

Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Interventions for Victims/ Survivors of Domestic Abuse

Deep Dive-Learning Report

May 2023

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1. Note on Context

This report was originally drawn up following a consultation in 2019 and deep dive sessions in May-July 2021.

Since this work was undertaken there have been changes and developments in the operation of Maracs across Scotland. Notably, while at the time this report was written there were 32 Maracs operating across 29 local authorities, since August 2022 there are 35 Maracs operating across all 32 local authorities.

Meanwhile, the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and more recently the cost of living crisis, has increased the vulnerability of those affected by domestic abuse and brought services in the violence against women and girls sector under additional strain.

The report provides a snapshot of the views and learning from the 2019-2021 period, together with themes and recommendations identified at a workshop held in November 2022 with stakeholders.

2. Background and Overview

Purpose and Approach

1. Equally Safe¹, the Scottish Government and COSLA's co-owned strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls, identifies effective Marac operation as a key component in addressing violence against women and girls in Scotland.
2. The Scottish Government has funded SafeLives to support the development of Maracs across Scotland, through the Marac Development Programme and the Marac Development Lead post between 2015-2021, and since October 2021 through the Safer, Sooner multi-agency programme. SafeLives collects and reports on Scottish Marac data. As of August 2021 there were 32 Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (Maracs) operating in 29 Local Authorities in Scotland (see Appendix A). It is worth noting that Marac only represents one part of multi-agency risk management work for domestic abuse cases.
3. The Scottish Government ran a consultation on how to improve multi agency risk assessment and interventions for victims/survivors of domestic abuse from 30 November 2018 to 2 March 2019, and sought views on opportunities to improve multi-agency risk assessment and interventions for victims/survivors of domestic abuse in Scotland. In particular, the consultation aimed to explore how best to ensure victims/survivors of domestic abuse in local communities across Scotland could benefit from a more consistent approach and how local arrangements could be strengthened to support the objectives of Equally Safe.

The consultation asked seven questions, which respectively addressed:

1. Training on domestic abuse and appropriate risk assessment tools
 2. The best model of multi-agency working for ensuring effective and early interventions for victims/survivors of domestic abuse
 3. The best model for professionals assessing risk in relation to domestic abuse
 4. The key partners that should be involved in multi-agency working to support victims/survivors of domestic abuse
 5. Guidance required to support and embed effective multi-agency working for victims/survivors of domestic abuse
 6. Protocols needed to ensure effective information sharing between agencies
 7. Whether multi-agency arrangements for protecting victims/survivors of domestic abuse should be placed on a statutory footing.
4. A number of key themes and observations emerged from the consultation analysis and the Scottish Government and key partners held a number of deep dive sessions over May 2021-July 2021 to explore these themes in more detail. The sessions covered:
- Risk assessment and whole system responses

¹ [Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2021/04/Equally-Safe-Scotland-s-strategy-to-eradicate-violence-against-women-2021-2024.pdf)

- Information sharing
- Collective leadership and accountability
- Training and workforce development
- Children and young people
- National guidance and statutory footing;
- Authentic voice and intersectionality.

5. This report outlines key observations, views and themes for further discussion in each session, as well as recommendations and the next steps we hope to take in order to develop an action/implementation plan, and improve our systems and responses.

Deep Dive Attendees

6. The events were attended by a wide range of senior third sector and public sector stakeholders from across the sector, including Marac chairs and co-ordinators, VAW Partnership Lead Officers and Chairs, Adult Protection and Child Protection Lead Officers, Social Workers, Housing Officers, Children’s Services Managers, Health and Social Care Team Managers, Women’s Aid Managers, Police Inspectors and Public Health leads.

7. In order to ensure a diverse range of views and experiences were considered at each event, an open invitation to attend each deep dive was promoted widely through key networks and newsletters, with an average of 65 partners registering for each event. The agenda for each session was co-designed with key third sector and public sector partners.

Glossary & Abbreviations

COSLA – Convention of Scottish Local Authorities

CYP – Children and young people

Dash – Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence Risk Indicator Checklist (also known as DASH RIC). Dash is an evidence-based tool supporting agencies to make defensible decisions about risk and safety for victims of domestic abuse. It was developed by SafeLives and partners to help practitioners who work with adult victims/survivors of domestic abuse to identify those who are at high risk of harm and whose cases should be referred to Marac in order to manage their risk.

DAQ – Domestic Abuse Questions (used by Police Scotland). DAQ is based on the Dash, with three additional questions to support decision making in relation to child protection.

