

**مساهمة الهجرة الدولية في التوسع الحضري بالمدار السقوي لتادلة: حالة  
المركز الحضري بني ملال - المغرب**

***The Contribution of International Migration to Urban Expansion  
The case of the Beni Mellal in the Tadla Irrigated Perimeter:  
Urban Center - Morocco***

د. كريمة حادق: جامعة الحسن الثاني الدار البيضاء، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية، المغرب.  
د. عبد القادر التايري: أستاذ باحث، جامعة محمد الأول، كلية الآداب والعلوم الإنسانية بوجدة،  
المغرب.

**Dr. Karima HADIK:** Hassan II University, Casablanca, Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences, Morocco. Email: karimahadik@gmail.com

**Dr. Abdelkader TAYRI:** Research Professor, University Mohammed Premier, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Oujda, Morocco. Email: abdelkadertayri@gmail.com

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.56989/benkj.v5i10.1627>

## المخلص:

نظرًا لأهمية موضوع الهجرة الدولية والتنمية الاقتصادية وعلاقتهما الوثيقة، والاهتمام الذي يثيرانه على المستويين الوطني والدولي، فقد قررنا القيام بهذا البحث، الذي يهدف إلى توضيح مساهمة الهجرة الدولية في انفجار المجال العمراني (الإطار المبنى) بمدينة بني ملال. وبعد معالجة هذا الموضوع وإجراء بحث ميداني اعتمدنا فيه المنهج الكمي، أظهرت النتائج أن نسبة كبيرة من العوائد المالية تخصص للاستثمار في العقارات المبنية وغير المبنية بهدف تحقيق ربح مضمون. إلا أن الاستثمار العقاري يساهم في تفاوتات مجالية مهمة، لا سيما من خلال الزحف العمراني على الأراضي الزراعية الخصبة المحيطة بالمدينة. وعلى الرغم من تنوع وتعدد الاستثمارات الاقتصادية للمهاجرين، فإن تأثيرها على التنمية الاقتصادية المحلية يظل محدودًا جدًا، حيث إن التحويلات المالية للهجرة الدولية غالبًا لا يتم استثمارها في القطاعات الإنتاجية، ولا تساهم في خلق الثروة، ولا توفر فرص عمل ليد عاملة مهمة. وبشكل عام، تبقى آثارها الاقتصادية إيجابية على المستوى الفردي، لكن لا يمكن اعتبارها عنصر تنمية ضمن المفهوم الشامل للتنمية الاقتصادية المحلية.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** هجرة دولية، تحويلات مالية، الاستثمار في العقار، توسع حضري، تنمية اقتصادية، مدينة بني ملال.

## Abstract:

Given the importance and relevance of the topic of international emigration and economic development, and the interest it arouses at the national and international levels, we decided to carry out this research, aimed at clarifying the contribution of international emigration in the explosion of the built environment in the city of Beni Mellal. After addressing this topic and conducting field research in which we adopted a quantitative approach, the results showed that a significant percentage of financial returns is devoted to investment in built and unbuilt real estate for a guaranteed profit. However, real estate investment contributes to aggravating spatial imbalances, particularly through the encroachment of construction on the fertile agricultural land surrounding the city. Despite the diversity and multiplicity of emigrants' economic investments, their impact on local economic development remains very limited, as financial remittances from international emigration are often not invested in productive sectors, do not contribute to wealth creation, and do not provide employment for a significant workforce. In general, their economic impacts remain positive at the individual level, but they cannot be considered a development element within the overall concept of local economic development.

**Keywords:** International emigration, financial repatriations, Real estate investment, urban expansion, economic development, city of Beni Mellal.

### **General introduction:**

International emigration is a multifactorial and multidimensional phenomenon, currently affecting almost every country in the world. This horizontal phenomenon has led to economic and social changes that can be identified at several levels<sup>1</sup>. Morocco is a country of emigration par excellence; this emigration to foreign countries has grown in importance since the 1960 and 1970. Moroccan emigrants represented approximately 8% of Morocco's population in 2015<sup>2</sup>, spread across more than 100 countries, mainly in Europe, but also in Africa and the Arab world<sup>3</sup>. Most researchers interested in the migration issue agree that it constitutes a crucial element of socio-spatial transformations in their regions of origin, thanks to the financial repatriations injected by emigrants<sup>4</sup>.

