

The background features a stylized illustration of women's profiles. On the right side, there are two prominent figures: one with a blue headwrap with white polka dots and a large circular earring, and another with a solid blue headwrap. Below them, there are floral patterns in red, white, and blue. The central text is overlaid on a dark blue background that also contains faint, larger-scale floral patterns.

Breaking Through Inequality:

Gender Dynamics and
Decision-Making Power
in Colombian Women's
Migration to Europe

Author: Arieke Miklós
Student number: S5698324
Email: A.miklos.1@student.rug.nl
Master: MSc. Population Studies
University: University of Groningen
Supervisor: Dr. Stephen Adaawen
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Abstract

This qualitative research investigates the impact of gender inequality on migration decisions among Colombian women who have migrated internationally. Conducted through semi-structured interviews with nine participants now residing in European countries, the study employs thematic analysis to explore how gender roles, socio-economic status, and social capital influence migration decision-making processes within households. Findings reveal that while migration is perceived as a pathway to achieve economic independence, escape societal constraints, and enhance decision-making autonomy within households, decisions often involve negotiations influenced by familial expectations and socio-economic pressures. Social networks emerge as crucial sources of informational support and emotional resilience, assisting women in navigating challenges such as language barriers, discrimination, and childcare responsibilities. The study underscores the necessity of tailored policies addressing gender inequalities to support informed migration decisions among women, advocating for enhanced access to education, employment opportunities, and inclusive social environments. By illuminating these dynamics, this research provides nuanced insights into the complexities of migration decision-making among Colombian women, advocating for gender-sensitive policies that empower women and promote equitable outcomes in global migration contexts.

Keywords: Gender inequality, women's autonomy, migration decision-making, intersectionality, social capital

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

With the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2016, the United Nations (UN) outlined its commitment to address serious global challenges over the next fifteen years (United Nations, 2016). The SDGs integrate economic, social, and environmental aspects with a specific focus on social inclusion. One of the goals that entails this specific focus on social inclusion is SDG 5, which aims to achieve worldwide gender equality and empower all women and girls by the year 2030 (Agarwal, 2018; United Nations, 2016). As illustrated by the UN Secretary-General in the publication *We the Peoples* (Annan, 2000), gender equality plays a significant role in socio-economic development across countries. It underscores the possibility of development being constrained due to social, economic and political inequality resulting from gender discrimination. These embedded inequalities, present in both developing and developed economies, become visible with limited access to quality employment, fair payment, resources, education, healthcare, gender-based violence and participation in decision-making. These challenges can significantly impact life choices, including complex migration decision-making, which can be driven by a desire for better opportunities and a safer environment. Therefore, prioritising the achievement of SDG 5 on gender inequality will improve global well-being (Filho et al., 2022).

To attain worldwide gender equality, as desired by SDG 5, women's autonomy needs to increase in the economic, physical and political dimensions. These dimensions are also taken into account with the Human Development Index (HDI), as well as the Gender Inequality Index (GII) which are used globally (Medina-Hernández et al., 2021). Women's autonomy refers to their ability, as well as the freedom to make decisions regarding their own lives and that of their families (Sinclair et al., 2022). To increase their autonomy, multiple challenges must be dealt with. These include, amongst other things, ending gender-based violence, relieving them from the individual responsibility of reproductive duties and enabling women to participate in equal decision-making (Medina-Hernández et al., 2021).

Despite ongoing efforts, no country has achieved complete gender equality, even though by 2014, 143 countries had already included gender equality in their national laws (Dhar, 2018). This lack of gender equality has consequences that extend beyond national borders and becomes visible when looking at some crucial factors. For example, worldwide, around 64 million primary-school-aged children are not attending school, with around 53% being girls (UNICEF, 2023). The majority of these children, nearly 75%, live in Central and Southern Asia and sub-Saharan Africa (Dhar, 2018; UNESCO, 2023). Moreover, for the last twenty years, approximately two-thirds of illiterate adults worldwide have been women (Dhar, 2018; Dormekpor, 2015). In addition, 35 per cent of women globally have experienced either physical and/or sexual violence (Dhar, 2018).

This global gender inequality is particularly evident in Latin America. Even though attempts through policies have been made to enhance women's education and increase their protection and rights, Latin American women continue to encounter more significant disadvantages compared to men (Braverman-Bronstein et al., 2023). The effect of gender inequality in Latin America becomes apparent when looking at economic growth, with studies showing that an increase of one unit in gender inequality results in a substantial decrease of 0.4561 in economic growth, due to reduced capital and human growth (Koengkan et al., 2022). While the relationship between gender inequality and economic growth has been extensively studied, there remains a need for more comprehensive research to completely grasp all potential effects of gender inequality, including its implications for migration decisions (Baudassé & Bazilier, 2014). Therefore, this thesis delves into the impact of gender inequality on migration decision-making, aiming to address the gaps in understanding the multifaceted effects of gender inequality and its implications for household migration decisions.

International migration from Latin American countries has been shaped by various factors, including economic opportunities, political instability, violence, crime and civil wars (Cerrutti & Parrado, 2015; Leal, 2021; Lopez-Ramirez & Sánchez-Soto, 2016). These factors pushed many individuals and households to migrate to seek better opportunities elsewhere (Pellegrino, 2000). Emigration outside of the Latin American region has grown in significance. About 80% of the migrants go to North America, primarily the United States, but also Canada. Other popular destinations include the European Union, particularly Spain (Lopez-Ramirez & Sánchez-Soto, 2016). These South-North migration streams have various consequences for Latin American countries. Two of the most important consequences are the loss of high-skilled people, known as the ‘brain drain’ and the vulnerability of illegal migrants to a range of hazards, such as human rights violations and deportations (Amuedo-Dorantes & Pozo, 2015; Pizarro & Villa, 2005).

Colombia is an interesting case study, within Latin America, to look at the specific challenges of gender inequality and its relation to migration decisions. The Colombian environment is shaped by high poverty rates (Torres, 2020). Over the past 20 years, Colombia has made significant progress in poverty reduction, with its poverty rate almost halving from 49.7% in 2002 to 28.2% in 2019 (Duque et al., 2023). On the other hand, inequality rates remain high (Duque et al., 2023). This has often led to elevated rates of informal work, which increases violence and domestic conflicts, in a country where gender inequality already plays a big part (Pineda, 2004; Torres, 2020). In addition, Colombia ranks as one of the highest in feminicides¹, emphasising the urgent need to mitigate this trend and to ensure justice in cases of violent deaths of women, sending a clear message against the normalisation of violence and femicide (Medina-Hernández et al., 2021).

Colombia’s long history of armed conflicts, fuelled by political unrest, drug trafficking and land conflicts, has significantly shaped migration patterns, particularly for women (Lozano-Gracia et al., 2010). According to Franco-Orozco and Franco-Orozco (2018), over seven million Colombians were displaced as a result of the violence and instability that occurred. Many women faced violence and became internally displaced, further pushing them towards migration decisions. This conflict also led to a significant rise in mental, physical, and sexual violence against women (Franco-Orozco & Franco-Orozco, 2018), with approximately 37% of Colombian women experiencing gender-based violence (Sims & Rodriguez-Corcho, 2022). This emphasises the urgency of addressing gender-based violence and the underlying gender inequality that supports it (Franco-Orozco & Franco-Orozco, 2018). Colombia’s enduring social and economic disparities have worsened this gendered aspect of migration (Duque et al., 2023). Limited economic opportunities due to these inequalities can make migration more attractive for women seeking a safer and potentially more prosperous future for themselves and their families. Social networks established by earlier migrants and people who fled the conflict, become crucial tools for navigating the migration process and finding support in destination countries (Silva & Massey, 2014).

1.2 Research objective and questions

The objective of this thesis is to investigate gender inequality and migration decision-making among Colombian households, with a focus on understanding how these dynamics shape differences in women’s autonomy in decision-making and access to resources. This research aims to explore how these differences constrain women’s agency and autonomy, reinforcing systematic discrimination and exclusion. By examining the complex interplay between gender dynamics, socio-economic factors and migration decision-making within Colombian households, this study seeks to generate insights that can inform interventions and policies designed to reduce the negative consequences of gender inequality. Ultimately, this research aspires to empower women to make autonomous decisions, contributing to the

¹ Homicides of women killed by gender violence

development of equal and inclusive societies where all individuals, regardless of gender, can fully participate in and contribute to sustainable development and improved well-being.

This has thus informed the main research question in this research:

How do gendered power dynamics within Colombian households affect women's participation in international migration decisions?

To answer this main research question, this study will be guided by three sub-questions.

1. *What underlying factors shape women's socio-economic status and gender inequality in Colombia?*
2. *How does social capital, understood as the investment in social relations for expected benefits, affect women's agency and decision-making power within Colombian households?*
3. *What are the implications for the socio-economic well-being of the women and their households?*

To address these research questions, this thesis has adopted a qualitative research approach, focussing on the ways gender inequality affects or shapes migration decision-making and the consequences for families. The decision on the use of a qualitative data approach has been made by the necessity to investigate the complex dynamics of gender inequality and migration decision-making in Colombia. This method enables a comprehensive understanding of the contextual factors, experiences and underlying motives that contribute to these complex situations. Therefore, a two-stage data collection strategy has been used. First, a thorough literature review has been carried out to obtain a solid understanding of the current issues facing gender inequality in Colombia, as well as a clear image of Colombian households' migration patterns and causes. Second, semi-structured interviews have been conducted to complement the literature reviews and explore any differences and similarities between the existing literature and the data gathered through these interviews. The number of interviews depended on the accessibility of suitable participants and time constraints, but ten interviews have been conducted. The interviews were conducted among Colombian women who have undertaken international migration either with or without a boyfriend or husband, and with or without possible children, with the aim to seek women with different socio-economic backgrounds. These interviews provided an in-depth investigation of women's thoughts and experiences, providing significant insights into their daily lives.

Concerning ethical considerations when addressing sensitive topics such as gender inequality and power relations, the research process upholds ethical integrity through careful attention to informed consent, confidentiality, and respect for participants' voices and perspectives during interviews. Moreover, positionality is crucial to consider, as it influences the researcher's interactions and interpretations, due to the researcher's background, biases, and privileges. Therefore an inclusive and equitable approach has been taken, fostering trust and cooperation with participants. Furthermore, to ensure open and sensitive communication, the interviews were conducted via video calls, due to time constraints and the possibility of interviewing participants who have migrated to other countries besides the Netherlands. This method allowed for visual cues and enabled the exploration of sensitive topics. The interviews were conducted either in Dutch or English, depending on the participant's preferences, and were audio-recorded after which these were transcribed. A thematic analysis has been done, using a combination of inductive and deductive approaches to uncover new themes and allow the participants to share their perspectives. This thematic analysis provides a nuanced understanding of how gender dynamics and power structures within Colombian households are shaped by gender inequality, ultimately influencing migration decisions.

1.3 Structure

This thesis is structured into five chapters, beginning with an introduction that provides essential background information on gender inequality in general and its relation to migration. It highlights the significance of the research and presents the main research question that has been explored in this thesis. The second chapter delves into the theoretical framework, where a thorough literature review has been conducted and the concepts ‘gender inequality’, ‘intersectionality’ and ‘Social Capital Theory’ were explored for a comprehensive understanding. Following this, the third chapter highlights the methodology that is used in this research, outlining its strengths and weaknesses. The fourth chapter focuses on the findings, addressing the sub-research questions of this thesis. Lastly, the fifth chapter serves as the conclusion, summarising key findings, addressing the main research question and discussing the implications and significance of the research conducted.

Chapter 2: Theoretical framework

This chapter on the theoretical framework is structured to comprehensively explore the concepts of gender inequality, intersectionality and the Social Capital Theory, aiming to highlight their relevance to migration decision-making. Firstly, the existing literature on gender inequality and international migration in Colombia has been reviewed to provide a foundation for understanding the current state of research. Secondly, each concept is discussed and defined in detail, emphasising their significance in understanding the dynamics of gender inequality and migration decision-making. Thirdly, a conceptual model is introduced to illustrate the factors influencing migration decisions within Colombian households. Finally, expectations are discussed based on existing literature, providing insights into the anticipated outcomes of the research. Through this exploration, it is aimed to establish a robust theoretical foundation for this research, guiding exploration into the nuanced factors shaping migration decisions.

2.1 Literature review

Most gender differences in attitudes and behaviours are culturally driven, rather than biologically determined (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). In the heavily gendered culture of Latin America, new generations are provided with behavioural standards that align with societal norms and expectations (Pinos et al., 2016). The gender bias happens to be particularly high in Ecuador and Colombia. Moreover, almost 30% of the Latin American population considers it acceptable for a husband to hit his wife (Mensa & Grow, 2021). This mindset fosters cultural stereotypes, shaping gender roles and responsibilities for men and women (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019). Machismo is one of these cultural stereotypes, which emphasises men's hyper-masculinity. This is often characterised by a man who can defend himself, drinks a lot, sires the most sons and controls the behaviour of his wife and other women in his life (Mensa & Grow, 2021; Pinos et al., 2016). Moreover, motherhood is seen as the primary role for women within these societies. This cultural belief, which views motherhood as a marker of adulthood for young women, reinforces gender inequality and the gendered division of labour (Braverman-Bronstein et al., 2023). These gender disparities are thus caused by formal institutional restraints and informal norms such as customs and deeply embedded gender norms concerning women's roles and places in society. These limits reinforce each other and tend to maintain a power imbalance in favour of men which identifies many large patriarchal cultures across the world (Milazzo & Goldstein, 2019).

Gender inequality undermines women's empowerment, influences household negotiations and diminishes both perceived and actual agency and self-esteem among women (Buchely, 2013). According to Jayachandran (2015), women within poorer developing countries have less of a say in both financial decision-making and decision-making in other areas, for example, family visits. Within a country, the women who live above the poverty line, have greater decision-making power within households and are less tolerant of gender-based violence, compared to women living under the poverty line (Jayachandran, 2015). These gender disparities can be attributed to the deeply embedded gender norms that are common in Latin American communities, where traditional expectations and behaviours perpetuate power imbalances and contribute to inequalities (Galindo-Silva & Herrera-Idárraga, 2023).

In Colombia, these gender norms are particularly pronounced as part of Latin American culture. Dominant norms in Colombia emphasise men and boys as breadwinners and decision-makers entering the workforce from a young age, while women and girls are expected to be submissive caretakers restricted to housework and caring for the elderly (Barrett et al., 2020; Buchely, 2013). Moreover, boys get more freedom from their parents to go out and socialise due to beliefs of masculinity, while girls are not allowed to do so and should stay inside (Barrett et al., 2020). These expressions of gender inequality from a young age, rooted in cultural norms, not only affect individual opportunities but also have broader societal implications. It will sustain structural discrimination and limit the development of gender equality (Galindo-Silva & Herrera-Idárraga, 2023). These norms and social structures in Colombian society marginalised women and have a negative impact on women's self-perceptions, their decision-making

power and gender-based violence (Sinclair et al., 2022). This becomes visible in a study on conflict-related sexual violence in Colombia where they found the female survivors blaming the patriarchal structures. These women described living in a society where men control aspects of women's lives through traditional gender roles and sexual violence serves as a tool to enforce this dominance (Kreft, 2020). Research by Galindo-Silva and Herrera-Idárraga (2023) further reveals the gender gap within households regarding traditional gender roles. Colombian men were more likely to support male dominance, while women opposed it. This suggests a desire for men to retain this power at home. However, men with their daughters appeared to hold more positive views on gender equality, possibly reflecting a willingness to empower future generations of women (Galindo-Silva & Herrera-Idárraga, 2023).

The landscape of international migration in Latin America has evolved significantly in the twenty-first century. These contemporary migration flows, often referred to as mixed movements, encompass a range of migrants, including, economic and environmental migrants, asylum seekers, refugees, forced migrants and stranded migrants. A primary feature of these mixed movements is the irregular and vulnerable status of many migrants. In the year 2020, approximately 25.5 million Latin American migrants lived in North America, while 5.4 million had gone to Europe, particularly Spain and around 11.3 million migrants residing elsewhere within the region (Cecchini & Martínez Pizarro, 2023).

International migration takes place for various reasons, typically driven by migrants aiming to maximise their profit while minimising costs. This cost-benefit way of looking at push and pull factors results in socio-demographic, socio-political, economic, geographic and environmental factors (Siraj et al., 2020). Research on international migration in Colombia, reveals a complex interaction of factors shaping migration patterns. Decades of violent conflict in Colombia have fueled emigration flows, with violence acting as a major push factor (Lozano-Gracia et al., 2010). Economic motives can also be a strong push factor for migration, particularly for women facing limited economic opportunities and burdened by domestic responsibilities. These limitations can be particularly pronounced in societies with deeply embedded gender norms. As highlighted by Barrett et al. (2020) and Buchely (2013), Colombian society emphasises traditional gender roles that restrict women's economic opportunities. This can create a strong push factor for migration, particularly for those seeking financial independence and a chance to escape these restrictive norms. Violence can further exacerbate these economic pressures, significantly altering migration patterns for Colombians (Silva & Massey, 2014). In addition, the pre-existing migration networks offer support and resources to Colombians considering leaving, which influences migration decisions (Lozano-Gracia et al., 2010). Recent studies emphasise the complex interplay between violence, social capital and migration decisions (Silva & Massey, 2014). Colombian migration is mainly influenced by internal conflicts and violence. Colombian people seek refuge both within and outside of the country's borders due to amongst others, attacks, death threats and kidnappings. These long-running political conflicts and the activities of guerrilla and paramilitary groups exacerbated by Colombia's significant illegal drug trade, create a hostile environment. These issues drive many Colombians to migrate internationally, searching for safety, financial stability and support from their friends and family abroad (Lozano-Gracia et al., 2010).