Idaa – Independent Domestic Abuse Advocate; in the definition agreed by SafeLives, ASSIST and Scottish Women’s Aid, the main purpose of an Idaa is to address the safety of victims at high risk of harm from intimate partners or ex-partners to secure their safety and the safety of their children. In the context of Marac, an Idaa ‘provides specialist support

before, during and after the Marac to address the risks faced by the victim; representing their views and wishes at the meeting, sharing expertise and co-ordinating the action plan’.

MAPPA – Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements, a UK-wide mechanism through which the police, NHS, prison service and local authorities work together to assess and manage the risk posed by violent and sexual offenders; more detail on the workings of MAPPA is available on the Scottish Government website and on the MAPPA site.

Marac – Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference. Maracs are regular, local meetings where information about domestic abuse victims/survivors at high risk of serious harm (including murder) is shared between representatives from a range of local agencies to jointly assess the risks and inform a coordinated action plan to increase the safety of the victim/survivor and their children.

Maracs are a specific model of multi-agency risk assessment and working for victims/survivors at high risk of harm as a result of domestic abuse. Where the report uses the terms ‘multi-agency working’ or ‘multi-agency responses’, it is describing multi-agency risk assessment and working more generally and not only Maracs.

PHS – Public Health Scotland

SG – Scottish Government

SWA – Scottish Women’s Aid

VAWG – Violence Against Women and Girls

3. Overarching Messages

8. While the remainder of this learning report outlines the specific messages and themes for further discussion that attendees highlighted at each deep dive event, there were a number of overarching messages that were highlighted at all seven deep dive sessions. These include:

- i. Adequate resourcing - There is a need to ensure adequate resources are made available to support Maracs, and other key multi-agency systems and processes, to operate to a high standard in each local authority area. This includes (but is not limited to) dedicated resources for Marac coordinators, Idaas, specialist services and national development support;
- ii. Clear roles and responsibilities - Professionals within all key public sector and third sector organisations need a robust understanding of their individual and collective roles and responsibilities in relation to Maracs. Processes must be put in place to ensure they have the knowledge, skills and support needed to fulfil these functions, and that accountability systems are robust;
- iii. National Guidance and Quality Standards - To support a consistent approach to identifying and responding to high risk victims/survivors of domestic abuse across Scotland, there is a need to develop national guidance and quality standards. This should build on the good practice and processes already in place in a number of local authority areas across Scotland, and support should be made available to local partners to implement the guidance and identify any areas for improvement; and
- iv. Statutory footing - Creating a statutory duty around Maracs could help to ensure it is given equal status to other public protection processes and that all key public sector partners prioritise this accordingly. However, there are concerns that a statutory duty could contribute to low standards, and potentially increase risk to victims/survivors, in areas where there are currently flaws in current Marac delivery. The specific duties placed on partners, and the additional resources required to meet them, will need to be fully explored to help ensure they drive forward improved outcomes for high risk victims/survivors of domestic abuse. It is important that this exploratory work also recognises and considers the wider infrastructure of support needed locally to ensure women, children and young people receive early and effective interventions, that prevent violence and maximise safety and wellbeing.

4. Emerging Themes and Recommendations

Overarching recommendations

9. The following overarching recommendations were identified at the workshop held in November 2022:

- Necessity of effective resourcing for Maracs; information on this needs to be fed into the strategic funding review, particularly in relation to funding for IDAAs. A sustainable funding model for Maracs needs to be developed to help ensure consistency in the quality of support to victims/survivors across Scotland.
- The voice of experience must inform every stage of the development of Marac in Scotland, to help ensure that Maracs are responsive to victims/survivors' needs.
- Link Marac development work with that being undertaken on domestic homicide reviews.

Short term recommendations

10. Carry out research/ mapping exercise of practice in local authority areas across Scotland. This will identify:

- Current involvement in Marac
- Training undertaken
- Training needs of professionals in different sectors and with different levels of involvement in Marac
- Information sharing
- Cost benefit analysis
- Use of DASH RIC
- Exploration of a composite storytelling case study.

11. To inform more inclusive, accessible practice in future, research will also include consultation of those with lived experience, and an exploration of:

- Gaps in the current system in identifying and responding to the risks that victims/survivors experience, including systemic barriers to referral
- Examples of inclusive and accessible practice.

Medium term recommendations

12. Develop a set of national standards around MARAC

- Standards should cover areas including role/sector expectations, good practice, accounting for needs of children and young people, information sharing, and resourcing models. This will prepare the ground for statutory footing.