The impact of the migratory phenomenon lies essentially in urban expansion, in fact, housing constitutes the preferred sector of investment for Moroccan emigrants, land and real estate appropriation has multiple effects on the economy, society, and the urban fabric, since in almost all cases, international migration is accompanied by significant economic activity giving rise to rapid urban growth and leading to a demographic

---

<sup>1</sup> MANDHOUI M., (2008). "International Migration and Socio-Spatial Dynamics in the Tunisian Sahel: The Case of the City of Sayada", article, Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sousse, Tunisia.

<sup>2</sup> OECD (2017). "Interactions between Public Policies, Migration and Development in Morocco, Pathways to Development", book, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> CHAREF M., (2017). "The State, Role and Place of Moroccans Abroad in the Souss-Massa Region", Study conducted for the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME), by Professor Charef and the team of the Regional Observatory of Migration, Spaces and Societies (ORMES), Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, p. 9.

<sup>4</sup> MOUNIR S., (1996). "From Faqih Ben Saleh to Milan: Moroccan International Migration to Italy and its Impact on the Regions of Origin," a thesis for a postgraduate diploma, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Rabat, p: 61.

evolution very different from that of centers without migration<sup>1</sup>. This phenomenon has become the center of interest of various specialist researchers and political and economic actors because of its many issues, its transformative impact on social, economic, and spatial life in the countries of origin of emigrants.

### 1–The Study Problem:

Real estate is a strategic production factor for all vital sectors and a lever for all economic, social, and even political development. Many studies have addressed the migration phenomenon in relation to urban space. These studies have examined the role of international emigration in the emergence of urban centers, highlighting the essential role of remittances in real estate investments and the production of housing for emigrants (Mohammed BERRIANE)<sup>2</sup>, (Mohammed CHAREF)<sup>3</sup>, (Hassan DAIDE)<sup>4</sup>, (Mohamed Hamjik)<sup>5</sup>, (Abdelkader Altayri)<sup>6</sup>. Most studies that have addressed the real estate aspect in its relationship with urban space confirm the latter's importance in the transformations experienced by space and society. These studies also agree on the fact that international emigration

---

<sup>1</sup> Ibid., p: 157

<sup>2</sup> BERRIANE. M, (1992). Research project on international labor migration and urban growth (Greater Nador) in notebooks of the study center for Maghreb migratory movements, No. 1, University Med 1er Oujda. p:12.

<sup>3</sup> CHAREF M. (1986). "International emigration and its role in housing production in Morocco, (Social, economic and spatial approach)", thesis, University of Poitiers.

<sup>4</sup> DAIDE H. (1989). "International labor migration and its role in the urbanization of two small towns in southwestern Morocco: Tiznit and Ouled Teïma", Thesis, University of Poitiers France.

<sup>5</sup> HAMJIK M. (1996). "International Migration and Urban Development in the Middle Rif," a thesis for a postgraduate diploma in geography, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Fez.

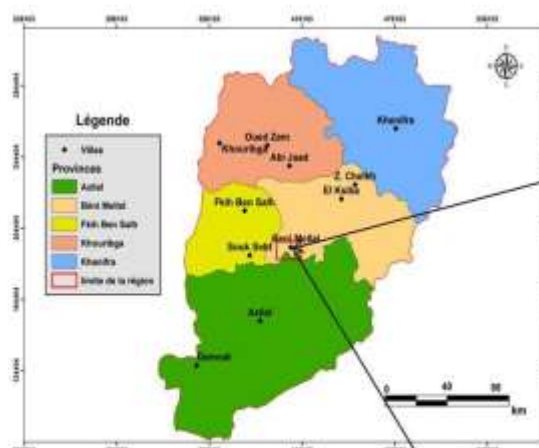
<sup>6</sup> TAYRI A. (2018). "International Migration and Socio–Spatial Dynamics in the City of Guerssif and Its Surroundings," a doctoral dissertation, Mohammed I University, Oujda.

has become an important component of economic development in many regions of the country, albeit to varying degrees. Our study area has experienced urban changes and transformations coinciding with key dates in the history of international emigration from the city and its region. Establishing an economic assessment of repatriations from international emigration remains a relative issue, given the complexity and multiplicity of the economic aspects of international emigration on the one hand, and on the other hand their intertwining with the transformations resulting from the dynamism experienced by society in general. In this perspective, our problem is structured around this question: To what extent have international migrant investments contributed to urban expansion in Beni Mellal?

