



## Ending domestic abuse

# SafeLives' Response to Scottish Government's Consultation on 'Improving Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Interventions for Victims of Domestic Abuse.'

February 2019

### About SafeLives

We are a UK-wide charity dedicated to ending domestic abuse, for good. We combine insight from services, survivors and statistics to support people to become safe, well and rebuild their lives. **No one should live in fear. It is not acceptable, not inevitable, and together – we can make it stop.**

Our Scottish publication [Whole Lives](#) highlighted that every year, nearly 130,000 people in Scotland experience domestic abuse. There are over 9,000 people at risk of being murdered or seriously harmed; over 12,000 children live in these households. For every person being abused, there is someone else responsible for that abuse: the perpetrator. And all too often, children are in the home and living with the impact. Domestic abuse affects us all; it thrives on being hidden behind closed doors. We must make it everybody's business.

### Ending domestic abuse, for good

We believe that domestic abuse can be stopped. Stopped before it starts. Stopped before it ruins lives.

And why do we say "for good"? Because we want to stop it before it starts. And if it does start, we want a response that provides long-term, wraparound support to decrease the chance it will happen again. Too many perpetrators repeat their behaviour, too many children grow up impacted by the long-term effects of domestic abuse.

The cycle needs to stop. Forever. For everyone.

### Foreword from Suzanne Jacob, OBE, Chief Executive of SafeLives

We very much welcome the publication of Scottish Government's consultation on 'Improving Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and interventions for victims of domestic abuse.' Below we've shared our response to each question and welcome any feedback or comments you may have ([info@safelives.org.uk](mailto:info@safelives.org.uk)). We'd encourage everyone to submit a response and make use of this opportunity to share their knowledge and experience and make their voices heard. You will find a link to the consultation questions [here](#).

## **Question One: How can we ensure training on domestic abuse and appropriate risk assessment tools for public bodies, agencies and services staff?**

In order to ensure people at the greatest risk of serious harm or murder as a result of domestic abuse get urgent help, we need to ensure staff are fully trained on how to assess risk; that control and coercion is at the centre of their understanding of risk; that professional judgement is used appropriately and that the risk is viewed as being posed by the perpetrator, not caused by the victim. SafeLives is fully committed to the Scottish Government's definition of domestic abuse, which includes a gendered analysis and all our work in Scotland is aligned with [Equally Safe](#) as a result.

[Whole Lives](#) suggested that people experience domestic abuse for an average of 4 years in Scotland before accessing specialist services (which is higher than other parts of the UK) and also that self-referral rates were high at 31%. This may suggest that services are not as good as they could be at recognising domestic abuse and responding appropriately. Domestic abuse must be seen as 'everyone's business' not the specialism of a few agencies. We need front-line staff to use a common tool, have shared understanding and thresholds of risk, and possess knowledge of local and national referral pathways. Every victim at high risk of serious harm or murder should be offered support from a dedicated Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate (Idaa – see [appendix D](#) for definition) – or a practitioner working to the same high standards as an Idaa – and have access to a robust and effective local Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Marac).

SafeLives has an evidenced track record for delivering consistent, high quality training to improve the response to domestic abuse across Scotland, including training for Idaas (in collaboration with ASSIST and Scottish Women's Aid), Marac representatives, chairs, steering groups and other Marac professionals, Crown Office Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS), Edinburgh City Council, CALMS, Wheatley Group, the Caledonian System, Victim Support Scotland (VSS), NHS Health Scotland, a significant number of local authorities and services including Women's Aid Groups, Fearless, ASSIST, and DAAS. SafeLives are currently working closely with Police Scotland and other sector partners (ASSIST, the Caledonian System, Fearless (Sacro) and Safer Borders) to implement [Domestic Abuse Matters Scotland \(DAMS\)](#), a comprehensive change programme that includes e-learning and face-to-face training for police officers and staff to build understanding of coercive control and prepare them for implementation of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018.

**“The entire training was well pitched, from engaging & knowledgeable trainers. I couldn't think of a single area that would require change - essential & important info delivered in an understandable fashion. No negatives - the training was logical & flowed one aspect into another.”**

Learner on SafeLives risk training, Glasgow 2018

**“This training assists in making you better prepared for the role which in turn can only help victims of domestic abuse.”**

Marac Chairs Training, Glasgow 2018

Utilising blended learning approaches that include online and face-to-face options give the best opportunity to reach the widest audience in a way that is tailored to the needs of their role. Training should incorporate a range of mixed media, and be interactive and participative to create the best environment for practical learning. The voices of those who have experienced domestic abuse should be at the heart of materials. All messaging should be aligned directly to the audience it is aimed at, and who they might work with in addressing domestic abuse i.e. housing officers need an understanding of how to work safely with the whole family, including perpetrators, not just those experiencing domestic abuse. SafeLives has created a network of expert domestic abuse trainers from a variety of roles, services and geographical areas of Scotland, which enhances the delivery and ensures the right fit for different audiences.