13. Develop training model

- The model will raise awareness and help ensure consistency of practice. The model will build on existing frameworks and adopt a tiered approach according to the level of professionals' involvement in Maracs. It will cover key themes such as information sharing, and accounting for children and young people's needs and experiences.

Long term recommendation

14. Marac should be put on a statutory footing

- This will put Marac on the same footing as other public protection processes, and potentially raise standards while driving better funding and consistency in quality of delivery across Scotland.

5. Risk Assessment and Whole System Responses

16. Attendees were asked to consider:

i. Risk Assessment

- How to develop and ensure a shared and common understanding of what risk looks like in relation to domestic abuse;
- How to improve the effectiveness of current methods/tools; and
- The support needed nationally and locally to strengthen their effectiveness moving forward.

ii. Whole system responses

- The current barriers to promoting a whole systems response to domestic abuse and the opportunities/ enablers to overcome these;
- The support needed nationally and locally to support this, and where this support is lacking; and
- Areas of good practice/current whole systems responses to learn from.

17. Key messages from the deep dive included:

- Training in both domestic abuse and current risk assessment tools like the Dash checklist, and potentially a standardised method and associated practices, would help ensure a consistent approach across systems and services (although some stakeholders have expressed concerns about the Dash's suitability for use by frontline staff without sufficient training);
- Common and shared language would help to promote a shared understanding of issues across systems and services; and
- Strong national and local leadership is vital to ensure recognition across systems and services that tackling domestic abuse is everyone's business.

Key Discussion Points

Risk Assessment

18. When asked about how we could develop a common and shared understanding of what risk looks like in relation to domestic abuse, attendees highlighted the importance of:

- Training in both domestic abuse and current risk assessment tools like the Dash;
- Embedding risk assessment and responses in organisational practice and ethos;
- The use of common language to promote a universal understanding across systems and services;
- Quality assurance processes to ensure consistency across areas;
- An audit to better understand how current tools are being used and how we might improve practice;

- Clear data sharing agreement to ensure information is shared across relevant services and agencies; and
- Clear pathways of support that are readily accessible.

19. When asked how we could improve the effectiveness of current tools and methods, attendees reflected on the potential benefit of:

- Adequate and accessible training and resources;
- Quality assurance processes to measure the effectiveness of current methods and their impact;
- Creating and fostering links with other public protection processes;
- A directory or repository of available services and training/resources that is easily accessible and kept up to date; and
- Strong leadership and strategic buy in across organisations and agencies.

20. In relation to the support needed nationally and locally to strengthen the effectiveness of current risk assessment processes, attendees noted:

- The requirement for strong national and local leadership, and a recognition across systems and services that tackling domestic abuse is everyone's business.
- A national framework or structure might be beneficial to address inconsistencies and ensure victims/survivors across Scotland receive a consistent response.
- The need for a commitment to general training and awareness raising across national and local systems to ensure practitioners and leaders are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Whole Systems

21. When discussing current barriers to promoting a whole systems response for tackling domestic abuse, and how to overcome these, attendees noted:

- There is a lack of knowledge and confidence among practitioners to recognise the signs of domestic abuse and to intervene effectively. This is compounded by a lack of awareness about services or available support;
- A need to consider a 'whole family approach', and increase awareness of how signs of domestic abuse can be present across the family unit;
- The importance of all public bodies, agencies and service representatives working together in a collaborative way and having a robust understanding of their individual and collective roles and responsibilities in relation to information sharing;
- The need to ensure Maracs enjoy the same recognition and buy in as other public protection processes and that all key partners recognise their roles and responsibilities within the process. It was noted that there should also be some accountability and/ or governance mechanism attached to the process;
- The importance of all key public sector and third sector partners working together to ensure women with multiple and complex needs benefit from

person-centred pathways of support and minimise siloed working within systems and services;

- The benefit of ensuring all policy is developed through a gendered lens to lead to better outcomes for women and children.

22. When thinking about the national and local support needed to promote a whole systems approach, attendees reflected:

- Resourcing was a factor nationally and locally and additional funding in this area would be required to ensure systems, services and structures are able to respond to the needs of women and children;
- National leadership would be hugely beneficial as it would help organisations and agencies to better understand their role in tackling VAWG. A national framework/standards for Maracs that is adaptable to local context would be beneficial;
- National Marac standards underpinned by a statutory footing might help ensure a joined up approach and that organisations and agencies recognise and fulfil their roles and responsibilities; and
- Clear data sharing agreements and processes between agencies would be beneficial, potentially in the form of national templates that can be adapted to local context.

