



# Institutional Protection of Migrants and Territorial Development in Morocco: Public Policies, Socio-Economic Integration and Territorial Inclusion

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**Abstract :** Migration has become an important issue for territorial development in Morocco. Over the past two decades, the country has gradually moved from being mainly a country of emigration and transit to also becoming a country of settlement for foreign migrants (OECD, 2017; Gazzotti, 2021). This change has encouraged Moroccan authorities to develop policies that address not only migration control, but also migrant protection and integration. The adoption of the National Immigration and Asylum Strategy (SNIA) in 2014 was an important step in this process. This paper examines how institutional protection of migrants is related to territorial development in Morocco. It focuses on access to public services, socio-economic integration, territorial inclusion and local governance. The analysis combines a review of Moroccan migration policies with descriptive statistical data from the 2024 General Population and Housing Census (RGPH) published by the High Commission for Planning (HCP). The available data show a clear increase in the number of foreign residents between 2014 and 2024, together with a strong concentration in urban and economically active regions. These patterns are important for understanding the territorial dimension of migration policy. They also suggest that national policies may produce different outcomes depending on local institutions, access to services and labour-market conditions. The paper considers migrant protection as part of a broader process of territorial inclusion. Migrants are not only recipients of public services and protection. When they have access to employment, education, health services and local institutions, they can also participate in the economic and social life of the territories where they live. The paper therefore develops a framework connecting institutional protection, socio-economic integration and territorial development, while identifying several relationships that can be tested through further empirical research.

**Keywords:** migration; migrant protection; migrant integration; territorial development; public policy; territorial governance; social cohesion; Morocco.

## Introduction

Migration has become an important issue in Morocco, not only because of the growing presence of foreign populations, but also because of its links with employment, public services and territorial development. Morocco has progressively moved from being mainly a country of emigration and transit to also becoming a country of settlement for migrants from different regions of the world (OECD, 2017; Gazzotti, 2021). This change has gradually placed migration within a wider public-policy agenda.

An important step in this evolution was the adoption of the National Immigration and Asylum Strategy (SNIA) in 2014. The strategy introduced a more comprehensive approach to migration, with particular attention to

the integration of migrants and their access to health, education, employment and other basic services (OECD, 2017). This represented a significant change from an approach mainly centred on migration control towards one that also considers the social and economic conditions of migrants.

However, the existence of national policies does not necessarily mean that migrants have equal access to rights and services throughout the country. Migration policies are implemented in concrete places, where migrants interact with local authorities, public services, employers, civil society organizations and local communities. The effectiveness of integration policies is therefore partly dependent on the capacity of institutions at different levels to work together and respond to local needs (Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas, 2016; Scholten & Penninx, 2016).

The territorial dimension is particularly relevant in Morocco because foreign residents are not evenly distributed across the country. The results of the 2024 General Population and Housing Census show a significant increase in the foreign resident population compared with 2014, while also revealing a strong concentration in a limited number of regions, particularly the major urban and economically dynamic areas (HCP, 2025). These differences raise questions about the capacity of territories to provide appropriate services and integration opportunities.

The socio-economic characteristics of migrants also matter. Employment, education and access to economic opportunities can influence the extent to which migrants participate in local economies and communities. Migration can contribute to territorial development through employment, entrepreneurship, skills and other forms of economic participation, but these contributions are not automatic. They depend on institutional conditions, labour-market opportunities and the ability of local actors to facilitate inclusion (de Haas, 2006; OECD, 2017).

Migrant integration should therefore be understood as a multidimensional process. Legal status is only one part of integration; economic participation, access to services, social relations and participation in society are also important (Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas, 2016). In Morocco, research has shown that obtaining formal recognition does not necessarily eliminate the practical difficulties migrants may encounter in their daily lives (Gazzotti, 2021; Kynsilehto, 2023).

From this perspective, institutional protection and territorial development should not be considered as two separate issues. Effective protection can improve migrants' access to education, health care, employment and social services. In turn, greater access to these opportunities can facilitate their participation in the economic and social life of the territories where they live. The relationship is therefore potentially important, although it should not be assumed to be automatic or necessarily causal.

This article examines this relationship in the Moroccan context. It focuses on four dimensions: access to public services, socio-economic integration, territorial inclusion and territorial governance. The analysis combines an examination of migration policies and institutional mechanisms with descriptive statistical evidence from the 2024 RGPH.

The main research question is:

**To what extent do institutional protection mechanisms and public policies for migrants contribute to inclusive territorial development in Morocco?**

To address this question, the article first reviews the theoretical relationship between migrant protection, integration and territorial development. It then examines the evolution of Morocco's migration policy and analyses recent statistical data on the foreign resident population. The following sections consider access to public services, socio-economic integration and territorial governance before discussing the main implications for inclusive territorial development.

## **1. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

### **1.1. Institutional protection and migrant integration**

Institutional protection refers here to the capacity of public institutions to ensure that migrants can effectively exercise their rights and access the services to which they are entitled. It therefore goes beyond the existence

of laws and administrative procedures. The practical accessibility of these rights, the availability of information and the ability of institutions to respond to migrants' needs are equally important.