### **The Domestic Abuse, Stalking and ‘Honour’-Based Violence Risk Checklist (The Dash)**

SafeLives’ Dash risk checklist is used by practitioners working with an individual who is experiencing domestic abuse to identify risk of further harm or homicide. Using an evidence based risk identification tool such as the Dash increases the likelihood of the victim being responded to appropriately and therefore of addressing the risks they face. The checklist is the first stage in a risk-led response (see question three) and is widely embedded across Scotland by an increasingly varied mix of multi-agency practitioners whenever an initial disclosure of domestic abuse is made; including specialist domestic abuse services, social work teams, housing providers, health and substance use services.

Dash was launched in 2009 following a period of consultation and a pilot with various services and organisations, including ASSIST in Scotland. The evidence base derives from domestic homicide reviews in London, South Wales and the US, and each question links to a risk factor associated with serious physical harm. Crucially, Dash is not simply an actuarial tool; it was designed to be used as part of a ‘structured professional judgement approach’ i.e. using a combination of factual information and professional judgement. This, of course, means that a baseline awareness of both domestic abuse and coercive control as well the rationale behind the tool is essential for those using it.

A review of risk-led policing and Dash application by English forces was conducted in 2016 following the 2014 HMIC report that highlighted shortcomings in police officers’ understanding of the tool, and widespread inconsistency of application. The 2016 research found that whilst there was uneven application of the tool and that training and guidance was inadequate and inconsistent, “*practitioners view DASH as a universally recognised tool that benefits and facilitates multi-agency working*”. In a follow up study in 2018, an adapted risk assessment approach was piloted in police forces with mixed results and SafeLives has been involved in the follow-up discussions about this potential change in approach that may involve introducing a two-step model. Whilst the reviews recommended some amendments to the Dash (a shift from yes/no responses and a slightly different space for expanding on responses) it is clear from both the 2016 study and 2018 review that a tool recording and assessing risk is vital for practitioners to ensure the safety of victims at high risk from domestic abuse. We welcome any evidence-based approach that improves outcomes for those experiencing domestic abuse and that gives front-line practitioners a clear process and we are proud of our role in the discourse around risk-led responses.

It is unclear how many services across Scotland are using Dash, but it is considered to be a high proportion. SafeLives would welcome an audit to ascertain coverage and evaluate whether application is even and consistent. We know that many Marac partners use Dash. Police Scotland introduced the DAQ (Domestic Abuse Questions) in 2013, which mirrors the ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) version of Dash (with the 3 additional questions). It is applied with victims at every domestic incident Police are called to. In 2016 the Dash was incorporated into the revised pathway for health visitors across Scotland. With funding from National Lottery Community Fund Scotland, SafeLives has recently

developed a Scottish version of the Dash to incorporate Scottish terminology, legislation and policy (see [appendix A](#)). The Dash is also available in many different languages, including [Gaelic](#)) to reflect the fact there are approx. 57,000 Gaelic speakers in Scotland. We want to minimise any potential barriers to reaching anyone experiencing domestic abuse as quickly and effectively as possible.

### **Dash Training Demand**

SafeLives regularly receives requests from across Scotland for training and guidance on the application of the Dash (in 2017/18 we had over 30 such requests), as well as queries about thresholds of risk and subsequent referral pathways. These come from a wide range of public sector organisations as well as services (specialist and mainstream) and individual practitioners. While some local authorities have found the budget to access this vital training, and agencies such as NHS Health Scotland to deliver training for trainers in risk, training is not nationally accessible and remains entirely unfunded by the Scottish Government. We believe a national training programme (with local sensitivity) on risk, the Dash and referral pathways is essential to equip public bodies, agencies and service staff with the tools, knowledge, confidence and understanding required to assess risk and increase the safety of victims experiencing domestic abuse and their children. This should of course dovetail a robust programme to raise awareness of domestic abuse, coercive control and the impact on the whole family, including how to safely respond to perpetrators.

**“[This training] provides something tangible to work with victims – powerful tool. I like the clarity it provides”**

Social Worker on SafeLives risk training, East Renfrewshire 2018

Training is vital to increase the speed and effectiveness of domestic abuse identification and response, but it is just one part of the puzzle – to complement high quality training, it is essential that organisations and services are supported in their implementation of any new learning and tools they intend to use. For example, a strategic governance process that supports the framework for a unified response, structured operational policies and processes that enable Dash and Marac to work most effectively at local level, streamlined with other local frameworks across Scotland. This is essential to achieve a consistent approach, and to avoid the current post-code lottery in service provision highlighted by both Whole Lives and the [National Scoping Exercise of Advocacy Services for Victims of Violence Against Women and Girls](#).

