



Institutional Architecture of Migration Governance in the Béni Mellal-Khénifra Region : Comparative Insights from Souss-Massa and the Oriental Region

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Abstract: Béni Mellal-Khénifra region in central Morocco exemplifies the new challenges of managing migration at the sub-national level, as it is both a significant area of emigration and an emerging destination for immigrants. This study examines the institutional architecture of migration governance in the BMK region. Using a qualitative approach combining document analysis, actor mapping, and key informant interviews, we identify the range of actors (national, regional, local, civil society, international) involved and analyze their coordination mechanisms. The results reveal a complex but still fragmented multi-level governance system. While initial steps toward coordinated governance – such as regional steering committees and multi-actor partnerships – have been made, significant overlaps of responsibilities and gaps in service provision persist. A comparative analysis with two other Moroccan regions (the Oriental and Souss-Massa) highlights BMK’s unique context as well as common challenges, such as the need for sustainable coordination frameworks and greater diaspora engagement. Drawing on these findings, the article proposes several recommendations to strengthen territorial migration governance, including clarifying mandates, institutionalizing consultation platforms, capacity-building for local stakeholders, leveraging diaspora resources, and establishing a regional migration observatory. The BMK case offers insights for the localization of migration policies in Morocco and similar contexts.

Keywords: Migration governance; multilevel governance; diaspora; Morocco; regional policy; Béni Mellal-Khénifra.

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1 Introduction

Morocco has, over the last decade, become a major migration crossroads, simultaneously a country of origin, transit, and destination for migratory flows. In response to this shift, the Moroccan authorities adopted a National

Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (*Stratégie Nationale d'Immigration et d'Asile*, SNIA) in 2014 aimed at immigrant integration and coherent management of migration flows, articulated in 11 priority programs covering education, health, housing, employment, etc. In parallel, a National Strategy for Moroccans Residing Abroad (*Stratégie Nationale en faveur des Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger*, SNMRE) was developed in 2015 to strengthen ties with the Moroccan diaspora, protect their rights, and involve them in the country's development. These two national strategies marked a turning point in Morocco's migration policy, reflecting the country's new status as both a transit and destination country, and aligning with the royal vision of a humane, responsible, and solidarity-based migration governance (Achengli, 2022).

In this national context, the implementation of these migration policies is acutely felt at the territorial level. The 2015 advanced regionalization law grants regions competencies in regional development, paving the way for the localization of public policies – including migration. However, knowledge about migratory dynamics remains uneven across regions. The Béni Mellal-Khénifra (BMK) region, in central Morocco, exemplifies these challenges. On the one hand, BMK is a significant emigration area: many inhabitants have migrated to Europe and now form an important community of Moroccans around the world originating from the region, with regular returns and substantial remittances (HCP, 2021). On the other hand, in recent years an increasing presence of international migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and the Middle East has been observed in this region. BMK is thus simultaneously a territory of origin (diaspora, returnees) and of destination (recent immigration), giving rise to an emerging territorial migration governance framework.

This study addresses the following questions: How does the institutional architecture of the BMK region respond to these multiple migration dynamics? Who are the actors involved in migration management at the regional and local levels, and how do they coordinate to implement the national strategies (SNIA, SNMRE) on the ground? What are the linkages between levels of governance (national, regional, local) and where do overlaps or gaps occur in institutional responsibilities? Finally, to what extent does BMK's experience diverge from or converge with those of other Moroccan regions, notably the Oriental and Souss-Massa regions, which are also engaged in the localization of migration policies (Enabel & UE, 2023)?

In order to answer these questions, the article aims first to **map comprehensively** the actors involved in migration governance in the BMK region and to analyze the coordination mechanisms in place, as well as the institutional challenges encountered. Secondly, it seeks to **compare** the BMK findings with those from the Oriental and Souss-Massa regions, to identify divergences, potential best practices, and opportunities for improving territorial migration governance. This approach is anchored in a multilevel governance perspective and sustainable territorial development, examining to what extent migration can serve as a lever for territorial development (PNUD & Policy Center, 2021) while also posing new challenges for local authorities.

2 Theoretical Framework

The research problem is situated within the concept of multilevel governance, defined as the process of coordinating public policies involving a plurality of actors at different levels (international, national, regional, local). In the migration domain, multilevel governance refers to the linkage between, on the one hand, national orientations (laws, strategies, central institutions) and international frameworks (e.g. Morocco's commitments in the Global Compact for Migration, cooperation with the EU), and on the other hand, local dynamics driven by sub-national authorities and civil society (Scholten, 2018). Recent work in geography and political science highlights that local authorities play an increasing role in managing migration, either as implementers of state policies or through innovative initiatives adapted to local realities (Agnew, 2021). The notion of territorialization of migration policies refers to this local adaptation of policies initially defined at the national scale, which requires vertical coordination mechanisms (State–regions–communes) and horizontal coordination (among actors at the same level) to ensure coherence of public action (OECD, 2018).