Social capital appears as an important component in international migration. Social capital, which includes both tangible and intangible benefits that are generated from social relationships, plays an important role in facilitating migration and settlement processes in destination countries. Within these social networks, norms, trust and information distribution are critical. Reciprocity is a common trait among Colombian migrants, which is critical in giving access to key information regarding migration processes. This knowledge helps migrants overcome obstacles and rescue-associated costs. As a result, social networks significantly reduce migration costs while increasing the change of international migrations, particularly for repeated waves of migrants (Aguilera & Contreras-Medrano, 2022).

Understanding how gender inequality intersects with these factors is crucial for a nuanced understanding of the migration decisions in Colombia. When delving into the already existing literature on the interaction between gender inequality and migration decisions and experiences, some interesting articles to discuss came up. Pedraza's (1991) research highlights the economic challenges and benefits for migrant women, who often concentrate in low-wage sectors such as the textile industry and domestic work. This reinforces existing gender and class inequalities in the labour market by reflecting the cultural expectations, as well as the limited economic opportunities. However, for other women, having a job outside the home provides greater autonomy in their households than when they stay at home where they depend on their husbands. (Pedraza, 1991). Beyond the possibilities for financial stability and empowerment, migration can have a significant impact on immigrant women's mental health due to cultural adaptation, economic issues and the separation from family. Addressing these challenges necessitates mental health services that take into account the distinct gendered experiences of immigrants (Pedraza, 1991).

Next to individual experiences, migration patterns are also influenced by gender inequality at the national level. While less gender equality is associated with a rise in low-skilled female migration, it also leads to more low-skilled male migration. On the other hand, more gender equality is associated with a rise in migration of high-skilled women. These outcomes imply that rather than being a primary driver forcing individuals to migrate, gender equality significantly influences who migrates, assessing the likelihood of migration depending on a person's gender and skill level (Baudassé & Bazilier, 2014).

The common perception that migration is solely driven by escaping hardship overlooks the intricate decision-making process involved. Research by Mazzilli et al. (2023) reveals that individuals must navigate a complex web of factors that extend beyond economic inequalities. Socio-economic inequalities such as limited job opportunities and social exclusion play a role. However, the equation goes beyond finance and safety. Migration decisions are also influenced by access to power, the protection of basic human rights and how societal expectations based on gender might affect their lives. This highlights the limitations of solely focusing on border control. Mazzilli et al. (2023) critique such policies, arguing the neglect of root causes that push people to migrate, such as structural inequalities like poverty and limited access to healthcare and education in both the origin and destination countries. By promoting inclusive and sustainable growth, societies can potentially reduce the drivers of migrations (Mazzilli et al., 2023).

In conclusion, these researches demonstrate the complex interplay of gender, inequality and migration. Experiences of migration are influenced by gender in relation to family dynamics, employment opportunities and mental health. Moreover, migration patterns may be affected by gender equality itself. It is essential to understand these complexities to establish inclusive societies and effective immigration policies. Building on this existing literature, this thesis aims to delve deeper into the complex mechanisms by which gender inequality influences migration decisions within the household. Moreover, how gender norms, family obligations and cultural expectations interact to influence migration decisions have been studied. The impact on both migrants and their families has been considered, focussing on factors such as possibilities for economic growth, social support networks and the accessibility of resources. By placing this study in the context of the larger body of literature on gender inequality and migration decision-making, the aim is to deepen the comprehension of the nuances at play and offer insight into policy and practice.

2.2 Theory

Gender inequality

The main concept that has been used in this thesis is 'gender inequality'. In order to grasp the concept as a whole, first the concept of 'gender' is discussed. Nielsen et al. (2021), make the clear differentiation between sex, which is biological, and gender which are the socially constructed roles, expectations and

identities associated with being female or male. Wood (2019, p. 3) however, conceives of gender as a “social status, a legal designation, and a personal identity... Woman and man, girl and boy are used when referring to gender”. Contrary to this more traditional view of gender, Cheung et al. (2020, p. 2673) also include other genders, “...many trans and gender diverse (TGD) individuals have a gender identity that is not binary (male or female), but instead falls in-between, outside or beyond the gender binary”. In their view, gender is seen as a spectrum, with male on one end, and female on the other end (Cheung et al. 2020).

Although researchers do not have a universal meaning of ‘gender’, the idea of gender (in)equality in literature focuses on the differences that exist between the different genders. Sen (2001), provides a basic definition of gender inequality as the differences in opportunities and treatment of men and women. The UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (2017) elaborates that gender equality involves creating equal opportunities for everyone to reach their full potential and make a positive contribution to society. Sen (2001) adds that gender inequality is a network of interrelated issues rather than a single problem. This is demonstrated by Dormekpor (2015), who emphasises how laws and social norms in developing countries may limit opportunities for women, often through practices such as early marriages.

However, Anthony (2022) adopts a more radical approach, arguing that many communities consider women to be fundamentally inferior from their birth. Forsberg and Olsson (2022) outline two important perspectives on gender inequality. One viewpoint is concerned with the distribution of resources. They argue that inequality can be seen as a mismatch in resources, including power, material assets and educational opportunities, which are all domains in which women are often disadvantaged. The opposing viewpoint considers the wider picture and is based on social capital. Given that women make up around 50% of the population, it is argued that gender inequality reduces the capability of a community as a whole. Social capital is either a reflection of how resources, power and skills are distributed within a community or it is embedded within social structures (Forsberg and Olsson, 2022).

Building on the traditional binary perspectives of Wood (2019) this thesis defines gender inequality as the difference between men and women in terms of opportunities, treatment and available resources. This aligns with Sen’s (2001) view of gender inequality as a complex phenomenon which is influenced by interrelated social, economic and cultural factors. Moreover, Forsberg and Olsson’s (2022) concept of resource distribution highlights the systemic aspect of gender inequality and its impact on power relations. This will in turn influence migration decision-making. Therefore, gender inequality has been used in this research as a concept to understand the complexity behind power relations within Colombian households that might influence the decision-making process.

Intersectionality

In order to understand gender inequality in a specific scenario, it is necessary to look at its context. Essentialist views that define women only on biological sex limit our comprehension (Okin, 1994). As an alternative to this, Crenshaw (1989) provided the idea of ‘intersectionality’. It acknowledges that people are shaped by a complex interplay of different identities such as class, race, religion and migration status (Crenshaw, 1989). The combination of these identities together impacts a woman's experience (Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008). People are not limited to being, for example, 'just' women, black, rich, or gay (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006). For instance, a black woman might face not only gender-based discrimination but also racism because of her race, creating a more complex struggle for equality. Intersectionality highlights the relational nature of social positions (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008).

Intersectionality is not an additive method since it does not sum up the individual impacts of factors but it rather adds up their combined effects. Intersectionality analyses how social settings and structural forces combine to influence and shape people’s experiences (Hankivsky, 2012). This acknowledges women as whole individuals, conscious of the fact that their experiences as women might differ much and that not all of them feel as powerless as others (Samuels & Ross-Sheriff, 2008). Crenshaw’s (1989) view

corresponds with this, arguing that the experiences of black women cannot be understood by just adding up the effects of sexism and racism. Their struggles are shaped by the intersection of these identities (Crenshaw, 1989).

Intersectionality approaches are also used in sociological research (Bose, 2012). Group-centred research gives priority to the perspective of marginalised groups, but it also runs the risk of over-generalising and ignoring power dynamics. Process-centred approaches, which often use quantitative methods, concentrate on the analytic relations between identities. Lastly, system-centred approaches examine how systems produce intersectional impacts by separating particular inequalities from institutions (Bose, 2012).

This thesis aims to make a significant contribution to the current discussions on gender inequality by recognising the complexity of various identities and how they overlap (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006). To completely understand the complex layers of gender inequality and how it affects social issues like migration, an intersectional, holistic approach is essential (Samuels and Ross-Sheriff, 2008). Intersectionality offers a way through which we can examine the ways that gender inequality appears in different contexts, especially in Colombian households. The purpose of this research is to better understand how power dynamics influence women's participation in migration decision-making by focusing on the intersection of gender and socioeconomic status, aiming to clarify women's agency and decision-making within Colombia through an intersectional approach.

Social Capital Theory

Social Capital Theory, despite being widely used, does not have a universally accepted definition (Guillén et al., 2010). However, there are fundamental principles that are agreed upon in discussions on social capital which are in essence the investment in social relations with expected advantages (Rogošić & Baranović, 2016). These investments emphasise how social capital is dynamic and needs work to establish and maintain to gain benefits.

Although the essence is captured by most definitions, they differ in how much emphasis is placed on either society or individual issues. Bourdieu (1985) refers to the material and immaterial resources that come from long-lasting relations within communities such as families or social classes. The amount of social capital someone has and the size of someone's network determine the volume of social capital (Bourdieu, 1985). Bhandari and Yasunobu (2009) resonate with this view, emphasising the integration of socio-cultural factors into social capital to justify development outcomes.

Contrary to perspectives that prioritise individual ties and personal networks, an alternative approach places greater emphasis on the institutional framework in which social capital functions. Guillén et al. (2010), go beyond individual ties and highlight the importance of social ties, shared norms and sanctions within social structures. For example, trust has been considered valuable and is even seen as an independent key indicator in social capital. This is due to the fact that mutual trust and having the same norms, leads to opportunities that would otherwise not have been feasible (Guillén et al., 2010). According to Bhandari and Yasunobu (2009), social capital is a multifaceted concept that is based on trust, norms and informal networks. Social relations are considered valuable resources that include amongst others, social institutions, norms, and values which foster cooperation and collective actions (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009).

This contrast highlights two key perspectives in social capital: the individual and the societal. Traditionally, social capital was seen as a personal advantage (Rostila, 2010). While acknowledging this, Bourdieu (1985), also highlights the role of social structures. He argues that the social capital lies not just in its accumulation, but also in its representation and delegation within social structures. This perspective illustrates how social capital can be embedded within institutions (Bourdieu, 1985).

Kreuter and Lezin (2002), add another layer by differentiating between loose or dense networks within social capital. This distinction relates to the level of analysis. The loose networks focus on the relations between social institutions, while dense networks focus on individuals and their immediate social networks.

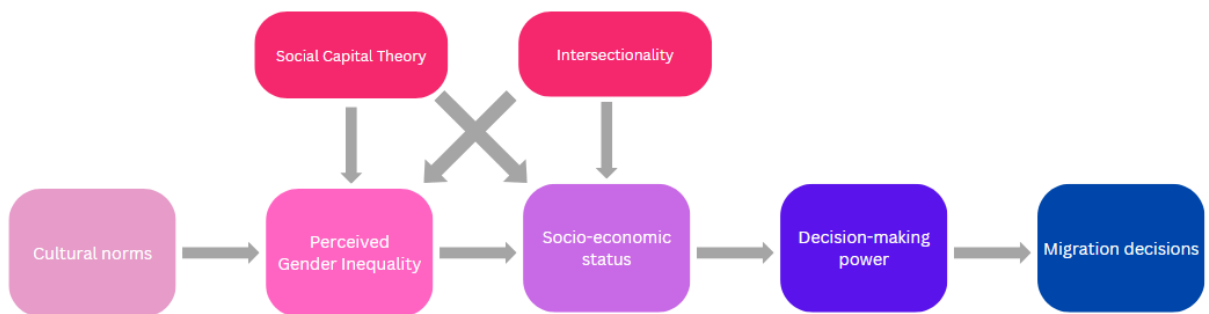
In conclusion, this discussion on Social Capital Theory underscores the absence of a universal definition. With varying definitions across disciplines, this thesis has adopted the general essence of the investment in social relations with expected advantages as discussed by Rogošić and Baranović (2016) as the guiding definition of social capital. Understanding that these definitions are dynamic, it is important to critically evaluate and discuss them in order to gain deeper insights into social capital and its consequences. In addition, the Social Capital Theory offers insights to examine how social networks may influence women’s agency during migration decision-making through access to resources, information and support systems.

2.3 Conceptual framework

This research presents a conceptual model (figure 1) aimed at understanding the factors influencing the migration decisions of households in the context of Colombia. This model forms the foundation for the research, specifically examining how gender inequality impacts migration decisions within Colombian households.

Figure 1

Conceptual model



The model proposes that cultural norms in Colombia contribute to perceived gender inequality, which in turn affects socio-economic status. This socio-economic status, influenced by perceived gender inequality, affects the decision-making power within households, as unequal treatment based on gender. This can limit women's participation in household decisions. Decision-making power within households, in turn, influences migration decision-making, as individuals with more authority may have greater influence over whether to migrate or stay and what the destination will be.

Additionally, Social Capital Theory is also relevant here. Social capital, as mentioned before, refers to networks and access to resources that can benefit an individual. Higher socio-economic status enhances people’s social capital, which affects their experiences of gender inequality. Moreover, this model underscores the importance of intersectionality, where socio-economic status intersects with other social identities that shape people’s experiences and opportunities. Individuals with higher social capital and intersecting privileges may have more agency and influence in household decision-making, including migration decisions. Furthermore, adopting a gender inequality lens that incorporates feminist viewpoints on migration decisions, provides insights into the unique challenges and driving forces that women in

Colombian households encounter. The model serves as a valuable starting point for this study on gender inequality and migration decisions within Colombian households. By understanding how socio-economic status and cultural norms interact with gender inequality, valuable insights could be gained into the complex factors shaping household migration decisions.

2.4 Expectations

Based on the existing literature on gender and migration discussed above, this thesis is well-positioned to investigate the complex relationship between gender inequality, international migration decision-making and women's experiences within Colombian households. Colombia's context of high poverty rates, entrenched gender inequality in the workforce and a history of armed conflict with high rates of femicide is expected to significantly influence women's migration decisions. The limited economic opportunities and pervasive violence might push women to migrate for greater autonomy, security and socio-economic improvements. Social Capital theory suggests strong social networks can enable migration, but gender inequality might restrict women's ability to build such networks. Applying a gender lens informed by intersectionality is crucial to uncovering the power dynamic within households regarding migration decisions. While cultural norms might typically have more influence on men, the research acknowledges the possibility that these dynamics might be more nuanced. By examining these factors, the research expects to provide a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between gender, economic, social networks and family structures. This will ultimately contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how these factors influence Colombian women's participation in international migration decision-making.

Chapter 3: Data and Methodology

This thesis complies with the qualitative research cycle, as explained by Hennink et al., (2019), as an approach to conducting qualitative research. In every phase of the research process, a series of cyclical tools is used, combined with inductive and deductive reasoning. Their strategy is to divide the methodology into three distinct phases. The first phase includes defining the research questions, evaluating the literature and applying a theoretical framework, as done in the above chapters. The second phase focuses on the methodology, data collection, participant recruitment and designing the research instrument, as has been done in this chapter. The third and last phase is the analysis chapter which includes coding, comparing and categorising the collected data, as is done in the next chapter. Hennink et al.'s (2019) cyclical research approach allows for continuous refinement and deeper understanding throughout the research process.

3.1 Research instrument

In this thesis, qualitative research methods have been utilised to investigate the possible impact of gender inequality on international migration decisions in Colombia. The decision to employ qualitative data has been made of the necessity to investigate the complex dynamics shaping gender inequality and migration decision-making in Colombia. These dynamics include the personal experiences, cultural contexts and intricate motivations behind migration decisions and gender inequality, which are best captured through qualitative approaches. This approach involves a two-fold data collection approach. Firstly, a thorough literature research has been conducted, to establish a solid understanding of the current issues concerning gender inequality in Colombia and a clear picture of the migration patterns and reasons of Colombian households. Secondly, semi-structured interviews have been employed to complement the literature review and explore any differences and similarities between the existing literature and the data gathered through these interviews. These interviews provide an in-depth exploration of women's perspectives and experiences, offering valuable insights into their daily lives. The analysis phase used a combination of inductive and deductive methods to have the opportunity to uncover new themes and allow participants to contribute their perspectives. Additionally, semi-structured interviews are preferred because their flexibility enables the exploration of other topics beyond the interview guide. Furthermore, to ensure open and sensitive communication, the interviews were conducted via video calls, due to time constraints and the possibility of interviewing Colombian women who have migrated to other countries besides the Netherlands. This method allows for visual cues and enables the exploration of sensitive topics. The interviews were conducted either in Dutch or English, depending on the participant's preferences, and were audio-recorded after which these were transcribed. To gain in-depth insights, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted with Colombian women. The interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

3.2 Operationalisation

As mentioned earlier, the interview guide has been structured in a way that the key aspects of the research were addressed, while remaining flexible to integrate possible new topics that might come up during the interviews. To translate the abstract concepts used in this thesis into measurable items for the interviews, the concepts need to be operationalised. That has been done here and examples of interview questions from the interview guide (Appendix B) are given.

Gender inequality has been measured by investigating the perceptions of gender roles and responsibilities within households. This was done through asking questions such as: How did you perceive the division of labour and responsibilities within your household in Colombia? And, how do you feel your gender influenced your role and status within your household before migration?

Intersectionality has been measured by exploring how their intersecting identities, in this case gender and socio-economic status influence the migration decisions and their experiences. An example of a question

that has been asked is: How do you think your identity (e.g., gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity) has influenced your experiences both before and after migration?