**“Consistency, that’s the thing that I’m banging on about all the time... that’s what we’re trying to push. Because there is such a difference and discrepancy.... It shouldn’t matter where the victim is, they should get the same support wherever they are.”**

Head of a Scottish domestic abuse support service 2017

## Question Two: In your view, what is the best model of multi-agency working for ensuring effective and early interventions for victims of domestic abuse?

**“Being discussed at Marac was helpful, I felt I am not alone.”**

DA Survivor

### Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (Marac)

For over a decade Maracs have transformed the multi-agency response to high risk domestic abuse across Scotland and improved outcomes for victims. Operating in 26 of Scotland’s 32 local authorities (as of January 2019) Maracs provide a safe environment for representatives from statutory and non-statutory agencies to meet and discuss individuals at highest risk from domestic abuse – those at risk of serious harm or murder.

**“When everyone attends, Marac undoubtedly increases the safety of victims”**

Scottish Marac representative, 2018

During the meeting, agencies aim to share relevant and proportionate information about current risk, after which the Chair will summarise risks and ask agencies to volunteer actions to reduce that risk and increase safety through the development of a tailor made action plan. **At the heart of the Marac is the working assumption that no single agency or individual can see the complete picture of the life of a victim, but all may have insights that are crucial to their safety.** Ensuring that the victim is supported throughout and their needs represented at the Marac is crucial to managing risk, improving and maintaining safety, and reducing repeat victimisation. Idaas (or domestic abuse specialists working to the same high standards of an Idaa) play an integral role in championing the voice of the victim during Marac and appropriately holding other agencies to account for keeping him/her at the centre of the conversation and resulting action plan.

As well as safeguarding victims, their children and multi-agency professionals, and making links with other public protection arrangements, Maracs provide an opportunity to hold perpetrators to account for their behaviour and disrupt the pattern of abuse. SafeLives’ Overview of Marac in Scotland ([appendix B](#)) provides greater detail about the evaluated Marac model, and how it currently operates in Scotland.

From our experience of supporting over 280 Maracs across the UK, we know the Marac model is most effective when it is part of a risk-led, Idaa response; adequately resourced, with strategic and operational multi-agency buy in. Our evaluation of the model in England and Wales ([Saving Lives Saving Money](#)) supports feedback from Scottish Marac professionals that Maracs create an environment which is conducive to safe information sharing and effective action planning for those at greatest risk. The benefits of this extend beyond the Marac itself.

**“Our joint working is very effective as people know each other and know who to contact. People involved in Marac are often already connected on other groups. Our Marac is always well attended and people recognise the benefit of the process.”**

Scottish Marac Coordinator, 2018

**Following intervention by a Marac and an Idva [Idaa] service, up to 60% of domestic abuse victims report no further violence.**

Saving Lives Saving Money (SafeLives)

**“Marac is a key strand of our VAW strategy”**

Scottish VAWG Coordinator, 2018

**Existing Marac capacity in Scotland**

In 2018, at least 2,350<sup>1</sup> victims at high risk of serious harm or murder as a result of domestic abuse and at least 3,400 children<sup>2</sup> were discussed at 338 Marac meetings across Scotland. However, this does not include all operational Maracs, including some large Scottish cities, and therefore in reality the numbers are likely to be much higher.

For a break-down of Scottish Marac data in the period 1<sup>st</sup> January – 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018, please see the table below. The data shows a small overall increase in the number of cases discussed at Maracs across Scotland since the previous year, however the number is still below the recommended 40 referrals per 10,000 adult female population.

Scottish Maracs 1st January - 31st December 2018 <sup>1</sup>	
Number of meetings	338
Number of cases	2,999
Estimated cases per year <sup>2</sup>	3,142
Repeat cases	623
- Repeat rate	21%
Recommended number of cases <sup>3</sup>	6,250
Cases per 10,000 female population	20
Change in cases since last year <sup>4</sup>	74
- % Change in cases <sup>4</sup>	+ 3%
Cases discussed per meeting	9
Children in household	4,310

*1. Based on data submitted by 22/26 operational Maracs in Scotland.*  
*2. For areas where data was submitted for less than 12 months (4 Maracs with 9 months of data) the annual rate was calculated using the average number of cases discussed per meeting.*  
*3. SafeLives recommends Maracs hear 40 cases per 10,000 female population.*  
*4. Maracs with no comparison data (4 Maracs) have been excluded from these calculations.*

We know that the current gap in data collection and national Marac coverage paints an incomplete picture of what’s happening across Scotland, and this frustration is felt on the ground.

