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# Gendered Labor Continuum: Immigrant Mothers Confronting Uncertainty and Pandemic Constraints

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**Abstract:** The literature on migration shows that legal status in receiving countries shapes immigrant experiences. While these studies effectively address the impact of precarious legal statuses on immigrant experiences, they often examine women's labor in public and private spheres separately. Yet, women's lives have long involved a *continuum* of paid and unpaid labor. The COVID-19 pandemic brought this continuum into sharp focus by spotlighting the influence of home and work dynamics. This study explores how immigrant women's labor in both public and private spheres are interconnected. Drawing on 18 initial interviews with Venezuelan mothers in NYC from 2020, and 13 follow-up interviews in 2024, we examine the impacts of structural forces on these women's labor arrangements and their strategies to navigate these impacts during and after the pandemic. Our findings reveal that while pandemic restrictions disrupted traditional labor market dynamics, they simultaneously intensified women's engagement in domestic roles. Despite this, the mothers exercised agency by exiting the labor market and engaging in patriarchal bargaining at home. Post-pandemic, they lost access to the coping strategy, and their improved legal status did little to alleviate their labor struggles. This study highlights the significance of a "gendered labor continuum" in contexts that lack institutional support and undervalue immigrant women's labor.

**Keywords:** forced migration; intersectionality; gender; motherhood; division of household labor; labor market; pandemic; post-pandemic



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## 1. Introduction

Camilla, a Venezuelan mother of five who sought asylum in New York City (NYC), experienced a sharp decline in her socioeconomic status after migrating to the United States (US). Formerly an ICU nurse in Venezuela, she initially worked within a cleaning personnel but ultimately became a stay-at-home mother even after the approval of her asylum request. Reflecting on her situation, Camilla expressed deep frustration at the harsh conditions of the labor market, stating "There's a type of employment here [in the US], what I call '21st-century slavery'", and lamented the lack of institutional support for childcare. Recounting her experience, she said, "I wanted to continue working, but I did not have someone to help take care of my children. So, I had to leave the [work] and stay at home. It is very frustrating because you can't provide for yourself or help the ones you love. Why do I have to sacrifice myself at home while he [her husband] goes to work? It is difficult for me, really difficult".

Migration scholars have shown that legal status in host countries significantly influences immigrant experiences by determining rewards and penalties that lead to stratifications (Abrego and Schmalzbauer 2018; Menjívar 2000, 2006; Mountz et al. 2002). Precarious legal statuses often exacerbate these challenges by limiting access to stable employment, social services, and economic opportunities. However, as Camilla's case illustrates, her struggles within domestic labor and the labor market persist, even with an improved legal status. Venezuelan women's experiences highlight that migration's impact on gender and

labor often remains significant, even with enhanced legal status, such as approved asylum requests in the US context. Thus, the scholarly focus should be directed toward the diverse intersections of gender, labor, and migration within structural inequalities, rather than concentrating *solely* on legal statuses, particularly in highly neo-liberal contexts like the US.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Venezuela, characterized by hyperinflation, repressive state measures such as curfews and mass arrests, and severe shortages of medicines, food, and energy, has driven millions to flee the country, making Venezuelans the second largest externally displaced group in the world (UNHCR 2023). However, Venezuelans are *not* always welcomed in their receiving countries (see also Salas-Wright et al. 2020). Instead, they have faced highly uncertain and precarious migratory statuses, such as asylum seekers, individuals under temporary protection regimes (since 2021), or undocumented migrants. Many Venezuelan migrants seek asylum when arriving in the receiving country or overstay their visas—if they had one. These varying legal statuses profoundly affect their work and family lives. For instance, asylum seekers and temporary protection status (TPS) holders face legal uncertainties and restrictions, while undocumented migrants struggle with the most severe economic and social challenges. By focusing on the Venezuelan population within this precarious context, this study seeks to uncover the nuanced impacts of these different legal statuses on their daily experiences and challenges.

While NYC has historically received immigrants from diverse regions around the world, Venezuelans have become one of the largest immigrant populations in the city due to various socio-political, economic, and network-related reasons (Pirovino and Papyrakis 2023). Since the spring of 2022, more than 110,000 Venezuelan migrants have arrived in NYC, making them the single largest group among new arrivals (Fandos 2023). However, these figures only account for the immigrants who successfully crossed the border—a journey that has become increasingly dangerous. While about 100 Venezuelans were apprehended annually at the border between 2015 and 2018, this number rose to 150,000 between October 2021 and August 2022 (Fandos 2023).

The border crossing was already difficult before the pandemic, but it became even more intense during the pandemic and immediately following the pandemic, largely due to the implementation of Title 42 by the US government. This measure, in place from March 2020 to May 2023, denied entry to migrants and asylum seekers from countries where violence is widespread, ostensibly as a pandemic-era border restriction. Consequently, even those who successfully cross the border are met with highly securitized and unwelcoming attitudes, such as Texas Governor Greg Abbott's provocative act of sending thousands of Venezuelans in busses from Texas to NYC in the spring of 2022 (Jordan and Sandoval 2023).

Moreover, Venezuelan migrants who successfully cross the border often face uncertain and precarious migratory statuses, with limited or no pathways to permanent residency in the US. In March 2021, Venezuelan migrants were designated as eligible for TPS (USCIS 2024). This status provides temporary protection against deportation along with a temporary work permit for only those who fit specific criteria, such as having entered the country before a pre-determined time (Federal Register 2021). These policies directly influence the daily lives of Venezuelan migrants, determining their living conditions, such as access to work and housing. TPS was expanded to include Venezuelans after the peak of the pandemic. Yet, following three years of implementation, TPS still generates uncertainty and precarity for this group, as has been the case for other Latinx migrants in the past (Menjívar 2006). The precarious status, combined with pandemic-related challenges like unstable work hours and job loss, is further exacerbated by the neoliberal US context, where welfare policies, including childcare support, have been limited even under *normal* conditions. These factors significantly impact the daily lives of Venezuelan migrants, particularly mothers, underscoring the need for scholarly attention to be paid to their post-migration experiences during the pandemic.

This study specifically explores the impacts of the structural forces on Venezuelan mothers' labor arrangements in NYC. In the Venezuelan diaspora, just as among many migrant populations, particularly Latinx ones, women's struggles are varied in both public

and private spaces (Abrego and Schmalzbauer 2018). While migrant women often bear most of the household and care duties in private spaces, they also experience downward mobility, even being pushed out of the workforce in their host country (Gu 2019; Schmalzbauer 2009). This research examined Venezuelan mothers' labor arrangements in both public and private spheres post-migration, during and after the pandemic, through semi-structured interviews with Venezuelan mothers who migrated to the US as a result of the Venezuelan crisis. Alongside their experiences, the mothers' responses to challenges were investigated. In doing so, this research reveals the intricate interplay between uncertain migratory statuses, labor market struggles, the traditional gendered division of household labor, and the resilience strategies of this immigrant group. We introduce the term "gendered labor continuum", referring to women's labor as a continuum of their labor in the public and private spaces where their paid and unpaid labor are intertwined and connected.

