

# Young Venezuelan migrant women in Bogotá

Aspirations, opportunities and challenges



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Master Thesis International Development Studies  
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## **Abstract**

As mass migration from Venezuela sweeps across Latin America, Colombia has absorbed a vast share of the exodus, where 1.3 million Venezuelans aim establish their livelihoods. This study sets out to explore what it means to start a new life as a young Venezuelan woman in Bogotá, Colombia. Research regarding the influx of Venezuelan migrants towards Colombia has been very limited in scope due to its recency. Furthermore, though many theories focus on integration and livelihood approaches, few focus specifically on women and even less on young women. Therefore, this study can be considered as important for analysis of current migration trajectories with this narrow focus. Particularly, the aspirations and incentives for migration and the concepts of livelihood assets, strategies and outcomes are used to explore how the recently migrated young women build up their lives in an urban context along the lines of transforming structures and processes. Part of the aim of this project is to explore the concept of gender and the transition to adulthood affecting how one builds a livelihood.

Methodologically, this study centred on the perceptions of the participating young Venezuelan migrant women. The conversations took the form of semi-structured interviews where a deeper focus was reached through a social mapping technique and by writing down a timeline of experiences in Bogotá, allowing the women to express their perceptions, behaviours and feelings. Furthermore, institutional practice observations and interviews with high-level staff of various institutions were performed to gain an understanding of the institutional landscape in Bogotá.

Taken together, several threads emerged. Though participants had different legal, economic and social statuses in Bogotá and come from a variety of backgrounds, all of them placed tremendous value on being able to find dignifying work. This seems to be something that is nearly impossible to accomplish due to xenophobic tensions, their legal status and accompanying risks of exploitation. Most young women in the study noted discrimination and feel vulnerable for the fact of being a Venezuelan migrant and because they are a (young) woman. Structural processes therefore limit the women's agency in being able to build a sustainable livelihood. The findings from this study encourage policy practitioners to address the economic and social realities facing the young migrant women, by giving an insight in the daily realities these women face.

**Keywords:** Forced migrants, urban migration, gender, transition to adulthood, livelihood approach

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I also want to thank all the people I was able to interview during my time in Bogotá, and for giving me their time and energy to share their knowledge and experiences.

But most of all, I would like to thank the young Venezuelan women who participated in my study. They offered me their hospitality and their time even though they were often struggling to make ends meet every day. They showed me incredible strength, openness and love. I admire them strongly and hope they are able to realise their hopes and dreams.

## Preface

*“When I’m with my husband, sometimes at night, there are times when we don’t even want to talk to each other. Then there is nothing else than the feeling of grief. We are unemployed, the stress, not knowing what to do. One then starts to wonder. Why we? They took our youth from us. The president who did all this was elected in the 90s, when I was 4 years old. I did not know anything about that and now we have to pay for what he did. I am 24 years old now, and who knows when it will end. If we are ever going to be able to return.”*

- Elianny, 24 years old

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## List of Acronyms

- ASMUBULI: La Asociación de Mujeres Buscando Libertad / The Association of women looking for freedom
- COP: Colombian pesos
- DIDF: Department for International Development Framework
- EPS: Entidades Promotoras de Salud / Health promoting entities that subsidize health costs
- IOM: International Organization for Migration
- FARC: Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia / Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
- JRS: Jesuit Refugee Service
- NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
- PEP: Permiso Especial de Permanencia / Special Permit to Stay
- SGBV: Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
- SLF: Sustainable Livelihoods Framework
- TMF: Tarjeta Migratoria de Tránsito Fronteriza / Special bordering transit card
- UN: United Nations
- UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees



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# 1 - Introduction

## 1.1 The crisis in Venezuela

Historically, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela was a recipient country, where migrants and people in need of international protection from various countries found a safe place to live. However, in recent years government mismanagement and international economic sanctions have led to inflation and shortages of basic goods, health and medicines. This has pushed Venezuela's population into poverty. An ever-deepening political, economic, and humanitarian crisis caused a mass movement of Venezuelans across Latin America. According to the United Nations High Commissioner (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the number of refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the world reached beyond 4 million by June 2019 (UNHCR, 2019). These organisations estimate that by the end of 2019, this number will reach 5.3 million. Loss of income as a result of the current political and a socio-economic situation, lack of access to food, medicine and other fundamental services, and insecurity and violence in the country, are the main reasons why the Venezuelan migrants say they are being forced to move (Martinez, 2018).

## 1.2 Migrants in Colombia

Colombia was never immune to the phenomenon of migration. However, Colombia has historically been a source of emigrants seeking protection and better economic conditions from the armed conflict, rather than being a host of immigrants. With the recent migration flow of Venezuelans towards Colombia, it revealed to have a lack of resources as a recipient country. By April 25, 2018, about 1,300,000 Venezuelans were in Colombia (Coordination Platform, 2019). Most Venezuelan migrants go to Colombia since it is a neighbouring country and because Colombia has, compared to many other countries in the region, a relatively open border policy. Colombia is, therefore, facing an increase in pressure and requires support to respond to communal needs. The influx of the Venezuelan migrants is exacerbating Colombia's already difficult situation in dealing with the internal conflict and the failing implementation of the peace agreement. Current protection problems for the Venezuelan migrant population include: security concerns, trafficking, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), forced child recruitment, xenophobia, lack of access to a legal status and documentation with risks of statelessness, lack of work opportunities, lack of information on asylum and assistance mechanisms, labour exploitation, survival sex work, and lack of access to health and education (UNHCR, 2018).

## 1.3 Young Venezuelan women

This study focuses on young Venezuelan women in Bogotá. According to the available demographic data, 31.4 per cent of the surveyed Venezuelan migrants in Colombia are between 18 and 29 years old (Migración Colombia, 2019a). This means there is a strong representation of young adults among the Venezuelan migrants. The gender distribution of Venezuelan migrants is 48 per cent male and 52 per cent female (Migración Colombia, 2019a). Since adolescent women are, therefore, a big share out of the group that migrates, it is important to strengthen academic literature of this group and specify their specific needs and strengths. Moreover, young migrants

are often identified as a key group at risk of social exclusion since they have to grow up in contexts of uncertainty, trauma of loss and attempting to create a future in an uncertain world (Correa-Velez et al., 2010). Specifically, young migrant women are, however, often an overlooked population. Given their age and sex, a young woman may be more vulnerable than an adult or an equally young male. Multiple problems can be experienced, including material poverty, poor quality housing, discrimination, poor diets and problematic access to health and social care services (Beirens et al., 2007). Therefore, the transition from childhood to adolescence is only one among many life changes the young Venezuelan migrant women face.

#### **1.4 Relevance**

For many Venezuelan migrants, arriving and settling in Bogotá is a contradictory experience of escape, struggle and opportunity. This study examines the ways in which young Venezuelan migrant women in Bogotá have created a life for themselves through the conceptualisation of livelihood practices. By focusing on the livelihood approach, the study identifies the various economic and social practices that these migrants create in order to survive, avert risk and settle in Bogotá. Hereby, the migrant women are perceived not necessarily as victims but as ‘creative agents of change’ negotiating the processes of forced migration in different ways depending on their positions.

Research to the influx of Venezuelan migrants towards Colombia has been very limited in scope due to its recency. Moreover, studies with a similar population focus such as gender and migration (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; De Jong, 2000), and youth or the transition to adulthood (Beirens et al., 2007, Correa-Velez et al., 2010), are based on migrants and refugees that are for a longer amount of time in the host country. This focus is therefore more on integration policies. More generally, there seems to be a focus on migrant movements towards Europe and North-America, while there are no discussions about Southern countries being a host to other Southern migrants and refugees. This is in spite of the fact that most people search for safety in the closest place, usually a neighbouring country, and towards big cities hoping to find employment. As a case study, Bogotá provides an important opportunity to analyse migrants livelihoods, especially in a city that is new to this phenomenon. Furthermore, they are not camp-based refugees, which attracts more attention in studies, but forced migrants and refugees building up their livelihoods in the city.

While the dynamics of forced migrants from Venezuela are at a stage that requires urgent responses, it is misleading to consider that migration is only a temporary phenomenon requiring short-term responses. On the contrary, the movement has lasting effects, both in the lives of migrants and the host communities. Therefore, it is necessary that the actions and responses to the influx of migrants are addressed in a comprehensive manner, short, medium and long term. It is of importance to gain a better understanding of current livelihoods and ways in which people improve them. Hereby, situations and vulnerabilities differ, between many factors, including gender and age. Adolescence is a period of transition and women experience different vulnerabilities and opportunities than men. Issues relating to migration are highly context-specific. Though there is extensive academic research on peoples livelihoods, there are a few aspects

missing which can be found within this case. The key aspect is that the livelihoods approach is rarely used in the case of forced migration where people are trying to recover their livelihoods in an urban context, alongside the impact of gender and of being a young migrant. This raises interesting questions about the lives of young women and highlights the importance of hearing directly about their experiences of building a life in Bogotá. Hence, the following main research question emerged;

*What are the aspirations, opportunities and challenges that recently migrated young Venezuelan women in Bogotá are facing and how do these factors influence their capacity to build a sustainable livelihood?*

## **1.2 Thesis outline**

This thesis is divided into nine chapters. The first introduced the topic of the study, reviewing the current migration situation from Venezuela to Colombia, concluding with the relevance of the study. The second chapter will assess theoretical underpinnings of the research project, as well as how this can be applied in the case of urban migrant livelihoods, after which it explains the conceptual model used in the design of this project. The third chapter introduces the context of Colombia and more specifically of Bogotá, where secondary data of Venezuelan migrants in this specific context is shared and given as a basis for the empirical chapters. The fourth chapter will explain the methodology and research questions, as well as the ethical considerations and limitations. Chapters five, six and seven will focus on the empirical findings of the decision behind women in the study coming to Bogotá and expectations they had prior to arrival. It also explores their livelihood opportunities in the city, their vulnerabilities, strategies to cope with this, and how this is influenced by gender and by being in a transition to adulthood. Chapter eight will connect the theories with the empirical findings. Subsequently, chapter nine will conclude the study by answering the research questions and offering policy recommendations.

## 2 - Theoretical framework

In order to understand the young Venezuelan women's experience of migration as a livelihood strategy, it is important to make use of theoretical underpinnings. First, a definition of forced migration is provided. Then, more is explained about gender and migration studies and what the transition to adulthood upholds. Next, the labour market segmentation theory is discussed. Finally, the academic framework of the livelihoods approach will be explained and how this is used in identifying the critical factors determining opportunities and constraints.

### 2.1 Forced migration

At present, there are 25.9 million refugees in the world (UNHCR. 2019). The definition of a refugee, as is mentioned in the 1951 Refugee Convention, is 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"* (UNHCR, 2010, pp. 3). Over time, this definition has been, however, regularly challenged since many forcibly displaced people do not easily fit within this formal category. Instead of being a refugee, somebody is then defined as a migrant within the context of forced migration, Forced migration is defined as *'[a] migratory movement in which an element of coercion exists, including threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes'* (IOM, n.d.). It is different from "voluntary" migration because in the former, there is no prior desire or motivation to leave.

The IOM (2018) estimates that about 258 million people lived outside their country of birth in 2017, which is about one in every 30 people. Forced migration can result from a range of circumstances and is usually the result of sudden, life-threatening events. However, the distinction between forced migration and economic migration is becoming more and more blurred. Castles (2003) states *"[f]ailed economies generally also mean weak states, predatory ruling cliques and human rights abuse"*. The effects of forced migration vary in political, socio-economic, and cultural contexts, and factors such as gender, class, age or ethnicity.

### 2.2 Gender and migration studies

In this research, a gendered perspective has been used to explore the livelihood opportunities and the experience of young Venezuelan women regarding their recent stay in Bogotá. The World Health Organization (n.d) refers to gender as *'the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed.'* Thus, to associate oneself as either masculine or feminine is identifying with gender. Gender is hence understood as socially constructed or as something that is learned, accompanying unequal distribution of power.

Even though women comprise a large and growing fraction of all migrants worldwide, research on migration has disproportionately focused on males. Within migration studies, the phrase "migrants and their families" used to be code for "male migrants and their wives and children".

Only in the 1970s and 1980s, feminist researchers and activists started to question the near invisibility of women as migrants and their presumed passivity in the migration process (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Ongoing developments in the feminist theory through the 1980s and 1990s further contributed to the focus on gender as socially constructed. Nowadays, there is more visibility of women in official statistics and are women no longer perceived as ‘accompanying spouses’. In fact, gender is an integral part of the migration process where the impacts of migration for women and men depend on many factors including the type of migration (temporary, permanent, irregular, regular, labour or natural disaster-or conflict-induced) policies and attitudes of the sending and receiving countries and gender relations within the household (Jolly, 2005).

Gender also affects who migrates and how migrants are able to adapt in the new country, the possibility of return and other impacts on the migrants themselves (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Men may, for example, be expected to support the family economically, and migrate to try to earn money. For women this may be less acceptable, and therefore perceive it as more challenging to migrate, or migrate shorter distances than man. Piper (2005) states that in general women appear more likely than men to migrate to accompany other family members. Thereafter, the new lifestyle in the host country and the loss of former support structures affect the social roles and responsibilities. Both men and women have to live with new regulations and have to enter new social relationships, which may challenge their old ties and kinships. Thus, migration can lead to shifts in gendered roles and responsibilities to a women’s benefit, but it can also entrench traditional roles and inequalities, exposing women to new vulnerabilities (Jolly, 2005). Following on from this, benefits would occur when migrant women are, for example, able to provide a higher source of income for themselves and their families, earning them greater autonomy and social status. However, new vulnerabilities may be that female migrants face new demands in providing for themselves and their families, while facing stigma and discrimination. Jolly (2015) mentions *‘[d]uring transit and at their destination women can be faced with verbal, physical and sexual abuse, poor housing and encampments, sex-segregated labour markets, low wages, long working hours, insecure contracts and precarious legal status (pp.1).*

### **2.2.1 Gender and migration in Latin America**

Since gender relationships vary from society to society, it is essential to have a deeper understanding of culturally and context specific gendered migration. The international migration of women within Latin America has grown considerably from the mid-20th century to the turn of the 21st century (Herrera, 2013). Poverty and demand for workers in a range of labour markets have expanded while gender and family roles have provided new opportunities for women to enter the workforce. Hereby, feminisation of the workforce reflects the expansion of transnational migration (Herrera, 2013).

Literature on gender roles and identity in Latin America suggest that Latin countries have similar machista cultures that include both positive and negative elements for men (DeSouza et al., 2004). Positive aspects include notions of pride, honour, courage, responsibility and obligation to the family and negative aspects imply sexual prowess and aggressive behaviour, as well as the strong sense of masculine pride and the belief that men are physically and morally superior to the

woman (Perilla et al., 1994, González, 1982). Hence, machismo entails what is socially and culturally the norm to be male, but it also defines what it is to be female. What is referred to as marianismo states the patterns of women in Latin-America as submissive and self-sacrificing (Perilla et al., 1994). The concept of machismo and marianismo are, however, increasingly questioned with claims there is a much broader and more complex range of masculinities and femininities than these stereotypes. Moreover, norms have also changed throughout the last 20 years due to significant social and cultural evolutions accelerated by women's increased rights and economic power (Vigoya, 2003). Today, there is heightened awareness of cultural criticisms surrounding traditional machismo from younger men and women of all ages. With this, Vigoya (2003) mentions that many men have entered a process of cultural transition regarding the dominant masculine ideals and the need for equality. However, there is still a chance that the same men are unaware of patriarchal remnants in their beliefs and attitudes. Another vital note Vigoya (2003) makes is that Latin American societies are multicultural with a broad array of social classes. Therefore, it is necessary to think about the various ways in which masculine identities are constructed in different social sectors, ethnic groups, and sociocultural contexts. Therefore, it is important to recognise that masculinity and femininity are not essential or static qualities but historical manifestations, social constructions and cultural creations.

### **2.3 Transition to adulthood**

As was mentioned earlier, 31,4 per cent of the Venezuelan migrants in Colombia are young people between 18 and 29 years old, of which a little more than half are women. During this time of their life, adolescents experience enormous changes due to physical maturation accompanied by cognitive, social/emotional, and interpersonal changes (Juárez et al., 2013). Young adolescent women stand at the doorway of adulthood and face more demographic choices and consequences than at any other life stage. This involves, for example, the completion of their education, commencing formal work, marriage, first childbearing and residential establishment (McDonald et al., 2013; Juárez et al., 2013). Therefore, much is decided in this stage, including whether she will remain in school, the amount and health of children and having an income which could be invested back into her family. The migration experience overlaps with many other transitions young people go through. Juárez et al. (2013) state *'migration adds another layer of complexity to the conditions of entry into adulthood, including a changed social and physical environment and often reduced oversight and guidance from kin and communities with respect to young people's behaviors, resulting in changes in attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors'* (pp. 6). This leads to vulnerability since there is often less family and social support during this specific period of life. This period is already characterised by psychological stress from fulfilling basic needs, leading to a greater likelihood of abuse and exploitation. Establishing a sense of belonging in the first stage of arrival is, therefore, very important in the wellbeing among migrant youth (Beirens et al., 2007).

