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Cultural Rights and Social Inclusion: Reflections on the Engagement of Refugee Communities in Egyptian Museums

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, Egypt has been a place of refuge for many individuals fleeing political upheaval, including Sudanese, Syrian, Yemeni, Iraqi, and Palestinian communities. The influx of Sudanese refugees since 2023 has further increased the country's refugee population. Yet, despite their growing presence, Egyptian museums have largely overlooked the stories, heritage, and experiences of refugees in their exhibitions and programs. This paper addresses this gap by exploring how Egyptian museums could advance social inclusion of refugee communities and support their cultural rights. Grounded in human rights frameworks and informed by museum practices from both the Global North and the Global South, the study employs a qualitative approach, drawing on in-depth interviews with museum professionals from the Egyptian Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities and individuals from refugee communities. It examines perceptions of the current lack of tailored initiatives and investigates how museums can foster intercultural understanding, promote social engagement, and help reduce inequalities in refugees' participation in cultural life. The findings reveal critical barriers rooted in institutional priorities, limited resources, and broader sociopolitical dynamics that often hinder their cultural inclusion, but also highlight emerging awareness among museum professionals of the need to engage marginalized groups. The paper proposes practical strategies for Egyptian museums to move beyond their traditional agendas by developing sustainable initiatives—such as co-created exhibitions, intercultural workshops, and collaborations with refugee organizations—that amplify refugees' voices and promote shared values of diversity and inclusion.

1 | Introduction

The escalating global refugee and asylum seeker crisis demands critical examinations of the practices and approaches of those institutions responsible for their inclusivity and social integration in host nations, such as museums and cultural institutions. In the last 2 decades, the museum sector has been increasingly pushed to play a more “socially responsible” role (Janes 2009; Sandell 2002) in “improving the quality of individual lives” (Weil 1999) and countering social inequality. This has resulted in growing policies, organizational practices, and programs

shaping museums' social work and reflecting their desire to stay relevant and engaged with the communities they serve (Silverman 2010). Over time, more social tasks are expected from museums, as social institutions, to support the inclusion of a broader spectrum of a diverse society, embrace equality, and empower marginalized individuals, including refugees and immigrants (Skartveit and Goodnow 2010; Whitehead et al. 2017).

Over the past few decades, several museums have adopted the language and idea of human rights to frame their approach to social inclusion in society and achieve social justice for

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marginalized communities (Sandell 1998, 2007, 2017; Sandell and Nightingale 2012). This led to widespread and mainstream adaptations of new narratives that reflect diverse demographics, represent a wide range of lived experiences, and embrace the inclusion of marginalized minority groups (Janes 2009; Moore et al. 2022). Among those marginalized groups that are increasingly targeted for such approaches are refugees and asylum seekers, whose perspectives and stories have historically been excluded in and beyond museums. Efforts to address the social exclusion of refugees have been tackled in various ways by museums based on their principles, resources, and management (Lannes and Rhodes 2019; Linn et al. 2024). Many museums worldwide have taken steps to fulfill their social responsibilities towards refugee communities (Boersma 2022; Golding and Walklate 2019; Skartveit and Goodnow 2010). These steps include creating socially inclusive spaces that encourage diverse cultural celebrations, education, and social care (Sergi 2021). Museums have also undertaken participatory projects that directly engage refugee communities and incorporate their stories and perspectives into exhibition narratives (Boersma 2022; Henrich 2011; Linn et al. 2024). Some museums have even developed stand-alone migration museums to provide a focused platform for addressing and representing the lived experiences of refugees (Ross 2017). Furthermore, intercultural workshops have emerged as powerful tools for facilitating mutual understanding and respect among diverse groups. These workshops often feature language classes, cultural history education, and collaborative art-making activities celebrating the rich tapestry of cultures within the refugee and host communities. Such initiatives not only enhance social bonds but also contribute to social cohesion and care (Vlachou 2017; Whyte 2017).

On a national level, Egyptian museums have undergone significant transformations in their roles and working practices over the past three decades. They have shifted from tourist-oriented institutions to take on new social responsibilities that benefit the local community and address ongoing societal changes (Zakaria 2023). These shifts have been driven by the wider societal tasks placed on museums in the contemporary world. In particular, the social changes triggered by the 2011 revolution underscored the need for Egyptian museums to establish stronger connections with Egyptian citizens and the local community (Zakaria 2025). Refugees have been an integral part of Egypt's local community since the last century. Unlike many host countries, Egypt has not established refugee camps. Instead, the national government has committed to integrating refugees into Egyptian society by providing them access to essential services, residency, and employment. However, despite increased awareness and efforts to involve refugees locally, their representation in Egyptian museums remains absent. The stories, histories, lived experiences, and challenges faced by refugees and asylum seekers have yet to be addressed in Egyptian museums' programs and exhibitions. As of October 2024, the UNHCR reports approximately 800,000 registered refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt, with many unregistered refugees (UNHCR Egypt 2024a). This significant presence highlights the urgent need for Egyptian cultural institutions to incorporate refugee narratives, ensuring their inclusion and representation in national museums.

To date, no study has been conducted to assess museological practices toward the refugee community in Egypt or to explore the role of Egyptian museums in supporting their inclusion and

embracing their cultural rights. This study seeks to address that gap by examining current museum practices toward refugees in Egypt and identifying challenges that hinder their engagement with museums' collections, exhibitions, and programs. The study argues that Egyptian museums hold significant potential as public spaces to combat prejudice and foster social inclusion. It highlights the necessity of providing platforms for refugees to share their heritage, perspectives, stories, and lived experiences through museum offerings and programs. Furthermore, the study underlines the benefits of improving museums' social engagement with refugees and provides practical recommendations to ensure their equal participation and inclusion in museums.

2 | Contextualizing the Social Role of Museums for the Inclusion of Refugees

2.1 | Museums and Empowering Refugees

In the recent past, the number of refugees has never been higher than it is today. These individuals are fleeing armed conflicts, ethnic violence, and persecution and need safe havens where they can find shelter and protection (Sergi 2021). Often, they feel disconnected from their previous social networks and struggle to establish a sense of belonging in their new country (Henry 2012). Despite their differences, they share common challenges, such as displacement, isolation, and economic struggles, which bring them together as a community (Skartveit and Goodnow 2010; Whitehead et al. 2017). This raises questions about how museums can engage in the debate surrounding refugees' rights and how museums, as "social agencies" and "agents of social change," can empower vulnerable groups and refugee communities in their host countries (Boersma 2020; Golding and Walklate 2019; Sandell 1998, 2007).

Given that museums and communities exist within broader political and philosophical contexts, influenced by contested histories, politics, economics, and value systems (Golding and Walklate 2019), museums have been forced, in response to contemporary pressures, to open up to new forms of engagement that allow more inclusive practice, promote participation and diversity, and reflect on their political and social roles (Moore et al. 2022; Morse 2022). Furthermore, museums, as "contact zones" (Clifford 1997, 188, 210), have significant opportunities to serve as a bridging platform between refugees' countries of origin and their new host countries. Museums are, thereby, assume social responsibility as "third places" (Mandel 2020) and "multicultural social arenas" (Dahre 2019, 65, 76) to face current challenges and support the integration of migrants and refugees. This has formed a significant part of a broader shift in the museum sector toward social inclusivity, in which museums seek to be more relevant to communities and align with emerging trends and new challenges of contemporary society (Boersma 2022; Linn et al. 2024; Sergi 2021; Vlachou 2017).

Extensive literature supports maximizing museums' engagement in social work and promoting socially purposeful practices within museum settings to encourage the inclusion of all communities, including displaced individuals and refugees (Dodd 2015; Janes and Sandell 2019). The museum's new role, as

officially identified by ICOM in 2022 (International Council of Museums-ICOM 2022), highlights the relevance of participatory practices of museums and their potential to break down persistent hierarchies. It provides further insight into common practices and empowering migrant communities (Boersma 2022; Linn et al. 2024; Sergi 2021). As political institutions, museums have transformed into activist institutions fighting for social justice and expanded their partnerships with civil society associations to develop sustainable solutions for human rights and social justice (Sandell et al. 2010; Sandell and Dodd 2010). In response to recent changes in society's prioritization of community well-being and public health, museums now have more opportunities to support the community's health needs, impact refugees' well-being, and social care in various ways (Chatterjee and Noble 2017; Morse 2022).

2.2 | Global Initiatives Toward Refugees Engagement

Over the past few decades, museums in the Global North have made significant progress in engaging with marginalized and excluded groups to support their integration into society. Numerous empowering initiatives have been implemented to promote social integration and well-being and enhance job opportunities. These initiatives aim to help refugees comprehend the local work environment, both historical and current, and to motivate them to contribute their own experiences. A good example is the 2019 Wakefield Museum project that aimed to support integration and well-being and improve employment for Syrian refugees in the United Kingdom (UK) (World Health Organization and Bhambri 2020). The goal was to increase their comfort in visiting museums and educate them about local museums' various opportunities, including volunteer programs. The Milton Keynes Museum in the UK has also designed a special program supported by volunteers who act as "buddies" for Syrian refugee families. These volunteers help the families, especially women, integrate into the Milton Keynes lifestyle and assist them with grocery shopping and public transport tasks (World Health Organization and Bhambri 2020). While these initiatives show promise, they risk being limited to short-term impacts without robust follow-up support. This support is essential to foster long-term integration and ensure that participation remains meaningful and impactful.