This distinction is important when studying migrant integration. Integration is generally understood as a multidimensional process involving legal and political participation, socio-economic conditions and social and cultural relations (Penninx & Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016). A migrant may have a regular administrative status, for example, while still experiencing difficulties in finding employment, accessing housing or using public services.

In the Moroccan context, the development of a more comprehensive migration policy has improved the institutional framework for migrant integration. However, formal recognition does not necessarily translate into equal experiences in everyday life. Migrants may continue to face administrative, economic and social barriers, particularly when local institutional capacities differ from one territory to another (Gazzotti, 2021; Kynsilehto, 2023).

### **1.2. Migration as a multilevel governance issue**

Migration policies are rarely implemented by a single institution. National governments establish the main legal and policy framework, while regional and local authorities, public services, civil society organizations and international organizations are often involved in implementation. This makes migration an issue of multilevel governance (Scholten & Penninx, 2016).

This perspective is particularly useful for Morocco. National policies concerning migrants are implemented through concrete services such as health care, education, employment assistance and social support. The experience of migrants can consequently vary according to the institutional resources and practices available in different territories.

The relationship between levels of governance is therefore important. When national policies are not sufficiently connected to local institutions, there may be a gap between policy objectives and their practical implementation. Conversely, stronger coordination can make it easier to identify local needs and adapt public action to territorial circumstances.

### **1.3. Migration and territorial development**

Territorial development focuses on the capacity of territories to mobilize their economic, social and institutional resources in order to improve local conditions and create development opportunities (Torre, 2015). From this perspective, migration can influence territorial dynamics through several channels, including employment, entrepreneurship, human capital and social networks.

Research on migration and development has shown that migrants can contribute to local and regional economies, although the effects vary according to economic conditions and institutional arrangements (de Haas, 2006; OECD, 2017). Migration should therefore not be automatically considered either a burden or a development resource. Its effects depend largely on the conditions under which migrants live and participate in economic and social life.

For Morocco, this question is particularly relevant because foreign residents are concentrated in urban and economically active territories. Their presence creates additional demands for public services, but it can also represent an economic and social resource when migrants have access to employment, education, entrepreneurship and other opportunities.

### **1.4. From migrant protection to territorial inclusion**

The relationship between institutional protection and territorial development can be understood as a gradual process. Access to rights and services provides migrants with basic conditions for participation. Better access to education, health care, employment and social protection can, in turn, improve their ability to participate in the economic and social life of the territory.

The conceptual relationship proposed in this study is therefore:

**Institutional protection → Access to rights and public services → Socio-economic integration → Territorial inclusion → Territorial development**

This relationship should not be interpreted as a simple linear causal mechanism. Each stage can be influenced by other factors, including labour-market conditions, discrimination, administrative capacity, local governance and the characteristics of migrants themselves.

Territorial governance and institutional coordination are consequently considered cross-cutting elements of the model. They can influence both access to services and the effectiveness of integration policies.

## **2. Migration Policy and Institutional Protection in Morocco**

### **2.1. The evolution of Morocco's migration policy**

Morocco's migration policy has changed considerably over the last two decades. The country was traditionally approached mainly as a country of emigration and transit. The growing presence of foreign migrants, particularly from sub-Saharan Africa, gradually changed this situation and created new challenges for public authorities (OECD, 2017; Gazzotti, 2021).

An important legal reference remains Law No. 02-03 of 11 November 2003, which regulates the entry and stay of foreigners in Morocco as well as irregular emigration and immigration. The law established a framework for controlling entry and residence while defining the legal conditions applicable to foreign nationals (Kingdom of Morocco, 2003).

Over time, however, the increasing diversity of migration situations made a policy based mainly on control increasingly insufficient. Questions concerning access to health care, education, employment, social protection and the situation of vulnerable migrants became more prominent in public debate and policy-making (OECD, 2017).

This evolution led to a broader approach to migration policy, particularly from 2013 onwards.

### **2.2. The National Immigration and Asylum Strategy**

In 2014, Morocco adopted the National Immigration and Asylum Strategy (SNIA). The strategy marked an important change in the country's approach to migration by placing greater emphasis on the integration and protection of migrants.

The SNIA covers several areas, including education, health, employment, social protection and humanitarian assistance. Its approach reflects the idea that migrant integration cannot be limited to regularization or administrative status. It also requires access to basic services and opportunities for participation in society (OECD, 2017).

The regularization programmes implemented as part of this broader policy were also significant. They provided many migrants with a more stable administrative situation and created better conditions for accessing certain rights and services. Nevertheless, regularization alone cannot guarantee full integration. Practical access to employment, housing, education and health care remains dependent on social and institutional conditions (Gazzotti, 2021; Kynsilehto, 2023).

### **2.3. From national policy to territorial implementation**

Although migration policy is largely defined at the national level, its effects are experienced locally. Migrants interact with schools, health centres, employment services, municipalities, associations and other local actors. This makes the territorial implementation of migration policy particularly important.

Several initiatives in Morocco have sought to strengthen this territorial dimension. The work carried out under the *Making Migration Work for Sustainable Development* approach, for example, has focused on territories including the Oriental, Souss-Massa and Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima regions. These initiatives have examined how migration can be better integrated into local development strategies and how local actors can contribute to migrant inclusion (IOM & UNDP, 2023).