23. In relation to areas of good practice in this area we might learn from and adapt, attendees noted:

- Public protection arrangements like MAPPA provide an insight into other public protection agencies and the potential benefits of a statutory footing;
- There are opportunities to learn from local authority areas that have developed multi-agency projects/ processes (generally with strong links between local Women's Aids, VAWPs, public services and specialist domestic abuse services) to enable victims/survivors to have access to joined-up pathways of support depending on their needs and that information is easily and readily shared and available to relevant agencies²; and
- The Safe and Together national model³ helps promote a whole systems response by embedding a streamlined understanding and response for victims/survivors of domestic abuse among practitioners.

Themes for Further Discussion

24. The following themes emerged from the deep dive session as key issues and possible actions to be explored. They were be considered as part of the Advisory Group's development of recommendations and an action/implementation plan:

² The Borders Pathway Project was highlighted as a good example of a whole system approach to domestic abuse, with attendees also highlighting examples of good practice from areas including Dundee, Fife and Ayrshire.

³ [About the Safe & Together™ Model | Safe & Together Institute \(safeandtogetherinstitute.com\)](https://www.safeandtogetherinstitute.com)

- i. How might a sustainable, consistent, whole systems approach be promoted at a national level, with improvements to effectiveness and quality assurance?

Responses could include:

- A recommendation to explore this within the refresh of Equally Safe and its delivery plan;
 - Considering how to increase capacity and resourcing for Maracs nationally and locally;
 - Performing a mapping and analysis of current gaps in provision and quality, listening to victims/survivors and their experiences of systems and services;
 - Undertaking an audit of, and tracking use of, Dash and other risk assessment tools being used across Scotland;
 - Developing quality standards for Idaas and the Dash;
 - Disseminating learning and best practice gleaned from the Marac co-ordinators forum, and setting up a process for sharing 'case study' learning;
- ii. What measures can be taken to develop robust links with other public protection processes?
 - iii. How might development of Maracs in Scotland link in with development of a Scottish approach to Domestic Homicide Reviews to harness learning for systems and services?

6. Information Sharing

25. Attendees were asked to consider:

- If adequate local data sharing arrangements are in place;
- The challenges, issues and impact of current arrangements;
- Areas of good practice to learn from;
- The support needed nationally and locally to support good practice; and
- If national standards/guidance would be beneficial and if so, what this would look like.

26. Key messages from the deep dive included:

- There is a degree of uncertainty among professionals over data sharing in general and over what information should be considered a 'grey area', in particular what is 'wellbeing' and what is 'safeguarding'. Clearer protocols or data sharing agreements could help clarify these areas and bolster practitioner confidence.
- Experience of data sharing between partners was inconsistent across Scotland, with variations in process and protocol.
- More consistent practice could be fostered through learning from how other public protection systems share information, as well as through peer support and the introduction of a National Guidance/Practitioners Handbook covering information-sharing.

Key Discussion Points

27. When asked to consider current data sharing arrangements and the challenges, issues and impact associated with these, attendees noted:

- Inconsistencies between partnerships regarding information sharing processes with partnerships taking different decisions in terms of what data will and won't be sharing at meetings and how;
- Some areas have formalised data sharing protocols that are highlighted at the beginning of each session; however, in general, more clarity around what is and isn't appropriate to discuss in meetings would be helpful to avoid chairs having to make decisions on the spot;
- There is a nervousness and uncertainty around data sharing in general. This can push people to either under-share, or over-share important information.
- Processes should ensure that key pieces of information make their way to people who can use it, acting on it to provide safety for the victims/survivors. Marac representatives in particular should have a strong understanding of what information is vital to share and with whom;
- Capacity of co-ordinators can be a barrier as they have a huge amount of work and responsibility to work through in each meeting. Increased support and resources would help to address this. It might be helpful to look into the role of Marac Co-ordinators across Scotland in more detail as there are wide disparities in terms of responsibility and expectations around the role.

- There are patterns in terms of what information is considered a 'grey area' where decisions to share are complex or difficult to reach. In particular, what is 'wellbeing' and what is 'safeguarding.' Scenarios with high risk perpetrators and victims/survivors with strong safety plans can also create a tension when it comes to information sharing.
- It would be helpful to have processes in place that reflect victims/survivors' needs and provide clear information to victims/survivors in terms of what information is shared at meetings and why –it is important for victims/survivors to feel safe to engage with services and this would help with managing expectations and ensuring adequate transparency such that victims/survivors understand the process and feel included, rather than it being 'done to' them.

