

THE GLOBAL GOVERNED?

When refugees flee war and persecution, protection and assistance are usually provided by United Nations organisations and their NGO implementing partners. In camps and cities, the dominant humanitarian model remains premised upon a provider–beneficiary relationship. In parallel to this model, however, is a largely neglected story: refugees themselves frequently mobilise to create organisations or networks as alternative providers of social protection.

Based on fieldwork in refugee camps and cities in Uganda and Kenya, this book examines how refugee-led organisations emerge, the forms they take, and their interactions with international institutions. Developing an original theoretical framework based on the concept of ‘the global governed’, the book shows how power and hierarchy mediate the seemingly benign notion of protection. Drawing upon ideas from anthropology and international relations, it offers an alternative vision for more participatory global governance, of relevance to other policy-fields including development, humanitarianism, health, peacekeeping and child protection.

KATE PINCOCK is a research associate at the Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, and a researcher for the Overseas Development Institute. She received her PhD in International Development from the University of Bath, and her research focuses on forced migration and gender in East Africa.

ALEXANDER BETTS is Professor of Forced Migration and International Affairs, and William Golding Senior Fellow in Politics at Brasenose College, University of Oxford. He was previously Director of the Refugee Studies Centre, is a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader and was named by *Foreign Policy* magazine as one of the leading global thinkers of 2016.

EVAN EASTON-CALABRIA is a senior research officer at the Refugee Studies Centre, and Junior Research Fellow at Wadham College, University of Oxford. Her research focuses on refugee self-reliance and the history of forced migration and development.

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Edited by a world leader in refugee law, this new series aims to be a forum for innovative writing on all aspects of the transnational movement of people. It publishes single or coauthored works that may be legal, political, or cross-disciplinary in nature, and will be essential reading for anyone looking to understand one of the most important issues of the twenty-first century.

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The Global Governed?: Refugees as Providers of Protection and Assistance
Kate Pincock/Alexander Betts/Evan Easton-Calabria

THE GLOBAL GOVERNED?

Refugees as Providers of Protection and Assistance

KATE PINCOCK

University of Oxford

ALEXANDER BETTS

University of Oxford

EVAN EASTON-CALABRIA

University of Oxford



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SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

Could we – should we – think differently about the ways in which refugees are assisted and protected? Is it possible to turn traditional thinking on its head by seeing refugees not as the objects of protection and assistance, but instead as the architects and managers of solutions?

In this important book, Alexander Betts, Evan Easton-Calabria and Kate Pincock suggest that the answer to both questions is an emphatic ‘yes’. Drawing on their academic backgrounds in political science, history and anthropology, the authors of *The Global Governed? Refugees as Providers of Protection and Assistance* push us to broaden our thinking about how the refugee regime should be understood and operated. Specifically, they draw on a series of original East African case studies to challenge the traditional privileging of states and international organisations as the “providers” of protection and assistance, showing how refugees can and do organise collectively to provide social protection to each other.

Having demonstrated the ability of refugees to provide rather than simply to receive, the authors pointedly challenge the view that ‘protection is a form of assistance that is presumed to be inherently benign ... [T]his representation frequently masks that it is malleable, highly contested, and frequently used to legitimate the authority to govern.’ Put simply, the way in which protection and assistance are presently structured can amount to an exercise of power over refugees. If this is so, ought we not to adopt a more critical stance about the roles of the official actors and their non-governmental partners who direct the current system of refugee protection and assistance that is – at least in theory – rooted in a commitment to refugee empowerment? And given the demonstrated ability of refugees themselves to author and manage answers to their own predicaments, is the time not right to think hard about a new theory of global governance in the refugee context – one in which refugees are recognised as governors, rather than just governed?

This book beautifully combines rigorous empirical research design with deep theoretical engagement. Its thesis is timely, challenging us all honestly to acknowledge the ways in which refugees have traditionally been denied agency over their own lives, and offering a theory of how that can and should change.

