



# Hasanuddin Journal of Strategic and International Studies

ISSN: 2963-1394 (Online) Journal Homepage: <https://journal.unhas.ac.id/index.php/hjsis/>

## Feminist Security Narratives on Indonesian Women Migrant Workers' Structural Insecurity After the 2017 ASEAN Consensus

Diandra Jasmine Fasabrina, Wishnu Mahendra Wiswayana

To cite this article:

Fasabrina, D. J., & Wiswayana, W. M. (2026). Feminist Security Narratives on Indonesian Women Migrant Workers' Structural Insecurity After the 2017 ASEAN Consensus. *Hasanuddin Journal of Strategic and International Studies (HJSS)*, 4(2), 65-79.

To link to this article:

<https://doi.org/10.20956/hjsis.v4i2.50579>

### Published by Hasanuddin University

Hasanuddin Journal of Strategic and International Studies (HJSS) is an open-access and international peer-reviewed journal. Our main objective is to disseminate current and original articles from researchers and practitioners that enrich understanding and contributes to the past, current, and future discourse and issues of strategic and international studies relevant to the Indo-Pacific region. The article should address multidisciplinary research on theoretical and empirical questions in the topic around strategic studies, international relations, international politics and security, international political economy, transnational society, international diplomacy and negotiation, international and regional organization, governance & democracy, terrorism and transnational organized crimes. HJSS encourage a robust analysis and rigorous methodologies (quantitative or qualitative or mix-method) written in an engaging and analytical article style so that it promotes new ideas, discourse, controversy, and solid reflection theoretically or practically toward Indo-Pacific's strategic and international studies issues.



Hasanuddin  
University

# Feminist Security Narratives on Indonesian Women Migrant Workers' Structural Insecurity After the 2017 ASEAN Consensus

Diandra Jasmine Fasabrina<sup>1,2,\*</sup>, Wishnu Mahendra Wiswayana<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Brawijaya, Malang, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Political Science and International Studies, University of Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland

## ABSTRACT

This article examines how Indonesian women migrant workers continue to experience structural insecurity across ASEAN member states despite the adoption of the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers in 2017. Existing scholarship often assumes that regional commitments naturally enhance workers' protection, yet few studies interrogate how ASEAN constructs the narrative of "security" and whose experiences are marginalised in that process. Using Feminist Security Studies and Wibben's poststructuralist narrative approach, this article analyses key ASEAN policy texts, particularly the 2007 Declaration and the 2017 Consensus, to identify how events, time, actors, locations, relationships, and points of view are narratively ordered. The findings demonstrate that ASEAN's security narrative remains state-centric and institution-focused, prioritising intergovernmental cooperation while omitting the everyday lived realities of women migrant domestic workers. As a result, gendered sources of insecurity, such as recruitment intermediaries, employers, and the private household workplace, are obscured from the regional policy frame, allowing systemic vulnerabilities to persist across the region. This study contributes to feminist security scholarship by showing how narrative analysis reveals the limitations of ASEAN's current discursive construction of security and argues that these limitations hinder the development of meaningful protection mechanisms for Indonesian women migrant workers in Southeast Asia.

## KEYWORDS

ASEAN, feminist security, Indonesian women migrant workers, narrative analysis, structural insecurity.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

Received April 10, 2026

Accepted June 26, 2026

Published June 30, 2026

Copyright © 2026 by Hasanuddin Journal of Strategic and International Studies (HJSIS).

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, permitting unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## 1. Introduction

Labour migration is one of the most prominent socio-economic dynamics in Southeast Asia, with Indonesia remaining one of the largest sending countries in ASEAN (International Labour Organisation [ILO], 2021). Labour Migration in Asia notes that intra-regional migration flows continue to increase, particularly to Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand (Asian Development Bank Institute [ADB], Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], & ILO, 2021). Within these mobility patterns, many Indonesian women migrant workers enter domestic work and other low-wage sectors historically associated with care and reproductive labour (ILO,

---

\*CORRESPONDENCE Diandra Jasmine Fasabrina | diandrajasmine05@gmail.com | Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Sciences, Universitas Brawijaya, Jl. Veteran No.10-11, Ketawanggede, Lowokwaru, Malang City, East Java 65145, Indonesia.

2019a). In these settings, women domestic workers face wide-ranging insecurity, from labour exploitation and excessive working hours to gender based violence (Tandos et al., 2022).

In Indonesia, these vulnerabilities should not be read as isolated cases. They recur as patterns produced by cross-border power relations. Transnational labour relations, uncertain legal status, and weak bargaining power place Indonesian women migrant workers within repetitive structures of vulnerability rather than making them merely victims of individual incidents (Achsini & Rosalinda, 2019). Similar patterns are also visible in gender relations in many developing contexts, where women are positioned closest to reproductive labour and naturalised caring tasks, leaving them most exposed when structural crises operate (Yunita, 2019). When the feminisation of migration intersects with cheap labour regimes and institutional patriarchy, women migrants are often positioned as others who sustain household and national economies. Yet they still face constraints over their bodies, mobility, and everyday safety (Safitri & Wibisono, 2023).

ASEAN has formally responded through the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, adopted in 2007, hereafter the 2007 ASEAN Declaration (ASEAN, 2007). This was later reinforced through the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers, agreed in 2017, hereafter the 2017 ASEAN Consensus (ASEAN, 2018). Several studies, including Fitria (2025), Habel et al. (2022), and Solechan et al. (2020), argue that these instruments operate as soft law and lack strong enforcement mechanisms. Critical readings further suggest that the 2017 ASEAN Consensus remains normatively ambiguous, weak on accountability, and insufficiently attentive to gender specific vulnerabilities. Consequently, it remains inadequate for addressing the specific insecurities faced by Indonesian women migrant workers (Fitria, 2025). This gap is also reflected in the limited coherence between ASEAN's gender equality commitments and migration policy frameworks that remain oriented toward political economy and state security. As a result, protection may exist at the level of documents but does not automatically become embodied security in the domestic workplace (Habel et al., 2022).