Implicitly, this raises the question of institutional architecture – i.e. the distribution of competences and resources among institutions – in steering migration issues. Our analysis draws on the concept of policy networks, considering that migration governance operates through a heterogeneous network of actors (administrations,

NGOs, international organizations, private sector, migrant groups) interacting and negotiating their roles. This framework helps capture both overlapping competences (for example, when multiple institutions intervene in migrants' socio-economic integration) and institutional gaps or voids (areas where certain needs are not addressed by any actor).

Furthermore, BMK's specific situation requires mobilizing the concept of territorial development and the migration–development nexus. The diaspora (Moroccans Residing Abroad, MRE) is seen as a local development actor through transfers of funds, investments, and skills to the region of origin. The SNMRE institutionalizes this vision by seeking to mobilize the competencies of Moroccans abroad for the benefit of local territories (Ministère Délégué MRE, 2018). At the same time, the hosting of international migrants in non-metropolitan areas like BMK calls into question the capacity of these territories to provide integration opportunities (employment, housing, social services) and to create an inclusive vivre-ensemble. In this regard, one can invoke the concept of local immigration governance, which highlights the role of cities and regions in migrant integration and the promotion of social cohesion (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2017).

In sum, our theoretical approach combines multilevel governance (to analyze relations between levels of authority), the migration-and-development perspective (to integrate the dual dimensions of emigration and immigration), and an analysis of actor networks. This framework allows us to grasp the complexity of migration governance in the BMK region, emphasizing the interactions between national, regional, and local actors in the implementation of localized migration policies.

3 Methodology

This research follows a qualitative and exploratory approach, relying on an in-depth document analysis as well as an actor mapping. First, we collected and examined key institutional sources: official texts (national strategies SNIA 2014 and SNMRE 2015, legal documents on regionalization), reports from international organizations (IOM, 2020; UNHCR, 2022), data from the High Commission for Planning (HCP) on migration, and studies and project reports related to the BMK region (notably the DEPOMI project – *Déploiement des Politiques Migratoires au niveau Régional*, 2018–2023, funded by the EU and implemented by Enabel, as well as publications by UNDP and the Policy Center for the New South on BMK). These secondary sources provided an overview of existing structures and ongoing initiatives in the region.

In parallel, we developed a **typology of actors** by identifying – via reports and web sources – all stakeholders involved in BMK's migration governance. These actors were classified by level (national, regional, local) and by nature (public/state, associative, international, private, etc.). We mapped their interactions based on available information about consultation or partnership mechanisms (for example, agreements between the Regional Council and the ministry in charge of Migration, NGO networks, project coordination platforms). The resulting institutional map (see Figure 1) visualizes hierarchical relations (oversight, coordination) and functional relations (partnerships, complementarities) among actors.

Figure 1. Institutional mapping of actors in migration governance in the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region.

Furthermore, to enrich the analysis, we conducted exploratory (open-ended) interviews with four key informants: an official from the Social Action Division at the BMK Wilaya, a staff member of the BMK Regional Council involved in migration projects, a representative of a local NGO active with sub-Saharan migrants, and an expert from IOM Morocco. These interviews (anonymized in line with research ethics) served to compare documentary information with field perceptions, and to identify any coordination dysfunctions or unmet expectations. Finally, the comparison with the Oriental and Souss-Massa regions drew on available specific sources (DEPOMI project regional workshop reports from those regions, official communiqués of the respective Regional Councils, local press articles) to identify points of convergence or contrast with BMK. All collected material was analyzed thematically, structured around the following categories: (1) actors and their roles, (2) coordination mechanisms, (3) institutional overlaps and gaps, (4) innovative initiatives and good practices, and (5) interregional comparisons. This methodology has certain limitations, notably reliance on available sources (there is not yet a detailed public assessment of BMK's regional migration strategy) and the limited number of interviews. Nevertheless,

triangulation of sources (institutional, academic, and stakeholder interviews) provides cross-validation of information and yields a sufficiently robust and novel analysis of migration governance in BMK.

4 Results

4.1 Typology of Actors in the Béni Mellal-Khénifra Region

National institutional actors: The Ministry of the Interior, through the BMK Wilaya (Governorate), plays a pivotal role as representative of the central state and in administrative coordination. The Wilaya supervises the deconcentrated state services (prefectures/provinces, sectoral departments) and is a key interlocutor for implementing national programs at the regional level. The Delegate Ministry in charge of Moroccans Residing Abroad and Migration Affairs (attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) is the national lead entity for migration policies (it developed the SNIA and SNMRE). Although it has no deconcentrated offices, this ministry works in partnership with local authorities and via specific projects (for example, it signed framework agreements with pilot regions to localize the national migration strategies). Other sectoral ministries contribute indirectly to migration governance: the Ministry of Education (schooling of migrant children), the Ministry of Health (migrants' access to healthcare), the Ministry of Employment and Professional Integration (employment programs, e.g. through ANAPEC including regularized migrants), the Ministry of Solidarity (social programs, protection of vulnerable refugees in coordination with *Entraide Nationale*), etc. The High Commission for Planning (HCP), although a statistical agency, provides essential data on migration flows, the foreign population counted, and households receiving remittances – data that inform regional policymakers (HCP, 2020).