28. When asked about examples of good practice and the support needed nationally and locally to enable this, including the benefit of national standards and guidance in this area, attendees reflected:

- In relation to Maracs, areas generally only share full minutes from meetings with all partners where absolutely necessary but in most cases, only the actions from the meeting are shared to minimise the amount of sensitive data being shared.
- There are benefits in stakeholders asking themselves what data it is essential to share, rather than just sharing data because they historically always have.
- Maracs across the country are in different stages of their development and need different levels of support in relation to data protection and information sharing protocols – process maturity varies hugely across the country.
- It would be helpful to improve culture to enable professionals to develop their confidence around information-sharing. This could include the establishment of a peer support network, or establishing local Marac 'leads' or 'champions' that people could turn to if they have questions.
- A National Guidance/Practitioners Handbook could be useful. It could contain examples of typical 'grey area' scenarios in which the decision whether to share is challenging or complex, as well as frameworks to help people understand whether the information they hold should or shouldn't be shared. This could be supported by training to ensure the handbook is used and useful, and that the basics are understood by practitioners in a consistent way nationally.
- The effectiveness of information-sharing protocols can be enhanced if they provide for information-sharing outwith Marac meetings when immediate action is required; and if they are accompanied by training as well as efforts to build trust between partners.
- Learning from how other public protection arrangements share information might be useful to help develop participants' confidence over information sharing.
- There should be more recognition nationally about Marac and the purpose of information sharing in the Marac process, highlighting the aims and obligations of Marac and why we share information in this context.

- The fact that Marac is not on a statutory footing can create a barrier as there are major differences in how Maracs across Scotland operate. Information sharing agreements and protocols differ in terms of who chairs, attends, coordinates etc. This creates issues for local multi-agency practice and meeting data protection legislation, gaps etc. A national approach and statutory footing might ensure consistency. However, this should account for local flexibility so statutory bodies can interpret and adapt to local needs and priorities.
- Any national guidance in this area should be principles focussed and allow for local areas to adapt data sharing agreements to their specific contexts.

Themes for Further Discussion

29. The following themes emerged from the deep dive session as key issues and possible actions to be explored. They will be considered as part of the Advisory Group's development of recommendations and an action/implementation plan:

- i. How might clarity and support around information sharing be improved?

This could be pursued through:

- Setting up a peer support network, for local Marac 'leads' or 'champions', that people could turn to if they have questions; and considering how to learn from and disseminate good practice from existing networks;
- Development of clear guidelines for what is appropriate information sharing - supplemented by practical training and case studies and best practice examples;
- Development of a national guidance/practitioners handbook, accompanied by training, on information sharing in line with the Information Commissioner's guidelines and principles, and with relevant consultation with professional bodies. This could be part of SG/ COSLA/ PHS Marac guidance (see National Guidance and Statutory Footing section) and contain examples of typical 'grey area' scenarios where deciding whether to share is complex or challenging, as well as frameworks to help people understand whether the information they hold should or shouldn't be shared;
- Multi-agency Violence Against Women Partnerships (VAWPs) guiding information sharing and awareness of Marac at a local strategic level;
- Ensuring consistent, clear responsibilities regarding information sharing for Marac co-ordinators across Scotland.

- ii. What might we learn from other areas, for example MAPPA, that have in place formalised agreements and protocols?

7. Collective Leadership and Accountability

30. Attendees were asked to consider:

i. General

- How to ensure that Violence Against Women and Girls is recognised as a key strategic priority both nationally and locally;
- The barriers to this happening and how to overcome these; and
- The key leadership roles that should be involved and how to help those in leadership roles to recognise their role in tackling violence against women and girls.

ii. Marac

- How to ensure there is strong collective leadership for the Marac model and that senior leaders within organisations understand the role they can play in ensuring senior buy-in within and across partner organisations; and
- How to ensure organisations and staff involved are held accountable to the process, its values and their own responsibilities.

31. Key messages from the deep dive included:

- Embedding a robust understanding of domestic abuse in assessment tools, processes and interventions would be beneficial and would ensure structures and systems recognise preventing and tackling domestic abuse is everyone's responsibility.
- It would be beneficial to develop or put in place accountability and quality assurance processes for Maracs to ensure a consistent and robust response across all local authority areas.