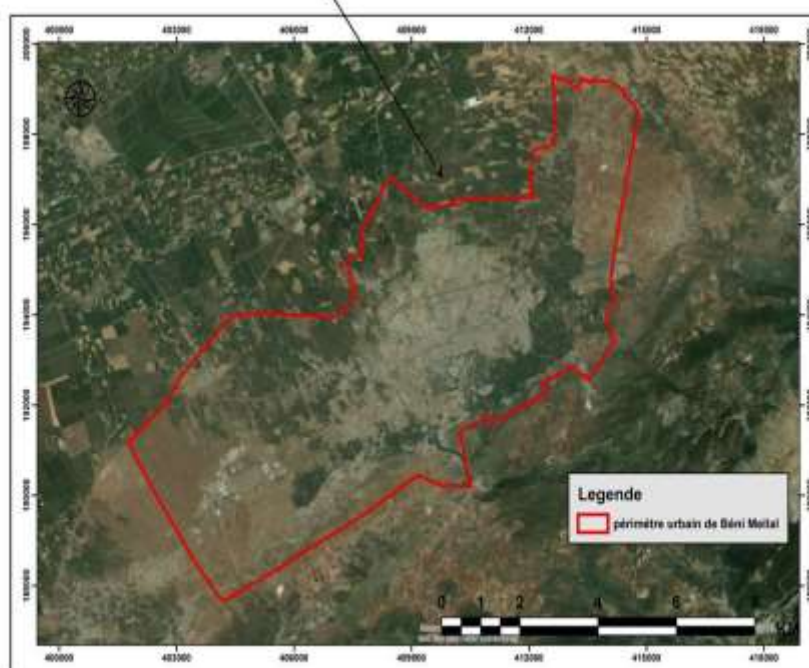
## **2–Study Area:**

Our study area is the city of Beni Mellal. Beni Mellal is the capital of the province of Beni Mellal. It lies in the Middle Atlas Mountains and the Tadla Plain, in the center of the country. Located on the road axis between the imperial cities of Fez and Marrakech, it is open to southern Morocco via the provinces of Er-Rachidia to the east, Khenifra to the northeast, and Ouarzazate to the southwest.

Map 2: Regional location of the province of Beni Mellal



Map 1: National location of the Béni Mellal-Khénifra region



Source: Team work

### 3–Work Methodology:

The quantitative method appears to be essential in our study; this method allows for more rigorous measurement of the variables used. In order to monitor the impact of the migration phenomenon on the ground, a descriptive approach was adopted, since description is inherent to geography. To ensure methodical and statistical information collection on our topic, we conducted a field survey using a 510-unit database of



observation units. We entered the questionnaires using SPSS software, and we used a geographic information system (ARCGIS) to create cartographic presentations.