The tension is stark in the case of Adelina Lisao, a domestic worker from Nusa Tenggara Timur, Indonesia, who died in Malaysia in 2018 after prolonged abuse. In the Indonesian and Malaysian context, the case highlights persistent asymmetries and weak protection, with limited prevention and enforcement (Nasrullah et al., 2023). Discourse analysis also shows that Malaysian media often depict Adelina as a passive victim, while perpetrators and enabling structures are frequently backgrounded (Adanan & Ungku Mohd Nordin, 2024). This matters for a feminist reading because it demonstrates how the experiences of Indonesian women migrant workers can be privatised and depoliticised. Violence in domestic work is treated as an individual tragedy rather than a security problem rooted in structural conditions (Stern & Wibben, 2015).

Most studies on migrant workers in Southeast Asia focus on law, labour policy, social protection, or human security frameworks that still position the state as the central actor (Widodo & Welgradoputra, 2023; Sundari & Andini, 2025). This state-centric tendency is evident in research that frames protection primarily as institutional action by state representatives once cases occur, thus privileging institutional mechanisms over the ways regional security narratives shape women's insecurity (Sundari & Andini, 2025). Legal approaches also dominate studies that map forms of protection and risks faced by Indonesian migrant workers, including violence and trafficking (Solechan et al., 2020). Feminist Security Studies (FSS), by contrast, insists that security be assessed from the experiences of those most vulnerable, including women, workers, and migrants. Violence is not only armed, but also operates through social structures that normalise exploitation (Stern & Wibben, 2015). Migration scholarship similarly critiques the 'add women and stir' approach and emphasises gender as a power relation that structures global migration

(Nawyn, 2010). However, relatively few studies connect FSS to the way ASEAN narrates security in its official documents and discourse on migrant workers (Wibben, 2014). This gap matters because policy narratives shape which actors, spaces, and forms of violence become visible as security concerns (Wibben, 2011; Wibben, 2014).

This article addresses that gap by combining Feminist Security Studies (FSS) with Wibben's poststructural narrative approach to examine how ASEAN constructs the security of Indonesian women migrant workers after the adoption of the 2017 ASEAN Consensus (Wibben, 2011). It argues that ASEAN continues to construct migrant worker protection through a state-centric and institution-focused narrative that marginalises the everyday insecurities of Indonesian women migrant workers. The analysis operationalises six narrative elements, namely events, time, actors, locations, relationships, and point of view, to trace how ASEAN orders security in official documents and related forum practices. Accordingly, this article asks: How has ASEAN's security narrative after the adoption of the 2017 ASEAN Consensus been constructed, and how does that construction help explain the persistence of structural insecurity experienced by Indonesian women migrant workers across ASEAN? This article aims to map that narrative through the six elements and to show how its construction contributes to the ongoing structural insecurity faced by Indonesian women migrant workers in the region.

## **2. Analytical Framework**

This section outlines the analytical framework for examining how ASEAN constructs the security of Indonesian women migrant workers in regional policy discourse. It connects two levels of analysis that are often treated separately. The first is the lived and layered insecurity experienced by women migrant workers in cross-border domestic work. The second is the policy narrative through which ASEAN defines protection, responsibility, and security. Rather than treating ASEAN documents only as legal or institutional texts, this article reads them as narrative constructions that shape what counts as a security issue, whose experiences are recognised, and which forms of insecurity remain marginal (Wibben, 2011).

The framework rests on two foundations. First, Feminist Security Studies places Indonesian women migrant workers at the centre of security analysis and highlights patriarchy, labour exploitation, and the domestic sphere as political sites of insecurity rather than peripheral social issues. Second, Wibben's narrative approach provides a way to read policy texts as stories structured through events, time, actors, locations, relationships, and point of view. Taken together, these perspectives enable analysis not only of what ASEAN says about migrant worker protection, but also of how its storytelling organises visibility, silence, and political relevance. These concepts guide the analysis in the Results and Discussion section.

### **2.1. Feminist Security Studies and Feminist Security Narratives**

Feminist Security Studies emerged as a critique of mainstream security studies that define security narrowly in terms of military affairs, interstate war, and external threats to sovereignty. In this tradition, the state becomes the primary subject of security, while individuals, especially women, workers, and marginalised groups, are reduced to objects in need of protection or rendered invisible (Sjoberg, 2013). Feminist Security Studies challenges this logic by shifting attention from high politics to everyday security, and from battlefields to spaces long treated as outside the domain of security (Stern & Wibben, 2015).

Violence against women is often excluded from security because it occurs in domestic spaces constructed as private and non-political (Shepherd, 2013). Dominant security narratives are also androcentric because they are often written from the standpoint of masculine subjects operating in military and diplomatic arenas, while reproductive and care labour, largely undertaken by

women, is treated as background rather than as part of political life (Wibben, 2011). In this sense, women's labour migration cannot be understood merely as an economic or labour market issue. It also concerns dignity, bodily integrity, and access to meaningful protection (Ramadhan & Ma'sumah, 2018).

Feminist Security Studies has developed beyond approaches that simply add women to existing frameworks. Instead, it treats gender as a power relation that structures security itself (Nawyn, 2010). This perspective insists that security should be assessed through the experiences of those most vulnerable, rather than solely from the standpoint of the state (Sjoberg, 2013). Methodologically, feminist security research also requires reflexivity, attention to positionality, and sensitivity to power relations so that the analysis does not reproduce a false neutrality that obscures patriarchy (Wibben, 2014).

