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The vulnerabilities of skilled irregular Venezuelan migrants and entrepreneurs in Chile

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ABSTRACT

In a context marked by restrictive migration policies, precarious living conditions and a neoliberal market, this article explores how Venezuelan migrants incorporated themselves into the job market through informal entrepreneurship, the challenges they faced, and sources of resilience they developed. We draw on eleven semi-structured and in-depth interviews with Venezuelan migrants who participated in a micro-entrepreneurship training program delivered by a Santiago-based NGO during the COVID-19 pandemic. Drawing on the entrepreneurship literature, vulnerability framework and thematic analysis, our findings suggest that there isn't a one-dimensional incorporation into the labour market experience among the group studied, despite similarities among the members; rather there is a dynamic intersectionality of gender, legal status, household economy and structural factors that amplify their precarity. The findings also highlight that migrants' capability of acquiring stable employment was essential to their well-being, in the absence of avenues to acquire formal employment, microenterprises became a source of motivation and resilience, providing them with a network of contacts and social support.

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Skilled migrant; vulnerability; informal labour market; entrepreneurship; Latin America

Introduction

Over the past three decades, Chile has experienced a progressive increase in the number of migrants arriving from other Latin American countries. Up until the year 2000, migrants were primarily women from Perú, Argentina and Bolivia. This pattern shifted as new arrivals came from Colombia, Haiti and Venezuela. By 2021, out of the 1.5-million foreign residents in the country, 40% were Venezuelans (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia 2022). Nicolás Maduros regime triggered a major humanitarian crisis, driving the increase in Chile's foreign population from 2.3% in 2014 to almost 8% in 2022 (Servicio Jesuita a Migrantes 2022).

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In the 1990s immigration to Chile was very much feminized, with a great proportion of women working in the domestic sphere (Canales 2018). Today, there is greater diversity regarding sex distribution, which varies according to nationality. While in the Venezuelan community, 51% of migrants are women, in the Haitian one, they only represent 37%. The same can be said about migrants' level of formal education, with Venezuelans having the highest level out of all migrant communities (Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas and Servicio Nacional de Migraciones 2022). Despite their qualifications, just 10% have managed to validate their university degrees, with most of them being overqualified for their current roles (Servicio Nacional de Migraciones 2022).

Venezuelans, along with a significant proportion of other Latin American migrants, experience vulnerable living conditions in Chile after arrival: an estimated 29.6% of migrant households live in poverty and 18.9% in overcrowded conditions (Margarit Segura et al. 2022; Ministerio de Desarrollo Social y Familia 2022). Migrants who do not hold a visa, which gives them the right to work, and access to social security, rely on the underground economy (Rival-Carrillo, Valenzuela-Valenzuela, and Cartes-Velásquez 2021). Unexpected crises such as the 2019 mass protests against social inequality in Chile and the COVID-19 pandemic further limited their opportunities of accessing the labour market and improve their well-being.

The government of ex-President Sebastián Piñera did little to improve migrants' quality of life and mobility. The government was accused of promoting a migration governance strategy which disguised 'restrictive measures as protective of migrants' (Finn and Umpierrez de Reguero 2020, 44) after creating *Visa de Responsabilidad Democrática,* specific for Venezuelans migrating to Chile (Oficio circular N° 96 2018). Venezuelans' ability to apply for a visa was restricted to specific Chilean consulates. Moreover, unlike other migrants, they must submit additional documents to support their application, such as criminal background checks and a passport issued in or after 2013, documents that are extremely difficult to obtain in a semi-paralysed state that does not encourage emigration. Instead of disincentivising Venezuelan immigration, these requirements have arguably contributed to an increase in the number of *irregular* migrants entering Chile (Finn 2019; Thayer 2021). This led to what Goldring and Landolt (2013) called a 'precarious legal status' that conditions migrants' ability to exercise the same rights that the citizens of a country enjoy through institutional processes.

Further, these restrictive migration measures lacked strategies to promote inclusion and facilitate migrants' settlement process (Thayer 2019; Thayer, Stang, and Dilla 2020). While holding an irregular status, many migrants entered informal or more precarious sectors, including the agricultural, construction and hospitality sectors, which are also less desired by Chilean workers (Stefoni, Leiva, and Bonhomme 2017). Additionally, they begun to participate in the unregulated labour market, including micro food-related enterprises (e.g. food carts, selling products door-to-door), driving and delivering on platforms such as Rappi or Uber (Morris Keller 2021). Sometimes these alternatives have given migrants greater financial independence and above minimum wage income, but they also put them at risk of criminalization and abuse by law enforcement and the public, as they may not have the right to work, nor the municipal permits to maintain their businesses and therefore left them exposed to fines and loss of working materials (Muñoz and Martinez 2022).