### **2.4 Labour market segmentation theory**

In order to understand inequalities in employment, it is essential to have a multi-dimensional approach, exemplified with the labour market segmentation theory. The labour market segmentation theory contrasts with the neoclassical economic theory on the grounds that

workers and jobs are not matched smoothly by a universal market mechanism consisting of buyers and sellers in an open competition (Leontaridi, 1998). Instead, segmentation theorists argue that there is not a single competitive market, but that it is “*composed of a variety of non-competing segments between which rewards to human capital differ because institutional barriers prohibit all parts of the population from benefitting equally from education and training*” (Leontaridi, 1998, pp. 64). Hence, there are many boundaries between segments and differences in labour markets. Moreover, the labour market segmentation theory also explains the economic marginalisation of ethnic minorities, lower classes and women (Fevre, 1992; Gordon, 1995). Typically, citizens from the host country occupy jobs in well-paid, stable jobs, while migrants are targeted with often badly paid, precarious and socially disliked jobs that are often inserted in the informal economy (Gordon, 1995). Herein, ethnic segmentation is often combined with gender segmentation, since labour can be considered more appropriate for women such as caring or cleaning sectors. The role of demand in the host country’s labour market should also be stressed with the process of irregular migration, trafficking or exploitation, recognising that employers’ decisions, particularly over recruitment, might be crucial in initiating and directing flows of migration. There is often a specific need for flexible and cheap labour on the part of the employers. This explains the easy incorporation of immigrants into society, particularly those with an irregular status.

The concept of intersectionality is vital in this study. Intersectionality is developed from the observation that a variety of socio-demographic categories, including gender, ethnicity and age, produce a state of multiple disadvantages that cannot be adequately understood from separate analysis (Stypińska & Gordo, 2018). For example, recent research on labour market segmentation in Latin America shows that far larger proportions of women than men work in informal jobs where incomes are low and labour protections are not in place (Lawson, 1998). These job characteristics have crucial welfare implications for migrants and their subsequent livelihoods in urban destinations. Additionally, the study from Stypińska & Gordo (2018) shows substantial gender differences in hourly wage at younger ages suggesting in terms of hourly wages, there is a great deal of gender and age inequality reinforcing one another.

## **2.5 Sustainable Livelihood Framework in an urban context**

In the 1990s, poverty was re-conceptualised into livelihood approaches where the multidimensionality of poverty is reflected by the views of the people themselves, placing them at the centre of analysis and decision making. With this, the focus is on opportunities and agency, as opposed to needs and constraints. The key elements of a livelihoods framework include the vulnerability context, livelihood assets, transforming structures and processes, livelihood strategies, and livelihood outcomes (Chambers and Conway, 1992). The SLF identifies five types of capital assets which can build up and/or be drawn upon. These are human, natural, financial, social and physical capital. Such assets can be seen as the livelihood building blocks (Farrington et al., 1999). Chambers and Conway (1992) also state a livelihood is sustainable when it can cope and recover from stresses, providing sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation. This can contribute net benefits to other livelihoods at the local and global levels, in both short and long term.



## Sustainable livelihoods framework

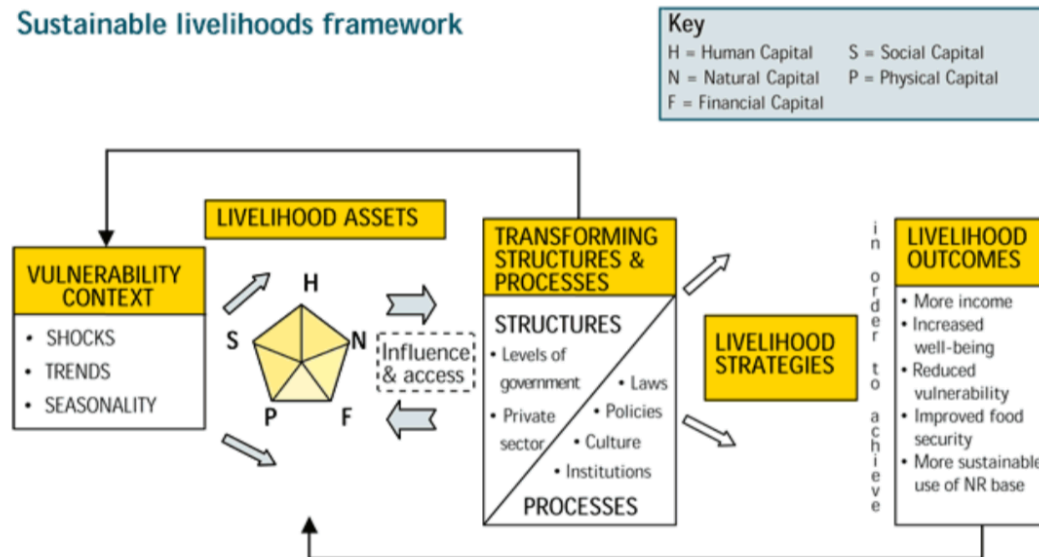


Figure 1: DFID's Sustainability Framework (Source: DFID, 1999)

The SLF has been traditionally developed to combat poverty in rural areas. However, it can also be used as a tool in the context of urban migration by focusing on the actions and strategies employed by migrants who moved to a city (Kaag, 2004). The Department for International Development (DFID) adapted the framework, as is shown in figure 1, by emphasising the concept of vulnerability and power relations. The adapted SLF focuses on the activities of people and the resources that are accessed in pursuit of a satisfactory living. The vulnerability context, institutions and policies can constrain or enable access to these assets and strategies. Through these different components, the framework captures both individual and structural determinants of achieving a sustainable livelihood. Longley and Maxwell (2003) state *'although livelihood approaches may not be sustainable in themselves, they should aim to sustain livelihoods in both the short term (to save lives) and the long term (to build resilience and address vulnerability)'*. Thus, a livelihoods analysis encourages one to think about appropriate livelihoods approaches in supporting urban migrants. The multiple livelihood components is further discussed below.

### 2.5.1 Vulnerability context

The original SLF is based on the reduction of poverty. It is important, however, that in this context vulnerability is distinguished from poverty reduction roles (Ellis, 2003). Economists in particular define poverty as a state with an absolute or relative norm, such as a poverty line. Vulnerability within the SLF, however, refers to the insecurity and sensitivity in the well-being of individuals or households in the face of a changing environment, and their responsiveness and resilience to the risks that are faced during negative changes (Moser, 1998). Environmental changes that threaten welfare can be ecological, economic, social and political and can be sudden shocks, long-term trends, or seasonal cycles.

Vulnerable situations that migrants face can arise from a range of factors that may coexist simultaneously, influencing and intensifying each other. They can also change in time as with

circumstances. Meikle et al. (2001) state that in an urban environment, migrants are likely to be vulnerable to certain specific shocks and crises such as poor living environments and being dependent on the cash economy for basic goods and services. Hereby, vulnerabilities are differentiated amongst migrants. Some will experience more discrimination and xenophobia due to, for example, their age, gender, ethnicity or migration status. This can also be on several intersecting grounds. However, the most prevalent vulnerability in building a livelihood is when migrants do not have a legal status or other subsequent rights (Horst, 2006; Meikle et al., 2001; Jacobsen, 2006).

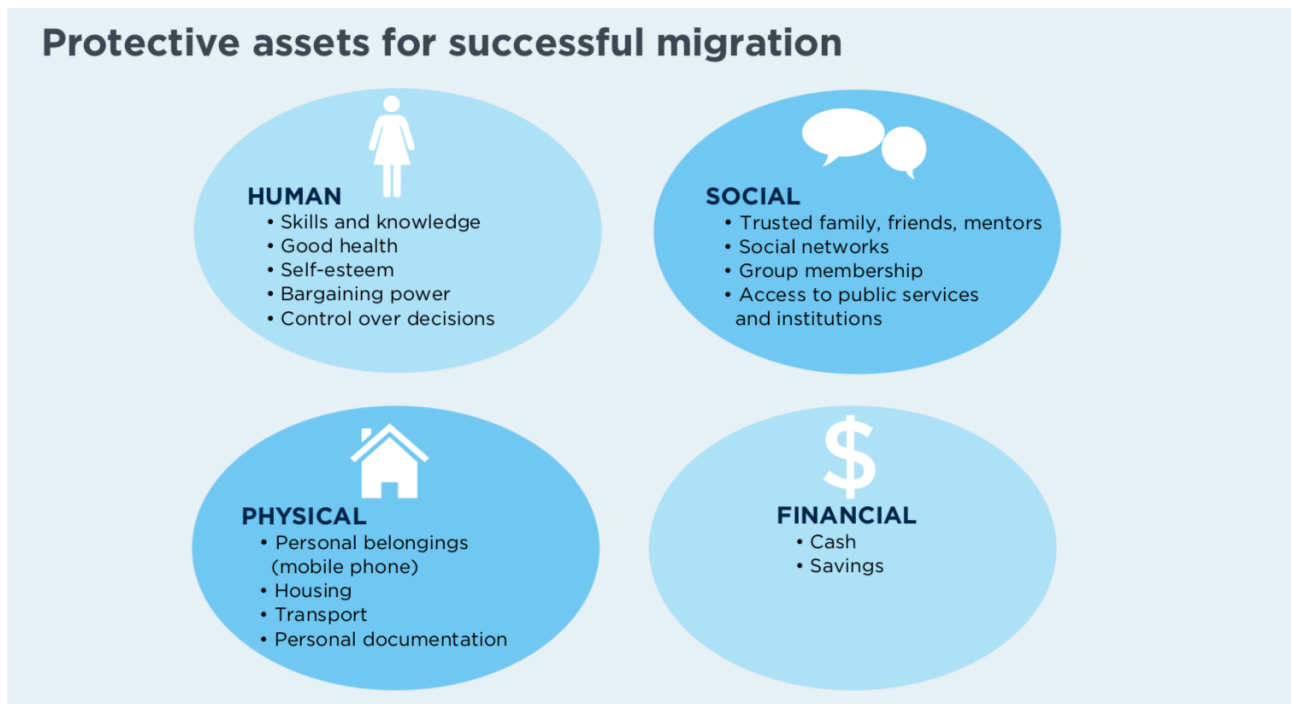


Figure 2: Protective assets for successful migration (source: Temin et al., 2013)

### 2.5.2 Livelihood assets

The SLF recognises that people construct their livelihoods within a broader socio-economic and physical context, using social and material assets. These assets within the framework include human capital, social capital, financial capital, physical capital and to a lesser amount in an urban context; natural capital. Figure 2 gives an overview of the most important assets in an urban context which increases the likelihood of successful migration. This is further elaborated below.

- *Human capital*

This form of capital represents skills and knowledge, experience, and physical state of good health. When combined, it allows people to engage with different strategies and fulfil their objectives regarding their livelihoods. Urban migrants are regularly at risk of a range of environmental and health hazards due to an unsatisfactory quality of the residential and working environments (Meikle et al., 2001). Migration can also make the skills of a worker obsolete, whereby it is impossible to find equivalent work in the host country and subsequently must perform low-skilled work they are overqualified for.

- *Financial capital*

This refers to the financial resources a person has to achieve regarding their livelihood. The economy in urban areas is characterised by a greater degree of commercialisation, where people need higher cash incomes than most rural households in order to survive (Meikle et al., 2001).

- *Physical capital*

This refers to basic infrastructure and personal belongings that are needed to support livelihoods. Mostly housing is the most important asset for urban migrants. Other examples are mobile phones, transportation or personal documentation.

- *Social capital*

Social capital refers to the social connections people rely on when seeking objectives relating to livelihoods, including networks, associations, local authorities, and the broader population (UNDP, 2017). Horst (2006) and Jacobsen (2006) identify social capital as the most important asset in a migrants livelihood. It includes both material and emotional support, alongside advice and connections for employment and financial networks. A specific focus on social capital is given in this study, which is further elaborated below.

### **2.5.3 Key livelihood asset: social capital**

Much research has concentrated on the concept of social capital in the past few decades (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman 1988; Putnam, 1993). Coleman (1988) defines social capital as an asset that can be used as a resource, recognising two components of social capital: (1) social capital as a relational construct and (2) as providing resources to others through relationships with individuals.

In pursuing livelihoods in a context of vulnerability, Jacobsen (2006) states, migrants are reliant on the support provided by their co-nationals already living in the city. Migrants factor these communities into their decision making when choosing a particular destination. The usefulness of social capital surfaces from the capability of individuals to convert it into other forms of capital. Social networks can, for example, help provide accommodation, jobs, information and emotional support in the host country. Moreover, social capital is also created through, for example, local friendships or the presence of charitable organisations. This is more likely to develop in urban areas because of the greater population density which can, in turn, lead to access to all kinds of resources (Jacobsen, 2006). Men and women's social networks differ from each other and consequently possess different levels of access to information. Women are more dependent on social networks in the destination than men are (Eklund, 2000).

### **2.5.4 Social networks**

As was explained above, social capital describes social ties and is closely linked to the concept of social networks. Social networks can be defined as *'the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by the virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalised relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition'* (Bourdieu and Wacquant,

1992, pp. 119). Hereby, intimate relationships to others in our community can help us in everyday matters, whereas strong engagement in societal networks generally correlates positively with a range of societal and attitudinal outcomes (Bourdieu, 1977; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993). Putnam (1993) further divides the notion of social networks into three different levels: bonding, bridging and linking.

- *Bonding networks*

This refers to the connections within a community sharing common characteristics as defined by, for example, co-ethnicity, co-national or co-religious identity, highlighting the need for a sense of identity or belonging to a particular group (Putnam, 1993). A study from Ager and Strang (2008) shows that migrants value proximity to family because this enables them to share cultural practices and maintain familiar patterns and relationships. Duke et al. (1999) studies shows the importance of refugee community organisations, since they provide a voice for migrants and refugees, a contact point for isolated individuals, expertise and sensitive responses in dealing with issues. They provide cultural and social activities which offer a chance to maintain customs and religion, celebrate traditions and exchange news from their home country.

- *Bridging networks*

The social bridges are defined as social connections with those of other national, ethnic or religious groupings or communities (Putnam, 1993). These connections serve as bridges to other networks and are essential to a person's integration, supporting the social cohesion within a society. Bridging networks may foster stronger connections across different social divisions, thereby strengthening the collective ability of young people to undertake coordinated actions for a common goal.

- *Linking networks*

While bonding networks describe connections that link members within and between groups, linking networks refer to the ties to people in positions of authority. This can be, for example, between individuals and structures of the state, such as government services or agencies. Connecting migrants to relevant services is a major task in supporting inclusion or integration in the host country since bonding and bridging networks might be unwilling or unable to include young migrants (Ager & Strang, 2008).

### **2.5.5 Livelihood strategies**

The selection of the livelihood strategies relate to the persons objectives; what type of livelihood wants to be achieved and in what area the livelihood is prioritised. Meikle et al. (2001) states '*livelihood strategies are based on the values and priorities of the men and women who pursue them, rather than simply on the options and resources available to them*' (pp.18). The livelihood strategies are, however, constrained by the options available and the pressure of immediate needs. By means of this, Meikle et al. (2001) make a distinction between short term and long term objectives. The short term objectives are linked to the concept of 'survival strategies' since they need to address immediate pressures. Long term objectives are more idealised and distanced

from the day to day pressures and include a more overall 'plan' such as an investment in education or the purchase of a vehicle. It is essential to focus on these objectives since it helps to avoid assumptions about what migrants prioritise and why they choose particular livelihood strategies.

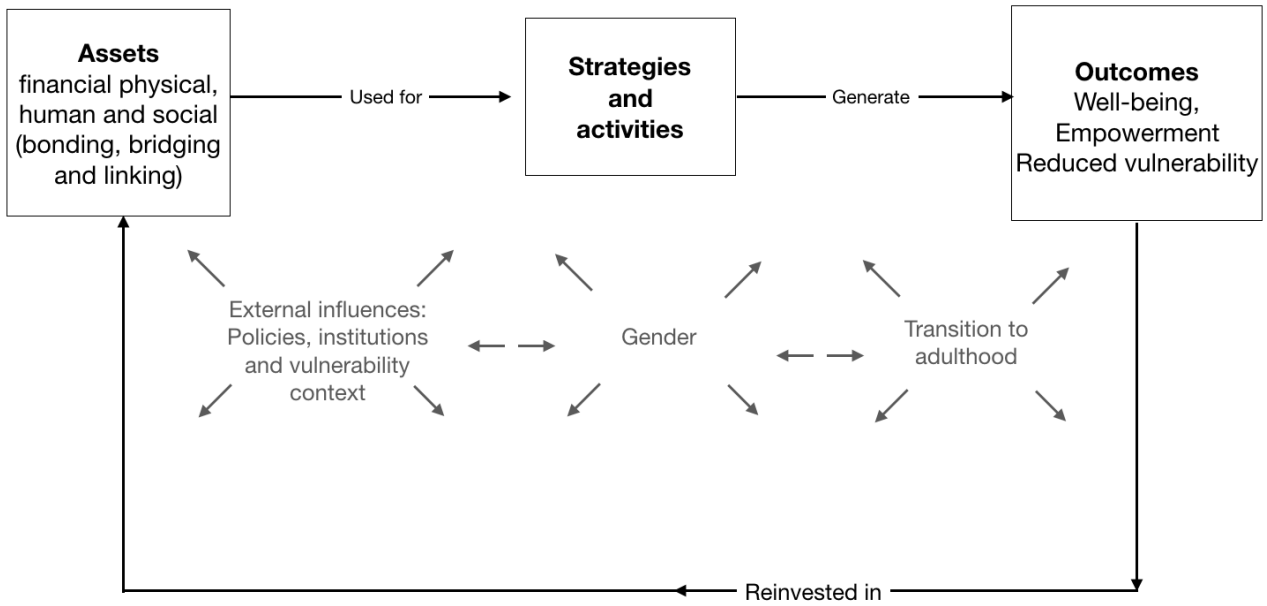
### **2.5.6 Livelihood outcomes**

The livelihood outcomes *'are the results of people's success or failure in transforming, through the variety of strategies and the assets available to them'* (Meikle et al., 2001, pp. 14). This can also be seen as the aspirations that people seek to fulfil through their livelihood strategies. These aspirations are very complex since they differ strongly according to the place, time, context and the individual. However, they are valuable in gaining an understanding of what it is that people are aiming for and if this is being achieved. In most cases, these outcomes can be thought of as the inverse of poverty (Meikle et al., 2001). For example, if an individual describes poverty as experiencing food insecurity, powerlessness and a lack of access to services, then the livelihood outcomes they seek is expected to be food security, a sense of power and improved access to services.