In Canada, the "Ahlan program" initiative, which means "welcome" in Arabic, by the Institute for Canadian Citizenship (ICC) offered free family-friendly tours and activities to Syrian refugees arriving in Canada around 2015–2016 (The Institute for Canadian Citizenship 2017). The program collaborated with several museums and cultural institutions, such as the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, the Royal Ontario Museum, and the Maritime Museum of the Atlantic, to introduce newcomers to Canada's culture. These tours feature workshops, events, guided tours, children's activities, visits to outdoor heritage sites, and storytelling sessions, allowing newcomer families to share their stories of becoming Canadian, build relationships, and connect with the shared culture (Vlachou 2017). The program demonstrates Canada's commitment to inclusivity but

primarily focuses on introducing refugees to Canadian culture. This emphasis may have unintentionally missed opportunities to highlight and celebrate the refugees' own cultural heritage. The program could improve by incorporating refugees' traditions and histories into cultural spaces, further enhancing this inclusivity.

Museums in Berlin, Germany, have undertaken inspiring integrative projects to support refugees and immigrants in response to the refugee protection crisis in 2015. One notable initiative is the Multaka Project, meaning "Meeting Point," which was initiated in 2015 by the Museum für Islamische Kunst (Museum for Islamic Art) (Boersma 2020; Multaka 2024). The project has since expanded to include five other Berlin State Museums: Museum für Islamische Kunst, Vorderasiatisches Museum (Near East Museum), the Skulpturensammlung (Sculpture collection), Museum für Byzantinische Kunst (Museum for Byzantine Art), and Deutsches Historisches Museum (German History Museum, DHM). Its primary aim was to foster connections between refugees, immigrants, and the host society by sharing cultural histories and building bridges of understanding and integration (Gram 2022). As part of this effort, refugees, particularly those from Syria and Iraq, have been hired and trained as museum employees, providing guided tours in their native language (Multaka 2024). In a later phase, these tours have extended to include speakers of English and German, allowing a broader audience to hear these impactful stories. While the Multaka Project has made Berlin museums inclusive spaces for refugees and immigrants, its approach reveals underlying complexities. A significant portion of the guides are not officially classified as "refugees," as examined by Gram (2022), raising questions about the allocation of refugee-specific funding and the broader categorization of "newcomers." This disconnect suggests potential overgeneralization in the project's focus and highlights the need for greater clarity in its terminology and objectives.

The Museum Europäischer Kulturen—Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Stiftung Preussischer Kulturbesitz (MEK), hosted an inclusive museum initiative titled "daHEIM: Glances into Fugitive Lives" from 2016 to 2017 (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin 2024). This initiative aimed to explore the history of migration through exhibitions and presentations involving immigrants from Albania, Afghanistan, Bosnia, Iraq, Kosovo, Pakistan, and Syria (Boersma 2020). By engaging asylum seekers directly in the creation of the exhibition, the project offered a platform for their personal narratives and artistic expression, challenging stereotypes and highlighting the diverse experiences of individuals seeking refuge within the broader context of global immigration history. However, while this initiative was commendable for compensating the participants/immigrants for their role and supporting them with housing, employment, and access to further education, questions remain about the extent to which the participants' voices shaped the narratives presented. Was their involvement genuinely empowering, or were their experiences framed within predetermined institutional agendas?

Several museums globally have implemented initiatives to support refugees and immigrants by fostering inclusivity, creativity, and social integration. The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology employs refugees and immigrants from the Middle East and Africa to offer "authentic

voices” in museum galleries (Charr 2020). Art programs like the “Travelling with Art” project at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark, in partnership with the Red Cross Asylum Department, engage refugee children in creative learning, empowering them educationally and socially (Louisiana Museum of Modern Art 2021; Whyte 2017). Museums such as the National Museums of Liverpool provide English language training programs to enhance refugees’ skills and societal integration (Vlachou 2017). Participatory exhibitions like the “Mixing Room Stories from Young Refugees” at Te Papa in New Zealand empower refugee youth to share their narratives without editorial interventions, promoting ethnic and cultural diversity (Kinson and Gibson 2013). The Migration Museum in the UK collects oral histories from refugees and immigrants. It uses diverse artistic expressions such as art, films, audio, photography, and installations to highlight their unique stories and motivations, ensuring that every voice is heard and valued, enriching public understanding (Migration Museum 2023). Specific museum initiatives, like the one at the Liverpool Museum, have partnered with refugees to create exhibits showcasing their personal items. The refugees have played a vital role in the museum’s permanent and temporary exhibitions by loaning items and sharing their oral histories (National Museums Liverpool 2024; Vlachou 2017). However, many of the programs discussed tend to be short-term, often prioritizing institutional objectives over the genuine empowerment of refugee participants.

Museums in the Global South are becoming increasingly aware of their role in supporting refugee communities, emphasizing inclusion, cultural dialogue, and empowerment. This shift is often driven by contemporary trends in museology throughout the Global South and the decolonial approaches emerging within African and Latin American contexts. These approaches challenge the dominance of Western Museum models and advocate for participatory frameworks and community-based practices that truly engage and benefit local communities (Brulon Soares 2021; Brulon Soares et al. 2022). Recently, these practices have expanded to include refugee communities, supporting displaced communities in a rapidly changing global landscape.

The National Museums of Kenya (NMK) have been at the forefront of these efforts, engaging in community-based exhibitions and heritage projects that integrate the narratives of displaced groups through participatory approaches. One exemplary initiative, *Who I Am, Who We Are*, is a community-driven art project that crafts cultural narratives in a nation marked by its diverse multiethnic communities and over a million internally displaced people and refugees. This project addresses displacement and cultivates a sense of belonging (Wright 2023).

The Iziko Museums of South Africa similarly engage with themes of migration, identity, and social justice through diverse exhibitions and initiatives. One interesting example is the Displacement Exhibition, which highlights the narrative of land appropriation and displacement in Palestine (Iziko Museums of South Africa 2022). This exhibition powerfully illustrates the broader struggle for self-determination and justice faced by Palestinians, and it was prominently displayed at the Iziko Bo-Kaap Museum. Through such initiatives, the museums foster meaningful discussions and raise awareness about critical social issues.

In Brazil, the Museu da Imigração in São Paulo adopts innovative participatory methods to actively involve refugee and migrant communities in the development of its exhibitions (Delaplace 2024). This approach emphasizes inclusivity and highlights the museum’s commitment to honoring the memorial aspects of migration. By focusing on collaboration with communities of immigrant origin, the museum enhances its role as a welcoming space (Delaplace 2024). Additionally, its educational programs are designed to forge meaningful connections with migrant communities and other groups, promoting intercultural dialogue and the collective construction of knowledge. This collaborative framework not only enriches the museum’s offerings but also strengthens community ties and fosters a deeper understanding of migration experiences.

These notable initiatives undoubtedly reflect a significant shift in museological practice within the Global South, where museums are increasingly emphasizing community engagement, addressing social inequalities, and creating spaces of belonging. Such approaches align with the calls for decolonizing museum narratives and embracing the diverse experiences of displaced and marginalized communities, reinforcing their relevance as agents of social transformation. However, these efforts remain limited in scale and require greater funding and institutional support to achieve a broader and more sustainable impact.

2.3 | Critiques and Calls for Inclusive Representation of Refugees

Despite the above-mentioned examples highlighting how museums around the world have increasingly acknowledged their responsibility to support refugee communities and engage them in their programs and offerings, the presence of refugee cultural agencies remains limited. It is essential for museums to collaborate closely with refugee networks and advocacy groups to engage with their demands and deepen the exploration of their involvement. Refugee networks can play a pivotal role in promoting self-representation, empowerment, and participatory engagement in cultural projects (RISE. Refugees, Survivors and Ex-Detainees 2024). Refugees should not be considered merely passive recipients of cultural services; rather, they ought to be recognized as active contributors who shape their own narratives.

As key cultural and educational institutions, museums have the potential to facilitate refugee integration through various initiatives that serve as tools for social integration (Ziese and Gritschke 2016). However, they must shift from the traditional role of merely “educating” refugees or introducing them to the host society’s culture, to one in which refugees actively contribute to and shape the cultural landscape of their new communities. Some scholars challenge the conventional perception of refugees as passive recipients of cultural education, advocating for a dynamic redefinition of cultural participation. Mörsch (2016), for example, in her paper titled “*Refugees sind keine Zielgruppe/Refugees Are Not a Target Group*,” critiques the conventional approach of categorizing refugees as passive beneficiaries of cultural education. She emphasized the necessity for museums to view refugees as active agents of their own cultural expression rather than solely as subjects of cultural education.

This perspective is vital, as it urges museums to recognize the cultural agency of refugees, ensuring that their stories, experiences, and histories are represented according to their own definitions. Initiatives like the RIS Refugee Network (Refugee Integration Services) can effectively facilitate this transformation (Global Compact on Refugees 2024), allowing refugees to engage effectively in cultural production rather than simply consumption. This could involve refugee in exhibitions, workshops, or cultural performances that share their own personal experiences and heritages. By embracing the practical demands put forth by refugee networks, museums can evolve from being mere public spaces of “learning” and “education” into essential sites of “cultural expression” and “agency.”

The representation of conflict and displacement in museums necessitates a critical examination of the power dynamics involved in curating refugee-related exhibitions. It highlights the risks of voyeuristic or reductive portrayals that often prioritize narratives of trauma or victimhood over the complexities of refugees' lived experiences. Scholars such as Brusius (2017, 2021) and Kamash (2021) stress the importance of decolonizing museum practices and advocate for inclusive, participatory methods that actively involve displaced communities in the curatorial process. By moving beyond passive displays and fostering collaboration with refugees, museums can empower these individuals to define and shape their own narratives, ensuring more nuanced and authentic representations. This approach not only avoids victim-centered portrayals but also enriches museums by prompting a reexamination of concepts such as belonging, heritage, and social and environmental change. Refugees, as active participants in the museum community, bring unique perspectives that preserve and celebrate their histories and cultures while contributing to a deeper understanding of adaptation and resilience in their new contexts.