Territorial actors (regional and local): At the regional level, the Béni Mellal-Khénifra Regional Council (CR-BMK) – an elected assembly – is a central actor by virtue of its competencies in economic, social, and cultural development. Since 2017, the CR-BMK has shown growing interest in migration issues, gradually integrating them into its Regional Development Plan (PDR). It benefits from support in this area via international projects (e.g. DEPOMI, which “accompanies the regional council on the question of migration, its governance and its integration into territorial planning”). In 2022, the CR-BMK established an internal thematic committee dedicated to MRE and migration affairs (according to an interview, CR-BMK, 2023). The BMK Wilaya (regional governor) is the other primary institutional actor: in addition to representing the State, it ensures coordination between the Regional Council and the deconcentrated ministerial services. Thus, for implementing SNIA programs (e.g. the 2014–2017 migrant regularization campaign, integration of regularized migrants) and SNMRE (diaspora mobilization), the Wilaya serves as the transmission belt for national directives and oversees their local execution in collaboration with the CR-BMK. At the local level, Provincial Councils and communes (notably the urban communes of Béni Mellal, Khouribga, Fquih Ben Salah, etc.) engage on concrete aspects: civil registration of children born to foreign parents, social aid for people in vulnerable situations (potentially including migrants), and decentralized cooperation initiatives involving European municipalities where the diaspora from BMK resides. However, the degree of involvement of these local governments varies and often remains informal, given the absence of an explicit “migration” mandate in communal laws.

Civil society and NGOs: A local civil society fabric is beginning to coalesce around migration issues. There are migrant rights associations – for example, the local chapter of the Moroccan Association for Human Rights (AMDH) in Béni Mellal, which mobilized during the regularization campaigns to assist migrants with administrative procedures. Some local development NGOs are also integrating migration into their projects: the Italian NGO *ProgettoMondo* is active in the region (with an office in Béni Mellal) providing socio-economic support to regularized migrants and raising awareness. Also noteworthy is the AIDECA association in Khouribga, historically focused on co-development (projects funded by migrants from Khouribga in Italy) – according to an interview, this association is now expanding its scope to sub-Saharan migrants present in the province. Migrant-led associations themselves remain few or not very visible in BMK compared to Casablanca or Rabat, due to the recent settlement of these migrants and their dispersion across the territory. Nevertheless, informal community groupings (e.g. the Ivorian community in Béni Mellal) act as information and mutual aid networks. Finally,

diaspora associations originating from BMK abroad (for example, hometown associations of Tadla-Azilal natives in France, or the Association of Moroccans of Fquih Ben Salah in Italy) play a role in maintaining ties with the region and in local development projects (building schools, sponsoring health campaigns, etc.), thus contributing – via co-development – to migration governance in a broad sense.

International actors and development partners: Several international organizations are involved or support actions in the region. The International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UN migration agency, provides technical and financial support to local authorities through projects like *Mainstreaming Migration into Local Development* (Phase III) which, as noted in Souss-Massa, also has components in BMK. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) monitors the situation of any asylum seekers present in the region and can intervene to facilitate their referral to the appropriate services (within a UNHCR–*Entraide Nationale* partnership). The European Union is an important indirect actor via program funding: in addition to DEPOMI (€8 million), the EU co-funds with AFD the **Sharik** program (2020–2024) supporting the regionalization of migrant/MRE policies in three regions including BMK. This program, implemented by Expertise France, supports the MRE Ministry in creating tools at the regional level (e.g. integrated welcome desks for MREs and migrants). Bilateral agencies such as Belgian Cooperation (Enabel), German Cooperation (GIZ), and Italian Cooperation are also present through local projects (e.g. Enabel via DEPOMI, GIZ via the “Perspectives on Return Migration” project). Finally, the local private sector is starting to get involved, notably via the Chambers of Commerce and Industry which, in collaboration with the Regional Council, seek to integrate diaspora investors (creation of a network of diaspora economic “ambassadors” – CRI BMK, 2022) and to promote entrepreneurship among regularized migrants by facilitating their access to training and financing programs (a pilot initiative in 2023 in Béni Mellal with IOM support, per an IOM interview).

Overall, BMK’s institutional landscape is **rich but fragmented**, with a plurality of actors whose level of engagement varies. Figure 1 illustrates this networked architecture: it shows in particular that the Regional Council and the Wilaya occupy a central position, receiving directives from central ministries while interacting with communes, NGOs, and international partners. It also reveals that the diaspora is a diffuse but cross-cutting actor, engaging mostly via informal channels or specific projects.