## **2.6 Linkages between the theories and research objectives**

The study aims to understand the young migrant women's experience of migration as a livelihood strategy. With this, critical factors are identified determining opportunities and constraints by taking Venezuelan young migrant women in Bogotá as a case study. The SLF is used as a tool to reveal the local barriers to livelihoods, but also the broader context that influences livelihood opportunities. The framework is chosen because it takes a holistic view on the issue and causes to find effective entry points for development interventions. It also gives an insight to the daily realities these women face within a perspective of agency. Within the livelihoods framework, social capital is indicated to be the most important asset in an urban migrants livelihood. Therefore, extra attention in this study is placed on social capital and its subdivisions of bonding, bridging and linking networks.

Since people in urban regions also need higher cash incomes than rural households in order to survive, it is essential to focus on employment opportunities. Therefore, the labour market segmentation theory is used to have a deeper understanding of the differences and the boundaries young migrant women might face. Exploring gender norms and the intersection of the transition to adulthood because in striving of improving once livelihood, many other potent obstacles and experiences are shown. In all, linking these theories make it possible to reach the objectives of this study. A visual representation of all important components in this study is shown in the conceptual model on the next page.



### 3 - Regional Context

This chapter provides the national and regional framework of the research. Information on the region in relation to migration is presented together with more in-depth data about Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá.

#### 3.1 Colombia - Numbers and facts

The Republic of Colombia is located in the northwest of South-America and shares a border with a.o. Venezuela (map 1).

In July 2019, the total population of Colombia reached 49 million people. Most people are living in urban areas; 80.6 per cent of the total population (DANE, 2019). The capital, Bogotá, is Colombia's main economic engine generating almost 27 per cent of Colombia's entire gross domestic product (GDP) in 2017.



Map 1: Colombia (Worldometers, 2019).

#### 3.2 Internal conflict and recent progress

Violence in Colombia has persisted for decades. At the beginning of the 1950s, guerrilla groups and government forces began to clash, and cartels and paramilitaries started to rise. In December 2016, Colombia formally ended the 52-year armed conflict that resulted in the deaths of more than 220,000 people and the displacement of more than 7.6 million people within and beyond the country's borders (Carvajal, 2017). While the peace agreement was a highly significant development, obstacles to durable solutions remain and internal displacement in the country continues (IDMC, 2017). The country has entered a fragile post-conflict phase and wants to focus on peace and stability by addressing the leading causes of international displacement, yet new migration issues arose with the humanitarian crisis in Venezuela.

#### 3.3 Migration patterns between Colombia and Venezuela

In order to better understand the current migration processes between Colombia and Venezuela, it is important to unravel the historic migration flows between the countries. Migratory flows between Colombia and Venezuela have already been observed for decades. Colombia experienced mostly large-scale emigration and little immigration during the 19th and 20th centuries. Large scale emigration from Colombia began in the mid-20th century due to the armed conflict. Around one million Colombians migrated to Venezuela during the last four decades. This made Colombians the largest immigrant group in Venezuela, mostly due to the perceived opportunities for economic growth in the country (Carvajal, 2017).

The pattern of Colombians migrating to Venezuela reversed in 2004 when the first wave of Venezuelan immigrants came to Colombia. Carvajal (2017) states this wave mostly consisted out of oil industry professionals who migrated after layoffs from the state-run oil company, *Petroleos de Venezuela*. In 2010, the second wave started which included Venezuelan executives and investors seeking to protect their assets from the ever-rising inflation. A third wave, starting in 2014, included professionals and students following widespread antigovernment protests. The fourth wave mostly consisted of Colombians returnees who previously migrated to Venezuela (Carvajal, 2017). Since 2018, the most vulnerable group began to migrate consisting of individuals and families with few resources, often requiring humanitarian assistance.

### **3.4 Current regional response**

The UN Refugee Convention does not recognise fleeing an economic crisis as a cause for seeking refuge. Since the Venezuelan exodus began, there have been debates in host countries as to whether Venezuelans should be considered economic migrants or refugees. Also, Colombia has been dealing with the Venezuelan influx as a migrant situation rather than a refugee situation. However, Colombia has been accepting Venezuelans based on the Cartagena Declaration of 1984, a regional treaty that expands the criteria on who should be granted protection beyond what is stated in the UN Refugee Convention. This definition of a refugee includes not only those suffering individual persecution, but also *'persons who have fled their country because their lives, safety, or freedom have been threatened by generalized violence, foreign aggression, internal conflicts, massive violation of human rights, or other circumstances which have seriously disturbed public order'* (Cartagena Declaration, 1984, pp.3). The Cartagena Declaration includes people who are affected by developments such as economic decline or food insecurity.

There have been several attempts to establish a more harmonised regional response to the Venezuelan refugee and migrant crisis. One of these attempts is the 'Regional Inter-Agency Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela', also entitled the Coordination Platform, aiming to lead and coordinate responses to the influx of refugees and migrants from Venezuela in the South-American region. The Coordination Platform is led by the UNHCR and the IOM and is composed of 38 UN agencies, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and the Red Cross Movement. Efforts include the protection, assistance and integration needs of the refugees and migrants and focuses on regional strategy and country-specific support (Coordination Platform, 2019).

The Coordination Platform (2019) recorded 1.3 million Venezuelans in Colombia by the end of May 2019. Currently, Colombia has been receiving over 50 per cent of all the people migrating from Venezuela, including those who remain in the country as well as those who use the country as transit. Colombia and Venezuela share a 2,200-kilometer common border that counts seven formal and hundreds of informal crossing points, making it difficult to control migration flows. Around 60 per cent of the migrants and refugees are in a regular situation, and 40 per cent are in an irregular situation (Migración Colombia, 2019a).



Since the massive migration from Venezuela began, Colombia gradually placed its focus towards policies identifying and regularising migrants, in order to maintain national security. In 2017, the special transit card, *Tarjeta Migratoria de Tránsito Fronterizo* (TMF), was realised to have an increased oversight of irregular migrants moving in and out from Venezuela. By May 2019, a total of 3,37 million migratory cards were approved (Coordination Platform, 2019). However, soon it became apparent that many Venezuelans were in need of remaining longer in Colombia than the authorised seven days. The government then suspended the TMF card in early 2018 and made it obligatory for Venezuelans to show their passport to enter Colombia. The Colombian government then introduced a temporary immigration measure known as the '*Permiso Especial de Permanencia*' (PEP), benefitting around 538,400 Venezuelans who entered through formal border points (Coordination Platform, 2019). The PEP has a maximum term of two years from issuance, allowing access to education and health institutions. It also authorises the exercise of formal economic activity. The PEP is free of any costs, however, it excludes those without a passport. Currently, the measure only applies to the Venezuelans that entered Colombia before December 2018 through a border control post and have a corresponding stamp in their passport. On June 4th 2019, holders of the PEP were allowed to have an extension for an additional two years (Coordination Platform, 2019).

### **3.5 Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá**

Bogotá is the largest and most populous city in Colombia. The estimated population counts 7,2 million people in the capital district (DANE, 2019). With approximately 278,511 Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá, the city is the most popular destination for Venezuelan migrants who reside in Colombia (Acosta, 2019). Bogotá has received around 22 per cent of all Venezuelan migrants in the country (Migración Colombia, 2019b). Most of these migrants are between 18 and 29 years old (Acosta, 2019). Motivations behind moving to the capital lies with the perceived employment opportunities. During an interview with the District Secretary for Social Integration, it was mentioned the mayor of Bogotá, Enrique Peñalosa, has an open attitude towards migration and wants to be understanding of the need to receive migrants. Integration of the migrants is, therefore, a key strategy. Estimates from the Coordination Platform (2019) state that by the end of 2019, over 2.2 million refugees and migrants from Venezuela will be in Colombia and research on Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá shows they are not planning to return (61 per cent) (Acosta, 2019). More specific information about employment, health, education, housing and social networks relating to Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá, is given below.

- *Employment*

Statistics show that 37 per cent of the workers in Colombia are formally employed, while 63 per cent of the workers are employed in informal work (Fernández, 2018). Looking more specifically at Bogotá, one can see that it is the main centre of employment in the country, supplying around 3.5 million jobs in the formal sector. The formal sector encompasses all jobs with normal hours and regular wages and are recognised as income sources on which taxes must be paid. This formal supply of employment is enlarged by approximately 1.8 million informal jobs (CCB, 2012).

However, there are high levels of unemployment in Colombia. According to a study of the Free University (2018), almost 3.4 million out of a population of 12.7 million people aged between 18 and 28 years are unemployed. 23 per cent of women are unable to find employment compared to 13.7 per cent of men. These rates show the difficulty of finding employment for young women in Colombia, and intersects with being a migrant which is also a barrier.

Venezuelan migrants who cannot regularise their residency in Colombia are restricted to informal work and cannot receive health coverage. Migrants who cannot work formally, are also prevented in having secure labour contracts that help guarantee dignified working conditions, pensions and access to healthcare. Research from the *Observatorio del Proyecto Migración Venezuela* (Acosta, 2019) shows that 65.6 per cent of the Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá struggle with finding employment in the city, whereas 21 per cent find it easy and 9.9 per cent of the respondents are in-between. 93.2 per cent of the Venezuelans migrants in Bogotá indicated they do not work in the same profession they studied and/or worked in earlier in Venezuela. Furthermore, 55.2 per cent of the Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá who do have employment work in an informal commerce business, and 20 per cent in a formal commercial business.

- *Health*

The Ministry of Health created a response plan for Venezuelan migrant with certain basic outlines. For children until five years old and pregnant and lactating women, health care assistance is guaranteed independent of their migratory status. Moreover, all people are entitled to free medical attention in public hospitals in cases of emergency. However, this is creating a gap in which hospitals themselves become responsible for classifying situations as an emergency or not, leaving many migrants unprotected. Moreover, for irregular migrants, treatments for chronic diseases such as cancer, HIV/AIDS or diabetes do not receive state provision. Research shows that 65,8 per cent of the Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá perceive it as difficult or very difficult to have access to health services (Acosta, 2019).

- *Education*

The same research also mentions that 27.3 per cent of the Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá have primary school as their highest education, 40.8 per cent high school and 14.4 per cent obtained a university degree (Acosta, 2019). The Colombian government guarantees access to public schools for children and adolescents regardless of whether they have regular or irregular status. Migrants who are older than 18 years old do not have an option to enter higher education without a regular migratory status. Moreover, 52.4 per cent of the Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá perceive it as difficult to very difficult to access education in the city. 75.7 per cent of the respondents mentioned their children are not studying in Bogotá, which is far higher than the countries average of 57.3 per cent. Inability to afford education and schools rejecting them due to missing legal documents are key reasons behind Venezuelan children being out of school. 59.5 per cent of the Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá perceive it as difficult to have access to the necessary legal documents (Acosta, 2019).

### *Housing and social networks*

Most Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá move to the lower class/poorer neighbourhoods of Bogotá such as Bosa, Suba and Kennedy. The housing possibilities in Bogotá are difficult to obtain. 54.9 per cent perceived it as very difficult to find housing (Acosta, 2019). Moreover, there is also an extremely limited amount of long and short-term shelters provided to Venezuelans migrants.

Since Venezuela used to have a considerable level of welfare for its citizens, Venezuelans did not need to emigrate. Hence, Venezuelans do not have a migratory culture, the experience or support networks of fellow citizens who are already living in host countries. Together with the change of migration patterns from the start of the humanitarian crisis as of 2005, these support networks grew substantially with family and friends already established in the host country. 53.5 per cent of the migrants who crossed the border from Venezuela to Colombia, stated that their family is waiting for them and 42.5 per cent have friends living in Colombia. 95.6 per cent of these migrants mentioned in the research that they already have a place where they can stay in Colombia, opposed to only 4.4 per cent whom do not (Bermúdez et al., 2018).

In all, the data available about Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá is mostly of a quantitative nature (Migración Colombia, 2019a; Acosta, 2019, Bermúdez et al., 2018). Even though this is important, at the same time it distances us from the reality these migrants are experiencing. This study adds to the existing literature and gives a valuable insight into the daily realities of young Venezuelan migrant women, and their experiences, difficulties and prospects of living in Bogotá.

## 4 - Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology and research design used in this study, including sampling methods, data analysis, operationalisation and a review of the ethics and limitations.

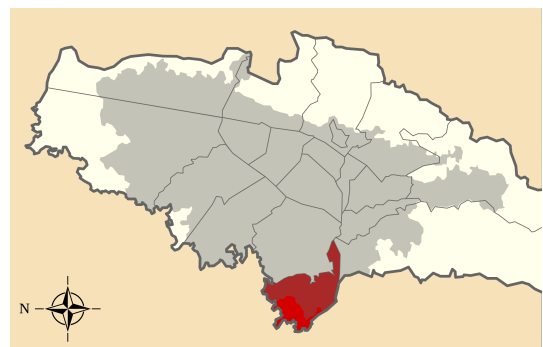
### 4.1 Main research question and sub questions

What are the aspirations, opportunities and challenges that recently migrated young Venezuelan women in Bogotá are facing and how do these factors influence their capacity to build a sustainable livelihood?

- What are the aspirations of the young Venezuelan women that recently migrated to Bogotá?
- What is the local vulnerability context of young Venezuelan migrant women in Bogotá?
- Which livelihood assets are currently available to the young Venezuelan migrant women in Bogotá?
- How do structural processes (policies & institutions) impact the livelihood opportunities of young Venezuelan migrant women when living in Bogotá?
- What are the livelihood coping strategies used in order to have an improved livelihood outcome for the young Venezuelan migrant women in Bogotá?
- What are the direct livelihood outcomes, and how can these be improved from a policy perspective?

### 4.2 Research location

Twenty districts form the neighbourhoods of Bogotá. The higher financial districts are located in the north and northeast of the city, while the lower economic neighbourhoods are in the south and southeast. The central, western and some northern districts are where the middle class resides. Since Bogotá is a big city with a lot of geographical differences, one specific neighbourhood was chosen as a research location; Bosa. Map 2 shows the locality of Bosa, in red, within the city of Bogotá.



Map 2: Bosa (Wikipedia, n.d)

Bosa is located in the southwest periphery of Bogotá and is characterised by a moderately cold climate, with an average of about 14°C. Bosa counts 776,363 inhabitants and is mostly inhabited by lower-income residents (Government Bogotá, 2019). Among the poor households, the largest number lives in difficult urban environment conditions of critical overcrowding and high economic dependence. It is one of the neighbourhoods with the highest population density and consists of a significant number of people displaced by the armed conflict and lately also of Venezuelan

migrants. Ninety-nine per cent of the businesses in Bosa are micro and small businesses (Government Bogotá, 2019).

#### **4.3 Operationalisation of the concepts**

The concepts and theories that have been discussed in the theoretical framework were operationalised based on the existing literature and the research context. Appendix 1 sets out each of these specific concepts, dimensions, and indicators. Since the SLF has been used for this study, many of the interview questions are based on this approach to get the best possible insight into the women's livelihoods. From interviewing key informants and external experts, and the drawing of timelines, the aim was to discover the extent to which this group is exposed to shocks, and the resilience of their livelihoods.. This was approached by creating an overview of risk factors to which the group is most prone, followed by a more detailed analysis of key problems, coping strategies and potential solutions. The concept of the labour segmentation theory was included.

Since the SLF aims to build on the assets and not solely emphasise weakness, it was essential to find out more about the migrant women's human, physical, financial and social assets. This also included questions about the changes in assets over time and the role these assets play in their livelihoods (appendix 1). Social capital was researched throughout a social mapping technique to indicate the extent of reliance on various connections of support. Moreover, transforming processes and structures merely focused on uncovering various forms of political and institutional processes excluding young Venezuelan women, such as xenophobia. It was therefore essential to be sensitive to gender differences and the accompanying intersectionality of age. A deep understanding was gauged through interviews with various institutions and key informants.

#### **4.4 Research methods**

To view migration solely in numbers distances us from the daily reality migrants have to face. Therefore, this study tries to give an insight into the everyday lives experienced by women in Bogotá. The research was developed in terms of a qualitative methodology, which is in line with the objectives of this research. A central role is given to the respondents in terms of their beliefs, ideas and values, prospects and narratives. In all, this methodology allowed respondents to show their reality of being a young Venezuelan migrants, and highlight their experiences, difficulties and prospects of living in Bogotá.

#### **4.5 Exploratory research**

In the first phase of the research period, a better understanding of the research context and topic was created. During these first weeks, Bogotá was explored, skills in the Spanish language were improved, and time was used to become familiar with the local culture through informal conversations with Colombian and Venezuelan people. The conversations with the Venezuelan migrants mostly happened while doing voluntary work at Fundacolven, a small organisation that provides Venezuelan migrants with information, clothes and food. The conversations with Colombians took place in the course of diverse occasions such as in shops, bus rides and restaurants. The acquired information contributed to first identifying the livelihood context for

Venezuelan migrants and institutions that are active in Bogotá, and resulted in the selection of Bosa as the research area. Moreover, throughout the entire fieldwork period situations and environments of the young migrants were observed involving on-set notes taking, enriching the collected data and enhancing a deeper understanding of the environment.

#### 4.6 Primary data collection and analysis

In the second phase, further relevant data was collected at governmental and non-governmental institutions in Bogotá with the aim of gathering relevant data for the regional and vulnerability context of the young Venezuelan women. Hereby, multiple experts were consulted to gain a thorough understanding of the situation. These formal interviews were prepared and can also be referred to as semi-structured interviews. The purpose of these interviews was to gain a more structural understanding of the work of these institutions and the vulnerability context for the young Venezuelan migrant women in the city. Four out of seven formal interviews were recorded, while during the other three interviews, notes were made. Codes were given in Nvivo to reoccurring important concepts in the transcripts and notes. The collection of primary and secondary data by having interviews with the various experts is illustrated in table 1.