This perspective is particularly relevant to Indonesian women migrant workers because their insecurity is shaped by layered forms of violence rooted in gender injustice, labour exploitation, and unequal power relations in both family and workplace settings (Sitepu, 2011). Feminist scholarship, therefore, resists framing women only as passive victims. Instead, it treats them as political subjects whose experiences illuminate how patriarchy, capitalism, and the state operate in interlocking ways (Stern & Wibben, 2015). Critiques of protection governance similarly show that migration policy often positions women as objects of protection, while feminist ethics of care offer a more responsive basis for policy analysis (Wuryandari, 2022).

Importantly, Feminist Security Studies expands the concept of insecurity beyond armed threats to include structural insecurity, namely vulnerability produced by social, economic, legal, and cultural structures that normalise exploitation and women's subordination (Mulya & Soetjipto, 2021). Indonesian migrant workers face insecurities across personal, health, and political dimensions, including violence and limited access to justice (Safitri & Wibisono, 2023). Feminised migration further shows how women can be positioned as essential contributors to household and national economies while remaining among those most vulnerable to exploitation (Wuryandari, 2022).

In this article, feminist security narratives are understood as ways of telling security that centre the experiences of women and other marginalised groups as the starting point for defining threat, protection, and political relevance (Wibben, 2011). Through this lens, Indonesian women migrant workers are treated as the core subjects of analysis rather than as a gender neutral category of migrant workers (Nawyn, 2010). This perspective also raises two central questions for reading ASEAN policy discourse: security for whom, and threat from what. These questions are essential for evaluating whether ASEAN's protection narrative captures the lived insecurities of Indonesian women migrant workers or instead reproduces a state-centric understanding of security.

## **2.2. Narrative Approaches in Security Studies**

A narrative approach to security studies, as formulated by Annick T. R. Wibben (2011), treats security not as an objective condition that can be measured technically, but as something continuously constructed through stories. Security narratives define who is deemed worthy of protection, which threats are recognised, and which spaces are considered legitimate security arenas (Wibben, 2011). From this perspective, ASEAN documents are not approached merely as normative instruments. They are also read as texts that tell a particular version of security regarding Indonesian women migrant workers.

Wibben argues that security storytelling is organised around six elements: events, time, actors, locations, relationships, and point of view (Wibben, 2011). Together, these elements order reality by selecting which episodes matter, arranging them in sequence, determining who

is given agency, identifying relevant spaces, framing power relations, and positioning the perspective from which security is understood (Wibben, 2011). In this study, these six elements are used to unpack ASEAN's policy narrative on migrant workers, making visible what is foregrounded and what is marginalised within official discourse (Wibben, 2014).

First is events, which refers to moments chosen as central to the story. In this article, this element is used to identify which episodes ASEAN presents as meaningful markers of protection and security. It helps reveal whether the narrative is organised around institutional milestones, policy adoption, and regional meetings, or whether the everyday insecurities experienced by Indonesian women migrant workers are also treated as politically significant moments.

Second is time, which concerns how events are sequenced and given meaning. This element examines whether ASEAN constructs migrant worker protection as a storyline of commitment, strengthening, and implementation, and how that temporal ordering shapes the meaning of security. Reading time narratively also helps the study assess whether continuing violence is framed as evidence of structural insecurity or merely as a delay in implementation.

Third are actors, who are the subjects granted agency within the story. This element examines who is authorised to define problems, set priorities, and determine solutions in ASEAN's discourse on migrant workers. It also allows the study to assess whether Indonesian women migrant workers appear as political subjects with meaningful agency or mainly as objects of protection within an institutional narrative.

Fourth is locations, which refers not only to geography but also to social spaces where insecurity is produced and recognised. In this study, the element of location is used to examine which spaces ASEAN treats as relevant to security. This includes whether policy attention is concentrated on regional forums, sending states, and receiving states, while domestic workplaces and other private spaces of vulnerability remain marginal.

Fifth is relationships, which refers to the power relations constructed among actors in the story. Relationships help identify whether ASEAN's discourse frames protection mainly through cooperation between states and institutions, or whether it also captures the unequal relations that shape insecurity in practice, such as employer-worker relations, recruitment agent-worker relations, and vulnerabilities linked to legal status.

The sixth point of view concerns the position from which security is narrated and whose perspective serves as the basis for knowledge about threats and protection. This element assesses whether ASEAN's narrative is told primarily from an institutional point of view or whether the lived experiences of Indonesian women migrant workers shape the meaning of security itself. In Wibben's terms, this is closely related to focalisation, namely the relationship between who sees and what is seen (Wibben, 2011; Wibben, 2014).

Together, Feminist Security Studies and Wibben's narrative approach form the analytical model of this research. Feminist Security Studies provides the critical standpoint from which security is assessed, while narrative analysis provides the tools for examining how security is discursively organised in ASEAN policy texts. By combining both, this study can move beyond listing protection provisions and examine how ASEAN's narrative of migrant worker protection may help sustain the structural insecurity experienced by Indonesian women migrant workers in Southeast Asia.

### **3. Research Method**

This study employs a qualitative method within an interpretivist paradigm to examine how ASEAN constructs the security of Indonesian women migrant workers through official policy texts. Rather than treating policy documents as neutral legal instruments, this research reads them as texts that produce meaning, distribute agency, and define what counts as protection and

what counts as insecurity. This approach is consistent with the article's analytical framework, which combines Feminist Security Studies and Wibben's narrative approach. Accordingly, the method is designed not merely to identify what ASEAN documents state, but to analyse how those documents narrate security and how such narratives may obscure the structural insecurity experienced by Indonesian women migrant workers.

### **3.1. Research Design and Approach**

This study uses a qualitative research design under an interpretivist paradigm. The focus is not on measuring the frequency of violence cases or evaluating policy effectiveness statistically, but on interpreting how security is discursively constructed in ASEAN policy language (Wibben, 2011). Security is therefore understood as a product of meaning-making shaped through language, narrative, and power relations, rather than as an objective condition that exists independently.