4.2 Coordination Dynamics and Governance Mechanisms in BMK

Vertical coordination (State–Region–Local): Until recently, the implementation of migration policies in BMK was rather top-down and case-by-case. For example, during the national migrant regularization campaigns in 2014 and 2017, it was the Wilaya (representing the Ministry of Interior) that led the provincial committees reviewing applications, in coordination with local authorities, but without formal involvement of the Regional Council or NGOs in decision-making. Similarly, programs for MREs (such as the summer “Operation *Marhaba*” information campaign) were coordinated by central bodies (the Mohammed V Foundation for MREs, relevant ministries) with local authorities only executing instructions. However, this approach evolved under regionalization. Since 2018, the government has encouraged the creation of regional consultation mechanisms on migration. In BMK, an ad-hoc regional commission was established in 2019 under the Wali’s aegis, bringing together representatives of the Regional Council, relevant deconcentrated services (health, education, etc.), and the Regional Directorate of the Social Development Agency, to monitor the integration of regularized migrants (*source: DEPOMI BMK report, 2021*). Nevertheless, this mechanism remains informal and centered on immigration. Only with the launch of the DEPOMI project in 2021 did vertical coordination strengthen and become more structured: a tripartite framework agreement was signed between the Ministry in charge of Migration, the BMK Wilaya, and the Regional Council, affirming the intent to localize the SNIA and SNMRE in the region. Based on this agreement, a regional steering committee for the DEPOMI project was set up, co-chaired by the Wali and the President of the Regional Council, meeting semi-annually to review project activities and integrate them into local policies. This committee also includes representatives of the provinces and some associations, constituting a first formal multi-actor platform. Moreover, DEPOMI implemented an innovative inter-level coordination mechanism: a national working group bringing together central officials (MRE Ministry, Interior) and representatives of the three pilot regions (BMK,

Oriental, Souss-Massa) to ensure coherence and exchange of experiences between the central and regional levels. This mechanism facilitated the spread of innovative practices and harmonized tools among regions and with Rabat.

Horizontal regional coordination: At the BMK scale, coordination among local actors is improving but remains embryonic. In the absence of a dedicated permanent body (a regional migration council does not yet exist), consultation occurs through ad hoc meetings. The DEPOMI regional workshops served as forums for exchange among academics, government officials, and civil society. In 2022, three regional consultation sessions were organized in Béni Mellal with migrants, elected officials and associations, to gather perceptions on migration policies and foster dialogue (IRD & Université de Liège, 2022). These initiatives, although time-limited, helped create an informal network of actors who know each other and communicate more. For example, the local NGO “Oum El Hijra” (fictitious name, specializing in literacy for migrant women) now works closely with the Regional Directorate of *Entraide Nationale*, after being connected at a workshop. Likewise, the Regional Council involved NGOs in developing a regional roadmap on diaspora skill mobilization and local integration of migrants (this roadmap, nearing completion at end of 2023, is one of the expected deliverables of DEPOMI). It is anticipated that this document will propose the creation of a permanent consultative body on migration at the regional level, which would be a notable step forward.

Despite these advances, coordination challenges remain. On the one hand, the relationship between the Wilaya and the Regional Council requires balance: historically, the Wali concentrated authority over migration affairs (state security considerations), and building trust was necessary to share information with regional elected officials. On the other hand, inter-provincial coordination within BMK is weak: each province (Béni Mellal, Azilal, Khouribga, etc.) manages its issues more or less in isolation (for example, Khouribga focuses on return of unaccompanied minors from Europe, Fquih Ben Salah on the clandestine emigration of its youth). A regional migration observatory, bringing together data and analysis by province, could improve horizontal coordination between provinces, but it does not exist yet (a recommendation to this effect will be raised in the conclusion). Finally, coordination with civil society remains uneven: while some NGOs are integrated into discussions, others (notably informal migrant groups) remain on the margins.

4.3 Overlaps, Gaps, and Institutional Challenges

The analysis of BMK’s institutional architecture brings to light several overlapping responsibilities and gaps that constitute challenges for effective governance:

Overlaps between national and regional actors: The issue of the diaspora (MREs) illustrates a notable overlap. Traditionally managed by the MRE Ministry at the central level (with support from the Mohammed V Foundation and the CCME – Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad), it is now also the subject of regional initiatives (creation of MRE Cells in some regions, organization of regional diaspora forums). In BMK, the Regional Council launched its own “House of Moroccans of the World” initiative in Béni Mellal in 2019 to offer a one-stop shop to diaspora members during the summer. However, this initiative partially duplicates national mechanisms like the Ministry’s temporary welcome desks in airports. The absence of clarified roles can lead to diluted efforts: for example, who is responsible for following up on diaspora investment projects in BMK – the MRE Ministry’s investment directorate, or the Regional Investment Center (CRI) and the Regional Council? At present, both intervene without a formal task-sharing mechanism, causing potential confusion for users (diaspora members) and loss of efficiency.

Overlaps between public sector and NGOs: Certain local NGOs effectively fulfill public service functions without a clear delegation framework. For example, Caritas Morocco (whose Casablanca branch also covers interior regions) runs a migrant reception center in Casablanca that occasionally receives migrants coming from BMK for healthcare and social support. In BMK itself, lacking a dedicated center, a local association (e.g. *Solidarité Tadla*) organized a citizen hosting network for homeless migrants. While these actions fill a gap, they raise a question of governance: no formal agreement exists between this association and the Wilaya or commune,

hence an implicit overlap (the association is partially substituting for public authorities in emergency aid). This lack of formalization can be problematic in a crisis (e.g. sudden arrival of a group of vulnerable migrants) because the response would depend on the association's goodwill without guaranteed resources.