Drawing from 18 semi-structured interviews with Venezuelan mothers residing in NYC, this study explored how the COVID-19 pandemic has influenced this continuum of the forms of labor faced by Venezuelan immigrant mothers. Specifically, we asked, "How did the pandemic change mothers' continuum of labor arrangements?" "What strategies did mothers use to resist the pre-existing and the new challenges introduced by the pandemic measures?", and "Have these arrangements and strategies been maintained in the post-pandemic era?"

Trying to go beyond a social-reproduction perspective, which struggles to articulate the differentiated-yet-unified experiences of multiple oppressions, this study adopted an intersectional feminist framework, which allowed researchers to accommodate any number of oppressive forms while also acknowledging how distinct oppressions reinforce and contradict each other (Glenn 1992). Looking at broader power dynamics could also help us reveal how Venezuelan mothers exercise their agency in navigating the impacts of the structural influences (Gu 2019).

## 2. Taking Stock of the Complexities of Women's Labor in Precarious Refugee Reception Contexts

The literature on migration has shown that legal status in host countries is pivotal in shaping immigrant experiences, as it determines the rewards and penalties that lead to the stratification of these experiences (Abrego and Schmalzbauer 2018; Menjívar 2000, 2006; Mountz et al. 2002). Scholars have highlighted that migratory status is not a simple dichotomy between citizenship and undocumented migrants, but rather involves liminal categories that significantly impact immigrants' lives due to their temporariness (Abrego and Lakhani 2015; De Genova 2002; Menjívar 2006; Mountz et al. 2002). For instance, Abrego and Lakhani (2015) highlighted how liminal statuses, such as TPS and asylum seekers, can lead to restricted mobility, fear of deportation, and long instability. They also emphasized that the holders of these liminal statuses often struggle to translate their legal standing into social inclusion due to the lack of awareness of the protection that comes with the status, the bureaucratic processes involved, and the barriers to accessing resources in practice.

Further research on the impact of precarious legal statuses, particularly in the labor market, has shown that these statuses *directly* influence immigrants' labor market struggles. TPS holders, for instance, face challenges in achieving stable employment and fair earnings (Menjívar 2006; Menjívar et al. 2022; Mountz et al. 2002). Goldring and Landolt (2011) build on these findings by showing that even after regularization, immigrants in Canada with precarious statuses continue to struggle with poor working conditions.

However, the impact of precarious statuses extends beyond labor market conditions and varies by gender (see also Vos et al. 2023). Therefore, migration scholars often focus on women's experiences in precarious migratory status. Scholars have explored how the precarious legal statuses affect women's private relationships within the household (Abrego and Schmalzbauer 2018; Menjívar and Abrego 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Dreby 2006) and their public relationships (Abrego and Schmalzbauer 2018; Menjívar 2006; Mendez and

Deeb-Sossa 2020). These studies effectively demonstrate the importance of precarious legal statuses in the post-migration experiences of women both in public and private spheres.

Yet, these studies often treat public and private labor as separate domains. In reality, women's lives involve an integrated continuum of unpaid domestic and paid labor. Therefore, to gain a comprehensive understanding of immigrant women's experiences, it is crucial to analyze their labor as a *continuum* that spans both home and the labor market rather than viewing them as isolated spheres. Therefore, it is essential to move beyond the dichotomized spheres of public and private in the everyday lives of women. This perspective aligns with broader labor and feminist scholarship, which emphasizes the interconnectedness of public and private labor (Parreñas 2021; Burawoy 1976; Piore 1979; Collins 2000).

Social class also plays an essential role in shaping migration experiences in the US. Earlier studies on gender and migration focused on working-class immigrants (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Parreñas 2001), with less attention given to middle-class experiences (Gu 2019). To address this imbalance, Gu (2019) explored the gender roles within middle-class Taiwanese immigrant families in the US, revealing how structural and cultural factors influence women's ability to negotiate power within their families. Gu's concept of the "patriarchal bargain[1]" highlights how pre-migration social class affects immigrant women's experiences and survival strategies post-migration. This notion underscores the importance of social class in shaping gendered experiences and survival strategies.

The migration process often entails downward mobility and deskilling, exacerbated by barriers to credential transfer and language proficiency (Gowayed 2019; Menjívar 2006; Menjívar et al. 2022; Flores-González et al. 2013). These factors can worsen women's positions in the gendered labor market, particularly within ethnic communities (Duffy 2005; England 2010; Flores-González et al. 2013). However, to diversify our understanding of immigrant women's experiences and their survival strategies post-migration, there still is a need to focus on immigrant women with a middle-class background and the downward mobility that accompanies the migration process. Therefore, this study focuses on an immigrant group, Venezuelans, with mainly middle-class backgrounds—as measured through educational attainment and employment histories—to explore their immigration experiences and subsequent survival strategies. The concept of a "gendered labor continuum" captures how patriarchal bargaining, translated into household labor and motherhood, is *just* one of the strategies mothers adopt to negotiate their labor within the structural constraints they face.

Race also plays a crucial role in migration experiences in the US, influencing how illegality and deportability are constructed and shaping access to employment (De Genova 2002). Research has shown that the racial and spatial landscape into which immigrants are inserted can determine their social and economic mobility by delimiting their access to employment (Dreby and Schmalzbauer 2013). Therefore, despite the negotiations within families, racialized women's empowerment dynamics within households are also significantly influenced by the broader labor market context in which immigrant women are situated. As a result, women of color are overrepresented in reproductive labor jobs, in which their labor is devalued (Duffy 2005; Glenn 1992). By adopting the understanding of the commodification of racial and gendered reproductive labor, these studies show how, in a labor market where women already struggle with lower wages, insecure employment, and less value being assigned to their labor, racialized immigrant women become more vulnerable (Cranford et al. 2003; England 2010; Glenn 1992; Mills 2003; Reskin 1988). Therefore, bridging the struggles in the private and public spheres can enhance our understanding of the experiences of racialized immigrant women and their survival strategies. In exploring Venezuelan mothers' immigration experiences, we consider their labor as a continuum of paid work in the labor market, alongside unpaid domestic labor, to develop the concept of a "gendered labor continuum" for these mothers.