**“Equally Safe Strategy highlights Maracs but not appearing to address the few remaining local authority areas that do not have a Marac, who are left ‘struggling’ to get on with this important issue.”**

Scottish local authority lead, 2018

<sup>1</sup> Number of cases minus repeats, rounded down to the nearest 50 to account for possible additional repeats across different Maracs.

<sup>2</sup> Estimate calculated by removing the overall repeat rate for Scotland (21%) from the total number of children discussed at Marac, which includes repeats.

### Question Three: In your view, what is the best model for professionals assessing risk in relation to domestic abuse?

**“Accurate and consistent risk identification and assessment processes are vital for making appropriate referrals to established interventions to manage and reduce risk i.e. IDVA [Idaa] and Marac”**

College of Policing, 2018

#### The Risk-Led Model

We believe that responses to domestic abuse must be grounded in the risk-led model; a coordinated community response where agencies work together to ensure people at the greatest risk of serious harm or murder as a result of domestic abuse get urgent and effective help. In question one, we outlined the key components of this model, namely ensuring those at high risk have access to Idaas and effective Maracs. In collaboration with ASSIST and Scottish Women’s Aid SafeLives has delivered Idaa training to over 250 professionals across Scotland since 2013, equipping them with the knowledge, tools and confidence to effectively support individuals experiencing domestic abuse. Demand for Idaa training remains high despite the end of Scottish Government funding in 2016. Similarly, 26 local authorities operating Marac, and a further 6 on the cusp of implementing the process, demonstrates that there is a significant amount of knowledge, experience and acceptance of the risk-led model across Scotland. While this is a huge achievement, we still lack national consistency and sustainability with areas and services highlighting problems with funding for Idaas and Marac, which leads to dilution of the model, its impact, and outcomes for victims.

**“I found the training very helpful and I came away with a much better working knowledge of the risk assessment and how it can be used and fits into work with families.”**

Learner on SafeLives risk training, Renfrewshire 2017

**“The training gave me the confidence that I required to keep victims of abuse safe”** Marac

Representatives Training, North East Scotland, 2019

Embedding the risk-led model means ensuring the effective assessment of risk for each individual, in each individual circumstance, and tailoring safe responses to meet their needs in line with that risk. It means that someone can talk about their specific circumstances and receive an individually tailored risk-led response. It means decisions are defensible and evidence based. It means adequate and sustainable funding is available for Idaas and Maracs. Most of all, it means that victims receive a robust, effective and timely response, no matter where they live in Scotland.

Importantly, risk-led and needs-led approaches are not mutually exclusive, quite the opposite is true. Safety is *the* priority need for anyone experiencing domestic abuse. SafeLives believes that in order to end domestic abuse, we need a holistic set of interventions to ensure victims of domestic abuse get safe, and stay safe. Only once that has been achieved will victims be afforded the space and opportunity to focus on their needs and recovery in order to lead the life of their choosing. Comprehensive safety and support planning that addresses the full range of risk and needs is essential for everyone experiencing domestic abuse, not just those at high risk. The risk-led model supports that approach through creating better overall awareness of domestic abuse, a shared language of domestic abuse, strengthening partnerships



and improving integrated working between both specialist and mainstream services who regularly come into contact with people experiencing *and* perpetrating domestic abuse.

The introduction of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act 2018 is a very welcome step in criminalising coercive controlling behaviours that isolate, degrade and restrict the lives of those experiencing domestic abuse. SafeLives are pleased to be working with Police Scotland, along with consortium partners ASSIST, the Caledonian System, Fearless (Sacro) and Safer Borders to prepare officers and staff for implementation of the new offence with our [DA Matters Scotland](#) programme. Those services who are experts in supporting people experiencing domestic abuse have understood the signs and impact of coercive control for a long time and recognise that it is the greatest pre-cursor for domestic homicide. Indeed, SafeLives' Dash includes several questions that directly relate to coercive control, such as harassment, isolation, harm to pets, financial control, etc. Applying Dash identifies those at high risk of serious harm, but can also support with highlighting forms of coercive control that can be used to inform a wider understanding of the abuse and control being experienced. This will therefore inform a skilled practitioner's overall professional judgement on their risk and safety needs. This is a structured professional judgement approach, which SafeLives fully supports and promotes through our risk training (see Q1 response).



## Question Four: In your view, who are the key partners that should be involved in multi-agency working to support victims of domestic abuse?

### Core agencies for an effective Marac

In order to ensure the risks to victims and their families and the management of perpetrators are jointly and comprehensively assessed and addressed SafeLives have identified 9 core agencies for an effective Marac. These are:

- ✓ Local Police
- ✓ Idaa (or equivalent specialist practitioner working with victims to the same high standards as an Idaa, including those based within local Women's Aid groups)
- ✓ Criminal Justice Social Work
- ✓ Children and Families Social Work
- ✓ Education
- ✓ Health (including the physical and mental health of adults and children)
- ✓ Substance Misuse Services
- ✓ Housing (including homeless services)
- ✓ Adult Support and Protection

Depending on local circumstances, additional agencies such as services for LGBT+ and BME victims, male victims, older victims, the fire service etc. also attend Scottish Maracs either on a regular or ad hoc basis.