Gaps in addressing needs: Despite the numerous actors, some domains remain under-served. This is notably the case for the economic integration of regularized migrants. Although the SNIA provides for migrants' access to the labor market, on the ground in BMK formal employment opportunities for sub-Saharan migrants remain very limited (high regional unemployment, possible discrimination). No specific public program (e.g. Arabic language courses, targeted job training) was sustained after the 2014–2017 regularization. This void has been partially filled by temporary projects (e.g. a horticulture training for 30 migrants in Fquih Ben Salah via IOM funding in 2019), but a long-term integration strategy is lacking. Similarly, destitute migrants' access to healthcare relies on general public services (or charitable assistance), with no intercultural mediation mechanism in BMK's hospitals. This represents a gap that health authorities are only beginning to recognize.

Jurisdictional ambiguities under regionalization: Advanced regionalization envisions that regions integrate migration into their planning, but legally, migration is not explicitly listed among regional competences. It is treated as a transversal issue (touching social, economic, cultural development). This situation creates an institutional blur: out of caution, some regional bodies might avoid acting for lack of a clear mandate. In BMK, the Regional Council at times hesitated to allocate its own funds for migrant-related actions, fearing to encroach on the State's role (testimony, CR-BMK). Such ambiguity is a potential brake on local initiative.

Sustainability and institutionalization: Many advances in BMK are carried by pilot projects or external grants (EU, international cooperation). The risk is a dependence on temporary funding. For example, the "migration" unit created in the Regional Council thanks to DEPOMI is only assured to operate for the duration of the project. Sustaining these gains within the regular organizational structures of the Council (or the Wilaya) is a crucial issue. Without follow-up, overlaps or gaps could reappear once the donors' spotlight is gone.

In summary, BMK is in a phase of institutional construction where roles are still being defined. Overlapping areas inevitably exist due to the cross-cutting nature of migration, but they can be transformed into complementarities if a clear governance framework is established. Similarly, the identified gaps indicate where to concentrate future efforts (e.g. create a regional economic integration program for migrants, formalize public–NGO partnership for social assistance).

5 Role and Contribution of NGOs and Non-State Actors

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and more broadly non-state actors (local associations, international organizations, diaspora) play an important role in BMK, often as pioneers on migration issues. Their contribution can be analyzed at three levels: service provision, advocacy, and innovation.

Service provision and substitution: As mentioned, several local NGOs provide reception, legal assistance or orientation services to migrants. For example, the association *Main dans la main* in Béni Mellal offers French language classes to French-speaking migrants to facilitate their integration. This service is not specifically provided by the State, so the association is meeting an immediate need. For its part, the diaspora regularly organizes medical caravans in the region (initiatives by MRE doctors returning to the country to offer free consultations), benefiting local communities including migrants. These non-state actions partially fill gaps in the official system, improving humanitarian conditions on the ground. However, their impact remains limited in the absence of scaling-up or public support (they are often one-off initiatives).

Advocacy and awareness-raising: NGOs play a watchdog and advocacy role vis-à-vis public authorities. The local AMDH, for example, published a report in 2020 alerting to the precarious situation of migrant workers on farms in the Tadla plain (exploitation, low wages, lack of contracts). This advocacy helped put the issue on the

agenda of the Fquih Ben Salah Prefectural Council, which subsequently proposed the creation of a dedicated labor inspection commission. Similarly, women's associations like *Solidarité Féminine* raised awareness about the situation of isolated migrant women (victims of trafficking or violence), pushing the Health Directorate to consider a specialized psychological support mechanism. Through their local embeddedness and fine-grained knowledge of migrant communities, associations act as intermediaries between these communities and the administration, bringing concrete problems to the authorities' attention. This advocacy role, although sometimes perceived as disruptive by authorities, has overall contributed to orienting regional policies towards greater consideration of migrants' rights (aligning with the human-rights-based approach advocated by the EU and Morocco).

Innovation and experimentation: NGOs and international partners often introduce innovative practices that can serve as models. In BMK, for example, IOM supported the creation of a migrant–local community dialogue space in a neighborhood of Béni Mellal, in the form of monthly meetings between representatives of Moroccan residents and sub-Saharan migrants, to prevent tensions through communication. This pilot initiative, inspired by a practice from Côte d'Ivoire, was well received and could be replicated elsewhere. Another innovation is the *Étoiles du Retour* association (composed of young returnees) which set up a mentorship system: entrepreneur MREs from BMK mentor young local project leaders (including migrants) to help them start their businesses. This mixing of diaspora members and local immigrants in one program is unprecedented and helps create social ties while stimulating economic activity. These innovations are informing policymakers' thinking: for instance, the Regional Council is considering integrating the diaspora–migrant mentorship concept into its action plan.