Literature on the pandemic has also shown that women worldwide disproportionately bore the burden of household and childcare duties throughout this crisis (Dinella et al. 2023;

Jung et al. 2022; Twamley et al. 2023). It may be expected that these challenges were further heightened among immigrant women in the US with precarious legal statuses, particularly undocumented immigrants, due to their restricted access to an already limited institutional support network (Bruhn 2023; Ybarra and Lua 2023). These hardships experienced by immigrant women during the pandemic have been attributed to two main factors: the shutdown of the services sector, where there is an overrepresentation of immigrant women's labor, and limited childcare options that pushed many women and children out of the public sphere (Bruhn 2023; Ybarra and Lua 2023). These studies show the disproportionate effects of the pandemic on immigrant women with precarious legal statuses.

Nonetheless, the literature on the pandemic's disproportionate influence on marginalized populations has rarely focused on how these groups navigated these challenges. Given that immigrant women were compelled to navigate the influences of the pandemic on their everyday lives by adopting survival strategies, exploring these strategies can expand our understanding of how immigrant women can exercise their agency in resisting structural vulnerabilities.

## 3. Contextualizing Venezuelan Mothers in the US

Research has noted a significant shift in Venezuelan migration patterns, which was predominantly directed toward Latin American countries, particularly Colombia, Peru, and Chile pre-2015 (Pirovino and Papyrakis 2023). However, the COVID-19 pandemic altered this trajectory, prompting a notable increase in migration toward the Global North (UNHCR 2023). Notably, the US has become a primary destination for Venezuelan migrants and has experienced a substantial rise in their numbers in recent years, surpassing pre-pandemic levels (Hoffman and Batalova 2023; Moslimani et al. 2023). Furthermore, studies indicate that Venezuelan migrants exhibit higher levels of educational attainment compared to other Latinx immigrant groups (Cadenas 2018; Hoffman and Batalova 2023; Moslimani et al. 2023). Consequently, the US has witnessed a rapid influx of this highly educated population, although its members have encountered challenges in securing employment in skilled occupations within the labor market, like other Latinx communities.

The migration of Venezuelans to the US has been influenced by two contrasting immigration policies—TPS and Title 42. These policies have been marked by temporary regimes, where migrants have minimal rights and are subject to uncertainty and fear of deportation (Abrego and Lakhani 2015; Menjívar 2006; Mountz et al. 2002; Kubal 2013).

First, the implementation of Title 42, initiated as a response to pandemic-related restrictions, affected those who asked for asylum at the US border. This policy, effective until May 2023, has impacted the mobility of Venezuelan migrants and adds to the complexities of their immigration journey. Second, the US government's recognition of Venezuela as an unsafe country has introduced another dimension to the migration landscape. This policy allows Venezuelan citizens residing in the US before July 2023 to apply for TPS. While offering a potential avenue for legal residency, the TPS policy also shapes the mobility patterns of Venezuelan migrants within the US.

Title 42 was implemented by the Trump administration in March 2020 under the excuse of public health safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, this program underwent multiple extensions, spanning both the Trump and Biden administrations, empowering immigration officers at borders to expel asylum seekers without allowing them to present their cases (Obinna 2023; Zard et al. 2022). Despite the Biden administration's defense of this policy for over a year, it was eventually rescinded in May 2023 (Robles 2023).

However, this policy had minimal impact on curbing irregular migration at the border and was ineffective as a deterrent (Chishti et al. 2024). Following the lifting of the program, there was a notable increase in migration flow, exemplified by the arrest of 5833 Venezuelans attempting to cross the border in September 2023 (Debusmann 2023). In response, the Biden administration reinstated deportation flights to Venezuela after a four-year hiatus, reducing the number of Venezuelan immigrants at the southern border (Correal et al. 2024; Debusmann 2023). However, the uncertainty surrounding these flights persists due to

the political dynamics between the two countries. Following these deportations, over 13,000 Venezuelans were repatriated from October to December 2023, though this figure pales in comparison to the over one million Venezuelan citizens who have entered the US in recent years (Correal et al. 2024). Notably, New York State has emerged as the fourth most popular destination within the US for Venezuelan migrants.

Conversely, the US federal government designated Venezuela as a TPS country in March 2021, prompting over 200,000 eligible Venezuelans to apply for TPS benefits. These benefits include authorization to remain in the US and permission to work. However, not all Venezuelans qualify for TPS; only those able to demonstrate their continuous presence in the US since 9 March 2021 are eligible (USCIS 2024). For those entering the country after 9 March 2021, eligibility to apply for TPS arises in 2025 if they have been in the US since October 2023 and have maintained a continuous presence since then (USCIS 2024). Nevertheless, as highlighted in the existing literature, TPS grants migrants only minimal rights, leaving them in precarious conditions within the labor market and legalizing their uncertain status (Menjívar 2006; Mountz et al. 2002).

Amid the implementation of Title 42 and the TPS for Venezuelans, the Venezuelan mothers included in this study entered the US before the enactment of Title 42 and before TPS was extended to Venezuelans. This left them with two primary choices: to apply for asylum or stay undocumented. However, as part of the pandemic, delays in migratory processes were exacerbated, including an increasing backlog of asylum cases (Bush-Joseph 2024). Consequently, asylum seekers, including some of the interviewees in this study, may endure years-long waits before their interview process commences (Bush-Joseph 2024). In this challenging context, both during and after the pandemic, Venezuelan mothers have been profoundly influenced by their precarious migratory status, influencing their labor market opportunities and daily lives.

In the broader US context, women have historically earned lower wages than men (England 2010). Racialized women, who are disproportionately represented in low-wage, reproductive jobs, face even greater vulnerability in the labor market (Duffy 2005). This issue is compounded by the US's free-market approach to family support, which lacks comprehensive federal policies such as paid maternity leave and affordable childcare and offers limited state-level support. This approach exacerbates inequalities related to gender, race, and class (Bariola and Collins 2021). In this environment, immigrant women with precarious statuses, including the Venezuelan mothers in this study, experience heightened challenges. They faced severe difficulties both during and after the pandemic due to inadequate support and protections in the labor market and for family care (Bariola and Collins 2021).

## 4. Methodology and Sample

This study drew on 18 interviews with Venezuelan mothers living in NYC initially conducted in 2020, with an additional 13 interviews with the same women in 2024. Revisiting the women allowed for an exploration of changes precipitated by the pandemic.

This is a subsample of 38 interviews collected through multisite fieldwork in NYC, the US and Lima, Peru. Semi-structured interviews are good for revealing the lived experiences of individuals. Moreover, they serve to amplify the voices of marginalized groups whose experiences are often sidelined within the traditional hierarchy of credibility (Van Den Hoonaard and Van Den Scott 2021). Thus, interviews were deemed the most appropriate methodological approach for achieving the objectives of this study.