## ***Results and Discussions:***

### **1– International emigration and its economic impact on the study area:**

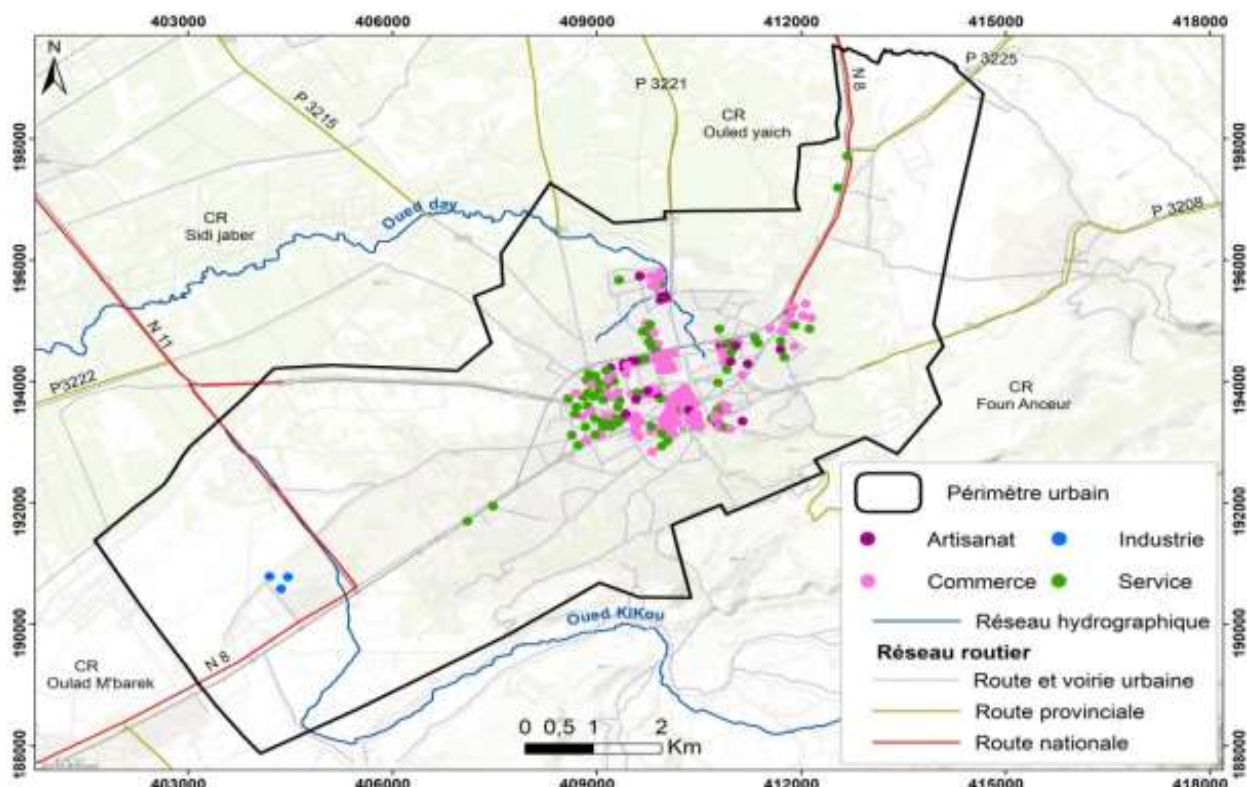
#### **1–1– Remittances made by emigrants:**

The research findings revealed that the rate of remittances sent by emigrants in our study area varies from one emigrant to another, depending on different criteria. A significant portion of remittances was spent on consumption purposes, including meeting family and household needs, as well as medication and education costs for unaccompanied children. It is difficult to determine the total volume of remittances sent by emigrants, given their complexity in terms of transmission channels and their nature.

#### **1–2– Economic Activities of Emigrants:**

Map (N°4) shows a diversification of economic activities, with trade remaining the predominant economic sector. This result is also due to the notable advantage of trade, since its profit margin is undetermined, and its short-term economic cycle makes this sector highly motivating. This activity is the one carried out by the majority of these emigrants before their international emigration. Economic activities employing fewer than 10 workers are in the lead with a rate of 93.5%. Based on our survey, we note that most of the economic activities of emigrants in the city were created after 2007, which demonstrates the negative influence of the global financial crisis, which triggered a deep recession in the local and national economies, resulting in the massive return of emigrants to the city of Beni Mellal.





Map 4: Distribution of types of economic activities of emigrants

**Source: field survey**

Informal economic activities occupy an important place in the city center, due to the economic advantages. The center is characterized by the antiquity of the urban fabric, the majority of the habitats are traditional with very narrow streets allowing emigrants carrying out informal economic activities to easily escape penalties in the event of administrative controls.

## 2–The role of international emigration in housing production and promoting vertical expansion in the city of Beni Mellal:

### 2–1– Real estate investment, the sector favored by those surveyed:

All studies on migrant investments confirm that they are concentrated in real estate<sup>1</sup>. Studies and research conducted at different times and in different Moroccan regions indicate that migrant investments are largely

<sup>1</sup> HAMDOUCH.B et al., (1981). "International migration in Morocco, a survey of its effects in urban areas", INSEA. p: 178.

concentrated in the housing sector. In this context, we can point to the research conducted in 1977 within the framework of the Remplod project, which covered the northern and southern regions of Morocco. This research revealed that 71% of migrants who transferred their savings to Morocco built a new home or renovated an old one, and that more than half of these, 57%, purchased a plot of land for construction<sup>1</sup>. The same concern was confirmed by a study conducted by the National Institute of Statistics and Applied Economics (INSEA) in 2000, which showed that 84% of migrant investments were concentrated in the real estate sector<sup>2</sup>.