An interpretivist approach enables this study to examine how categories such as migrant workers, protection, and security are defined and ordered, which actors are granted agency, and whether the experiences of Indonesian women migrant workers are made visible or rendered marginal in regional discourse. This orientation is compatible with Feminist Security Studies, which assesses security from the lived experiences of vulnerable groups and critiques state-centric definitions of protection (Shepherd, 2013). Accordingly, Indonesian women migrant workers are positioned as the starting point of analysis and as the lens through which ASEAN's regional security claims are evaluated.

### **3.2. Data Sources**

All data in this study are qualitative and document-based. The primary sources are ASEAN policy documents that directly regulate or frame migrant worker protection, especially the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2007) and the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2017) as published by ASEAN (ASEAN, 2007; ASEAN, 2018). These documents are treated as the principal texts through which ASEAN's regional security narrative is articulated.

To trace continuity after the adoption of the 2017 ASEAN Consensus, this study also uses supporting ASEAN documents related to implementation and follow-up, including relevant post-2017 regional outputs (ASEAN, 2020). Additional contextual sources are drawn from publications by international organisations and state agencies, including ILO reports, ADBI publications, and BP2MI statistics, in order to situate the policy narrative within broader patterns of labour migration, gendered vulnerability, and migrant worker protection in Southeast Asia (ADBI et al., 2021; ILO, 2018; ILO, 2021; BP2MI, 2022).

### **3.3. Data Collection and Analysis**

Data were collected through document-based research by identifying, selecting, and reading official ASEAN texts and supporting reports relevant to migrant worker protection. The selection focused on documents directly related to the regional governance of migrant labour, and that reflected ASEAN's official language on protection, rights, cooperation, and implementation. The documents were then organised according to their role in the narrative, namely, foundational texts, follow-up texts, and contextual supporting materials.

The analysis was conducted through qualitative document analysis using Wibben's six narrative elements, namely events, time, actors, locations, relationships, and point of view (Wibben, 2011). Each document was read to identify how these elements were constructed and how they shaped the meaning of security in ASEAN discourse. The interpretation was guided by Feminist Security Studies to assess whether the resulting narrative centred on the lived

insecurities of Indonesian women migrant workers or instead privileged institutional and state-oriented understandings of protection. In this way, the analysis moved beyond listing policy provisions and instead examined how ASEAN's narrative construction may contribute to the persistence of structural insecurity in cross-border domestic work.

#### **4. Results and Discussions**

This section presents findings and discussion to answer the research question: how ASEAN's security narrative after the adoption of the 2017 ASEAN Consensus is constructed, and how reading it through FSS and Wibben's poststructural narrative approach helps explain the persistence of structural insecurity experienced by Indonesian women migrant workers in ASEAN (Wibben, 2011). To maintain a coherent flow, the discussion moves from the realities of insecurity to the ways ASEAN "tells" security. This structure makes the tension between lived experience and regional policy framing more visible (Wibben, 2011).

The section is organised around two main foci. First, it maps the configuration of structural insecurity faced by Indonesian women migrant workers in ASEAN as a contextual grounding, including power relations, care work, and domestic space as key sites of vulnerability. Second, it unpacks ASEAN's post-2017 security narrative through Wibben's six elements and interprets it through an FSS lens to critique the state-centric bias that shapes regional policy developments from 2007 to 2025, highlighting continuity and recurring storytelling patterns that sustain protection gaps.

##### **4.1. Structural Insecurity of Indonesian Women Migrant Workers in ASEAN**

The structural insecurity experienced by Indonesian women migrant workers in ASEAN shows that migration is not only a movement of labour, but also a movement of vulnerability. BP2MI statistics indicate that Indonesian migrant worker placements remain concentrated in low-wage, high-risk sectors, with major destination countries closely linked to intra-ASEAN migration routes (BP2MI, 2022). This pattern corresponds with ILO findings that women workers are concentrated in care work and domestic work, sectors that often remain beyond effective public oversight and formal protection (ILO, 2019a). In these conditions, migrant women workers face risks of physical and psychological abuse, gender based violence, wage theft, confinement, and trafficking. These risks are not incidental, but are closely tied to unequal cross-border labour relations that shape migrant domestic work in the region (Solechan et al., 2020).

These insecurities become more visible when viewed through a human security perspective. Indonesian women migrant workers experience layered threats across personal, health, and political dimensions, including excessive working hours, document confiscation, restricted mobility, limited rest, and deportation threats used as instruments of control (Safitri & Wibisono, 2023). Such conditions cannot be reduced to the actions of a few individual perpetrators. Rather, they are sustained by legal, political, economic, and governance structures that continue to treat domestic work and care work as private and non-political spheres, making violence easier to normalise and conceal (Shepherd, 2013). Social studies also point to the paradoxical position of women migrant workers, whose contributions to family welfare often coexist with stigma, double burdens, and psychological pressure that do not necessarily lead to dignity or everyday safety (Andriani & Prasetio, 2024).

Structural insecurity also emerges before departure and extends beyond the workplace itself. Many women encounter gender based violence within households and communities before migration, and migration may be pursued as a strategy to escape poverty or domestic violence, even though it can create new forms of vulnerability in destination countries (Sitepu, 2011). Domestic work continues to position women as natural providers of care and household

labour, causing reproductive labour to be devalued, underpaid, and easily controlled (Wuryandari, 2022). Vulnerability also affects families left behind, especially when cross-border protection and social security mechanisms fail to ensure access to support, recovery, and the fulfilment of rights in cases of violence, injury, or death abroad (Erizal et al., 2020; ILO, 2018).