Key Discussion Points

32. When asked to consider how to ensure that violence against women and girls is recognised as a key strategic priority and how to overcome any barriers to this happening, attendees noted:

- Work in this area can be very siloed which can lead to some organisations/ policy areas not recognising tackling and preventing domestic abuse work as their responsibility.
- There is currently a lack of accountability in national and local government around progressing this agenda and leadership is often driven by individuals rather than embedded in cross-policy systems and structures.
- A 'hearts and minds campaign' could be helpful to promote effective collective leadership. This could help ensure people in relevant areas and roles recognise their responsibilities and develop their understanding of gender based violence.
- Embedding domestic abuse in routine work and assessment tools would be beneficial, and would ensure structures and systems recognise preventing and tackling domestic abuse is everyone's responsibility.

- It would be helpful to create a plan for embedding national priorities at a local level, with clear lines of responsibility for implementation.

33. When asked about how to ensure strong collective leadership for the Marac model and appropriate accountability processes, attendees reflected:

- In terms of improving how Maracs operate across Scotland, it is important to recognise what works well and work towards achieving this. The principles of an effective Marac are applicable to all, but their implementation must take account of local/geographical differences;
- There is a need to ensure parity with other public protection agendas;
- There is a need to ensure Maracs have a wide range of knowledge and experience at the table, everyone should be respected equally and have the opportunity to contribute. No single organisation can do this alone. We need to rely on each other's expertise and work collaboratively;
- There is potential for further work to confirm the key organisations/ policy areas that need to be involved in Marac, and to consider how we help those in leadership positions recognise their role in tackling Violence Against Women and Girls;
- A whole system approach is needed with strong governance in place. An inter-connected co-ordinated approach creates visibility and provides a framework that ensures cohesion, consistency and accountability;
- A clearer delineation of roles and responsibilities, and how these can support others during the Marac process, would be beneficial and could be informed by an exploration of the relationship between Maracs and the work of partners;
- Maracs should operate to a similar standard in general to ensure a consistent response;
- It would be helpful to develop and ensure resources and support are available to elected representatives in their leadership role to improve and develop understanding of the impact of gender inequality, including VAWG;
- A National Chairs Group consisting of VAWG Chairs and SG representatives could be useful and we should consider how Maracs engage with local Violence Against Women Partnerships and explore how this relationship could be enhanced.

Themes for Further Discussion

34. The following themes emerged from the deep dive session as key issues and possible actions to be explored. They will be considered as part of the Advisory Group's development of recommendations and an action/implementation plan:

- i. How can we ensure all Maracs operate to a similar standard with associated governance and quality assurance processes, and foster leadership buy-in?

Actions could include:

- Development of a local (and national) champions' network to promote VAWG (possibly with a focus on Marac) across relevant systems and structures;
- Encouraging chief officers and other key local leaders to attend a Marac meeting to gain a better understanding of how they work and the critical role they play
- holding a national VAWG Marac conference to raise the profile of this issue and invite national and local leaders to attend
- embedding Equally Safe principles within wider strategic plans and frameworks at a local and national level
- ensure support is available for elected representatives in their role to improve and develop understanding of gender equality issues
- Ensuring that guidance or statutory guidance (including, where relevant, existing guidance in relation to VAWG) makes clear the roles that local partners are expected to take in Marac and other multi-agency risk assessment and working, has the senior buy-in required, and the resources available to support local partners' participation
- Embedding domestic abuse in routine work and assessment tools

8. Training and Workforce Development

35. Attendees were asked to consider:

- Areas of good practice to learn from in terms of building domestic abuse-competent workforces;
- The support needed nationally and locally to support good practice and facilitate access to appropriate training and wider workforce development;
- The training in place to promote a shared understanding of the role and function of Maracs and how to improve on this and increase awareness; and
- The training in place to promote a shared understanding of risk assessment tools and processes and how to improve on this.

36. Key messages from the deep dive included:

- Developing a national framework to support a consistent approach to training on risk assessment and other key elements when identifying and responding to domestic abuse would be beneficial, along with a quality assurance framework to support it;
- Training is needed to support consistency across local authorities for Maracs, and this should include all participants, representatives and chairs.