The territorial approach is also relevant because migration patterns differ considerably between Moroccan regions. Some regions attract migrants because of employment opportunities, international connections or large urban centres, while others have a much smaller foreign population. These differences create different institutional needs and priorities.

#### 2.4. Institutional Coordination and the Practical Implementation of Migrant Protection

The implementation of migrant protection policies involves several categories of actors. Central government institutions establish the main legal and policy framework, while regional and local institutions contribute to its implementation. Public health and education services, employment institutions, civil society organizations and international organizations also play an important role.

This institutional diversity creates opportunities for cooperation, but it can also generate coordination difficulties. When responsibilities are distributed among several actors, migrants may encounter problems identifying the appropriate institution or obtaining consistent support. Multilevel governance is therefore essential to translating national policy objectives into effective territorial action (Scholten & Penninx, 2016). The issue is not simply the number of institutions involved, but how they cooperate. Coordination mechanisms, information sharing and clear referral procedures can improve access to public services and reduce gaps between institutional interventions.

Beyond coordination, the effectiveness of migrant protection also depends on the distinction between the formal existence of rights and their practical implementation. Institutional protection can be assessed at two complementary levels: the legal and policy framework, including laws, strategies, programmes and administrative mechanisms, and the extent to which these arrangements are accessible to migrants in their everyday lives.

This distinction is particularly important for migrants who face administrative or socio-economic difficulties. A right may exist formally but have limited practical value if individuals are unaware of it, cannot reach the relevant institution or encounter barriers when seeking assistance. The Moroccan experience illustrates this challenge. Since 2013–2014, the country has developed a more comprehensive institutional framework for migration, but its effectiveness ultimately depends on implementation across different territories, the coordination of the actors involved and their capacity to respond to migrants' needs.

Understanding these institutional challenges requires examining the population concerned. The following section therefore considers the number and distribution of foreign residents in Morocco, together with their main socio-economic characteristics, in order to establish the statistical basis for analysing the territorial dimensions of migrant protection and integration.

### 3. Data and Statistical Analysis

#### 3.1. Data Sources and Methodology

The empirical analysis is mainly based on data from the 2024 General Population and Housing Census (RGPH), conducted by the High Commission for Planning (HCP). The 2024 census provides recent information on the size, demographic characteristics, geographical distribution and socio-economic situation of foreign residents in Morocco. Where relevant, the results are compared with the 2014 census in order to identify major changes over the last decade.

Additional information is drawn from reports and studies published by the OECD, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These sources are used mainly to place the statistical results within the broader institutional and policy context.

The analysis is essentially descriptive. It does not attempt to establish a causal relationship between migrant protection and territorial development. Instead, it identifies demographic, territorial and socio-economic patterns that can help assess the conditions under which migrant integration takes place.

The analysis presented in this section should consequently be understood as descriptive rather than causal. The available HCP data are particularly useful for identifying broad territorial and socio-economic patterns, but they do not provide all the variables required to estimate the effect of institutional protection on territorial development. A more advanced empirical test would require individual-level or territorial-level data combining information on institutional protection, access to services, employment, social inclusion and local development. Such data could then be analysed using multivariate regression or structural equation modelling.

For the purposes of this article, the statistical evidence is therefore used to establish the empirical context in which the institutional and territorial dimensions of migration policy operate. The next sections examine how these patterns relate to access to public services, socio-economic integration and territorial governance.

### 3.2. Demographic and Territorial Patterns

The number of foreign residents recorded in Morocco increased considerably between 2014 and 2024. According to the HCP's comparative data, the foreign resident population rose from 86,206 in 2014 to 148,152 in 2024.

**Table 1. Evolution of the foreign resident population in Morocco, 2014–2024**

| Indicator                  | 2014   | 2024    | Change  |
|----------------------------|--------|---------|---------|
| Foreign residents          | 86,206 | 148,152 | +61,946 |
| Overall change             | —      | —       | +71.9%  |
| Average annual growth rate | —      | —       | 5.6%    |

Source: HCP, RGPH 2014 and RGPH 2024.

The increase is substantial in relative terms, but the foreign population remains a small share of Morocco's total population. What is more important for this study is the spatial and socio-economic profile of this population. The growth in the number of foreign residents increases the relevance of questions concerning access to services, employment and local integration, particularly in the territories where migrants are most concentrated.

The change in the composition of the foreign population is also notable. The share of nationals from sub-Saharan African countries increased considerably between 2014 and 2024, while the relative share of European nationals declined. This confirms the transformation of Morocco's migration profile and helps explain why integration has become a more visible public-policy issue. Foreign residents are not evenly distributed across Morocco. Their geographical concentration is particularly strong in the country's largest urban and economically active regions.

**Table 2. Distribution of foreign residents by selected regions, 2014–2024**

| Region                    | 2014 (%) | 2024 (%) | Change (percentage points) |
|---------------------------|----------|----------|----------------------------|
| Casablanca-Settat         | 35.1     | 43.3     | +8.2                       |
| Rabat-Salé-Kénitra        | 29.0     | 19.2     | −9.8                       |
| Marrakech-Safi            | 4.5      | 9.2      | +4.7                       |
| Souss-Massa               | 3.0      | 9.4      | +6.4                       |
| Tanger-Tétouan-Al Hoceima | 6.2      | 6.5      | +0.3                       |
| Fès-Meknès                | 9.2      | 4.1      | −5.1                       |
| Oriental                  | 7.5      | 1.9      | −5.6                       |

Source: HCP, RGPH 2024.

