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FEMINISATION OF MIGRATION AND GENDER CONSTRUCTION: A BEAUVOIRIAN ANALYSIS OF WOMEN MIGRANT WORKERS FROM LAMPUNG

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Abstrack

The feminisation of migration has become an important issue, particularly as more women are involved in cross-border labour migration. However, this phenomenon cannot be understood only in terms of increasing numbers. It is also closely related to how gender roles shape women's migration pathways and experiences. This study aims to examine the feminisation of migration among women migrant workers from Lampung using Simone de Beauvoir's perspective, with a focus on gender construction and women's position within migration. This research uses a qualitative approach based on literature review and content analysis, drawing on academic studies, policy reports, and institutional data related to migration and gender. The analysis is guided by Beauvoir's concept of women as the Other to understand how social structures influence women's roles in migration. The findings show that women's migration is strongly linked to gendered labour pathways, particularly in domestic and care sectors. Migration systems, including policies, training, and labour arrangements, tend to place women in roles that are essential but often undervalued and less protected. At the same time, migration provides access to income and mobility, but does not necessarily change the structures that shape women's position. Overall, this study suggests that feminisation of migration reflects not only women's movement across borders, but also the persistence of gendered relations that continue to influence how women are positioned within migration systems

Keywords: Feminisation of Migration, Women Migrant Worker, Simone de Beauvoir

Abstrak

Feminisasi migrasi telah menjadi isu penting, terutama dengan meningkatnya keterlibatan perempuan dalam migrasi tenaga kerja lintas negara. Namun, fenomena ini tidak dapat dipahami hanya dari sisi peningkatan jumlah. Feminisasi migrasi juga

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berkaitan erat dengan bagaimana peran gender membentuk jalur dan pengalaman migrasi perempuan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis feminisasi migrasi pada pekerja migran perempuan asal Lampung dengan menggunakan perspektif Simone de Beauvoir, dengan fokus pada konstruksi gender dan posisi perempuan dalam migrasi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui studi pustaka dan analisis konten, dengan memanfaatkan berbagai sumber seperti artikel ilmiah, laporan kebijakan, dan data institusional yang berkaitan dengan migrasi dan gender. Analisis dilakukan dengan menggunakan konsep perempuan sebagai the Other *dari Beauvoir untuk memahami bagaimana struktur sosial memengaruhi peran perempuan dalam migrasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa migrasi perempuan sangat terkait dengan jalur kerja yang bersifat gendered, terutama di sektor domestik dan perawatan. Sistem migrasi, termasuk kebijakan, pelatihan, dan pengaturan kerja, cenderung menempatkan perempuan pada pekerjaan yang penting namun seringkali kurang dihargai dan minim perlindungan. Di sisi lain, migrasi memang membuka akses terhadap pendapatan dan mobilitas, tetapi tidak secara otomatis mengubah struktur yang membentuk posisi perempuan. Secara keseluruhan, penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa feminisasi migrasi tidak hanya mencerminkan perpindahan perempuan lintas negara, tetapi juga keberlanjutan relasi gender yang masih memengaruhi bagaimana perempuan diposisikan dalam sistem migrasi.*

Kata Kunci: Feminisasi Migrasi, Pekerja Migran Perempuan, Simone de Beauvoir

Introduction

In recent years, the feminization of migration has emerged as an important issue in the study of global migration. This concept refers not only to the increasing number of women migrating across borders, but also to the growing tendency of women to migrate independently for work, rather than simply accompanying their families (International Organization for Migration, 2022; Piper, 2008). The International Organization for Migration said in 2022 that almost half of the people moving to countries are women, which is around 48 percent. Women are now moving to countries by themselves and they are the heads of their households, which is different from how things used to be (Bargain et al., 2022; Choon Yen et al., 2014; Prati et al., 2022).

However this trend is not about numbers. Migration is heavily influenced by gender. This includes why people migrate, the opportunities they have, and the risks they face during the

process (Anastasiadou et al., 2023). Many women migrate not only for economic reasons but also because of social pressure, lack of opportunities and to escape poverty, violence or discrimination. So the feminization of migration should be understood as a social process that reflects broader gender relations (Amirapu et al., 2022; Fleury, 2016).