3 | The Study Framework

3.1 | Refugee Community in Egypt

The global challenge of refugee migration has sparked crucial debates about the political and ethical challenges and controversies surrounding human rights on an international scale. Egypt, situated in the heart of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and often contextualized within the Global South, serves as a critical hub for migrants and refugees from various nationalities. This dual contextual framing highlights Egypt's role both within the MENA region's geopolitical and cultural dynamics and the broader decolonial discourse associated with the Global South. Throughout history, Egypt has hosted millions of migrant and refugee communities who were forced to flee their countries of origin due to political reasons, religious persecution, war, and civil unrest, among others, providing them a haven (Andrade et al. 2021). With its strategic location along the Mediterranean, Egypt has long been a pivotal attraction for millions of people from MENA countries and sub-Saharan Africa. It has served as a key transit point for those seeking to cross the Mediterranean Sea to reach Southern Europe. While some refugees view Egypt as a transit country on their journey to Western nations, many ultimately choose to settle there (Norman 2017a).

Egypt has long been a melting pot of immigrants, serving as a refuge and crossroads for diverse communities throughout history (Norman 2017b, 74 ff). Greeks lived in Egypt from the Hellenistic until many were compelled to leave after the 1952 revolution (Hatzivassiliou 2021). Egypt also provided shelter to immigrants and refugees following historical events such as the Bolshevik revolution in Russia in 1917, the Armenian massacres in Turkey in the 1920s, and both World Wars (Zohry 2003). Palestinian refugees have been arriving since the 1940s (Andrade et al. 2021). Since the end of the Cold War, Egypt has experienced new forms of immigration (Norman 2017a, 2017b). Migrant groups from the Horn of Africa, particularly Sudanese refugees and migrants, have been the central immigrants to Egypt since the 1990s (Kagan 2002). The ongoing conflict in the region, including the Arab Spring, has led to intermittent increases in the number of migrants and refugees from countries such as Iraq, Libya, Syria, and Yemen coming to Egypt.

The UNHCR office in Egypt is responsible for managing all asylum-related tasks, including reception, registration, documentation, and determining refugee status, on behalf of the government. Once an individual is recognized as a refugee by the UNHCR, they receive protection from Egypt. Following registration with the UNHCR, asylum seekers or refugees must obtain a residence permit from the Egyptian authorities to legalize their stay (UNHCR Egypt 2024b). According to the 2022 report from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), there are 9,012,582 migrants and refugees living in Egypt, making up approximately 8.7% of the country's total population of 103,655,989 at this time (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2022). The recent increase in migrants in Egypt has been particularly notable since 2019, largely due to ongoing instability in neighboring countries that has forced many refugees from Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, Sudan, Iraq, and Ethiopia to seek asylum in Egypt (Andrade et al. 2021).

3.2 | Egypt's Legal and Sociopolitical Landscape Regarding Refugees

It is important to make a clear distinction first between immigrants and refugees. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), a migrant is defined as “any person who has moved or is moving across an international border or within a state away from their usual place of residence, regardless of their legal status, whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary, the reasons for the movement, or the length of their stay” (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2022). While the term “refugee” originates in the French Huguenots *réfugiés* who sought refuge in England during the 17th century, it was only during the Second World War that “the refugee” was officially recognized as a legally recognized a legal category under international law (Sergi 2021).

According to Article 1A, Paragraph 1, of the Geneva 1951 Refugee Convention together with the 1967 Protocol a refugee is clearly defined as “any person who is outside any country of such person's nationality or, in the case of a person having no nationality, is outside any country in which such person last habitually resided, and who is unable or unwilling to return to, and is unable or unwilling to avail himself or herself of the protection of, that

country because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (Boersma 2022, 16; Goodwin-Gill 2008).

Although Egypt has not enacted any laws regarding refugees and asylum seekers, it has formally ratified several crucial treaties beginning with the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, which it ratified in 1981, along with its 1967 protocol. Egypt has also ratified the Organization of African Unity's Convention, Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa (Hassan 2021; Sharafeldin 2020). These three conventions are considered the cornerstone of Egypt's policies towards refugees and asylum seekers. Before ratifying these treaties, Egypt had only signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) office in Egypt in 1954, outlining the role of UNHCR in Egypt and the Egyptian Government's responsibilities and obligations related to registration, asylum documentation, refugee status determination (RSD), and assistance to the most vulnerable (Andrade et al. 2021; UNHCR Egypt 2024b).

In 2019, a significant workshop was organized by UNHCR in partnership with the Egyptian Ministry of Justice, focusing on the legal framework for refugees, human rights laws, and the drafting of national asylum legislation (Hassan 2021; Sharafeldin 2020). This workshop demonstrated alignment with European externalization of migration policies in the Middle East and North Africa. As a result of the workshop, an asylum law regulating the rights of refugees was put into process. In June 2023, the Egyptian Cabinet of Ministers approved the “Refugee Law draft,” which proposes the establishment of a Permanent Committee for Refugee Affairs as the primary legal entity on all refugee matters. Based in Cairo, this committee will collaborate with UNHCR to provide optimal services and assistance to all refugees, gather relevant statistics and data on the number of refugees in Egypt, and report to the Prime Minister (Ahram Online 2023).

Egypt has a long history as a country of immigration and settlement. However, it has not been recognized as a migrant receiver in global migration policy discourse. This lack of recognition significantly impacts its ability to access support and assistance programs from international organizations that aim to aid the resettlement of refugees and immigrants. Academic scholars argue that since the 1980s, Egypt has been considered a country of emigration, with many of its nationals moving to Europe, North America, and other regions (Norman 2017b). The specific statistics and exact number of migrants and refugees in Egypt are uncertain, and there are also unregistered refugees in the country, making it challenging to accurately estimate the actual number of international migrants and refugees living in the country. This is due to issues related to a lack of cooperation between data collection systems, low interest and high costs, and a lack of regularly updated data (Andrade et al. 2021). Due to these factors, global organizations that assist migrants and refugees have not fully recognized the large numbers and recent increase in migration. As a result, the support programs and assistance provided by the UNHCR and other international organizations are insufficient to meet all the needs of the current number of refugees in Egypt. This has put significant pressure

on the Egyptian government, which is already dealing with overpopulation, an economic crisis, and recent additional challenges arising from the Gaza war and border issues.

While the current population of Egypt is 117,452,507 as of January 1, 2025, according to the latest data from the United Nations, as elaborated by Worldometer (Worldometer 2025); the Egyptian government has declared that the country hosts around 9 million migrants and refugees, as stated by the prime minister at the World Economic Forum held in Riyadh on the 28th of April, 2024 (State Information Service 2024) (see Table 1). According to a survey by IOM, which gathered data from various sources, including embassies, migrant communities, service providers, and academia, the estimated number of migrants in Egypt has reached 9,021,749. The largest communities are Sudanese, Libyan, Yemeni, and Syrian, most of which reside in Cairo, Giza, Alexandria, and Damietta governorates (United Nations Egypt 2022).

Since the outbreak of conflict in April 2023, more than 1.2 million Sudanese nationals have arrived in Egypt, making them the largest group of newcomers. Many have sought support from the UNHCR, registering as refugees or asylum seekers. As of November 17, 2024, the UNHCR has registered approximately 829,697 refugees and asylum seekers from 59 nationalities in Egypt, with around 40% being children (UNHCR The UN Refugee Agency 2024; UNICEF Egypt 2024). Egypt continues to be a destination country for Syrian refugees and asylum seekers, with an estimated population of more than 1.5 million, approximately 159,000 of whom were registered with the UNHCR as of October 2024 (UNHCR Egypt 2024a). However, the actual figures are likely higher, as indicated earlier. Despite this, Egypt's commitment to humanitarian efforts remains evident, hosting the highest number of registered refugees and asylum seekers in its history. This surge is primarily attributed to the ongoing crises in Sudan and Syria (Hassan 2021; UNHCR Egypt 2024b). Additionally, large numbers of people escaping conflict and political instability in countries such as East Africa, the Horn of Africa, Iraq, and Yemen have sought refuge in Egypt. Among these refugees are individuals from South Sudan, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Yemen, Somalia, Iraq, and over 54 other nationalities registered with UNHCR in Egypt (UNHCR Egypt 2024a). As a result, Egypt is one of the countries hosting the highest number of refugees globally. Moreover, the ongoing escalation of events in Gaza has raised concerns about the potential influx of refugees from Palestine. Egypt is carefully preparing for such contingencies while attempting to avoid actions that might lead to a mass of refugees from Gaza into its border (Wintour 2024).

In recent years, Egypt's economic conditions have significantly deteriorated, creating vulnerabilities for both refugees and the host community. Despite these obstacles, refugees have managed to integrate into the informal economy and receive support from international and domestic organizations (Hassan 2021; Norman 2017a; Sharafeldin 2020). However, they continue to encounter numerous barriers, including limited job opportunities and language difficulties—particularly for non-Arabic speakers—and challenges in adapting to new cultural values and norms that may conflict with those of their home countries (Hassan 2021; Henry 2012;

TABLE 1 | Refugees, migrants, and population figures in Egypt by July 2024.

