

# Building Inclusive and Sustainable Resettlement Neighbourhoods in Rabat Region, Morocco

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**Collaborative Project**

**Timeframe: 2022 - ongoing**



**Belgium**

Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) (Co-Coordinator)  
 Université Catholique de Louvain, Site Saint-Louis Bruxelles (UCL)  
 Haute École Louvain en Hainaut (HELHA)  
 Echos Communication (Belgian NGO)

**Morocco**

Institut National d'Aménagement et d'Urbanisme (INAU), Rabat (Co-Coordinator)  
 Université Hassan II, Casablanca  
 Institut National de l'Action Sociale, Tanger (INAS)  
 Municipalities of: Ain El Aouda, Sidi Bouknadel and Tamesna.  
 Local civil society associations.

**Institutional support**

Collaboration with Al Omrane, communes, and local civil society associations facilitates access to data and fieldwork and supports dissemination.

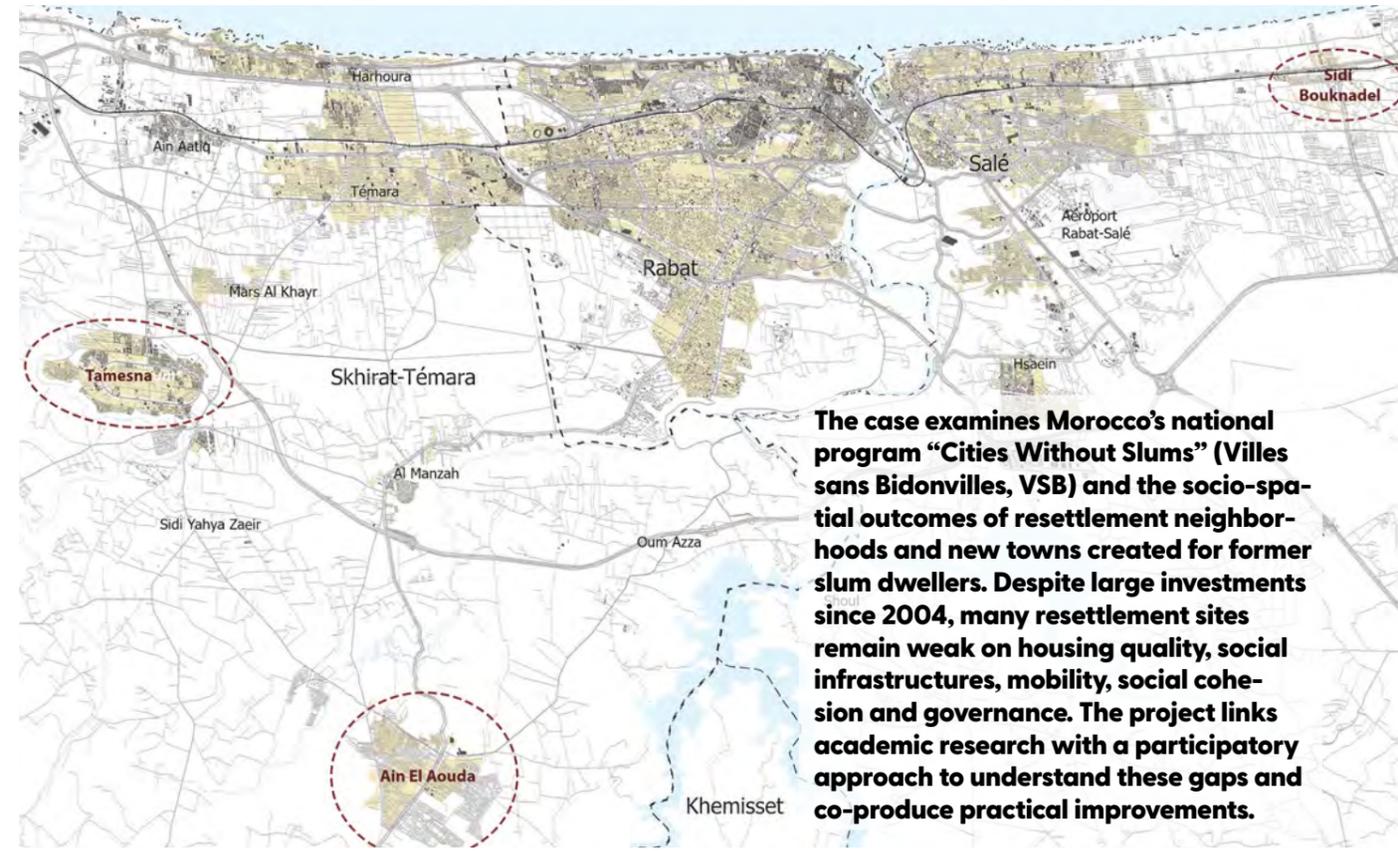
**Urban Challenges Tackled**

Integrated mobility and housing upgrade  
 Enhanced public and social infrastructure  
 Participatory and community-driven governance