In Southeast Asia, especially in Indonesia this trend is very clear. Women migrant workers mostly work in care sectors. These sectors are closely related to roles of women and the global need for care workers (Parreñas, 2001; Piper, 2008). Data from Badan Perlindungan Pekerja Migran Indonesia BP2MI (BP2MI, 2024b) shows that female migrant workers dominate these sectors. This confirms that migration, in Indonesia has a pattern based on gender (Noor et al., 2025; Simbolon et al., 2024a). Even though women's participation in migration continues to increase, this does not mean that gender equality has been achieved. Many studies show that female migrant workers still face serious challenges, such as weak legal protection, informal working conditions, and unequal power relations (Kofman et al., 2000; Anderson, 2000). According to Human Rights Watch (2023) and Komnas Perempuan (Komnas Perempuan, 2024) report Indonesian women migrant workers often experience violence, exploitation, and restriction of rights throughout different stages of migration, from recruitment to return (Nursani et al., 2026).

One of the regions that reflects this condition is Lampung Province, which is known as a major migrant-sending area in Indonesia (Darmastuti & Simbolon, 2022a). Migration from Lampung is not only influenced by economic needs, but also by social expectations, especially regarding women's roles in supporting family welfare. In many cases, women are expected to contribute economically, and migration becomes one of the available options (Ceasar et al., 2025; Pargito, 2020). This shows that women's migration is closely connected to gender norms that shape their decisions and experiences (Elmhirst, 2011).Migration is also

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closely related to structural conditions in the country of origin. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS, 2023) show that most migrant workers come from regions with limited employment opportunities, making migration an important strategy for improving household income through remittances (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2025; Barnadi et al., 2025). However, as explained by de Haas (de Haas, 2010), migration decisions are not only driven by economic factors, but also shaped by social networks, cultural norms, and existing social structures.

However, most migration studies in Indonesia still focus mainly on economic aspects, such as remittances and development outcomes (Barnadi et al., 2025; Meiliyana, 2019). Gender is often discussed only in terms of vulnerability, without deeper analysis of how social and cultural factors shape women's migration experiences, especially at the local level. In this case, what Simone de Beauvoir says is helpful to understand these issues. She says that women are often seen not as important as men and that they become this way because of how society treats them. This is important to understand how womens roles are made and kept, when they migrate. Women migrant workers are a good example of this. Womens migration and women migrant workers, are shaped by things, including what people think women should do and this is what we need to understand better.

Analytical Framework

This study looks at the feminization of migration and how women migrants from Lampung are affected by gender construction. According to International Organization for Migration (IOM), Feminization of Migration is the trend of women making up a growing proportion of global migrants and shifting the type of migration from migrating as dependent joining their partner, to migrating independently as primary labor (International Organization for Migration, 2024). We use the ideas of Simone de Beauvoir to understand this phenomenon. In her book The Second

Sex, Beauvoir says that women are not born women but become women through the way society treats them. She also says that women are seen as the "Other" in a world controlled by men (de Beauvoir, 1953).

To critically analyze this phenomenon, this study utilizes the existential feminist framework of Simone de Beauvoir, specifically drawing from her seminal work, *The Second Sex* (1953). Beauvoir posits that gender identity is fundamentally constructed rather than biologically predetermined, famously asserting that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman." Central to this construction is her concept of "the Other," which describes an asymmetrical power dynamic where man establishes himself as the absolute, universal Subject, while woman is defined purely in relation to him, rendering her the incidental, subordinate object. Within this framework, a woman is denied autonomous subjectivity and is forced to navigate a social reality preconfigured by patriarchal norms.

This theoretical lens provides a vital analytical tool for understanding the feminization of migration. While macro-level data confirms that women are increasingly migrating independently as primary breadwinners, Beauvoir's concept of alterity (*otherness*) reveals that physical and economic mobility does not automatically equate to structural liberation. Instead, independent female migrants frequently encounter transnational migration systems such as spanning preparation protocols, state deployment policies, and host-country labor markets, that continue to treat them as "the Other." By keeping these workers limited to unstable domestic and care roles, both societies make sure that old ideas about what men and women should do stay the same. Consequently, the feminization of migration manifests as a paradoxical space where women exercise economic agency yet remain trapped within institutional arrangements that reinforce their secondary, subordinate status in a male-dominated global labor system.