The figures show a clear change in the territorial distribution of foreign residents. Casablanca-Settat increased its share from 35.1% to 43.3% and became by far the main concentration area. Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, on the other hand, saw its share decline from 29.0% to 19.2%.

Marrakech-Safi and Souss-Massa experienced particularly strong increases. Their respective shares reached 9.2% and 9.4% in 2024. Fès-Meknès and the Oriental recorded the opposite trend, with their shares declining considerably over the same period.

These changes are important from a territorial-policy perspective. They suggest that migrant-related needs are increasingly concentrated in specific urban and economic centres rather than being evenly distributed across the country.

The geographical pattern becomes even clearer when the distinction between urban and rural areas is considered.

**Table 3. Distribution of foreign residents according to place of residence, 2024**

| Place of residence | Share of foreign residents |
|--------------------|----------------------------|
| Urban areas        | Approximately 95%          |
| Rural areas        | Approximately 5%           |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>100%</b>                |

Source: HCP, RGPH 2024.

Around 95% of foreign residents live in urban areas. This strong concentration is consistent with the economic and institutional characteristics of Moroccan cities. Urban areas generally offer greater access to employment, education, health services, transport and administrative institutions.

For territorial development, this concentration has two implications. First, large cities and economically dynamic regions face a greater need to consider migrants when planning public services. Second, the contribution of migrants to local economic activity is likely to be more visible in these territories than in rural areas.

### 3.3. Analytical Framework and Indicators

The statistical information presented above is used to operationalize the main dimensions of the conceptual framework. Because the available national data are mainly aggregate statistics, the variables are treated as indicators rather than as direct measures of causal effects.

**Table 4. Analytical dimensions and indicators**

| Dimension                  | Main indicators                                                 | Data source                              |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| Institutional protection   | Legal status, administrative access, information and assistance | Institutional reports / policy documents |
| Public services            | Health, education, housing and social services                  | HCP / institutional sources              |
| Socio-economic integration | Employment, unemployment, education and economic activity       | HCP                                      |
| Territorial inclusion      | Regional concentration, urban residence, social participation   | HCP / institutional sources              |
| Territorial                | Coordination, local institutional capacity and                  | OECD / IOM / UNDP                        |

| Dimension               | Main indicators                                                      | Data source       |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| governance              | stakeholder participation                                            |                   |
| Territorial development | Employment opportunities, economic participation and local inclusion | HCP / OECD / UNDP |

Source: Author's analytical framework based on HCP, OECD, IOM and UNDP data.

The data therefore provide a useful empirical basis for understanding the territorial profile of migration in Morocco. They show where foreign residents are concentrated, their main reasons for migration and several characteristics related to education and employment. However, they do not allow us to determine directly whether stronger institutional protection causes better territorial development outcomes.

#### 4. Migrant Protection and Access to Public Services

##### 4.1. Access to Health, Education and Social Protection

Access to health care is one of the main dimensions of migrant protection. The development of Morocco's migration policy since 2013 has gradually placed migrant health within a broader public-policy framework. The National Immigration and Asylum Strategy considers access to health services as part of the integration process, while more recent initiatives have sought to improve the identification of migrants' health needs and their access to appropriate services (OECD, 2017; IOM, 2024).

The issue is not simply whether migrants are formally entitled to health care. Their ability to use health services may also depend on their administrative situation, knowledge of available services, financial resources and the accessibility of health facilities. Language and communication difficulties can also create practical barriers, particularly for migrants who have recently arrived in Morocco.

The territorial distribution identified in Section 4 makes this issue particularly relevant. Since the vast majority of foreign residents live in urban areas, cities and large regional centres have a particularly important role in providing health services to migrant populations. The concentration of migrants in Casablanca-Settat, Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, Marrakech-Safi and Souss-Massa means that local health systems in these regions are more directly concerned by migration-related needs (HCP, 2025).

The health dimension also illustrates why national protection mechanisms need to be connected with local implementation. A national policy may establish the principle of access, but its practical effectiveness depends partly on the ability of local services to identify migrants, provide appropriate information and respond to their specific situations.

Education is another important component of migrant integration. Access to education is particularly important for children and young people because it affects both their current well-being and their future participation in Moroccan society.

The Moroccan migration policy framework has progressively sought to facilitate the integration of migrant children into the education system (OECD, 2017). This approach is consistent with the broader understanding of integration as a process that includes access to institutions and opportunities, rather than simply the acquisition of legal status (Penninx & Garcés-Masareñas, 2016).

The educational profile of foreign residents presented in Section 4 also deserves attention. The relatively high proportion of foreign residents with secondary or higher education suggests that migrants represent a diverse human-capital resource. At the same time, the presence of people with little or no formal education indicates that integration policies cannot rely on a single approach.

Education therefore has a dual role. It provides access to knowledge and opportunities for migrants themselves, while also facilitating interaction with the host society. For younger generations in particular, schools can become important spaces of social interaction and inclusion.