The interviewees were Venezuelan mothers who had migrated to NYC due to the Venezuelan crisis and were currently residing in NYC. Half of the mothers were single mothers at the time of the interviews in 2020. The criteria for inclusion in the sample were that the mothers had migrated in 2014 or later and had had at least one child under 17 years living with them at the time of the interview. The criterion for single mothers was that the women had at least one child under the age of 18 and did not have a partner to help in raising the children. They may have had a partner who was not the biological parent of

the children living with the mother and the child, but the partner was not involved with the raising of the children (Pew Research Center 2013). This allowed us to uncover how motherhood differed for single women in the Venezuelan diaspora versus women who were raising children with a partner and how their strategies in the crisis differed.

The initial interviewees in 2020 were recruited via Facebook groups of Venezuelans living in NYC. This approach was necessary given the reluctance of Venezuelan mothers residing in NYC to share their experiences due to prevalent xenophobic rhetoric. For the field revisit, our research team successfully reconnected with the same 18 participants from the initial interviews, ultimately conducting follow-up interviews with 13 of them. This approach ensured continuity and enriched the depth of our data collection process.

The decision to cap the number of interviewees at 18 aimed to cultivate richness and depth within the dataset through a strategy focused on depth rather than aiming for theoretical saturation. This method, known as sampling for depth, involves selecting a smaller number of cases to thoroughly explore specific aspects of the phenomenon under study. In this case, it allowed us to explore the intricate interplay between the uncertain migratory statuses, labor market struggles, household labor, and resilience strategies of Venezuelan mothers in NYC—the objective of this study (Weiss 1994). We identified subcategories as various education levels, middle-class backgrounds before migration, and distinct divisions of household labor before migrating, ensuring interviews with a suitable number of people in each category (Small 2009).

Demographically, the average age of the 18 mothers interviewed was 43, and the average age at which they migrated was 40.5. An overwhelming number of mothers (17 out of 18) had a university degree from Venezuela, and most of them (16) worked as white-collar workers outside their households in Venezuela. During the interviews conducted in 2020, most of the mothers (12) interviewed had limited English skills. However, four years later, all the mothers have made significant progress in their English proficiency.

In this study, we used education level and profession as proxies for social class. We recognize that, given the extensive social programs and economic prosperity experienced in Venezuela from the 1960s to the 1980s, a substantial portion of the population attained high levels of education. Consequently, it is unsurprising that research on the Venezuelan exodus indicates that the initial waves of migration to the US and Europe primarily consisted of middle-class and professional migrants equipped with the necessary economic and material resources, such as passports and visas, to facilitate their entry into these countries (Acosta et al. 2019; Cadenas 2018). The interviewees in this study can be identified as those who migrated during the second wave of the Venezuelan exodus. In other words, the interviewed mothers also were middle-class professionals back in Venezuela.

Interviews in both the 2020 and 2024 rounds were conducted via videoconferencing platforms such as Zoom. In 2020, the interviews were held online due to the pandemic restrictions. For the 2024 interviews, the online format was necessary because of the geographical dispersion of participants across NYC and the researchers' location in another country. This cross-border situation also rendered phone interviews impractical.

All interviews were conducted in Spanish, the native language of the participants, and transcribed and translated into English by the researcher whose first language is Spanish. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 min, providing rich insights into the experiences of Venezuelan mothers during their migration journey, their engagement in the labor market, and the dynamics of their household labor in the post-migration and post-pandemic periods.

Thematic coding, facilitated by the qualitative data analysis tool Atlas.ti, emerged as the most suitable approach for analyzing these interviews. Thematic coding offers a structured method for organizing and interpreting qualitative data, allowing researchers to uncover central themes and narratives shared by participants. Given the intricate nature of our research objectives, thematic coding provided the flexibility needed to capture the complexity of the participants' experiences, challenges, and perspectives (Naeem et al. 2023).

To promote intercoder reliability (O'Connor and Joffe 2020), two researchers in the project independently reviewed a selection of the other researcher's coding, to monitor whether codes were being assigned in a similar manner. Any minor discrepancies in code interpretation or usage were discussed and resolved during their regular meetings. In total, 38.8% of the transcripts from the 2020 interviews and 30.7% of the 2024 transcripts from the 2024 interviews were cross-checked for consistency.

In our coding process, we initially identified patterns and keywords within the interview transcripts. Subsequently, we selected relevant codes, developed recurring themes and concepts, and further conceptualized them. Finally, this iterative process culminated in the development of the conceptual framework.

## 5. Findings: Navigating Labor Market Struggles through Embracing Motherhood

How did the pandemic change the mothers' continuum of labor arrangements? What strategies have mothers used to resist the pre-existing challenges and new ones introduced by pandemic measures? Have these arrangements and challenges been maintained in the post-pandemic era? Our research identified four key findings regarding how the pandemic altered these Venezuelan mothers' labor arrangements and the strategies they employed to navigate pre-existing and new challenges.

First, consistent with the existing literature, we observed that the Venezuelan mothers experienced deskilling and downward mobility in their socioeconomic status, characterized by notable struggles within the labor market—specifically, engagement in low-waged reproductive labor—in the post-migration phase. The labor market experiences of the mothers were associated with the conditions of the racialized and gendered market in NYC and the precarity of the mothers' migratory statuses.

Secondly, we identified that these labor market struggles worsened during the pandemic, evidenced by increased job instability, fluctuating work schedules, and restricted or no access to already-limited state benefits.

Thirdly, notably, we found that, as a strategy to confront the worsening conditions of the labor market during the pandemic, many Venezuelan mothers, despite their high educational attainment and professional backgrounds back in Venezuela decided to exit the labor market. However, this strategy was more available for mothers with partners, who could assume full responsibility for household labor and embrace stay-at-home motherhood. Single mothers, however, faced greater difficulties and were less able to adopt this strategy. Nonetheless, these mothers continued to employ "patriarchal bargaining" to negotiate the gender roles in household labor.

Fourth, in the post-pandemic era, associated with a more stable legal status for mothers (due to the implementation of TPR) and increased economic struggles, Venezuelan mothers found themselves in a more marginalized position in the labor market than before and during the pandemic. Due to increased economic struggles, the mothers who adopted the strategy of exiting the labor market and taking on the full burden of household labor during the pandemic lost their ability to employ this strategy. These findings highlight the *ineffectiveness* of migratory statuses like TPS, protecting migrant groups in the labor market in contexts that lack institutional support and undervalue immigrant women's labor.