This article thus addresses the questions of: How do Venezuelan migrants in Chile incorporate themselves into the labour market? And to what extent does entrepreneurship contribute to their resilience and/or vulnerability? This is an important question in a context in which many migrants incorporate themselves into the job market through informal entrepreneurship, and where Venezuelans have rapidly become the largest national migrant group in Chile, facing diverse challenges in the job market.

Entrepreneurship, migration and intersectionality

Migrants' participation in entrepreneurship has been discussed since the 1980s (Bates 1989). Traditionally, the perceived key factors in influencing the development of entrepreneurship were ethnicity and culture. Some scholars argued that ethnic businesses became barriers to migrants' mobility, limiting their financial and occupational opportunities. Others pointed out that finding a job in an ethnic enclave bears lower transaction costs since migrants can tap for credit and business opportunities into family or community's resources (Portes and Sensenbrenner 1993). While migrants' entrepreneurial activities can pay off economically, one should not assume homogeneity, as they may follow different trajectories and employ different adaptation strategies (Portes and Martinez 2020).

Entrepreneurship can offer more than economic gains because its success depends on social capital. Social networks strengthen business relationships and trade by providing access to information, capital, and other networks (Jack, Dodd, and Anderson 2008). Another important concept is the identity-work nexus whereby people define their own identity in the context of their work and through mutually constitutive social interactions (Knox, Casulli, and MacLaren 2021) which can impact people's sense of vulnerability or resilience.

While some start a business driven by a business opportunity, others are driven to this avenue out of necessity, pushed by the discrimination faced in employment (Wauters and Lambrecht 2008) or a lack of better working opportunities (Block and Sandner 2009). The concept of survivalist entrepreneurship therefore emerged to describe a hyper-precarious experience placed at the intersection of class, gender, legal status and racialised experiences, combined with a lack of choice (Romero and Valdez 2016).

Portes and Rumbaut (2014) have provided a more complex understanding of migrant entrepreneurship by discussing it in relation to four factors: individual (education and work experience), group (social capital), host society (social and economic level), and government policies (immigration and labour market access). This proposal has been pushed forward by suggesting that it is the intersectionality of factors such as gender, race, class, legal status and religion, that are better suited to reflect the variety of experiences of migrant entrepreneurs, even when they are from the same community and have similar patterns of migration and settlement (Agius Vallejo and Canizales 2016; Romero and Valdez 2016).

By highlighting the concept of intersectionality, it is possible to make explicit the interconnected nature of different factors in the reproduction of systems of discrimination and disadvantage. Intersectionality contributes to the understanding of social stratification because it explains the emergence of social divisions as the result of intersections between the social, political, historical and economic context (Yuval-Davis 2015).

A local perspective on entrepreneurship and migration

In Chile, entrepreneurship has a long-lasting connection to the neoliberal policies implemented during Pinochet's dictatorship, which were continued by the democratic governments that followed (Di Giminiani, Pérez, and Quezada 2021). The labour market flexibility, the privatization of services and resources, and the efforts made to attract foreign capital are examples of its reach. The figure of the entrepreneur emerged in this sociopolitical context as an alternative path through which individuals could achieve success, creating wealth for themselves, for their employees and the society at large (Bernasconi 2005). Currently, entrepreneurship is promoted as a strategy to tackle poverty, mainly for those who have been traditionally positioned at the edges of society (Daher, Jaramillo, and Rosati 2021). Nonetheless, entrepreneurship has also been criticised as it highlights neoliberal values such as individual responsibility, self-discipline and self-development in matters that should arguably be addressed through a community-based lens (Reininger and Castro-Serrano 2021).

This article focuses particularly on microenterprises, which are small businesses with less than 10 employees including the employer. They represent 25% of the Chilean labour market, but only 15% are profitable enough to employ other workers, most of them being solo enterprises. Regarding informality, 53% of all microenterprises, started by Chileans and migrants, are not registered in the Chilean Internal Revenue System (Saez 2020). This data reflects what some scholars claim; by pushing discourses of individual empowerment, entrepreneurship has been employed to cover up the precarity of the informal market (Di Giminiani, Pérez, and Quezada 2021).

Even though, over the past decade, the experiences of migrant workers have received increasing attention by Chilean researchers (Chan, Ramírez, and Stefoni 2019; Silva Reyes 2020; Stefoni and Bonhomme 2014; Stefoni, Leiva, and Bonhomme 2017), there is a dearth of studies about the experiences of migrant entrepreneurs (Mancilla and Lima 2014). While some evidence has been published about privileged entrepreneurs who enter the formal labour market (Poblete and Mandakovic 2021; Rodrigo, Romaní, and Ricci 2018), little has been said about those starting microenterprises within the informal sector. This is a relevant area of inquiry as it allows an exploration of the intersectionality of different factors that may lead to the emergence of inequalities, and how these intersect with each other. It also provides a lens to study vulnerability and resilience amongst migrant entrepreneurs in a neoliberal context where entrepreneurship is seen as a path to better one's opportunities.

