

Hi!

My name is Luis and I'm 9 years old. I'm glad you have come to Colombia, but I'd be even more happy if I could welcome you to my home in Venezuela.

Imagine that only a year ago I had my own room, I attended various interesting extracurricular activities and it was great. But I saw my parents' life getting harder and harder. They had to work more and more to be able to buy food. On top of that, it was not easy to find shops where you could buy the products you needed. All over Venezuela there was a shortage of basic products... One day my younger brother got sick. When our parents took him to the hospital, they found out that not only was there no longer any medicine, but also no water. Diseases started to spread in the hospital because people couldn't even wash their hands. My parents didn't want to live like this any more, they were worried about our and their own health. They decided to move to Colombia, where they could find work and, for the money they earned, buy food and medicine. We packed our backpacks and suitcases and set off. On foot! Imagine that a regular bus ticket cost as much as my parents' annual salary... We had no other option but to travel on foot. So we couldn't take too much of our stuff. We only took what was necessary.



We went to Colombia just like the people in the pictures – with backpacks, suitcases, bags... We looked like tourists, but we weren't tourists.

On the way we talked about how we had no influence over some things in our country. However, we can decide what to do, how to react in different situations. My mum explained to me that this is mental resilience, that is, the inner strength in our head and heart. It's like muscles. You can exercise it and it becomes stronger. I'll tell you our recipe for inner strength. It is made up of three things. The first one is this: you have to think about what you are grateful for to other people, to yourselves, to fate... Even in a difficult situation we can remember that we have our family on our side who loves us, that our body has the strength for us to travel to a place where we will be able to live a better life. We can be grateful for the sunshine, for someone replying to our smile with a smile, for something smelling nice next to us, e.g. blooming flowers in the meadow. There's always something to find, we just need to look for it!

The second thing is this: think about what skills you have and what you know, what you can do to change your situation. For example, when we reached a town beyond the border between Venezuela and Colombia, we had no money to buy food. I knew, however, that I had good eyes and I noticed things that other people ignore. So my brother and I walked the streets and tried to collect what we could sell – cans, sometimes some clothes, whatever we managed to find. Like the boys in the picture.

Look. This is how we managed to survive the first difficult days in a foreign country.



These days I'm not hungry any more. I go to school and feel safe. Finding a school wasn't easy, either. And this is the third component of the recipe for internal strength: even when it is difficult, you should not give up. You have to search, ask questions, ask for help when it is needed. It took my parents a long time before they managed to find a school that would accept me. They kept trying, asked different people if they knew anything about it, if they knew anyone who could help, went to local schools and tried to convince the headmasters to accept me. It finally worked! I try not to be discouraged by difficulties, just like my parents! I go to a school where the curriculum is different than in Venezuela. I'm behind with my classes because of our journey, so I really have a lot of catching up to do. I'm doing the best I can. I also ask my new friends for help. Fortunately, we speak the same language! And they are happy to help me.

Look, these are my friends from the school in Colombia.



And in this picture my friends are playing football during a break.

Everything I am writing about in this letter makes me sad but I really want you to know that I have learned a lot in this difficult situation. I discovered that the really important thing is inner strength, mental resilience, which you can develop within yourself by combining and mixing the three components that I have told you about. You can combine them in different ways, depending on the situation you find yourself in. I encourage you to practice your inner strength, to develop your mental resilience.

*I send you my warmest greetings
Luis*