By July 2024	The numbers of refugees in Egypt										Resource						
Migrants and refugees' numbers	9 million										Stated by the prime minister in April 2024 (State Information Service 2024)						
Egyptian population	117,452,507										Based on Worldometer elaboration of the latest United Nations data (Worldometer 2025)						
Total number of registered refugees and asylum seekers	672,000										UNHCR by June 2024 (UNHCR Egypt 2024)						
Number of their nationalities	62										UNHCR by June 2024 (UNHCR Egypt 2024a)						
Top countries of origin of refugees and asylum seekers	Sudanese	388,785	Syrians	156,445	South Sudanese	43,055	Eritreans	36,805	Ethiopians	18,423	Yemenis	8665	Somalis	8058	Iraqis	5678	UNHCR by June 2024 (UNHCR Egypt 2024a)

International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2022). Access to formal education remains critical for many refugees, enabling them to improve their skills and pursue better opportunities in the future (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2022; United Nations Egypt 2022). Additionally, discrimination, racism, changes in gender roles, and pre- and postmigration trauma can negatively impact cultural adjustment. Losing one's culture and mother language upon leaving one's home country can disrupt cultural identity (Henry 2012). Furthermore, many refugees rely on humanitarian aid for essential needs like food, medicine, and mental health support. These circumstances underscore the urgent challenges faced by refugees and host community members in Egypt (International Organization for Migration (IOM) 2022; Norman 2017a; Sharafeldin 2020).

Egypt is notable for its hospitality as a host state, integrating refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers into its national systems by providing them with access to residency, employment, and other services on par with its citizens. Unlike many other countries, Egypt has refrained from establishing camps, except for the temporary Saloum Camp on the Libyan border in 2011 (Norman 2017a). While the government's hospitable stance has likely contributed to the recent influx of individuals seeking refuge, it also raises concerns about the social and political implications of this inward migration trend (Norman 2016). Amid economic difficulties, job scarcity, and increasing living costs, Egypt faces additional challenges stemming from the lack of accurate data on the number of refugees, with official figures significantly underestimating actual numbers. Despite these challenges, the Egyptian population has historically demonstrated hospitality and solidarity, hosting refugees within local communities. However, recent conditions have sparked isolated social media campaigns by nationalist groups expressing anti-refugee sentiments (Arabi Facts Hub 2022), alongside television programs advocating stricter registration processes, the deportation of individuals not legally entitled to stay—particularly those posing security threats or with rejected asylum applications—and the implementation of more restrictive asylum laws as measures to address the economic crisis.

3.3 | Museums Initiatives in Supporting Refugees

3.3.1 | Overview on the Egyptian Museology and Community Practices

Egyptian museums have historically evolved along distinct trajectories shaped by their unique origins and development. Established during the colonial era in the latter half of the nineteenth century, they were primarily founded and developed by Europeans (Reid 2019). Initially, their primary function was to serve as repositories for artifacts recovered during excavations, with displays geared mainly toward foreign tourists, neglecting the needs and interests of local communities (Khalil 2015). In the wake of nationalist movements, museums emerged as instruments of resistance and responses to colonialism, fostering national identity—particularly through establishing state-national museums controlled and managed by Egyptians (Mahmoud 2012; Zakaria 2025). Since the last quarter of the twentieth century, Egypt has witnessed a

notable expansion in the number of museums, driven by a regionalization movement to create regional and local museums across the country's governorates (Doyon 2008; Zakaria 2023). This initiative sought to instill a sense of identity within local communities and educate them about their history (Hawass 2005).

Over time, Egyptian museums have evolved from being primarily focused on tourism to becoming spaces that engage a broader spectrum of the local population (Zakaria 2024). While most of these museums still operate under centralized governmental administration, a limited number are under non-governmental, private management, or shared governance frameworks. The major national museums of Egypt, commonly known as antiquities museums, remain under the auspices of the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA), which serves as the focal point of this study.

Over the past three decades, Egyptian museums have undergone significant changes in their purpose and societal roles. Traditionally focused on attracting international tourism by presenting Egypt's ancient heritage to a global audience, they have now transformed into institutions that are connected to the local communities of Egypt; recent years have witnessed a shift toward greater engagement with local communities. This transformation has been particularly pronounced in the wake of the social and political changes following the 2011 revolution, which promoted museums to embrace new responsibilities in meeting the needs of Egypt's diverse and evolving society (Zakaria 2025). To meet these new challenges, Egyptian museums have implemented a range of community-based initiatives, including educational programs, social events, workshops, exhibitions, and other services designed to serve various groups, such as children, school students, adults, individuals with disabilities, women, and vulnerable groups. While these initiatives bear some conceptual resemblance to the community-oriented practices characteristic of African and global south museology, they remain uniquely shaped by Egypt's distinct cultural context and historical legacy.

3.3.2 | Refugee Communities

Refugees have been an integral part of Egypt's local communities for over a century. However, despite growing awareness and national efforts, only a limited number of museum projects specifically address their needs. This notable gap in Egyptian museums reflects a degree of exclusion and underscores the urgent need for more inclusive initiatives to facilitate their inclusion in museums and provide them access to museum programs and offerings.

The first concrete activity targeting refugees within Egyptian museums dates back to a workshop held in 2016, organized by Megawra-Built Environment Collective, an NGO, in partnership with UNESCO Cairo, the Egyptian Ministries of Tourism and Antiquities and Culture, UNHCR, and Terre des Hommes. This initiative was developed in accordance with the Sustainable Development Goals outlined in the UN's 2030 Agenda, aiming to strengthen the relationship between Culture and Sustainable Development (Megawra—Built Environment 2016). Activities include museum visits, interactive programs, and workshops held within museum

premises. The cultural workshop took place in two museums in Egypt—the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC) and the Gayer Anderson Museum. The primary goal was to foster meaningful connections between refugees and asylum seekers and their host communities. Participants teamed up with museum professionals, such as curators and educators, to develop interactive activities that drew inspiration from the museums' artifacts. The first author was among the museum staff involved in this workshop. These activities spanned a range of mediums, including visual arts, storytelling, and music. The program was carefully crafted and tested with input from 40 to 50 children and youth representing both refugee and local communities (Figure 1a,b). It aims to equip participants with tools to combat socioeconomic vulnerability while also creating a safe space for everyone involved and promoting intercultural understanding and respect. Through engaging with museum collections, the program has successfully fostered creativity and dialogue around diversity and contributed to strengthening community resilience and social welfare for refugees' youth and children (Megawra—Built Environment 2016).

The Child Museum, affiliated with the NGO-Association of Heliopolis and also known as the Children's Center for Civilization and Creativity, has introduced activities aimed at fostering the inclusion of Sudanese refugee children aged 6 and 12 into society. These activities, including storytelling, hands-on learning, narration, and para-curricular activities, provide the children with engaging educational experiences while raising awareness of their intangible heritage. This initiative aligns with the UNESCO Conventions for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003) and the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), supporting the preservation of children's cultural identities (UNESCO 2019, 2024a, 2024b).

As a part of the UNHCR program, the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization marked World Refugee Day 2022 by welcoming 50 young refugees from Syria, Yemen, Iraq, and Sudan. The program included a guided tour of the museum's extensive collection, providing participants with an opportunity to connect to Egypt's rich cultural heritage (Egypt Today 2022).

In 2023, the second author organized a workshop titled "Heritage & Environment: Protect What Matters and Bring Us Together" with the support of the Child Museum. This workshop aimed to promote social accessibility for refugee children while fostering cultural exchange, education, and community engagement. It brought together 20 children aged 8–15, including Egyptian participants and refugee children from Sudan, Yemen, and Syria (Alders 2023). Activities encouraged children to explore and appreciate diverse heritage, including Egyptian, Yemeni, Sudanese, and Syrian cultures, fostering a sense of cultural identity and to promoting mutual understanding. The workshop also invited the children's mothers to participate in cultural dialogue, where they shared insights on preserving intangible heritage and maintaining cultural identity from a distance. The workshop featured hands-on activities, ecological programs at the Science Center of the Child Museum, and multimedia experiences designed to encourage learning and cultural exchange (Alders 2023) (Figure 2a,b).



FIGURE 1 | (a, b) Syrian and Egyptian children made a portable sundial as part of sundial activities, accompanied by a discussion on the current Gregorian and Coptic calendars. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cun.70002)]

The efforts mentioned above highlight the potential of Egyptian museums to build connections between refugees and Egyptian society, support their inclusion in museum programs, and encourage the sharing of their cultural histories. However, these initiatives are still modest and mostly isolated. While commendable, they reveal significant systemic gaps in museum practices in Egypt, especially regarding the emerging social approaches

necessary to foster inclusion for diverse populations and vulnerable groups.

It is essential to distinguish between the terms “inclusion” and “integration” as they carry distinct connotations, particularly regarding refugees and marginalized communities. Inclusion in museums programs highlights equitable access, representation,



FIGURE 2 | (a, b) Workshop activities for Egyptian and refugee children at the child museum. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com)]

participation, and respect for diversity. Initiatives such as those led by Megawra-Built Environment Collective and the Child Museum have made notable progress in promoting inclusion by creating environments where refugees' cultural rights and narratives are acknowledged and valued. However, these efforts are somewhat limited in scale and impact; they often fall short of achieving integration, which suggests assimilation, social cohesion, and mutual adaptation between the refugees/migrants

and the host society—a concept further explored through global examples in Section 2.

4 | Methodology and Research Instruments

The present study investigates how Egyptian museums can engage refugee communities in their programs and activities,

embracing their cultural rights. It examines existing gaps in current museum practices regarding refugees, identifies the challenges that impede their engagement with museum offerings, and explores the Egyptian museums' potential to foster inclusion, establish cultural connections, and incorporate refugees' life experiences and stories into museum exhibitions and programs. This approach aligns with prevailing political and public discourses that support the empowerment and integration of refugees into Egyptian society. The study also argues the necessity of providing platforms within museums for refugees to share their heritage, perspectives, narratives, and life experiences, thereby enriching museum offerings while expanding their societal responsibilities to address the exclusionary practices.