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However, Beauvoir's framework is largely philosophical and does not specifically address the structural and transnational dimensions of migration, such as labor markets, state policies, and global care chains. Therefore, this study incorporates insights from the literature on the feminization of migration, which highlights the increasing participation of women in global labor mobility and their concentration in gendered sectors such as domestic and care work.

By integrating Beauvoir's feminist perspective with the concept of feminization of migration, this framework enables a critical analysis of how gender norms shape women's participation in migration, position them within unequal power relations, and reproduce their roles in both local and global contexts. At the same time, this framework also captures the ambiguity emphasized by Beauvoir, in which women's migration can simultaneously reflect conditions of subordination and opportunities for agency and economic contribution. Through this analytical framework, the study interprets the feminization of migration in Lampung as a socially constructed phenomenon, where women's migration is shaped by gendered expectations, structural constraints, and broader socio-cultural dynamics.

Methods

This study adopts a qualitative methodology grounded in a systematic literature review and thematic content analysis to examine how the feminization of migration shifting social frameworks and traditional gender dynamics. To establish a robust dataset, academic monographs, peer-reviewed journal articles, and institutional reports from organizations such as UN Women and the IOM were gathered. The selection was limited to literature published between 2000 and 2025 that directly explores independent female migration and labor dynamics; this research treating gender only as a baseline demographic variable without structural analysis was excluded. During the evaluation of this material, individual arguments and thematic paragraphs served as

the primary units of analysis. The coding procedure involved two distinct phases: an initial open coding stage to identify recurring thematic patterns, such as economic autonomy and legal precarity. And then followed by a secondary phase mapping these themes onto Simone de Beauvoir's concepts of gender construction and women as *the Other*.

This framework facilitated an investigation into the ways contemporary migration systems continue to relegate autonomous female breadwinners to subordinate positions. To safeguard interpretive validity and minimize analytical bias, data triangulation was performed by cross-referencing theoretical literature with empirical case studies and official reports. Furthermore, a transparent audit trail was maintained to track coding developments, and preliminary findings were subjected to peer debriefing with colleagues in the field to ensure the final analysis remained balanced and objective.

Discussions

Structural Conditions of Women's Migration in Lampung

Migration from Lampung is closely related to local unemployement condition and the province's long-standing role as one of Indonesia's migrant-sending areas. In many parts of the province, access to stable and well-paid jobs is still limited. According to BPS Lampung, the unemployment rate reached 4.19 percent in August 2024, with more than 200,000 people recorded as unemployed (BPS Lampung, 2024). This situation reflects not only the lack of job opportunities, but also how difficult it is for many people to find work that can provide long-term security.

Because of this, migration is often seen as a practical solution. For many households, the decision to migrate is closely related to everyday needs, such as education, housing, and basic consumption (Darmastuti & Simbolon, 2022a). Over time, migration has become deeply normalized in many communities. People are often influenced by the experiences of others around

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them such as family members, neighbours, or friends who have worked abroad(Darmastuti et al., 2022). As a result, migration is no longer seen as something unusual, but as a path that is already familiar and socially accepted (de Haas, 2010).

According to the 2025 official report, five provinces dominate Indonesian migrant worker placements, accounting for over 85% of the total share. Jawa Timur remains the top sender at 23.55% (69,925 placements), despite an 11.87% decline from 2024. Jawa Barat follows at 21.00% with a slight 1.30% increase (62,358), while Jawa Tengah holds third place at 20.97% (62,276) after a 6.51% drop. Nusa Tenggara Barat represents the fastest-growing region, surging 13.48% to reach 35,215 placements (11.86% share), and Lampung rounds out the top five at 8.14%, experiencing a mild 3.92% decrease to 24,175 placements (BP2MI, 2026). A large proportion of these workers are employed in the informal sector, and by mid-2025 more than 9,000 workers had already been deployed, mainly to Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. The types of work most commonly taken, such as caregiver, domestic worker, and housemaid. (Biro Administrasi Pimpinan Sekretariat Daerah Provinsi Lampung, 2025). This indicate that migrant labour is still concentrated in sectors that do not require high formal qualifications but involve intensive labour.