Social protection represents another area in which the distinction between formal rights and effective access becomes important. Migrants do not form a homogeneous population. Their situations vary according to age, employment status, family circumstances, administrative situation and reasons for migration.

Some groups may face greater difficulties, including people without stable employment, women in vulnerable situations, unaccompanied minors, refugees and migrants with limited access to administrative information. A general migration policy may therefore need to be complemented by targeted forms of support.

The institutional framework developed under the SNIA has involved public institutions as well as civil society and international organizations. This cooperation is particularly relevant for vulnerable migrants because associations and specialized organizations can help identify needs and facilitate access to public institutions (IOM & UNDP, 2023).

However, the availability of support can vary between territories. This reinforces the importance of territorial governance. Where local institutions and civil society organizations cooperate effectively, migrants may have better access to information and referral mechanisms. Where such coordination is weaker, the existence of national programmes may have a more limited practical effect.

#### **4.2. From Formal Rights to Effective Access**

The distinction between formal protection and effective access is central to the argument of this article. A legal right becomes meaningful only when individuals can actually use it.

For migrants, several factors can influence this process. These include knowledge of rights, administrative procedures, language, financial resources, geographical accessibility and the behaviour of institutions. Consequently, two migrants with similar legal status may experience public services differently depending on their circumstances and place of residence.

This issue is particularly important in the Moroccan context because the foreign population is strongly concentrated in a small number of territories. The concentration of migrants does not necessarily mean that these territories provide better access in every area, but it does mean that their institutional capacity becomes particularly relevant.

The territorial approach therefore shifts the analysis from the simple question of whether migrants are protected under national policy to a broader question: **how effectively is this protection translated into everyday access to public services?**

The territorial distribution of foreign residents also suggests that public policies need to take local differences into account. Casablanca-Settat, for example, accounts for the largest share of foreign residents, while Souss-Massa and Marrakech-Safi have experienced substantial increases since 2014. These territories may therefore face different combinations of needs related to employment, education, health care and social support (HCP, 2025).

At the same time, regions with smaller foreign populations should not be ignored. The number of migrants alone does not determine the importance of a policy issue. Local economic structures, institutional capacity and the specific characteristics of migrant populations can also influence the type of support required.

A territorial approach should consequently avoid a simple allocation of resources based only on the number of foreign residents. It should combine demographic information with indicators of vulnerability, access to services and local institutional capacity.

#### **4.3. Public Services and Territorial Inclusion**

Access to public services is also connected to territorial development. Health and education improve individual capabilities and can facilitate participation in economic and social life. From this perspective, migrant access to public services is not only a question of social protection; it can also influence the ability of migrants to participate in local economies and communities.

The relationship should nevertheless be treated with caution. Access to a service does not automatically generate economic development. Rather, it creates conditions that can facilitate participation. Other factors, including employment opportunities, labour-market institutions, housing conditions and social relations, also influence outcomes.

The conceptual relationship can therefore be expressed as follows:

**Institutional protection → Access to public services → Individual capabilities → Socio-economic participation → Territorial inclusion**

This relationship provides the basis for the following sections, which examine employment, entrepreneurship and other forms of socio-economic integration.

The analysis suggests that migrant protection and public-service provision are closely connected to territorial inclusion. When migrants can access health care, education and social services, the institutional barriers separating them from the rest of society may be reduced. Conversely, persistent difficulties in accessing basic services can reinforce social and economic exclusion.

This does not mean that public services alone determine integration. Rather, they constitute one of the conditions that make integration possible. Their effectiveness also depends on employment opportunities, social relations, housing and the quality of local governance.

The next section therefore focuses on the economic dimension of integration and examines how employment, entrepreneurship and migrant skills may contribute to territorial development.

## **5. Socio-Economic Integration and Territorial Development**

### **5.1. Employment and Economic Vulnerability**

Employment is one of the most important dimensions of socio-economic integration. It provides income and can facilitate access to housing, social protection and other services. It can also create opportunities for interaction between migrants and the wider population.

The data presented in Section 4 show that employment concerns a significant proportion of foreign residents aged 15 and over. In 2024, 53.8% were classified as employed, while 4.6% were unemployed. These figures confirm the importance of the labour market in understanding the position of foreign residents in Morocco (HCP, 2025).

However, employment alone cannot be considered a sufficient indicator of integration. A person may be employed while experiencing insecure working conditions, low income or limited access to social protection. For this reason, the quality and stability of employment should also be considered when assessing socio-economic integration.

This distinction is particularly important for migrants because their employment conditions can be influenced by their administrative situation, recognition of qualifications, access to information and the structure of the local labour market.

Informality represents an important challenge in the relationship between migration and socio-economic integration. Employment in the informal economy can provide migrants with an entry point into the labour market, but it may also limit their access to social protection, stable income and labour rights.

Evidence from territorial studies in Morocco suggests that informal employment can be significant among migrant populations, although available studies are generally limited to particular regions or groups and should not be generalized to the entire foreign population (IOM & UNDP, 2023).

The issue is therefore not simply whether migrants are economically active, but under what conditions they participate in the economy. From the perspective of institutional protection, access to decent and legally protected employment is particularly important.