Considering this scenario, we draw on the 'Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability Model' (International Organization for Migration 2019). This model acknowledges that not all migrants have the same rights and needs and that they face different challenges and risks for vulnerability during and after their migration journey. As we were interested in exploring Venezuelans' experiences when entering the job market – as sometimes, irregular migrants who might have experienced violence, intimidation or political prosecution, the model offered a lens to explore vulnerability and resilience from a situated, and multi-dimensional approach (Carroll et al. 2020). Considering the socio-historical and political factors involved in Chile's immigration trends, it was important to use an analytic tool that could account for the impact of structural factors on our participants' experiences.

The model considers both resilience and vulnerability to be assessed considering the presence, absence and interaction of risk and protective factors at four different levels: individual, household/family, community and structural level. It somewhat aligns with Portes and Rumbaut's work (2014), and the intersectionality of various factors discussed in the entrepreneurship literature. Individual factors refer to physical and emotional characteristics, beliefs and experiences. Household and family factors are related to household size, employment, livelihood, and gender roles. Community factors are about social networks, access to resources, and availability of educational opportunities, health care and social services within the area where one is situated. Structural factors include socio-economic and political conditions from local to international level, which shape individual's conditions and beliefs. We use the framework to structure and discuss our findings, underpinned and led by the theoretical lenses of migrant entrepreneurship exposed earlier.

Methodology

To examine the experiences of Venezuelan entrepreneurs in Chile, we designed an exploratory qualitative study. The data stems from a literature review on migrant entrepreneurship and migrant vulnerability models and in-depth interviews. We used a single case study design (Khai and Asaduzzaman 2022) because it allowed us to explore in detail a phenomenon within a particular sociocultural and political context (Creswell 2013). At the time, to the best of our knowledge, there were no other entrepreneurial programs in Chile for migrants who did not hold a valid visa and had minimal start-up capital.

Constructivism was the philosophical framework for the study, as it emphasizes that there is not a unique, 'valid' interpretation of reality, as individuals may produce different understandings of an experience (Crotty 2003). Thus, we were not seeking to generalize the results, but to capture the participants' experiences and understand how intersectionality emerged in their everyday lives.

Our sample was purposive and included eleven migrant entrepreneurs. They were recruited through an NGO that during the pandemic designed an entrepreneurship training program for twelve migrants, which offered them business skills, financial aid, and mentorship. Through the NGO we sent them an invitation to attend an online session where they were informed about the study and invited to participate. The session was conducted in Spanish, and in a digital space to ease participation and comply with COVID-19 restrictions. We purposefully avoided using the NGO's premise and inviting NGO staff to this session in order to reduce the risk of (perceived) coercion (Wolf 2021). Those interested in participating, contacted the researcher directly to organise an interview. This project was approved by the Scientific Ethics Committee for Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities at UC Chile (ID 201202007) before data collection.

Data was collected in Santiago between March and July 2021 through semi-structured, in-depth interviews via Zoom. During the interviews, we paid special attention to identify the challenges migrants faced when applying for a visa, looking for employment or seeking state support, and to understand the role of the training program and micro-enterprise in their migration journey so far. We also sought to explore the factors that enabled participants to overcome obstacles related to the migration process.

Interviews lasted between one and two hours and participants' consent was attained prior to the interviews. The audios were transcribed by a trained research assistant. Data was analysed through thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) which generated codes, categories and themes that enabled us to better understand the interviewees' experiences. A codebook was developed based on the in-depth reading of interviews, the research questions, and the literature review. The research team met regularly to compare the individual analysis of interviews and discuss areas of disagreement, as a strategy to triangulate the findings (Natow 2019).

There were sensitivities involved in researching vulnerable groups with an undocumented status or active in the informal economy. The authors and research assistants all had prior training and experience in working with vulnerable people. We were particularly careful about preserving their anonymity and ensuring that the questions raised did not trigger discomfort or traumatic experiences. Being able to redirect participants to services that could offer them support was an important consideration (Düvell, Triandafyllidou, and Vollmer 2010). Our personal bias when designing the interview guideline, and conducting and analysing the interviews, was kept in check by engaging in reflective exercises, and by maintaining an open dialogue within our group (Jamie and Pattison Rathbone 2022). Having team members with diverse nationalities and cultural backgrounds aided in introducing multiple perspectives and challenging potential biases.

Findings

Eleven entrepreneurs, eight females and three males, participated in the study. They were all Venezuelan skilled migrants. The IOM defines skilled migration based on migrants' years of study, typically requiring at least a bachelor's degree for the term to apply (International Organization for Migration 2016). Narrow definitions of skilled migration mainly consider scientists and engineers as fitting within this category, while broader definitions include all professionals and technicians, including skilled tradespeople. In this paper, we used a broad definition to capture different academic and professional trajectories.