Key Discussion Points

37. When asked to consider current good practice and the support needed to facilitate and ensure access to appropriate training attendees noted:

- Training is most successful where an infrastructure is put in place within and across organisations to support the learning to be implemented;
- Finance and resourcing for training is a big issue – organisations cannot deliver on training, or free up staff time to attend training, without adequate resources in place locally. Similarly, we need to ensure buy-in from senior managers. If they do not understand why domestic abuse training is important, they may be unwilling to free up staff time to do this training;
- Training cannot be a one-off activity but should be considered as continual professional development. A rolling programme is required that is linked to policy and practice and the need for learning to be refreshed;
- The pandemic has had a huge impact on methods of delivering training. It has encouraged organisations to think about who their priority groups are for training and use e-learning resources that stakeholders can complete at a time that suits them, as well as webinars and virtual sessions (although online learning may not be suitable for all courses and individuals);
- Recent training delivered by SafeLives was highlighted as an example of good practice as it focussed on raising awareness of amongst professionals from librarians to housing leads;
- The Domestic Abuse Awareness Raising Tool (DAART), developed by SafeLives with funding from the Scottish Government and hosted by

SafeLives, provides a comprehensive overview for practitioners to help develop their initial understanding of domestic abuse.

38. When asked to consider the training in place for Maracs, attendees reflected:

- There is a need to think more widely than Marac reps and chairs when considering who needs training. We need to think about who has the ability to identify and refer into Marac and ensure they have the knowledge, skills and confidence to do so in a robust way. Health Visitors were identified as a key group to be targeted.

39. When asked to consider how to strengthen existing training around the use of current risk assessment processes, attendees noted:

- Training is needed to support its consistent use but there needs to be national support for the model, with consistent messaging required across organisations; and
- Territorialism and competition for resources can't be allowed to undermine such important processes – we need to build on the strong tools that are in place, such as the SafeLives materials, rather than taking a step backwards.

Themes for Further Discussion

40. The following themes emerged from the deep dive session as key issues and possible actions to be explored. They will be considered as part of the Advisory Group's development of recommendations and an action/implementation plan:

- i. How can we create the right environment to maximise training opportunities and impact?
 - This might be pursued through awareness raising, a champions' network, culture change, and linking policy to practice
- ii. How can we develop a consistent approach to training, and ensure high standards of training, while sharing and making the best use of existing resources?

This could involve:

- Developing a national framework/forum, and building a quality assurance framework to support it;
- Developing clear standards/expectations for levels of training for practitioners (supported by appropriate resource), working with COSLA (and learning from other training frameworks like the Dementia Framework for Excellence);
- A 'train the trainer' model;
- Specific training for Marac Chairs/Co-ordinators, Idaas and representatives to ensure each is aware of their specific roles and responsibilities;
- Working with existing mechanisms, or potentially developing a new forum, to regularly share learning about what works and what doesn't work in terms of workforce development

9. Children and Young People (CYP)

41. Attendees were asked to consider

i. General

- How current local systems, structures and processes maximise the safety and well-being of CYP affected by domestic abuse;
- How to ensure that CYP are visible in our collective response, ensuring that their experience is not viewed only through their mother/parent;
- What works well, and areas of good practice.

ii. Maracs

- How the voices of CYP are represented in your local Marac;
- How to ensure effective co-ordination between Maracs and other child protection processes;
- What works well, and areas of good practice.

iii. Risk and Needs Assessment

- How to manage and measure the needs of and risks posed to children and young people affected by domestic abuse as victims/survivors in their own right; and
- What works well, and areas of good practice.

42. Key messages from the deep dive included:

- It is important to take a 'whole family approach' to domestic abuse and to recognise children as victims/survivors affected by domestic abuse in their own right;
- Additional investment in advocacy services specifically for children and young people could help ensure their voices are heard at Marac and within other domestic abuse processes.

Key Discussion Points

43. When asked about current structures and responses to CYP, and the visibility of children as victims/survivors affected by domestic abuse in their own right, attendees noted:

- Processes and perspectives vary locally which can lead to varying inputs and outcomes in terms of support provision for children and young people;
- There is clear value in taking a holistic approach, but often services work in siloes rather than complementing each other;
- Gathering the views of children and young people, and hearing from children and young people themselves is crucial. Apps like Viewpoint and Mind of My Own can support this;
- The importance of engaging with practitioners like social workers to capture the nuances of what's happening and the dynamics within a family. Obtaining

views from Education and others regularly in contact with children and young people is also important; and

- How to communicate with children is really important as they themselves may not understand what is really happening and the impact. Practitioners need to be skilled at asking the right questions in the right ways.