Social Capital Theory has been measured by assessing social networks and resources available to the women within the households. Examples of interview questions that were asked are: How important were social networks and relationships in your decision to migrate? And, how did you use social networks to gather information and resources for migration?

3.3 Population

The population that has been researched contains Colombian women who have undertaken international migration out of Colombia, with or without their households. These possible households include the participant herself and a boyfriend or husband, either with or without possible children. The decision to focus solely on Colombian women who have undertaken international migration comes from the recognition of gender-specific factors that may shape their experiences and perspectives. This allows for a deeper understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women in Colombia, contributing to a more comprehensive analysis of gender inequality and migration decision-making within households. Moreover, there was also the practical decision of focusing solely on women, because of the possibility of men not wanting to discuss such gender-sensitive topics with a female researcher.

Additionally, considering the intersecting influence of socio-economic status and gender, there was the aim to include women with different socio-economic statuses to examine potential differences within the population. Through purposive sampling, the participants were selected to represent women with diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Purposive sampling is a qualitative research technique that selects participants based on their extensive knowledge and expertise with the issue. Unlike random sampling, which seeks wide representations, purposive sampling prioritises depth of understanding by selecting individuals who may contribute valuable insights that are relevant to the research's objectives (Palinkas et al., 2013). These careful sampling methods allowed a more nuanced analysis of the intersection of gender, socio-economic status and migration decisions within Colombian households.

The initial plan is to conduct interviews with approximately ten participants. This allows for in-depth exploration of their experiences and perspectives. This approach balances depth of understanding with practical considerations, ensuring rich and diverse insights within the constraints of time and resources. However, the study has employed saturation as a decisive criterion to determine if purposive sampling is sufficient. Saturation, in this context, is the stage at which further data collection cases obtain new insights into the topic. It signifies that the data collected are comprehensive and rich enough to address the research questions adequately (Hennink et al. 2019). As the interviews progress, it has been assessed whether new information is emerging or if themes are becoming repetitive, indicating that saturation has been reached. By applying this method, the aim is to ensure that the data collected are comprehensive, nuanced and reflective of the complexity of gender inequality and migration decision-making within Colombian households.

However, finding enough participants posed a significant challenge. To address this, the research population was expanded to include Colombian women who have migrated internationally, whether they did so alone or with their own households. This broader approach allowed the inclusion of women who migrated independently, including students. The inclusion of students was particularly beneficial as they were relatively easier to reach, given the researcher's status as a student. Despite these efforts, only nine participants were interviewed in the end. This was due to the struggle of finding enough participants, but also because the students, who were the majority of the participants, had similar experiences. This led to a sense of saturation, as illustrated by Hennink et al. (2019). The recruitment process primarily utilised a snowballing effect, where initial participants referred to others, but not all participants were reached this

way. Some were contacted through other means, ensuring a diverse and representative sample. A summary has been made in Table 1. of the women who participated in this research.

Table 1.

Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Socio-economic status	Household composition during migration	Country of destination
Johana	40	Middle class	With husband and children	Netherlands
Dolores	29	Middle class	Alone	Germany
Marta	37	Middle class	Alone	Germany
Gloria	30	Higher class	With husband	Netherlands
Sofia	23	Middle class	Alone	Netherlands
Ana	34	Middle class	Alone	Netherlands
Isabel	34	Lower class	With child	Netherlands
Rosa	32	Higher class	Alone	Germany
Elena	31	Lower class	Alone	France

3.4 Data analysis

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how gender inequality in Colombia shapes migration decisions within households, a thematic analysis has been conducted on the qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews, as illustrated by Braun and Clarke (2006). This in-depth analysis focused on identifying, analysing and reporting recurring themes within the transcripts. These themes explored the impact of perceived gender inequality on decision-making power within households, ultimately revealing how these factors influence migration choices. The analysis began with a thorough familiarisation with the data through repeated readings. Codes then were assigned to capture the key concepts and patterns related to these themes using ATLAS.ti (see Appendix C). These codes have been further refined and organised into larger themes, which have revealed the underlying connections between gender inequality, women’s empowerment within households and migration decisions. ATLAS.ti has been used for the coding process and the visualisation of emerging themes. This thematic analysis has provided a nuanced understanding of how gender dynamics and power structures within Colombian households are shaped by gender inequality, ultimately influencing migration decisions.

3.5 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial in conducting research, particularly when touching upon sensitive subjects such as gender inequality and migration decisions. The ethical integrity of the research process has been upheld through careful attention to informed consent, confidentiality, positionality and respect for the participants’ voices and perspectives, during the interviews. Firstly, informed consent has been obtained through a detailed sheet outlining the research purpose, participant rights, data collection methods and how anonymity would be ensured (Appendix A). The participants have had the right to ask

questions, withdraw from the study at any point and have their data removed at any time. Secondly, confidentiality has been maintained through anonymising the data, with pseudonyms replacing the participants' names in the transcripts and the thesis. Moreover, the interview recordings have been stored securely according to the General Data Privacy Regulation (Faculty of Spatial Sciences, 2023) and were only accessible to the researcher.

Thirdly, positionality may influence participant interaction and interpretation of findings. Reflexivity and self-awareness are crucial to conduct ethical, culturally sensitive research. Considering the researcher's identity as a white female from the Netherlands shapes the approach to the research topic. Understanding this lens is essential, as identity, background and social status shape perspectives, biases and interpretations of findings. This has not only influenced the formulation of the questions and methods but also the engagement with participants, interpretation of findings and framing of the analysis. As a researcher from the Netherlands, recognised for its gender equality and social welfare, insights into progressive policies can inform discussions on gender inequality and migration in Colombia. However, it is crucial to consider the limitations of this perspective and avoid imposing Western-centric ideologies. Additionally, actively addressing biases and privileges throughout the research process is crucial to ensure an inclusive and equitable approach, fostering deeper understanding and cooperation with different communities in Colombia.

Respect for the participants' voices goes beyond listening alone, it also involves creating a safe space for them where they feel comfortable to share their experiences. This includes being sensitive to potential power imbalances and avoiding leading questions that could guide their responses. Moreover, participants were given the opportunity to review their anonymised transcripts for accuracy and to ensure their perspectives and experiences were accurately represented. Furthermore, building trust with participants through open communication and active engagement created a cooperative environment for genuine discussions and significant contributions to the research.

The use of semi-structured interviews together with a comprehensive literature review, has guaranteed a multifaceted understanding of the subject while also enabling validation of findings. By triangulating data from these sources, greater confidence in the results has been gained and the conclusions that have been drawn were strengthened. Lastly, the research aimed to provide important insights into the relationship between gender inequality and migration decision-making by using an ethical approach, which could lead to more informed policy and social interventions in Colombia.

3.6 GenAI

The use of GenAI in this thesis complies with the required principles, as specified in the 'Guidelines for GenAI use in the Master's Thesis Population Studies'. This research has not used GenAI to directly generate text for this thesis. GenAI has only been used as an idea generator and language corrector. Moreover, this tool has been used to obtain recommendations on structuring or improving expressions used.

Chapter 4: Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the research, derived from a thematic analysis of interviews conducted with Colombian women. The analysis focuses on the impact of gender inequality on the decision-making processes of international migration. By examining the experiences and perspectives of these women, this chapter aims to unravel the complex ways in which gender roles, power dynamics and expectations influence migration decisions within Colombian households. The findings presented here contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between gender and international migration.

Gender inequality

Gender inequality in Colombia and throughout Latin America remains a significant issue, deeply rooted in cultural norms and societal expectations. Parental expectations, such as keeping children close are a sign of familial success, as Marta pointed out. She illustrated how her mother was surprised and disappointed when she decided to extend her stay abroad, expecting her to return to Colombia after one year of living abroad. Both Elena's and Ana's parents were hesitant about their migration, because of the fear of their daughters not returning to Colombia. Colombian culture also highly values traditional milestones such as getting married and having children. Elena and Marta both described the ongoing pressure to get married and have children. This societal expectation is something their parents reluctantly set aside. They both pointed out the fact that these marriages are also expected to be heterosexual. To which Marta added that she is in fact bisexual, but she will never get married to a man, so her parents have likely already given up that expectation. Ana also highlights this pressure to conform to a traditional role "So, yeah, so it's probably I was trying to get out of that expected role of women. And I wanted to have a career." (Ana, June 23, 2024). The expectation to marry a man and have children is not only present within families but also reinforced by society at large. Dolores even experienced this pressure on the work floor as she highlighted,

For example, in the company where I worked before coming here, there was like an incentive to build a family, a hegemonic family. Also, because it was like you received money for getting married. There was an extra, yes. So if you got married, then they gave you money. If you had kids, they gave you money. So it was like encouraging. (Dolores, June 16, 2024)

However, there is evidence of a generational shift towards challenging traditional roles. Some parents, like Dolores's, actively challenged these roles within their household. While traditional milestones marriage and children remain important, her parents, especially her mother, actively challenged those traditional gender roles within the household. Dolores, just like Rosa, was never expected to only perform domestic tasks and was instead encouraged to pursue her academic goals. This highlights a potential evolution in societal expectations, where professional aspirations for women are increasingly encouraged. Dolores stated,

Yeah, I grew up in a family that always encouraged me to do whatever I wanted professionally. Because I feel like the women in the previous generation had like this hard task of going to the university for the first time in the family or getting a job, maybe not quitting your job while you were being a mother. So yes, they were tough. And from my generation, like I can say, I was always encouraged to do whatever to go beyond my dreams and that yeah, a lot of things. (Dolores, June 16, 2024)

This highlights a societal evolution where professional desires for women are increasingly supported. Marta's father also challenged traditional masculinity by actively participating in childcare and household tasks, which goes against typical expectations of masculinity. Contrary, Gloria had a very traditional

father. She described him as: “My father, he's really... Como se dice machista? Okay. He's the opposite of feminist. Yes, he's really traditional, he's very conservative, so he's quite opposite...He used to be that way. Quite opposite to feminist.” (Gloria, June 21, 2024). However, his perspective had been evolving, likely coming from the fact Gloria simply did not listen to him, suggesting a generational shift. He does not enforce the traditional expectations as strictly, which allows Gloria more autonomy, including pursuing higher education in a non-traditional field. This suggests a significant generational shift in parental attitudes towards gender roles and expectations within Colombian households.

In addition, the pressure to achieve higher education is a significant expectation, particularly in families where previous generations did not acquire advanced degrees. Elena also observed that if her brother had decided to move abroad for studies first, it would have been less of an issue due to his gender, emphasising the additional academic pressure on women. Isabel adds another layer by highlighting the impact of socio-economic classes on gender norms. She thinks that these expectations are more prevalent in the lower socio-economic strata, where reliance on others is stronger. In wealthier households, emphasis is placed on education and job opportunities for daughters, while traditional gender roles persist. For example, Elena spoke about her desire to break free from traditional female roles in Colombia, aiming for a career rather than complying with domestic expectations such as maintaining a well-organised house and marrying quickly. Marta's experience, where her father contributed to child care, suggests a potential reduction in responsibilities for women. Sofia's situation further underscores the persistence of gendered expectations within households, even when parents may not consciously intend to reinforce them. She shared, “For example, my father never, never cleaned the bathroom because he's a boy. So it's the thing that only do the... Or my mom or me. So yes, I think that the gender plays a role there.” (Sofia, June 22, 2024).

Furthermore, the gender dynamics in Colombian women's daily lives reflect a delicate balance between traditional expectations and evolving societal norms. Gloria explained this by describing how dating norms often reinforce traditional gender roles, such as men being expected to pay for dates and picking up the girls at home. On the other hand, evolving attitudes lead to women like Rosa being gradually spared from household tasks, particularly when domestic help is available. Johana's experience adds another layer of complexity. According to her, wealthier families with domestic help might seem to have more traditional gender roles, where women manage the household. However, Johana highlights that without domestic help, the division of labour can shift, potentially leading to a more balance between partners. This shows how socio-economic status can influence these dynamics in households. Rosa agrees, emphasising the burden on women in lower-class households.

This delicate balance extends within families, where conflicts and disagreements are becoming more common. Gloria mentioned how her brothers had to share a car due to attending the same school, while she received her own car for attending a different school, highlighting disparities and potential conflicts. The rising attempt to rethink gender roles within families is reflected in this greater understanding. Another important factor in this development for more gender equality is education. The way gender roles are reinforced is highlighted by Dolores mentioning that pursuing an education gives women the confidence to pursue careers and challenge social norms. However, there are still many forms of traditional pressure remaining. Elena's ambition for a career shows the continuous struggle women in Colombia have to resist the social pressures of prioritising marriage and domestic roles.

Next to the visible gender inequality within Colombian households, gender inequality can be seen throughout the whole Colombian culture and its norms and values. Johana and Dolores provide contrasting perspectives on societal expectations in Colombia compared to Europe. Johana highlights the cultural norm where Colombian women are expected to prioritise family at a young age, which often limits their educational opportunities and therefore their careers. On the other hand, Dolores considers the constructive cultural norms in Colombia that emphasise traditional roles for women, such as becoming a

wife and mother. She compares this to her experiences in Europe, where women are less constrained by society to follow their personal and professional ambitions.

Marta sheds light on another aspect of Colombian society, describing it as “a very classic, Colombia is like a very classic society, very racist, very sexist, like very everything that you can imagine.” (Marta, June 16, 2024). These cultural norms significantly shape the daily lives of Colombian women. Elena and Sofia describe incidents of street harassment, illustrating the objectification and disrespect for women’s boundaries that are pervasive in Colombian culture. Sofia adds, “In Colombia, the machismo culture leads to women being seen as objects. Men often feel entitled to comment on our appearance or invade our personal space without consequence.” (Sofia, June 22, 2024). In addition, Rosa shared an example of double standards in relationships where men can cheat without much consequences but women are judged harshly if they do. This acceptance of men cheating means they often do not feel accountable in relationships, while women face different expectations and consequences. Isabel believes Colombian culture is deeply ingrained in men. She shared: “You could get a man out of Colombia, but you can’t get Colombia out of the man.” (Isabel, June 23, 2024).

Moreover, safety concerns are another critical difference between Colombia and Europe, highlighted by the women. Ana and Sofia discuss feeling unsafe in Colombia due to high levels of violence and harassment against women. Sofia expresses fear of walking alone at night in Colombia, where safety precautions are necessary due to prevalent crime rates. Ana compares this to her experiences in Europe where she feels safer and more comfortable moving freely. She notes, “In Europe, there’s a stronger sense of security for women. I can walk alone at night without fearing for my safety, which was unimaginable in Colombia.” (Ana, June 23, 2024).

Furthermore, gender dynamics at workplaces also influence the lives of Colombian women. Gloria highlights this, sharing: “In Colombia, women often face judgement based on appearance and societal pressures to conform to traditional gender roles are strong... Women are judged more on their skills and abilities rather than conforming to traditional gender roles.” (Gloria, June 21, 2024). This is reflected in the experiences of Marta and Rosa. They describe Colombian women facing sexism at work often being pushed to lower-level positions and facing discrimination based on appearance. Marta recalls incidents in which her male coworkers made offensive remarks about her appearance, highlighting the pervasive prejudice against women in Colombian workplaces. Rosa reinforces this point, sharing that “In Colombia, women engineers are expected to take on administrative tasks while men handle technical roles, which limits our professional growth and perpetuates gender inequality.” (Rosa, June 25, 2024). Sofia further emphasises this by noting that typical careers for women in Colombia are care professions, such as teaching and nursing, which are often low-paid jobs.

In addition to workplace dynamics and safety concerns, cultural attitudes towards gender roles differ distinctly between Colombia and Europe. Gloria addresses the social pressure faced by women in Colombia. They are often expected to conform to traditional feminine stereotypes and are often judged based on their appearances and adherence to norms like depilation. In contrast, Ana highlights the progressive attitudes in Europe, particularly in the Netherlands, where women experience less pressure to conform to traditional gender norms and have greater freedom to express themselves. Furthermore, Marta points out the broader acceptance in Europe of women who do not conform to traditional gender norms, including those who dress in more masculine ways, without assumptions about their sexual orientation. This comparison underscores the varying societal expectations and challenges faced by women in different cultural contexts, highlighting how cultural attitudes towards gender roles influence women’s freedom and societal acceptance.

Socio-economic status and gender norms

When talking about socio-economic status, multiple women mentioned an official strata division in Colombia. This division is mainly based on the income of the households. While officially these reach from one, being the lowest, to six being the highest, some people are in the seventh or eighth strata. Depending on which strata a household is in, they pay a certain amount for utilities. Households in strata one and two can be seen as lower class, strata three and four are middle class and strata five and six are considered higher class. While not all women mentioned the exact strata they were in back in Colombia, they all discussed their socio-economic status. Isabel and Elena both grew up in the lower class, Dolores, Marta, Sofía and Ana in the middle class and Johana, Gloria and Rosa were raised in the higher classes. These strata are very restrictive, multiple women mentioned not being able to hang out with people from other classes. These strata determined what school you went to, who your friends would be and what your future would look like, as people from different classes did not have the same opportunities. For example, Marta mentioned the following,

...I think your socio-economic background, like whether your family was rich or not, right. That's determined a lot in your life. Who are your friends? Which schools you go to? And I don't come from a rich family. My family was like a middle class family in Cartagena, which is not even the, the capital where, and I didn't go to a study in the university, but I think somehow I got like lucky in the sense that somehow my life ended up being very similar to the life of many people from like affluent families because I wanted to, to go to university. (Marta, June 19, 2024)

While these socio-economic strata are restrictive in their determination, shifting between different classes is possible. Dolores, for example, mentioned moving between the third and fourth classes during her childhood. Similarly, Isabel spoke of growing up in the lowest classes during early childhood but reaching the middle class later on. These examples highlight that even within Colombia's stratified system some social movement is possible.