The participants' enterprises focused on different markets, such as the food industry, design of goods, handcrafts and body care. Their age fluctuated between 37 and 59 years. Most of them had been living in Chile for at least two years. All of them lived with family members and 10 out of 11 had entered the country through an authorised channel, initially holding a valid visa. At the time of the interview, only six of them had a valid visa, four had an expired visa and one no visa at all (see Table 1).

The results of the analysis were organised following the IOM's Determinants of Migrant Vulnerability Model (2019). For each dimension, we identified risk and protective factors (Figure 1).

Structural factors

Structural factors were classified into two categories: those that impacted migrants only and factors that affected Chilean society.

Table 1. Description of sociodemographic characteristics of entrepreneurs.

Pseudonym	Age	Sex	Education	Job in Venezuela	Years in Chile	Who do you live with?	Holds valid visa	Type of business	Other paid jobs?
Angel	49	M	Tertiary	Regional manager	3	Wife, 2 children	No	Bakery	Yes
Victoria	40	F	Tertiary	Visual communicator	4	Ex-partner, 2 children	No	Design	No
Romina	48	F	Tertiary	Architect	1.5	Husband, 2 children	Yes	Design	Yes
Lili	37	F	Technical	Baker	14	Husband, 2 children	Yes	Bakery	No
Valentina	44	F	Technical	Artist	8 months	Partner	No	Handcraft	No
Pablo	53	M	Tertiary	Regional manager	2	Cousin	No	Bakery	No
Fernanda	59	F	Tertiary	Lawyer	2	Son's family	Yes	Body care	No
Elena	40	F	Tertiary	Medical sales rep	5.5	Husband, 2 children	No	Charcuterie	No
Diego	40	M	Tertiary	Medical sales rep	5.5	Wife, 2 children	Yes	Charcuterie	Yes
Lucía	39	F	Tertiary	Engineer	2.5	2 children	Yes	Design	Yes
Laura	44	F	Technical	Sales rep	3.5	Husband	Yes	Handcraft	Yes

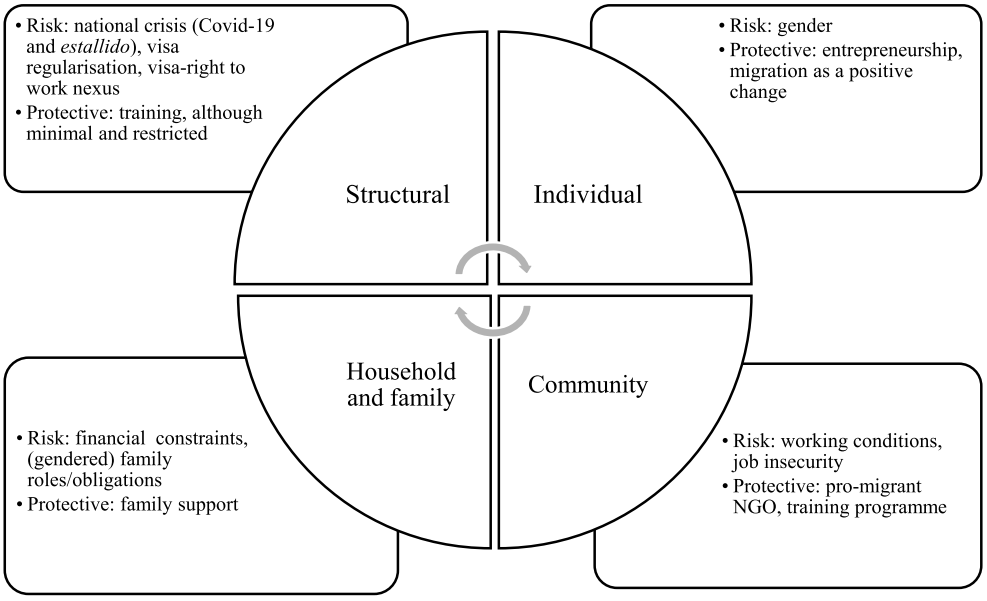

Figure 1. Findings: migrants vulnerability diagram.

The first category was related to the process of visa regularisation and the consequences of visa requirements upon participants' decisions. The process was described as a 'policy of attrition' and 'of tear and wear'. Some of the interviewees had been waiting for their visas to be renewed for over 18 months. This extended waiting period left them without a valid Chilean ID, which is essential to undertake any kind of official process, such as signing an employment contract, opening a bank account or contracting a mobile phone plan. Most participants described a lack of, or slow processing of, IDs and visas as paralysing. This made it harder for them to access the labour market and address everyday needs, but it also made them question their decision to remain in the country:

> When I fulfilled the requirements for the permanent visa I sent the papers immediately, but I am still waiting. A year and a half has passed, and the system shows that my process has advanced 25%. It's a game of attrition […] I already have some acquaintances [that tired of waiting] moved to another country (Lucía).