This pattern is not only shaped by conditions in Lampung, but also by demand from destination countries. The need for domestic and care workers continues to increase, especially in countries with ageing populations and high labour demand in household services. The data reveals that female-dominated care and domestic roles constitute the largest share of Indonesian migrant worker placements from 2023 to 2025. House Maid positions consistently rank as the highest employment category, peaking at 100,096 in 2024 before dropping to 76,773 in 2025, yet securing a massive three-year total of 265,481 placements. Caregivers represent the second-largest sector with a stable three-year cumulative total of 160,240 placements, maintaining steady

numbers through 2025 (53,574). Other notable sectors include Plantation Workers, which showed growth in 2025 reaching 27,828 placements, and Domestic Workers, which nearly doubled from 7,799 in 2023 to 14,466 in 2025. Conversely, traditional sectors like Construction Worker placements saw a steep decline, falling from 13,185 in 2023 to just 3,609 in 2025According to BP2MI, in 2025 (BP2MI, 2026). This creates a specific space for migrant workers, particularly women, to enter these sectors. As a result, migration is not only driven by conditions at the place of origin, but also by labour demand that already expects and prefers certain types of workers (Baruah, 2019; Herdiana et al., 2025).

For women, these structural conditions become more specific. The jobs that are widely available abroad, especially in domestic and care work are closely related to roles that women are already associated in everyday life. Because of this, women are more likely to enter these sectors, not only because opportunities exist, but also because these jobs are seen as suitable for them. This shows that women do not enter a neutral labour market, but one that has already defined their position (Parreñas, 2015). At the same time, this pattern cannot be separated from the cultural context in Lampung, where patriarchal values still shape gender relations. In many communities, including in Lampung, women are expected to take care of domestic responsibilities while also contributing to family income. This creates a situation where women carry a double burden. Migration, in this sense, is often seen not as a form of independence, but as an extension of their responsibility to support the household (Elmhirst & Darmastuti, 2015).

Because of this, the feminisation of migration in Lampung can be understood as the result of several conditions working together. Limited employment opportunities at the local level encourage people to migrate, while the global demand for care and domestic work creates a pathway that is more accessible to women. At the same time, patriarchal norms influence how women are positioned within this process. These factors do not stand

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separately, but reinforce each other in shaping women's migration (Parreñas, 2015; Piper, 2008). The role of the government also shows that migration is now more structured. Various programmes such as integrated service centres (LTSA-PMI), training facilities, and vocational preparation initiatives aim to organise migration in a safer and more systematic way (BP2MI, 2024a). These efforts indicate that migration is no longer treated only as a personal or household decision, but as part of a broader system that needs to be managed.

However, even with these developments, the main condition remains. Job opportunities in Lampung are still limited, and migration continues to be one of the most accessible options, especially for women. This suggests that feminisation of migration is not simply about increasing opportunities, but also about the limited choices available. Women participate more in migration, but within a structure that has already shaped their roles from the beginning.

Gender Construction in Feminisation of Migration

The feminisation of migration is not only about the growing number of women who migrate, but also about the way women's work is socially defined. At the global level, women migrant workers are still strongly concentrated in domestic and care sectors. The ILO notes that domestic work remains one of the largest sources of employment for women worldwide, with 75.6 million domestic workers globally, and 81 percent of them informally employed (International Labour Organization, 2021). The IOM also points out that major migration options for women are closely linked to the service sector, especially domestic work and health-care work (International Organization for Migration, 2022). This means that the global labour market does not absorb women in a neutral way, but channels them into work that is already associated with care, service, and household responsibility.

This global pattern is closely related to how gender roles are constructed. Work such as caregiving, cleaning, child care, and household maintenance is often treated as an extension of women's "natural" role, even though it is labour that requires time, skill, and emotional effort. Because of this, the demand for women migrant workers is not simply demand for labour in general, but demand for a gendered form of labour. In other words, women are recruited not only because workers are needed, but because they are assumed to be more patient, caring, and suitable for domestic service . This shows that the feminisation (Parreñas, 2015; Piper, 2008) of migration is closely linked to the social construction of femininity itself.

