Introduction
Following the UK Government’s recent announcement of its intention to admit up to 20,000 Syrian refugees in the next five years, this briefing outlines Scottish Refugee Council’s proposals for how the humanitarian admissions programme may be coordinated and supported in Scotland in the best interests of Syrian refugees, receiving local authorities, and communities.

Background
Development of the UK Government’s Syrian VPR Scheme

The Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation (VPR) Scheme was first announced to the UK Parliament by the Home Secretary on 29 January 2014. From its inception until September 2015, the scheme admitted a total of 216 refugees to the UK. The intention of the scheme was to prioritise three particular groups in need of humanitarian admission: survivors of torture and violence, women and children at risk, and those in need of medical care. The scope of the scheme was to admit no more than “several hundred people over three years” with the expectation that each month 10-15 refugees would be admitted to the UK through the scheme.

Following public, media and political pressure to respond to the ongoing humanitarian crisis, the Prime Minister announced to the UK parliament on 7 September 2015 that the UK would resettle 20,000 Syrian refugees over the course of the current parliament (May 2020).

In Scotland, the First Minister responded by holding a summit in Edinburgh on 5 September 2015, bringing together Ministers, opposition leaders, statutory bodies, refugee representatives and civic society. She announced that Scotland was ready to welcome 1000 refugees as a starting point and established a taskforce, chaired by the Minister for Europe and External Affairs, with membership from the Scottish Government, Scottish Refugee Council, COSLA, local authorities, refugee representatives, and key statutory, third sector and community organisations, to coordinate Scotland’s response to the crisis.

1 It is important to note that the Syrian VPR is a Humanitarian Admission Programme. This differs from refugee Resettlement, in that the latter is regarded by the UNHCR as a means to permanent settlement for refugees (see www.unhcr.org/pages/4a16b1676.html). Additionally, the European Commission has proposed a temporary Relocation scheme in response to pressures on EU border states as a way of redistributing responsibility for those arriving in Europe who are clearly in need of international protection. The UK has so far declined to participate in this scheme, the only member state to do so.
2 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201314/cmhansrd/cm140129/debtext/140129-0001.htm#14012951000001
4 http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmhansrd/cm150907/debtext/150907-0001.htm#1509074000002
UNHCR sets out in its Resettlement Handbook, the categories of people who may apply for resettlement in a third country:

- **Legal and/or physical protection needs of the refugee in the country of refuge** (including threat of *refoulement*);
- **Survivors of torture and/or violence**, where repatriation or the conditions of asylum could result in further traumatisation and/or heightened risk; or where appropriate treatment is not available;
- **Medical needs**, in particular life-saving treatment that is unavailable in the country of refuge;
- **Women and girls at risk**, who have protection problems particular to their gender;
- **Family reunification**, when resettlement is the only means to reunite refugee family members who, owing to refugee flight or displacement, are separated by borders or entire continents;
- **Children and adolescents at risk**, where a best interests determination supports resettlement;
- **Lack of foreseeable alternative durable solutions**

The UK's Syrian VPR scheme initially specified three of these categories when it was announced in January 2014. In his announcement of September 2015, the Prime Minister stated that a fourth category would be added, that of ‘*children and adolescents at risk*’. However, the UK Government has since reduced its focus on children and stated that it is working with UNHCR to expand the VPR scheme to mirror other UNHCR categories.

The Syrian VPR is a humanitarian admission scheme, which differs from resettlement in that *countries admit groups from refugee populations in third countries so as to provide them with temporary protection on humanitarian grounds*. Thus, those arriving through this programme will not be recognised as refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention. The expectation in humanitarian admission programmes is that refugees will be admitted to a third country for a limited period of time and that their leave will be reviewed. In the case of the Syrian VPR, those admitted to the UK are granted five years’ leave to remain,

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6 [http://www.resettlement.eu/page/resettlement-relocation-or-humanitarian-admission-we-explain-terminology](http://www.resettlement.eu/page/resettlement-relocation-or-humanitarian-admission-we-explain-terminology)

7 Scottish Refugee Council’s view is that those arriving under the scheme should be afforded refugee status in line with resettled refugees. The rights and entitlements of those granted HP are similar to those recognised under international law as refugees. However HP status poses some difficulties in relation to travel documents. A person granted HP is expected to keep his/her own national passport valid and would not be entitled to apply for a UK Travel Document unless they can provide evidence to show that they have been unreasonably refused a passport by their own country. A UK Travel Document is not as widely accepted by other states as a Blue Refugee Travel Document. Those arriving under the scheme may apply for asylum.
however, the Prime Minister has suggested that people will be eligible to apply for settlement in the UK at the end of their five-year Humanitarian Protection Leave. 