Additionally, all interviewees reported that the regularisation process was sometimes difficult to understand, and the information available on official websites was unclear and used legal jargon. Even though the legal requirements were stated, the particularities of each migration story did not always fit the stated rules, causing confusion. This was the case of Pablo whose temporary visa had expired while living in Santiago. When he was ready to apply for a new visa, Pablo received a letter informing him of an unpaid fine for missing the legal period to apply. However, the document did not state the amount of money he had to pay.

> Since there was no way to contact the Immigration Department, I had to guess. They could have stated this clearly in the letter: 'You must pay a fine for this amount', so I thought: 'I am not going to risk it' (…) I told my cousin 'I'm going to calculate the cost of the fine considering the date I entered the country; I have no choice' (Pablo).

Another structural factor that impacted the working opportunities of participants was tying employment to visa status, which not only curtailed their right to work but also heightened their anguish:

> Sometimes I feel like throwing myself out of the window because it is very cumbersome. I didn't have time to validate my degree in Venezuela [before departing]. Once I arrived, I had to find a job with a contract to fulfil the requirements of my visa. At work they gave me a three-month contract, thus my visa was issued for three months. Employers will never give you a job with a permanent contract immediately. You have to wait, sometimes up to three contracts, before they offer you a permanent one. Since I arrived, I have had at least five short contracts and now I'm irregular. My Chilean ID expired in 2017 (Victoria).

What Victoria described above represents a common reality, where a short-term fee-contract resulted in having a visa that lasts only for the same length of time as the contract. In Chile, beyond the classic permanent contract, there is also a fixed-term contract and a fixed-fee contract. The latter is not regulated by the Labour Code (Dirección del Trabajo 2017), and the benefits to which workers are entitled depend on the agreement they reach with their employer. What participants have reported in this study, also represents the experience of some Chilean workers. Between 1998 and 2006 temporary employment, with contracts lasting up to three months, in formal enterprises grew from 18.8% to 30%. This figure has not decreased since. Even those holding a permanent contract experience the market flexibility, as 20% of permanent contracts are terminated during the first 12 months, and 50% last up to three years (Vives, Valdebenito, and Baeza 2019).

This context is even more precarious for migrant workers, as many are employed under fixed-term or fixed-fee contracts, with the 'promise' of eventually accessing a permanent contract but with no obligation to do so. Due to this, some participants had to compromise on their choice of a job. This was the case of Lucía, a trained engineer who managed her own company in Venezuela, after arriving in Santiago could only find work in the complaint department of a telecommunication company, a job that took her over a year to find. She worked 10-hour long shifts six days a week and had two children to care for. Resigning from this job was impossible because it was the only path to apply for permanent residency and provide for her family.

Following a similar trend, Angel, a manager with decades of experience in a multinational company, did not manage to attain a position in the same industry, having to work in a restaurant from 9am until 1am, where his employer used to tell him: 'I know you're tired son, but you know I'm helping you'. Reflecting about that period, Angel commented: 'I thought to myself: I don't know if he's helping me to die, but he's helping me'. Despite the long hours of work, lack of training, being given tasks that nobody else wanted, and the fact that the owner closed the restaurant without any prior notice, the lack of alternative opportunities induced a feeling of acceptance and gratitude – as our interviewee expressed 'for the opportunity she gave me, I'll owe her forever'.

In relation to the second category of structural factors, participants identified as risk factors to their well-being the social crisis that took place in Chile during October 2019 and the emergence of the pandemic. There was an agreement among participants that the socio-political crisis increased their vulnerability as many lost their jobs or experienced insecurity. This was the case for most participants of the study (nine). Victoria, a 40-year-

old mother of two, recounts how before the *estallido*, she had been working for six months as a commercial executive in a newspaper, role that gave her a profound sense of achievement: 'it was like being on top of the world: I had my house, I paid my bills, I became financially independent from my ex-partner'. However, losing her job due to the *estallido* brought many changes:

> I had to go back to living with my ex-partner, I couldn't afford my apartment anymore […] I wanted to die five times over […] And then the pandemic began, and I said, 'Oh my God, what am I going to do?' I was always deeply unmotivated; my dreams had been ruined.

The social outburst held a special meaning for the participants of the study. All of them mentioned feeling 'worried' or 'scared for the future of Chile'. Angel and Laura were adamant in explaining that Maduro's dictatorship 'started in the same manner as the *estallido*'. Thus, this crisis not only affected their financial security but also their well-being as it brought back memories of what triggered their own migration journey.