### *5.1. Structure of Producing Precarity for Venezuelan Mothers: Labor Market Conditions, Lack of Institutional Support, and Legal Status*

Our research into the structural forces that produce precarity for Venezuelan mothers reveals that their struggles are not solely a result of their precarious legal status, but also stem froe m two additional structural factors: (1) a lack of institutional support, and (2) racialized and gendered labor market conditions (Cederberg 2017; Creese and Wiebe 2012; Goldring and Landolt 2011; Stock 2022). This finding is consistent with the existing literature on the deskilling and downward mobility of immigrants post-migration.

Among the 18 mothers in our sample, all encountered this downward mobility upon entering the labor market or even being pushed out of the labor force, with only one

managing to secure employment in a non-profit organization and thus avoid irregular and low-paid racialized and gendered work. The majority (17 out of 18) resorted to irregular jobs, primarily in the caregiving, cleaning, and service sectors (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Venezuelan immigrant mothers' pre- and post-migration occupations.

| Pseudonym | Marital Status | Occupation Pre-Migration | Occupation during the Pandemic | Occupation Post-Pandemic |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Camilla | Married | Nurse | Cleaning personnel; Exit labor market | Remains out of labor market |
| Elisa | Married | Engineer | Exit labor market | Service sector |
| Vanesa | Single | Public Accountant | Eldercare and service industry | Service sector |
| Luisa | Married | Medical Doctor | Construction, care, and cleaning; Exit labor market | Tailoring at home; anesthesiologist |
| Adriana | Single | Bank Employee | Cleaning personnel and babysitter | Cleaning personnel |
| Barbara | Married | Bookstore Employee | Owner of an informal childcare center; Exit labor market | Cleaning personnel |
| Mariana | Single | Public Official | Service industry | - |
| Lucia | Single | Sales Associate | Cleaning personnel | Cleaning personnel |
| Carolina | Married | Accountant | Exit labor market | Part-time accountant |
| Rosa | Married | Professor | Exit labor market | Service sector |
| Segobia | Married | Human Resources | Exit labor market | - |
| Melisa | Common-law | Publicist | Exit labor market | - |
| Andrea | Married | Engineer | Exit labor market | Construction; Program manager |
| Nancy | Married | Engineer | Community Manager at an NGO | Community Manager at the same NGO |
| Paula | Single | Sales Associate | Babysitter | - |
| Gianina | Married | Business Owner | Babysitter; Exit labor market | - |
| Elvira | Single | Lawyer | Cleaning personnel | Service sector |
| Jennifer | Married | Computer Technician | Service sector | Service sector |
| Isabel | Single | Business Owner | Exit labor market | - |

Vanesa's experience illustrates how the lack of institutional support for childcare leads mothers not only on a downward trajectory but even to unemployment. Despite her background as a public accountant in Venezuela, Vanesa, a 43-year-old single mother of one, initially found work in the service industry and later as a caregiver in NYC. Her brother provided childcare while she worked. Vanesa accepted difficult job conditions due to financial necessity, describing her experience: "I've had two jobs since I got here. One was washing dishes in a restaurant, but they didn't pay me. Now, I work with the elderly, but they *really* exploit us a lot. . . They really exploit us. I've been a caregiver for a long time, but they pay me $18–$19 at most". When her brother moved out of the U.S., she was forced to quit her job to care for her 10-year-old daughter, leading to homelessness until she found a state-level subsidy program for the homeless.

The precarious legal statuses of these mothers further exacerbate their downward mobility. An overwhelming number of the mothers in our sample (17 out of 18) grap-

pled with uncertain migratory statuses associated with temporariness, non-mobility, and illegalization, which exacerbated their challenges in the labor market.

Luisa's case epitomizes this precarity vividly. Luisa, a 39-year-old Venezuelan mother of one, was a respected medical doctor in Venezuela until political persecution during the 2017 protests forced her and her family to flee. Arriving in NYC in 2017 on tourist visas, they soon needed to seek asylum, leaving Luisa with an uncertain legal status. Formerly a skilled medical professional, Luisa found herself in low-paying, physically demanding jobs. Her reflections can be seen below:

> "At that time, we didn't have any immigration status; we were in the process of applying for asylum. We didn't have work permits; we had nothing. My husband worked in construction. Sometimes, I had to work in construction, too. I remember one day, a friend called me, and she said she needed someone to help them. I said, 'Well, I'll go'. It was for a demolition job. My friend would say, 'Imagine, a doctor, and here you are demolishing—you're very brave'. And I, well, yes, I do it because I need the money. Cleaning houses and taking care of the elderly. Sometimes, I laugh and say, before, in Venezuela, I would pay someone to do this for me; now, someone pays me to do it".

While Luisa's experience underscores the connection between her downward mobility and her precarious legal status, it is important to mention that gaining recognition for your credentials as a doctor across countries is generally expensive and not easy. However, such difficulties in the labor market are common among the participants in this study, regardless of the difficulties faced concerning the recognition of their credentials and gaining a work permit.

For instance, unlike Luisa, who referred to her labor market struggles during the time she was on a temporary tourist visa, Adriana, a 42-year-old single mother of two, who worked as a bank employee back in Venezuela, had already held a work permit for years. However, she too experienced labor market challenges. In fact, even though she had applied for asylum in 2017 shortly after she had arrived in the US, she had not yet received an interview date for her asylum case by the time of our interview three years later. This uncertainty regarding her immigration status profoundly impacted her job stability, as she emphasized during our interview: "Actually, well, my main concern at the moment is our migratory status [and] my job stability... well... But mostly, the migratory stability is because there is a lot of delay in the processes, and the decision will be our destiny, as well as every other concern here".

Adriana's struggle with the asylum process, exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, highlights the importance of stable immigration status for job security. She explained that "I'd like to move to a more economical city, but the problem is that I don't even have the security of my political asylum, so I first need to have some migratory stability to be able to go to a more economical state where I can at least have a little more tranquility. Here in NYC, it's stressful; it's very stressful. [E]xpenses are practically destroying you little by little. It's tough, what we're, what I'm actually going through right now".

Adriana also described the relentless cycle of overwork and low pay in NYC: "Life here in New York is stressful; I've barely had any breaks since arriving in 2017. I haven't rested in the three and a half years I've been here. [...] Because you know very well that your entire budget gets messed up if you don't work one day". This continuous cycle that Adriana referred to was only exacerbated during the pandemic.

In short, the immigration experiences of Venezuelan mothers in NYC, who had a high socioeconomic background back in Venezuela (a background that was, in fact, what enabled their immigration to the US in the first place by allowing them to acquire US visas), were mainly determined by the structural forces of the reception context: lack of or limited institutional support, labor market conditions, and precarious legal statuses—including not only the absence of work authorization but also the temporary and uncertain nature of their legal statuses.

