBV, or human trafficking for example is life-threatening according to Emily, which is why she feels somewhat protected by the "umbrella" of NGOs that she works with.

The cooperation among communities can sometimes be the other way around, and for Daria, that is one of the biggest issues in her work. The hostile environment among community organisations exists and Daria has felt her life threatened, even more so because she is a female leader. This intersectional position in a patriarchal country is also menacing for her especially when men don't recognize her leadership because she is a woman.

Belia feels that there is a collaboration among the communities but not on a governmental level and that without proper housing and without a job, their voices cannot expand. The clashes she felt happened when she first arrived in the neighbourhood where she lives, but she does not consider having felt threatened by them, and she admits feeling safer in Colombia. One of her biggest accomplishments was to enrol migrant children in school, until armed men took the kids out of school threatening them. Fear is now bigger than the will to go to school, and it's an issue that teachers, leaders and the City's Office are trying to work out.

Mari mentions the Colombian patriarchal society as a limitation for women's voices to reach higher. The dynamics in the border region, the tension, the violence, the lack of gender equality:

29 According to the National Department of Statistics (DANE) "Socioeconomic stratification is the mechanism that allows classifying the population into different strata or groups of people who have similar social and economic characteristics, through the examination of the physical characteristics of their homes, the immediate environment and the urban or rural context of the same". Municipalities and districts may have between one and six strata, depending on their dwellings' economic and social heterogeneity. In <https://www.sdp.gov.co/gestion-estudios-estrategicos/estratificacion/generalidades>

I have a friend that tells me we are the voices of those with no voice. Of women that don't have a voice and of those that have died. In Colombia there is many femicides

Norah ensures that her community is getting the support they are entitled to, connecting with Profamilia when implants are needed, with the local hospital when paediatric care is needed, and with the City Hall to ask them for help for the children of the neighbourhood. Her biggest accomplishment – which she speaks about with pride and an open smile – is having created a football club with the support of the Mayor's Office. She is also part of the network of Soledad's community leaders, with whom she gathers regularly, for motivation and support.

When asked about her challenges Gracia doesn't hesitate to highlight xenophobia as the worst. She recommends raising more awareness about these topics to lower discrimination rates and provide ways in which Venezuelans can be more active. She also acknowledges the difficulties of being a leader and the need to take care of herself:

Yes, being a migrant is not easy, and being a leader is not easy either. And in this whole process, I am now already taking the steps to sit on the other side of the chair and take some time also to take care of myself because carrying the migrants' problems on my back is very hard.

4.1.6. Expectations for the future

When asked about their wishes and expectations for the future, two topics stood out: better job opportunities and information to lower discriminatory attitudes. Health care, education, housing, and overall better conditions for a safer integration in Colombia were also constant in the interviewees' answers.

Emily talks about “searching for a common good” so that everyone can have the same conditions, and the same opportunities. She desires the welfare of her family and a job, recognizing that there is much to give to Colombia with her nursing expertise.

She is in Colombia for the long run but she does not hide the wish to return to her beloved Venezuela, taking back the lessons she has learned, and supporting migration in whichever route it is done. On a governmental level, she wishes that the Venezuelan population can have a safe integration in Colombia, not only through humanitarian aid but especially by including Venezuelan professionals in Colombian positions for a true inclusion that would lower the discrimination levels.

The lack of a health post in her community is one of Mari's main concerns, but she also asks for public officers to be more informed about the laws so that they can transmit information accurately. She adds that money is being internationally injected into Colombia for humanitarian aid purposes but the emergency has been lost.

Belia wishes for better life conditions for Venezuelans in Colombia because many are at risk of leaving again. Without a job "we are starving in Colombia as well", she emphasises, "and what we want is to work, to be successful." She recognizes that many of the people she knows are entrepreneur professionals with good job aptitudes that can be an advantage for Colombia.

Ana believes that improvements have been made for an institutionalised integration of migrants with the Duque government, but the lack of information still represents a huge barrier to Venezuelan women's access to their rights. Venezuelans are discriminated against because of their accents, they submit to receiving worse and institutional xenophobia is an obstacle to integration:

I feel like these leaderships could be stronger (in some areas of Colombia), and more politicised, especially when it comes to migrant women. Leadership is a very powerful thing, it gives them visibility, and there is a very strong mobilisation on the issue of restitution of rights.