The social crisis deeply affected entrepreneurs. A month after the *estallido*, approximately 10,000 small and medium size businesses had been affected by riots, looting and property destruction. Additionally, sales fell by almost 50% in clothing, footwear, and accessories, leading to the closure of shops and the dismissal of workers (BBC News Mundo 2019). While unemployment affected locals and migrants, the socio-political scenario held greater consequences for those who did not have financial backup and social support to face this crisis.

Another participant explained how their newly set-up family business, a general store, situated in one of the suburbs more affected by protests and riots during the *estallido* increased their fragile socioeconomic situation:

> I swear that if we could have left Chile, we would have done it, but we had no money and we had all these debts left by the early closure of our store […] And then the pandemic started, and we didn't have a job, our children were at home, and we had to find something to improve our situation (Diego).

As the previous narrative shows, the pandemic came to deepen the already precarious living conditions of some participants. These stories could have also been told by Chileans, but migrants' lack of a support net and the precarity of not holding a visa deepened their level of insecurity.

Regarding protective structural factors, three of the female participants reported accessing training-related services via governmental programs at the national or local level. Romina for example, accessed a National-level programme called '*Mujeres Jefas de Hogar*' (Female heads of households), which offers training opportunities to foster women's economic autonomy and supports them to overcome obstacles when finding a job (Servicio Nacional de la Mujer y Equidad de Género 2022). However, a requirement to apply for this programme is to hold a Chilean ID, limiting the opportunities of irregular migrants to access this kind of support.

Individual factors

A 2022 report from the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, indicates that the informal labour market is associated with greater

vulnerability, as individuals are left unprotected in relation to their work rights and welfare (Livert, Miranda, and Espejo 2022). The document identifies individual factors that make some people more prone to enter the informal labour market in Chile, including age, level of education, gender and being a migrant. In this study, the main individual risk factor for vulnerability was gender. There was agreement among participants that being a woman (8 out of 11) reduced their opportunities to find and maintain a job.

> I brought my training certificates from Venezuela, but it was useless because when I got here, I realised that the job market for women wasn't easy; it was hard for me to find a job [but] my husband found a job immediately! (Laura).

Moreover, having children added to female entrepreneurs' challenges, as it became a barrier to find a job, or to find spare time to work on their microenterprises. Some female participants faced significant precarity as they struggled to cover essential needs. This was the case of Lucía who migrated to Chile while pregnant with her second child. While she came prepared – with health insurance and enough funds to last for at least a year, she ran out of savings sooner than expected. Every time she disclosed her pregnancy during a job interview, 'all doors were closed' she said.

> When my youngest daughter was just a newborn, I ran out of savings, and I couldn't find stable work. Once, all I had were $1,000 pesos [£0,93] to survive for a week. A neighbour gave me some bread and fruit to feed the children.

For Victoria, the issue of securing permanent and decent work resulted in asking her ex-partner for help: 'When I lost my job, I had to start from scratch and live again with my children's father […] After the separation I wanted to achieve economic independence, however, it was no longer possible'. These stories are indicative of the difficulties some migrant women faced before deciding to start their microbusinesses. In a sense, these experiences encouraged them to find new ways to survive amidst job insecurity.

Two protective individual factors that somehow ameliorated their precarious situation also emerged. First, participants reported a strong belief that the positive aspects of migration outweighed the negatives, sharing a strong narrative of positivity and resilience in their stories.

> Despite all the obstacles, there is always something beautiful in my life. You can empower yourself, convince yourself that you can do it, believe in yourself. It doesn't mean to forget what you left [in Venezuela], but difficult experiences can push you to believe that you can achieve what you dream of (Victoria).

The second protective factor relates to entrepreneurship. Even though participants were diverse and had different migration and work trajectories, they all considered that the opportunity to start an enterprise was invaluable. Some of them drew a parallel between migration and entrepreneurship to express that even though both imply a challenge and hardship, they also convey a strong desire to improve their own life, a search for better opportunities:

> Entrepreneurship implies having a dream, it is a search for something better. In other words, you have an idea and you dream about it and you want to develop it. It's the same with migration, because I have the idea that I can have a better future, a better life (Elena).

Household and family factors

Financial constraints, family roles and housing conditions where another set of risk factors among the interviewees. Being the breadwinner of the household was a stressful aspect for most participants. To financially support their families and tackle financial constraints, some participants relied on their micro-enterprise and multiple other jobs.

> We cover our expenses from my husband's business, which doesn't provide much but it's enough to pay the rent [£324 monthly for a small two-bedroom apartment], and some sporadic jobs I get in the field of design [£350 approx.]. These are like droplets that fall here and there. Sometimes I wonder how we've managed to survive with so little (Romina).

For female participants, multiple factors intersected with each other which increased their vulnerability. They were permanently trying to juggle household obligations, child rearing, maintaining a paid job and making time to work on their start-ups.