### *5.2. Worsened Conditions of the Labor Market during the Pandemic*

As highlighted in the preceding section, the structural dynamics of the reception context, encompassing labor market conditions, lack of or limited institutional support, and precarious legal statuses, significantly influence the daily experiences of Venezuelan mothers. However, the advent of the pandemic and its associated restrictions and health concerns exacerbated these struggles among Venezuelan mothers, particularly those employed in the care, service, and cleaning sectors—a demographic encompassing all but one mother in our sample. Regardless of whether their jobs were formal or informal—which mostly was determined by their legal statuses—all mothers (and overall, their households) in our sample experienced additional forms of hardship in the labor market, with higher income losses for those who were in the informal market.

Take Barbara, for instance, a 42-year-old undocumented mother of four who had long worked for minimum wage in restaurants alongside her husband in NYC. Having relied on part-time work for years due to the unavailability of affordable childcare, Barbara decided to bring work into her house to fulfill her motherhood role while also gaining financial independence. She started her informal childcare center and took care of 10–12 children after school. However, the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions disrupted her work, leaving her household without any income. Both Barbara and her husband lost their work with no access to state benefits, such as unemployment, due to their legal statuses. At the time of our interview, Barbara summarized the anxieties this created for herself and her husband:

> "Because of this COVID situation, I don't have any income. I think, well, he [her husband], being a man, he's more reluctant to express his feelings, but I could see that he was anxious, so sitting on the couch and getting up, moving around, touching his head, looking out the window. So, it was desperate for me because I thought I'm also dealing with my feelings, and then I couldn't find a way to help him".

Similarly, Adriana, with a pending asylum request, experienced the worsening labor market conditions firsthand. Despite initially securing full-time employment in the formal market, the pandemic swiftly transformed her stable income into an unpredictable and insufficient one, mirroring the broader challenges faced by Venezuelan mothers.

When the pandemic emerged in March 2020, Adriana was employed as a cleaner at an airport. Before the pandemic, she had grappled with two years of unstable employment, juggling cleaning houses, waitressing, and vending arepas on the street. Thus, she happily accepted the position of cleaning personnel at the airport. However, shortly after she started working at the airport, the pandemic broke out, turning her short-lived stable income into an unpredictable and inconsistent one. During our interview, Adriana expressed her frustration with the deteriorating labor market conditions during the pandemic:

> "Before the pandemic, my day has always been very stressful, and right now with the pandemic, it is worse. You see, right now at the airport, the flights... I returned to work three weeks ago, but they are no longer giving us 40 h [a week] because the flights have decreased a lot. Right now, the second wave of the pandemic hitting Texas and Florida impacted flights even more... They reduced us to 3 days a week, and we're only going to work from 9 am to 5 pm, which makes a total of 24 h weekly. Imagine, I mean, it's nothing, right?"

Adriana's account underscores the pervasive impact of the pandemic on labor market stability, with reduced working hours and decreased demand exacerbating existing struggles. The Venezuelan mothers, whether engaged in formal or informal labor, grappled with heightened precarity during the pandemic, compounded by the absence of institutional support from the state, particularly for unemployment and childcare. In navigating these challenges, the Venezuelan mothers tried to employ strategies to manage both labor market struggles and increased household labor, particularly childcare, as all family members were confined to the household.

### *5.3. Venezuelan Mothers Exercising Agency to Navigate Structural Vulnerabilities*

The exacerbation of labor market challenges during the pandemic prompted the Venezuelan mothers to adopt a strategic response reminiscent of middle-class White women: exiting the labor market (Moen 2003). Even though this was not the immigrant mothers' desired end, they still used it to diminish their labor market struggles. Essentially, we observed an intensification of household labor among Venezuelan mothers in response to structural vulnerabilities the mothers experienced: labor market struggles, precarious legal statuses, lack of state institutional support, and pandemic restrictions and economies. Camilla's case exemplifies the effective utilization of this strategy. Her story is a poignant reflection of the intersecting challenges faced by racialized immigrant women in the labor market.

Despite her career in nursing in Venezuela, Camilla, a 47-year-old mother of five, found herself relegated to low-paid "unskilled" work as cleaning personnel. Being exposed to the intersecting challenges faced by racialized immigrant women in the labor market, what she called "21st-century slavery", Camilla decided to embrace her motherhood and exit the labor market. Reflecting on the gender dynamics she faced in the labor market, Camilla expressed the following:

> "You can have a lot of talent and know many things, and they [the employees] will never take you as seriously as they would take a man. When it came to getting paid, any man, doing a quarter of what I did, earned much more than I did. Even though you could do many things. . . They make you clean the bathrooms, clean everything that needs cleaning".

She recounted an incident where the only man who could do a task she also could got upset and dismissed her capabilities, saying, "You're just for cleaning".

Referring to the low payment, Camilla described the situation as follows:

> "Here, there's a type of employment, what I call *21st-century slavery*, where companies pay a good sum for your work, especially in places like VIPs, but they don't hire you directly. They hire a company that hires you, and they have nothing to do with you. They only pay that company, and that company pays you, but only half of your salary. I was supposed to earn $25 per hour, and I was paid $12.50. So, look, I prefer to stay at home and dedicate myself to my children, giving them love, guidance, and support, more than working 10 h a day for $12.50 per hour. And I did many things, and I really did my job well: They respected me a lot; everyone was happy. But it was like a drug of wonderful parties—you meet celebrities, amazing, but when you get to the end of the week, you only get $500, and someone else is earning your other $500. So, I said no, I'm going to dedicate this time to my children. I haven't worked since then".

This strategy, aimed at confronting deteriorating labor market conditions (e.g., lack of job opportunities, irregular work hours, low pay), reflects how, despite their professional backgrounds in Venezuela, Venezuelan mothers embraced motherhood as a commitment to unpaid reproductive work, adhering to traditional gender roles of male breadwinners and financially dependent homemakers.

One such mother, Elisa, aged 48 and a mother of one, immigrated to NYC with her husband and six-year-old son two years prior to our interview. Despite her over 20 years of engineering experience back in Venezuela and holding a green card—the only participant in our sample with this permanent legal status—Elisa struggled to secure employment before the pandemic. With the onset of the pandemic, she chose to prioritize her son and household duties. Even though she was overwhelmed with the tasks, she continued to embrace them as a strategy:

> "You surrender to the duties because I wake up, I make breakfast, and then I have to start thinking about what I'm going to make for lunch today, um, after that, what I'm going to make for the snack, then prepare dinner—investing a lot of

> time in the kitchen. [. . .] [I'm] always coordinating with the start time to get to school, to help him with homework, to do the chores that I wasn't used to doing [back in Venezuela] because my work rhythm was different. Here I am, totally dedicated to the house".