Formal employment can strengthen both individual economic security and participation in the local economy. Conversely, persistent informality may limit the potential contribution of employment to longer-term territorial inclusion.

### **5.2. Entrepreneurship and Human Capital**

Employment is not the only form of economic participation. Some migrants engage in self-employment, small business activities or entrepreneurship. These activities can be particularly relevant in urban territories where markets, customers and networks are more developed.

The data from the 2024 RGPH indicate the presence of different forms of self-employment among foreign residents. This suggests that migrants participate in the economy through several channels rather than being limited to salaried employment (HCP, 2025).

Migrant entrepreneurship can contribute to local economic activity by creating businesses, responding to market demand and developing links with suppliers and customers. However, entrepreneurship should not automatically be equated with successful economic integration. Migrant entrepreneurs may also face difficulties related to access to finance, administrative procedures, business registration, market access and social networks.

Institutional support can therefore influence whether entrepreneurial activity remains informal and fragile or develops into more stable economic participation.

The educational profile of foreign residents provides another important dimension. As shown in Section 4, a substantial share of foreign residents aged 10 and over have completed higher education. This suggests the presence of significant human-capital resources within the migrant population (HCP, 2025).

However, education does not necessarily translate into employment corresponding to migrants' qualifications. The recognition of diplomas and professional experience, language skills and access to professional networks can affect the use of migrants' skills in the host labour market.

The issue of skill recognition is therefore relevant from both an integration and territorial-development perspective. When migrants' qualifications are not adequately recognized or used, part of their potential contribution to the local economy may remain underutilized.

Conversely, when skills are matched with local labour-market needs, migrants can contribute to sectors facing labour shortages and to the diversification of local economic activity.

### **5.3. Migrants as Actors of Territorial Development**

The relationship between migration and territorial development should consequently be considered from a broader perspective. Migrants are not simply beneficiaries of public policies. They can also become economic actors through employment, entrepreneurship, consumption, investment and the use of their skills.

This does not mean that migration automatically produces positive development outcomes. The effects depend on the institutional and economic context in which migrants live. Access to employment, legal protection, education, financial services and local networks can influence the extent to which migrants participate in territorial economies (OECD, 2017).

The same applies to local communities. The economic contribution of migrants is more likely to become part of inclusive territorial development when it is accompanied by policies that reduce exclusion and promote interaction between migrants and host communities.

The territorial distribution of foreign residents observed in Section 4 provides an important context for understanding these processes. Casablanca-Settat, Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, Marrakech-Safi and Souss-Massa concentrate a large share of the foreign population. These regions also have important urban economies and labour markets.

The concentration of migrants in these areas may facilitate access to employment and economic networks, but it can also increase competition for certain resources, particularly housing and public services. The effect therefore depends on the capacity of local institutions and markets to accommodate population changes.

Migration should consequently be incorporated into territorial planning rather than treated as a separate policy area. Regional development strategies, employment policies and local economic programmes can take migrant populations into account when assessing labour-market needs and economic opportunities.

Socio-economic integration can contribute to territorial inclusion when migrants are able to participate in the economic and social life of the places where they live. Employment can provide income and social contacts, while entrepreneurship can create links with local markets and other economic actors.

The relationship can be represented as:

**Access to protection and services → Economic opportunities → Employment / entrepreneurship → Economic participation → Territorial inclusion**

The process is not necessarily linear. Discrimination, informal employment, limited access to finance, administrative barriers and weak recognition of qualifications may interrupt this progression.

For this reason, institutional protection remains relevant even after migrants enter the labour market. Economic participation and institutional protection should be seen as complementary dimensions rather than separate policy objectives.

The evidence suggests that the contribution of migrants to territorial development depends largely on the conditions under which they participate in local economies. A migrant population with relatively high levels of education and labour-market participation represents a potential resource, but this potential can only be realized when institutional and economic barriers are sufficiently limited.

From this perspective, territorial development policies should not focus exclusively on attracting investment or creating employment. They should also consider how existing populations, including migrants, can participate in and benefit from local economic development.

This leads to a broader understanding of inclusive territorial development: development is not only about economic growth within a territory, but also about the capacity of its institutions to allow different population groups to participate in economic and social opportunities.

The following section examines this institutional dimension more closely by focusing on territorial governance, coordination between actors and social cohesion.

## 6. Discussion, Research Hypotheses and Policy Recommendations

### 6.1. Institutional Protection, Socio-Economic Integration and Territorial Inclusion

The relationship between migrant protection and territorial development in Morocco cannot be understood solely through the existence of legal provisions or public programmes. What matters is also how these measures affect migrants' everyday lives, particularly their access to public services, employment and opportunities to participate in local communities. The concentration of foreign residents in several urban and economically active regions makes these questions increasingly relevant to territorial policy (HCP, 2025).

Institutional protection may facilitate integration by improving access to legal information, administrative procedures, education, health care and social protection. However, formal recognition of rights does not necessarily guarantee that migrants can exercise them in practice. Administrative difficulties, limited information and unequal access to services may continue to restrict participation. This distinction is consistent with the approach developed by Penninx and Garcés-Mascreñas (2016), who consider integration a multidimensional process involving economic, social and institutional participation.