Emily, with her positive expression, says that with its ups and downs, migrating has been an opportunity: "despite the difficulties, we passed every one of the obstacles that presented to us along the way." Being in danger is still a reality for her, though not with the same vulnerabilities she suffered in Venezuela. Aware that opportunities would not come easily, Emily fought for the regularisation of her family in Colombia since the day she arrived.

Daria is very specific about engaging with a local community in Nariño in the Pacifico area. Most of the Venezuelan women there work in the coca leaf business or as sex workers and she would like to bring them a sexual and reproductive protection program.

Health access is on the top of Danna's priorities for those in an irregular situation, especially for women and children:

This is a population in extreme vulnerability and poverty that must choose between food or medicines, and rent, and that is what affects their mental health because it is not easy to migrate. Well, in a country like Colombia that has many difficulties adapting to this and to a system that has so many barriers to access, I think that what is seen in public policies to be established and what people are waiting for

Gracia feels the same as Eva:

We should not be crutches for the population, we should not repeat and replicate aid because that doesn't help people to work. We need to convert this population into productive ones that generate employment, and train people.

She believes that aid is for a moment of need but not a constant because there will come a time when people do not want to work if they are always getting help and living out of it, which will be a heavy burden for the country. So by doing that, governments are simply repeating the mistake the Venezuelan government made. She says “there is nothing more beautiful than a population that is productive, and that productivity generates employment.”

4.2. Field research

Field research is an important way to immerse in the field of the study, allowing the researcher to uncover some truths when observed.

Considering that the centre of this research is the women who work with Venezuelan migrant women in Colombia, the logical step would be for the researcher to engage when collecting data, by participating, observing and interviews, and analysing the results of this engagement.

The field research of this study is intertwined with the second part of the qualitative research. It was through the presence of the researcher in Colombia, that it was possible to get to know the women in the social leadership processes.

One such occasion was the official presentation of the Constelaciones project in Bogotá. At the beginning of December 2021, several feminist organizations in Colombia joined to present this binational project that unites Venezuelans and Colombians *lideresas*, in the efforts to generate integration processes through political participation and migration.

Together with the personal experience of each woman, and the similarities of their life experiences, this safe space was presented as an opportunity to convert the vulnerabilities inherent to the integration, into transformative and positive practices.

Each one presented an advocacy plan to impact their surrounding realities, complementary in some cases, but less than cooperative in others. In fact, it became clear that some *lideresas* were close as opposed to others, a fact that was better explained during the interviews, becoming one of the topics of the research.

During the months that the researcher spent in Colombia, Venezuelan migration was a permanent subject in everyday life. Whether because data would be published in the newspapers regarding the most recent wave of migrants crossing through irregular paths to reach Colombia, the exposure of the increase of vulnerabilities of the migrant population due to the COVID-19 pandemic, or simply because there would be a Venezuelan to every outdoor incursion, from the bakery to the grocery store.

Regarding xenophobia and discrimination, fieldwork made it clear that the feelings towards Venezuelan migrants are not hidden. On one hand, the researcher was informed of a practice that has been quietly gaining momentum in Colombia for over 40 years - social cleansing - a phenomenon described in a report from Centro Nacional de Memoria Histórica (CNMH), aimed in recent years to attack the Venezuelan population. In fact, flyers against “Venezuelans and vicious” were distributed by a paramilitary group around Colombia in recent years, threatening the “social cleansing” of Venezuelans (Driscoll, 2021). On the other side, both on an institutional and political level, discrimination is everywhere. Regarding the vaccination campaign, the president stated that they would not be available for Venezuelans to prevent a “stampede”; giant mopos on Santa Marta were spotted with xenophobic messages, and both the media and public institutions don’t prevent negative messages regarding the migrant population.