In order for Marac to be effective, it is essential that core agencies consistently attend and participate in the Marac. Agency representatives must be empowered by their organisations to have the necessary time and access to systems to complete research, to have training and confidence in what constitutes relevant and proportionate information sharing, and to be at an appropriate seniority level to be able to commit resources and offer creative actions that will increase the safety of victims, and address the behaviour of perpetrators.

**“Partnership working works very well, as well as information exchange and there is a good political buy in into the Marac principles etc. There is a great willingness in making it work and good representation.”**

Executive Manager, Women's Aid Group, Scotland

## Question Five: In your view, what guidance is required to support and embed effective multi-agency working for victims of domestic abuse?

### Scottish Maracs

Although Marac operates in the majority of local authorities the lack of national roll out and subsequent funding for core Marac components has led to organic growth, various models of operation and national inconsistencies. While much progress has been made in recent years through SafeLives' Marac Development Programme (MDP), Maracs across Scotland are struggling to provide dedicated Marac Coordinators, Administrators, Idaas and Chairs, or invest in ongoing training, development and evaluation to improve local practice despite their best efforts.

**“For me this training was so overdue. I now have a far better understanding of what my role is in this process.”**

Learner on SafeLives risk training, Glasgow, 2017

**“Excellent training, informative and answered lot of question that I had regarding information sharing and storing information”**

Marac Representative Training, Western Isles, 2017

SafeLives welcomed the reference to Marac within Equally Safe in 2014, but many shared our disappointment at the lack of an explicit action relating to Marac within the Equally Safe Delivery Plan. As such, we agree with feedback from Scottish Maracs, and areas implementing Marac that call for clarity around Scottish Government's expectation for Marac to operate consistently, in every local authority, and how this should be resourced. Through our recent survey ([appendix C](#)) Marac stakeholders listed funding for coordinators and Idaas within the top three priorities that would improve Marac outcomes for victims and children in their area.

### Resources

As part of the MDP, SafeLives has compiled and continues to add to the [Scottish Resource Library](#). Guidance documents are created in response to requests from Scottish Maracs and practitioners through the MDP helpdesk, at local site visits and through training. To date we have not had capacity within the MDP to develop a range of Scottish Marac Toolkits similar to those which support professionals in England and Wales but this is something which we believe would be beneficial to Marac professionals across Scotland, ensuring they know the unique contribution which their agency can make in increasing the safety of victims at high risk of serious harm or murder. [Appendix D](#) includes the Scottish Marac toolkit which was developed recently as part of our Whole Lives project, funded through National Lottery Community Fund Scotland.

### Training and Development

Training for Marac professionals is a key priority for those involved in the process as evidenced by our survey in [Appendix C](#). Our most recent training events have focussed on the role of chairs and representatives as well as safe information sharing and action planning. Feedback overwhelmingly supports the continuation of national events, but some areas have flagged that despite the cost being significantly subsidised through the MDP, a lack of available budget remains a barrier to some professionals from accessing support.

**“We’re keen to find out what [free] training would be available to our MARAC to assist with improving our practice as we have no budget to fund this currently.”**

Scottish Marac Coordinator

**“It would be good if there was national development of [Marac] resources that can be used locally.”**

Scottish VAW Coordinator, 2018

A ‘Training for Trainer’ model for Marac representatives and chairs is one option to provide a cost-effective method for consistent training delivery across the country. Moreover, high quality e-learning packages can enhance wider understanding and awareness of domestic abuse and coercive control, risk identification and information sharing for a wide range of multi-agency partners. SafeLives has developed successful e-packages with NHS Health Scotland, Police Scotland and for the Idaa programme. Whilst e-learning cannot replace good quality in-room training, it can enhance the reach of messaging around effective and safe practice, and they can be tailored for specific audiences and local needs. This can be further enhanced by webinars and interactive briefings that can be accessed across the whole country.