The first hypothesis therefore examines the relationship between institutional protection and socio-economic integration:

**H1: Stronger institutional protection is positively associated with socio-economic integration among migrants in Morocco.**

Socio-economic integration, in turn, may facilitate territorial inclusion. Employment, education and entrepreneurship can help migrants establish professional relationships, develop social networks and participate more actively in their communities. Nevertheless, economic participation does not automatically eliminate discrimination or social distance. The quality of employment, the stability of living conditions and opportunities for interaction with local residents remain important.

**H2: Higher levels of socio-economic integration are positively associated with territorial inclusion among migrants.**

Territorial inclusion also raises the question of how migrants' participation relates to local development. Migrants may contribute to territorial economies through employment, entrepreneurship, consumption, skills transfer and community activities. Their contribution should not, however, be assumed to produce measurable development outcomes in every context. It depends partly on the opportunities available within each territory and on the extent to which migrants can participate in economic and social life. Territorial development must therefore be considered in terms of both economic activity and the distribution of opportunities among different population groups (Torre, 2015).

**H3: Higher levels of territorial inclusion are positively associated with inclusive territorial development.**

These relationships form the central analytical framework of the study. Institutional protection may create favourable conditions for integration, while socio-economic participation may support territorial inclusion. Inclusion, in turn, may contribute to more inclusive development. These relationships remain hypotheses to be examined empirically rather than causal effects established by the available descriptive statistics.

**6.2. Institutional Coordination, Territorial Governance and Empirical Validation**

The effectiveness of migrant protection also depends on how institutions work together. Migrants may need to contact several public services and administrative bodies to obtain information, access assistance or complete procedures. When these institutions coordinate their activities, access to services may become easier. When responsibilities are fragmented, the practical benefits of existing protection measures may be reduced.

Institutional coordination can therefore influence the relationship between protection and inclusion. The fourth hypothesis is formulated as follows:

**H4: Stronger institutional coordination strengthens the positive relationship between institutional protection and territorial inclusion.**

Territorial governance is related to this issue but covers a wider range of institutional conditions. It includes local administrative capacity, cooperation between public authorities and civil society, access to reliable information and the participation of relevant stakeholders in policy design and implementation. National migration policies are implemented in territories with different economic conditions, institutional resources and demographic characteristics. Their effectiveness may consequently vary according to the capacity of local actors to translate national objectives into practical measures. This interpretation is consistent with multilevel approaches to migration governance (Scholten & Penninx, 2016).

**H5: Stronger territorial governance is positively associated with the effective implementation of migrant integration policies.**

The five hypotheses provide a basis for a more systematic investigation of migrant protection and territorial development in Morocco. Nevertheless, the available statistical evidence has important limitations. The 2024 General Population and Housing Census (RGPH) provides useful information about the distribution and characteristics of foreign residents (HCP, 2025), but aggregate data cannot establish whether migrants benefiting from stronger institutional protection experience better integration outcomes. Nor can they demonstrate that migrant inclusion directly improves territorial development.

Testing these relationships would require more detailed information collected from migrants, institutional representatives and local stakeholders in several Moroccan regions. Relevant variables could include administrative accessibility, access to public services, employment conditions, social participation, discrimination, institutional coordination and local governance capacity. Depending on the research design and available data, multivariate regression or partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) could be used to examine the proposed relationships. Particular attention should be paid to the validity of the measurement instruments, sample size and the distinction between statistical association and causality.

Such an approach would extend the descriptive analysis by examining not only where foreign residents live, but also how institutional arrangements and territorial conditions influence their opportunities for integration. It would also help identify differences between regions and determine whether the proposed relationships remain consistent across different socio-economic contexts.

**6.3. Territorial Implementation, Public Services and Socio-Economic Integration**

The analysis points to the need to integrate migration more systematically into regional and local development policies. In territories where foreign residents are concentrated, regional development plans could incorporate indicators relating to migrant populations, access to services, employment and social participation. These indicators would help local authorities identify specific needs and assess whether existing programmes respond adequately to them.

This approach should be accompanied by appropriate financial, technical and administrative resources. Territorialization cannot be effective if responsibilities are transferred to local authorities without the means

to carry them out. Better coordination between national institutions, regional and local authorities, public services, civil society organizations and international partners could also reduce administrative fragmentation and improve access to assistance.

The development of territorial migration observatories, or monitoring mechanisms within existing institutions, could strengthen the evidence available to decision-makers. Information on employment, education, health, housing, social protection and discrimination would help identify territorial disparities and monitor changes over time. Such arrangements should have clearly defined responsibilities and respect confidentiality and personal data protection.

Employment policies also require attention to the quality of economic participation. The number of employed foreign residents does not indicate whether they benefit from stable jobs, adequate working conditions or social protection. Measures supporting formal employment, vocational training, recognition of qualifications and access to information about labour rights could therefore help address existing barriers. Support for migrant entrepreneurship may also contribute to local economic activity, particularly where entrepreneurs can access business information, financing and administrative assistance.

Public services should be considered alongside employment. Access to health care, education and social services depends not only on formal eligibility but also on the accessibility of information, administrative procedures and available resources. Staff training, clear communication and language assistance where necessary could help improve migrants' experience of public institutions. Local authorities should take demographic changes into account when planning service capacity, while ensuring that the needs of migrants and other residents are addressed fairly.