Nonetheless, while the household division of labor had become more gendered for their households, these Venezuelan mothers continued to exercise their agency—not only in the labor market by exiting the labor market but also—by negotiating the patriarchal norms without necessarily giving their power over their families and households. On the contrary, the patriarchal bargain became their negotiating power in the gender dynamics of their household and even in the decision-making processes inside their families.

For instance, Barbara, who had withdrawn from the labor market to assume full responsibility for household duties, strategically negotiated the gender dynamics by delegating certain tasks to her husband whenever feasible.

> "I'm taking care of everything. Sometimes my husband helps me with the cleaning, but that's when I say, 'Oh, help me clean'. Sometimes I would say to him in the afternoon, 'Oh, well, I'll go out for a walk for a while, or I'll lie down to sleep. You take care of the kids, make sure they finish their homework'. But it's when I tell him to do it. But that's like, if he does the bathroom cleaning, I still handle the rest".

This comment describes how, even though the mothers were aware of the unequal gender division of household labor among themselves and their partners, they negotiated and navigated their roles within the context of gendered household division of labor by keeping their power over the families and delegating certain tasks to their household. This ultimately diminished the full responsibility for household tasks that the mothers took on when exiting the labor market.

Nonetheless, this strategy was *only* available to mothers with a partner since it is intertwined with the mother's partnership status. In this way, it reproduces the gendered household, and as we will see in the next section, the strategy was short-lived.

Single mothers, on the other hand, could not employ the strategy available to partnered ones during the pandemic. They continued to grapple with the adversities of the labor market without any comparable means of mitigation. The pandemic measures in the labor market (e.g., reduced hours) and education (e.g., remote learning and lack of institutional childcare support) further compounded the single mothers' struggles, leaving them to shoulder all the burden of economic hardship and caregiving responsibilities alone.

For instance, Mariana, a single mother of one school-aged son who migrated to NYC in 2018, expressed how she struggled between caring for her son and going to work and sometimes had to leave her 13-year-old son alone: "I worked in the restaurant for 4 days. I reduced the number of working hours because he was here and I had to take care of him—he was at home, the food, the things. So, before, I worked 5–6 days—well, I couldn't do that anymore".

Similarly, Adriana, also a single mother of two, explained how, as a single mother, her work became her main worry when she migrated. She had to leave her two children alone for a lot of time.

> "They have grown up on their own because I have dedicated myself full-time to work and, well, that's also something very negative here in the US, in New York, because sometimes you don't dedicate much time to your children. You leave them alone most of the time, um, because you dedicate yourself to work, and there is no other option but to work because, well, if you don't go out to work, unfortunately, you don't guarantee them a safe roof and food".

Mariana and Adriana's cases showcase how single mothers do not have the same possibilities to employ the strategy of exiting the labor market in response to the vulnerabilities that come with labor market struggles and uncertain legal statuses due to a lack of

support from state institutions and within families. As a result, they shoulder more work both inside and outside the household.

Despite pre-migration gendered divisions of labor in Venezuela, the exacerbation of labor market struggles and the lack of institutional support in the US has intensified household labor burdens for immigrant mothers. The absence of affordable childcare and the erosion of institutional support during the pandemic have exacerbated these challenges, particularly for single mothers. These findings contribute to the literature on immigration, gender, and labor by showing the implications of structural forces—in this case, the intersections of the racialized and gendered labor market, precarious legal statuses, lack of affordable childcare, and the erosion of already limited institutional support during the pandemic—for the existing gendered distribution of labor inside families.

### *5.4. Trapped in Limbo: Venezuelan Mothers' Struggle to Access Strategies in the Post-Pandemic Era Despite Implementation of TPS*

As the pandemic receded, the economic landscape for these Venezuelan immigrant mothers underwent a significant shift, prompting a reassessment of their strategy that had allowed them to confront the worsening conditions of the labor market during the pandemic. Despite the initial adoption of a strategy of exiting the labor market during the pandemic, many mothers found themselves compelled to re-enter it due to increased economic struggles and the rising cost of living in the city.

Lucia described the post-pandemic labor market conditions, highlighting the decrease in demand for workers and low pay: "Since the pandemic, work decreased quite a bit because we are currently experiencing a high inflation rate in New York and work decreased a lot, a lot, a lot. I mean, a client who used to clean his house frequently, every week, or every 15 days, now tries to stretch it out to the month. Of course, yes. Even up to two months. Because, because, for, for not, for not paying. Well, a little more. Of course, they want to keep the same price. Of course".

In other words, even though Venezuelan mothers *had* to return to the labor market post-pandemic, this return was *not* easy for them due to the worsened economic conditions. Luisa's experience exemplifies this. During the pandemic, she chose to focus on her daughter's care; however, when we interviewed her 4 years later in 2024, she told us that, after the pandemic, her family was struggling with several economic debts, necessitating her return to the labor market. Despite obtaining a green card, Luisa (who had had a pending asylum request at the time of our first interview in 2020) continued to encounter challenges in securing employment, experiencing delays in payment and undervaluation of her skills:

> "They didn't pay me for the first two months. They said there was a payroll issue. But in the end, I didn't understand. Like, eight weeks without pay since I started, and [they] offered me money from their own pocket while the problem was being resolved. I said, 'I don't need any money from your pocket. I need something more formal for you to pay me directly [through] the payroll'".

Despite these setbacks, Luisa sought assistance from an NGO working with immigrant women to improve their labor market prospects. Eventually, she secured a position as an anesthesia technician, although it was a position that did not fully utilize her skills from back home in Venezuela, due to the lack of recognition of her education credentials in the US. Despite her frustrations of not having her educational credentials recognized, the improved salary allowed Luisa to enhance her family's living situation and provide therapy for her teenage daughter that addressed the emotional toll of migration: "I am grateful for that salaried job, but to be very sincere and very truthful, I feel very frustrated every time I get to work, and I have to keep telling myself [that it is a good job] compared to other jobs I had in the US, it's a good job. But it doesn't showcase my knowledge".

Luisa's story illustrates the persistence of deskilling and undervaluation of labor among Venezuelan mothers, despite some improvement in legal status. Moreover, Luisa's case was the only one with some improvement in the mother's position in the labor market,

as she received a green card, instead of TPS, the more common legal status among the Venezuelan mothers.

Most of the Venezuelan mothers, even after obtaining a more stable legal status than the ones they had previously held—in most cases obtaining TPS—continued to struggle in the labor market. More specifically, the approval of TPS for Venezuelans did little to alleviate their labor market struggles, even though most of them had applied for this documentation to allow them to have access to a work permit. Most Venezuelan mothers, despite having access to work permits with TPS, continued to encounter wage cuts, reduced hours, and job insecurity. The uncertainty surrounding migratory status further compounded these challenges. These struggles took the form of either difficulty in finding a job that was not considered "unskilled" or difficulty re-entering the labor market, even for "unskilled" work.