However, the women's experiences also demonstrate that migration can significantly impact their socio-economic trajectories. As Dolores (June 19, 2024) pointed out, "You have to consider also like the currency rate, the exchange rate between the two countries and considering that like one euro is four times what pesos are for us, your capacity of buying stuff reduces a lot." Examining the experiences of the women after migrating to Europe reveals a mixed picture. Both Sofía's and Ana's situation remained largely unchanged, suggesting that migration did not significantly impact their economic status. In contrast, Elena, Marta and Dolores all experienced a decline in their financial situation, mostly because of losing their job in Colombia to come to Europe. However, Isabel and Gloria, who initially faced economic challenges, were in a situation where things eventually improved after finding well-paid jobs. Their economic situation eventually even exceeded their status in Colombia. Gloria shares,

We still had some issues when we arrived because my husband's company, like we didn't achieve the objectives that we had to achieve in order like to have a profit because we came here with our savings. So then we, like all our savings were gone. And then we, like I started working at Decathlon. My husband started working at a restaurant and we started taking care of dogs also. That was a year ago. So in that perspective, I mean, it was quite hard, but it was because we didn't want to like call our families like, hey, we need money. (Gloria, June 21, 2024)

International migration from Colombia

What stands out when looking at the different reasons the women had to migrate internationally from Colombia, is the multifaceted nature of their decisions. Economic factors often push them to seek opportunities abroad, as with Sofía's desire to obtain better job prospects in her field of expertise. Gloria and her husband decided to come to Europe for her to study and her husband to establish his enterprise

here. Education serves as a dual purpose for some of the women. Both Ana and Elena got a scholarship to go to Europe, which allowed them to pursue both economic opportunities and social mobility. Similarly, Rosa wished to migrate for her master's program to gain more academic knowledge in her field of expertise, which was not available in Colombia.

However, not all women decided to migrate for themselves, Johana and Isabel, who both already had their child(ren) in Colombia, wished to go abroad to access better opportunities for their children. Education has been the primary drive for them, but also for Johana, it was important that her children would become acquainted with their father's culture and family. Isabel emphasised the importance of getting her daughter out of Colombia since she was changing negatively.

Moreover, safety, social inclusion and personal growth all emerge as powerful motivators that go beyond economic necessity. This is evident in Marta's desire to explore another culture and a different perspective on life, which highlights the aspiration for personal growth. Similarly, Elena's decision was also influenced by the desire to escape a "toxic family environment" (Elena, June 27, 2024). In addition, some women, such as Dolores, seek a more open and inclusive culture in Europe. As Dolores stated:

But the other side is more like how I felt in the Colombian culture. I think I never felt like I fitted into the way of thinking of the regular Colombian person...it's part of the culture, that you are expected to play a role as a woman or as a young person. (Dolores, June 19, 2024)

This sentiment highlights the desire for a more open and inclusive environment, a recurring theme for some Colombian women seeking a new life abroad.

The women's experiences reveal a thoughtful recognition of privilege within their migration experiences. Dolores's statement exemplifies this awareness: "I come from a family of an only child...I think I am a very privileged person, to be honest, because, you know, as families are smaller, maybe it's easier to distribute the resources." (Dolores, June 19, 2024). Having a smaller family likely translated into more financial resources which could be used for her migration. This awareness of privilege is echoed by others. Johana acknowledges the privilege of growing up in a supportive family with access to education and travel opportunities. Similarly, Marta adds another layer by acknowledging the advantages of her education and language skills upon arrival, enabling her to navigate the challenges of a new country more effectively. By recognising these advantages, the women demonstrate a broader understanding of the challenges faced by migrants with fewer resources and opportunities. Their experiences highlight the complex interplay between individual circumstances and structural factors that shape migration journeys.

Moreover, Sofia's thoughts further complicate this picture. She points out that the government may be more supportive of the very poor people in the lower social classes, leaving the middle class with fewer resources, while not having those resources themselves. Ana highlights this privilege of obtaining a government scholarship that paid her expenses, which reduced the costs of migration. In addition, Elena spoke about her uncle giving her a scholarship with some financial freedom while studying. This emphasises the value of family support, even when her family's financial position was not ideal. Furthermore, Isabel's experiences demonstrate the difficulties faced by those with limited resources. She came on a student visa because her mother and daughter were already living in the Netherlands, The student visa was her only option at the time. It was a tough period due to high tuition fees and limited work opportunities.

The decision-making processes behind the migration of Colombian women are shaped by family dynamics, collaborative planning and individual aspirations. Some women's migration decisions were heavily influenced by their families. The influences varied from encouragement to reluctance. Several women, including Rosa, were inspired by relatives who saw migration as a sign of success. Similarly, Johana and her partner carefully prepared their migration together, speaking with family members who

were already living there to gather information, ensuring a smooth transition for their children. Johana emphasised the importance of their social networks, "Important, very important, because before...to decide to move to the Netherlands, we talked a lot with...for example, with family of my man, the family that live here in the Netherlands. So we talk about with his cousins, about the schools, about the good places to live." (Johana, June 11, 2024).

Moreover, Gloria also relied heavily on her extensive social network in Europe to navigate bureaucratic processes and gain practical insights, making the adjustment smoother for her and her husband. Isabel shared this experience, mentioning that her mother and extended family who were already living in the country of destination were crucial to her. She explained it as follows,

But definitely, the fact that my mother was here. I think that's the only...reason that gave me...actually...gave me the security to come here. I don't think I would dare...to come here on my own with a child. But I definitely think it's...the highest reason....and certainly the most important... help I had...when I was here. (Isabel, June 23, 2024)

However, others experienced more scepticism and had to rely more on their determination. Sofia, for instance, made her own decision despite her parents' doubts. She shared, "...when I say to my parents that I wanted to do it they didn't believe me they were like I asked you can not do it. You...you are not so brave to go." (Sofia, June 22, 2024). Her motivation was inspired by the great experiences of friends and family who lived abroad. Similarly, Dolores approached her migration as a long-term project, actively seeking information and resources from acquaintances who had migrated before. She noted

I filled myself with information from years ago. And I know many people that had migrated. Like I was talking to them and trying to find out ways of financing from different sources. So, yes, I think it was more like my willingness to talk to them. (Dolores, June 19, 2024)

Furthermore, Ana's mother was worried about her migration and possibly not returning to Colombia. Despite her mother's worries, Ana's independence encouraged her to migrate anyway. Elena's parents did not support her migration decision, since they thought she should not spend the little money they had on going abroad.

These varied experiences highlight the complex interplay between family influence, social networks and personal resolve in these Colombian women's migration decision-making. While some depended significantly on family support and thorough planning, some built their paths by pure willpower and the pursuit of their personal goals.

Impact of migration on mental health and well-being

Migration can have a significant impact on mental health and well-being. The women shared their experiences with adapting to a new country, managing financial stress, dealing with loneliness and finding a new social network. Various women were facing challenges with their mental health. Elena, for instance, was experiencing anxiety and panic attacks after migration, due to her parents not supporting her. Therefore she got psychological aid from an aunt in Colombia. Ana has experienced worse mental health as well, due to the Dutch climate amongst others. Moreover, she noted that she is now more aware of her feelings as these were not recognised in Colombia. Whenever someone is not feeling well mentally, they get to hear "...why are you depressed? Yeah, you have everything. You cannot complain." (Ana, June 23, 2024). In contrast, Sofia's mental health has improved due to her migration, she does not have feelings of depression anymore. Moreover, Marta has experienced severe mental health challenges due to the complicated and extended process of obtaining her visa, which made her feel vulnerable and unsupported. Rosa emphasised the persistent feeling of being a foreigner, which made her feel like an outsider.

The importance of language and integration is a recurring subject among these women. Johana's sense of achievement is fostered by her pride in learning Dutch and the beneficial effects it has on her children, who now speak three languages interchangeably. On the other hand, Elena struggled with the language barrier and cultural differences in France, which hindered her ability to interact and make friends, which made her consider going back to Colombia. However, over time she adapted and has built a strong social network despite the cultural and language barriers. These women's experiences underline the importance of language skills in achieving a sense of belonging and navigating new social relations in their new countries.

Financial stress emerged as another significant problem affecting women's mental health. Dolores expresses significant concerns for her financial stability and the pressure of finding a job next to her studies. Similarly, Gloria faced financial difficulties when her husband's business did not meet its objectives, causing stress and a feeling of being trapped. Due to this they had to rely on their savings and found it difficult to ask for help, which demonstrates how financial uncertainties may exacerbate the challenges of migration. Also, Marta was living from her savings during her sabbatical. However, when she decided to stay in Germany, she had to find a job, but she could not find what she was looking for. Marta was not willing to take any job, because she did not migrate in search of better opportunities. She shared,

...I don't speak the language, my German is like good enough for like, day to day interactions, but I cannot work in Germany. And not having studied here, I think the first employment is very hard to get. Yeah. Also, for my line of work, right? Like I'm not doing like IT or anything. (Marta, June 19, 2024)

Moreover, the presence of community and support networks emerges as a crucial factor in their mental well-being. Dolores acknowledges the importance of having friends in Europe as a part of her social network. She mentioned "They are also part of this network that I have, like this circle. We motivate each other." (Dolores, June 19, 2024). Similarly, Marta soon established a strong social network, despite feeling unsupported initially due to the lack of family. She observed,

Maybe I was more open to making new friends. I think socially, speaking in terms of friends like I have like a good network in that sense. However, like this is not my country. So at the same time, I feel, yeah, unsupported, like my family's not here. (Marta, June 19, 2024)

Gloria also emphasised the importance of her social relations in smoothing the adjustments for her and her husband. She stated,

You are what you attract, I think. So for us, it has been quite nice. I mean we have managed to get Dutch friends. Of which people say that's very fast. And it's not because we take things personal or that we are eager to make friends. No, we just let things happen. (Gloria, June 21, 2024)

Furthermore, Sofia highlights the value of her international friends and the influence they have on her well-being, even though connections take time to develop. She advocated establishing social relations before moving to a new country to help with the transition. In addition, Ana also finds comfort in the Colombian community in the Netherlands, which helps her with coping with seasonal depression and feelings of loneliness. Isabel underscores the importance of her mother already living in the Netherlands, which provided support and security. Without her, she would be more hesitant in her migration decision.

Nonetheless, the individualistic culture of European societies compared to Colombian culture, may both empower and isolate these women. Isabel recognises the possibility of personal growth given by the Dutch system but also admits the consequent loneliness. Marta reflects that even her girlfriend would only help her up to a certain point, while in Latin America this communal solidarity is stronger. Personal

development and adaptation are major elements in their experiences. Johana and Isabel prioritise this personal development, with Johana appreciating the opportunity to live in another country and gain new skills and Isabel being grateful for the ability to make decisions for her and her family's well-being. Isabel mentioned,

I can even visit a dietitian if I choose to, and I have the financial stability to afford it even if insurance doesn't cover it. This shift in welfare has allowed me to prioritise my well-being. When I come home now, everything is managed financially and otherwise, giving me the time to invest in personal growth. I can read books on personal development or take courses on spirituality, which I'm passionate about. (Isabel, June 23, 2024)

In addition, Sofia found that her migration allowed her more time for herself and overall improved her mental health in comparison to her past experiences with depression. These narratives illustrate how migration can provide opportunities for self-improvement and fulfilment, despite the challenges.

In terms of roles and responsibilities in the households, the migration had a significant impact. Johana, who was used to receiving help in her house for all responsibilities, is now responsible for managing work, childcare and household chores on her own. This shift makes her miss the support system she relied on in Colombia. In contrast, Gloria shares the responsibilities in their house with her husband, as they did in Colombia. For Sofia, the change is liberating. She appreciated her increased time for herself, free of the responsibilities she had as the oldest child in Colombia. She even learns new household skills such as cooking. Ana's and Elena's situation reflects a sense of continuity. While they are both financially independent after migration, they still have the responsibility to financially support their families in Colombia.

Reflections on migration experiences

Reflecting on their migration experiences, the women provided diverse perspectives on their decisions to migrate and whether they would recommend it to other women. Johana highlights the value of learning the language and being able to run a household on your own while adapting to Dutch culture. She shares: "Now also, it does not depend not on the country, I think that the happiness is inside of you. Not a fan of the place is only. depends up to you, it's up to you." (Johana, June 11, 2024). Dolores emphasises the importance of preparation and support in migration. She stresses the difficulties of staying focused and meeting deadlines. Moreover, she gives the advice; "Surround yourself with people who support you and if they know something about migration, it's way better." (Dolores, June 19, 2024).

Moreover, Gloria and Marta offer nuanced perspectives. Marta highlights the contextual aspects of migration decisions, such as age and financial stability. Gloria emphasises resilience and suitability for migration, noting that not everyone can handle the difficulties, especially if they have the Colombian culture integrated. She mentioned a Spanish saying which translates into,

If you're given a situation or if you are put through a situation, it means because you're able to go through to it. I mean, like, life is not going to give you a situation you're not capable of overcoming. (Gloria, June 21, 2024)

Both Sofia and Ana share positive reflections on their migration decisions. However, Sofia wished she had more stability before migrating and Ana recognises that her experiences have not always lived up to her expectations. Both women recommend migration with careful consideration of practicalities and personal circumstances. Ana states, "It's not like the dream...it's hard, it's still hard." (Ana, June 23, 2024). Elena shares Ana's experience and warns about the difficulties people face when they first migrate. She emphasises that the culture shock in Europe can be particularly challenging. Ana further stresses the

importance of considering human rights, especially for women and LGBTI people, when choosing a country to migrate to.

Furthermore, Isabel and Rosa agree with the significance of preparation when considering migration. Isabel advocates dedication to either establishing a life abroad or returning home with a purpose, to completely integrate into your new country. Rosa adds depth to this by highlighting the contrasts between life abroad and life in her home country. She shares, “Because you are always a foreigner, so you will always be treated like a foreigner when you're not at home.” (Rosa, June 25, 2024). Rosa emphasises how migration may lead to a better quality of life, especially for people who are struggling in their home countries, while also acknowledging the comforts of her home country such as a larger house and having domestic help. In conclusion, these narratives illustrate a complicated picture of migration, highlighting the struggles, progress and differing degrees of satisfaction with their migration decision. They emphasise the significance of being prepared, resilient, and carefully considering the options before migration.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

5.1 Discussions

This research delves into the intricate dynamics of gender inequality and its profound impact on migration decisions within Colombian households. Drawing on qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews with Colombian women who have migrated internationally, the study illuminates how gender inequality shapes these decisions. Women often view migration as a means to escape restrictive Colombian social norms and cultural expectations that curtail their educational and employment opportunities, as well as their autonomy in decision-making. Consequently, migration becomes a compelling strategy for seeking improved economic prospects, safety, or personal empowerment. The interviews reveal how gender inequality compels women to navigate their aspirations for independence against economic imperatives and familial responsibilities.

Moreover, social capital has emerged as an essential factor in facilitating the migration processes, particularly for women who often face challenges such as language barriers, discrimination or lack of childcare options. The interviews revealed that strong social networks, which include both familial and community ties, played a crucial role in supporting the women throughout their migration journeys. These networks offered essential resources, including information on migration procedures and social support in the destination countries. The ability to utilise social networks reduced migration risks but also enhanced women's resilience in unfamiliar places.

Furthermore, an intersectional analysis shows how gender interacts with other social identities such as socio-economic status, ethnicity and age to shape different migration experiences. Women from lower socio-economic backgrounds faced additional challenges, including limited access to education and formal employment, which exacerbated their vulnerability and limited migration opportunities. In contrast, women from higher socio-economic backgrounds and stronger social networks were better able to benefit from migration as an opportunity to achieve socio-economic mobility and overall empowerment. This interplay of identities creates disparities. For instance, women with higher socio-economic status and access to resources might migrate for educational or career opportunities, while those women from lower socio-economic backgrounds face barriers that are rooted in structural inequalities.

Returning to the conceptual model (Figure 1), this research aligns with its core aspects, illustrating the dynamic interplay between gender inequality, socio-economic status, decision-making power within households and migration decisions of Colombian women. Gender inequality acts as a fundamental determinant, shaping access to education, economic opportunities and decision-making autonomy within Colombian society. These limitations significantly impact women's motivations and abilities to migrate. For instance, limited access to education can restrict career opportunities, making migration appear more appealing for economic advancement. In contrast, women from higher socio-economic backgrounds often have greater access to resources and autonomy to migrate from education to career opportunities. Furthermore, socio-economic status heavily influences this interaction. Women who have more resources available might use migration to improve their education or careers. However, women from a lower socio-economic status face additional challenges, since limited access to finances often restricts their migration options.

Moreover, decision-making power within households is heavily influenced by prevailing patriarchal norms in Colombia. This power acts as a crucial mediator in contexts where those norms are strong, since women may need to negotiate and compromise within households to obtain permission to migrate. This dynamic underscores the interplay between individual agency and structural constraints. Colombian

women face familial expectations and cultural constraints while actively using migration as a potential path to empowerment.