The case of Adelina Lisao makes these structural conditions particularly visible. Adelina, a domestic worker from NTT, died in Malaysia in 2018 after experiencing prolonged abuse in her employer's household. Her case shows that violence against women migrant workers is deeply embedded in unequal power relations within migrant domestic work rather than arising as an isolated incident (Nasrullah et al., 2023). Discourse analysis also shows that Adelina is frequently represented as a passive victim, while perpetrators and the structures enabling violence are pushed into the background (Adanan & Ungku Mohd Nordin, 2024). From a Feminist Security Studies perspective, this is a form of silencing in which women's embodied experiences are reduced to tragic stories rather than recognised as structural security problems (Stern & Wibben, 2015). Overall, the structural insecurity experienced by Indonesian women migrant workers in ASEAN is produced through the intersection of feminised migration, the devaluation of domestic and care work, weak cross-border protection, and patriarchal power relations embedded in the regional political economy. This context provides the basis for the next section, which examines whether ASEAN's security narrative captures, marginalises, or obscures these lived insecurities (Wibben, 2011).

#### **4.2. ASEAN Security Narratives after the 2017 ASEAN Consensus**

This sub-section examines ASEAN's security narrative regarding migrant workers, with particular attention to Indonesian women migrant workers engaged in cross-border domestic and care work. It focuses on ASEAN's security constructs after the 2017 ASEAN Consensus, using the 2007 ASEAN Declaration as the starting point for the regional narrative (ASEAN, 2007; ASEAN, 2018). Rather than relying on a single document, this article traces the policy storyline from 2007 to 2025 to identify recurring patterns in how protection is narrated and institutionalised.

ASEAN documents and forums are approached here as policy stories that select particular episodes, order time, assign agency, designate relevant spaces, structure power relations, and privilege certain perspectives over others (Wibben, 2011). This framing shapes what is recognised as security and what remains invisible in ASEAN discourse. Drawing on Wibben's six narrative elements, namely events, time, actors, locations, relationships, and point of view, this section shows what ASEAN foregrounds as protection and what becomes marginal when the lived experiences of Indonesian women migrant workers are used as the benchmark of security (Wibben, 2011; Stern & Wibben, 2015). The findings across these six elements are summarised in Table 1.

##### **4.2.1. Events**

Events are episodes selected by policy texts and given political significance as markers of what matters for security (Wibben, 2011). In ASEAN's narrative on migrant worker protection, the central events are predominantly institutional. Security is represented as advancing through declarations, consensuses, formal meetings, and policy recommendations, rather than through recognition of the everyday insecurities experienced by women migrant workers in domestic work.

This event logic can be traced from the 2007 ASEAN Declaration, which places migrant worker protection within a leaders' diplomatic framework and begins the regional story at the level of state commitment (ASEAN, 2007). Narrative continuity is then sustained through the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour, initiated in 2008, which repeatedly serves as a policy venue

and a mechanism for recommendations (ILO, 2019b). The 2017 ASEAN Consensus appears as a key anchor event that signals a strengthened regional commitment, followed by implementation-related outputs such as the 2020 Action Plan and the 2024 checklist on fair recruitment and decent work (ASEAN, 2018; ASEAN, 2020; ASEAN, 2024). The 16th AFML recommendations adopted in Jakarta in 2023 also reinforce the storyline of institutional follow-up and legal labour migration pathways (AFML, 2023).

The narrative problem is that the insecurity experienced by women migrant workers rarely becomes an event that reshapes the story. Gender based violence in domestic workplaces, document confiscation, mobility control, household isolation, and recruitment chain exploitation are generally treated as background conditions rather than politically defining moments. As a result, severe cases such as Adelina Lisao's death in 2018 do not significantly disrupt the regional narrative of progress, even though they reveal the persistence of structural insecurity after the 2017 ASEAN Consensus (Nasrullah et al., 2023). From a Feminist Security Studies perspective, this pattern shows that event selection privileges institutional continuity while marginalising lived insecurity as a core security concern (Stern & Wibben, 2015). This pattern indicates that ASEAN's security narrative privileges institutional and diplomatic milestones as defining events, while the everyday experiences of migrant workers are excluded from becoming central security events.

#### **4.2.2. Time**

In narrative terms, time is not simply chronology, but a way of organising meaning by connecting past, present, and future into a particular storyline (Wibben, 2011). ASEAN's policy narrative tends to arrange time as a story of normative progress, moving from initial commitment, to strengthened instruments, to implementation and follow-up. This temporal ordering creates the impression that protection improves as formal processes continue.

This policy time begins with the 2007 ASEAN Declaration as a leader-level commitment and is reinforced through the annual rhythm of AFML recommendations and regional meetings (ASEAN, 2007; ILO, 2019b). The 2017 ASEAN Consensus serves as a major temporal marker, framing the period from 2007 to 2017 as a path toward strengthening, while the years after 2017 are narrated as a phase of implementation driven by regional bodies and national coordination (ASEAN, 2018). In this way, the timeline of protection is structured around official milestones and institutional continuity.

The difficulty is that this orderly policy timeline does not correspond to the lived time of Indonesian women migrant workers in domestic work. Structural insecurity does not unfold according to summit calendars or annual forum cycles, but through repetitive everyday routines shaped by dependency, exhaustion, surveillance, and vulnerability. Consequently, continuing violence after 2017 can be narrated as a delay in implementation rather than as evidence that the regional protection narrative itself remains inadequate. A feminist reading, therefore, reveals a gap between policy time and lived time, where the continuity of institutional processes can obscure the continuity of insecurity (Shepherd, 2013; Stern & Wibben, 2015). This temporal framing constructs a sense of continuous improvement, which risks obscuring the persistence of structural insecurity experienced by migrant workers beyond formal policy milestones.

#### **4.2.3. Actors**

Actors are those who are granted agency within the story, namely the subjects authorised to define problems, set priorities, and determine solutions (Wibben, 2011). In ASEAN's post-2017 narrative, member states remain the primary actors. This agency appears in declaratory moments through heads of state or government and in implementation processes through labour and migration authorities in sending and receiving countries (ASEAN, 2007; ASEAN, 2018).