Going through the La Guajira desert, where migrants are known to settle, women and children are the ones at the improvised and irregular *peajes* (tolls in Spanish) made of rope, asking for food and sweets. The Venezuelan backpacks of the Chavismo days are a constant on the roads we pass. In faded red, blue, and yellow colours, kids and adults protect their heads from the desert-burning sun with “Chávez Petroleros de Venezuela” caps. On the bay of Punta Gallinas, a military car crosses our path. The driver explains that Los paisanos – how they call the people of the north are tough: “they are here to control disputes among indigenous, including migrants from Venezuela. If a goat disappears if someone invades the land of others, everything is a motive for a fight”. A few miles ahead, a little girl with a flowery dress stands alone at one of the improvised *peajes* hoping for the car to stop and give her sweets. She wears a yellow cap with red letters again, identifying her as a Venezuelan.

CHAPTER 5

Findings

As previously mentioned, this study was guided by the question of how Venezuelan migrant women become social leaders in Colombian contexts and in which ways they help other women integrate into the hosting country, by addressing gender-specific issues.

With that purpose, starting with the economic and social ramifications of migratory processes through a gender lens to mitigate negative reconfigurations of gender relations and power inequalities (Piper, 2005) allowed to have a perspective on the depth of this phenomena's influence in their integration processes.

Firstly, it was key to acknowledge that these women's stories did not begin with social leadership experiences. They were shaped by their migratory experiences, which need to be looked at from the legacy behind the migratory process. For that reason, it was crucial to start with factors that composed their lives in Venezuela (education, job, children, economic status) to what led them to leave Venezuela and their experience in transitioning to Colombia.

This led to the second finding, whereas social leadership turned out to be, for many of them, a way of strengthening their integration. In one way, it is possible to see how there is an unselfish attitude in taking over such responsibilities. In another it may be seen as an interesting personal coping mechanism that reinforces their roles in their communities and instils them with precious information to access their rights in Colombian society. Whichever is the case – or regardless of whether both are a motivation for these female leaders – their commitment to their communities has positive outcomes that were supported both by literature review and ethnographic research. It was possible to understand how their work connects the beneficiaries to organizations that provide aid. On another level, they are more than mere bridges that connect the provider and receiver to each other. They become people of trust, that other women reach to ask for help, and they start their own initiatives aiming at helping the community. Cases such as Gracia's cooking lessons, Eva's foundation, or Norah's football team, show how they become entrepreneurs and pass on the knowledge, creating a chain of inter-help.

The investigation shed light into several and diversified migratory experiences, and though none was particularly uplifting, it was interesting to find that none was told with a tone of complaint or despair. On the contrary, they all had hope in their narratives. Their priority after crossing the border is to establish themselves in a place, find a house for their families, regularise their situation, and find a job that will provide them more stability. In Colombia, due to the particularities of their communities, they entered leadership processes to assist the

migrant community in their integration. For some, this meant empowering themselves by learning about their rights, developing new skills, and converting in women's resistance symbols in places where *machismo* and patriarchy are still deeply rooted.

Some interviews revealed a certain naiveness in the migratory experience. In fact, two of the women admitted they were not aware that Venezuela's situation was as critical at the time of their departure to Colombia. Although some had more difficult experiences than others, for all, leaving was a decision made to look for better living conditions, which went from escaping poverty to making more money, to having better health care opportunities. When arriving in Colombia, they all faced hardships, and most recognized that not having legal papers to be in the country makes them more vulnerable.

Despite their negative experiences on the migratory journey, most of them also spoke about the help they received. Eva was advised where to go and went on the trunk of a bus aided by random strangers who gave her food, clothes, transportation, and hiding; others had a helping hand in their way through the *trochas*; some found support in the community they arrived to.

All the interviewees that were born in Venezuela had a sad tone to their story and nostalgia towards their home country. Despite believing in a better future, and striving to find it, for themselves and their families, and for their communities, there are those who are not sure that remaining in Colombia will be a possibility, and there are those who contemplate going back to Venezuela, or even moving on to other country.

Ultimately, it all comes down to not finding work, but the discrimination that Venezuelans suffer does not increase their will to remain in Colombia. This is very much present in the day to day of Venezuelans who live in Colombia. And although most of the interviewees referred to this matter as a negative point in their receptive country, some stated that things were improving. However, most interviewees complained about discrimination in public services, and they wished this would change in the future. In that sense it would be important to Venezuelan women if policies were applied towards eliminating barriers in access to essential and comprehensive equity-oriented services. This would include developing the skills and capacities of services professionals and countering misinformation, lowering the stigma associated with migrants in host communities, and broadening migrant's perceptions of SGBV, gender roles, and xenophobia.