**“The more people that know about Marac and how to refer, the better.”**

Scottish Marac Representative, 2018

**“The training captures the importance of a Marac, and the level of danger involved in high risk cases”**

Learner on Marac Information Sharing and Creative Action Planning Training , South West Scotland, 2018

**“I definitely feel that training on what is expected for Marac would be hugely beneficial or else we could be completely missing the point.”**

Scottish Marac Representative, 2018

### **Quality Assurance and Evaluation**

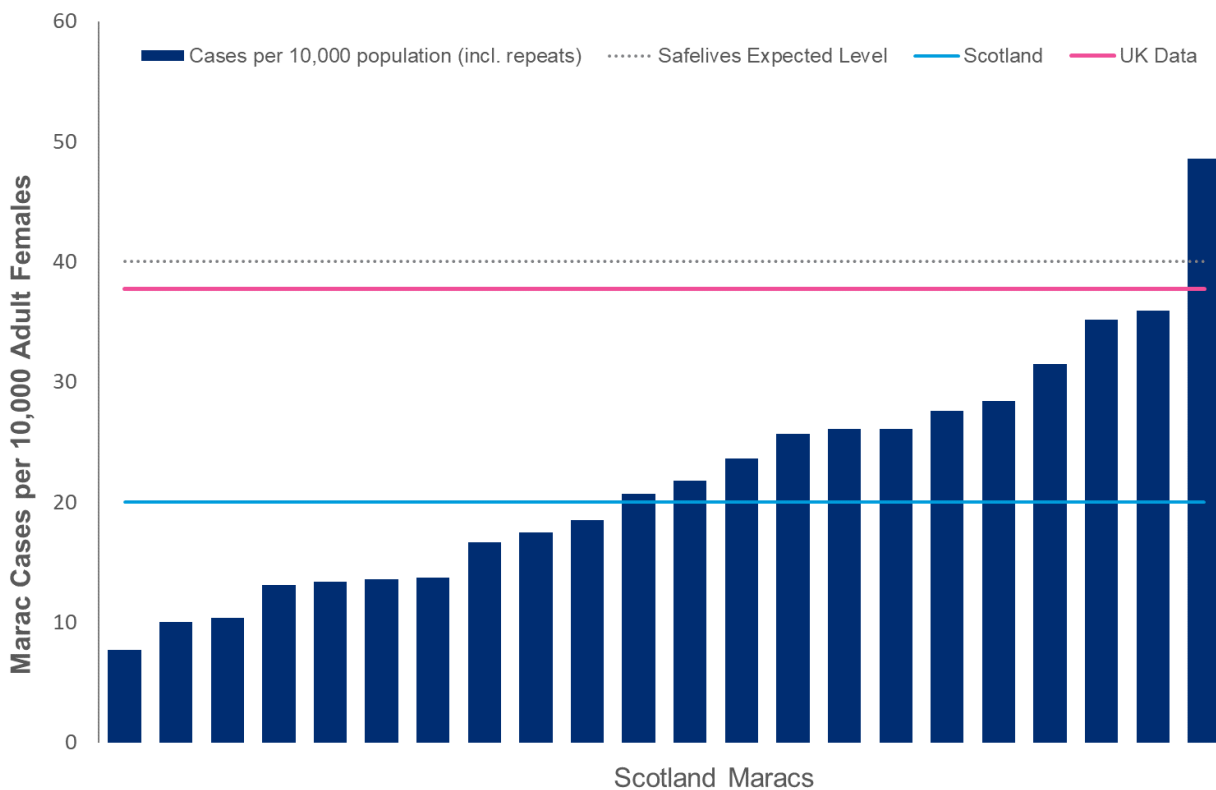
As part of UK-wide Marac data collection, data is submitted to SafeLives from 22 Scottish Maracs, every quarter. The data comprises dates of meetings held within the quarter and information about cases discussed at each meeting. This includes details such as the total number of cases discussed, the number referred by each agency and the number of cases where the victim had certain characteristics (such as disability).

## What the data can tell us

The information below is a snapshot of Scottish Marac data collected from 22 Scottish Maracs between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2018 and 31<sup>st</sup> December 2018. The data can be used to highlight where improvements are needed in the identification of victims.