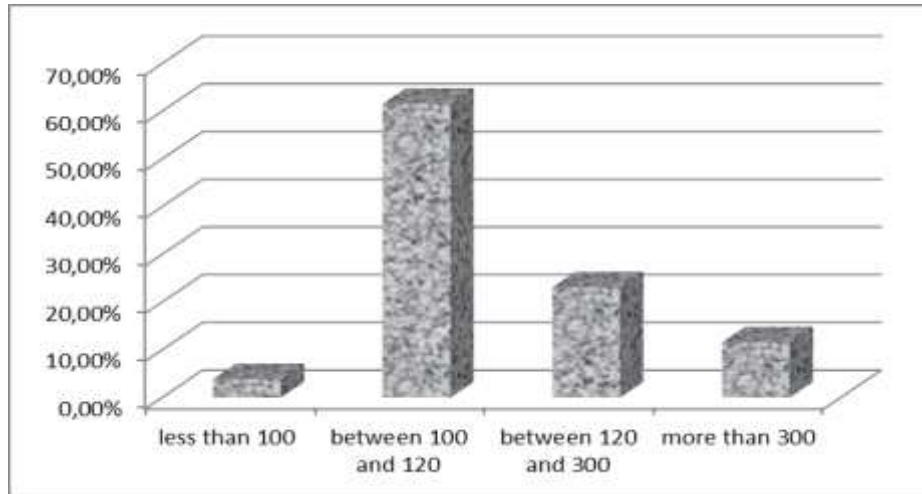
The survey revealed that 96% of emigrants invest in the construction or acquisition of housing for their own or their family's use. After securing their own home, some emigrants proceed to build other housing and purchase additional plots of land. 32.31% of emigrants own built real estate other than the home in which they reside. The survey data shows that the area of land plots varies between 100 m<sup>2</sup> and 120 m<sup>2</sup>, representing 61.54%.

Figure 1: Distribution of land plots of the emigrants interviewed according to surface

---

<sup>1</sup> AL-HOSSEIN B., (2005). "The Foundations of International Migration and Socio-Spatial Dynamics in the Eastern Rif – The Case of the Tamsaman Basin and its Margins", PhD thesis in Geography, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Dhar El Mahraz, Fez, p. 310.

<sup>2</sup> HADIK K. (2024). "The impact of international emigration on urban dynamics: case of the city of Beni Mellal", doctoral thesis, Hassan II University Casablanca, p: 161.



**Source: 2021 field survey**

In the city of Beni Mellal, the cost per square meter of construction is constantly increasing. We note that this city is recording very high prices, amounting to 15000 Dh/m<sup>2</sup> and is spread along the main axes of the city. Land speculation is linked to a strong demand resulting from population growth. To further deepen our research, we sought to study the evolution of the construction sector in the city of Beni Mellal. To do this, we used the building permits issued by the municipality.

Table 1: Change in the number of building permits between 2000 and 2021.

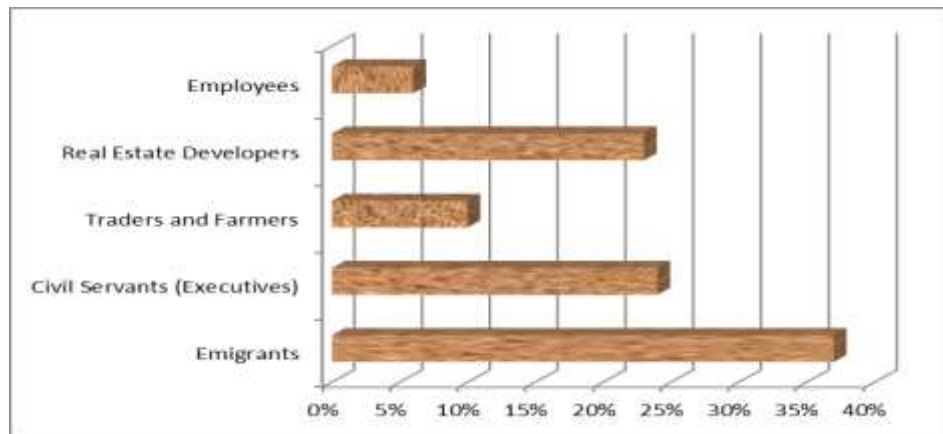
Years	Building permits	
	Number	Percentage (%)
2000	403	2,49
2001	808	4,98
2002	544	3,35
2003	820	5,06
2004	781	4,83
2005	828	5,12
2006	73	0,46
2007	119	0,74
2008	147	0,91