This study employed a qualitative approach to examine the role of Egyptian museums in realizing refugees' cultural rights. It investigates the perspectives of museum professionals from the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) on promoting social inclusion and nurturing intercultural understanding among refugee communities, while also exploring refugees' concerns and expectations regarding the services and initiatives museums can offer to facilitate their inclusion. A qualitative approach was selected due to the limited availability of data and studies on Egyptian museums' practices toward refugee communities and the lack of in-depth studies on how Egyptian museums contribute to the inclusion and advocacy of refugee rights within the context of the current political and public discourses. In-depth interviews were conducted with a purposive sample of museum professionals and refugee individuals (Guetterman 2015). The qualitative data evaluation was designed to answer the following research questions guiding the study:

1. How can the Egyptian museums contribute to supporting refugee communities' social integration and reducing inequalities in their participation in the cultural life of the community?
2. How can museum exhibitions and programs foster social engagement with refugees, promote intercultural understanding, and contribute to realizing their cultural rights?

4.1 | Participants

The study interviewed twenty-five participants from museums affiliated with the MoTA and individuals from refugee communities. Thirteen participants were purposely selected from Egypt's national museums. They are museum professionals employed in different departments of Egyptian museums, including curatorial departments, educational departments, and museums management. They possess between 6 and 20 years of experience in the museum sector and represent a diverse range of expertise. Their diverse knowledge and experience provide valuable insights into current practices, challenges, and opportunities. They were selected from diverse geographical locations to ensure a range of comprehensive perspectives. These professionals were chosen from ten of Egypt's national museums, including the Egyptian Museum in Cairo (EMC), the Islamic Art Museum, the Coptic Museum, the Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC), the Gayer Anderson

Museum, Alexandria National Museum, the Sohag National Museum, the Akhenaton Museum, and Aswan Museum.

The museums chosen for the study are the national museums of Egypt, which have a significant impact not only within the nation but also internationally. These museums are all affiliated with the MoTA, which plays a crucial role in coordinating government museums and developing strategies and policies to enhance their roles and effectiveness in serving Egyptian society. Moreover, the EMC, the GEM, the NMEC, the Coptic Museum, and the Museum of Islamic Art are among Egypt's most influential and frequently visited museums. The study also considered examples of regional museums to capture their diverse views and impressions of the subject topic.

Additionally, the study involved twelve participants from refugee communities in Sudan (three participants), Yemen (two participants), Iraq (two participants), and Syria (five participants) who are currently residing in Egypt. Their ages range from 35 to 60. They have been in Egypt for varying lengths of time, ranging from one year to 19 years. Most of them have completed the registration process with UNHCR. They have different durations of officially being recognized as refugees: The Sudanese were just registered two months ago, the Yemeni registered eight years ago, the Iraqi refugees since 2006, and the Syrian refugees since 2013. The interview profile is presented in Tables 2 and 3.

4.2 | Procedures

The study began with a comprehensive review of literature to analyze the evolving roles of museums as social agencies advocating for and empowering refugees' rights. It also investigated global museum practices and programs aimed at embracing refugees and fostering their inclusion in host countries. This was followed by an analysis of refugee communities in Egypt and the efforts of Egyptian museums to support refugees and strengthen their inclusion in programs. Semi-structured interviews were then conducted using a qualitative method to explore how Egyptian museums can promote social engagement with refugees, support their cultural rights, and facilitate their inclusion in cultural life (Creswell and Guetterman 2019).

The interviews were conducted to gather insights from both museum professionals and refugee individuals regarding the challenges faced by refugee communities in Egypt when accessing museums (Kvale 1996). The aim was to identify ways to address these challenges, support refugees' cultural rights, and facilitate their inclusion into Egyptian museums. Additionally, the interviews sought to explore strategies for Egyptian museums to develop initiatives and programs that engage refugees and highlight their heritage. The study also delved into the interest of refugee communities in participating in museum programs and collaborative projects, as well as their expectations of Egyptian museums in supporting their societal inclusion.

The interview questions were thoughtfully designed to align with the study's literature review and research objectives (Cohen et al. 2007; Creswell and Guetterman 2019). The questions were tailored to participants' backgrounds, with 13 questions for museum professionals and 12 for refugee individuals. Prior to the

TABLE 2 | Interview profile and question guide for museum professionals.

	MoTA's museums	No. of Participants	Experience of working with refugees	Interviews Guide	
1	Egyptian Museum in Cairo (EMC)	2	Yes	1. Which museum and department are you affiliated with?	
2	Islamic Art Museum	1	No	2. How long have you been working as a museum professional?	
3	Coptic Museum	1	No	3. Have you had the opportunity to work with refugees in a museum program? If so, what kind of programs, who responsible for designing these programs and what were the positive and negative aspects of this experience? If not, what challenges have prevented you from doing so?	
4	Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM)	2	No	4. What are the challenges that refugees in Egypt encounter when attempting to access and interact with museum exhibits at the Egyptian Museums? How can these challenges be addressed and improved?	
5	National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC)	2	Yes	5. From your perspective, how can museum collections and exhibitions promote social engagement with refugees, foster intercultural understanding, and contribute to realizing refugees' cultural rights?	
6	Gayer Anderson Museum	1	No	6. Do you think showcasing refugee stories in Egyptian museums could serve as a source of their empowerment? If yes, in what ways?	
7	Alexandria National Museum	1	No	7. How does interaction with museum's collections, exhibitions, programs foster social engagement with refugees, promote intercultural understanding, and contribute to realizing their cultural rights?	
8	Sohag National Museum	1	No	8. What initiatives can museums use to improve refugee access to their collections, exhibitions, and programs?	
9	Akhenaton Museum	1	No	9. What resources and support are necessary to effectively put these initiatives into practice?	
10	Aswan Museum	1	No	10. Can the recent organizational changes in the museums sector and the state's policy towards inclusion effectively support these initiatives? If they can, how?	
				11. How can museums collaborate with community organizations, NGOs, and refugee-support networks to effectively address the needs of refugees from your perspective?	
				12. What strategies can museums adopt to develop initiatives or programs meaningfully involve refugees and support their integration in society?	
				13. Is there anything else you would like to add?	

TABLE 3 | Interview profile and question guide for refugee participants.

Country	No. of Participants	Arrival date	Registration date as refugees	Museum Experience	Interview Guide
Syria	5	2012–2013	2013 Two of them are not registered refugee	Three participants visited one; two visited multiple time.	1. Where are you from? 2. How old are you? For how long have you been in Egypt? 3. Have you completed the registration process as a refugee with UNHCR? If you're comfortable sharing, how long have you been officially recognized as a refugee?
Sudan	3	2021–2023	2024 One of them is not registered as a refugee	No visits reported	4. Have you had the opportunity to visit any museums in your home country or abroad before your trip to Egypt?
Iraq	2	2005	2006	Once	5. While in Egypt, have you visited any museums? If so, please share your impressions and expectations, that is, which museum, how many times, and what barriers or obstacles you face during the museum visit. If not, what are your reasons, from your perspective, for not visiting a museum yet?
Yemen	2	2016	2017	Twice	6. Have you participated in any museum programs or events aimed explicitly at refugees or immigrants in Egypt? If so, what was your experience, and how could the experience be enhanced for maximum benefit? 7. Are you interested in participating in museum programs and events related to your heritage and country? If so, would you be open to sharing your experiences and personal history? 8. Would you be interested in participating in collaborative projects with museums to curate exhibitions highlighting your culture and heritage? If so, would you be willing to contribute personal items representing your unique identity? 9. Which museum activities are you most interested in? Please select from the following options and feel free to suggest other program ideas as well: storytelling, arts and crafts workshops, guided tours, participatory projects, temporary exhibitions, or language courses. 10. What responsibilities should Egyptian museums have towards refugee communities? 11. What positive steps have you captured within Egyptian museums that could contribute to the inclusion and integration of refugees into Egyptian society? 12. Is there anything else you would like to add?

interviews, informed consent was obtained from all participants. The interviews, each lasting 30–45 min on average, were recorded and subsequently transcribed for analysis.

4.3 | Data Analysis

The interviews were conducted in Arabic using the Zoom platform, as all participants, including museum professionals and members of refugee communities, were Arabic speakers. Open-ended questions were used to capture comprehensive insights into the participants' perspectives and experiences. This approach aimed to elicit diverse responses and encourage detailed, personalized answers from the respondents (Kvale 1996). The conversations were carefully recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated to facilitate analysis. The analysis process involved systematically organizing, sorting, and categorizing the data according to themes that emerged during the study. This thematic approach ensured alignment with the research questions, study scope, and objectives. The interview questions used during the interviews can be found in the accompanying Tables 2 and 3.

5 | Results and Findings

The study's results revealed that refugee communities are largely overlooked in museum programs and excluded from community outreach initiatives. While museums have made strides in addressing broader societal needs, their efforts to engage and integrate refugee communities have been limited and insufficient. However, the study also highlights a growing awareness among museum professionals of the importance of expanding their roles to include refugees within museum settings and support their integration into museums' offerings. This sentiment was reflected in many responses from museum professional, such as: *"We have many thoughtful ideas that can be developed into concert programs to support refugee communities, but unfortunately, they are beyond the scope of our work."* Another museum professional stated, *"The museum sector has not yet developed any special programs for refugee individuals, nor have they integrated their stories into museum exhibitions."* Moreover, museum professionals expressed strong willingness to support refugees through tailored programs. However, they reported that institutional structures, the museum sector's predetermined agenda, and other administrative requirements present significant barriers, suggesting that museum leadership neither adequately prioritizes nor actively supports such initiatives.