Research showed that discrimination is felt in public services, in misleading information being given, and in threats of deportation hanging on the minds of irregular migrants. All this adds up to Venezuelans being afraid of looking for information regarding their rights in public spheres, rather than going to people like them, the community leaders in this case.

Despite cultural resemblances between Colombia and Venezuela, feelings of discrimination and xenophobia are intense among the migrant communities, and as victims of intersectional discrimination, Venezuelan women find themselves in a position of cumulative disadvantage. They are exposed to bigger risks than men regarding discrimination, exploitation, and violence, both while crossing the borders and after arriving in Colombia. The intersections of gender, ethnicity, nationality, and lack of official documentation can lead to extreme violations of human rights, including sexual abuse, deterioration of reproductive health, and threat to physical integrity (Martínez Pizarro, J., 2003).

In Oxfam research (February to June 2019), about the stigma in the welcoming communities, most people admitted defending bigger restrictions on the border with Venezuela, adding that the newcomers represent a threat to labour stability, in Ecuador, Peru, and Colombia. Regarding women, there was a generalized assumption that most Venezuelans would become sexual workers in the destination countries. The same report stated that in Colombia, the increase of acts of xenophobia and discrimination originated a wave of returnees to Venezuela. In fact, one of the interviewees confessed she was thinking of re-emigrating if her life conditions wouldn't improve soon in Colombia, even if this means crossing the dangerous Darien Gap (in the Colombia-Panama border) to the USA.

UN Woman referred to violence against women in Latin America as “the pandemic in the shadows”³⁰. But not only do the levels of impunity remain high as there is a lack of confidence in the police. As an example, Sisma Mujer stated that 90% of reported cases of sexual violence filed in 2020 did not progress from the initial stage, and NGO Temblores underlines they received 132 reports of sexually violent acts committed by the police between 2017 and 2021. Several interviews revealed that these barriers, as well as the lack of information and of safe spaces where to go, sometimes push women to revictimization places. These situations justify that victims tend to keep silent or turn to more trustworthy sources inside of their communities, like *lideresas*.

When it comes to finding a job in the destination countries, migration status and skill level come as a drawback for both women and men. But still, Timmerman et al. (2018) point out the “triple disadvantage” of gender, race/ethnicity, and being a non-national as a factor for women to be over-represented in marginal, unregulated, and poorly paid jobs. In fact, the research started from the idea that the interviews would register mostly the point of view of women with

³⁰ UN Woman, La pandemia en la Sombra. <https://www.unwomen.org/es/news/in-focus/in-focus-gender-equality-in-covid-19response/violence-against-women-during-covid-19>

low levels of literacy, and after some interviews, it was possible to understand that some had high levels of literacy. The assumption ignored the fact that highly skilled women have higher rates of migration than both low-skilled women and highly skilled men (EIGE, 2019). These highly skilled women can have a powerful effect on the Colombian economy if they are used accurately, rather than working in irregular exploitative jobs.

Like most of the interviewees advocated, Anita Freitez (in Pachas Vargas, 2018, p.14) suggests promoting the use of the qualified Venezuelan labour force, among other measures that will help turn the effects of this migratory crisis into opportunities for improvement for migrants and for the host countries. From the academic and civil society spheres, it is also essential to establish alliances to deepen the generation of knowledge on Venezuelan migration and to follow up on the guarantees of full protection that should be given to Venezuelan migrants. Information is one of the keys to reducing discrimination and xenophobia, which all the interviewees describe as one of the main barriers to having their voices listened to and accessing their basic rights.

Still, they use different communication methods as an essential means of expressing ideas and developing revolutionary initiatives, capable of creating stronger, better-informed, and more engaged communities than ever before.

From the collected narratives it was possible to understand that they see themselves more as voices of their communities than specifically as leaders, a word they refrain from using. From their point of view, they act as a link between the organisations and vulnerable populations, to achieve results that improve their livelihoods. However, they also emphasise the need to be heard, and in that matter, there is a lack of safe spaces where their voices can impact decisions on a local and governmental level. Many of them are volunteers, using their own resources despite having little, and this comes as a constraint. When surviving and making ends meet for their families is the top priority, a stronger institutional support would provide them with the tools to be more helpful for their communities and reduce the burden of migration. One of the interviewees stated that recognition is not their primary purpose, but it is important to “have the energy to keep going”.