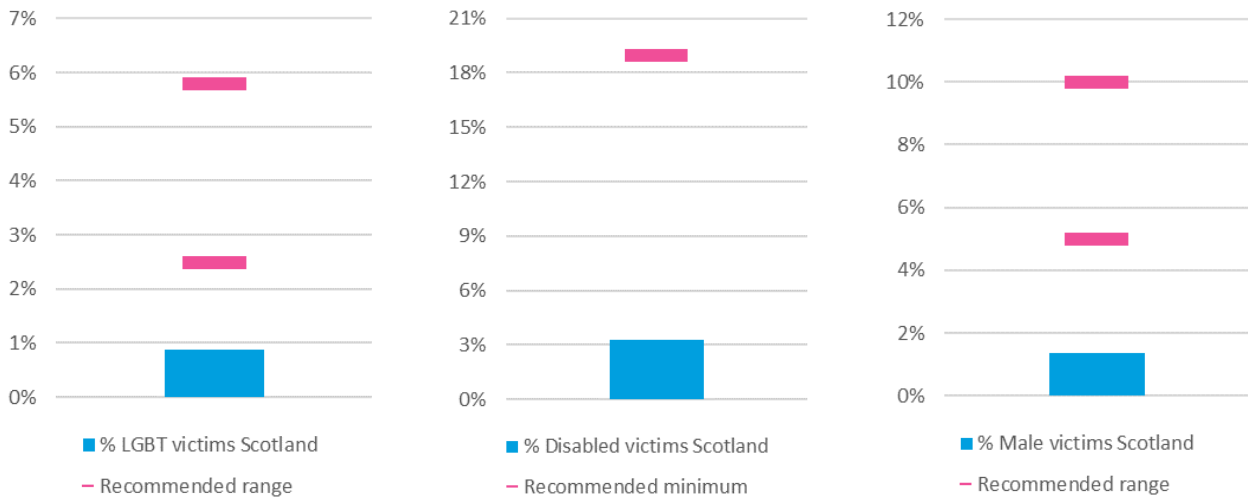
### Rate of referral into Maracs

Scottish Maracs are seeing fewer referrals per 10,000 of the adult female population compared to the UK as a whole. SafeLives recommends that Maracs see 40 cases per 10,000 in order to reach the estimated number of victims of domestic abuse at high risk of serious harm or murder. The graph below shows a breakdown of cases per 10,000 by individual Maracs within Scotland. The number of cases varies widely within the 22 Maracs and only one exceeds the expected rate of 40 cases per 10,000.



### Minority characteristics

Like the rest of the UK, Scottish Maracs are seeing a lower rate of victims with certain minority characteristics than would be expected based on population estimates and the prevalence of domestic abuse. The graphs below show the percentage of cases with certain minority characteristics, compared to SafeLives' recommended levels.



By combining data from individual Maracs to build a national picture across Scotland we are also able to understand the bigger picture of support available across the country, and make Scotland-wide recommendations which are useful for a wide range of stakeholders, for example the checklist to inform the development of local information sharing and operating protocols, GDPR guidance and the national action planning guidance which is currently being developed. As well as improving the performance of Marac, data capture must increase the accountability of statutory and voluntary agencies responding to domestic abuse, so survivors can see available information and how it compares to the national picture.

By analysing Marac data and making these results widely accessible we can improve the evidence base available to Maracs (and others) to monitor and improve their practice, to better support victims, challenge perpetrators and to stop abuse.

Due to cuts to the MDP budget, SafeLives currently absorbs the cost of collecting, analysing and reporting on Scottish Marac data, but this approach is not sustainable. As such, a dedicated resource for Scottish Marac data collection is necessary to continue to undertake existing activities and move towards more efficient methods of data collection in order to demonstrate the impact of Marac in improving outcomes for victims experiencing high risk domestic abuse.

## Question Six: What protocols need to be put in place to ensure effective information sharing between agencies?

The voices and experiences of victims and survivors are inextricably linked to all of SafeLives' work. We know that a key concern of victims and those who advocate on their behalf is the parameters around the information being shared between agencies. It is vitally important that information shared is relevant, proportionate and robustly governed so that victims feel confident about engaging with a process designed to help them. Instead this process often feels threatening and out of their control.

We are aware that the introduction of GDPR created perceived barriers for many organisations in sharing information, however, as our [guidance](#) sets out, we are confident that GDPR has not changed the legal basis for sharing relevant and proportionate information within the Marac setting. By supporting Scottish Maracs around the introduction of GDPR we were able to dispel misconceptions about the legislation and highlight it could improve practice as our engagement with Scottish Maracs throughout the lifetime of the MDP has repeatedly highlighted that confidence around information sharing varies greatly across the country.

***“Core governance needs to be reported somewhere to make it visible that they are part of a bigger movement of safety across the country. Too often it feels like at individual case level we can’t achieve much and lose the perspective of a national provision of protection.”***

Scottish GBV Lead, 2018

### Marac Operating Protocols (MOPs) and Information Sharing Protocols (ISPs)

Ensuring Maracs are governed by local, up-to-date information sharing and operating protocols is vital to the overall accountability and integrity of the Marac process. It is the responsibility of Marac steering groups, or governance groups to demonstrate that the legal grounds to share information have been established, that only relevant and proportionate information focussed on risk is shared, and that the storage and distribution of information is strictly managed. [Appendix E](#) contains a checklist for Marac steering or governance groups which outlines the key features of Marac ISPs and MOPs in order to assist in the drafting of local documents. SafeLives advocates that local areas check protocols with their own legal advisors and recommend that the Information Commissioners Office Scotland is contacted for guidance on specific issues.