James C. Hathaway
Editor, Cambridge Asylum and Migration Studies

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The dominant public view of refugees is as victims in need of humanitarian assistance. And while many people fleeing conflict and persecution may be vulnerable, we also need to recognise that refugees frequently mobilise to help themselves and their communities. Rather than simply being passive recipients of international aid, refugees are sometimes the *providers* of protection and assistance. Whether through formal organisations or informal networks, they collectively organise to provide support to others in areas as diverse as education, health, livelihoods, finance or housing. And yet their role as providers of social protection is rarely recognised or supported by the international humanitarian system.

Our aim in this book is to highlight and better understand the role of refugee-led protection and assistance. When does it emerge? How does it interact with the humanitarian system? What role should it have in relation to aid delivery? These questions matter for international responses to refugees. Providing answers could identify opportunities for more effective and legitimate forms of refugee assistance. But our answers also matter more broadly for the theory and practice of global governance. By challenging the dominant perception of the provider–beneficiary relationship present in policy fields such as development, humanitarianism, peacekeeping and health governance, we can begin to critically interrogate our assumptions about the presumed passivity and victimhood of the supposedly ‘global governed’ and reconsider the meaning of participatory global governance.

The Refugee Studies Centre at the University of Oxford has a long history of research relating to the agency of refugees. Ever since Barbara Harrell-Bond published *Imposing Aid*, the centre’s work has focused on recognising the capacities of forcibly displaced communities rather than simply focusing on their vulnerabilities. It has covered the economic, political and social lives of refugees and pushed back against the top-down imposition of humanitarian aid. This book very much builds upon that tradition. But it focuses on a hitherto largely unexplored aspect of refugee agency: the ways in which refugees collectively organise to provide the very services – protection and assistance – usually associated with large humanitarian organisations.

The research in the book emerges from a joint Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC)-funded Global Challenges Research Fund project entitled ‘The Global Governed? Refugees as Providers of Protection and Assistance’. The project, which ran from 2016 to 2018, aimed to examine the range of forms of organisational forms through which refugees provide social protection to other refugees. It was conceived as interdisciplinary, encompassing anthropology, political science and history. While all three authors have interdisciplinary backgrounds, Kate was the anthropologist, Alex the political scientist and Evan the historian.

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We chose to focus our fieldwork on East Africa, notably on camp and urban contexts in Uganda and Kenya, because this reflects all three authors' regional expertise, and because these contexts offer contrasting policy environments. Between the authors we also had a range of established contacts with refugee-led organisations across our research sites. The basic division of labour for the research ran as follows: Alex was principal investigator and shaped the research design, Kate undertook the bulk of the ethnographic fieldwork, and Evan contributed to both fieldwork and the conceptual development of the project. Writing was a joint effort.

However, the book also relied upon the contributions of many people other than the authors. We are especially grateful to the following refugees for their input and guidance, and for connecting us to their communities: Bahati Ghislain and Jamila Hussein in Nairobi; William Bakunzi and Abdalla Majeed in Nakivale; Ruddy Tutu, Kafi Bashir and Abdikadir Zamzam in Kakuma; and Robert Hakiza and Ter Manang Gatwech in Kampala. Their openness to our research allowed us to gain access to the conversations and insights that have informed this work. We are also grateful to the international organisations and NGOs that have engaged with our work, including UNHCR staff, who not only allowed us access to compound accommodation but also made time to respond to our many questions.

A draft manuscript benefitted immensely from the feedback of participants at several workshops. In November 2018, the Refugee-Led Organisations Network hosted a workshop in Kampala that provided us with input from a number of refugee-led organisations. Also in November 2018, we held a book workshop in Oxford, during which colleagues from a range of disciplinary perspectives generously highlighted ways to improve the manuscript. At the European University Institute in Florence, we presented the research at a symposium on civilian self-protection, from which we received especially helpful suggestions. We are particularly grateful to Matthew Gibney, Betsy Jose, Josiah Kaplan, Tom Scott-Smith, Emily Paddon Rhoads and Cory Rodgers for reading and commenting on draft chapters.

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