Participants' responses have been analyzed and organized into specific categories, providing a framework for addressing these gaps and exploring strategies for improvement.

5.1 | The Refugees' Reflections on Egyptian Museums

The refugee participants have all had the opportunity to visit museums in Egypt multiple times, with a special mention of the Egyptian Museum of Cairo (EMC). However, newly arrived Sudanese refugees had not yet had the chance to visit the EMC. The participants were deeply impressed by the wealth of Egyptian

civilization. They reported feeling welcome during their visits and did not face difficulties understanding the museum exhibitions.

Despite these positive experiences, refugee participants highlighted the scarcity of museum programs and workshops tailored to their needs, as outlined in the study's framework. The few activities they attended aligned primarily with those mentioned in the study's theoretical framework (see above Section 3.3.2). For instance, three Syrian participants in the 2023 workshop held at the Child Museum conveyed their positive experiences. They stated that the workshops and related activities facilitated cultural exchange and provided them with a platform for self-reflection. One participant shared, *"We had such a great time! We really felt a strong connection to the culture and people of the Egypt, and our kids started learning about other cultures, too. We really hope to have a similar experience, like this again, for kids or even us adults."*

5.2 | Impressions and Expectations of Museums: The Refugees' Perspective

Refugee participants highlighted the critical role of social and cultural institutions, including museums, in offering them essential care and support. One Iraqi refugee stated, *"Museums are responsible for sharing accurate information and cultural knowledge to raise people's awareness of new societies, their situations, and their histories."* Refugees require immense compassion and attention. They acknowledged that participation in museum activities and programs can help alleviate the challenges they face and smooth their transition into their new home country. Another participant expressed, *"Engaging in museum activities will help us feel more at home in our new country. It will also help us feel connected to and part of the new culture."*

Participants highlighted the importance of museums in introducing refugees to the host country's civilization and culture. Such programs foster a sense of inclusion, appreciation, and respect for their new environment, demonstrating the host country's commitment to embracing and accommodating refugees. A Syrian refugee remarked, *"Building strong cultural connections with the host community is very important as it fosters a sense of togetherness and comfort between existing residents and newcomers, particularly refugees who may feel nervous at first. This support helps them settle into the new country and adjust more easily."*

The participants stressed the need for museums in Egypt to increase awareness about Egyptian culture and its connection with the culture of refugee countries. This approach can benefit both refugees and local communities, as highlighted by many of the participants, including a Yemen refugee, *"We are looking for activities to help us settle into our new country and feel like a part of the host country's culture. It's important for us to embrace the wonderful things about our new home, and for the host country to show an interest in getting to know us."*

Refugees also expressed a desire for more inclusive museum programs. They suggested that Egyptian museums organize events and extend invitations for participation to promote mutual understanding and integration. As one participant suggested: *"Egyptian museums can play a crucial role in supporting us by*

providing a space for interaction with museum collections, exhibitions, programs, and the local community. Events that bring us together with Egyptian locals can help promote mutual understanding and integration by introducing refugees to the local community and helping them form new friendships.”

Participants proposed tailored guided tours for refugees visiting Egyptian museums. These guided tours would deepen their understanding of Egyptian history and its connections with their own cultural heritage. One participant commented, “This knowledge will improve mutual understanding and interactions between us and the local community.” Another has stated, “Providing guided tours can enhance our understanding of Egyptian culture and heritage and can help share this knowledge with our friends.” Other participants suggested that refugees be recruited by the museum as guides or facilitators to lead guided tours or facilitate the workshops; as one participant explained, “This would help us better comprehend and convey information while also improving our skills.”

Refugees also highlighted the importance of museums providing activities for children, incorporating cultural diversity into their programs, and addressing psychological needs. A participant mentioned, “I need fun and social activities for my children and me... I need to meet new people and feel welcomed... The museum activities should consider cultural differences and combine children from different backgrounds in activities together.” Others expressed their desperate need for psychological support, as echoed by one: “We need social events and programs to offer psychological support to help us heal from the trauma we have experienced.”

A significant majority (80%) of refugee participants expressed a strong interest in museum programs and events associated with their heritage and home countries. Many expressed willingness to share their personal stories and participate in exhibitions showcasing their experiences and culture. Some have indicated that they would consider attending such events if organized by the state, their country's embassies, or the UNHCR. Some even offered personal items to reflect their distinct identities to be used in collaborative projects with museums. A Syrian participant recounted positive experiences with similar activities with refugee-led organizations.

However, not all participants shared this perspective. An Iraq participant, for instance, expressed reluctance to engage in any activities related to his past, heritage, or memories in his home country. He explained, “When we left the country, I left everything behind—my clothes, personal items, and heritage. As a Kurd, our traditional dress is well-known, but I chose not to bring any. I left all my memories there as well. I had to let go of everything during a challenging time. When I arrived in Egypt, I focused on starting anew. I have no interest in holding on to anything from the past.”

5.3 | Challenges and Barriers

The study identified several challenges and barriers impeding the inclusion of refugees in Egyptian museums programs and offerings. These challenges, derived from feedback from refugee

participants and museum professionals, are categorized into financial constraints, institutional and organizational barriers, limitations in marketing and museum engagement, among other barriers elaborated in the following:

5.3.1 | Financial Constraints

The largest group of refugees often struggles to access cultural institutions and visit museums due to financial constraints. Admission fees, transportation, and other expenses often make museum visits unaffordable. One refugee expressed, “We are a family of five looking forward to visiting museums. Sadly, we can't afford to buy tickets for everyone, let alone cover other related expenses.” Furthermore, some refugees voiced frustration with museums like the National Museum of Egyptian Civilization (NMEC) and Grand Egyptian Museum (GEM), which classify them as foreign tourists and thus impose higher admission fees. A Syrian refugee shared, “Refugees are treated as tourists, making it difficult for us to visit museums regularly. We would love to visit museums, but the high prices prevent us from enjoying what these institutions offer.”

Considerable evidence from museum professionals indicates they have very limited financial resources to implement educational programs or activities for the public in general. A lack of a dedicated budget for museum programs hinders their ability to create sustainable programs tailored for refugees. One commented, “Providing an inclusive program that embraces refugees without a reasonable budget is challenging.”

Most museum professionals have indicated that they often seek assistance from schools, NGOs, and international cultural institutions to procure the essential materials and tools required to successfully implement their programs. As a result, they emphasize the importance of support from refugees' advocacy institutions. One museum professional highlighted, “The organizations that support refugees should also consider assisting museums in their initiatives since our museums face financial struggles. While arranging individual programs for refugees is feasible, developing a comprehensive agenda will require extra support and budget.”

5.3.2 | Institutional Barriers

Institutional challenges within museums contribute significantly to the limited programs for refugees. Museum professionals have highlighted some institutional barriers that hinder their ability to work with refugees within their institutions, resulting in a shortage of delivered programs targeting refugees. Three museum participants in the study have already contributed to the above-described museum initiatives for refugees. One museum professional shared, “I have contributed to only one workshop designed for refugees; as far as I know, there are no other programs the museum sector has developed to embrace refugees.” Another museum professional commented, “Some refugees attend regular museum events, but those events are neither targeted nor tailored to their needs.” This insight underscores the importance of creating more inclusive and targeted initiatives to serve refugees better within the museum context.

Museum programs are part of a centralized agenda, adhering to a predetermined plan set by the museum sector for all museums. This predetermined plan lacks any vision to embrace refugees in museum programs, leaving little room for flexibility or the inclusion of refugee-specific initiatives. A Museum professional reported, “We focus on topics and themes related to special national or global occasions, such as International Women’s Day, Mother’s Day, and National Festivals. Our current agenda, submitted from the museum sector, only focuses on those topics and does not include themes related to refugees.”

Some participants suggested that this lack of focus on refugee topics might align with broader government policies. One participant observed, “I haven’t seen any indication of the Egyptian museums’ interest in this topic... Considering that Syrians have been in Egypt since 2013, it’s concerning that Egyptian museums haven’t addressed this issue. This lack of attention may be part of the government’s policy of not addressing the refugee situation.”

Additionally, concerns about the feasibility and outcomes of refugee-specific programs, along with fears of potential failure, discourage museum professionals from pursuing these initiatives. Some participants shared their perspectives on the obstacles that contribute to the lack of refugee programs. They believe there is a fear of uncertainty regarding the success and practicality of these initiatives, which further complicates efforts to implement them.

5.3.3 | Organizational Constraints

Security concerns and bureaucratic hurdles present significant obstacles to developing refugee-focused museum programs. Museum professionals attribute the absence of specialized museum programs supporting refugees’ lives and culture to security concerns as a primary obstacle. They have expressed reservations about the lengthy administrative procedures requiring multiple approvals and obtaining permission from the museum sector and other authorities to organize programs or events for refugees. One museum professional highlighted the challenges faced in completing extensive administrative paperwork and obtaining approvals to initiate programs targeting refugees, stating, “When I participated in a museum initiative targeting refugees, I faced many challenges in completing a long list of administrative paperwork and obtaining approvals to start the programs. This resulted in a delay, partly because we needed approval from security agencies, which took a lot of time and effort.” MoTA’s regulations only allow direct arrangements with nongovernmental agencies or foreign individuals if they obtain secure approval from the state-concerned authorities.

Participants, including museum professionals and refugees, expressed concerns about the lack of coordination and collaboration between museums and refugee-support organizations at national and international levels. One of the museum professionals emphasized, “Such collaboration with refugee organizations can greatly enhance our understanding of the needs of refugee communities... this understanding, in turn, can lead to the development of more effective support programs in partnership with museums.”