**Funding**

ARES—Académie de Recherche et d'Enseignement Supérieur (Belgium)

Resettlement area in Aint El Aouda (2024). Residents use vacant lots to raise animals, set up bread ovens, and carry out other everyday activities. Photo by Geoffrey Grulois.



Map of the metropolitan region of Rabat showing the three studied sites: Ain El Aouda and Sidi Bouknadel resettlement areas, and Tamesna new town. Map by Houda Nkhili.

**The case examines Morocco's national program "Cities Without Slums" (Villes sans Bidonvilles, VSB) and the socio-spatial outcomes of resettlement neighborhoods and new towns created for former slum dwellers. Despite large investments since 2004, many resettlement sites remain weak on housing quality, social infrastructures, mobility, social cohesion and governance. The project links academic research with a participatory approach to understand these gaps and co-produce practical improvements.**

A Moroccan-Belgian transdisciplinary team integrates architecture, urbanism, and sociology. Methods include ethnographic observation, household and stakeholders' interviews, ethno-architectural surveys, mapping and, and focus groups with residents, associations, municipal administrations, national agencies, and the public operator Al Omrane.

Objectives are to improve habitability and spatial integration, enhance service and mobility access, foster social cohesion, and enhance governance. Expected results include actionable policy briefs, strengthened inter-institutional coordination and trained early-career researchers in Moroccan institutions. By coupling rigorous inquiry with co-production, the project aims to deliver inclusive, resilient, and sustainable resettlement neighborhoods in Morocco.

Knowledge exchange runs on two coordinated tracks. The academic track develops three PhD projects and a postdoctoral program to advance research on

post-slum integration, housing and social infrastructure design and social life. The participatory track uses workshops with citizen and stakeholders to translate findings into recommendations. This track also uses an experimental project in community social work (with the help of a social

community worker) to support grassroots citizen initiatives—such as collective gardens, micro-public space upgrades, or reuse-material furniture—to strengthen appropriation, neighbor relations, and resilience in these resettlement areas

The knowledge exchange is structured and iterative. Joint committees gather every four to six months to cross-read results from the different sites. North-South missions at start-up, mid-term, and closure organize study days, field visits to similar projects and a final conference to diffuse lessons beyond the case sites.

Morocco has reduced poverty yet faces persistent territorial inequalities. Rapid urbanization and informal settlements challenge housing quality, service provision and mobility. Since 2004, "Ville Sans Bidonville" programme and new towns construction led to relocating many households but often to peripheral sites with limited social infrastructures, access to jobs and weak governance capacity. Local authorities possess constrained resources; responsibilities fragment across agencies. Civil society and INDH funding are mobilized but participation can be instrumental rather than empowering.



## The Trans-Disciplinary Dimension

### The process

The project evaluates socio-spatial outcomes of Morocco's Cities Without Slums program and new town policies. Using architecture, urbanism, and sociology, it combines field observation, ethnographic and architectural surveys, mapping, and stakeholder workshops

to co-produce recommendations. Our analyses and actions take place on three sites – two resettlement

areas in Ain El Aouda and Sidi Bouknadel and Tamesna new town - to improve housing habitability, social infrastructures, mobility, social cohesion, and governance for more inclusive and sustainable resettlement neighborhoods.

The process is structured around three interconnected phases. In the initial co-design phase, INAU, ULB, UCL, Uni-

versité Hassan II, and HELHA jointly shaped the methodology, combining academic objectives with local priorities. This was followed by a research process grounded in extensive fieldwork, including ob-

servations, interviews, ethno-architectural surveys, mapping, document analysis, and community social work, alongside participatory workshops engaging residents, associations, communes, ministries, and Al Omrane. Recommendations were co-written and validated with stakeholders, informing municipal programmes and national agendas. The continuation phase focuses on sustainability through joint committees aligning doctoral research with participatory outputs, seminars in Morocco and Belgium to exchange results, pilot resident-led micro-projects in public space, and preparatory work toward establishing a Social Observatory of Resettlement.