At the regional level, ASEAN institutions, such as the ASEAN Committee on Migrant Workers and the ASEAN Secretariat, are also key actors in coordination and follow-up.

This actor configuration is reinforced through AFML, which provides a regional forum involving governments, employers' organisations, workers' organisations, civil society organisations, and international organisations (ILO, 2019b; AFML, 2025). Yet even within this broader forum structure, primary agency remains centred on governments and institutional actors. Migrant workers are more often represented as a general category, usually migrant workers and their families, rather than as differentiated political subjects whose gendered experiences shape how security itself should be understood (ASEAN, 2018).

This matters because actor status shapes whose insecurity becomes legible in policy discourse. When Indonesian women migrant workers do not appear as central actors, their experiences in domestic work are more likely to be filtered through institutional mediation rather than voiced as direct knowledge of insecurity. A feminist reading, therefore, shows that ASEAN's narrative continues to privilege formal actors as problem solvers while limiting the political visibility of women migrant workers as subjects of security (Nawyn, 2010; Stern & Wibben, 2015). This demonstrates that ASEAN's security narrative centralises institutional authority in defining security while systematically limiting migrant workers' political visibility as agents within the discourse.

#### **4.2.4. Locations**

Locations refer not only to physical geography, but also to the political and social spaces where security is defined, discussed, and legitimised (Wibben, 2011). In ASEAN's post-2017 narrative, protection is largely located within institutional and intergovernmental spaces, including the ASEAN region, origin countries, destination countries, and formal regional mechanisms (ASEAN, 2018). Security thus appears most visible in policy venues where commitments are negotiated and reaffirmed.

This policy geography is reinforced by the recurring locations of regional forums. The AFML sequence, from Manila in 2008 to Bangkok in 2019, and later Phnom Penh in 2022, Jakarta in 2023, and Kuala Lumpur in 2025, situates protection within official spaces of dialogue and governance (ILO, 2019b; AFML, 2022; AFML, 2023; AFML, 2025). These locations support ASEAN's image of regional cooperation and institutional movement.

However, the primary sites where Indonesian women migrant workers actually experience insecurity are often outside this narrative centre. Employers' homes, private spaces of isolation, recruitment channels, pre-departure shelters, dormitories, and informal workplaces rarely appear as core security locations, even though they are often the places where document confiscation, mobility control, and gender based violence occur (ILO, 2019a). From a Feminist Security Studies perspective, this reflects the public-private divide that treats domestic space as outside politics, allowing ASEAN's narrative to privilege formal policy locations while underrecognising the spaces where insecurity is most intensely lived (Wibben, 2011). Spatial framing in ASEAN's security discourse privileges formal institutional arenas such as regional forums and state territories, while rendering domestic spaces and recruitment sites largely invisible as sites of insecurity experienced by migrant workers.

#### **4.2.5. Relationships**

Relationships refer to the power relations constructed among actors in the story, including who is framed as protector, who is framed as protected, and which relationships are treated as politically relevant to security (Wibben, 2011). ASEAN's discourse often frames these relationships in terms of cooperation, responsibility, coordination, and respect for national laws.

Protection is therefore narrated primarily as an intergovernmental relationship managed through norms and institutional processes.

After the adoption of the 2017 ASEAN Consensus, the dominant relationship in ASEAN's narrative remains that between sending and receiving states, alongside the relationship between states and migrant workers understood through governance and protection language (ASEAN, 2007; ASEAN, 2018). This relational structure is maintained through regional mechanisms such as AFML and through policy tools related to fair recruitment and implementation (ILO, 2019b; ASEAN, 2024). The result is a diplomatic and orderly narrative in which the state remains the main unit through which security is imagined and organised.

A feminist reading shows that the relationships most decisive for insecurity often operate elsewhere. Employer-worker relations can involve control over time, the body, communication, and movement. Recruitment agent-worker relations can create dependency through debt, fees, and information asymmetry. State-worker relations can also create vulnerability through legal precarity, limited remedies, criminalisation risks, and deportation threats (Safitri & Wibisono, 2023). When ASEAN's narrative gives priority to intergovernmental coordination, these more intimate yet structural relations are often reduced to general labels such as abuse or exploitation, rather than being recognised as power relations that systematically produce gendered insecurity. Protection may therefore appear progressive at the level of cooperation while leaving intact the relations that sustain vulnerability in domestic work (Stern & Wibben, 2015; Wibben, 2011).

#### **4.2.6. Point of View**

Point of view refers to the position from which security is narrated: who speaks, whose perspective defines security, and whose experience becomes the basis for knowledge about safety and threat (Wibben, 2011). This is closely connected to focalisation, or the relationship between who sees and what is seen (Wibben, 2011; Wibben, 2014). Groups that are not positioned as narrators are more likely to appear only as objects of policy discussion or disappear from the story altogether.

Since the adoption of the 2017 ASEAN Consensus, ASEAN's security narrative is predominantly told from an institutional perspective. States and ASEAN organs are presented as observers, managers, and guarantors of protection. The 2007 ASEAN Declaration frames migrant worker protection as a leader-level intergovernmental agenda, and the 2017 ASEAN Consensus continues this framing through the language of cooperation, rights promotion, and gradual implementation (ASEAN, 2007; ASEAN, 2018). The same point of view is reproduced through AFML and related regional forums, where institutional continuity becomes one of the main signs of progress (ILO, 2019b).