Finally, socio-economic integration should be accompanied by measures that encourage social participation. Schools, associations, community organizations and cultural initiatives can create opportunities for interaction between migrants and host communities. Consultation mechanisms involving migrant representatives and civil society organizations could also help identify practical difficulties that are not captured by administrative statistics. Such participation would recognize migrants as contributors to local life and as stakeholders in the policies affecting them.

#### **6.4. Monitoring, Evaluation and Inclusive Territorial Development**

The proposed framework could also inform the development of a Territorial Migrant Protection and Inclusion Index (TMPII). The index could bring together five dimensions: institutional protection, access to public services, socio-economic integration, territorial inclusion and territorial governance. Possible indicators would cover administrative accessibility and legal assistance; access to health, education and social services; employment, training and entrepreneurship; social participation and discrimination; and institutional coordination, local capacity and migrant participation.

At this stage, the TMPII should be treated as a proposed analytical instrument rather than a validated index. Its construction would require a clear selection of indicators, a justified weighting method and empirical testing across different Moroccan regions. Sensitivity analysis would also be necessary to assess whether the results remain robust under alternative methodological choices. Only after these steps could the index be considered for territorial comparison or policy evaluation.

The same principle should guide the evaluation of migration policies more generally. The number of programmes implemented or administrative procedures completed provides useful information, but it does not necessarily reveal whether migrants' living conditions have improved. Evaluation should also examine changes in access to public services, employment conditions, social participation and institutional coordination. This would help distinguish the implementation of a policy from its actual outcomes.

The broader implication is that migrant protection, integration and territorial development should be examined together. Morocco's institutional framework provides an important basis for action, but its practical effects depend partly on how policies are implemented and on the opportunities available in different territories. Improving coordination, strengthening local capacity and developing reliable evidence would help public authorities identify existing gaps and direct resources toward the needs of particular regions. Further

empirical research remains necessary to determine the strength of these relationships and establish which interventions are most effective in promoting inclusive territorial development.

## 7. Conclusion

Migration has become an increasingly important dimension of public policy and territorial development in Morocco. The country's transition from mainly being a country of emigration and transit to also becoming a country of settlement has required a broader institutional response, particularly since the adoption of the National Immigration and Asylum Strategy in 2014.

The analysis presented in this article shows that migrant protection cannot be examined only through national legislation or the existence of public programmes. The territorial dimension is equally important. Migrants experience public policies through health services, schools, employment institutions, local authorities, associations and other organizations operating in specific territories.

The statistical evidence from the 2024 RGP confirms the importance of this territorial dimension. The foreign resident population reached 148,152 people in 2024 and increased substantially compared with 2014 (HCP, 2025). At the same time, foreign residents are strongly concentrated in urban and economically dynamic regions. Casablanca-Settat alone accounts for a large share of the foreign population, while other regions such as Souss-Massa and Marrakech-Safi have also experienced significant changes in their relative position.

The socio-economic profile of foreign residents also shows that migration cannot be reduced to a question of humanitarian assistance. A significant proportion of foreign residents are economically active, while a considerable share have secondary or higher education. These characteristics suggest that migrants are also participants in local labour markets and potential contributors to territorial economic activity.

Nevertheless, economic participation should not be confused with full integration. Employment does not necessarily mean decent working conditions, social protection or social inclusion. Similarly, formal access to rights does not automatically guarantee effective access to health care, education, housing or other services.

The central argument of this article is therefore that institutional protection, public-service access, socio-economic integration and territorial inclusion should be considered as interconnected dimensions. Institutional protection can create the conditions for participation, but its effects depend on local institutions, labour markets, public services and the quality of coordination between different actors.

The conceptual model developed in the article can be summarized as:

**Institutional protection → Access to public services → Socio-economic integration → Territorial inclusion → Inclusive territorial development**

Territorial governance and institutional coordination operate across these different stages.

The five hypotheses proposed in the article provide a basis for further empirical research. In particular, future research should examine whether stronger institutional protection is actually associated with better socio-economic integration, whether socio-economic integration contributes to territorial inclusion, and whether territorial governance strengthens these relationships.

An important limitation of the present study is the nature of the available data. The HCP statistics provide valuable information on the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of foreign residents, but they are mainly aggregate data. They therefore cannot establish causal relationships between institutional protection and territorial development.

Future research could address this limitation through field surveys conducted in several Moroccan regions, particularly Casablanca-Settat, Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, Souss-Massa, Marrakech-Safi, Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima and the Oriental. Combining migrant surveys with interviews with local institutions and civil society organizations would make it possible to examine the mechanisms identified in this article more directly.

The development of a territorial monitoring framework, such as the proposed Territorial Migrant Protection and Inclusion Index, could also provide a useful tool for comparing regions and evaluating policy implementation over time. Such a framework would need to be validated through empirical research before being used as a policy indicator.

Ultimately, the question is not simply whether Morocco has developed a framework for migrant protection. The more important question is how effectively this framework is translated into rights, services, opportunities and participation in the territories where migrants live. This is where migrant protection and territorial development meet.

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