2009	1034	6,39
2010	1007	6,22
2011	980	6,05
2012	890	5,49
2013	1067	6,58
2014	1160	7,17
2015	1213	7,49
2016	1034	6,38
2017	897	5,53
2018	999	6,16
2019	866	5,35
2020	307	1,89
2021	220	1,36
Total	16197	100

#### The Beni Mellal Urban Agency, 2021

However, in 2015, emigrants benefited from a significant percentage of building permits (37%), compared to 24% for civil servants (executives), followed by real estate developers (23%), then traders and farmers (10%), and finally 6% for low-wage earners. This confirms the link between urban expansion in the city of Beni Mellal and financial resources from international emigration. The figure below also largely clarifies the distribution of building permits above.

Figure 2: The distribution of building permits issued in Beni Mellal



Source: 2021 field survey

## 2.2–The vertical structure of the built space: emigrants participate in the expansion of vertical housing:

The results of the field research indicate that vertical expansion has become a distinguishing feature of the housing of the city's immigrants. Due to the successive rise in land values in the city, and the problems this sector is facing due to real estate speculation, the immigrants' resort to vertical exploitation. Vertical construction is widespread, especially in the following neighborhoods: the administrative district, Al–Taqaddum, and Ouled Hamdan, the Ramz and Al–Safa neighborhoods, and the Al–Wafa, Al–Amal, and Al–Sharabi neighborhoods. The immigrants' contribution to the production of vertical construction is confirmed spatially through the absolute dominance of buildings with basements and four floors and above in the main streets and axes such as Mohammed V Avenue and the Royal Army Avenue, in addition to Ibn Khaldoun Street and Mohammed VI Avenue. Vertical construction is also widespread in some subdivisions such as the Ghita subdivision and the facade of the Riad Al–Salam neighborhood, and then in the neighborhoods that were intended for villa housing and were converted into multi–story residential neighborhoods such as the Al–Sharaf and Al–Asri neighborhoods.



Photos 1: Real estate investments by emigrants in Boulevard Mohammed V and Boulevard Mohammed VI

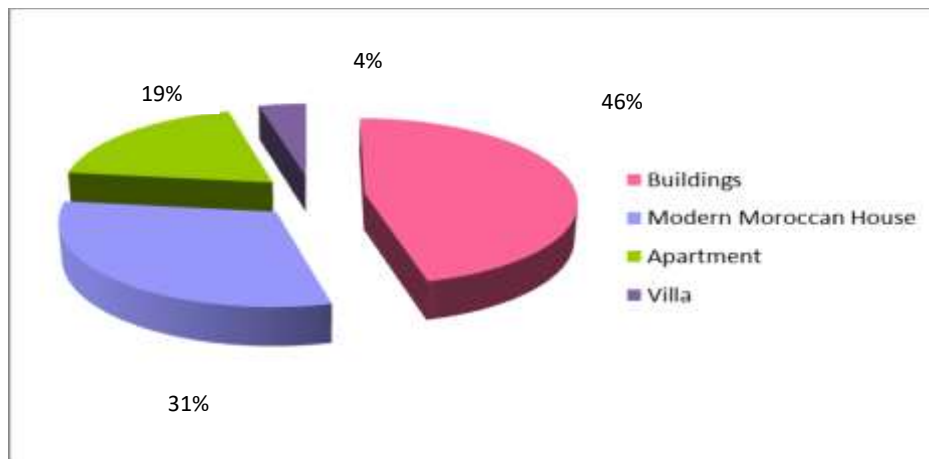


Source: 2021 field survey

The survey data indicates that 94.31% of the housing built by emigrants is in category R+1 and above, in fact, this rate includes R+1 (13.72%), R+2 (26.08%), R+3 (28.63%), R+4 (18.82%), R+5 and above (7.06%). On the other hand, housing with ground floor only represents

1.57%. The results also showed that modern Moroccan buildings and houses are the predominant type of built properties owned by the sample members other than their main residences.