From a Feminist Security Studies standpoint, this institutional focalisation risks producing silencing. Indonesian women migrant workers rarely appear as narrators of security. More often, they are represented as part of a generic category of migrant workers and their families, which obscures the specific experiences of domestic work, household isolation, reproductive labour, and gender based violence (Nawyn, 2010; Stern & Wibben, 2015). The Adelina Lisao case illustrates this consequence clearly, since violence against a woman domestic worker can be read as an individual tragedy rather than as evidence of structural insecurity and of a narrative failure to recognise the private household as a security locus (Nasrullah et al., 2023). This article, therefore, shifts the point of view by using the lived experiences of Indonesian women migrant workers as the benchmark for evaluating what ASEAN recognises as security, what it treats as a threat, and what it continues to exclude (Shepherd, 2013; Wibben, 2011).

**Table 1.** The Six Narrative Elements of ASEAN Security after the 2017 ASEAN Consensus and Their Implications for Indonesian Women Migrant Workers

Element	Narrative Findings
<b>Events</b>	ASEAN's narrative foregrounds institutional events such as the 2007 ASEAN Declaration, the 2017 ASEAN Consensus, and the AFML process. The implication is that violence against Indonesian women migrant workers in domestic work is more often treated as background rather than as a key event that reshapes the narrative direction.
<b>Time</b>	Time is arranged as a storyline of progress from commitment, to strengthening, to implementation. The implication is that continuing violence after 2017 tends to be read as an implementation problem rather than as persistent structural insecurity in domestic work.
<b>Actors</b>	ASEAN member states and regional institutions are positioned as the primary actors in defining problems and solutions, while migrant workers are often represented as a general category. The implication is that agency remains centred on governments and institutions, so gendered experiences are not placed at the centre of the security narrative.
<b>Locations</b>	The main locations in the narrative are regional forums, origin countries, destination countries, and other institutional spaces of cooperation. The implication is that domestic workplaces and other everyday sites of vulnerability are rarely recognised as central security locations.
<b>Relationships</b>	Relationships are primarily portrayed as cooperation between sending and receiving states and as governance responsibilities managed through formal frameworks. The implication is that employer and worker relations, agent and worker relations, and other unequal relations that produce insecurity are insufficiently politicised.
<b>Point of View</b>	The dominant point of view is institutional, with ASEAN and member states acting as observers and managers of protection. The implication is that Indonesian women migrant workers rarely appear as narrators, and structural insecurity can be reduced to individual tragedy rather than recognised as a systemic problem.

Source: Processed by author

## 5. Conclusion

This article argues that ASEAN's security narrative, following the adoption of the 2017 ASEAN Consensus, continues to be constructed within a state-centred, institution-focused framework. Within this narrative, security is made intelligible primarily through formal commitments, intergovernmental coordination, and the continuity of regional policy processes. As a result, protection is understood more as governance progress than as a transformation of the everyday conditions faced by Indonesian women migrant workers, especially those working in domestic and care sectors.

When read through Wibben's six narrative elements, this construction becomes more clearly visible. The events privileged by ASEAN's narrative are institutional milestones, such as declarations, consensuses, forums, and implementation-related outputs, while the everyday violence experienced by women migrant workers rarely becomes a defining event in the regional story. Time is arranged as a narrative of progress from commitment to strengthening and implementation, making continuing violence after 2017 easier to interpret as a technical problem rather than as evidence of enduring structural insecurity. Actors with the greatest agency are member states, ASEAN institutions, and official stakeholders, while Indonesian women migrant workers are more often represented as a general category than as political subjects whose experiences shape the meaning of security itself.

This narrative construction also helps explain why structural insecurity persists. The locations that dominate ASEAN's security narrative are regional forums, institutional venues, and state jurisdictions, whereas domestic workplaces, recruitment channels, and other everyday sites of

vulnerability remain marginal. Likewise, the relationships highlighted in the narrative are mainly intergovernmental, while the unequal relations that most directly shape insecurity in practice, including employer and worker relations, recruitment agent and worker relations, and vulnerabilities linked to legal status, are insufficiently recognised as political relations producing insecurity. The dominant institutional point of view further limits the visibility of women migrant workers' own experiences, allowing structural violence to appear as an isolated tragedy rather than as a recurring regional security problem.

These findings show the value of combining Feminist Security Studies with poststructural narrative analysis in the study of ASEAN migration governance. A feminist reading demonstrates that security cannot be assessed solely through documents, forums, and formal cooperation, but must be evaluated through the lived experiences of those most vulnerable. In this case, the experiences of Indonesian women migrant workers reveal the limits of ASEAN's current protection narrative and show how state-centred storytelling can obscure the everyday realities of exploitation, isolation, and gendered vulnerability. The implication is that a more substantive regional security narrative should recognise domestic work as a political site of protection, foreground unequal power relations across recruitment and employment processes, and create greater space for women migrant workers' experiences to inform how threats are identified and how protection is designed. Future research may further examine how these narrative patterns operate in specific destination country contexts and how advocacy strategies can more effectively bring women migrant workers' perspectives into regional policy discourse.

## References

- Achsin, M. Z., & Rosalinda, H. (2019). *Teori-Teori Migrasi Internasional*. UB Press.
- Adanan, A. A., & Ungku Mohd Nordin, U. K. (2024). Representation of victim and perpetrator in Adelina Lisao's abuse case in Malaysian online news articles. *Indonesian Journal of Social Science Research*, 5(1), 318–326. <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijssr.05.01.28>
- Andriani, D., & Prasetyo, L. (2024). Fenomena perempuan pekerja migran Indonesia untuk kesejahteraan keluarga. *Jurnal Intelektualita: Keislaman, Sosial dan Sains*, 13(2), 350–358. <https://doi.org/10.19109/intelektualita.v13i2.25518>
- ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour. (2022). *The 15th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML): Resumption of labour migration and regional cooperation recommendations*.
- ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour. (2023). *The 16th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML): Enhancing the effectiveness of legal pathways for labour migration in ASEAN recommendations*.
- ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour. (2025). *The 18th ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (AFML): Accelerating actions towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on safe migration and decent work for migrant workers in ASEAN recommendations*.
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations. (2007). *ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers*.
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations. (2015). *The ASEAN Charter* (18th reprint).
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations. (2018). *ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers*.
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations. (2020). *Action Plan of the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers*.
- Association of Southeast Asian Nations. (2024). *Checklist on fair recruitment and decent work for migrant workers in ASEAN*.