A similar pattern appears in Indonesia. BP2MI's 2024 placement publication shows that informal placement still dominated migrant worker deployment, reaching 57.39 percent in August 2024 (BP2MI, 2024b). Informal placement in Indonesia is strongly connected to domestic and care work, sectors in which women remain highly visible. Reports also note that women continue to make up the majority of migrant workers in these sectors and often work in conditions that are private, informal, and difficult to monitor (Komnas Perempuan, 2024). This shows that migration from Indonesia is shaped not only by labour export, but also by gendered labour segmentation that places women in certain occupations more than others.

In the context of Indonesian, this pattern is also tied to social expectations. Women are often expected to remain responsible for domestic work while also helping to support household income. As a result, migration becomes one of the available ways for women to fulfil economic responsibilities without fully escaping traditional gender roles. What appears as women's increasing economic participation is therefore still closely linked to existing ideas about what kind of work is considered appropriate for women (Elmhirst, 2011).

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This broader pattern can also be seen in Lampung, where women migrant workers are largely concentrated in domestic and care-related jobs, such as caregivers and housemaids. As discussed earlier, most placements from Lampung are still in the informal sector, which is closely linked to this type of work (BP2MI, 2024b). This shows that women's migration from Lampung does not enter a wide range of employment sectors, but is largely directed into specific jobs that are already associated with women. In this sense, the pattern observed at the global and national levels is also reproduced at the local level, where women's migration follows pathways that have already been shaped by gendered expectations.

In Lampung, this is not only an economic issue, but also a cultural one. Research on Lampung society shows that patriarchal values still remain strong, with women often placed in subordinate positions and associated with domestic space, while men are more strongly linked to authority and public decision-making (Darmastuti et al., 2022; Simbolon et al., 2024b). In such a setting, women are expected to manage household responsibilities while also contributing to family income. This creates a double expectation, where women carry both domestic and economic responsibilities. Migration then becomes one possible way to respond to these expectations.

This is where Simone de Beauvoir becomes relevant as a descriptive lens. Beauvoir's idea that women are not born, but become women helps explain that women's roles are produced through social expectations rather than biological factors. In the migration context, this means that women are not naturally "fit" for domestic and care work; instead, they are continuously directed toward these occupations because society has already attached those roles to them (de Beauvoir, 1953). The concentration of women migrants in domestic work, caregiving, and household service therefore reflects a broader social process in which femininity is closely linked to care, obedience, and service.

At the same time, reports and protection documents show that this construction also has consequences. Komnas Perempuan's monitoring report highlights continuing risks in the placement process, while broader reporting on migrant domestic workers shows the persistence of exploitation, weak protection, and barriers to justice (Komnas Perempuan, 2021). This indicates that the construction of women as suitable for domestic and care work does not only shape where they work, but also affects how their work is valued and how their vulnerability is often normalised.

Overall, the feminisation of migration from global patterns to Indonesia and Lampung shows that women's migration is closely tied to the social construction of gender. Women migrate in growing numbers, but they do so through pathways that are already shaped by expectations about femininity, care, and service. This shows that feminisation of migration is not only about increasing participation, but also about how gender roles continue to shape migration patterns and women's position within them.

Women Migrant Workers as "the Other"

While the previous section has shown how gender shapes women's participation in migration, this section moves further by examining how women are positioned within migration systems. Rather than revisiting patterns of labour distribution, the focus here shifts to how institutional arrangements, policies, and social narratives place women migrant workers in a secondary position within migration itself. One way to approach this is by looking at how migration governance works in practice. It does not simply facilitate movement, but also directs workers into specific labour pathways. In this process, women are rarely positioned as actors who freely choose from a wide range of opportunities. Instead, their mobility tends to follow routes that are already aligned with care and service work. Studies on migration governance in Southeast Asia suggest that labour export systems often organise workers in ways that reflect these assumptions, which helps explain why women are

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concentrated in more controlled and lower-status sectors (Ford & Lyons, 2012; Olivia, 2018)

A similar dynamic can be seen in the preparation process. Many training programmes for prospective women migrant workers focus on domestic and caregiving roles, including household management and elderly care. While these programmes are intended to improve readiness, they also subtly reinforce the idea that women's place in migration lies within these sectors. What is less emphasised are aspects such as labour rights, negotiation, or mobility within the labour market (Olivia, 2018). In this sense, preparation is not entirely neutral but it also shapes expectations about what kind of worker women are supposed to become.