Table 1: Overview of the approached institutions, roles and results

No.	Institution	Role of interviewee	Results
1	Migration related NGO: El Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados (JRS)	Advocacy officer Latin America and the Caribbean	Primary and secondary data
2	Colmena Venezolana	Pastor	Primary data
3	Legal assistance program - Rosario University	Lawyer	Primary and secondary data
4	Sex workers association: ASMUBULI	Head of Colombian sex workers association	Primary data
5	-	Psychologist	Primary data
6	City hall of Bogotá	District Secretary for Social Integration	Primary data
7	City hall of Bogotá	Manager of the program of attention to the Venezuelan migrant	Primary and secondary data

During this phase, interviews were also held with the recently migrated young Venezuelan women. The specific target group was identified during the exploratory research phase, and selection criteria were determined. Only young Venezuelan women were interviewed between the age of 18 to 24 years old and who lived in the research area of Bosa. Exceptions were made with one Venezuelan woman who was homeless and was interviewed in Chapinero, and four sex workers who were interviewed in the red light district in Santa Fé. The research area of Bosa also contains a red light district. However, it was not possible to visit this area due to safety reasons. In an interview with the head of ASMUBULI, a Colombian sex workers association, it was mentioned that both the red light districts are similar, leading to the decision to have an accompanied visit to

Santa Fé. Other selection criteria consisted of the length of the women's stay in Bogotá, and the place of origin in Venezuela. Hereby, a variety of characteristics was aimed for in the research. An overview of the respondents can be found in table 2. All names in this table and in the following chapters are fictional for reasons of confidentiality.

Table 2: Overview of the recently migrated young Venezuelan women and their characteristics

No.	Name	Age	Time in Bogotá	Neighborhood	Marrital status	Children
1	Arianna	21 years	4 months	Bosa	Married	2
2	Gabriela	20 years	9 months	Bosa	Unmarried	2
3	Ana	24 years	7 months	Bosa	Married	1
4	Elianny	24 years	1,5 years	Bosa	Married	1
5	Laura	21 years	1 year	Bosa	Unmarried	1
6	Keila	18 years	1,5 years	Bosa	Married	1
7	Maria Alejandra	24 years	2 years	Bosa	Married	1
8	Katherin	24 years	3 years	Bosa	Married	1 and pregnant
9	Daniela	21 years	1 year	Bosa	Married	2
10	Clau	22 years	2 years	Bosa	Married	1 and pregnant
11	Lucera	23 years	2 months	Bosa	Unmarried	2
12	Virginia	18 years	5 days	Bosa	Unmarried	-
13	Genesis	18 years	10 months	Bosa	Unmarried	1
14	Fiora	22 years	3 years	Bosa	Married	1
15	Annerys	21 years	20 days	Bosa	Married	3
16	Layla	23 years	1 month	Bosa	Married	3
17	Ashley	22 years	15 months	Bosa	Married	1
18	Andrea	20 years	4 days	Chapinero	Married	3
19	Vero	24 years	3 weeks	Santa Fé	Unmarried	1
20	Ismalba	24 years	1,5 years	Santa Fé	Unmarried	-
21	Sofia	24 years	2 months	Santa Fé	Unmarried	2
22	Maydelis	21 years	1 years	Santa Fé	Married	2

The objective of the semi-structured interviews with the Venezuelan women was to gain extensive information on a structured basis about the livelihoods. Semi-structured interviews are very effective in gaining insights into the informants' experiences, thoughts and emotions (Thaagaard, 2009). An interview guide was prepared with questions related to the research themes. During the interviews, the respondents could answer the questions, elaborate on the topics most important to them and raise their issues. All interviews were held in Spanish and individually with the researcher to make the respondents feel as comfortable as possible. The length of the interviews varied between 30 and 90 minutes. While conducting the semi-structured interviews, participants

were asked if they would be willing to participate in a secondary, life history, interview. With this, the aim was to delve deeper in their experiences of their new life in Bogotá and to be able to map out more clearly what use is made of their social capital (bonding, bridging and linking connections). Since participants already participated in semi-structured interviews, there was a bigger element of trust in the second, life history conversations. During the life history conversations, the participant and researcher co-created a timeline of their stay in Bogotá. Additionally, also a social mapping technique was performed to determine the people who were involved in helping them build up their livelihoods in the city. The mapping exercises helped participants re-create their lives on paper and focus on the elements of their choosing. Thereupon, all interviews that were held with the young women were transcribed and coded in Nvivo in order to find valuable relationships and patterns within the data. Data was categorised and labelled by making use of the following overarching codes: personal characteristics, capabilities, vulnerabilities, outcomes, gender, and transition to adulthood. This was later divided into smaller groups of codes with data allowing the researcher to identify relations between different parts of the data and formed the basis for the analytical and empirical chapters of this thesis.

#### **4.7 Secondary data collection and analysis**

Statistical information, research reports and policy documents were provided by various institutions and retrieved from books, articles, reports and websites. Data was first scanned to find out whether it was useful for the study, whereafter relevant information was read carefully. Then, valuable data was marked and copied into one document combining all useful secondary data.

#### **4.8 Sampling methods**

The selection of respondents was conducted through a purposive sample that took the characteristics and socio-economic differences within Venezuelan women who migrated to Bogotá into account. This includes difference in cities of origin, age, and having different legal statuses such as irregular, dual citizenship or regularised statuses. All young Venezuelan women that were interviewed are between 18 and 24 years old, and their stays in Bogotá range from four days to three years. The regions of origin range from Caracas, Valencia, San Cristobal, Maracaibo, Guacara, Barquisimeto and Merida. Furthermore, characteristics ranged between middle and low socio-economic situations, twenty of the women are mothers, five had formal jobs, six were informal workers and eleven did not have employment. All the above-mentioned factors have an influence on the access to civil, social, cultural, and political rights as well as their perspectives, experiences and relationships in Bogotá.

Also, snowball sampling was used as a sampling method to select the respondents. This was, however, very difficult since most women in the study did not have any contacts in Bogotá and could not direct the research to other potential participants. This made the research population a very hard-to-reach group. However, through a pastor from Bosa, various connections were made with Venezuelan female respondents. Additionally, respondents were directly approached by the researcher and asked whether they would be interested in participating. Some women were asked



during information meetings, in the street or at their jobs whereafter, the interview was held in a safe environment of a quiet cafe or at their house.

Finally, according to Thaagaard (2009), the size of the sample should be assessed in relation to a saturation point, meaning that the sample should be sufficiently large when new informants do not give further understanding of the phenomenon. The saturation point was reached in this study after 22 formal interviews with young Venezuelan women and seven institutional interviews.

#### **4.9 Ethical considerations**

Interviews were conducted in a safe environment of the participants choice. All interviews started by giving short information about the researcher, then informing the respondents about the research topic, the aim and purpose of the study and the confidentiality of their answers whereafter permission for the interview was asked and their informed consent was given. The women who participated were guaranteed their answers would be completely unanimous and ensured the information would be handled confidentially. The interviews were then recorded by phone (with informed consent) and notes were made. The recordings were later transcribed in Nvivo. All the names of the young women that are used in this research are replaced by fictions names for reasons of confidentiality. Thus, much attention was given to the privacy and anonymity of the respondents. Digital security was also of importance, wherein, recordings and transcriptions were soon placed from the phone to an external hard drive that was stored safely.

#### **4.10 Limitations**

Limitations distinctive to this research project are important to mention as they may have influenced the collected data, and conclusions of the study. An analysis was performed on the individual/household level, with an in-depth focus where much attention was placed on personal situations. Hereby, it is essential to note that due to the methodological choice of doing qualitative research, and therefore also having a small sample, findings cannot be generalised. Because of the vulnerability of the recently migrated young Venezuelan women, it was challenging to recruit respondents that might have caused the sampling procedure to be affected in the representativeness. It was only partly possible to approach the respondents directly due to various safety issues, which resulted in a limited control over the research sample. Furthermore, the snowball sampling through the network of the pastor in Bosa might further have affected the representativeness and diversity. Therefore, this study is merely aimed to explore the lived experiences of this difficult to reach group, without leaping to broad generalisations of a wider migrant population.

The limited time available for conducting the research and difficulties of reaching the potential participants for an interview determined the scope of this research. The majority of the Venezuelan women that participated could only be interviewed once. Except for two women who also contributed to life-histories interviews, others were not able to participate in a follow-up interview. This would have been valuable to clarify issues, enrich their stories about their livelihoods and could have enabled an even more in-depth analysis of the research topics. Particularly because the women recently migrated towards Bogotá and were fully occupied in building up their livelihoods in Bogotá. Therefore, comparing their livelihood situations would have been valuable to

recognise more concrete strategies that were used. Moreover, since the topic of transition to adulthood was included in this study, this could have been beneficial.

Furthermore, the inexperience of the researcher might have affected the results and enhanced the possibility of, for example, interviewer bias. The interviews were held in Spanish, without the use of a translator. This approach was chosen to create a better sense of trust between the researcher and participant. Even though, respondents seemed open and comfortable during the interviews, it is possible that some misunderstandings occurred. Hereby, the researcher could not always ask the respondent to elaborate further on an important part of the answer that was given due to incomplete mastery of the Spanish language. Also, it is possible that the Western perspective of the researcher has caused incorrect interpretations and/or influenced cultural misunderstandings of the data.

## **5 - Deciding to leave: reason of migration, expectations and aspirations**

The following chapters explain the empirical data that was gathered during the fieldwork. Alongside the descriptions of the women's livelihoods in Bogotá, participants also mentioned their aspirations in life and the motivations behind their migration. This chapter highlights the process of migration towards Bogotá and the expectations they had before coming to the city.

### **5.1 Vulnerability of the recently migrated Venezuelan women**

As was mentioned earlier, there has been a notable change in the profile of migrants leaving Venezuela over the past four years. Since 2018, the most vulnerable group since the start of the crisis began to migrate. These consisted of individuals and families with fewer resources, who had to walk greater distances and were more in need of humanitarian assistance. Looking at the time frame the women in the study came from Venezuela to start living in Bogotá, it ranges between four days and three years with an average of around one year. All women in the study are in a vulnerable situation and have few possibilities. In most cases, the women were still in high school when the crisis hit Venezuela, were pregnant or recently had a baby and could, therefore, not save sufficient money to come to Colombia earlier. When it got too difficult to stay in their home country and saw no other solution, they decided to move.

### **5.2 Factors leading to migration**

The women in the study stated they had to flee poverty, hunger and violence in their old neighbourhoods and perceived migrating as their only option to survive. Andrea, a 20-year-old young woman, arrived four days before the interview was held in Bogotá with her husband, two children and little brother. After many people in her family died after not being able to get treatment due to the lack of medical personnel and medication, she decided to leave Venezuela. *"There is nothing left in Venezuela. People who have stayed there are staying because it wasn't possible to leave. I'm sure that if we all could leave Venezuela, we all would do that."* Andrea and her husband do not have any contacts in Bogotá, do not have employment and are forced to live on the streets. Andrea's story clearly shows the desperation in Venezuelan migrants leaving Venezuela.

The cities where the women in the study came from in Venezuela vary. Some women came from big cities such as Caracas, Valencia, Barquisimeto, Merida and Maracaibo while others migrated from relatively smaller cities such as San Cristobal, Maracay, San Fernando and Valera. Most of the women in the study mentioned the neighbourhoods they lived in, are similar to the neighbourhood they currently live in, in Bosa. Many described their old neighbourhoods to be of the lower socio-economic status. Especially after 2015, their old neighbourhoods became very dangerous due to the high rise of criminality. Gabriela came nine months ago to Bogotá with her two children. She was forced to leave her old neighbourhood in San Fernando while pregnant with her daughter.

*“About five years ago, I was doing fine in Venezuela. The last year, however, it became a very critical situation. I was pregnant with my daughter but had to go to bed sometimes without eating so the small children would be able to have food. Incidentally, we only ate once a day”*  
(Gabriela, 20 years old).

Some women mentioned they and/or their husbands were fired from their jobs since they worked at companies owned by the government of Venezuela. Due to the crises they were forced to cut back and fire many employees. Laura mentioned it was very easy to find a job in Venezuela but since the money lost all its value, it became impossible to pay for all the daily expenses. *“It rains jobs in Venezuela. It’s so easy to find the job you want to do there, but the thing is that the salary is not enough. What you earn is not going to be enough for food, the expenses you need. It is basically as if you had no job. That’s why I migrated, with the aim to reach a better quality of life and to get my daughter forward”* (21 years old). All women with children made clear their children's' wellbeing was their top priority. Katherin, a mother of a young boy and pregnant of her second child, explains: *“I came to Bogotá because of the situation in Venezuela. I began to see that things were not working well and because of my son. Yes, because of my son, I decided to undertake this journey of coming here, to give him a better future, because there is no future at all there”* (24 years old).

### **5.3 Expectations of livelihood in Bogotá**

Visa restrictions and cost of travel are among the main factors that were indicated by the Venezuelan women in the study influencing the destination choice of Colombia. When asked why the women specifically chose Bogotá for their stay, they mentioned having wanted to remain close to Venezuela, hoping to return as quick as possible when the crisis declined in the country. Moreover, this decision was heavily influenced by the access to livelihoods. As many women in the study stated, employment is a key source of protection. Many believed the opportunities to find work in Bogotá would be high because of the enormous size of the city and, therefore, expected there would be a high demand for workers. These expectations were, however, rarely met. Katherin has lived for three years in Bogotá. Before she got pregnant, she worked every day of the week from 08:00 till 19:00 ‘o clock in a restaurant earning 20,000 pesos a day (+/- 5,50 euros). Earning this little money was something she did not expect before coming to Bogotá. *“When I wanted to come to Bogotá, they told me that here the money earned would be enough for many people, and this is not true. With the minimum wage here, it is only possible to eat, to survive, to pay rent and to pay for utilities. It was not as I had been told. Although it is more than there, in Venezuela, it is not what I expected.”* (24 years old).

Lucera had high expectations about her stay but was also soon disappointed. She has lived for two months in Bogotá. Her husband left earlier to Peru while she was staying with her mother and two children in Venezuela. After a couple of months her husband left her for a Peruvian woman. After this she decided to migrate, together with her two children and mother, to her brother and uncle who were already in Bogotá. *“I came to Bogotá with the idea to be able to give everything to my children, to have my own things, my own house and to be able to live well. I wanted to work*

*hard, earn money and take care of my children because I do not get the support of the father of my children. That was my dream”* (23 years old). Lucera explained that due to the difficulties of being discriminated in Bogotá, not being able to find a job, having a small, crowded house that was full of flees, and because children kept becoming sick, she started to doubt whether to return to Venezuela. Also, Gabriela described her stay in Bogotá as more complicated than it was before migrating;

*“My stay in Bogotá does not meet the expectations that I had before coming. I thought that everything was going to be easier with work and stuff, but in reality, when I arrived here, it became more complicated.”* (Lucera, 20 years old).

Only one woman in the study was positive about her stay in Bogotá. Clau is 22 years old and arrived two years ago, together with her husband. Most of her family migrated to Peru, but Clau mentioned she was happy in Bosa, where she and her husband both have a job, her child is in school, and they are expecting a second baby. *“I don’t plan to return to Venezuela. I won’t return because I like it here and the quality of life is a little better. It is one with a salary. It is like here I am living as if I was turning back in time. In 2010, Venezuela was like that. I like Colombia. I think that we are settling here because Venezuela is very stuck”*. Many participants in the study said they only wanted to return to Venezuela until they see a change of regime and when the economy and other institutions are rebuilt. However, this could take many years.

#### **5.4 Aspirations for the future**

All women that were interviewed indicated they were in the process of building up their (adult) lives in Venezuela until it drastically changed with the collapsing economy. It was often mentioned that the women wanted to find a nice husband, to start a family, have a beautiful house and own a car. Most of the women in the study were already married and had children. Therefore, they were more occupied with the wellbeing of their own family than many other late adolescents in relation to their transition to adulthood and migration (Jacobsen, 2006, Juárez et al., 2013, Correa-Velez, 2010). The women in the study felt they were no longer in control of their lives due to the migration experience and the (lack of) opportunities they perceived in Bogotá.

Elianny is 24 years old and is around 1.5 years in Bogotá. She described her life in Venezuela, before the crisis, as comfortable. Even though the pregnancy was unplanned, where she had to stop her studies, her and her husband found stable jobs and were happy. Ever since the crisis in Venezuela, she feels her life has completely changed; *“Emotionally we are on a lot of pressure apart that we are very young and that has marked us. It took away our youth, took away our dreams. We stopped thinking about the future that I used to be thinking of. I used to think that when I would be graduated from university, I would get my car, my house. But no, now we only think about having enough food, about being well, that the children do not lack anything. So yes, we have many responsibilities”*. The second part of Elianny’s answer shows her earlier dreams of a ‘middle-class family life’. Her inability to make these aspirations come true has given her much stress.

As was mentioned earlier, almost all women in the study mentioned that their stay in Bogotá did not meet their expectations. Therefore, other livelihood strategies were sought to increase their living conditions. Arianna was in Bogotá for four months. She came together with her husband, who makes a living by washing cars. Arianna could, however, not find employment. Their two children are staying with her mother in Venezuela. Being able to send money as remittances and not being too far from home was their main motivation behind coming to Bogotá, but since this was not going as planned she mentioned her change in strategy; *“I hope to get a job and to return my children to me. I have not worked for four months, and could not send anything to my children and help my mother. I plan to leave for Ecuador or Peru. There I have my brother and sister, and they say it is possible to earn more money”* (21 years old). Similar to Arianna, other women in the study indicated they would like to move to another country to increase their livelihood opportunities. They mostly mentioned Ecuador, Peru or Chile because they heard from other Venezuelan migrants that there would be better opportunities for finding employment, better wages and a higher chance of obtaining a working visa.