- Asian Development Bank Institute, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, & International Labour Organization. (2021). Labour migration in Asia: Impacts of the COVID-19 crisis and the post-pandemic future.
- Badan Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia. (2022). Data pekerja migran Indonesia: Semester I 2022.
- Erizal, A., Agusmidah, A., & Ningsih, S. (2020). Pelindungan keluarga pekerja migran Indonesia (PMI) pasca berlakunya Undang-Undang Nomor 18 Tahun 2017 tentang Pelindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia. *Law Jurnal*, 1(1), 9–24. <https://doi.org/10.46576/lj.v1i1.784>
- Feraru, A. S. (2016). ASEAN decision-making process: Before and after the ASEAN Charter. *Asian Development Policy Review*, 4(1), 26–41. <https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.107/2016.4.1/107.1.26.41>
- Fitria, N. (2025). A critical review of the ASEAN Convention on the protection of women migrant workers: Gaps, challenges, and recommendations. *JCIC: Jurnal CIC Lembaga Riset dan Konsultan Sosial*, 7(1), 51–62. <https://doi.org/10.51486/jbo.v7i1.235>
- Habel, S., Koff, H., & Adam, M. (2022). Normative coherence for development and regionalism: Gender equality in ASEAN's migration policies. *Development Policy Review*, 40(S1), e12618. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12618>
- International Labour Organization. (2018). Social protection for migrant workers in ASEAN: Developments, challenges, and prospects.
- International Labour Organization. (2019a). In search of decent work: Migrant workers' experiences of reintegration in Cambodia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Thailand and Viet Nam.
- International Labour Organization. (2019b). ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour: Background and updates 2019.
- International Labour Organization. (2021). ILO global estimates on international migrant workers: Results and methodology (3rd ed.).
- Leelianou, S. (2021). Does ASEAN's consensus decision making remain relevant? (Master's thesis, Flinders University).
- Mulya, L. H., & Soetjipto, A. (2021). Maskulinitas sebagai tonggak keempat dalam kajian feminisme hubungan internasional. *Indonesian Perspective*, 6(2), 222-235. <https://doi.org/10.14710/ip.v6i2.43545>
- Nasrullah, N., Farman, L., Pangestu, R. A., & Putra, A. N. (2023). ILO and legal protection for Indonesian migrant workers (Study case: Adelina). *Jurnal Legalitas*, 16(1), 124–136. <https://doi.org/10.33756/jelta.v16i1.18627>
- Nawyn, S. J. (2010). Gender and migration: Integrating feminist theory into migration studies. *Sociology Compass*, 4(9), 749–765. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2010.00318.x>
- Ramadhan, I., & Ma'sumah, I. (2018). Mengkaji peran UN Women dalam Mengatasi Kekerasan terhadap Perempuan dan Mewujudkan Kesetaraan gender Melalui Perspektif Feminisme. *Jurnal Asia Pacific Studies*, 2(2), 144-160. <https://doi.org/10.33541/japs.v2i2.871>
- Safitri, D., & Wibisono, A. A. (2023). Keamanan manusia pekerja migran Indonesia: Ketidakamanan dan perlindungannya. *Intermestic: Journal of International Studies*, 7(2), 741–769. <https://doi.org/10.24198/intermestic.v7n2.17>
- Shepherd, L. J. (Ed.). (2013). *Critical approaches to security: An introduction to theories and methods*. Routledge.
- Sitepu, A. (2011). Tindak kekerasan terhadap perempuan pekerja migran. *Sosio Informa: Kajian Permasalahan Sosial dan Usaha Kesejahteraan Sosial*, 16(1), 61-76. <https://doi.org/10.33007/inf.v16i1.44>

- Sjoberg, L. (2013). *Gendering global conflict: Toward a feminist theory of war*. Columbia University Press.
- Solechan, S., Utami, T. R., & Azhar, M. (2020). Upaya meningkatkan jaminan perlindungan pekerja migran Indonesia. *Administrative Law and Governance Journal*, 3(1), 153–161. <https://doi.org/10.14710/alj.v3i1.153-161>
- Stern, M., & Wibben, A. T. R. (2015). A decade of feminist security studies revisited: Editors' introduction. *Security Dialogue, Special Virtual Issue*, 1–6.
- Sundari, R., & Andini, D. F. (2025). The role of the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia Kuala Lumpur in addressing the rights of Indonesian women migrant workers. *Hasanuddin Journal of International Affairs*, 5(2), 131–145. <https://doi.org/10.31947/hjirs.v5i2.43667>
- Tandos, R., Zhu, R., & Krever, R. (2022). The protection and empowerment of Indonesian female migrant domestic workers: Proposals from a multi-stage analysis. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies*, 28(2), 205–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2022.2051818>
- Wibben, A. T. R. (2011). *Feminist security studies: A narrative approach*. Routledge.
- Wibben, A. T. R. (2014). Researching feminist security studies. *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 49(4), 743–755. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10361146.2014.971100>
- Widodo, H., & Belgradoputra, R. J. (2023). Perlindungan pekerja migran Indonesia. *Binamulia Hukum*, 8(1), 107–116. <https://doi.org/10.37893/jbh.v8i1.343>
- Wuryandari, R. D. (2022). Perempuan dan penerapan etika feminis dalam tata kelola perlindungan pekerja migran Indonesia. *Jurnal Ketenagakerjaan*, 17(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.47198/naker.v17i1.111>
- Yunita, P. (2019). *Gender role in environmental protection in developing countries: Case study Indonesia* [Unpublished manuscript].