This becomes more evident when looking at policy implementation. Although Law No. 18 of 2017 formally guarantees protection for Indonesian migrant workers, its application remains uneven, particularly for domestic workers. Because this type of work takes place in private households, monitoring is limited and enforcement becomes difficult. Komnas Perempuan continues to document cases of overwork, restricted communication, and various forms of violence. What stands out here is not only the persistence of these cases, but the fact that they occur within a system that is already aware of such risks (Dewi & Setiyana, 2024; Endang Yulianingsih et al., 2026; Probosambodo et al., 2025).

Conditions in the countries where people move to for work show this situation clearly. For example in Hong Kong there is a rule that says migrant domestic workers can only stay in the country for two weeks after their job contract ends. This makes it hard for them to find a job. In Malaysia the laws that are supposed to protect workers are not good enough. Domestic workers do not have clear rules about how many hours they can work and when they can rest. These problems are not small issues. Organizations like Amnesty International and the International Labour Organization have said that these rules can make workers dependent on their employers, which means they have power to

negotiate and are more vulnerable at work (Amnesty International, 2020; International Labour Organization, 2021).

At the time the way people talk about migrant workers in public is also important. In Indonesia people often call workers "pahlawan devisa". This term might seem like it is giving them respect. It actually sees them as people who are making sacrifices and values them only for the money they send back home not for their work. As Lindquist said, this way of talking about workers focuses on the money they send home but does not pay much attention to their rights, as workers. Migrant workers and their rights are what we should be focusing on migrant workers need to be treated (Lindquist, 2010).

In Lampung the way people think about society and the way women are expected to behave intersect. Women are expected to help their families but they are also expected to take care of the home. One way women deal with these expectations is by moving to another place for work (Khamim et al., 2024; Nurtina, 2019; Wulandari et al., 2022). However this does not mean they are completely free from these expectations. Women are still seen as the ones who take care of people even when they are working in another country (de Beauvoir, 1953).

People often think that moving to a place will make their life better that it will give them more possibilities. For a lot of women who move to a new country for work this is not always the case. They do not really get to be in charge of their lives. Instead they usually end up doing jobs that're boring and have a lot of rules. They have to work with people all the time. So just because they can move around it does not mean their life will really change. There is a difference between being seen and being recognized. Women who move to a country for work are very important to the economy both at home and around the world. For example Indonesia gets a lot of money from people working in countries according to the World Bank in 2026.. Even though people know about the work they do it does not mean they are treated fairly. People know they contribute

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a lot. They are still not able to make their own decisions. Women migrant workers play a role, in this but their rights are not always respected (World Bank, 2026).

These things all point to the fact that when we talk about the feminization of migration it's not just about more women taking part. The feminization of migration must be understood as more than a demographic shift, serving instead as a structural mechanism wherein migration preparation, policy implementation, and public perceptions collectively function as institutional arrangements and social narratives that relegate female migrant workers to a secondary, subordinate position as 'the Other' within a male-dominated system, ultimately driving systemic inequality between men and women throughout the entire migratory process.

Conclusion

This study shows that the feminisation of migration cannot be understood simply as an increase in the number of women who migrate. What appears as growing participation is closely tied to a broader process in which gender roles continue to shape how women enter and experience migration. From global patterns to the case of Indonesia and Lampung, women's migration remains strongly linked to care and domestic work, which suggests that labour opportunities are not entirely open, but already structured in gendered ways.

From Simone de Beauvoir's perspective, this condition can be understood more clearly. Women migrant workers are not only part of migration flows, but are positioned within systems that define their roles in relation to others. Their work is essential, yet it is often undervalued and placed in sectors with limited protection. In this sense, Beauvoir's idea of women as *the Other* helps explain why women are not fully recognised as independent subjects, but continue to be shaped by expectations that limit their agency.

At the same time, migration should not be understood only in terms of opportunity or constraint. What becomes important is

how both exist at once. Women may gain access to income and mobility, but these gains take place within structures that continue to shape their roles. As a result, migration does not fully transform women's position, but often reworks it within a different setting. Taken together, the feminisation of migration points to more than a demographic shift. It shows how gendered relations continue to shape migration, not only in who moves, but also in how women are positioned within the process. As long as these underlying structures remain in place, increased participation does not automatically lead to greater autonomy.

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