5.3.4 | Marketing Limitations

Many refugees and museum professionals noted a lack of awareness about existing museum programs. Refugees expressed difficulty accessing information about museum activities, particularly those designed for specific audiences. A Syrian refugee highlighted that they were not well-informed about the museum’s offerings and Egypt’s attractions, including its antiquities and museums, upon their arrival in the country, stating, “When we first got to Egypt, we didn’t really know much about the amazing things there were to see in the country. This included the historical sites, museums, and all the cool tours and services designed for visitors like us to learn all about Egypt’s history.” Refugee participants stressed the importance of having resources that could guide them to different museums across the country, provide necessary information about available services, and offer guided tours tailored for them to learn about the country’s history. They emphasized the responsibility of museums to engage with refugee communities and improve their promotional and marketing efforts, as many refugees are unaware of the services and programs museums offer. As one participant of the Yemen refugee expressed, “Unfortunately, we are not informed about the programs and events offered by Egyptian museums. We are unsure if they have specific programs tailored for us... Even though we follow some museum Facebook pages, we often miss out on museum activities.” This underscores the significance of marketing in promoting museum initiatives within local communities.

Museum professionals acknowledged this shortcoming, emphasizing the need for targeted marketing strategies to reach refugee communities. One museum professional mentioned, “The refugee community is not aware of the organized programs in museums that might suit and benefit them.” Another emphasized the need for improved marketing of museum services as well as increased logistical and financial support from the state for museums, “I think it’s important for museums to receive more support from the state, both logistically and financially. Additionally, there should be more marketing and promotion of the various services and offerings available at museums in general.”

5.3.5 | Personal and Professional Barriers

Considerable evidence in the response of museum professionals indicated that they have issues with feeling self-efficacy when running programs or workshops centered on refugees’ experiences without the necessary training. This self-doubt largely stems from a lack of training programs and experience working with refugee populations. One museum professional stated, “Museum staff is not well-equipped to assist refugees. Specific qualifications and training are needed to address the unique psychological, social, and economic factors that refugees face.” Many museums professional admitted feeling inadequately prepared to serve the refugee community.

One participant said, “Honestly, I could say that museum curators or educators, in general, do not have the sufficient abilities and skills to deal with refugees because they have not received training.” Another commented, “While we recently received specific training to support people with disabilities, there’s been

no similar training to handle the trauma experienced by refugees in our museum program.” The current lack of specialized professional development programs hinders museum staff in their efforts to foster inclusive and empathetic environments for refugees. This situation underscores the importance of implementing capacity-building initiatives in this crucial area.

5.3.6 | Psychological Barriers

The Mental health challenges, housing instability, unemployment, and economic struggles faced by refugees significantly affect their engagement with museums and cultural pursuits. These factors contribute to a sense of instability that hinders their ability to integrate into new communities or prioritize cultural experiences. One museum professional expressed this concern, stating: “Visiting museums is a special experience that often comes with a sense of security and stability. It’s important to remember that refugees are not just tourists; they are in the process of adjusting to life in a new country and embracing a new community.” Another museum professional noted that refugees may develop a stronger interest in museums as they begin to settle and adjust, “I think that refugees, especially when they first arrive in a new country, might not immediately think about visiting museums or be interested in what they have to offer. However, as they start to adapt and settle in, such as the Syrian and Yemeni communities in Egypt, they become more interested in social and cultural activities. They want to help their children adjust and give them access to educational, cultural, and entertainment programs.” These comments underscore the importance of addressing the psychological barriers refugees face and fostering a supportive environment that encourages participation in cultural experiences.

5.3.7 | Lack of Awareness of Museum Culture

The study findings highlight a significant obstacle for refugees and immigrants in the local Egyptian community, which is a lack of awareness about museums and their cultural value. Many Egyptian locals still perceive museums as primarily intended for tourists, resulting in low visitation rates and limited engagement. One museum professional observed, “The Egyptian people encounter difficulties in visiting and connecting with museums because there isn’t enough awareness about how meaningful museums are in everyday life.” Another commented, “When refugees are welcomed into a new community where there isn’t a strong tradition of visiting museums, it can be difficult for them to see the value in experiencing museums.”

Refugees from countries with strong museum traditions may be more inclined to engage with museum offerings. Still, those from communities without such traditions may struggle to understand the significance of museums in their new context. This highlights the need for outreach programs that promote museums as accessible and meaningful cultural spaces for all.

5.3.8 | Limitations in Museums Engagement

Although refugee participants reported no significant challenges comprehending the museums content or feeling excluded

during visits, as some had tour guides or prior knowledge of Egyptian history, museum professionals hold contrasting perspectives. They have voiced concerns about barriers to meaningful engagement. They emphasized that cultural disparities and unfamiliarity with Egyptian history could hinder refugees from fully engaging with and appreciating museum exhibits. One museum professional stated, “Egyptian museums focus solely on the history of Egyptian civilization, often leaving out many captivating stories of refugee cultures...There’s so much to explore beyond their culture and interests.” Refugees frequently noted the absence of representations of their own cultures in museum collections, making it challenging to connect with the exhibits. The lack of specialized programs further hinders their interaction with and meaningful engagement with museum exhibits.

5.4 | Refugees’ Needs and Requirements

Refugee participants highlighted the immense potential of Egyptian museums to support and represent their communities by hosting events that foster mutual understanding and integration between Egyptians and refugees. Such initiatives not only contribute to the refugees’ understanding of the local community but also facilitate their social integration and the establishment of meaningful relationships.

Syrian refugees in Egypt, in particular, emphasized the need for programs and activities tailored for their children. Many arrive in Egypt feeling isolated and fearful due to the unfamiliar social environment, compounded by the absence of extended family support. This often leaves them struggling to find suitable activities for their children, who may spend long hours at home in boredom, with some not even enrolled in school. Addressing these needs is essential to support their mental well-being. One Syrian refugee shared, “When I first arrived in Egypt, I found it important for us as refugees to engage in activities that help us feel better and overcome negative thoughts and feelings resulting from the traumas of war-torn countries. I suggest activities that create a fun atmosphere, allowing us to escape current challenges and connect with a more positive, family-oriented, and social environment.”

Refugees also expressed a strong interest in participating in the museum’s activities, such as arts and crafts workshops, guided tours, and language courses. Customized guided tours, in particular, were seen as an opportunity to introduce refugees to Egypt’s history and its connections with their own civilizations, fostering mutual understanding and strengthening bonds between the communities. A Yamani refugee remarked, “Programs that focus on museum guidance can have a positive impact on us in two important ways. Firstly, they enhance our knowledge as we learn about museums, Egyptian culture, and history. Secondly, when refugees become familiar with museums, they can advocate for the museum within their community.”

The study revealed that refugees possess unique potential as cultural ambassadors. By sharing their experiences and advocating for museum visits within their communities, they can effectively promote museum programs in culturally relevant and relatable ways. This approach not only enhances engagement but also fosters meaningful cultural exchange and deeper connections between refugees, their communities, and the museum.

Workshops and courses were also highlighted as essential tools for improving the cultural, economic, and psychological well-being of refugees. Museum professionals suggested that crafted workshops focusing on teaching crafts could generate job opportunities, allowing refugees to develop their skills, gain education, and improve their economic prospects. One museum professional expressed, “If museums offer language courses, refugees can acquire supplementary skills to support their personal growth and development in various aspects of life.”

The importance of collaboration between museums and other organizations was emphasized. Partnerships with refugee organizations, the media, and humanitarian groups—such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—can significantly enhance outreach efforts and the effectiveness of museum programs. Additionally, participants suggested discounted tickets to make museum visits more accessible to refugees. Finally, it was emphasized that any programs targeting refugees should be grounded in a comprehensive assessment of their specific needs. Tailoring initiatives to address these requirements ensures museums can provide meaningful and impactful support to refugee populations.

6 | Discussion

Egypt's longstanding policy of avoiding camps for refugees and asylum seekers in favor of their integration into urban communities reflects a distinctive sociopolitical approach. While this policy has enabled refugees to participate more fully in Egyptian society, it also presents various challenges. A significant issue is the limited institutional support within the cultural sector, where Egyptian museums have yet to consider their inclusion among their offerings and exhibitions, nor have they yet to develop programs that promote intercultural understanding in response to the needs of refugee communities. Although certain museums have demonstrated interest and willingness to support the refugee communities in some initiatives—detailed in Section 3.3.2—these efforts are only being implemented through individual endeavors or programs organized by NGOs, the UNESCO Office in Cairo, or other international organizations rather than as part of a broader institutional initiative. Furthermore, their impact tends to be short-term interventions, often lasting only from one to three days, which do not promote longer-term sustainable programs. Such transient efforts do little to empower refugee communities or ensure meaningful societal inclusion.

Most community engagement programs within the Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities (MoTA) are influenced by a centralized agenda that fails to provide a clear vision for refugee inclusion. As a result, initiatives specifically targeting refugees are not prioritized within the cultural agenda, likely due to a lack of awareness among policymakers and cultural leaders regarding the crucial role museums could play in supporting these communities. Furthermore, the absence of a cohesive institutional strategy reflects broader sociopolitical dynamics, where refugees are frequently viewed through a lens of temporary crisis management rather than as active contributors to the cultural and social fabric of the nation. The challenges faced by refugee communities within the cultural sector and museum offerings

are also compounded by the state's focus on national security and economic stability over cultural inclusion. This emphasis is mirrored in the museum sector, where the state agenda prioritizes expanding infrastructure and enhancing visitor experiences rather than addressing the needs of marginalized groups, including refugees.