> The challenge of being a mother, a teacher, a housewife, a wife and also an entrepreneur is difficult. Being able to juggle all these activities has been difficult, because of course, one will give priority to one's children, one will give priority to one's husband, one will give priority to other things rather than the business (Lili).

When we asked participants about the meaning of having a stable and secure job with a fair salary, all of them agreed stating that this was an essential aspect of a good life. They all believed that having their own business could contribute to this aim.

> It is invaluable, we are all searching for that goal. When you are starting a new business you work a lot, but also take on a huge risk, because no one knows if it is going to pay off. That's why everyone who does well with a start-up and can have a better quality of life, should feel proud of themselves, because there is a lot of uncertainty involved. Having a stable job where your household and psychological needs are covered, where you reach spiritual peace by doing something that you enjoy, I think it's priceless (Angel).

All interviewees maintained close family ties in Venezuela. They not only maintained their previous roles as children, siblings, or parents, but they also contributed to the family income by sending remittances regularly: 'I try to send my parents 50,000 pesos monthly [£46], that is a lot of money in Venezuela' (Laura). Despite the distance, participants highlighted the value of family support. This could range from just emotional support (e.g. providing motivation and inspiration during hardships), or practical support in the sense of putting on working hours to make the start-up grow.

> Most of the time I have to have a person to help me get the orders out and sometimes that person is my husband ((laughs)). So, he is a jack-of-all-trades; he kneads, bakes, he turns on the oven, he helps me pack the cakes, then we clean and tidy together, it's a family thing (Lili).

> We did very well with the first sale. Some clients already knew about our products; the family supports you, the friends of the family support you too. We have clients who are friends of our family in Venezuela! Our family recommended us to their friends and they are really good clients (Diego).

Community factors

Community factors refer to local social networks, access to resources in their neighbourhoods, and availability of educational opportunities, health care and social services

within an area. The only, but important risk factor we identified at the community level was related to having to work in a risky part of the city, where interviewees were more exposed to crime. Some participants were obligated to undertake these risks as their family income depended on it.

> When I worked as a delivery driver in a restaurant, I used to take the workers home at the end of the shift. While I was driving, a vehicle intercepted us and began to follow us […] I had to drive through a small street at more than 100 km/h with the car stuck to the back, I went through four red lights to get to the police station and I said: 'I can't work in these conditions anymore', I got scared (Diego).

In relation to protective factors, interviewees identified the training program they undertook at the NGO as a source not only of technical and financial support, but, importantly, of emotional and social support. The community that was formed from the programme strengthened their resilience:

> When I want to throw in the towel, she [the instructor] arrives at the right moment and [the NGO] appears and brings you together with a bunch of people who all have the same problems, so you say 'this guy is worse off than me, and this one hasn't had papers for three years either … I am not the only one facing this problem' (…) There, I met people who have their own story, but we are all the same; we all cry and miss [what we left behind]. There is a camaraderie among the group. We buy products from each other and recommend each other's products (Angel).

> [At the entrepreneurial programme] we have been given the tools to not make you feel that you haven't done enough, that you aren't good enough, that you are invisible, but on the contrary, that you are *worthy*. Even though we have different stories, we face similar challenges and you are given tools to face them […] The fundamental gain is the human value. I have a friend I met through the programme … It's incredible how the connection emerges despite the distance imposed by the pandemic (Lili).

No interviewee recounted experiencing discrimination or aversion within their community; on the contrary, their local community and support received from Chileans represented a source of resilience.

> My neighbours were very fond of me. Mrs. M. worked in a kindergarten, whenever she could, she brought me pears, apples, and bread; she looked after me. Her daughter and I are still friends, she gave me advice, she was worried about the cold in winter, she gave me blankets and clothing for my daughters (Lucía).

> In the building where we live there is a lot of support among neighbours. If someone needs something, whether it's a cup of sugar, printing a document, one says: 'Neighbour, I can help you, come over to my place'. When the pandemic started, many people lost their jobs and with my family we created a 'solidarity food basket'. If someone had any kind of food to donate, they put it in a basket and whoever needed it could take it (Pablo).

The entrepreneurship provided migrants with visibility to those who beforehand felt that were unseen; despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, apps enabled those who joined the entrepreneurial programme to establish a network which offered them the opportunity to 'speak to someone like yourself, or to receive a call, because that is when I will feel reintegrated, or when any migrant from any culture, from any part of the world, feels inserted' (Angel).

Discussion and conclusion

The empirical insights presented above reveal several key factors that drove migrants' vulnerabilities. These included political and bureaucratic impediments introduced, lack of access to decent work, and gender inequalities, which were all amplified by emerging national and global crises. The study highlights that migrants' capability of acquiring employment was important to their well-being and offered a source of motivation which served as a key protective factor against the vulnerabilities of migration.