The current Syrian VPR Process

In the first step of the VPR scheme, UNHCR identifies and refers potential cases to the UK Home Office who checks whether the referrals meet its eligibility criteria and carries out medical and security checks. If passed, the Home Office arranges exit visas from the host country and entry visas into the UK. It is at this point that in the current process that the Home Office passes details of eligible cases to individual local authorities that have been asked to be considered for participation in the scheme. Currently, local authorities are asked to accept or reject cases on the basis of a referral form that provides detail of family make-up, age, and specific needs, followed by a full medical health assessment report prepared by the International Organisation for Migration.

Currently, the Home Office contracts individual local authorities to deliver the reception and integration steps of the process in the UK, including making necessary arrangements for health services, housing, school places and education provision, as well as for any specialist services that may be required given the complex needs of many admitted through the scheme. The local authority may commission services from specialist organisations and NGOs.

Expanding the VPR scheme

The Home Office has acknowledged that the model currently in place, designed for a few hundred, is not fit for purpose to be scaled up dramatically in a short space of time. What is proposed is that refugees will be admitted under the existing scheme up until the end of 2015, until a new approach is developed and implemented.

Below, we set out our proposals for this new approach, which are based on consideration of UNHCR guidelines and consideration of existing resettlement programmes.

The principles to ensure sustainable outcomes for refugees include:

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8 HC Deb 7 September 2015 c44
10 UNHCR (2013) The Integration of Resettled Refugees: Essentials for Establishing a Resettlement Programme and Fundamentals for Sustainable Resettlement Programmes, UNHCR, Available at: www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf
11 Created in March 2012, the SHARE Network has built toward a network of European regions, cities, municipalities and their civil society partners involved in and/or with a commitment to refugee resettlement, protection and integration of refugees. Led by the ICMC Europe office in Brussels and co-financed by the European Commission, SHARE has provided a platform for peer exchange and mutual learning between actors working at the regional and local levels across Europe, and facilitated the inclusion of these actors in the wider European Resettlement Network and European and international discussions on resettlement and relocation. SHARE Network resources, tools and reports can be accessed via the network’s webpages http://www.resettlement.eu/page/good-practice-guide-housing-refugee-resettlement
Entrenching resettlement in legislation and policy instruments, ensuring permanent residence, family reunification, and equal access to rights, including access to citizenship;

A responsive integration programme supported by consultation and collaboration with relevant stakeholders, engagement with civil society including community representatives, and the commitment of adequate resources;

Supportive, hospitable and welcoming communities;

Enhancing coordination and strengthening partnership;

Holistic and person centred approach that is gendered and embedded in equalities principles;

Refugees’ participation;

Encouraging access to mainstream services, as well as ensuring the availability of specialist services where required; and

Access to socio-economic and legal rights.

In light of these principles, and taking account of best practice and learning from previous resettlement programmes, we propose three separate, but interlinked recommendations:

1. National or regional coordination;
2. Reception or welcome centres;
3. National or regional services.

1. National Coordination

Scottish Refugee Council proposes that the Home Office moves away from the single local authority contracting model and considers a regional or national approach to the VPR scheme. Two approaches could be taken in Scotland: (i) The UK Government executively devolves the reception and integration aspects of the scheme in Scotland to the Scottish Government13, or (ii) the Home Office contracts a consortium or consortia of local authorities to deliver the scheme in Scotland.

The first option would not impact on reserved policy areas as the UK Government still maintains overall responsibility for key elements of the process (*identification, selection, pre-departure, travel*). The Scottish Government would be responsible for all aspects of reception and integration in Scotland, which are policy areas that already fall within their competences. The Scottish Government would be the single point of contact for the

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12 UNHCR (2013) *The Integration of Resettled Refugees: Essentials for Establishing a Resettlement Programme and Fundamentals for Sustainable Resettlement Programmes*, UNHCR, Available at: [www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf](www.unhcr.org/46f7c0ee2.pdf)

13 In recognition of the need for national coordination in even the smaller-scale first phase of the scheme, the Scottish Government produced in 2014 a single national healthcare framework to support families that come to Scotland under the VPR.
Home Office, agreeing an overall funding package and the number, timing and management of arrivals. The Scottish Government would deliver these aspects of the scheme in close partnership with local authorities and key statutory, devolved bodies, especially health boards and education authorities.

Joint working between the Home Office and the Scottish Government is already provided for through their Concordat, which states, inter alia, that:

"…joint working will be particularly relevant in the following cases and could usefully be covered by working level agreements: the planning and implementation of responses to civil and other emergencies, where such emergencies affect, or may affect, the whole of Britain (…) arrangements for the dispersal of asylum seekers and the designation of reception zones.”

The Scottish Government already has a national refugee integration strategy and a refugee taskforce in place to coordinate such an approach.