Despite these positive contributions, NGOs face challenges: precarious funding, reliance on volunteers, and sometimes institutional reticence (some local authorities view the involvement of external actors warily, fearing criticism). However, a trend towards greater complementarity is emerging. As Myriam Cherti (IOM Morocco) emphasized at a conference in Khouribga, *“the deployment of migration policy at the regional level requires capitalizing on the experiences of key actors for the benefit of the territories.”* The synergy between public and associative actors is increasingly seen not as an option, but as a **condition for successful territorial migration governance**.

6 Discussion: Comparison with the Oriental and Souss-Massa Regions

The dynamics observed in BMK benefit from comparison with those of other pilot regions for the territorialization of migration policies, in particular the Oriental and Souss-Massa, which have different *de facto* migration realities. This comparative perspective brings out local specificities as well as common factors of success or difficulty, in order to identify opportunities and limitations of territorial migration governance in Morocco.

6.1.1 The case of the Oriental region

The Oriental region (capital Oujda) borders Algeria and includes the enclaves of Nador/Melilla and Berkane. Historically, it has been marked by high emigration (many families from Oujda and Berkane have members in France, Belgium, etc.) and by serving as a transit zone for sub-Saharan migrants seeking to reach Europe. Since the 2000s, the Oriental has seen an influx of migrants blocked at the Algerian-Moroccan border (in Oujda) and around Melilla (in Nador). This early on mobilized humanitarian actors: for instance, Médecins Sans Frontières operated in Oujda until 2013 to assist migrants expelled from Algeria, and the local NGO *Association Manos Solidarité* is still active in Nador providing aid to sub-Saharans in the border forests. Migration governance in the Oriental therefore initially developed with a security and humanitarian focus. The State, via the security forces and the Wilaya, manages border security and crises (such as the tragic mass storming of the Melilla fence in June 2022, where dozens of migrants perished), while NGOs take charge of emergency aid and the defense of rights.

With the SNIA (post-2014), the Oriental gradually integrated a dimension of reception and integration for regularized migrants. It is estimated that after the regularizations, several thousand migrants who were formerly in transit settled in Oriental cities (primarily Oujda and Nador). In response, the Oriental region initiated a few

measures: the Oriental Regional Council signed a convention in 2019 with the MRE Ministry to open a Migrant Welcome Center in Oujda (a first in Morocco), intended to guide migrants toward public services (*Région Oriental, 2019*). This center, managed in partnership with Caritas Oujda, is an example of formalized public–associative collaboration. Furthermore, the region included migration in its 2021–2027 PDR as a transversal axis, focused on two components: (1) the Oriental diaspora (notably the many entrepreneurs from Nador in Europe, via a “reverse visits” program to introduce them to local investment opportunities) and (2) social integration of migrants (in connection with Mohammed I University of Oujda, which hosts sub-Saharan African students).

Nevertheless, compared to BMK and Souss-Massa, the Oriental’s migration governance still faces significant specific constraints:

The **security lens** remains predominant, which means the Oriental’s Wilaya keeps a very tight control on migration-related initiatives. Trust in NGOs is more limited – as evidenced by recurrent tensions between authorities and human rights associations in Nador. This can impede the establishment of open consultation mechanisms.

The **public perception** of migration in the Oriental is still largely negative (migrants seen as irregular outsiders causing problems), complicating local acceptance of integration measures. For example, a proposed migrant job market in Oujda, put forward by IOM, was abandoned due to opposition from local shopkeepers (*Interview, IOM*). This societal factor is less present in BMK, where migrants are fewer and less visible numerically.

On the other hand, the Oriental benefits from a longstanding **diaspora associative network** (the region’s MRE associations abroad are older and well-structured, notably in France). This is an opportunity: mobilization of the Oriental’s diaspora is more advanced than that of BMK. For instance, active participation by Oujda expatriate associations in funding local startups via the MDM-Invest program has been observed. The challenge is to align these diaspora-driven initiatives with the overall regional strategy, which is beginning through projects like Sharik.

In sum, the Oriental presents migration governance marked by **urgency** (transit, border management) and initial institutional structuring. The comparison highlights that BMK, not having an international border, was able to approach migration from a more socio-economic angle from the start, whereas the Oriental still must contend with security imperatives. However, both regions share the need to **balance diaspora and immigration** within a coherent vision.

6.1.2 The case of the Souss-Massa region

The Souss-Massa region (capital Agadir) offers a contrasting profile. It is a region with a strong migration tradition: a major source of emigration (many Amazigh families from the Souss have members in Europe, particularly in France and Germany, forming a prosperous diaspora), and also a destination for internal migration (workers from other Moroccan regions drawn to agriculture in Chtouka or tourism in Agadir) and international immigration (sub-Saharan workers in farms and food-processing factories, students from West Africa at the University of Agadir, etc.). Souss-Massa benefits from a relatively dynamic economy (agro-export, fisheries, tourism) that attracts labor, including foreign labor. Migration governance there has made notable strides, to the point that the region is emerging as a national **model** in this domain.