Safe spaces and protection measures come hand in hand with their expectations for the future. According to Liliana, social and community leaderships are very visible and most of these women live in difficult contexts of armed conflict, political violence for women, and misogynous cultural practices. The need to create a social fabric of inter-help pushes them to continue their work but they feel a shortage of places where cooperation is encouraged. They

hope that women's voices are considered, to gain the trust of the institutions, and respect not only from the population, but also from the cooperation agencies.

As a final consideration, it was interesting to find that, while listening to their recent life's story, from their migratory experience until the present day, going through their paths in helping others, there is little reference to their own process of the morning their past lives. Not much is said about the loss of their livelihoods in Venezuela, the struggles they go through, but especially how they take care of themselves while contributing for the wellbeing of others, which sometimes takes many hours of their days, and knows no boundaries. Being a leader is not always a beneficial position to be in. They are often forgotten in the humanitarian aid processes and not having a job that provides income to help maintain their households, they often quit the leadership positions.

There was also little mention to mental health issues, though Eva confessed that Venezuelan people are not accustomed to talk about such issues. She emphasised the importance of managing emotions and of learning about them in a didactical way.

In summary, the resilience of Venezuelan women in Colombia was showed through their adapting and coping mechanisms in the hosting country. In this process they go through, they involve others in need of help, creating a network inside of their communities where women are able to access information that will provide them their rights, but also empower them. Ultimately, their influence has a direct impact in facilitating the integration processes and achieving better livelihoods.

Conclusions

This qualitative study aimed at contributing to the literature on Venezuela migrant women's lives in Colombia, and their leadership processes in the hosting communities. This was done by understanding, firstly, their migratory motivations and experiences; secondly their integration processes in Colombia and the inhibitor factors that leads them to pursue access to their rights by their own means; and finally, how they become community leaders and the relevance of their work to other Venezuelan women.

The study of the relations between leaders and communities, and the effects on the lives of these people, is a necessity to better understand the migration phenomenon and contribute to improve the living conditions in the receiving countries.

Several conclusions can be withdrawn out of this thesis. The first one, which pervades the whole thesis is how the migratory processes of Venezuelan women influenced their integration in Colombia. Despite their economic situations most left to find a better life in Colombia, and most arrived at Colombia with little resources, which made them more vulnerable. Difficulties in finding a job and housing are among the primary concerns of these women. However, it was mainly the need to inform themselves about how to regularize their situation in Colombia, access education for their children or understand their rights in the labour sector that pushed them to the leadership processes.

The results of this research strengthens the idea that Venezuelan *lideresas* are in fact important contributors to their communities' welfare and integration. They are driving forces who collect and disseminate information, and provide technical assistance to the communities, helping them improve their livelihoods. They are often a 'safe haven' for their communities, serving as a bridge between migrant population and access to fundamental rights, such as education, health, legal information. The partnerships they make and the important links between outside bodies, governmental and non-governmental organisations and communities are decisive for the integration of these migrants in Colombia, and essential contributions to improvements in the quality of life of the women and their families.

Providing trustworthy information, empowering women to become leaders, and enabling community leaders to work towards community-scale inter-help and cooperation may be one of the keys to a better adaptation and integration of migrant populations into host countries.

This dissertation weaved together methodological reflections of social practices and gender in Venezuela – Colombia’s migratory context. It addresses urgent matters of putting women in the centre of decision-making, by listening to their voices to facilitate integration and preventing them to fall into revictimization places.

Statistics show that when women are included in the decision-making in a peace process, the resulting peace agreement is 20 percent more likely to last at least two years, and when women are included in the negotiation process itself, the agreement is 35 percent more likely to last at least 15 years. The lack of women in peace-making negotiations sets a dangerous precedent in Venezuela as women’s voices and experiences are excluded from the post-conflict reconstruction, leaving room for societal discord in the future (Kohan & Rendon, 2020). This research supports that the same applies to its neighboring country. In the Colombian context where violence has alarming numbers, directly influencing Venezuelan women’s lives and their futures, it would be interesting to deepen ways in which collaboration between Colombian and Venezuelan leaders and other actors such as NGOs and governmental institutions could provide fruitful insights into optimistic integration policies.