Most of the women who were asked in the study about their plans and dreams for the long term future, were not able to answer the question with detail. The vast majority of the women in the study mentioned their aspiration to return to their homes in Venezuela and the pain they feel since this cannot be realised anytime soon.

*“Everyday the situation in Venezuela worsens more and then the option of returning is impossible. It would be even suicidal; the last 30 days have been without water, there are viruses and being exposed to everything there without medicines is dangerous, even more with small children. This is not an option. But then what am I going to do? A lot of people told me they wanted to go back to Venezuela, but it can’t be done anymore”* (Laura, 21 years old).

Another main priority and long term plan that became clear is that all mothers in the study wanted to secure the futures of their children. They, however, also mentioned the difficulty in doing so. *“We are here out of necessity. We are here to improve the quality of life, or at least to save our lives because it is not even about improving the quality of life that much because also here [Bogotá] we do not have a quality of life. We are subsisting, trying to resist every day not to falter. We cry every night trying to think about what we are going to do.* (Elianny, 24 years old). Even Clau, the only woman in the study who mentioned she was relatively happy with her stay in Bogotá, described how though she had many hopes and dreams, she found it hard to think about a future;

*“I don’t think about the future, only the short term future, because you don’t know what’s going to happen. At the moment I only think about having my baby, be a good mom and that she doesn’t lack anything. Also, I would want to return to my country and finish my studies because I didn’t finish my studies now. I only finished high school and couldn’t study more to become a professional”* (Clau, 22 years old).

In sum, the Venezuelan women in the study are in the midsts of their lives. Most women who were interviewed dreamed of their own house, a car, a good job, a nice husband, and to offer their children everything they could ever wish for. Due to the crisis in Venezuela, they were forced to leave their country, making their childhood-dreams seem further away than before. The women have to survive while trying to recover from the shock of the crisis. The capitals and the strategies available to these women vary, just like their objectives are constrained by the options available and the pressure of immediate needs. The next chapter will further discuss and specify the opportunities, but also the vulnerabilities the young Venezuelan women face in Bogotá.

## 6 - Settling in: conditions in Bogotá and migrant livelihood strategies

This chapter will focus more on the empirical evidence found during the research project, relating to the host community conditions of Bogotá. It connects the data that was gathered and the descriptions given by the Venezuelan women that were interviewed about their livelihoods. The chapter is subdivided into multiple aspects relevant to the migrants in the host community. It also incorporated the capabilities from the SLF Framework. These are embedded within the vulnerability context and limiting processes and structures.

### 6.1 Legal status

Out of the interviews, it became apparent that livelihoods are profoundly affected when migrants do not have a legal status or other subsequent rights. The clear majority of participants had difficulties in obtaining a passport in Venezuela due to high prices and other problems within the institution. This leads to many migrants crossing the border at unauthorised crossings, enhancing their vulnerability in Bogotá. As is illustrated in table 3, most women in the study have an irregular status within Colombia. They mentioned that the lack of a passport and in consequence, also a lack of TMF and PEP permissions are the main issue in finding employment and in receiving health care. Arianna is one of the women in the study who does not have a passport or a work permit; *“It hasn't been easy for me because they ask for the card and ask for some papers. I don't have them, I don't have a passport, I don't have those papers. And well, I did go out to look for a job but they always ask for the card”* (21 years old). Not having any documentation therefore decreases ones livelihood opportunities and increases vulnerabilities.

Table 3: Overview of the research participants legal status

	Name	Status		Name	Status
1	Arianna	Irregular	12	Virginia	Irregular
2	Gabriela	Irregular	13	Genesis	Irregular
3	Ana	Regular	14	Fiora	Irregular
4	Elianny	Irregular	15	Annerys	Irregular
5	Laura	Irregular	16	Layla	Irregular
6	Keila	Irregular	17	Ashley	Irregular
7	Maria Alejandra	Regular	18	Andrea	Irregular
8	Katherin	Dual nationality	19	Vero	Irregular
9	Daniela	Irregular	20	Ismalba	Irregular
10	Clau	Irregular	21	Sofia	Irregular
11	Lucera	Irregular	22	Maydelis	Irregular



### *Statelessness*

Another important effect of not having any documentation is that many children from Venezuelan migrants that were born in Colombia were not granted citizenship. Namely, when foreigners want to obtain the right to Colombian nationality, they must prove their address in Colombia through a residency visa. Genesis is one of the women in the study who experienced difficulties in registering her baby; *"I came here to Bogota about ten months ago. I got pregnant and he was born here. The baby is now neither Venezuelan nor Colombian"* (18 years old). Having an irregular status, it was impossible to document her baby's citizenship, meaning her child is now stateless, further preventing access to other basic services.

### *Colombo-Venezuelans*

Only three women were in possession of a passport of which one had a Colombian ID, a *cédula*. Katherin is 24 years old and part of the large binational community. Her Colombian father had to seek refuge in Venezuela during the years of the armed conflict in Colombia. Since Katherin's parents asked for a double nationality, she also received her Colombian *cédula*. She mentioned this gave her some benefits opposed to the Venezuelan migrants who came to Bogotá without documentation. However, she also said that since her *cédula* indicates that she was born in Venezuela, this makes her documentation less powerful. In the interview she claimed that she noticed discrimination by employers for not wanting to hire since she is born in Venezuela; *"They give you a permit and they tell you the permit is for health, for work, to study. That's a lie. When you tell a lot of companies that you have the permit, they still say - No, we do not accept this permission."* The two other women in the study who had all the necessary papers, also experienced difficulties in finding a job. This shows that even though chances increased by having official permission to work in Colombia, there are still societal factors, such as xenophobia, that make it difficult to realise formal employment. Moreover, a representative of a key NGO in Colombia, the Jesuit Refugee Service (JRS), mentioned employers in Colombia are often unaware of the rights and legal regulations in relation to the Venezuelan migrants, making it difficult to find employment even for those who have permission to work.

In sum, the vulnerability context is determined by the law and policies of host governments and the way these are implemented. This is also formed by public and private institutions attitude towards migrants, which can be with attitudes of sympathy or xenophobia. Women in the study mentioned that they feel they cannot exercise their rights and see it as very difficult to obtain healthcare services, education and work without having a passport or other documentation.

## **6.2 Employment**

The participants work backgrounds were varied, whereas their educational background was similar. Employment had varied between being a saleswoman in a shoe store, cosmetologist and a street vendor. They described having a stable income and safe living condition in Venezuela before the crisis.. Due to the crisis, however, they lost their jobs and could no longer pay for their basic needs. As an effect, all of the women that were interviewed in the study said their main survival strategy was to come to Bogotá to find employment. However, as was mentioned in the regional context, it is very difficult for young women in Colombia to find employment, and the

extra factor of being a migrant does not make this easier. As is illustrated in table 4, almost all of the women in the study were not working. Some women found formal employment in a bakery or as a manicurist, while others were informally selling candy in buses. Four women were sex workers. Their experiences are described in box 1.

Table 4: Overview of employment situations of respondents

	Name	Employment		Name	Employment
1	Arianna	None	12	Virginia	None
2	Gabriela	None	13	Genesis	None
3	Ana	Informal: cosmetics, massages	14	Fiora	None
4	Elianny	Informal: sells cake and cosmetics, massages	15	Annerys	None
5	Laura	Informal: sells candy	16	Layla	Formal: bakery
6	Keila	Informal: sells candy	17	Ashley	None
7	Maria Alejandra	Formal: Bakery	18	Andrea	None
8	Katherin	None	19	Vero	Formal: prostitution
9	Daniela	None	20	Ismalba	Formal: prostitution
10	Clau	Formal: manicurist	21	Sofia	Informal: prostitution
11	Lucera	None	22	Maydelis	Informal: prostitution

Genesis was still studying in Venezuela. It was, however, impossible for her to continue her studies due to the crisis and on top of that, she became pregnant with her first child. The possibilities to invest in an education disappeared, and Genesis came to Bogotá to find a job; *“I was already looking for a job here [in Bogotá] when I was in Venezuela.*

*I was looking for a job a lot but I was never called, I never had a stable job here, no. And now I’m here in Bogotá, I put my resumes in stores and they haven’t called me. In the name of God, I find a good job. I need a lot of work, for the stability of my son, for the rent, for the services, for the food.”* (Genesis, 18 years old).

#### *Lack of employment opportunities*

With a PEP permission or with a work visa, it is permitted to have a formal job in Colombia. For many Venezuelan migrants, however, it is impossible to obtain this work permit since they are irregular migrants. As mentioned earlier in the regional context, around 60 per cent of the Venezuelan migrants are in a regular situation, whereas 40 per cent are in an irregular situation. The participants in this study are in an irregular situation, not having a passport and/or other permission to stay. Layla, a young mother of three children, came to Bogotá to find employment but soon became demotivated; *“I have seen that Colombians also find it difficult to be able to find a job, let alone somebody who is an emigrant from Venezuela, this makes it even more difficult. Everybody goes out to look for work and nothing, nothing and nothing.”* (23 years old).

All women that were interviewed expressed looking for work in various fields, both formal and informal. It did not matter what type of employment providing they could earn money. In spite of this, the vast majority were unable to find employment. Moreover, Elianny mentioned that even though she has a PEP-permit, she remained unemployed. She mentioned how xenophobia inhibits her livelihood opportunities. *“It is very difficult. Very difficult because there are people who tell you that when they offer a job vacancy, they do not want Venezuelan people because they want to give the job to people from here [Colombians]”* (Elianny, 24 years old). The case of Elianny, shows how xenophobia further deepens the vulnerability of the women and prevents integration in the host country. This leads to reinforced segregation between this Venezuelan population and the Colombians.

### *Informal employment*

Informal employment refers to employment that goes unreported and that is not covered by the regulatory framework. In effect, this type of employment leaves the worker unprotected. They are not covered by pension contributions, and do not receive health insurance, making it difficult to see a doctor. However, by conducting informal employment activities, it escapes the lack of employment alternatives and means one can gain independence from exploitative practices. Hereby, it can allow them to combine work and family responsibilities. For example, four of the women in the study mentioned they sold candy in buses and on the street. Laura is a caring single mother of a one-year-old daughter. For over one year, Laura has been going every day with her baby into the buses to sell candy. The money she earns varies between 10,000 to 15,000 COP a day, which is around 2 to 4 euros. Laura explained her income is dependent on the willingness of the people in the bus to pay and whether she is able to do certain time shifts on the buses. She explained the competition between the informal candy vendors is very difficult at times and causes fights; *“We don’t have any stable jobs so we have always sold sweets in buses and on the street. There is a lot of trouble between sellers though. The vendors here don't like us also working on the buses. So let's just say his integrity was at risk, too. He began to have many problems with the other sellers here and made the decision to go to another place because he was at risk. They had threatened him, just for the fact of being a seller, for the fact of being Venezuelan, for the fact of defending himself.”* (21 years old). The man Laura talks about is her brother, who also came to Bogotá with the hope of making a living out of selling candy. He soon, however, came into conflict with other vendors in the bus and received threats, causing him to flee to another city in Colombia.



Image 1: Selling candy in buses (Source: El Tiempo, 2014)

## Box 1: Venezuelan migrant women working in prostitution

In Bogotá's most popular downtown red-light district of Santa Fé, Sofia, a former high school student and mother of two children from Venezuela, stood beside the road waiting for her first client of the day. She used to work inside a brothel but decided to leave and work on the streets; *"I work here now in the street because it is still better than that it would be inside [referring to brothels]. I work here from 8 in the morning until I have made enough money for the day to support my children and family in Venezuela. Sometimes, I continue to work till 11 at night."* Sofia mentions she worked in one of the many brothels in Santa Fé, but since her pimp would force her to work more hours and did not help her when clients treated her bad, she left. *"The client is king. Losing a client is worse than us being treated badly."* Sofia is one of many Venezuelan women working in prostitution in Colombia. At the moment around 70 to 80 per cent of the sex workers in Santa Fé are from Venezuela, according to Fidelia Suarez, the head of ASMUBULI, a Colombian sex workers association. However, little is known about the true scale of this largely invisible problem.

Isalba also works in prostitution, but in contrast to Luisa, works for a pimp in a brothel. She says she had no choice but to start working as a sex worker. *"I came to Bogotá and immediately started looking for a job. After two months, and still not being able to find anything, I decided to work here."* She was studying before the crisis hit Venezuela and never expected to be doing this type of work. When her cousin, whom she came together with to Bogotá, started working in the brothel, she also decided to do so. The pressure having to take care of her family members who are still in Venezuela, and the hopelessness of not being able to find other employment possibilities left her thinking this was the only option left. Isalba continued: *"The greatest struggle here in Bogotá is to be here in this situation, not having a proper job while my mind is with my family in Venezuela."*

The stories of the women, make clear that they are faced with limited opportunities when they arrive in Bogotá, led them to become sex workers. The economic outcome for these women varies but is significantly higher than the other migrant women mentioned in the study. For example, Sofia explained she earns around 200/300 thousand pesos (54/80 euros) per day being a lot higher than the 20/30 thousand (5,5/8 euros) that many of the other respondents who are doing other jobs mentioned. The money Sofia earned is directly spent on taking care of her children and to send as remittances to her family in Venezuela. The women that were interviewed in Santa Fé, however, mentioned they wanted to stop doing the sex work, because of shame and its risky reality. Sofia's family, for example, does not know. *"I'm ashamed to have to do this"* said Sofia visibly nervous. *"I don't want to keep doing the same job here till finally things are become better in Venezuela because that can still take a long time. I want to do something else here soon."* Another woman who was working in the streets is Maydelis. She started doing sex work four months ago, while also her family does not know about it - not even her husband who is with her in Bogotá. *"My husband thinks I'm working in a shop. Every day I think about quitting this here, [referring to sex work] but I earn enough money for us and our child now. I don't want to beg for money again on the streets and come home with nothing."*

Even though the women earn more money than the other women that were interviewed in this study, they are in far more vulnerable situations. During the interview with Sofia, she also mentioned the insecurity she would experience when being with the clients. *"Some men are nice, and some are aggressive. For example, some men take me to a room and then demand more time or want to do it without a condom."* The lack of negotiating power of the women since they are already in a vulnerable situation, leads them to be in a risk of obtaining sexual transmitted diseases.

Also, Vero mentioned the difficulties about living and working in Santa Fé. *"There are a lot of fights here. Sometimes it is for nothing really. I feel the Colombian girls are jealous because the men here prefer to have Venezuelan women. They think Venezuelan women are better."* (24 years old). Vero's story and various conversations with Colombian sex workers in the neighbourhood showed the strong competition they perceived. Colombian women explained the prices they were able to ask for sex was decreasing since more Venezuelan women started to work there and that they would feel threatened by the large number of new arrivals. One of the Colombian women said: *"They damage the business since some are so desperate to only ask for 20,000 pesos (5,5 euros)"*. Hereby, she mentioned that a lot of the Venezuelan women asking for this minimal amount of money are minors who work in a park around the corner.



Image 2: Santa Fé (source: Caracol, 2017)



Image 3: Sex workers (source: Author, 2019)

### *Caretaker of the children*

Another reason why many participants could not work is because they got pregnant or had to take care of the child(ren). When Elianny finished high school, she decided to start university since it was her dream to work in the tourism sector. Soon she found out, however, that she was pregnant and decided to stop her studies. She started working as a cosmetologist doing hair, skin, and nail treatments. This allowed her to earn a bit of extra money next to her husband's income who worked at a bank in Venezuela. When he lost his job, they both decided to come to Bogotá. Here, Elianny and her husband started earning their money by also selling candy in buses. *"We both worked in buses but since we do not have somebody to take care of the baby. We had to take the baby with us in the bus. This was very difficult and affected the baby a lot. We*

*decided not to take him anymore with us and now I am looking for a kinder-garden, a nursery, to bring him but there is no place for him. Where we live there is a high demand so there is a waiting list. Now I cannot work.*" (24 years old). Meanwhile, her entrepreneurial mind kept trying to come up with other ways to make a living. During the second interview that was held three months later, she mentioned she started to bake cakes at home and sell these on the streets. She also started to use the skills she learned during her time working as a cosmetologist and created her own small (informal) business by giving beauty treatments and massages to people at their homes. This allowed her to slightly increase her income.

### *Exploitation*

Many participants referred to labour abuses that are committed, particularly in relation to their levels of income. Lucera worked in a bakery before but quit because she felt discriminated by her employer, who would call her 'Veneca', a rude word for Venezuelan. Her uncle and brother are now the only two people in her family who are paying for the rent and food, creating a very difficult situation. She felt desperate and would easily accept other jobs, even if the working hours would be long and the salary lower than the minimum wage; *"I've heard that many Colombians here, want to humiliate a Venezuelan. They want to put you to work like a donkey. Exploitation is called that. Thank God I have an interview today in the afternoon with a lady and tomorrow, I pray to God, I will start working. The job is, however, being a kitchen assistant from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., so you're not working 8 hours, you're working more than 8 hours. That's \$30,000 [+/- 8 euros] you're gonna get paid. I mean: really?"* The minimum wage in Colombia is 828,116 COP (+/- 232 euros) per month (for 48 hours a week) as of January 1, 2019 (WageIndicator, 2019). For Lucera, this means that she would earn half of the minimum wage with her new job.

### *Stable employment*

Even though most women in the study were not able to find employment, there are also some other experiences of women who found a job. Clau and her husband, for example, are both irregular migrants in the country, but both found employment rather quickly. Her husband found a job as a barber on the same day he arrived in Bogotá and she found a job as a manicurist at the third day of arrival. She did not have any experience as a manicurist but said she was incredibly lucky with the recommendation of her Colombian neighbour. Clau is very happy that she found the job since it provided her with more stability for her family. Besides Clau, it was also relatively easy for Maria Alejandra to find employment. She is 24 years and works in a bakery. She gained working skills in a bakery back in Venezuela and also got recommended by a Colombian acquaintance to, what is now her, employer, indicating the importance of social capital. Maria Alejandra does wish for another job where she can work fewer hours, but overall, she is relatively opportunistic about her stay and chances in Bogotá.