Addressing the main research question, “How does gender inequality influence migration decision-making within Colombian households?” the findings demonstrate a strong connection between gender inequality and migration decisions. Colombian women facing limited opportunities and societal constraints often view migration as a strategy to achieve economic independence, personal growth and increased safety. The research emphasises how social capital, gender dynamics, socio-economic status and decision-making power within households interact to shape the complexities of migration decisions. These insights highlight the need for tailored policies to recognise and limit the intersectional impact of gender inequality, socio-economic differences and cultural norms on women’s migration experiences in Colombia.

5.2 Conclusions

Strengths and limitations

The qualitative approach adopted in this research provides a thorough analysis of individual experiences and perceptions of migrated Colombian women. By emphasising qualitative insights, the research captured rich, context-specific data that illustrated the daily realities of Colombian women managing gendered inequalities. The semi-structured interviews enabled an in-depth understanding of the motivations, challenges and strategies employed by these women in migration decision-making, through a lens of gender inequality.

Moreover, the qualitative approach facilitated the discovery of unexpected findings and themes. By maintaining flexibility in data collection and analysis, patterns and insights have been identified that may have been overlooked in a more structured approach. For example, the role of social capital as an important factor in migration decision-making has emerged as a key theme, which emphasises the importance of social networks in supporting these women during their migration process.

Despite its strengths, several limitations were encountered. The relatively small sample size restricts the ability to generalise the findings to larger populations of migrated Colombian women. The decision to broaden the research population during the process to include all Colombian women who have migrated internationally enriched the research’s depth but the population still reflect a small portion of the migrated population. Furthermore, the participants were aged between 23 and 40, which potentially overlooked the experiences of older generations of migrated Colombian women. Next to this, the women came from different socio-economic backgrounds, but all had the opportunity to migrate. By focussing on the experiences of women who have successfully migrated, the perspectives of women who considered migration but ultimately decided not to have been overlooked.

The research employed a qualitative approach, focusing on the in-depth experiences of a specific group of Colombian women. While the findings provide rich insights into this population, generalisability to larger populations is limited. The relatively small sample size restricts the ability to definitively claim the experiences of these participants represent all Colombian women who migrate internationally. Future research with larger sample sizes and a broader range of participants, including socio-economic background, ethnicities and age could improve the generalisability of the findings. However, the research connects meaningfully with existing theories on gender and migration. The findings regarding the importance of social networks in migration processes support the Social Capital Theory. In addition, the research aligns with the intersectionality theory by illustrating how gender interacts with other social identities, especially socio-economic status, to impact migration experiences.

Future research and policy

This research contributes significantly to ongoing societal and academic debates concerning gender inequality, migration and social development. The findings highlight the challenges faced by Colombian women due to gender inequality and how migration can be seen as a strategy for overcoming these issues. The research also underscores the importance of social capital and intersectionality in understanding migration experiences. These findings inform policy discussions related to gender equality in migration.

Nonetheless, several directions for future research are recommended to deepen the understanding of Colombian women's migration and address existing gaps. To start, future research should aim to include a larger and more diverse sample size to enhance the generalisability of the findings. This should include women from even more diverse socio-economic backgrounds, ethnicities and age groups to ensure a more comprehensive representation of the population. Broadening the age range to include older women will also provide insights into experiences across different life stages and generations. In addition, investigating the experiences of women who considered migration but ultimately decided against it is crucial. Understanding the challenges and barriers that prevent migration can reveal important factors influencing migration decision-making.

Moreover, even though this research has highlighted the importance of social capital, future research could explore this topic in more depth. This includes examining the specific processes through which social networks provide support, how these networks are created and sustained in different contexts and how they evolve over time. Gaining an understanding of the differences in the influence of social capital among various migrant groups and destinations can provide more focused insights. Furthermore, future research should delve deeper into the intersections of gender with other social identities, such as age and ethnicity, to provide a more nuanced understanding of migration experiences. For instance, examining how ethnic minority women or older women navigate differently can uncover unique challenges and opportunities.

In addition, to address the generalisability limitation, qualitative and quantitative methods could be combined. Larger-scale statistical analyses and surveys can validate and extend qualitative findings, offering both in-depth insights and broader applicability. With the use of a mixed-methods approach, migration experiences can be better understood. In order to fully capture the dynamic and complex nature of migration experiences, further research should continue to use flexible methodologies. This will enable the discovery of unexpected findings and patterns.

To support Colombian women in their migration process and address the challenges revealed in the research. Policies should focus on strengthening support networks for migrant women. This includes providing resources to help women build and maintain social capital, such as community centres and support groups. These initiatives can help build strong social networks that provide both emotional and practical support. Moreover, policymakers should recognise and address the barriers that prevent women from migrating. This can include providing information and resources about the migration process, financial assistance and developing programs to support women who are considering migration but face significant challenges.

Furthermore, policies should be inclusive and consider the diverse backgrounds of migrant women. Tailored support for older or ethnic minority women as well as for women from various socio-economic backgrounds can ensure satisfying their specific needs. This includes offering language classes, cultural integration programs and social services. It is crucial for migrant women to get support in integration and adaptation. Moreover, employment training, support for housing and healthcare can help women to adapt to their new environments.

Lastly, policies should address the gender inequalities that affect migrant women. This could be done through promoting gender-sensitive practices in all aspects. These policies should ensure equal access to education and employment opportunities for women, combat discrimination and promote gender equality in decision-making roles. By fostering an environment that values gender equality, Colombia can reduce the socio-economic barriers that push women towards migration for better opportunities.

A critical part of addressing gender inequality is reducing gender-based violence. Colombia should develop comprehensive strategies to prevent and handle such violence, enhancing legal frameworks and expanding access to support services for survivors. Public awareness campaigns are also essential to shift societal attitudes towards gender violence and create safer environments for women. By actively addressing these issues, Colombia can reduce the vulnerabilities that push women to migrate for safety and security.

Moreover, empowerment initiatives are crucial in enhancing women's economic and social status. Colombia should support programs that promote entrepreneurship among women and offer financial training. In addition, promoting work-life balance through flexible work arrangements, affordable childcare, and parental leave is crucial to have the opportunity to go against the Colombian expectations of women. These initiatives empower women to participate more actively in economic activities and decision-making processes which reduces their reliance on men and using migration as a way of economic advancement.

Finally, adopting an intersectional approach that considers how gender intersects with ethnicity, age, and socio-economic status ensures tailored policies that address the specific challenges faced by women. Fostering inclusive support programs across Colombia and establishing a robust system to monitor and evaluate the impact of these gender equality policies are equally essential. Regular assessments will identify gaps, measure progress and ensure interventions effectively reduce gender inequality and contribute to a more equitable and inclusive society overall.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Informed consent form

Informed Consent Form for Research Participation

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. This letter explains what the research entails and how it will be conducted. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. If anything is unclear, feel free to ask questions using the contact details provided at the end of this letter.

What is the Research About?

As part of my Master's degree in Population Studies at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, I am writing my thesis on gender inequality and migration decision-making among Colombian women who have migrated internationally with or without their households. This research aims to explore how gender roles and expectations influence the decision-making power Colombian women have regarding international migration.

By gathering your experiences and insights, this research seeks to contribute to a broader understanding of the interaction intersection between gender and migration. Therefore, I am interested in interviewing you for this research. If you have any questions before, during, or after the interview, please feel free to ask or contact me.

What Does Participation Involve?

For this research, you will be interviewed through video call, about your experiences with gender inequality and migration decision-making within your household. The interview will last around 45 minutes to one hour. After the interview, you will have no further obligations. The interview will be audio-recorded with your permission. This way there can be made a transcript, which will be analysed to better understand how gender inequality influences migration decision-making among Colombian women.

The findings from this research may be included in future publications, presentations, or reports related to this study. All data will be handled in a confidential and non-identifiable manner to ensure your privacy and anonymity. If you have any questions regarding this possibility, please contact me.

Participation is Voluntary!

You are under no obligation to participate in this research. If you choose not to participate, please inform me at any time, before, during, or after the interview. In such a case, your data will be removed without any questions asked. During the interview, you are not required to answer any questions you do not wish to answer. Your answers will contribute to a better understanding of how gender inequality impacts migration decision-making among Colombian women.

Security

The researcher will uphold the highest ethical standards throughout this research. Your responses will remain anonymous, and pseudonyms will be used to ensure that anything said in the interview cannot be traced back to you personally.

The audio recordings will be stored securely, accessible only to the researcher and the supervisor. These forms will be stored in a secure location to which no one else has access. Your insights may indirectly benefit future studies and contribute to new understandings that support women in similar situations.

Concluding Remarks

If you would still like to participate in this research, please complete the informed consent form by providing your name, the date, and your signature. If you have any questions about the form or the research, feel free to ask.

More Information

Arieke Miklós
a.miklos.1@student.rug.nl
+31636164266

Stephen Adaawen (supervisor)
s.a.adaawen@rug.nl

— — —

I, the participant, have read and understood the informed consent form and wish to participate in this research: YES / NO

Participant

Name:

Date:

Signature:

— — —

I, the researcher, explained the informed consent form, informed the participant of all of her rights and ensured there was the opportunity to ask any questions or make any remarks regarding their participation.

Researcher

Name:

Date:

Signature:

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. Your insights and experiences will be valuable to the research!

Appendix B: Interview guide

Interview guide

‘Thank you for participating in my research. The information you will share in this interview will be used confidentially as stated in the informed consent form you signed. The purpose of this interview is to gain insight into your experiences as a Colombian woman who has internationally migrated with her household. If you do not want to answer any questions or wish to stop the interview at any moment, that is fine. I would like to ask if you are okay with me audio-recording this interview. Do you have any questions before we start?’

Introduction

1. Can you please introduce yourself and briefly describe your background? (name, age, occupation, marital status, etc.)

Socio-economic status and gender inequality

2. Can you describe your socio-economic background in Colombia before migration? including living conditions, education, economic status, community involvement, and the region in Colombia)
3. How has your socio-economic status changed since migrating? (including income, employment, living conditions, and community involvement)
4. How did you perceive the division of labour and responsibilities within your household in Colombia?
5. How do you feel your gender influenced your role and status within your household before migration?
6. Can you share any experiences where you felt treated differently because of your gender in your community?
7. How did these experiences impact your decision to migrate?

Migration decision-making (depending on with or without family)

8. What motivated you to migrate on your own?
9. Were there any significant factors that influenced your decision to migrate alone rather than with family or a partner? (e.g., economic opportunities, safety, education)
10. Were there any other people whose opinions influenced your decision?

OR

11. What factors influenced your household's decision to migrate? (e.g., economic opportunities, safety, education)
12. Who in your household primarily made the decision to migrate?
13. Did you feel that your voice was equally considered in the decision-making process? Why or why not?

Social capital and networks

14. How important were social networks and relationships in your decision to migrate?
15. How did you use social networks to gather information and resources for migration?
16. Have these social networks helped in enhancing your autonomy or decision-making power?

Intersectionality and post-migration experiences

17. How do you think your identity (e.g., gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity) has influenced your experiences both before and after migration?
18. Can you describe any specific challenges or advantages you have faced due to the intersection of these identities?

Life after migration

19. How has your life changed since migrating in terms of responsibilities and roles within your household?
20. Have you experienced any changes in gender dynamics and your autonomy after migrating? (How gender roles are perceived and enacted in your new community, or changes in your ability to make independent personal or financial decisions)

Impact on well-being

21. How has migration affected your personal well-being and mental health?
22. What support systems are available to you in your new country, and how have they impacted your well-being?

Reflections and insights

23. Looking back, how do you feel about the decision to migrate?
24. What advice would you give to other women in similar situations considering migration?
25. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?

Wrap-Up

Conclude the participant's answers and ask if there is anything else they would like to share about their experiences. Thank them for their participation and emphasise that the information will be used confidentially. Ask the participant whether they would like to receive a transcript of this interview and/or the outcomes of the research. Stop the recording.

Appendix C: Codebook

Theme	Code	Sub-codes	Type	Definition
Roles and expectations	Roles and responsibilities		Deductive	Specific roles and responsibilities in traditional families.
	Expectations		Inductive	Expectations regarding the upbringing and education of children
	Gender norms in child-rearing		Deductive	Beliefs and practices surrounding gender roles within child-rearing.
Migration	Reasons of migration	Economic reasons	Deductive	Employment opportunities and better living conditions.
		Social reasons	Deductive	Family reunification, escaping violence or discrimination, seeking better opportunities for children
	Migration decision-making		Deductive	Who the decision made to migrate and the destination
Social networks	Social networks in migration decision-making		Inductive	How social networks were used to gather information and resources for migration
	Social network in new country		Inductive	How migrants build and utilise social networks in the new country
Intersectionality	Socio-economic status in Colombia		Deductive	Economic status, living conditions, education, and community involvement before migration
	Socio-economic status post-migration		Deductive	Income, employment, living conditions, and community involvement after migration.
	Intersectionality in socio-economic status		Deductive	How socio-economic status intersects with gender and other social identities
Decision-making power within households	Division of labour		Deductive	Division of labour, responsibilities, and decision-making power within the household before migration
Adapting to new country	Mental health and well-being post-migration		Inductive	Impact of migration on personal well-being and mental health

	Changes in responsibilities and roles		Deductive	Changes in daily responsibilities and roles after migration
	Cultural differences and stereotypes	Differences in gender inequality	Deductive	Differences in gender dynamics between Colombia and the new country
		Other differences	Inductive	Differences in culture and stereotypes between Colombia and the new country
Reflections	Reflections		Inductive	Personal reflections on the decision to migrate

Appendix D: Analysis

Roles and responsibilities

Johana: For example, as small example, I always know when is their appointments for the doctor appointments, dentist appointments, vaccinations, for example with my kids. And my husband does not, you know. It's a small issue but more specific a task that the women always have to do, yeah, you know.

Dolores: care activities

Dolores: economic responsibilities

Marta: Uh, and, and funnily enough, I come from a home where my father was, I would say in that sense, very non-traditional, like he will do a lot of, uh, taking care of us, like very involved, like a very feminine, uh, father.

Gloria: No, not at all. Like, there's... Like, when we first... Like, for the context, like, when we first got married, like, I was more in the position, like, we should split. We should split, like, tasks. But then he was like, there's no need to do that. Like, I mean, whenever something needs to be done, whoever realizes that it needs to be done will do it.

Gloria: But, like, my father, he's really... Como se dice machista? Okay. He's the opposite of feminist. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Very traditional. Yes, he's really traditional, he's very conservative, so he's quite opposite...

Gloria: If I'm in my parents house and I have two brothers my brothers were there usually my mom will tell me like could you come and help me with this and I was always like yeah but I also have two brothers but I was always that way and then they were all mad because they were like yeah but she called you first and I'm like yeah but you exist too I should always call me first and and I didn't agree on that

Sofia: So I always had to take care of my sisters

Sofia: the cleaning and all this kind of stuff is always like the older sister have to do everythi

Sofia: For example, my father never, never cleaned the bathroom because he's a boy.

Sofia: Pay more attention to the house and know how to cook.

Ana: We have like tasks in the house, like mop the floor, cleaning the dishes, small tasks. But in general, my mom was in charge of everything and she gave us a small task to us.

Ana: But my brother, for example, he doesn't have so many tasks as my sisters. They have to take care of him, kind of. He used to help, but not as much because he was a boy and, you know, boys don't clean the house. He used to maybe do like go to the supermarket, that kind of things, like go outside of the house, but to mop the floor, cook, clean the dishes. That was my sisters.

Ana: I have to send money back. I have to take care of my mother and a bit for my niece and nephews, because my brothers and sisters, they have daughters and sons.

Rosa: Well, we had a person who was like a maid that was helping us with the household chores. My responsibility was more or less like paying the public services. But regarding like cleaning or like normal duties, I think I have none.

Rosa: For example, when my dad is present, I am the one who has to cook. If only it's my dad and I, I have to be the one cooking, I have to be the one doing much of the work. Basically, because my dad has no idea how to do anything.

Rosa: Like my host mom was always cooking, my host mom was always like doing the cleaning, my host mom was the responsible of everything.

Isabel: My mother had to become the primary breadwinner because there were three children to support. It was decided that she would go to work while my grandfather stayed at home. My grandfather was essentially a stay-at-home dad. He took care of everything at home without any hesitation or complaints. All the household chores were managed by him, and even the rules in the house were his, not my mother's. So, if I had to describe the division of labour in my family, my grandfather did everything at home. He didn't mind being the househusband at all

Elena: But yeah, let's say that the main source, the main distribution of the chores was on her.

Elena: So, yes, of course, that was our eternal fight with my mom because my mom used to do everything for my brother. But for my sister and I, it was more on our side. She wouldn't get mad if my brother didn't do the dishes, for example. But if we don't do the dishes, she will get mad or she will never ask him to do the dishes, you know.

Elena: because you're a woman, you have to help, I don't know, like cut the vegetables or put the table or whatever, while the boys are just sitting in the couch, you know, watching TV.

Expectations

Dolores: Like you get a lot of pressure for getting married. For example, in the company where I worked before coming here, there was like an incentive to build a family, a hegemonic family. Also, because it was like you received money for getting married.

There was an extra, yes. So if you got married, then they gave you money. If you had kids, they gave you money. So it was like encouraging.

Dolores: it's part of the culture, that you are expected to play a role as a woman or as a young person.