Migrants' vulnerabilities were primarily enhanced by structural factors. Their vulnerabilities were driven largely by structural barriers dominated by political unwillingness to address migrants' human and labour rights (Finn 2019; Thayer 2021; Thayer, Stang, and Dilla 2020) and its interaction with decades of the flexibilization and precariousness of the labour market.

This often meant that even those who entered the country lawfully found themselves in irregular situations after waiting for lengthy periods of time for their visa to be processed, lacking clear information about the procedures of submitting the necessary documentation or the timeframe associated with it. Further, this highlighted the tension that arose from becoming an entrepreneur without a valid visa in a country where entrepreneurship has been praised by authorities as an individual strategy to surpass hardship and unemployment while hiding the government's responsibility in addressing the labour-related precarity experienced by locals and migrants.

The dependency relationship between migrants and their employers was also highly problematic – people who wanted to apply for residency had to provide proof of income and hold a working contract, which as documented elsewhere (Demetriou 2015), can lead to the acceptance of abusive conditions. Linking migrants' legal status to employment rights and social security has adverse associations with substandard working conditions, falling below established labour standards (Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants 2020). This situation heightens migrants' susceptibility to exploitation and abuse, simultaneously depriving the host country of potential economic benefits. For example, studies show that providing migrants with access to healthcare presents economic advantages for host countries and contributes to increased public health and social cohesion (Legido-Quigley et al. 2019). All these structural barriers fuelled 'anger' and 'frustrations' that added psychological strain to individuals that were already facing material precarity.

Crises, such as those triggered by COVID-19 and the *estallido*, clearly exacerbated migrants' vulnerabilities and limited their work opportunities, which confirms previous findings (Tagliacozzo, Pisacane, and Kilkey 2021). The immediate impact was financial with the labour market plummeting and opportunities of employment decreasing, thus entering the informal market via starting a small business was for most participants, the only reliable source of income during that period.

At an individual level, gender underpinned several vulnerabilities for women. Acquiring secure employment was difficult and so was juggling domestic and childcare chores with work. This is in line with other reports that found that women participate in the informal labour market in greater proportion than men (Buchely and Castro 2019; Calderón et al. 2017). This proportion increases when women have children, as they face

barriers to find a job in the formal sector that allows them enough flexibility to also care for their children. At the same time, this aspect intersects with immigration, increasing the level of precarity of female migrant entrepreneurs (Salas-Hernandez, Sagbini-Henriquez, and Salazar-Araujo 2019).

At the family level, the breadwinner felt burdened with the pressure of supporting family members in the host country and the home country, whether financially or by performing family roles. These elements intersect with the migration process and Chilean Laws configuring an uncertain and unfair setting for these migrants to thrive. When reviewing the protective factors that drove resilience, it was the social networks and the entrepreneurial scheme that stood out. Narratives of integration, and not discrimination, were highlighted when interviewees spoke about the support they received from work colleagues and people in their local community.

Launching the start-ups, beyond being a necessity to overcome adversity, was perceived by most interviewees as a highly positive experience. The micro-enterprise was often correlated with 'integration', 'recognition' and 'independence'. Laura explained it as follows: 'We feel supported, we feel loved, we feel valued and that is very much appreciated … it is very beautiful, because you don't feel excluded'. Most participants derive a sense of pride and success from their business and a new, re-found purpose that anchors them better in their new reality. These accounts persisted even in the face of challenges such as the lack of a Chilean ID or a bank account to make their business grow.

Migrants are known to 'suffer more than other groups through non-recognition and there is substantial 'brain waste' with negative results for the economy and the migrants themselves' (Hugo 2014, 31), but through their micro-enterprises some felt acknowledged, seen and validated as human beings beyond the tag of being 'migrants'. Entrepreneurship among migrant populations should hence also be valued not only for its economic and mobility potential, as discussed in the literature section of this article but also for its independent social capital function which is interlinked with intrinsic personal values of 'hope' and 'resilience' and manifest themselves at the individual, family and community level. This is not to say though that the state is absolved of responsibility and as Valdez and other repeatedly point out, we should not downplay the structural constraints are critical impediments in the integration of migrants in the labour market, which then forces them into informal 'survival' paths.

This qualitative exploratory study of entrepreneurial Venezuelan migrants in Chile contributes to the increasing body of research on migration in Chile and the broader literature of entrepreneurship, labour integration and intersectionality.

The study is limited by the small sample of respondents, and reliance on a single case study, i.e. that of Venezuelan migrants in Chile. Consequently, our insights offer merely a snapshot into how migrants incorporate themselves into the labour market and the multifaceted implications of entrepreneurship. An avenue for advancing our understanding lies in conducting comparative analyses involving not only diverse migrant groups but also migrants aided by NGOs when setting up enterprises and those navigating the process independently. By addressing these restrictions, future research stands to make substantial contributions to a field that remains notably underexplored.

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