Figure 3: Distribution of built properties owned by sample members other than their main residences by type



Source: 2021 field survey

### 2.3–The impact of urbanization in Beni Mellal on agricultural land:

The city of Beni Mellal is experiencing increasing overall urbanization, to the detriment of its peri-urban agricultural land. Today, an average of 13.65 hectares of agricultural land (crops and especially olive trees) are consumed each year by urbanization along the urban fronts expanding towards the northwest and southwest, leading to a disorganization of the agricultural land.



Photos 2: Agricultural land in the Jnan Taher (southwest of the city) and Gaachya (north of the city) neighborhoods designated for housing developments.



Source: 2021 field survey

### ***Conclusion:***

The results showed that despite the diversity and multiplicity of emigrants' economic investments, their impact on local economic development remains very limited. Migratory income is not invested in productive sectors, particularly the industrial sector, and especially the food industry, whose raw materials are widely available in the Tadla plain. The tourism sector has not benefited from emigrant investments, and consequently, emigrants' economic activities do not contribute to wealth creation or employ a significant workforce. A significant percentage of financial returns is devoted to investment in built and unbuilt real estate in the hope of guaranteed profit. However, this trend contributes to exacerbating spatial imbalances, particularly through the encroachment of construction on the fertile agricultural land surrounding the city. In general, the economic impact of international emigration remains positive at the individual level, but the issue raises several questions at the regional level.

Therefore, economic impact cannot be considered a development factor in the holistic concept of local economic development.

### ***Bibliographic references:***

- AL-HOSSEIN B., (2005). "The Foundations of International Migration and Socio-Spatial Dynamics in the Eastern Rif – The Case of the Tamsaman Basin and its Margins", PhD thesis in Geography, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Dhar El Mahraz, Fez, p. 310.
- BERRIANE. M, (1992). Research project on international labor migration and urban growth (Greater Nador) in notebooks of the study center for Maghreb migratory movements, No. 1, University Med 1er Oujda 1992.p:12.
- CHAREF M. (1986). "International emigration and its role in housing production in Morocco, (Social, economic and spatial approach)", thesis, University of Poitiers.
- CHAREF M., (2017). "The State, Role and Place of Moroccans Abroad in the Souss-Massa Region", Study conducted for the Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME), by Professor Charef and the team of the Regional Observatory of Migration, Spaces and Societies (ORMES), Ibn Zohr University, Agadir, p. 9.
- DAIDE H. (1989). "International labor migration and its role in the urbanization of two small towns in southwestern Morocco: Tiznit and Ouled Teïma", Thesis, University of Poitiers France.
- HADIK K. (2024). "The impact of international emigration on urban dynamics: case of the city of Beni Mellal", doctoral thesis, Hassan II University Casablanca, p: 161.
- HAMDOUCH.B et al., (1981). "International migration in Morocco, a survey of its effects in urban areas", INSEA. p: 178.

- HAMJIK M. (1996). "International Migration and Urban Development in the Middle Rif," a thesis for a postgraduate diploma in geography, Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Fez.
- MANDHOUI M., (2008). "International Migration and Socio-Spatial Dynamics in the Tunisian Sahel: The Case of the City of Sayada", article, Faculty of Arts and Humanities of Sousse, Tunisia.
- MOUNIR S., (1996). "From Faqih Ben Saleh to Milan: Moroccan International Migration to Italy and its Impact on the Regions of Origin," a thesis for a postgraduate diploma, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Rabat, p: 61.
- OECD (2017). "Interactions between Public Policies, Migration and Development in Morocco, Pathways to Development", book, OECD Publishing, Paris, p. 17.
- TAYRI A. (2018). "International Migration and Socio-Spatial Dynamics in the City of Guerssif and Its Surroundings," a doctoral dissertation, Mohammed I University, Oujda.