Marta: parents in Colombia and in Latin America, they want to have their kids close. Right. So for, I think when I told my mom that I was staying, she was like, Oh my God, but I thought it was only going to be a year.

Marta: it's like a sign of success to be married and to be straight

Marta: I've had the pressure of like getting married, but also getting married to a man, which is never going to happen. Um, yeah. And then to have kids, that's the other, um, expectation. I think at this point, my parents already gave up the idea, but, um, I think that that's still, that's still there.

Ana: My mom, she was and is still scary about me living abroad and maybe don't coming back. They were not really happy about that. But I'm quite independent. So, even when they don't agree, I did what I did.

Rosa: Like, oh, you are, you are a big successor for now because you moved. So it's kind of a mindset.

Isabel: In Colombia, maybe when you are more mature and have the money, you do what you want and don't care what people think or do. But often, when you're in lower social classes, it matters a bit more because you need others more. However, when I look at family members who are a bit wealthier, it's the same upbringing. It's the same "you're a girl, he's a boy." Girls don't do that, girls don't get that, and that's not how you behave as a girl. It's really more a matter of culture than socio-economic status. That said, I think you do get a lot more opportunities to develop as a woman in higher socio-economic classes. They motivate you much more to go and study. For me, it was more about needing to take care of myself and really start studying because our socio-economic status was lower.

Elena: They are like super nice to me and globally. But I really felt back then that I had to do what they were expecting me to do.

Elena: So, yeah, so it's probably I was trying to get out of that expected role of woman. And I wanted to have a career. And honestly, it sounds flat, but I didn't want to be like my mother. So I felt like in Colombia, OK, I could have a job and etc. But at the end, they will expect it from you, you know, to have your house super organized, get married quickly, have kids quickly, you know. So it was not for me

Elena: They were more happy because I was going to do a PhD. Because in my family, my mother didn't finish university and my father did university, but no more than master or something like that.

Elena: And yes, I think if it would have been my brother who decided to go outside the country first, it would have been less dramatic, for sure.

Gender norms in child-rearing

Dolores: And my dad grew up in a family that used to be like that, definitely. So that had to change with us because my mom was the other way around. Like she also grew up in a household where women did everything, but then she wanted to change that. And she really always asked him to do things at home. And so he did. It was like a breakthrough, a generational breakthrough, I would say for my dad.

Dolores: My dad is a very loving person and he's very helpful. But yes, I think he considered that he didn't have to do some things and it's very, it was very subtle.

Marta: Uh, and, and funnily enough, I come from a home where my father was, I would say in that sense, very non-traditional, like he will do a lot of, uh, taking care of us, like very involved, like a very feminine, uh, father.

Gloria: But, like, my father, he's really... Como se dice machista? Okay. He's the opposite of feminist. Yeah. Okay. Yeah. Very traditional. Yes, he's really traditional, he's very conservative, so he's quite opposite...

Gloria: f I'm in my parents house and I have two brothers my brothers were there usually my mom will tell me like could you come and help me with this and I was always like yeah but I also have two brothers but I was always that way and then they were all mad because they were like yeah but she called you first and I'm like yeah but you exist too I should always call me first and and I didn't agree on that

Gloria: what I see in Colombia like when women are growing up they're always being told like um be safe uh don't trust strangers boys not that much I mean yeah of course their parents tell them the same but they worry more about the little girls than the men

Sofia: For example, my father never, never cleaned the bathroom because he's a boy.

Sofia: Pay more attention to the house and know how to cook.

Ana: But my brother, for example, he doesn't have so many tasks as my sisters. They have to take care of him, kind of. He used to help, but not as much because he was a boy and, you know, boys don't clean the house. He used to maybe do like go to the supermarket, that kind of things, like go outside of the house, but to mop the floor, cook, clean the dishes. That was my sisters.

Rosa: For example, when my dad is present, I am the one who has to cook. If only it's my dad and I, I have to be the one cooking, I have to be the one doing much of the work. Basically, because my dad has no idea how to do anything.

Rosa: And I, of course, I know the difference, like, especially in older generations. That they assume that we have to do like this basic stuff.

Rosa: Probably here is more, like, more awareness of some machismo behaviors, but I think most of it is generational. Like I've seen it more in generation changes than within countries.

Rosa: It's a generational thing, exactly, exactly.

Isabel: If I wanted to play, it was often questioned; No, why shouldn't I? But if he's a boy, he's allowed. I came to hate that, because he's a boy, he's allowed. That was always a trauma for me, let me put it this way

Isabel: This applied even with our cousins. The boys would go out and do things, while we stayed at home

Isabel: In Colombia, maybe when you are more mature and have the money, you do what you want and don't care what people think or do. But often, when you're in lower social classes, it matters a bit more because you need others more. However, when I look at family members who are a bit wealthier, it's the same upbringing. It's the same "you're a girl, he's a boy." Girls don't do that, girls don't get that, and that's not how you behave as a girl. It's really more a matter of culture than socio-economic status. That said, I think you do get a lot more opportunities to develop as a woman in higher socio-economic classes. They motivate you much more to go and study. For me, it was more about needing to take care of myself and really start studying because our socio-economic status was lower.

Isabel: It's not always equal, but women here generally have more equal opportunities. They tend to postpone pregnancy and relationships to focus on education first. In Colombia, starting a family at a young age is common because family support is crucial for success

Elena: So, yes, of course, that was our eternal fight with my mom because my mom used to do everything for my brother. But for my sister and I, it was more on our side. She wouldn't get mad if my brother didn't do the dishes, for example. But if we don't do the dishes, she will get mad or she will never ask him to do the dishes, you know.

Elena: when you're a small kid or a teenager, you receive comments on the street that make you feel uncomfortable, you know, from men that just saw you passing by and it's like disgusting.

Elena: I decided to go back basically because I didn't want to be in the middle of a toxic family environment. Like my uncles, no, aunts, sorry, my aunts or the sisters of my mother are always controlling what you should do.

Elena: And if you don't do this, oh, my God, what is people going to say? And you have to be like a good girl and you have to, you know, we always do things right, etc. You have to go help doing the dishes. You have to, you know, behave because they are helping you. So you should not ask anything that goes outside what they do.

Elena: for example, my father also treated my sister and I different than from my brother.

Elena: She's going to ruin her life. She's going to get pregnant, blah, blah, blah. And I was 15 years old and they sent me to live with my aunt for some time because I was going to ruin my life. But they were encouraging my brother too when he had the age, because I'm the oldest. When my brother was a teenager, they were encouraging him to go out with girls. I was like, what's the logic of that?

Elena: And yes, I think if it would have been my brother who decided to go outside the country first, it would have been less dramatic, for sure.

Economic reasons

Johana: it was for my kids. I wanted to...to bring them...no, to give them the opportunity to...to see other things, other contexts

Dolores: I wanted to do my master.

Dolores: intellectual challenge

Gloria: I migrated because I wanted to study in Wageningen. And my husband wanted to establish his company here.

Gloria: I want my company to grow in Europe we didn't like the States yeah and I also um because in Colombia people migrate a lot to the States yeah yeah so I told him like I wanted to study, uh something abroad both of us we have had already uh been to Europe and lived in Europe and we liked it here so we were like yeah maybe sometime

Sofia: to study abroad and look for opportunities outside one reason but also because i am really interested in sustainability and i think that netherlands have like better um a better approach in that

Sofia: But I am not very optimistic about my job opportunities there. So maybe I will consider to come back here.

Sofia: if i wanted better opportunities maybe i could go abroad and yes i could study abroad and look opportunities outside, yeah.

Ana: I came here with a scholarship from the government of Colombia, so they paid for everything. Yes, and I hope to get a job later, so middle class, I guess.

Ana: My decision of migrating was based in the, I mean, I want to do my master in bioinformatics and Colombia doesn't have a lot of development in this team. So, I knew that I would have more opportunities here in Europe or even back in Colombia if I have my master from here.

Rosa: And now I started being more involved in managing. And well, at the end, I basically moved. For personally, I just wanted to have a professional, a higher professional level in education.

Elena: And I decided to come to France back in 2015 because my university gave me the chance to learn a language and do an academic exchange. So I chose French.

Elena: Because I was coming back because of my boyfriend, because of the PhD, because of this really toxic environment, my family.

Social reasons

Johana: It's really difficult, but I see like, a big opportunity for my kids to grow up in Europe in... a country that respects the rights for example, the education for the whole children.

Johana: good decision to raise the children...the opportunity...that the children can develop a different language for example, and see different options around

Johana: connected with the roots here in the Netherlands. And it was like...more...yeah a nice experience to...live like a family in this new country.

Dolores: I think I never felt like I fitted into the way of thinking of the regular Colombian person.

Dolores: But the other side is more like how I felt in the Colombian culture

Marta: I moved for my sabbatical because I wanted some adventure on like new things.

Marta: I was looking for was a place where people have like different ways of looking at life, like real thinking about like themselves, relationships and well, how do you look at women? But that was not the main thing, but I think just looking for a place that was like different, more diverse, more open, more progressive, which is again, why I landed in Berlin.

Marta: I think that makes it difficult because I'm not in this survival mode. Like, Oh, I'm flying from war or I don't have a job and I'm here to do whatever to get money.

Sofia: it impacted in the decision to go to live with my grandmother and after i lived with my grandmother i felt like more more free but i didn't have like that economic independence that i want so for that reason

Ana: So, I think I have more awareness about what is the reality in Colombia. Because when you came from a high, I don't know, family with money back in Colombia, you don't realize what is the reality in the rest of the country. So, I think that influenced a lot in my decision.

Ana: And that was one of the things that I considered when I was applying to the universities, and check how is this, what is the human rights, human and women rights, LGBTI rights in this kind of countries, because I have not changed Colombia for other things that, you know, worse.

Rosa: And, well, now I moved to Germany because I had kind of a close relationship with Germany. So I started to do my master's thesis like last year. And I'm doing a master's in integrated natural resource management in Berlin.

Isabel: Studying here wasn't merely about academic achievement; it was the key to improving our lives. It provided the foundation for securing better opportunities, financial stability, and ultimately, the ability to raise her in an environment that nurtured her growth and development.

Isabel: it was about giving her the stability and opportunities she deserved.

Elena: Let's say that it was also part of the decision to come back to France because we had met and we decided to keep the relationship. So I also wanted to come back to see what happened. So yeah, basically, we have been together since the beginning, but we got married almost two years ago.

Elena: I decided to go back basically because I didn't want to be in the middle of a toxic family environment. Like my uncles, no, aunts, sorry, my aunts or the sisters of my mother are always controlling what you should do.

Elena: So, yeah, I really said, OK, if I live in another country, nobody can control me. I can do whatever I want and I'm not going to be stressed about,

Elena: So, yeah, so it's probably I was trying to get out of that expected role of woman. And I wanted to have a career. And honestly, it sounds flat, but I didn't want to be like my mother. So I felt like in Colombia, OK, I could have a job and etc. But at the end, they will expect it from you, you know, to have your house super organized, get married quickly, have kids quickly, you know. So it was not for me

Elena: For me, it was just one year to see what happened just to have the experience. You know, actually, that was a big crisis in my family because they didn't want me to come because they said that we didn't have the money to afford it and that I should not spend money on that.

Elena: Because I was coming back because of my boyfriend, because of the PhD, because of this really toxic environment, my family.

Migration decision-making

Johana: It was the same

Marta: I made the decision on my, like fully on my own, but I think it helped to get validation from my parents because I thought they were going to tell me I was crazy to just like quit my job to go

Gloria: Oh it was um both of us decision

Sofia: it was a decision that i did by myself

Ana: My mom, she was and is still scary about me living abroad and maybe don't coming back. They were not really happy about that. But I'm quite independent. So, even when they don't agree, I did what I did.

Isabel: I made the decision to bring her to the Netherlands, where my mother would care for her as a fosterchild while I finished my schooling.

Social networks in migration decision-making

Johana: Important, very important, because before...to decide to move to the Netherlands, we talked a lot with...for example, with family of my man, the family that live here in the Netherlands. So we talk about with his cousins, about the schools, about the good places to live. Yeah, we started our research about the context in the Netherlands.

Dolores: And I know many people that had migrated. Like I was talking to them and trying to find out ways of financing from different sources

Dolores: People from my university, my previous university back home, yes, they helped a lot.

Gloria: but yeah we have we actually have lots of like friends that are living here in the Netherlands and throughout Europe. Yeah so that helps like gathering information and stuff yeah exactly especially uh yeah because like my cousin when we first arrived she was like okay you need to do this this this like this is a step by step for you to register for you to do everything so it was like easier.

Sofia: experience of other people, like for example in my university I watched a lot of like in meetings of the international directions, no you know detection internal relation is when the department of the day exchange in the university. So, yes I attended a lot of those meetings and people was like super happy to live the experience abroad so I think it was like the main reason. I felt motivated to do it yeah

Isabel: But definitely the fact that my mother was here. I think that's the only... reason that gave me...actually... gave me the security to come here. I don't think I would dare...to come here on my own with a child. But I definitely think it's...the highest reason.... and certainly the most important... help I had...when I was here.

Social network in new country

Dolores: They are also part of this network that I have, like this circle.

Dolores: Fortunately I have many people to who I can reach out, in case I want to talk to someone or if I want to talk about something specific. I think it has been complicated for my mind, yea. So far, it is the loneliness.

Dolores: So now he is like my best friend here, like my family. But we are not family, and we didn't know much about each other before I came here. But this is the way it goes when you migrate, I guess

Dolores: I knew one person, from before. And I...we became friends very quickly. He offered his house for me to stay during the first two weeks.

Marta: However, like this is not my country. So at the same time, I feel, yeah, unsupported, like my family's not here

Marta: Maybe I was more open to making new friends. I think socially, speaking in terms of friends, like I have like a good network in that sense.

Marta: This was very difficult. Uh, because I, I didn't know anyone in this country, right?

Marta: She's, and I mean, she has to live abroad, but she doesn't understand what it's like to yeah, feel so vulnerable.

Marta: people in Europe are much more individualistic than in Latin America. So people here, even my partner, like she would help me to the point where it is not too uncomfortable for her, right. So this idea that people will like, go the extra mile for you to be supportive and to be helpful, here this doesn't happen

Marta: Right, I think this gives the sense that you are here more on your own.

Gloria: But yeah we have we actually have lots of like friends that are living here in the Netherlands and throughout Europe. Yeah so that helps like gathering information and stuff yeah exactly especially uh yeah because like my cousin when we first arrived she was like okay you need to do this this this like this is a step by step for you to register for you to do everything so it was like easier.

Gloria: I kept talking with her about that. And then I talked a lot with my husband and of course, with my family in Colombia and my friends. And I also made, which right now is a really close friend. She's Colombian. We actually met on the streets because of dogs. Yeah, they really look alike. And we became really close friends.

Gloria: You are what you attract, I think. So for us it has been quiet nice. I mean we have managed to get Dutch friends. Of which people say that's very fast. And it's not because we take things personal or that we are eager to make friends. No, we just let things happen. And the system also makes it really really easy I think.

Sofia: I have a social network but mainly I also international people

Sofia: But like relationships need time. So I don't feel that I can say that they are like my family. Like they can support me at any moment.

Sofia: And in that moment, I realised like how valuable it was to have these friends here. And yes, definitely, they have impacted my wellbeing here. Like that I can feel integrated.

Sofia: And I would recommend that they try, it's not easy, they try to build a connection before I arrive here. Try to find WhatsApp groups or people that are already here and contact them before come here.

Ana: Even in Netherlands, we have a strong community and that's good because we meet a lot and we kind of celebrate this December, you know, our style and that helps. But still, I feel depressed in season. Then in summer is better. Yeah. But yes, but also, I mean, I feel more depressed, but I also feel more aware of that feelings.

Isabel: But definitely the fact that my mother was here. I think that's the only... reason that gave me...actually... gave me the security to come here. I don't think I would dare...to come here on my own with a child. But I definitely think it's...the highest reason.... and certainly the most important... help I had...when I was here.

Isabel: The Netherlands is known for its individualistic culture, which has its pros and cons. On one hand, individuals can achieve a lot for themselves without societal pressure. On the other hand, this individualism can lead to social isolation. The Dutch government encourages self-reliance through various benefits and allowances, which can be advantageous but also contribute to loneliness, a growing issue. In contrast, Colombia relies heavily on family support since similar government support systems are not as prevalent.

Isabel: My mother was truly the cornerstone of everything. Without her, I believe things would have still worked out somehow because we are resilient fighters by nature, but it would have been a different story, I think. The support she provided alleviated a lot of stress.

Elena: My parents were right. This was a mistake, et cetera. And so it was really hard. I considered coming back, but then I said, OK, no, I'm not going to let some stupid kids, you know, put me down. And then we had, we started building this Latin community. Then I also met my boyfriend at that time. I think that that was also something really nice, because so I had somebody like to share with and spend most of the time also.

Socio-economic status in Colombia

Johana: really nice economic status

Johana: But not all people in my country, so I am privileged for that.

Johana: Not the real world, because I used to live in Colombia in a small bubble, that this is not the real world, you know, and this was my bubble with my...because in Colombia, you start to move with the same people in the same places because it's the same... But the reality outside of this bubble is terrible.

Dolores: So the economic situation of my family, I would say it was very good before migrating. We're not rich people, but at least we didn't miss anything.

Dolores: So the place I live in is four, and I always moved between three and four. So that is my family's socio-economic status relative to the rest.