### Training and Guidance

From observing Scottish Maracs and engaging with a range of multi-agency professionals we know that breaches of safe information sharing principles generally occur due to a lack of training and understanding about what constitutes risk-focussed, relevant and proportionate information, and how that information can be used and stored. It is consistently highlighted as a key concern by learners at the outset of training, workshops and development events we operate and reflected in our recent Marac Overview document in [Appendix B](#). Whilst Marac has created a unique environment conducive to safe information sharing, where the dynamics and manifestations of domestic abuse are understood, professionals are often concerned about missing out key details or not sharing the missing puzzle piece which could impact on victim safety.

In order to address this, the adoption of national and local protocols and guidance must be combined with training to ensure professionals and agencies are clear about their roles and responsibilities. Only then will we be able to confidently assure victims of domestic abuse that their information is being shared legally and proportionately, in order to increase their safety and hold perpetrators to account.



## Question Seven: Do you think that multi-agency arrangements for protecting victims of domestic abuse should be placed on a statutory footing?

Yes  No

Please explain your answer.

**“Marac has ran for a long time in our area and now needs the statutory underpinning for it to be given the status it needs”**

Scottish GBV Lead, 2018

**“A statutory underpinning placing MARAC on the same footing as MAPPA would be very helpful”.**

Scottish DA Coordinator, 2018

[Saving Lives Saving Money](#) demonstrates the effectiveness of the risk-led Idaa/Marac model - we know it works. Additionally, the commitment of numerous professionals, services and local authorities across Scotland who have embedded the model locally with no core funding is testament to its ability to improve outcomes for victims and children at high risk of serious harm or murder as a result of domestic abuse. These families deserve a really robust response no matter where they live. In order to achieve this and end the current postcode lottery of service provision we need commitment from Scottish Government to the sustainability of the risk-led model, Scottish Idaas and Maracs. We believe that placing Marac on a statutory footing would give VAWG forums the credence they deserve, and provide local authorities with clarity about how best to response to high risk domestic abuse.

**“A national model for MARAC would be helpful”**

Scottish VAW Coordinator, 2018

Domestic abuse won't stop because of legislation alone. Domestic abuse will only stop when our society embraces wider cultural change – from top to bottom. The Scottish Government has a huge opportunity to start a national conversation about domestic abuse and approaches that really make a difference in the long term. Survivors' voices and experiences must be at the heart of that discourse and that change – listening and responding to the change that survivors tell us is so necessary.

It is important that the preamble to any statutory arrangement recognises the disproportionate impact that domestic abuse has on women and girls, and its close relationship with other forms of violence against women and girls. It is also crucial to recognise that domestic abuse can impact anyone regardless of age, gender, sexuality, class, income or religion. If the statutory footing it is placed on is too specific, we risk missing those who are most vulnerable.

Too often local authority teams working with domestic abuse operate in isolation, making responses that recognise the connected nature of families a rarity. The response to domestic abuse is held far too separately from responses to other adverse experiences children and adults face, from child abuse, to mental ill-health, to youth crime and economic disadvantage. Local authorities and the full range of local agencies will benefit from working in a more holistic way,

addressing the needs of the whole person, not one or a series of issues and life stages, and treating immediate and extended family members as they are – deeply connected to each other.

Health professionals, children’s social work services and police are often the first agencies to come in to contact with someone who is experiencing domestic abuse. But, fundamentally, the Scottish Government should support *all* agencies and groups to improve the identification and appropriate referral of domestic abuse victims. Too many victims are still invisible to key agencies. Earlier identification of domestic abuse by agencies cuts the time that victims and their families will live with domestic abuse. This time delay is already too long in Scotland (in Whole Lives whilst the average length of time was 4 years, 25% of survivors had experienced domestic abuse for over ten years before accessing specialist support).

We believe strongly that no one agency can respond effectively to domestic abuse. We also believe that issues of social vulnerability and justice are tolerated more and treated with lower levels of urgency than those which happen far more rarely, but whose impact can be immediately and visibly devastating, such as national security or civil contingencies. To prepare for a statutory Marac system we think it would be valuable for those agencies which sit around Marac to take part in a programme of simulated exercises similar to those which are routine for national security and civil contingency operations. This allows organisations to get to know each other’s priorities, ways of working, behaviours, capabilities, legal powers and thresholds.

Multi-agency collaboration and proactive partnership working (at all levels) is crucial to any effective response. Central to this is the understanding that all of the needs a person has will interconnect. For example, trying to address domestic abuse issues without understanding how substance use creates additional impacts, and being able to work on both issues will result in poor outcomes.

SafeLives fully embraces the opportunity to work together with all agencies committed to improving outcomes for those living with domestic abuse. We cannot and will not do this alone when there is great expertise in so many organisations across Scotland. Together, we can create a change that will put an end to domestic abuse. Placing Marac on a statutory footing in Scotland is a key step in achieving this.

**“There is a strong commitment to multi-agency working and that seems to be working well.”**

Scottish Advocacy Service Manager