Like Pearce et al. (2011), this thesis supports the urgent need for structural changes to consider migrant women’s voices in public policies, paying special attention to her diverse profile as “she is both potentially vulnerable to exploitative conditions and forging new avenues of societal leadership”. Their contributions in building support networks and in raising their voices may be an important harbinger for effective changes on a local and governmental level,

Finally, it expects to contribute by bridging the gap between a vulnerability position derived from migratory context observed through an intersectional lens, and the biased visions about the role of women in social processes regarding their integration in Colombia.

6.1. Future research

The results of this thesis may influence future investigation in the area of gender and of migration, and as such, some suggestions for upcoming research follows.

Firstly, while doing research for this thesis, and throughout my months living in Colombia, I came across several news stories that referred to Venezuelan woman integration processes in Colombia. Often, they told stories of resilience and of how their voices were making themselves heard, contributing to social changes³¹. The newspaper El Espectador, recognized for its innovative reporting and fight for the freedom of speech started a series of audio reports of

31 Migra Venezuela. <https://migravenezuela.com/web/articulo/las-lideresas-venezolanas-un-ejemplo-de-vida-en-colombia/3084>

Venezuelan migrants. It was named *Historias que marchan* and it represented a space where several subjects were talked about, from music and work to sexuality and GBV in Colombia. In this sense, it would be interesting to analyse the mediatic representation of Venezuelan female leaders in Colombia, to understand in which ways their voices and visibility has an impact in structural changes.

The second suggestion could come as complementary to this dissertation. It regards looking from the point of view of the migrant woman and to understand how collective solutions unfold. It could be enriching to analyse Venezuelan women's' perception about the work of their community leaders, and how they impact their lives and their integration processes in Colombia.

It was also intended that this study could serve as a starting point to create community structures to serve migrant woman in the future. This could be achieved by implementing, in other countries, a study that would train local leaders to prevent and reduce GBV in their communities, based on the Colombian concept of *comadrear* – building women's support systems and trust networks that are applied to resist GBV. Such project could carefully evaluate how a community-based approach that trains local leaders to become collaborators, and reliable focal points working with their communities on GBV prevention, monitoring, and reduction, could have a positive effect and contribute to effective changes in that community. In this way, expanding woman's agency potential by providing opportunities and adequate resources will better prepare them to be the key agents for structural changes to happen in their communities.

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Annexes

Annex A: Interview guide

QUESTIONS/TOPICS	OBJECTIVES
The migratory experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand their life story and background - Get to know their migratory experience
Intersectionality and discrimination in Colombia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Register the difficulties in the receptive country and Venezuelan women hardships
Overcoming hardships and becoming a leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Redefinition of female papers in the migratory experience
Social leadership in action: how <i>lideresas</i> help their communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explore how their social work amplifies theirs, and other women's voices
Weaving support networks: cooperation and clashes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishing partnerships with other community leaders VS. the clashes
The impact of the word <i>lideresa</i>: dangers and threats	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do they identify themselves as <i>lideresas</i>? - What dangers come with this word?
Limitations to making themselves heard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What barriers are there in Colombia for Venezuelan migrant women
Moving into a patriarchal society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are the patriarchy and a <i>machista</i> culture preventing them from accessing their rights?
Expanding their voices to Venezuelan women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How <i>lideresas</i> reach and communicate with Venezuelan women, and its impact
Expectations for the future	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Exposure to the needs they consider to be more urgent for them and other Venezuelan women
Challenges of being a leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How the <i>lideresas</i> overcome their personal challenges and mourn their past lives - Taking care of their mental health

Annex B: Interview script

Authorization disclaimer

Before each interview, carried out in Spanish, the participants were informed of the purpose of this interview through an explanatory sheet sent by WhatsApp or E-mail (Annex B). They were all asked for permission to record the interviews and to use the transcriptions in the dissertation thesis of the Master's in Humanitarian Action in ISCTE – Portugal. They were also informed that they can interrupt or end the interview whenever they felt the need to do so.