Marta: I had like a very, and this is why I'm able to come here and not work for two years and not run out of savings, right? Because I had like a very good income in Colombia.

Marta: your socioeconomic background, like whether your family was rich or not, right. That's determined a lot in your life. Who are your friends? Which schools you go to? And I don't come from a rich family. My family was like a middle class family in Cartagena, which is not even the, the capital where, and I didn't go to a study in the university, but I think somehow I got like lucky in the sense that somehow my life ended up being very similar to the life of many people from like affluent families because I wanted to, to go to university.

Gloria: Yeah. So I can say that I'm in the sixth stage, let's say like that. So when I migrated here, like I had the means to migrate.

Sofia: My class is like the three

Sofia: If you are poor, there are also a lot of scholarships, like the government really support the poor class. But if you are from medium class, you are not here, but neither here.

Ana: I came here with a scholarship from the government of Colombia, so they paid for everything. Yes, and I hope to get a job later, so middle class, I guess.

Ana: So, I think I have more awareness about what is the reality in Colombia. Because when you came from a high, I don't know, family with money back in Colombia, you don't realize what is the reality in the rest of the country. So, I think that influenced a lot in my decision.

Ana: because when I hang out with these people that back in Colombia would not be possible because we belong to different social class.

Rosa: And I don't know if you know any background of Colombia, but it is like divided in between, which is the easiest way to define your economic situation. So the status goes from one to six. Well, I'm six. So this is my economic background in Colombia.

Rosa: Like, especially in a lower income household. Yeah, basically, women have to do it all. Like they have to cook, they have to do it all. And there's also a big problem.

Isabel: The economic situation was always about survival.

Isabel: We always, in terms of the economic situation, after my father passed away, it was pretty tough in itself, I would say. We were surviving. We often slept and lived with family. My mom had to change jobs very often, change houses, change cities. So I moved around an awful lot. Economically, we always had to ask for help from our family.

Elena: But let's say that my parents didn't have a very stable income. So my mother didn't work. She's a housewife. And my father used to be a teacher on universities or in schools, art teacher. So it was really hard to live with only one income and we are three kids.

Elena: But we didn't have like extra from that most of the time

Elena: And since I migrated, so the first year, it was quite hard because I was a student. And I came here because we didn't have money. Let's say money for this kind of things. I had to make a... Oh, I'm missing the word in English. Not to lend money. From the university, they had some programs to give you some sort of money that you can give back with no interest.

Socio-economic status post-migration

Gloria: o, because they wouldn't be able to...I mean in Colombia we had like a life of luxury, we have a car, we have our parents, we have country houses. But then here, that is totally different. They wouldn't want to live like that. Yeah, I can advise people, but not everyone is fit for it I think.

Sofia: And I think that my economic state doesn't change too much. I don't feel that I have a better economic condition.

Isabel: I have many more opportunities now: I can travel, pay for additional courses that I like, go on holidays, buy books and clothes, things I couldn't have dreamed of in Colombia

Elena: And since I migrated, so the first year, it was quite hard because I was a student. And I came here because we didn't have money. Let's say money for this kind of things. I had to make a... Oh, I'm missing the word in English. Not to lend money. From the university, they had some programs to give you some sort of money that you can give back with no interest.

Elena: Actually, I was able to give back money to my family in Colombia. And since I am working in my current company, so I have an engineer with a PhD salary, which is quite good. So I don't struggle anymore. And I still send money to my family in Colombia.

Intersectionality in socio-economic status

Johana: But if you have different level...if you have the opportunity to go to the university and get a diploma, get a nice job...yeah it's different.

Johana: it's important to get a education, that can go to this target, you know. So if you have a good education and you can talk, speak another language so that is more...you have more advantage than another person that don't have this opportunity. So I think that they are...in this case...to get a good and nice job for example.

Dolores: I think I am a very privileged person, to be honest, because, you know, as families are smaller, maybe it's easier to distribute the resources.

Dolores: I know it is hard to find a person that comes from a small city or town. Because for them it is way harder to find the information that this is a possibility in their life.

Marta: Because if you're not part of that, I think, I think in my case, another thing that comes into play in a country like Colombia is that I am, um, we don't use this like Afro distension, uh, but I'm not like a white Colombian. Right. Which I think is also something that comes into play a lot in a country like Colombia. Right. Which probably has also impacted, uh, yeah, my, my career in ways that maybe I can not directly perceive. Yeah. And of course, like being a woman also makes a difference on what kind of roles you get

Gloria: it happens, and it doesn't discriminate the hierarchy that I told you about. It happens in all the socio-economical, like, stages.

Ana: So, I think I have more awareness about what is the reality in Colombia. Because when you came from a high, I don't know, family with money back in Colombia, you don't realize what is the reality in the rest of the country. So, I think that influenced a lot in my decision.

Rosa: Like, especially in a lower income household. Yeah, basically, women have to do it all. Like they have to cook, they have to do it all. And there's also a big problem.

Isabel: In Colombia, maybe when you are more mature and have the money, you do what you want and don't care what people think or do. But often, when you're in lower social classes, it matters a bit more because you need others more. However, when I look at family members who are a bit wealthier, it's the same upbringing. It's the same "you're a girl, he's a boy." Girls don't do that, girls don't get that, and that's not how you behave as a girl. It's really more a matter of culture than socio-economic status. That said, I think you do get a lot more opportunities to develop as a woman in higher socio-economic classes. They motivate you much more to go and study. For me, it was more about needing to take care of myself and really start studying because our socio-economic status was lower.

Isabel: I've noticed that higher education levels among Dutch husbands often correlate with a greater tendency to support and encourage their wives' personal and professional growth.

Division of labour

Johana: we had someone that can help with the house and with the children, so you feel more comfortable because you don't have to do everything. So you have time, quality time for you, for your couple...you know. It's more...I think that is more enjoyable life.

Johana: For example, as small example, I always know when is their appointments for the doctor appointments, dentist appointments, vaccinations, for example with my kids. And my husband does not, you know. It's a small issue but more specific a task that the women always have to do, yeah, you know.

Dolores: But I do think that my mom did a lot more cooking and like caring stuff than my father.

Dolores: But yes, my mom in general was the one who cooked, who woke up early to do the breakfast for everybody. If someone has to leave early, who's taking care if someone is sick, who offers help for the other parts of the family, like my dad's sisters and brothers or her sisters and brothers, she's the one always like taking the initiative to go and help.

Dolores: And my dad grew up in a family that used to be like that, definitely. So that had to change with us because my mom was the other way around. Like she also grew up in a household where women did everything, but then she wanted to change that. And she really always asked him to do things at home. And so he did. It was like a breakthrough, a generational breakthrough, I would say for my dad.

Marta: although my mom was a stay home mom, we had someone in the house who would help us with everything and different people for different things.

Gloria: when we first got married, like, I was more in the position, like, we should split. We should split, like, tasks. But then he was like, there's no need to do that. Like, I mean, whenever something needs to be done, whoever realizes that it needs to be done will do it. Yeah. And it's worked like that, like, ever since.

Gloria: If I'm in my parents house and I have two brothers my brothers were there usually my mom will tell me like could you come and help me with this and I was always like yeah but I also have two brothers but I was always that way and then they were all mad because they were like yeah but she called you first and I'm like yeah but you exist too I should always call me first and and I didn't agree on that

Sofia: So I always had to take care of my sisters

Sofia: the cleaning and all this kind of stuff is always like the older sister have to do everything

Sofia: For example, my father never, never cleaned the bathroom because he's a boy.

Ana: We have like tasks in the house, like mop the floor, cleaning the dishes, small tasks. But in general, my mom was in charge of everything and she gave us a small task to us.

Ana: But my brother, for example, he doesn't have so many tasks as my sisters. They have to take care of him, kind of. He used to help, but not as much because he was a boy and, you know, boys don't clean the house. He used to maybe do like go to the supermarket, that kind of things, like go outside of the house, but to mop the floor, cook, clean the dishes. That was my sisters.

Rosa: Well, we had a person who was like a maid that was helping us with the household chores. My responsibility was more or less like paying the public services. But regarding like cleaning or like normal duties, I think I have none.

Rosa: For example, when my dad is present, I am the one who has to cook. If only it's my dad and I, I have to be the one cooking, I have to be the one doing much of the work. Basically, because my dad has no idea how to do anything.

Rosa: Like he has simply no idea how the house works, like in general.

Rosa: Like my host mom was always cooking, my host mom was always like doing the cleaning, my host mom was the responsible of everything.

Isabel: My mother had to become the primary breadwinner because there were three children to support. It was decided that she would go to work while my grandfather stayed at home. My grandfather was essentially a stay-at-home dad. He took care of everything at home without any hesitation or complaints. All the household chores were managed by him, and even the rules in the house were his, not my mother's. So, if I had to describe the division of labour in my family, my grandfather did everything at home. He didn't mind being the househusband at all

Elena: But let's say that my parents didn't have a very stable income. So my mother didn't work. She's a housewife. And my father used to be a teacher on universities or in schools, art teacher. So it was really hard to live with only one income and we are three kids.

Elena: But yeah, let's say that the main source, the main distribution of the chores was on her.

Elena: But most of the time it was her who had to clean the whole apartment or do the lunch, prepare breakfast, etc.

Elena: that was our eternal fight with my mom because my mom used to do everything for my brother. But for my sister and I, it was more on our side. She wouldn't get mad if my brother didn't do the dishes, for example. But if we don't do the dishes, she will get mad or she will never ask him to do the dishes

Elena: because you're a woman, you have to help, I don't know, like cut the vegetables or put the table or whatever, while the boys are just sitting in the couch, you know, watching TV.

Mental health and well-being post-migration

Johana: I feel so proud at this point, because I can, for example, speak a new language, Dutch is not the best. But I try and learn, I study, I see my kids that they can handle with three different languages at the same time.

Johana: For me, I'm very grateful to...to learn, and to have the opportunity to live in other country.

Dolores: If you have to come here and get a job and you don't know how are you going to finance your stay, it's stressful because when you're here you also have to solve a lot of things and mentally it's very hard to think about money. I would say it's hard for me, for example.

Dolores: What is going to happen with my family?

Dolores: Fortunately I have many people to who I can reach out, in case I want to talk to someone or if I want to talk about something specific. I think it has been complicated for my mind, yea. So far, it is the loneliness.

Dolores: I think also, I think Berlin is very friendly for migrants. But I don't have any experience in other cities. You could maybe see more xenophobia, but I don't have that experience. But I think that could also be very hard. But Berlin is very friendly to international people. So yeah, it has been good so far. It has been a good experience.

Marta: But that meant that I was not willing to take whatever job the market was going to offer me just to get a foot on the door

Marta: Then staying here has been more complicated. Not because the process, because you need to extend your visa. And then I had not because the process in itself is complicated because it's very straightforward. They tell you what to do, but it's just because it takes ages.

Marta: The worst. This has been a very, a very difficult decision.

Marta: This was very difficult. Uh, because I, I didn't know anyone in this country, right?

Marta: She's, and I mean, she has to live abroad, but she doesn't understand what it's like to yeah, feel so vulnerable.

Marta: I think that makes it difficult because I'm not in this survival mode. Like, Oh, I'm flying from war or I don't have a job and I'm here to do whatever to get money.

Gloria: we still had some issues when we arrived because my husband's company, like we didn't achieve the objectives that we had to achieve in order like to have a profit because we came here with our savings. So then we, like all our savings were gone.

Gloria: Because we think different, you know, like, yeah. We didn't want like to call parents like, hey, I need you to transfer me money because I couldn't do this

Gloria: So yeah we were, we were like in um, like in jail more or less.

Gloria: You are what you attract, I think. So for us it has been quiet nice. I mean we have managed to get Dutch friends. Of which people say that's very fast. And it's not because we take things personal or that we are eager to make friends. No, we just let things happen. And the system also makes it really really easy I think.

Sofia: Like I but okay it also depends like the stage in which I am because for example the first six months i was super happy. I

Sofia: So yes in my case of like at the start everything okay and later i start to miss, yeah.

Sofia: I still feel like in some way vulnerable but at the same point I feel more safe than in Colombia.

Sofia: for first time I felt I have time for myself so even when I get have even when i have to get used to cooking for me that was not like the usual thing in my country

Sofia: my mental health has been okay in general like before come here like two years before come here i felt like depression so i think that is the worst thing i have ever felt and coming here i haven't feel like something similar so in general i think that is okay

but it's inevitable like to feel sometimes see this feeling of fear. Not like fear of something happens to me and i am alone here i am so far my home

Sofia: And in that moment, I realised like how valuable it was to have these friends here. And yes, definitely, they have impacted my wellbeing here. Like that I can feel integrated.

Sofia: And in that moment, I realised like how valuable it was to have these friends here. And yes, definitely, they have impacted my wellbeing here. Like that I can feel integrated.

Ana: Even in Netherlands, we have a strong community and that's good because we meet a lot and we kind of celebrate this December, you know, our style and that helps. But still, I feel depressed in season. Then in summer is better. Yeah. But yes, but also, I mean, I feel more depressed, but I also feel more aware of that feelings.

Ana: I mean, they say, if you are depressed, try harder. But in Netherlands, it's like quite more open. And my professor, for example, a little bit worried about you don't feeling well. So, the university have a lot of programs.

Ana: They say, why are you depressed? Yeah, you have everything. You cannot complain. And then you have to don't say nothing. So, I feel more aware of these feelings. And I have more of these feelings.

Rosa: Because you are always a foreigner when you're, you will always be treated like a foreigner when you're not at home.

Isabel: I have many more opportunities now: I can travel, pay for additional courses that I like, go on holidays, buy books and clothes, things I couldn't have dreamed of in Colombia

Isabel: I now have the luxury of making choices that were once unimaginable, like deciding between brown or white bread, or whether to eat fruit. I can even visit a dietitian if I choose to, and I have the financial stability to afford it even if insurance doesn't cover it. This shift in welfare has allowed me to prioritise my well-being. When I come home now, everything is managed financially and otherwise, giving me the time to invest in personal growth. I can read books on personal development or take courses on spirituality, which I'm passionate about. Personally, my life has taken a complete 180-degree turn.

Elena: For me, it was just one year to see what happened just to have the experience. You know, actually, that was a big crisis in my family because they didn't want me to come because they said that we didn't have the money to afford it and that I should not spend money on that.

Elena: So it was really hard for me at the beginning because I felt like very guilty, like, oh, my God, I'm ruining this family. And we have a lot of fights about that.

Elena: Actually, I actually had to get help like psychologically from the wife of one of my uncles, because it was really hard for me that my parents would not support me.

Elena: Actually, my mom even said, like, I hope you go and you never come back.

Elena: Then I arrived and I discovered that I couldn't relate. I mean, I consider myself like a very, how do you call it, not extrovert person, like easy to relate with. And French people were really hard to relate with, like people from our age. It was really hard. They didn't understand our French and they didn't speak English very well, so it was hard to communicate. And yeah, really, they were mean.

Elena: My parents were right. This was a mistake, et cetera. And so it was really hard. I considered coming back, but then I said, OK, no, I'm not going to let some stupid kids, you know, put me down. And then we had, we started building this Latin community. Then I also met my boyfriend at that time. I think that that was also something really nice, because so I had somebody like to share with and spend most of the time also.

Elena: So I was feeling like, OK, I'm an awful person. I'm just here because I'm super selfish. But yeah, with time I got over it.

Elena: I experienced like a period of time were I was, uhhh, like my mental health was not very good. I had a lot of panicattacks and I was anxious all the time. I was going to the docter like every week, because I always thought sometihing was wrong with me. And I think this is also related a little bit.

Changes in responsibilities and roles

Johana: But here, it was difficult because you have to do everything by yourself.

Johana: struggle with the daily activities like cleaning, the kids and cooking and everything

Johana: It was really hard because also...you have to go to work, you have to clean the house, cooking, do the laundry, everything. I think that is when I have this kind of help in my house, here that is not possible. So you miss this kind of support.

Dolores: I think I do the same things basically. Of course I have more responsibilities about my expenses now, like I'm on my own economically wise. But I don't have a problem with that. I feel like I have a lot of responsibility with my family who is away, because I'm an only child. As an only child you also feel like you need to take care of them, it's hard being away. So that's kinda something I want to work on. Like I have on my mind that I want to be there for them in a way. When you balance out your options, of course for me there is the option of staying here after studies.

Sofia: for first time I felt I have time for myself so even when I get have even when i have to get used to cooking for me that was not like the usual thing in my country

Ana: I have to send money back. I have to take care of my mother and a bit for my niece and nephews, because my brothers and sisters, they have daughters and sons.

Rosa: Like, I get to live more earning what I'm earning than here. For example, I have more space. I have a bigger house with a patio. I have pets. I have somebody helping me with the house chores. Yeah. Also, I miss the fruits a lot.

Elena: Actually, I was able to give back money to my family in Colombia. And since I am working in my current company, so I have an engineer with a PhD salary, which is quite good. So I don't struggle anymore. And I still send money to my family in Colombia.

Elena: So, yeah, I really said, OK, if I live in another country, nobody can control me. I can do whatever I want and I'm not going to be stressed about.

Differences in gender inequality

Dolores: As a men you will always hear like yes you are great, you will learn a lot, you will study, you will get a job and be rich, something like that. But for girls it's different you will get a men, you will have a german boyfriend soon and it's like, come on. That's not where I'm traveling for.