### Competences and Skills

The project mobilised interdisciplinary expertise spanning architecture, urbanism, and sociology, supported by shared leadership and coordination between Moroccan and Belgian institutions. Facilitation and mediation capacities enabled effective multi-actor negotiation and conflict management, while strong methodological skills in ethnography, surveys, mapping, and policy analysis underpinned the research. Project management, monitoring, and evaluation ensured structured implementation, complemented by community social work and capacity-building for local actors. Communication activities translated outcomes into policy briefs, study days, conferences, and structured feedback to public administrations, strengthening institutional uptake.

## The Open Science Dimension

### Inclusivity

Inclusivity is pursued through resident-facing ethnography, mixed focus groups, and coproduction workshops, which brings inhabitants, associations, and institutions into shared analysis and codesign. An experimental project in community social work identifies bot-

tom-up priorities and supports grassroots micro-projects, recognizing local knowledge and skills as valid evidence for action.

### Equity

Workshops ensure presence of women, youth, and vulnerable households; schedules and formats adapt to care and work constraints. Gender-focused partners and local centers (e.g., women's promotion centers) help remove participation barriers. Outputs highlight intergenerational needs, accessible public space, and affordable mobility; recommendations target more equitable governance.

### Sustainability

The project generates integrated social, environmental, economic, and institutional benefits by strengthening neighbourhood ties and resident stewardship, promoting small-scale greening, and the reuse of materials through micro-projects. It reduces economic burdens by improving connectivity and supporting local livelihoods through a more diverse spatial mix.

Slums Hammou Alila et Koulas in Rabat, 2014.  
Photo by Salma Belkebir.

# The Knowledge Valorisation Dimension

- **Urban planning value:** is generated through evidence-based recommendations for ministries, communes, and Al Omrane, complemented by participatory diagnosis methods and transferable toolkits applicable to other contexts.
- **Research value:** is achieved through the training of three PhD candidates and one postdoctoral researcher embedded within Moroccan institutions, strengthening locally grounded academic capacity.
- **Social value:** is created by reinforcing networks among residents, associations, and public actors.

## Outputs & Impacts

### Outputs

The project produces comparative site reports and socio-spatial analyses that inform targeted policy briefs prepared for MUAT, Al Omrane, and local communes. It also generates open datasets, including maps, ethno-architectural surveys, and interview guides, supporting transparency and reuse. Knowledge exchange is ensured through mid-term study days and a final conference organised with local partners, while a practical toolkit for participatory diagnosis and community micro-projects translates research findings into actionable local interventions.

Doctoral theses and articles on architectural, urbanistic, and sociological findings, among others: [«Neighbourhoods and Post Housing Territorial Ap-](#)

[propriation\(s\) in a Peri-Urban Context :The Case of the Attadamoune Neighbourhood in Ain El Aouda, Morocco».](#)

[«La fabrique de la ville pour le relogement : cas de la ville nouvelle de Tamesna».](#)

### Impacts

**Research:** Enhanced research capacity at INAU and Université Hassan II through trained PhDs and a postdoc. Transferable methods adopted by partners beyond the two sites.

**Practice:** Improved coordination between municipal services, Al Omrane, and community actors in case sites (process indicators). Grassroots initiatives implemented in one experimental project neighborhood (Sidi Bouknadel), informing municipal social approaches.



El Amal neighborhood, Tamesna new town (2024). Former slum dwellers have been resettled in apartment blocks organized around new public spaces. Photos by Geoffrey Grulois.

**An international transdisciplinary team integrates architecture, urbanism, and sociology to tackle, from different perspectives, the institutional, social and urban challenges of two resettlement areas near Rabat.**

**Knowledge exchange operates on two coordinated tracks: an academic track advancing research through PhD and postdoctoral projects on post-slum integration, housing, and social life, and a participatory track engaging citizens and stakeholders via workshops to translate findings into actionable recommendations.**



Resettlement area in Sidi Bouknadel Municipality (2024). Vacant lots appropriated by residents for drying laundry. Photos by Geoffrey Grulois.