The absence of refugee-specific narratives and programs within Egyptian museums underscores the nascent nature of social inclusion practices within the MoTA's museum framework. The evolution of educational programs and community engagement in Egyptian museums began in the 1990s, initiating a shift toward serving a diverse range of societal segments. By the 2000s, museums had established administrative divisions specifically dedicated to educational and outreach initiatives, operating under the supervision of the MoTA's museum sector (Zakaria 2023). A significant milestone occurred in 2020 with the establishment of a central administrative department focused on individuals with disabilities and marginalized groups. This department collaborates closely with specialized units in each affiliated museum to design and implement targeted programs (Zakaria 2025).

These developments reflect a growing commitment among Egyptian museums to promote inclusion and societal integration, evidenced by an increase in programs directed at local communities and vulnerable populations over the past three decades. However, despite these initiatives representing significant progress, they are still in their early stages, heavily centralized, and lack the institutional commitment necessary to effectively address the specific needs of local communities, including refugees. The integration of refugees into museum sector programs has largely been overlooked, highlighting gaps in both institutional awareness and the broader cultural agenda.

Critical barriers to the inclusion of refugees in Egyptian museums are deeply embedded in the sociopolitical context of the country. Security concerns, bureaucratic challenges, and limited resources obstruct the development of programs specifically aimed at refugees. Additionally, the already constrained financial resources allocated to museums restrict their capacity to implement effective community engagement initiatives, let alone tailored programs that address the complex needs of refugee communities. Financial limitations pose a substantial obstacle to the creation of refugee-specific programs. Egyptian museums often struggle with insufficient funding for community engagement efforts overall, which results in a lack of resources necessary for workshops, materials, and services vital to realizing these initiatives (Zakaria 2023). These budgetary constraints severely hinder not only the development of programs for refugees but also broader outreach efforts within the community.

Moreover, while Egypt receives some support from organizations such as the UNHCR, this assistance is inadequate to meet the needs of the refugee population, particularly given the number of unregistered refugees. This shortfall places considerable pressure on the Egyptian government, which is already dealing with overpopulation, an economic crisis, and recent additional challenges arising from the Gaza conflict and border issues. Consequently, the government often prioritizes basic needs and

essential services over cultural initiatives and financial support for museums in assisting refugees and immigrants. While this focus is understandable amid the country's economic and social pressures, a more balanced approach that emphasizes the importance of cultural inclusion and well-being for all individuals within Egypt is needed.

Museums hold the potential to play a vital role in this regard, serving as spaces for cultural exchange and mutual understanding that can support refugee communities while expanding social engagement with more segments of society.

7 | Recommendations

The Egyptian museums have immense untapped potential to play a significant role in supporting refugees and fostering cultural and social initiatives to address their exclusion and marginalization, along with other disadvantaged groups. It is encouraging to see that the term “marginalized groups” has gained attention in the museum sector's agenda in the past few years. There is a growing awareness among museum staff, who are continuously expanding their roles to engage with various segments of society. Egyptian museums have the potential to represent the rich diversity of their contemporary society and advocate for inclusivity, equality, and human rights. They can design programs and exhibitions that reflect the histories and experiences of refugee communities, presenting new cultural perspectives to help change perceptions and combat any stigma. By curating exhibitions that explore the historical and current experiences of refugees, as well as showcasing artistic works and personal items that represent their heritage, museums can offer valuable insights into the challenges faced by these communities and foster greater empathy and understanding among society members. Tailored guided tours and interactive activities can foster mutual understanding and integration. Furthermore, refugees should be involved in the co-creation of museum programs and exhibitions. Their lived experiences and cultural knowledge can enrich museum offerings and ensure relevance to their communities. Other key recommendations include professional development and training programs for museum staff, focusing on trauma-informed practices, cultural competency, and engagement strategies for diverse audiences. Establish collaborative partnerships with refugee organizations, humanitarian groups, and the media to expand outreach efforts and enhance program effectiveness. Involving organizations such as UNHCR can significantly bolster these initiatives. Furthermore, offering discounted tickets to accommodate the challenges refugees face, such as financial constraints, can enhance their accessibility and engagement with Egyptian museums.

To overcome institutional and organizational barriers, new museum projects like NMEC and GEM have the potential to serve as inclusive spaces for sharing refugee stories, engaging with communities, and promoting intercultural understanding. These museums have transitioned from state-owned museums to partnerships with the private sector. This shift allows not only more flexibility beyond governmental bureaucracy but also fosters partnerships with NGOs and civil society groups, including refugee-led organizations. Consequently, these museum institutions are well-positioned to curate exhibitions and workshops

that genuinely portray refugees' experiences, perspectives, and challenges. Moreover, these museums have a major impact on the Egyptian community and can act as catalysts for promoting discussions and dialogues on equality and social justice. Given the high visibility and ongoing engagement of these two museums through their exhibitions and public events pertinent to modern society, the media and press are likely to cover such activities. This effort will not only help increase awareness among all segments of society and cultural leaders, but it can also serve as an influential model for other museums in Egypt to emulate. NMEC and GEM could also lead efforts to collaborate with refugee organizations and hold lectures and discussions to create a space for conversation and discussion, allowing people to delve into refugees' histories. Cultural exhibitions and displays have proven effective in facilitating interaction and serving as valuable meeting points for sharing information and raising awareness about refugee issues.

The local press and media have consistently portrayed refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt as separate from the local community. In contrast, the museum views these “difference” as a starting point for learning and promoting shared values of diversity in society. The current “ICOM Egypt,” made up of many museum professionals from MoTA, actively participates in workshops and programs at Egyptian museums to raise awareness about the importance of diversity and our common humanity. Such initiatives will open up more possibilities for Egyptian museums to cooperate with refugee-advocacy organizations to incorporate refugee-focused programs and activities. This will allow museums to move beyond their traditional agendas and address pressing issues, allowing refugees to share their heritage, thoughts, and life experiences, given that the refugees and asylum seekers are part of a broader narrative of migration, globalization, and transitional movement.

Addressing these gaps necessitates a significant shift in both the museum sector and the broader sociopolitical approach to refugees. Museums must transcend tokenistic efforts and adopt a more comprehensive vision that recognizes refugees as active participants in cultural and social life. This requires the development of long-term, sustainable programs that reflect the diverse experiences of refugees, as well as fostering partnerships with organizations such as the UNHCR to navigate resource limitations.

In accordance with MoTA's regulations, obtaining secure approval from the relevant state authorities is essential before making direct arrangements with nongovernmental agencies. Consequently, forming official partnerships with refugee agencies is essential to facilitate direct collaboration for the inclusion of refugees in Egyptian museums. Establishing partnerships and collaborative projects with refugee-led organizations, civil society groups, and NGOs at both national and international levels will be crucial in overcoming financial constraints and ensuring the sustainability of long-term programs. As previously mentioned, the current focus on expanding museums across Egypt has understandably taken precedence over other initiatives. Therefore, collaborative projects with refugee organizations could enhance financial resources for MoTA and support additional initiatives.

Furthermore, the sociopolitical landscape requires that the Egyptian government and cultural leaders acknowledge the transformative potential of museums in addressing refugee challenges. While immediate concerns such as housing and education are critical, cultural inclusion is equally vital for fostering a sense of belonging and resilience among refugees. A balanced approach that integrates cultural and social initiatives within the national agenda can not only improve the well-being of refugees but also strengthen the role of museums as agents of societal change.

8 | Research Limitations

The present study entails limitations that affect the generalization of its results regarding museum practices concerning refugees and how Egyptian museums can support them. The study recognizes that the findings are based on a limited number of museums and may only partially represent the inclusive practices of Egyptian museums nationwide. Additionally, the small number of refugee community participants involved in the study does not fully represent the diverse nationalities of refugees in the Egyptian population. It is important to note that the responses obtained from the study's participants, particularly the museum professionals, may be influenced by their respective institutions, their perceptions of refugees, and other external factors beyond research questions. Despite these limitations, the study's findings can still contribute to the ongoing discussion about the role of museums in supporting refugees and asylum seekers. Furthermore, it serves as a valuable foundation for future research on refugees and the involvement of Egyptian museums.

9 | Conclusion

The growing number of refugees and asylum seekers in Egypt presents both a challenge and an opportunity for Egyptian museums to redefine their role in society. By embracing refugees' stories, experiences, and heritage, museums can contribute to the social integration of refugees and foster intercultural understanding, promoting a more inclusive society. Recent changes in museum practices have opened the door for better engagement with marginalized groups; yet current efforts often lack vision and diverse representation, including those of refugees. To tackle these challenges, Egyptian museums need to shift their strategies. They should establish partnerships with refugee organizations, NGOs, and international bodies such as the UNHCR to secure funding and resources. Engaging refugees as co-creators of exhibitions and programs will help ensure ethical practices and give them a voice. Museums must focus on participatory models that treat refugees as equal stakeholders in sharing their stories.

NMEC and GEM are feasible approaches to lead efforts to support refugee stories by dedicating exhibition programs and hosting workshops. They could also promote dialogue through events that foster intercultural understanding and advocate for necessary changes. Utilizing their public-private governance structures will help them navigate institutional barriers more

effectively and ensure collaboration with refugee organizations. To implement these changes, a clear strategy is needed, including capacity building, collaborating with refugee-led groups, and engaging the public through media and events to raise awareness about refugee issues while promoting diversity and inclusion through museum platforms. It is also crucial to secure long-term funding and partnerships to integrate these initiatives into the museums' core agendas.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that supports the findings of this study are available from the author upon reasonable request.

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