The benefits of taking either of these two approaches would be:

- Allows the Home Office to have a single or fewer contracts in Scotland rather than several contracts in Scotland;
- Such an approach is already in existence and tried and tested at a regional level as part of the Gateway Resettlement Scheme;
- Enables coordination of services and clarification of roles for different stakeholders;
- Allows better uses and sharing of resources avoiding expensive duplication;
- Removes limitations on current contracts and allows for best practice to be followed and allows other activity to be considered and managed such as community participation in community preparation and befriending schemes, for example;
- Gives the potential for the management of an ongoing resettlement programme versus an ad-hoc one. Stable and regular national programmes better support overall national capacities;
- Facilitates collaboration and exchange of best practice between local authorities and other stakeholders.

15 International Catholic Migration Commission & Sheffield City Council (no date) Welcome to Sheffield: Reflections on 8 years’ experience of receiving resettled refugees at the local level, Available at: http://www.resettlement.eu/page/welcome-sheffield-publication [Accessed 27 October 2015]
2. Initial reception or welcome centres

Due to the significant numbers proposed to be admitted through the scheme and the potential number of local authorities involved in Scotland, we propose that a national or regional reception scheme is introduced into the model. This would allow for a significant number of refugees to arrive at one time in Scotland in a more managed and coordinated way, ensuring that people’s immediate rights and needs are identified and met as early on as possible in the process.

The advantages of an initial short-stay reception centre model\textsuperscript{17} to accommodate refugees for a brief period of time would be to enable:

- Improved organisation allowing for a coordinated initial reception in Scotland;
- Standardised orientation (not currently included in VPR scheme);
- Access to relevant information gathered pre-arrival;
- The delivery of a person-centred, gendered and equalities focused approach from the outset, addressing immediate needs in the location where specialist services could be available;
- Time to complete a full needs assessment through a wrap-around service delivery model, to ensure people are prepared for dispersal to the receiving local authority and community, lightening immediate demand on councils and local services less familiar with refugee populations;
- Enable better matching of refugees with areas and communities best able to facilitate integration in line with individual needs and aspirations;
- Time for refugees arriving to recover from their journey,
- Potential opportunity to fast-track access to entitlements such as social security and any additional support needs;
- Distribution of information about basic rights and entitlements; and
- Implementation of the principle of early intervention and access to specialist services to meet the needs of new arrivals with potentially very complex needs can be coordinated and met from the outset.

3. National or regional services

Currently, responsibility lies with each local authority to decide how they will support the reception and integration of refugees through the VPR scheme, with the potential for contracting out services. We propose instead that consideration is given to developing and funding shared and specialist services either nationally or regionally. The benefits of this approach would be:

- Ensuring consistency of support throughout Scotland;

\textsuperscript{17} Such an approach is taken in Belgium. See: \texttt{http://resettlement.eu/country/belgium}
Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme: Implications and Options for Scotland

- Ensuring an approach that is tailored to the needs of the men, women and children in particularly vulnerable circumstances who are likely to be resettled through this programme;
- Enabling the sharing of best practice;
- Potential reductions in overall costs;
- Allowing local authorities with little or no experience in resettlement to become involved in the scheme;
- Ensuring the best integration outcomes for refugees and communities.  

Such services may include:

- A national casework model supporting the development of a needs-based and personalised integration plan, advocacy to ensure access to rights, and liaison with local authorities, statutory and local services, communities and volunteers  
- A national mentoring scheme to train, support and match volunteers to help refugees build social connections in their new communities;
- Translation and interpreting support;
- Specialist second tier advice for refugees with particular rights and needs as survivors of torture, trauma or sexual violence, including counselling and other forms of specialist support.

About Scottish Refugee Council

In 2015 Scottish Refugee Council will celebrate 30 years of working to ensure that all refugees in Scotland are treated fairly, with dignity and that their human rights are respected.

Our vision is for a Scotland in which all people seeking refugee protection are welcome.

As an independent charity, we’re here to provide essential information and advice to people seeking asylum and refugees in Scotland where we can. But that’s just part of the story: We also campaign for political change, raise awareness about issues that affect refugees; and we work closely with local communities and organisations.

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19 See for example Scottish Refugee Council’s Holistic Integration Service which supports all newly recognised refugees in Scotland through casework support and a personalised integration plan: http://www.scottishrefugeecouncil.org.uk/assets/0000/9731/HIS_Year_2_FINAL.pdf and the Gateway resettlement Scheme: International Catholic Migration Commission & Sheffield City Council (no date) *Welcome to Sheffield: Reflections on 8 years’ experience of receiving resettled refugees at the local level*, Available at: http://www.resettlement.eu/page/welcome-sheffield-publication [Accessed 27 October 2015]

20 See for example SHARE network’s video case study from the Dutch municipality of Sittard-Geleen, in the region of Limburg, where the Dutch Refugee Council (*VluchtelingenWerk Limburg*), the local authority and local people acting as volunteers work in partnership to receive resettled refugees.