Under the impetus of the Souss-Massa Regional Council (CR-SM) and in concertation with the Wilaya, several unprecedented advances have taken place:

As early as 2018, the CR-SM explicitly integrated migration into its PDR as one of 25 priority projects. It commissioned a strategic study on regional migration in partnership with Ibn Zohr University of Agadir, leading to the development of a **Regional Migration Strategy** adopted in 2022. This strategy sets a holistic vision encompassing both diaspora and immigration.

Among flagship projects is the creation of a **Regional Center for Orientation and Support of Migrants (CROAM)** in Agadir, integrated into the new Regional Socio-Economic Integration Center. This center (in progress) aims to provide a one-stop information service for migrants (access to rights, language training, job orientation) and for MREs (investment guidance, etc.). It is the first institution of its kind at the regional level in Morocco.

Souss-Massa was also a pilot in establishing a network of “**economic ambassadors**” from the diaspora, in collaboration with the Regional Investment Center (CRI). This network, launched in 2022, mobilizes entrepreneur MREs from Agadir and Taroudant to promote investment in the region.

In terms of coordination, Souss-Massa, like BMK, signed a convention with the MRE Ministry and the Wilaya to territorialize the national strategies. More importantly, the region managed to attract and coordinate multiple international projects: DEPOMI, Sharik/AFD, the IOM/UNDP *Mainstreaming Migration* project, *Indimaj II* (Entraide Nationale with a donor, aiming at migrant integration into local society). The CR-SM, in partnership with these projects, organized a major **national conference on migration policy localization** in 2022 in Agadir, demonstrating its leadership role.

Comparatively, the Souss-Massa region is distinguished by a **strong local political will** and **advanced strategic planning**. Where BMK is just beginning to equip itself with tools, Souss-Massa already has a structured vision and is moving into implementation (e.g. the migrant center). This is due to several factors: a more entrenched tradition of international cooperation in Agadir, the presence of resources (a larger regional budget, mobilized local academic expertise), and the urgency of addressing concrete issues (for example, hundreds of undocumented sub-Saharan migrants work in the region’s agricultural greenhouses, often in precarity – a socio-economic and human rights issue the region could not ignore).

The opportunities emerging from the Souss-Massa case are instructive for BMK and the Oriental: they show that with **local political impetus**, it is possible to territorialize migration governance effectively – by creating dedicated regional institutions, integrating the issue into development planning, and mobilizing the diaspora as a development partner. Souss-Massa has succeeded in making migration an **asset** (e.g. valorizing MRE competencies, employing migrants in sectors with labor shortages) rather than a problem.

However, limitations persist even in the Souss-Massa model: the implementation of the regional strategy still depends greatly on external funding and state support. The question of the **sustainability** of new structures (such as the future migrant center) and their reach across the entire region (and not only Agadir) arises. Moreover, Souss-Massa must manage sensitive issues like the exploitation of undocumented migrants in agriculture – a topic where the role of enforcement authorities is delicate (regularizing these situations without discouraging investors). This complexity is partly shared with BMK, which also experiences clandestine emigration of its youth and will need to align its development efforts to offer alternatives to exile.

6.1.3 Common and Divergent Challenges

In comparing BMK, the Oriental, and Souss-Massa, each region has its specific priorities (humanitarian security in the Oriental, integration and diaspora in the Souss, a mix of both in BMK). However, **common challenges** emerge: the necessity of durable multi-actor coordination, the importance of involving the diaspora in local governance, and the urgency of filling institutional voids (be it a reception center, an observatory, or a clarified legal framework). All three also highlight the need to strengthen the capacities of regional actors – a mission initiated via DEPOMI. Ultimately, the comparison shows that the success of territorial migration governance rests on a subtle balance between **adaptation to the local context** (each region must identify its own “migration configuration” and respond with tailored solutions) and **national harmonization** (ensuring a common baseline of rights and procedures for all migrants on Moroccan territory, regardless of region).

7 Conclusion

The institutional architecture of migration governance in the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region is characterized by the intertwined presence of national, regional, local, associative, and international actors, reflecting the cross-cutting nature of migratory phenomena. The exhaustive mapping carried out in this study showed that the BMK region – albeit still incomplete but promising – mobilizes all of these actors around the dual themes of emigration (diaspora, returnees) and immigration (reception and integration of new arrivals). The coordination dynamics initiated – a regional steering committee, multi-actor workshops, tripartite agreements – testify to a growing awareness of the need for coordinated multilevel governance, in line with national orientations (SNIA, SNMRE) and Morocco's international commitments. Nonetheless, the analysis highlighted important institutional challenges to overcome: clarifying mandates to avoid overlaps between institutions, filling gaps in service provision for migrants, ensuring the sustainability of initiatives beyond pilot projects, and integrating non-state actors more systematically into decision-making processes.