To summarise, finding employment is the main strategy of the women coming to Bogotá but in most cases this remains to be a huge challenge due to various factors such as their legal status, xenophobia and responsibility of their children. To make ends meet, some women turned to informal work but this can bring insecurity and exploitation with it. Those working, credited their social connections in getting those jobs.

### 6.3 Security

Half of the participants mentioned they feel relatively safe in Bosa. Hereby, it was often mentioned that Bosa was similar to the neighbourhood they previously lived in Venezuela. Genesis explained that during the crisis, she started to feel increasingly insecure in the neighbourhood she lived until it became unbearable for her to stay since she became pregnant and needed medication. She describes the security situation in Bogotá as such; *“Compared to Venezuela, here is a lot of security. Oh, yes, of course”* (18 years old). Therefore, the psyche about the safety situation is not as bad as it was in Venezuela though many women in the study acknowledged that they often felt unsafe and responsible for their safety in Bosa. Ana, for example, came with her husband and son to Bogotá but felt very unsafe in the city. Her coping strategy, as she explained, is to be selective about the place and time and with whom she visits places; *“I don’t go out at night when it is dark, thank God nothing happened to us, thank God”* (24 years old). Her main fear is to be robbed since these happen frequently. Lucera experienced a robbery on the first day she came to Bogotá. While she walked out of the bus, she felt a knife to her side. She had to give her phone, and even though it had been two months, she had to borrow another persons phone to contact her family. She felt very scared that something bad might happen again. Andrea also got robbed of her belongings the first day she arrived. *“When I got here to Bogota, they stole the little I had. We fell asleep and we did not realise when we were being robbed”* (20 years old). Andrea, her husband, two children and her little brother came to Bogotá without any money or people they know. They were forced to sleep in the street or parks together with their children. After the robbery, the only things they had left were the clothes they were wearing at the time.

#### *Xenophobia*

Another important aspect of insecurity for the Venezuelan migrants in Bogotá is the increasing xenophobia towards them. Comparing to hostility towards Venezuelan migrants, Colombia remains relatively muted in comparison to other countries in the region such as Brazil and Ecuador. However, this is slowly fracturing. Foreign policy (2019) reported that clashes against the migrants sprout up across the country and Colombia’s migration authority, Migración Colombia, also express their concern about the increasing threats against migrants (Migración Colombia, 2019a). During the research period, this perception was also noted in conversations with Colombians, whereby, the idea persists that Venezuelan migrants are too lazy to work and are bringing crime into the city. Moreover, almost all of the women in the study experienced cases of discriminatory practices affecting their sense of security in the city. Most of the women mentioned they face obstacles in their livelihood opportunities from this. Arianna, for example, mentioned she avoids some streets in Bosa in order to avoid potentially dangerous situations;

*“I don’t pass by here, people are very offensive. Not all, but some Colombians. They want to come and offend you for everything, and they want to come and throw things at you.”* (21 years old).

In sum, the Venezuelan women that participated in the study experienced a lot of discrimination and xenophobia in Bogotá. This deepens the vulnerability of the women and made it more difficult for them to integrate into the host community. Moreover, robberies would in some cases deprive them of their belongings, and create challenges for their livelihoods.

## 6.4 Housing

Finding housing is often the starting point of a livelihood strategy when coming to Bogotá. Most Venezuelan migrants are moving to Bosa, Suba or Kennedy since the houses and other costs of living are cheapest in these neighbourhoods that are all in the outskirts of Bogotá. Image 4 shows a picture made in Bosa, the neighbourhood where the Venezuelan women in this study live. Most of the women that were interviewed came to live in an apartment where other family members were already. This is a huge benefit since these women immediately had a safe place to stay, together with people they know. Another strategy, was that the costs of the rent could be shared between the people who live in the apartments, and sometimes also other costs such as food or internet. Most women that were interviewed mentioned they could only afford to rent a room, apartment or section of a house from a landlord. None of the participants was able to afford their own house.



Image 4: Street in Bosa (Source: Author, 2019)

### *High costs of rent*

Many Venezuelans took part in the social housing system in Venezuela and never had to pay for their rent. This was also mentioned by some participants in the study. Coming to Bogotá, many women mentioned they feel overwhelmed by the high costs of the rent and other services. Ashley is living now for one year and three months in Bosa. She works long hours in a bakery earning only 20,000 pesos (5,5 euro) a day; *“You have to scramble the money together. There are things that you can’t buy now because you have to collect all the money to be able to pay the rent”* (22 years). Also, Fiora mentioned in the interview how her rent was her main stress factor during her stay in Bosa;

*“You don’t pay rent there [Venezuela]. That’s hard over here because this is what cost us the most, and that’s what makes us worry the most. If we cannot pay the rent, we won’t be able to stay in the house and then have to look for another place elsewhere. This would be horrible because practically, they don’t accept many Venezuelans”* (Fiora, 22 years old).



### *Xenophobia*

Fiora also mentioned that Venezuelans are often barred from renting. Some other women in the study also stated how discrimination affects their chances of finding housing. Ashley, for example, mentioned that finding a place to stay was not an easy process and she noticed a lot of discrimination;

*“This one time my husband called to find out more about the rent of a house and then hang up saying - ah, but you are Venezuelan? We don’t rent to Venezuelans. It is the fault of many of us because there are people who have also rented and left everything badly, but I mean: not everybody is the same. You have to give new people a chance too”* (Ashley, 22 years old).

### *Housing and social capital*

Most of the respondents mentioned, however, that it was relatively easy to find housing. This is in contrast with the findings from the data of Proyecto Migración Venezuela (Acosta, 2019), that states 54.9 per cent of the Venezuelan migrants find it difficult to find housing in Bogotá. As was the case with Genesis, many of the participants in the study already knew people that moved to Bogotá before they came to the city themselves. Therefore, their social connections helped them in finding housing or they moved into the same house their family members were already living. However, not everybody was that lucky to be able to make use of social connections to find housing in Bogotá. Andrea came with her husband, two children and little brother to Bogotá without knowing anybody in the city. The money they received from begging was directly used to pay for food. They were hoping, however, to be able to use their time soon in finding a job in order to pay for housing. *“Here, the rooms are expensive. They are 45,000 pesos if you understand me. Imagine paying daily 45,000. Where are we going to get that money? We can’t do it. I don’t have a job and we just can’t pay for it. I start crying at night because I don’t have anything”* (20 years old). Andrea describes the stress of finding a house in Bogotá. The costs of renting an apartment without having a stable income make their living conditions very insecure since they had to sleep in the streets.

In sum, each housing situation was different between the women, but a common theme was the high costs of the apartments and the need to share a room or apartment with more Venezuelan migrants in order to split the costs. Even though there are many challenges in being able to pay the monthly rent for the housing, many of this study’s participants found it relatively easy to find housing through their social network of previously migrated family members.

## **6.5 Health services**

When the women were asked about their health, more than half of them expressed that they did notice changes in their health after arriving in Bogotá. The cold climate was often mentioned by the respondents as the main factor causing problems for their health or their children.

*“Coming here it gives us headaches. We got a lot of times the flu and allergies. It affects us a lot because we come from hot soil. We are not used to the cold here”* (Fiora, 22 years).

### *Mental health*

Besides the cold, many women mentioned stress causes problems for their health. *“We have more headaches here. Sometimes we cannot sleep, and many times we have stomach discomfort. It’s because we are under a lot of pressure and yes, the climate also affected us a little but more than that it is of emotional reasons. Our youth is taken away from us and it took away our dreams”* (Elianny, 24 years old). The change in the social environment after migrating, and a decreased family and social support system in young peoples lives, creates increased vulnerability with high psychological stress. This was confirmed by a psychologist in Bogotá who has many adolescent clients, including Venezuelan migrants. She mentioned the Venezuelan migrants are forced to grow up faster. The family relations are often strong in Latin-American countries, making it difficult to live in another country without having their parents near. It was recognised how forced migration has an extensive psychological impacts, whereby anxiety and depression among young migrants are widespread. The traumatic experience of having to flee the home country is then exacerbated by daily stressors of displacement, poverty, risks of violence and exploitation, discrimination and social isolation.

### *Healthcare*

Colombian hospitals provide preventive care and medicines to the population that is registered in the Colombian health system. Venezuelan migrants who have a regular status, work permit, and formal employment can receive healthcare. Additionally, the Colombian government established a social assistance program called SISBEN. This is a unified household vulnerability index that is used to identify beneficiaries that would receive subsidised social protection. This social protection guarantees access to essential health care and basic income security. However, since a lot of Venezuelan migrants in Colombia have an irregular status they are not able to apply for the SISBEN assessment and are not able to receive social protection. Also, when the Venezuelan women in the study were asked whether they felt they could access quality healthcare, answers were mostly negative. The women mentioned many health issues were not perceived as a direct medical emergency situation in the hospitals and since most of the women that were interviewed have an irregular status or do not have insurance in Colombia, they are left with high-costs of the treatment. This is something they were not used to. *“We didn’t have to pay for services in Venezuela, we didn’t pay for rent and health is totally free. We didn’t have to have EPS there, or be talking to social work. Nothing like that”* (Virginia, 18 years old). What Virginia means with EPS, is *Entidades Promotoras de Salud*. These are health-promoting entities that subsidise health costs for the people who have formal employment in Colombia. Furthermore, she mentioned social workers whom you would need to talk to. These are people who assess in the hospital whether it is necessary to receive the healthcare. Also, Ana mentioned that she desperately searched for a hospital that would provide covered treatment;

*“My child has gotten sick twice already and since I don’t have SISBEN, it has been very difficult. The places that I have gone to, they did not want to attend us and so on. Because I don’t have insurance”* (Ana, 24 years old).

### *Fear of high costs*

Many more women in the study mentioned they were scared to go to a hospital due to the potentially high costs. Therefore, many women did not seek treatment for themselves or their children, even when the situation would actually require medical attention.

*“A while ago, my little cousin got an asthma attack. He turned purple and was hospitalised what lasted six days. Then he got charged two million pesos. Imagine, how could they ever pay for this? From where? We came here for a better future and better stability, and then they are going to charge you two million pesos. Those people were ruined! Now my child has diarrhoea, I can’t explain why. Yesterday he peed on me with blood and today there was blood again. It scares me a lot, but I haven’t gone [to the doctor] because I don’t know, I don’t know. They have told me that here the Venezuelans aren’t treated and I won’t take him to a place where I know they won’t be treated” (Lucera, 23 years old).*

Lucera’s fear of receiving a high medical bill shows the danger for her son, who clearly needs to see a doctor. Moreover, since many participants already had limited access to food in quantity and quality, stayed in places that sometimes lack good hygiene and lived in a relatively cold environment with a lot of rain, there was a higher risk of viral diseases; *“Our health changed a lot since we came here. My child keeps having viruses, and then I also get it. We are here, and we keep having diarrhoea and vomit” (Andrea, 26 years old).*

### *Pre- and post-natal treatment*

Many pregnant Venezuelan women travel to Colombia to specifically seek healthcare for pre- and post-natal treatment due to the near-collapse of the healthcare system within Venezuela. Also, four women who participated in the study gave birth to their baby in Colombia, and two women were pregnant at the time of the interview. They mentioned their pregnancies were one of the reasons coming to Bogotá. However, many women described how the high costs of healthcare made it impossible for them to take their baby’s to the doctors for post-natal treatment. Genesis could not have ultrasounds during her pregnancy and since the baby is born, she has not been able to have him seen by a doctor;

*“When I was pregnant, I never got an ultrasound or some exams, ever. I needed to have money and pay for it. I have to pay, but I cannot. The day I went to give birth, I luckily didn’t pay anything because I had a normal delivery. If it had been a cesarean, I would have had to pay, but as a normal delivery, I didn’t. Now my son is here but he has still not been seen by a paediatrician. We don’t go because I don’t have the money for it. Whenever I would go, it would be because it is an immediate urgency” (Genesis, 18 years old).*

To summarise, most women in the study perceive access to treatment as difficult. They were aware that they would receive free medical care in case of an emergency. However, fear persists whether a health situation would be viewed as a direct emergency, and be therefore financially covered, or not.

## 6.6 Education

Looking at the previous education the women received in Venezuela, interesting findings are to be found in the study. Except for Annerys and Ashley, all of the women interviewed could finish high school. Some of them also started to study in higher education, but only Elianny was able to receive a university degree. The reason most participants gave for having to quit their education was because they became pregnant during high school or university. After giving birth to their child, they would stay home to take care of the baby or start a job which required limited qualifications. Most of these women were still looking for employment in Bogotá.

Moreover, as mentioned in the regional context, many of the migrants who have fled Venezuela, are students who could no longer afford to study. For example, Virginia recently had to quit her studies. *“I wanted to study medicine, but there was no possibility to have education anymore in Venezuela, and there is just nothing anymore actually. So I decided to come here to Bogotá. Also because my mother is a little ill with her health so I decided to come and see if I could get a job and help her by sending her money. To help her buy the medicines”* (18 years old). When it was asked what Virginia would like to be doing most in Bogotá, she answered she would like to continue her studies but cannot imagine a way for this dream to be realised. *“I don’t know about the studies here, because they ask for a lot of papers. And imagine, here if you go to work, you can’t study because you still have to pay for all your expenses and have a work schedule from 8 am to 8 pm”*. Students, thus, perceived many barriers in not having the necessary documentation and financial support, making it very difficult to finish their studies in Colombia. It is notable that many participants still dream about continuing their studies;

*“I have to finish my studies and be someone in life. I am going to do it so that my children feel proud of me and above all my family”* (Arianna, 21 years old).

### *Children’s education*

All of the mothers in the study mentioned that finding employment is a direct strategy to provide the family with all the basic needs. Providing their children a good education was the main priority with an eye towards their future wellbeing. However, Laura explained that it is difficult for her to achieve this. *“What future are we offering our children? I would like my son to go to university, but what can I offer? Maybe that moment is very far away, but I have to think about it. We cannot save money, and that’s not because we don’t want to. It’s very difficult because we don’t have a choice”* (21 years old). Nevertheless, almost all of the mothers in the study found a school for their children, which they were positive about, saying it was a lot better than in Venezuela. The women whose children were not in school or kindergarten mentioned this was because the children are too young and/or do not perceive it as necessary yet. The only exception was Andrea. She was trying to find a public school where she could enrol the children but perceived this as difficult, despite Colombia offering free education to migrant children. Currently, there are more than 130,000 Venezuelan children enrolled in schools across Colombia (Unicef, 2019). This pressure of numbers created by the Venezuelan influx leads to a lack of school spaces meaning it can be difficult to find a school. Since Andrea could not find a public school, she began exploring the

prices of private schools. Andrea soon found out, however, that this would be impossible due to the high costs.

In sum, the Venezuelan women interviewed were hindered from completing their studies by the crisis in Venezuela and/or by getting pregnant. Women also experienced barriers in Colombia, due to a lack of the necessary documentation and financial possibilities. Furthermore, most women in the study did not experience any difficulties in finding education for their children and were positive about this fact.

### 6.7 Savings and remittances

All of the women in the study had limited financial resources. This can be explained since the profile of the migrants arriving in Colombia has changed a lot over time. From the earlier arrivals, who left Venezuela around 2015, many were able to support themselves. However, Venezuelans who seek refuge more recently have far less financial resources to navigate their migration journey. Since all of the women that were interviewed do not have any savings, they have to live by the day and are struggling to make enough money to support their livelihoods. Table 5 illustrates the strategies of the women to be able to have enough money to pay for their living expenditures.

Table 5: Strategies used by participants to gain financial resources

<b>Strategies used by participants to raise money</b>	
Income raising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Formal employment (eg. manicurist, baker)</li> <li>• Vending candy</li> <li>• Food preparations and vending (eg. cakes)</li> <li>• Prostitution</li> <li>• Selling assets (eg. Massages, beauty treatments)</li> <li>• Begging</li> </ul>
Lowering expenditures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cutting transport costs</li> <li>• Changes in purchasing habits (poorer quality food)</li> <li>• Buying less food</li> <li>• Scavenging</li> </ul>
Social capital	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shared childcare (with family members who are also living in the house)</li> <li>• Sharing costs of housing and other living expenditures</li> <li>• Mutual help (e.g. loans friends, acquaintances)</li> <li>• Family splitting (e.g. leaving children with family members in Venezuela)</li> </ul>

Adapted from: Meikle (2001)

Genesis explains in the interview that she lives with her mother and two brothers in Bogotá and shares a room there. She could not work since she just had her baby, but her mom and brothers would try to find ways to earn money. Everybody works independently to be able to split the costs of the rent, food and internet together. Monthly they spent around one million pesos together, which equates to 30,000-35,000 COP (8,5/10 euro's) a day. Genesis mentioned they earn 25,000-30,000 COP (7/8,5 euro's) on a good day, but on a bad day it would barely be 5,000 pesos

(1,5 euro) per person. This highlights the economic vulnerabilities many women/families face and the importance of having a stable job.