Socio-demographic record

Name

Age

Place of birth

Currently living in

Education

Profession in Venezuela

Current job in Colombia

Children

NGO/ Organization you are affiliated with

Email

Interview script

1. Can you talk about your migratory path story, starting from the reasons that made you leave Venezuela, until the moment you arrived in Colombia?
2. What have been the biggest challenges you faced when you arrived in Colombia? / How did Colombia welcome you?
3. Have you ever felt discriminated against due to your nationality?
4. How did the process of becoming a leader occur?

5. What is your contribution, as a leader, to help other women in their integration processes?
6. In which ways do you contribute to expanding the voice of Venezuelan migrant women of your community?
7. In which ways is there coordination between *lideresas* and also between *lideresas* and other stakeholders (NGOs, governmental institutions, local institutions...) to amplify the voice of Venezuelan women in Colombia?
8. Have you ever felt threatened because of your work as a leader?
9. Do you feel that *machismo* represents a limitation to your work?
10. What is the importance of having Venezuelan social leaders?
11. What are the limitations to having Venezuelan migrant voices heard in Colombia?
12. What are the limitations you find in communicating with women in your community?
13. What are the biggest challenges of being a leader?
14. Have the hardships of living in Colombia ever made you think of going back to Venezuela?
15. What would you like to see happening in the future so that Venezuelan women's voices are heard in Colombia?
16. What does it mean for you to be a leader?
17. How do you deal with your personal issues of being a migrant, while helping others?

Annex C: Presentation sheet

Entrevista para la tesis de maestría “Expandiendo las voces de las mujeres venezolanas en Colombia – un caso de estudio con lideresas”, en el marco del máster en Acción Humanitaria de ISCTE - Lisboa

Acerca de la investigadora: Me llamo Carolina Silva y soy de Portugal, donde trabajé como Comunicadora Social durante 15 años, y hace dos años estudio el Máster en Acción Humanitaria en ISCTE. Por el Máster y mi interés en la realidad de Latino América, en setiembre de 2021 me mudé a Venezuela, y en octubre a Colombia para hacer una colaboración con la Fundación para el Desarrollo en Género y Familia - Genfami.

Punto de partida: En los meses que viví en Colombia me enteré de esta particularidad en Latino América, de cómo las lideresas son la importante cara de una migración, y como son el ejemplo de la resiliencia que busca cambiar la situación de sus comunidades y de su entorno. Comprender como las lideresas venezolanas en Colombia se convierten en importantes voces de mujeres migrantes venezolanas en movilidad en ese país, la intervención comunitaria y los cambios importantes que logran en sus comunidades es importante no solamente para expandir sus voces mas allá, pero incluso para replicar estos modelos en comunidades con falta de intervención y liderazgo.

Tema de la entrevista: La ruta de vida de las lideresas venezolanas en Colombia que trabajan con mujeres migrantes. Conocer sus caminos, los retos y amenazas a los que se enfrentan las mujeres, pero sobre todo sus historias de fuerza y resiliencia, y de las estrategias utilizadas para hacer oír su voz.

Objetivo de la entrevista: Un análisis cualitativo para observar desde el punto de vista de las líderesas. Conocer sus contextos y sus historias y comprender los retos a los que se enfrentan, los riesgos que les limitan, su interacción con la sociedad patriarcal, cómo se mueven en la sociedad colombiana. Escuchar sus estrategias para movilizarse y comunicarse con los demás, ósea, las fórmulas que cada lideresa ha encontrado para poder difundir, involucrar, conectar, fortalecer y crear redes con otras mujeres. Y conocer sus deseos, los cambios que desean alcanzar.

Tipo de entrevista y modalidad: Idealmente via Zoom, o cualquier otra plataforma de videollamada como Teams, Skype, Whatsapp (lo que prefiera cada persona). Si no es posible, envío las preguntas por email.

Duración de la entrevista: Una hora

Fechas: Idealmente entre 2 y 12 de agosto

Cualquier duda o inquietud puede contactarme por email
carolinasousasilva@gmail.com o **Whatsapp** +351964148156

Annex D: Venezuelan refugees and migrants in Latin America & the Caribbean



Source: adapted from R4V (2022)