The comparison with the Oriental and Souss-Massa regions allowed situating the BMK example in a broader spectrum. It appears that the Souss-Massa model, with its proactive regional strategy and innovative measures, is a source of inspiration for BMK – notably regarding the formalization of a migrant reception structure and the activation of the diaspora lever in regional development. Conversely, the Oriental's experience underlines the importance of managing security and humanitarian issues while progressing toward policy territorialization – a challenge that BMK, less exposed to irregular flows, can anticipate differently (for example by focusing more on the local economic integration of regularized migrants).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study sheds light on the evolving landscape of migration governance in the Béni Mellal-Khénifra (BMK) region, a territory that exemplifies Morocco's broader migratory transition. Historically considered a region of emigration, BMK now finds itself navigating the dual reality of continuing outward migration and a growing presence of immigrants. This shift calls for new approaches to governance—approaches that are not only innovative and inclusive but also rooted in the specific needs and capacities of the territory. Against this backdrop, several strategic directions for strengthening migration governance emerge from the research. Foremost among them is the need to institutionalize a permanent regional consultation platform on migration. Establishing a Regional Migration Council—bringing together public institutions, civil society actors, migrant representatives, and members of the Moroccan diaspora—would provide a stable space for dialogue, coordination, and policy continuity that extends beyond the lifespan of externally funded projects. Capacity-building also emerges as a critical pillar. The empowerment of local actors through targeted training and structured interregional exchange must be prioritized. In this regard, the network established between BMK, Souss-Massa, and the Oriental regions under the DEPOMI initiative offers a valuable foundation. Annual workshops and mutual learning events can help institutionalize the sharing of knowledge and best practices, thereby reinforcing collective competence. Another essential step is the clarification of the legal and financial framework underpinning migration policy localization. The upcoming reform of advanced regionalization presents a timely opportunity for the State to formally assign migration as a regional competency. In parallel, dedicated funding—particularly through national mechanisms like the Social Cohesion Fund—should be allocated to support regional projects benefiting both migrants and Moroccans residing abroad (MREs).

Facilitating co-development is another area of opportunity. The creation of a well-functioning one-stop shop for diaspora investors—accessible both online and in person—would support the emergence of diaspora-driven projects. This tool, developed in coordination with the Ministry in charge of MREs and the Regional Investment Center (CRI), should be informed by successful examples from regions such as Souss-Massa. Alongside these efforts, the establishment of a Regional Observatory on Migration, in partnership with Sultan Moulay Slimane University, would greatly enhance the region's capacity for evidence-based policymaking. By collecting localized data and conducting applied research, the observatory would help inform strategic decisions and extend the research-action approach already underway. To reinforce and sustain these initiatives, complementary measures are also needed. The implementation of sustainable financing mechanisms is one such measure. Public-private partnerships, decentralized cooperation, and innovative tools such as regional diaspora solidarity funds can provide long-term support for migration-related initiatives led by or benefiting migrants. It is equally important to ensure

the formal inclusion of migrant associations and informal community groups in policy processes. Their participation—potentially through elected representation within the Regional Migration Council—would enhance the legitimacy and inclusivity of decision-making, and ensure that policy reflects lived realities on the ground. The integration of regularized migrants into the local economy also demands urgent attention. A dedicated regional program should be developed to combine language acquisition, vocational training adapted to local labor market demands, entrepreneurship support, and anti-discrimination measures to facilitate social and economic inclusion. From a governance perspective, the coordination between provinces within the BMK region must be strengthened. Establishing a regional migration coordination committee with designated focal points in each province would support coherence in action and help reduce territorial disparities in services for migrants. Moreover, it is crucial to formalize partnerships between public institutions and local NGOs. These organizations often fill essential service gaps, particularly in health, education, and reception. Formal agreements recognizing their role and providing stable logistical, legal, and financial support would enhance the sustainability of their contributions. To build institutional capacity more broadly, a training module on migration governance should be integrated into continuous education programs for public officials at both regional and local levels. This would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of migration and better-equipped institutions. Awareness-raising must also be a priority. Local campaigns highlighting the positive contributions of migrants—designed in collaboration with the media, schools, cultural institutions, and religious leaders—can play a critical role in combating stereotypes and promoting social cohesion. At the academic level, regional universities should be encouraged to develop certified training or degree programs in territorial migration policy. Including fieldwork and practical components, these programs would help build a new generation of local experts equipped to support institutional needs.

Finally, establishing a participatory evaluation mechanism for regional migration policies would offer a powerful tool for strategic governance. Involving a wide range of stakeholders—migrants, NGOs, researchers, elected officials, and public institutions—this mechanism would ensure regular assessments, facilitate ongoing learning, and help refine priorities and actions over time.

Together, these recommendations outline a roadmap for BMK to evolve into a leading example of hybrid migration governance—one that balances local development goals, inclusive policy processes, and the protection of migrants' rights. As Morocco marks the 10th anniversary of its National Strategy for Immigration and Asylum (SNIA) and reconsiders its approach to engaging the competencies of Moroccans abroad, the BMK experience provides timely and practical lessons for building a coherent, localized, and human-centered migration governance model.

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