Dolores: But yeah, that influences maybe the behavior you can have as a women abroad, you are more vulnerable. Maybe you get a partner that doesn't care, like getting into harmful relationships, because you need to get in a relationship as soon as possible.

Marta: That women are, are meant to be like feminine, that you are meant to want to have kids, uh, have a family and so on. Maybe it's okay if you don't work and you stay at home. And like, like the idea of what happens here in Europe, like men that stay at home with the kids, they'll be unthinkable

Gloria: Also, and it happens quite a lot, which I do not agree, but if you go clubbing in Colombia, usually women don't pay the cover. Oh. Men do pay it, but women don't, which I don't agree. Yeah. Also, it happens that if you go out, I don't know, with friends, you know, with friends, or whatever, and they're, like, the same amount of men and women, usually pay the bill.

Gloria: Yeah never seen anything also that in which they treat men or women uh differently um I think we're treated likewise, yeah. Like I've had people help me like in the train men and women when I have like a lot of stuff and I have to get them on the train and I'm alone people help I mean it's not that all men help, no men and women.

Sofia: So I felt like a lot of fear and I thought in that moment like if I was a boy maybe this would happen.

Sofia: in colombia if i walk in the night that long like i have the probability that something wrong passed to me like 90 percent and what else yes like here you also are more free to dress yourself in the way that you prefer

Sofia: I have seen like the jobs that have better opportunities in my country are like the tech jobs, like people that know how to coding and programming and this kind of stuff. And those are like the careers that woman does not prefer to study. So I think that it influences a lot in the, in the inequality between the jobs because it's like the best paid job, but there are no women in that, in that field. So I only will say that in the education is like determinant in the equality.

Sofia: So for example, a typical career for a woman would be, could be like being a nurse or like to be teacher or like the worst paid jobs.

Ana: So, there is sometimes that we women were not allowed to do in the research, but that was because the hormones that they use to make the flowers open can be unhealthy to the reproductive system of women. So, yes. So, it was because the gender, but in a good way, I guess.

Ana: And they have priority for women in tech because the gap, you know. So, I apply and I get it. But the problem was that I get the money but not the university.

Ana: But still, in Colombia, they're still making these kind of jokes about gender, and it's quite normal and socially accepted to say that, because you are a woman, you are stupid.

Ana: And then the research came and say, oh, it should be hard to work with so many girls. And I was, why? I said, oh, you know, women. You know what? What is the thing that we're working together? It was, I just don't like it. I will choose three girls, three boys, you know, because women, all of you, you should fight. We never fight. It was a good thing. It was just stereotypes.

Ana: And the Dutch guys over there, they were really, really open and they always try to help us and they try to understand our situation, really help us. Yes, and try to, you know, involve us in the Dutch culture. But I was lucky because I know a lot of people that don't have this experience.

Rosa: What I was telling you, like, they didn't value my work and they didn't put me in charge of the things that I want.

Rosa: it's the feeling of feeling safe. I can walk late nights, I can wear whatever I want. And I would never feel like threatened in the streets. In Colombia, I do feel like in some points, maybe if it's late at night, I wouldn't be walking by myself. That actually, maybe if I were a boy, maybe I would be doing it. But as a woman, I would never be walking like late nights in Colombia by myself. Here, it doesn't matter. And this is something that I really appreciate.

Rosa: So this feeling of safety is something that I really value of being here, like in Europe.

Rosa: I think it's like how they feel they own the person, like they have the right to just take the woman that they see.

Rosa: Oh, yeah, this, you know, it's always this perception that everything is allowed for them

Rosa: Probably here is more, like, more awareness of some machismo behaviors, but I think most of it is generational. Like I've seen it more in generation changes than within countries.

Rosa: In Colombia, the guy gets to cheat. But if we cheat, we are seen as a really bad person, we don't do it that often either. They do it all the time and it's because they get away with it. It's actually accepted in the society, they are like ah yeah but he is a man and he gets to do it. So basically, they don't have any responsibility in the relationship. It's all okay, because you don't have any responsibility. But for us, it's totally different. So basically, yeah the responsibility part. Evrything for them is possible.

Elena: when you're a small kid or a teenager, you receive comments on the street that make you feel uncomfortable, you know, from men that just saw you passing by and it's like disgusting.

Elena: Yeah, there were some comments, some comments, some situations in which you could feel that because you're a woman, you are like less taken seriously.

Elena: the same uncle that sponsored my university, he had a company and he said that he didn't like to hire women because they had to go on maternity leave because they are always changing humor, blah, blah, blah. And I was like, how can you say that? I'm in front of you.

Elena: Or, for example, people telling you that because you're a woman, maybe you're not as good as a man, or she cannot resist as good as a man, this manhood environment.

Elena: And of course, here you can see much more activism, much more activities related to gender equality that are not, let's say, limited to just the feminists, ultra extremist feminists, etc.

Elena: oh, why can't you do two things at the same time? You're a woman. Women are supposed to be good at multitasking.

Other differences

Johana: that's why I really like here in the Netherlands, because every child has the opportunity to go to school. And you know, to get nice food...go to ride a bike. But in my country, this is not possible for every single child.

Johana: in Europe or in the Netherlands, I see that the people have the same opportunity, for example, to travel, to go to the school, to...the opportunities are very available for all the people.

Dolores: And it comes from a lot of things, like, labor conditions are very different back there. So I had to work many, many hours. And then I spent two hours going back home.

Dolores: So the quality of life here is very different.

Dolores: I think also, I think Berlin is very friendly for migrants. But I don't have any experience in other cities. You could maybe see more xenophobia, but I don't have that experience. But I think that could also be very hard. But Berlin is very friendly to international people. So yeah, it has been good so far. It has been a good experience.

Marta: Colombia is a very classic, Colombia is like a very classic society, very racist, very sexist, like very everything that you can imagine.

Marta: the wider range and people that don't identify with any gender, women that dress in more masculine ways and are, they're not gay at all or lesbians or anything, which Colombia is more, in most cases, more, if a woman dress more masculine, they tend to be, yeah. Um, into women, but here it's like, no, not, not necessarily.

Marta: people in Europe are much more individualistic than in Latin America. So people here, even my partner, like she would help me to the point where it is not too uncomfortable for her, right. So this idea that people will like, go the extra mile for you to be supportive and to be helpful, here this doesn't happen

Gloria: And even my friends that still live in Colombia, they're like, no way I'm going out with someone that doesn't pick me up in his car. And I'm like... Yeah. That's a big cultural difference. Yeah. It's a huge cultural difference

Gloria: Probably, but also my cousin works from home. She doesn't go to an office. She has friends from all over the world, I mean she has friends from Africa, from all over Europe, from Colombia, from other places in Latin America. But yeah I think that's more from Europe perspective. I mean if you want to see the good in the world you can, but if you don't. I think that's it. I have never felt that anyone was discriminating me in Amsterdam, never.

Sofia: Even with an informal job, I have more economic freedom here.

Sofia: And in general I think that here people respect more.

Ana: I like that in Netherlands, they don't really care about how you dress. If you are too feminine, or too short, or too, you know, you have to dress better, because I have always dressed more casual. Yeah. I don't know, what to say. In Colombia, I always used to hear, you are not feminine. You are not. But that's kind of common.

Ana: Stereotype is really, really strong over there.

Ana: I mean, they say, if you are depressed, try harder. But in Netherlands, it's like quite more open. And my professor, for example, a little bit worried about you don't feeling well. So, the university have a lot of programs.

Ana: They say, why are you depressed? Yeah, you have everything. You cannot complain. And then you have to don't say nothing. So, I feel more aware of these feelings. And I have more of these feelings.

Ana: In Colombia, the food, the vegetables, the taste of the fruit are different. Yeah. Even if I can afford it, and I cannot most of the time, even if I can afford the fruit here, pineapples, I don't know, things like that, it doesn't taste like that. And this is stupid, maybe, it's something simple, it's more spiritual, but I really miss that kind of things that in Colombia you have. Yeah. You don't need to be rich for that, you know. You can go just to the store and get a clementine, it tastes so sweet. And it was like, kind of the things that I miss most. The rivers. In my city, it's a rural city, there is a lot of rivers close to my house. And we used to go by bike in the weekends and just swim in a crystal river, blue water, warm weather. And now you have to ride. And now I have to ride, now it's cold. Yeah. And the shore is clean, but... No. Exactly. That kind of things that you cannot, it's not about the money. And I don't, and I don't, when I was back in Colombia, I don't think like that, like a privilege.

Rosa: Because you are always a foreigner when you're, you will always be treated like a foreigner when you're not at home.

Rosa: Like, I get to live more earning what I'm earning than here. For example, I have more space. I have a bigger house with a patio. I have pets. I have somebody helping me with the house chores. Yeah. Also, I miss the fruits a lot.

Isabel: It's not always equal, but women here generally have more equal opportunities. They tend to postpone pregnancy and relationships to focus on education first. In Colombia, starting a family at a young age is common because family support is crucial for success

Isabel: The Netherlands is known for its individualistic culture, which has its pros and cons. On one hand, individuals can achieve a lot for themselves without societal pressure. On the other hand, this individualism can lead to social isolation. The Dutch government encourages self-reliance through various benefits and allowances, which can be advantageous but also contribute to loneliness, a growing issue. In contrast, Colombia relies heavily on family support since similar government support systems are not as prevalent.

Isabel: In Colombia, life was day-to-day survival. There was little time for self-care or reflection on my well-being. It was all about working every day and coming home to rest. Maybe on Sundays, there was a brief moment to socialise with friends over a drink, but that was about it.

Isabel: You could get a man out of Colombia, but you can't get Colombia out of the man.

Reflections

Johana: Now also, it depends not on the country, I think that the happiness is inside of you. Not a fan of the place is only..depends up to you, it's up to you

Johana: So for me, this is amazing. I like the Netherlands, I think that the most important is try to understand the new country, the opportunities that the country can offer to you. And try to...yeah, to do the best to learn the language, to try to integrate with the culture and to be open with the country. Now also, it depends not on the country, I think that the happiness is inside of you. Not a fan of the place is only..depends up to you, it's up to you. So that's for me. So I liked it. I miss, like I said, this kind of support. But now that I can be very proud of me because I learned for example, to clean my house, to cook. And this is important, you know, to try to handle a house.

Dolores: So I always tell them to ask people who know at least one thing about going abroad. Yeah, the best thing you can do is asking about experiences and surrounding yourself with people that will support you in this process. Once you are sure you want to pursue this dream, you need to be aware it is not going to be easy. But you need people who are going to be there for you, will support you and will rooting you, in case you don't believe in yourself. Because it is very complicated when you don't believe in yourself. You need to meet deadlines and be very strict with yourself to meet the deadline of application and the visa and so on.

Marta: Yeah, so it's not the same. When I actually moved to another country when I was your age, than someone at my age, right. So age matters, how many money you have matters, your openness to experiences matters. So I, I don't think that for me to recommend that, I need to understand their situation. I think in my case, yeah I don't regret the decision, because it tured out well, I mean my friends, my partner, workwise you will be okay. I mean I work international, so it doesn't really matter if I'm here or in another country. Uhm, socially, I mean society wise I don't know how it is going to turn out, like with this whole political extremely right, yeah. But I think so far, it's good. I think I like Berlin, so.

Gloria: there's a saying in Spanish. I'm going to translate it: If you're given a situation or if you are put through a situation, it means because you're able to go through to it. I mean, like, life is not going to give you a situation you're not capable of overcoming. So that was my mantra. And then if I look back, I'm like, yeah, now I can laugh about the floor. But back then, I mean, I couldn't.

Gloria: But then I have other friends that...they have the Colombian culture so much integrated within their veins and in their dna, that I would say no. No you wouldn't be able.

Gloria: o, because they wouldn't be able to...I mean in Colombia we had like a life of luxury, we have a car, we have our parents, we have country houses. But then here, that is totally different. They wouldn't want to live like that. Yeah, I can advise people, but not everyone is fit for it I think.

Gloria: You are what you attract, I think. So for us it has been quiet nice. I mean we have managed to get Dutch friends. Of which people say that's very fast. And it's not because we take things personal or that we are eager to make friends. No, we just let things happen. And the system also makes it really really easy I think.

Gloria: I would do it again. Yeah, I actually, I don't regret moving. I think that things happen how they're supposed to happen. And you learn from everything. I mean, it's like, there's a saying in Spanish. I'm going to translate it: If you're given a situation or if you are put through a situation, it means because you're able to go through to it. I mean, like, life is not going to give you a situation you're not capable of overcoming. So that was my mantra. And then if I look back, I'm like, yeah, now I can laugh about the floor. But back then, I mean, I couldn't.

Sofia: I am happy with that. I think that I have learned a lot. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I will do it again. But with another conditions. Like, for example, I just came here without knowing what I would work here. Or with like anything safe. Anything safe. So it was a lot of uncertainty in every step I had. So yes, I would like to come here. But if I have like... I have the security that I have something stable. Like, I don't know, like a job or a scholarship or something like that, but in the same condition I came, no. But I don't regret it. I am happy anyway. But if I do it, I will do it different. Yeah. Yeah.

Ana: And that was one of the things that I considered when I was applying to the universities, and check how is this, what is the human rights, human and women rights, LGBTI rights in this kind of countries, because I have not changed Colombia for other things that, you know, worse.

Ana: You know, it's like 10 seconds that you spend taking a picture close in a nice monument. And then you put it on Instagram and it looks like you are living the dream. But like that is 10 seconds. Then you have to face it. You have problems with the migration, doing the paperwork, try to get a visa, try to get a job. Try to not lose everything in a way. So it's hard.

Ana: Yes, for sure. But I would do it again. Yes, I cannot change the life experience that I had, you know, meet a lot of different people from different countries, be able to survive or feel more stronger than ever. But it's not like the dream, you know. When my friends back in Colombia, they say, oh, what a nice, it's not like that. You cannot imagine, it's like living in now, my life is wonderful. It's hard, it's still hard. And also because I lost a lot of things that I have never think as a privilege.

Ana: it's something simple, it's more spiritual, but I really miss that kind of things that in Colombia you have. Yeah. You don't need to be rich for that, you know. You can go just to the store and get a clementine, it tastes so sweet. And it was like, kind of the things that I miss most. The rivers. In my city, it's a rural city, there is a lot of rivers close to my house. And we used to go by bike in the weekends and just swim in a crystal river, blue water, warm weather. And now you have to ride. And now I have to ride, now it's cold. Yeah. And the shore is clean, but... No. Exactly. That kind of things that you cannot, it's not about the money. And I don't, and I don't, when I was back in Colombia, I don't think like that, like a privilege. Then I moved to Venezuela, it was, oh man, that's privilege. Yeah. That was a privilege that I can know.

Rosa: It depends on the situation, no? For example, sometime I would say don't bother coming here, it's okay. And also, what I was telling you about, the single mother, she has been taking care of her daughter all the time. Because of the institute, the daughter can not walk by herself from the school to their house, she has to be picked up. So yeah. She has to be with the mother all the time. She can not be left alone. So she has these difficulties, she does not have work that she can do from home. So here she would have more freedom and for example, the daughter won't be at risk when walking by herself or whatever.

Isabel: From my work, I've observed many women grappling with incomplete transitions, neither fully here nor there, but living in between, constantly planning for both places without committing to either. This phenomenon isn't exclusive to women but is prevalent among many men as well. However, women often have an advantage in finding employment during migration, even if it's not the highest-paying job.

Isabel: Determine if you're migrating to earn money temporarily or to build a permanent life. Personally, building a life here has brought stability to my family, my daughter, mother, and husband are all settled here, making this country our home. This clarity contrasts sharply with those who remain undecided about their future, perpetually torn between two places and eventually finding it hard to imagine returning to their home country after years abroad. Therefore, it's crucial to clarify your goals before migrating.

Elena: Yes I think so. I love my husband. So, and we have a household with our cats. We are in a pretty stable situation. I have my job. And even we are moving to Greece, with him. Because I found a job there and we are going to his country to see how it goes. So, overall I'm very happy because everytime I go back to Colombia to visit my family I said, yeah no I can not live here anymore. Because of this thing with the people expecting you to do things, because of the, you know, crazyness. Apparently Europeans love the crazyness about my country, but I'm escaping that. And because of course in my field, and that is related to gender inequality, in my field it is really hard to find a job and be treated seriously. I used to be a production supervisor, but because I was a women and all the operators were men, they were not treating me seriously. So that's another example. And I had to deal with truckdrivers and they didn't want to talk to me when they saw me, of course I'm, you know, a small women like with babyface. They did not want to talk to me, they were like where the man in charge, and I was like I'm in charge, park your truck over there. They were like you know nothing, and I'm like, I'm the boss here and just do what I say. So yeah, it was really hard to fight men every day, like at a daily basis. So, yeah I have to confirm that migrating was a good decision for me.

Elena: As I told you, I was quite independent already before coming here. I mean dependent from my from my parents economically and also like not living with them. So apart from that, because people were mean etc., I was not feeling very like, you know homesick or something like that. But I had friends that actually went back after six months because they could not stand like French culture or you know, the studies or they didn't find an internship etc. and it was too much. It's about being open to the unknown. You never know what you're gonna find here. You have to be open to embrace whatever there is. It is not easy at the beginning, because of course you are completely out of your comfort zone. So if you feel comfortable changing your comfort zone, it's a good option. And be ready to have like a harsh time at the beginning and then it will be okay. But yeah if you are like very link to your family, you know, to your culture and everything it's hard. I think it's because the cultural shock is also very very harsh.