*“We don't have a stable job, we live from sweets, selling sweets and if someone wants to buy it from you and if the other day people don't want to buy it, that money is then what you take home. Your food depends on the sale of sweets, diapers depend, milk depends, it depends on whether or not being able to pay the rent, services. There are times you wake up with absolutely nothing” (Laura, 21 years old).*

#### *Possible emergency situations*

When Laura was asked what she would do in emergency situations she answered the following; *“So far we have not been presented any unforeseen costs for emergencies, thanks to God. I wouldn't know what to do if that day comes because we do not have money kept. As soon as the night falls, after all day working by selling candy there is already no more money left. Money is directly spent so the next day when we wake up we start with nothing again. So we have no choice, we cannot save money.”* The difficulty of not being able to save any money affects all the women in the study, enhancing their vulnerability to possible shocks or other emergencies. Maria Alejandra also mentioned she is not able to save any money and when her baby got sick, she had to work shifts from 6:00 in the morning till 23:00 'o clock in the night in order to afford medicine.

#### *Remittances*

Most women in the study mentioned that they came to Bogotá with the aim to earn money so they could send remittances back to their family in Venezuela. These remittances function as a critical source of support for many households who are still in Venezuela. All research participants who send remittances do this in the form of money transactions. Even though research participants came to Bogotá with this strategy, many are unable to succeed in sending the money. Genesis has been in Bogotá with her mother and two brothers since 10 months. Genesis could not work since she had to give birth and now has to take care of her baby. Her mother and two brothers are helping her, but this also means there is insufficient money left to send as remittances;

*“We have a lot of family in Venezuela and no matter how much we would want to [send money], we can't help them” (Genesis, 18 years old).*

Ana mentioned in the interview that she is sending money to her parents and siblings who are still in Venezuela and to the family of her husband. *“We send them 20,000 and that's a little bit over there, it's not enough anymore. 20,000 / 30,000 pesos every three days, but that's not enough. My husband's grandmother got sick, she had to buy all the medicines here, so it's not enough, it's not enough” (24 years old).* Ana's story shows her willingness to help relatives but it also shows the pressure this creates, especially with unforeseen costs such as the sickness of her husband's grandmother.

In sum, all of the women in the study did not have any savings. They had to live day by day, trying to make enough money to provide for the basic needs of their families. This made them more vulnerable in the sense that it would be difficult to recover from potential shocks or emergencies. Many research participants mentioned they were also trying to help their families by sending money as remittances but this is often not possible.

## 6.8 Social connections & institutional support

### Bonding connections

The majority of the women in the study had a very small social network in Bogotá. Most participants only had a couple of family members or husband who came before them to Bogotá, as the only social connections in the city. This did not seem to change a lot during the period living in the city. Elianny and Laura, were asked to participate in a second more in-depth interview, consisting of a social mapping exercise (Image 5).

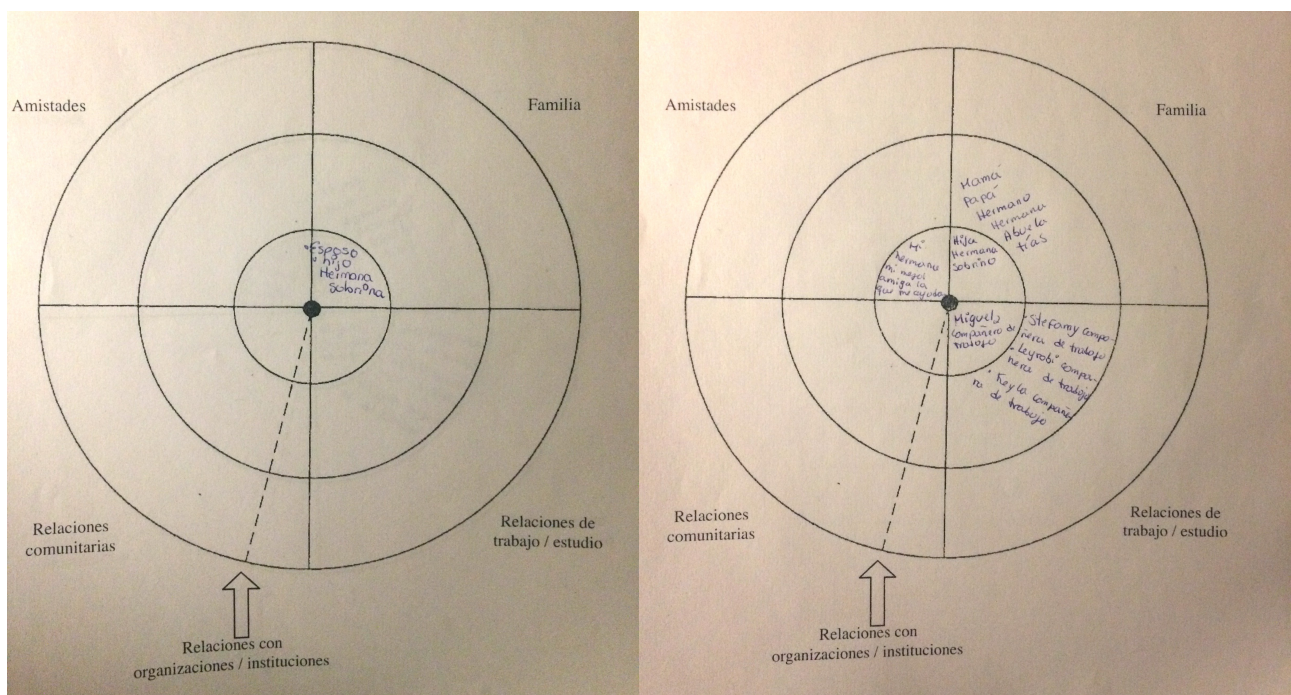


Image 5: Social mapping exercises of Elianny (left) and Laura (right)

Elianny only wrote her husband, child, sister and her niece as their family members most close to her since they are mentioned in the inner circle of the model. She could not name any other social connections in Bogotá. Laura mentioned slightly more connections. Closest to her were her daughter, sister and nephew who were all living with her in the same house in Bosa. She also wrote her sisters name in the most inner friendship circle suggesting her sister is not only family but also a best friend. Other people she mentioned that were important for her are her mother, father, brother, grandma and aunts. They were, however, still in Venezuela.

*“Having my family far away is the biggest struggle about being here in Bogotá. And well, at least I’m with my daughter and sister but, the warmth of a mother is most needed. Whenever something was wrong, I would run into the arms of mommy and here I cannot. Here I cannot even have a video call because there is no signal” (Laura, 21 years old).*

At the time of the interview, there was no electricity in large parts of Venezuela for a long time, making it impossible to contact family members. Laura mentioned that before, they would be able to have regular phone calls which offered her moral support. *“My family mostly helps me psychologically, the moral they give you. Like to let sad feelings go, that everything is going to be fine, that everything will be over soon”* (Laura, 21 years old). Besides family members, Laura mentioned some coworkers were very important to her while staying in Bogotá. At first, Laura was working alone in buses selling candy until she met Miguel there, another Venezuelan migrant who was selling candy. They decided to start working together on the buses. She mentioned it was a lot nicer to work together and socialise with him, meaning she feels less alone. She also felt safer. Other Venezuelan migrants she met on the buses are Stefany, Leyrobi and Keyla (image 5).

What became clear out of all the stories told is that social relations with family members are very strong. Besides the difficulty of missing family members who are not physically present in their new life in Bogotá, it became clear how family relations help them in their livelihood strategies. *“I lost my job in Venezuela ,and there was no more food to eat. My brother was here in Bogotá, so I talked to him to see if we could come and then we came”* (Maria Alejandra, 24 years old). Further, the women in the study never mentioned negative experiences about living with family members in Bogotá.

The stories of respondents, however, showed commonality in the suffering of the forced family separation. Many of the women had to migrate without many of their family members, and some even had to leave their children in Venezuela. These mothers delegated parenting responsibilities to other members of the family, such as grandparents, uncles or friends. Arianna is one of the women struggling immensely with the forced family separation. Together, Arianna and her husband decided that it would be better to leave their children with his mother so they could both try to earn money in Bogotá. *“It is hard to wake up with the feeling of being separated from my children. We were never separated before. It hurts me a lot to only be able to see them in a photo or video”* (Arianna, 21 years old). In the four months Arianna was in Bogotá, she was unable to find a job and was therefore unable to send money to their children and other family members in Venezuela.

### *Bridging Connections*

A small group of women found their social connections to be important in building up their new livelihoods in Bogotá. Maria Alejandra mentioned, for example, how her Colombian neighbour helped her to find a job in a bakery. Moreover, Katherin explained that she worked in a company but when she became pregnant she was no longer able to work there. Now her husband was the only one earning money for the household, making it difficult to make ends meet; “

*The day we receive the salary, we already have to pay rent, services, food and then we immediately run out of money. Thank God we have people who collaborate a lot with us in that regard. These are Colombian friends, or well, acquaintances. I met them at my job, they are very nice collaborating people”* (Katherin, 24 years old).



However, narratives mostly show the difficulty in forging new friendships and social networks in Bogotá, both with Colombians and other Venezuelan migrants. The only connections made were, in the case of Laura, with her coworkers in the buses. Reasons mentioned behind having a minimal social network in Bogotá, was the lack of social time since they both needed to take care of the children, and because they are working many hours a day in order to survive. Maria Alejandra mentioned the difficulty of building social relations with people in Bogotá. Even though she is opportunistic about the possibilities her new life in Bogotá has brought, she does not possess a large group of friends.

*“Here, almost everyone is busy. There are no moments of being able to meet, of having a friendship. No, here with everyone it is like - ‘hello how are you? Bye, I’m late for work, I’m going, I’m leaving.’ That’s how life is here. When you are for a moment not anxious, then the other person is anxious. That’s how you live” (Maria Alejandra, 24 years old).*

This lack of interaction within the group of migrants together with the lack of contact with other groups, including the host community, can constitute a form of collective social exclusion. Herein, migrants are isolated in the sense of not receiving moral support, harming their psychological well being. Besides the psychological stress of not having a diverse social network, it means migrants have limited informal resources to successfully build their lives alongside both institutional and market urban structures. The story of Maria Alejandra is, however, distinct since she did have a clear bridging connection with her Colombian neighbour helping her find employment in a bakery. Also, Katherin mentioned her contacts from her previous job would still help her out whenever they are facing hardships; *“Here it is very difficult to save money because in my case my husband is the only one who works. The day we receive the salary, we already have to pay rent, services, food and then we immediately run out of money. Thank God we have people who collaborate a lot with us in that regard. These are Colombian friends or well acquaintances. I met them at my job; they are very nice collaborating people” (24 years old).* These examples show how a social network can offer huge benefits to a livelihood.

### *Linking Connections*

Linking connections are between the migrants and the government bodies specifically designed to help them (Ager and Strang, 2008). Two interviews were held with employees of the municipality of Bogotá. Both explained how the local government of Bogotá is trying to cope with the large increase in migration. The large inflow of migrants from Venezuela represents a major social and economic challenge for Bogotá. Besides the governmental policies of providing border assistance, education for minors, and ensuring emergency and childbirth care, services that are offered by the municipality of Bogotá include various information points, including in the bus station where many Venezuelan migrants arrive into the city. Moreover, a centre was opened in the heart of Bogota, specially designed for the migrants. Besides being an information point, it is also a place where people can meet each other and start building a network. Resources are, however, extremely limited. Furthermore, most of these facilities are solely located in the centre of Bogotá instead of in the neighbourhoods where the majority of migrants live, including Bosa. Another limitation the municipality of Bogotá has is that they are prevented from providing assistance to migrants that have an irregular status. Since a big part of the Venezuelan migrant population in

Colombia are irregular, they cannot be helped through government programs. Therefore, care and humanitarian assistance are mostly coming from civil society organisations and faith-based organisations. Hereby, actions taken by churches primarily focus on the facilitation of access to food, emergency shelters, providing health services such as the delivery of essential medicines. Most women mentioned, however, in the interviews that they did not receive any form of help from institutions in Bogotá. Arianna also mentioned many sources of communication are missing; *“No I don't get any help, and you know, there's also a lack of information and a lack of news, it has to be stronger in the communication. For example, when the permissions are given. Because we do not have any source of communication”* (Arianna, 21 years old).

Only three of the women in the study mentioned they went with their children to a ‘vaccination-day’ organised in Bosa by the municipality and various NGO’s. Here they received important vaccinations that they were unable to obtain in Venezuela. Some of the women also mentioned they received some help from faith-based organisations. Laura, however, explained that even though there were some cases where help was provided, she could not participate;

*“In January or in December there was a day for toys for the children that the pastor organised, and well, these are the only two occasions I've ever been. Because I have very little time here and as we have to work a lot of time also in the buses, you also have to limit yourself a lot because, or you go, or that day you do not eat, so it is complicated too”* (Laura, 21 years old).

None of the women said they were a member of social organisations or groups in Bogotá. Most respondents were catholic and attended church meetings regularly when in Venezuela. This was no longer a priority since moving to Bogotá, where time is prioritised on earning sufficient money to afford food that day.

In sum, within the research area of Bosa limited numbers of organisations are active in providing help. Moreover, participants did not seem to have many new relationships within the city of Bogotá, making it more difficult to move forward both physically (through help in finding employment and housing) and emotionally (through socialising). It became clear that within the participant pool, the women found it difficult enough to get through the day and had no interest in friendships.

## 7 - Gender matters

This chapter explains how gender differences and inequalities both in Venezuela and the receiving country, Colombia, shape the experiences and behaviours of men and women. The analysis emphasises the significance of broader social factors involved in influencing women's roles and access to possible resources, facilities and services in the migration process.

### 7.1 Decision on migration

As explained in the theoretical framework, gender forms the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships. Gender relations and hierarchies within a household affect decisions regarding the migration strategy. The interests of women and men do not always coincide and affect decisions about who manages to migrate, for how long and to which countries. Hereby, gender discrimination and norms in the household and society push particular groups of people to migrate in specific ways. Men may be expected to support the family economically, and migrate sooner to try to earn money, while it may be less acceptable for women. Women appear more likely than men to migrate to join other family members (Piper, 2005). This is consistent with the findings from the Venezuelan women interviewed in the study. Most of the young women migrated after their husbands or other family members came to Bogotá. They explained their family members or husbands already looked for housing and found a way to make a living; *"I was at the border and my husband was working here in Bogotá. So, it was very difficult. I was over there and he was over here. And then, he had an accident here in Bogota, in Colombia. After the accident, I came here with my kids and everything and now even the sun is here today"* (Arianna, 21 years old). Thus, none of the women mentioned they were the first of their family to migrate on their own to Bogotá.

### 7.2 Changing roles

In the theoretical framework, it was discussed how the literature on gender roles in Latin America suggests that the concept of machismo (and marianismo) is of importance on identity forming. This entails what is socially and culturally the norm to be male and also defines what it is to be female. Hereby, Triandis (1984) stated that women are presented as o.a. self-sacrificing, nurturant, respectful and needing to be sheltered, while men are idealised as masters, stronger, more intelligent and less emotional. This is, however, increasingly being questioned with the claim that these norms have changed throughout the last 20 years and that there is a much wider and more complex range than these stereotypes (Vigoya, 2003). Gabriela, however, did notice a strong machismo culture in Colombia. During the nine months she has been living in Bosa, she got to meet her Colombian boyfriend. *"I have a boyfriend here and he liked to go out to drink but he didn't like me to go out, so I didn't go out, and he comments on the way I dress, the way I talk"* (20 years old). She continued about her experiences and the differences she noted between the machismo norms in Venezuela and Colombia; *"Yeah, there is less machismo in Venezuela. Well, yes there is but not as much as here. Here a Colombian has his Colombian wife and others next to her. The woman is locked up in the house and he is in the street"* (Gabriela, 20 years old).

Also, the migration process in itself may challenge traditional gender roles. After migrating, a migrant can experience, for example, greater decision making power and a greater burden of responsibility and labour (Piper, 2005). Hereby, migration can produce positive and empowering experiences for women and leads to women's benefit, whereby social upward mobility is experienced. Hugo (2000) states *"an empowering experience for women is influenced by the context in which the migration occurs, the type of movement, and the characteristics of the women involved"*. Empowerment is more likely to occur when the migration draws women from rural to urban areas, separates them from a family group and engages them in formal employment outside the home, for an extended period. Therefore, in some contexts, migration can be empowering for women. However, migration may also contribute to downward mobility in the host country, where further marginalisation occurs. The study reveals that many of the women who were interviewed experienced social downward mobility since they had to engage in jobs that are beneath their educational qualifications or since they would not be able to find employment at all; *"[S]ometimes I feel bad because I quit my job [in Venezuela]. I just stopped working to come here [Colombia]. And here, I was thinking that you can find work, but it was different because I cannot find a job. Not without that paper, I can't find anything"* (Arianna, 21 years old). The women in the study also experienced an added work burden due to the pressures of paying for rent and food, while others also assumed more responsibilities in taking care of the children. Lucera, for example, came together with her two children to Bogotá to live with her mother, brother and uncle. In the interview, she explained the importance of having her children close to her, but at the same time, making it more difficult to make a living;

*"At least I'm happy to have my children here. Sometimes however I feel that if my children were not here I would develop more, if you understand me. My baby boy is very close to me and he always want to be near to his mother. If I would be alone I could develop more because I would not have the children there in the house. Now I have to go home because he cries a lot, till he turns purple. But still, I thank God that I have my children here with me because imagine if they would have stayed in Venezuela. I would not be complete, no I would not be complete"*  
(Lucera, 23 years old).

Forced migration has resulted in a change of roles from what they were previously doing in Venezuela, where they now care for their children with minimal opportunities to work. This shift in responsibilities clearly impacts on the welfare and future of the women. As was the case with Lucera, pregnancy or breastfeeding diminishes the chances of getting a job and makes building up a livelihood more difficult. Gender roles are thus prevalent.

*"It is very different to be a man, because a man can work the eight hours, or maybe twelve but when you already have a baby it is more complicated because then you think: 'Ah the baby where can I leave it?' Or if it is in a kindergarten, the baby leaves at four or the latest to leave a garden is at five. A man can stay working until seven or eight at night, a woman if she has a baby, no, she can't do it because her garden is until four"* (Laura, 21 years old).