For instance, Adriana, who now had TPS, said, "One feels more empowered because they get a Social Security number, so now I can work". However, she was still employed as a cleaner, a job she already held before being granted TPS, despite her college degree and years of banking work experience back in Venezuela. This sense of empowerment stemmed from the newfound legal status that gave her a semblance of stability and recognition. Yet, the reality of her situation belied this feeling of empowerment.

Similarly, Barbara, who used to be a babysitter pre-pandemic and had exited the labor market during the pandemic, had to re-enter the labor market post-pandemic, but she struggled to do so due to racialized barriers. She pointed out the worsened conditions of the labor market post-pandemic by saying, "Many people like me were left without jobs, mostly because of the pandemic. Now, here in New York, some companies don't want to hire Hispanics either". While the economic conditions deteriorated post-pandemic, racial discrimination in the labor market persisted, limiting her abilities to leverage her more secure legal status. Therefore, when Barbara finally secured a cleaning job, she was very grateful: "Yes, I was desperate because I'm used to working, to having my own money. I also send money to my family back in Venezuela. I needed to work no matter what, and well, yes, thank God I started working, cleaning houses, and it's been going well". Barbara's struggle reflects a broader issue where racialized barriers continue to hinder access to employment, even when legal statuses have improved—to TPS.

The negative experiences of Venezuelan mothers in difficult labor market conditions also took on gendered forms, such as sexual harassment. For instance, Lucia, after being granted TPS, continued working as a cleaner. However, her mistreatment in the labor market was not only represented by the deskilling of her abilities and the undervaluing of her labor but also through sexual harassment: "Last year, a friend recommended a friend of his to hire me to clean his house. However, the friend thought I was too pretty; he took his clothes off and even requested a massage. It was a bad experience. Thankfully, my husband had recently gifted me this [pointing to a smartwatch], which allowed me to call him even when my phone was out of reach. He came to help right away".

Since then, Lucia has not gone to her job alone. So, all the Venezuelan mothers in this study had continued to experience racialized and gendered labor market conditions after the pandemic that manifested in wage cuts, reduction in hours, loss of clientele, the unwillingness of clients to pay more for services, job insecurity, and even sexual harassment.

The experiences of the Venezuelan mothers in the labor market post-pandemic show that the insecure migratory status of TPS offers *little* or *no* protection against labor market struggles, and in the rare case of those who have been granted asylum, this more secure status does not assure them of upward mobility, or even of a similar socioeconomic level to that they had back home. Moreover, these experiences of Venezuelan mothers show us that their struggles in the labor market continued to be racialized and gendered due to the labor market conditions.

Despite these challenges, these Venezuelan mothers, especially those who were married, expressed a need to enter the labor force again, since they all agreed that the inflation rate and prices in the city had steadily increased since the pandemic. The increased debt

most of them acquired during the pandemic exacerbated their necessity to re-enter the labor market.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

This study examined how structural forces shaped the experiences of Venezuelan mothers in NYC, focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the interplay between labor market conditions, institutional support, and legal status. Our findings revealed that while precarious legal statuses affect immigrant women's experiences, they are not the sole factor. In fact, the two additional structural elements play more of a determining role in the continuum, of immigrant mothers' labor: lack of or limited institutional support and racialized and gendered labor market conditions. These structural forces serve as a critical backdrop for understanding Venezuelan mothers' experiences during and after the pandemic.

Focusing on immigrant women's experiences pre- and post-pandemic, the findings of this paper unveiled that pandemic restrictions disrupted the traditional labor market dynamics for immigrant women while simultaneously amplifying their household labor. The pandemic exacerbated their vulnerabilities, and while TPS offered some legal relief, it did little or nothing to mitigate ongoing labor market struggles.

Unlike the feminist theories of the 1960s, later feminist frameworks have argued that hegemonic patriarchy and embracing motherhood may *not* be mutually exclusive (Maroney 1985). Instead, motherhood and patriarchal institutions depend on women's cultural, economic, and political gains, and how women bargain their motherhood roles and gender relationships inside their families in diverse contexts, as several migration research studies have shown (Dreby 2006; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Parreñas 2001). The findings of this study supported this argument, as they demonstrated, that despite their challenges, Venezuelan mothers used their agency in resisting the structural challenges. They navigated structural obstacles by engaging in patriarchal bargaining within their households and adapting their labor market strategies. Some mothers used motherhood as a survival tactic, negotiating gender roles within the family to manage the lack of institutional support and devaluation of their labor. However, this strategy was not equally accessible to single mothers, who faced heightened caregiving demands and labor market devaluation without the support of a partner. These findings underscored the critical interplay between private and public struggles, emphasizing that understanding immigrant women's experiences requires a comprehensive view of both spheres.

Nevertheless, exiting the labor market as a survival strategy for immigrant women was challenged in the post-pandemic era due to economic hardships and the shifting of immediate caregiving needs to a secondary priority. The findings showed that TPS approval did little or nothing to alleviate the labor market struggles of the Venezuelan mothers. Wage cuts, reduced hours, and job insecurity persisted for many post-pandemic. These challenges manifested in difficulty finding employment that was not deemed "unskilled" or re-entering the labor market, even for such positions.

This study acknowledges its limitations, including the constraints on post-pandemic insights due to the inability to reconnect with all the mothers interviewed in 2020. This underscores the necessity of longitudinal studies to grasp the enduring effects of the pandemic and migration policies like TPS. Nevertheless, this study contributes to our understanding of women's intertwined labor struggles in multiple spheres.

This study aimed to contribute to the efforts to diversify the understanding of immigrant women's experience during the pandemic and the post-pandemic era, particularly in relation to how mothers exercise their agency while navigating structural forces and negotiating gendered roles in the household. We attempted to bridge the gap between the private and public spheres, which tend to be analyzed separately.

Moving forward, further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of policies such as TPS on labor markets and gender relations within households, particularly in the context of a lack of welfare state policies. Moreover, while TPS policies for Venezuelans are

still in place, we will continue to see how the legalization of this precarious status impacts the labor market and the household dimension on a larger scale. Therefore, we highlight the importance of conducting longitudinal studies and follow-up interviews to understand the long-term impacts of migration policies such as TPS post-pandemic.

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## Note

[1] The term is coined by Kandiyoti, who defines it as a blueprint that reveals how "women strategize within a set of concrete constraints" (Kandiyotu 1988, p. 275) in any society. These strategies and constraints will change based on class, race, ethnicity, and culture. However, the patriarchal bargain will show that specific form of women's resistance to structural oppression.

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