Strict gender norms ensure women are supposed to be the caretaker of the children, prevalent in most of the interviews held. It should be noted, however, that the field notes showed that there are also exceptions where men are the main carer. Maria Alejandra also mentioned other gender norms of the host society and how this affects the migration of women and men differently. Namely, how Venezuelan migrant men are perceived as more threatening in Colombia than women are: *“It is more difficult for them [men], yes, a lot. Yes, because here there are more bad men, who steal, than it is for women. There is more distrust, if you understand me, instead with the women it is always a little more peaceful. And yes, in all ways it is more difficult for men: to wash, to cook..in all senses it is more difficult for them”* (24 years old). The more stereotypical idea of machismo and marianismo prevails here.

### **7.3 Income generation**

As was mentioned in the theoretical framework, gender-segregated labour markets in host communities offer different opportunities and rewards to male and female migrants. Globally, most migrant women generate income through jobs considered as unskilled, as they are often poorly paid and performed in the domestic domain (Piper, 2005). Moreover, Piper (2005) emphasises the deskilling and disqualification that many women in Latin America experience, where they possess high school and/or graduate-level education. As a result, women often end up doing unskilled jobs which tends to be looked down upon socially and devalued economically, unlike skilled jobs which promise more rights. Arianna has been in Bogotá for four months, looking for a ‘decent’ job. She feels undervalued and perceives her chances for personal socioeconomic empowerment as limited. In order to pay for her expenses, she became an informal street vendor;

*“For a woman it is too embarrassing. I am very ashamed to walk around with bags offering oranges and lemons. If I were a man, I would also have had the opportunity to do any kind of job because here are more jobs for men than for women”* (Arianna, 21 years old).

As mentioned previously, gender-segregated job markets influence the work opportunities, also in Bogotá, where it is more difficult for young women to find employment. It should also be noted that almost all of the women in the study were unable to complete high school since becoming pregnant. Therefore, pregnancy had a big effect in relation to their human capital (education). In contrast, this is less impactful for men since they are more able to continue their studies or jobs during the pregnancy of their wives and after the baby was born. However, the statement of Arianna that Venezuelan migrant men can easily find a job seems to be exaggerated.

### **7.4 Sexual exploitation**

Many Venezuelan women are at high risk of sex trafficking, sexual exploitation, and other forms of gender-based violence (GBV). This vulnerability is fuelled by different factors including dangers of the journey before coming to Bogotá, the extra risks of being undocumented, lack of access to essential services and safe livelihoods, and the feeling of desperation to support family members in Venezuela. These vulnerabilities create opportunities which perpetrators exploit. Gender discrimination tends to travel with the migrants and is exacerbated in displacement. Also, many

women in this study mentioned cases where it is clear that individuals, communities and/or institutions can drive people to take advantage of pre-existing norms that condones men's entitlement over young women. Lucera mentioned that many men automatically assumed she would be open to having sex with them simply for being a Venezuelan young woman. Lucera explained that she regularly receives private messages on Facebook from men offering her 50 to 100 thousand pesos (14 to 28 euros) to have sex with them. She added that if she would not have the support of her brother and uncle who are covering her costs while staying in Bogotá, she might have accepted the offers. This clearly shows the particular risk for Venezuelan migrant women of being sexually exploited by participating in survival sex. One-third of the women in the study described men approaching or contacting them online. Survival sex is, for many women, the only option available to ensure their own survival and that of their family. Especially, the women who are in an irregular situation.

A similar experience was explained by Laura. *"There are many Venezuelans who are prostituting themselves and people assume that all Venezuelans come to prostitute. So people already think you're going to do that type of work. Because I sell candy on the street, is because I did not come to prostitute myself, I came to work and this is the only way to have work. It is very uncomfortable that someone comes to offer you that kind of work. Many times people tell me they have a job for me and ask for my number and it turns out it is for something else"* (21 years old). Fiora explained that existing gender norms and discrimination limit her chances of finding employment;

*"I put my resume in a bakery and, I obviously left my number there to be called. Nor did he call me for work or anything, but he did write me at Whatsapp that we should go out. He invited me to eat, and that we should go without my son. And what I did was block him from Whatsapp and he didn't give me a job. And that's also why you lose a lot of work, because they want you to go out with them and I'm not going to do that, I'd rather not work. I'd rather not get a job. Really, rather than, than to get a job with an interest in something. Maybe they're not all like that, maybe not all, but there are many, too many like that"* (Fiora, 22 years old).

In sum, gender discrimination and norms in the household and society clearly affected the women in the study. The decision to migrate was in all cases based on husbands or other family members whom came earlier to Bogotá. The study reveals most of the women experienced social downward mobility. Also, strict gender norms ensure women are supposed to be the caretaker of the children. Lastly, participants mentioned cases of men taking advantage of pre-existing norms that condones their entitlement over young women adding the risk of being sexually exploited.

## **8 - Discussion**

This chapter seeks to synthesise the threads of the theoretical concepts and the empirical findings that were discovered into an analysis of what it means to be a young female migrant in Bogotá. The SLF was chosen as a building block for this study in order to better understand the situation of urban migrants. Hereby, an emphasis was placed on the concept of the labour segmentation theory, gender and the transition to adulthood.

### **8.1 Migrating to the city**

In the first empirical chapter, the decision of migrating to Bogotá and the expectations were discussed. Findings showed that the lack of food, medication and safety in the women's hometowns in Venezuela, forced them to migrate to Bogotá. In Bogotá, the women expected to find employment since it is a big city with a higher demand for employees. With regards, the feminisation of the workforce reflects the expansion of transnational migration (Herrera, 2013). Also, Temin et al. (2013) speak about the concentration of opportunities in the cities, mentioning young migrants have more education possibilities, health institutions, diverse labour and capital markets and a range of NGO's and community groups in urban areas. Even though in theory, cities would consist of more schools, hospitals and other institutions, the study shows this does not immediately provide migrants access to it. Out of the interviews with the women, it became clear that there are limiting structures and processes in the host community, making it very difficult for them to use their unique assets and reinvest them in their livelihood opportunities. Hereby, the situation was shown to be worse for the Venezuelan women who have an irregular status in the study, causing problems in obtaining healthcare services, education and work in Colombia. The women also experienced various barriers in improving their livelihoods due to the xenophobia that further limited chances of finding employment, housing and even imposed security problems. Thus, although the job markets are more diverse in urban areas, it is still found to be extremely difficult to find stable employment. According to the findings of the study, it would be too simplistic to state that voluntary rural-urban migration or forced migration towards an urban region would automatically bring opportunities. Dependence on the cash economy while living in a city is a strong vulnerability for the urban migrant. Young migrant women can, therefore, be found marginalised, vulnerable and unable to take advantage of the resources that may be within walking distance in a city.

### **8.2 Livelihood strategies**

Within this research, it was chosen to make use of the livelihoods framework to be able to have a more in-depth insight of the women's livelihoods. The open conversations that were held with the women uncovered their challenges, struggles, creativity, combativeness and hopes. Here, the literature on the livelihoods framework sees poor households as 'strategic managers' in negotiating their livelihoods outcomes by choosing from a range of assets and options available (Chambers and Conway, 1992). However, this study on recently migrated young Venezuelan women showed that the structural processes of, for example, governmental policies and gender norms are so constraining that it is nearly impossible for the young women to make use of their assets without having high levels of insecurity and vulnerability. The women are strongly limited in

the possibilities they are having to improve their livelihoods and do not, as was suggested by Chambers and Conway (1992), make these 'rational' choices while building up their livelihoods. The young women were trying to survive day by day with varying situations, values and emotions. Henceforth, long term planning seems to be impossible, where the women are only occupied thinking about achieving their daily basic needs. The women cope with their vulnerabilities as a basis of subsequent livelihood strategies instead of being able to work towards a longterm goal and invest their assets into this. This also relates to the debate on forced versus voluntary migration. The decision to migrate is usually undertaken because there are existing strong motives that make a person want to go to another country. This then evolves into a strategy wherein, it is decided that the chances are likely to be improved in the host community. Herein, the decision to leave the home country is usually taken under very strong pressures by the circumstances and are for a big part beyond the control of the migrant.

### **8.3 Lack of social networks**

Literature underlines the importance of social capital and mentions that whether migrants in urban areas are isolated or able to take advantage of opportunities to enhance their capitals, is all depending on their ability to obtain social capital (Jacobsen, 2006). Herein, Jacobsen (2006) mentioned urban migrants are reliant on their co-nationals and that they are of main importance in the decision-making process when choosing a particular destination. This corresponds with the findings from the study, whereas, bonding capital was found to be the strongest connector for the women. Most of the women migrated after their husbands or other family members migrated, increasing their opportunities for finding housing. This also shows how social capital can work as a catalyst for other capitals. The women in the study who were able to find formal employment credited their bridging social connections in getting those jobs. However, this study discovered that the overall social networks of the Venezuelan women that were interviewed were very limited. The bridging connections, such as local friendships or acquaintances, were almost not present within their new livelihoods of Bogotá making it more difficult to have access to resources in the city and to move forward both physically and emotionally. The most heard argument for not being able to have social connections in the city was because the women do not have time to socialise since they are desperately trying to make money to get through the day. Also, the linking connections seemed to be extremely limited within the research area of Bosa since there are not many organisations active in providing help. This finding results to be the opposite of what Jacobsen (2006) claimed that it is likely for migrants to have a broad social network in urban areas due to a greater population density resulting in more access to information and resources. Also, Eklund (2000) mentioned women are more dependent on social networks in the destination than men are. A lot of women in the study mentioned, however, they had to take care of the children and that they would not have a lot of social connections because of this reason. Subsequently, it might be more likely that men have a greater social network since they are mainly outside of the house to earn money. This research, however, has only focused on young women's experiences. Comparisons between the social networks and experiences of men and women are, therefore, difficult to make.



#### **8.4 Migration and gender**

The gender analysis chapter discussed the literature of Hugo (2000), who mentioned migration could produce a positive and empowering experience for women. The young Venezuelan women in this study, however, seem to experience a downward mobility process in the host country. Even though most of the women in the study could not finish high school due to an unplanned pregnancy, they were often employed before the crisis hit Venezuela and their migration journey began. Being in Bogotá, most women were not able to find employment, could not proceed their studies and experienced many new vulnerabilities that were not forming a threat to them earlier (before the crisis hit Venezuela). Moreover, the gender-segregated job markets also influence women migrants' work opportunities, the money they earn, and risks of exploitation (Piper, 2005). Data from Piper (2005) states how gender discrimination tends to travel with the migrants and to be exacerbated in displacement corresponding with the results from the study. Many respondents mentioned cases where they were approached by men offering them money or food in return for sex, showing the vulnerability of the women to become a victim of exploitation/survival sex. It is clear that individuals, communities and/or institutions can drive people to take advantage of pre-existing norms that condones men's entitlement over young women. Therefore, this study correlates to earlier statements from Piper (2005) that in general gender discrimination and the weaker position of many women in societies, are often the root cause for women migrants' greater vulnerability at all stages of the migration process. Thus, gender adds an important vulnerability to the process of migration and is further exacerbated with the intersectionality of being an adolescent.

#### **8.5 Migration and transition to adulthood**

Various studies state that young migrants can be identified as a key group at risk of social exclusion (Correa-Velez et al., 2010; Beirens et al.). Also, in this study it became clear that the young Venezuelan women have to grow up in contexts of extreme uncertainty and trauma of loss. Most of the women in the study mentioned the pain of not being near to their close relatives and would be visibly emotional when talking about them. Additionally, the denoted lack of bridging connections of the women that were interviewed, are consistent with the risks of this group of suffering from social exclusion. Feelings of despair were often voiced, expressing the difficulty of having to attempt to create a future in an uncertain world. Herewith, Beirens et al. (2007) mentioned that the transition from childhood to adolescence is only one among many life changes the young migrants face. The young women that were interviewed were in the midsts of building up their lives with aspirations of having a 'traditional family life'. The need to survive on a daily basis and not being able to offer their children a stable future made the women very vulnerable to depressions.

## 9. Conclusion

The crisis in Venezuela forced young women to escape the hardships in their home country since it was perceived to be no longer possible to fulfil their basic needs. Even though migrating to Bogotá involves risks, many women believed their (forced) migration strategy could unlock opportunities and a chance for prosperity by finding a stable job in the city. This would provide them with the agency to meet the basic needs, and send money as remittances to family members in Venezuela. The young women left their homes, with different degrees of preparation for what lies ahead. The ability of young migrant women to take advantage of opportunities in the host community depends on the assets available to them in daily life. The women's level of education, working experience and physical state of good health builds on their capacity to negotiate urban environments and increases employment options. However, most women in the study mentioned they were hindered in completing their studies primarily by getting pregnant or since the crisis in Venezuela started. Additionally, they did not build up a lot of this working experience which also can be explained by their young age.

Finding employment in Bogotá turned out to be a huge challenge for most of the women in the study. While it could be assumed that living in the city can offer many opportunities for the migrant women since schools, hospitals and job opportunities are physically close, the study showed the strong limiting structures and processes make it very difficult to make use of the women's assets to reinvest in their livelihood opportunities. Having an irregular migration status, xenophobia in the host country and the need to take care of the children limits the chances of finding employment. The situation was shown to be worse for the Venezuelan women that have an irregular status, causing more problems in obtaining work, healthcare services, and education in Colombia. Some of the women in the study did have bridging connections in Bogotá which proved to be a strong asset in offering them employment, but the far majority of the women have a very limited social network in the city. By not having support from social connections, especially these women who are young, risk falling into exploitation, isolation or depression. Moreover, a limited presence of public and private institutions that offer help to them was noted, being even more limited in the neighbourhood of Bosa. Therefore, the vulnerability context of women is perceived to be very strong. Gendered vulnerabilities heighten risks of sexual exploitation, including survival sex.

Coping strategies of the women who were not able to find formal employment were to earn money informally such as by selling candy in buses or doing massages at peoples homes. All of the women in the study, however, were still having difficulties with their financial capital since they did not have any savings and had to try to make enough money to provide their families shelter and enough food to eat, making it more difficult to recover from potential shocks or emergencies. Thus, the women's everyday life transitioned into daily tasks of securing work, food and shelter and were limited in the possibilities of being able to send money as remittances to their families in Venezuela or investing in longterm strategies or aspirations. This created feelings of being 'stuck' in the situation, restricting their livelihood opportunities and increasing feelings of isolation.

## **8.1 Policy recommendation**

If women, as well as men, are to benefit from the development potential of migration, a shift is needed in policies that enable migrants to take up opportunities that regular and, therefore, safe migration may offer. This fosters positive impacts of migration for the social and economic development of migrants as well as for the sending and receiving countries. Sufficient regular migration channels would avoid the women to be pushed into more riskier irregular channels. It is of importance to recognise the rights of migrants throughout the whole migration process, including pre-departure information on legal rights, ensuring basic services such as health, housing and education. Their energy and resilience can allow them to become contributing members in the host community without being held back by structural powers. Moreover, when Venezuelan women thrive in their new home of Bogotá, they can become a powerful agent of social and economic change, also transforming the prospects of family members that are with her in Bogotá as well as in Venezuela or other parts of the world.

The legal status of the women is, thus, one of the most important topic for migrants. Documents alone are not enough, however, to ensure the protection of women, particularly also for women at risk of sexual exploitation. The lack of local capacity, as well as the limited options available for support services, makes current practice fall short in ensuring protection of Venezuelan migrant women. There is a high need for protection programs including safe shelter, psychosocial support and further livelihood support. Moreover, social service access should be expanded to the areas where most of the Venezuelan migrants are living, including the research area of Bosa. Programs should also target women and more specifically, young women, and help build assets and social networks. Most importantly, the expanding of efforts to increase employment, their social network and education opportunities, as well as ensuring that these options are safe, will do much to prevent young women from being sexually exploited.

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## Appendices

Appendix 1: Operationalisation Table

Concept	Dimensions	Indicator
Sustainable Livelihoods framework	Vulnerability context	What was the reason for leaving Venezuela?
		What were the expectations of the host community?
		How do participants feel in Bogotá?
		Do participants feel safe in Bogotá?
	Human assets	What education do participants have?
		What working experience do participants have?
		Was participant able to find work/have education in Bogotá?
		Did the participant find the terms of employment acceptable?
		What is the health situation of participants?
		Did their health change coming to Bogotá?
		Are participants content with the healthcare they receive?
	Physical assets	What was the living situation in Venezuela?
		Were participants able to find housing in Bogotá?
		Were participants content with their housing situation?
		Do participants make use of any other objects that help them in their livelihoods (Phone, car, bike etc.)?
	Financial assets	Do participants have any savings?
		What are participants current income?
		What are participants main daily costs?
		Did participants have other forms of receiving money?
	Sustainable Livelihoods Framework + Institutional Networks	Social assets: Bonding connections
Did participants make any connections with other Venezuelan migrants?		
	Bridging Connections	Did participants make any connections with Colombians?
	Linking connections	Did the participant use the services of any NGOs or government bodies?
		how did all of the above affect the participants livelihoods?



<b>Concept</b>	<b>Dimensions</b>	<b>Indicator</b>
Sustainable Livelihoods Framework	Transforming Structures and Processes	Do participants have a legal status in Colombia?
		Do participants have a legal identification cart in possession?
		How do participants feel this is affecting their livelihoods in Bogotá?
		Do participants notice xenophobia or other factors limiting their livelihoods in Bogotá?
	Strategies	How do participants cope with the difficulty of finding employment?
		How did or would participants cope with unforeseen circumstances?
	Outcomes	Does the participants stay in Bogotá meet with their expectations?
		How do participants feel about their stay in Bogotá so far?
		What would participants like to further improve?
Gender		How do participants feel about the differences between men and women in their migration experience?
Transition to adulthood		How do participants feel about the differences between age in their migration experience?