44. When asked to consider how the voices of children and young people are heard at Maracs, and more broadly, how their needs and the risks posed to them are measured, attendees reflected:

- There was a general recognition that representation of children's views within Marac could be better;
- More data and insight through speaking to victims/survivors, and journey mapping could be helpful, for example to map the journey children take locally, how they reach services and Marac;
- There may in some cases need to be a distinction between direct (adult) victims/survivors of domestic abuse, who can be referred to Marac, and children for whom the impact is generally more indirect, and in what circumstances Marac may not be helpful for children;
- Within Marac the voice of the child is strong where there are good existing relationships with children's workers and others. Where there is only shorter term engagement this is less meaningful;
- The incorporation journey of the UNCRC will further emphasise the role of authorities to ensure that the voice of the child, wherever appropriate, is integral to decisions made; and
- There is an inconsistency in terms of listening to the voice of the child in Scotland and what information is provided to Marac by relevant agencies and organisations.

Themes for Further Discussion

45. The following themes emerged from the deep dive session as key issues and possible actions to be explored. They will be considered as part of the Advisory Group's development of recommendations and an action/implementation plan:

- i. What do we need to do to develop a holistic, whole family approach that recognises CYP as 'victims/survivors' affected by domestic abuse?

This could involve:

- Research on CYP's current journey/ experience of navigating local systems and services to identify areas for improvement
- Asking children & young people who have engaged with Marac how their voices could have been better heard, in circumstances where this is appropriate;
- Investigating, perhaps through a deep dive, the tensions between and across both civil and criminal justice systems in respect of parental rights and access to children where domestic abuse is a factor.

ii. How can we ensure CYP's views are heard as part of the Marac process?

This could be pursued through:

- Additional resources to support independent advocacy for children and young people;
- Working with stakeholders to come up with creative ways to engage with children in the Marac process, taking account for the risks arising when perpetrators use children as part of their abuse;
- Considering alternative methods of capturing the views of children and young people
- Greater training for social work/health/education staff on domestic abuse and Safe and Together principles
- Developing links with child protection processes.

10. National Guidance and Statutory Footing

46. Attendees were asked to consider:

- The guidance and resources available to support local Maracs and what works well;
- The current barriers to the guidance being implemented, and how to strengthen systems and processes to overcome these;
- If national guidance would help to drive improvement and any challenges in this area; and
- How to strengthen the Marac process at a local level and whether a statutory footing would strengthen how Maracs currently operate.

47. Key messages from the deep dive included:

- There are examples of good practice in terms of guidance and resources that could be adopted and adapted across local authority areas but the process would benefit from a clear national steer in terms of what resources should/can be used;
- A National guidance document for Maracs and a central repository for training and resources could offer consistency
- A quality assurance process for Maracs could provide monitoring and improvement mechanisms.
- While a statutory footing would help ensure Maracs are viewed at the same level of priority as other public protection processes, a careful consideration of potential negative consequences would be required as part of any decision making process.

Key Discussion Points

48. When asked about the current guidance and resources available and any barriers to implementing guidance, attendees reflected:

- Maracs generally follow SafeLives' guidance for Maracs based on the development of the evaluated model in England & Wales, which has been adapted to reflect the Scottish context and meet Scottish need;
- There is a suite of learning and resources available but no clear direction in terms of which to use or what resources would be most appropriate; and
- There are examples of good practice in terms of guidance and resources that could be adopted and adapted across local authority areas. This includes some guidance for chairs and co-ordinators.

49. When asked about the potential benefit of national guidance in this area, attendees noted:

- National guidance could ensure consistency and some form of quality assurance process for Maracs;

- National guidance could also be useful as a framework for training and resources;
- National guidance could also enshrine data sharing agreements and principles to support an effective flow of information between agencies; However, it would be important to ensure this was regularly reviewed and updated; and
- To help inform any guidance, there needs to be work done to gather information from Maracs across Scotland to find out what works well in order to inform specific sections. For example, joint working, representation, quality standards, training and resources.

50. When asked about how to strengthen local Maracs and whether a statutory footing would help to drive improvements, attendees noted:

- Some local areas have a dedicated Marac Coordinator in place which is hugely beneficial to the productive and effective operation of Maracs within a local area; however, even in these areas great variation exists in job descriptions, roles and responsibilities
- The role of an Ldaa in the process is crucial but provision is inconsistent and there are issues with resourcing in some areas;
- With no mandatory requirement to fund Maracs, funding allocation is inconsistent and it is often left to local areas to seek funding opportunities, some of which can be time limited;
- Having Maracs on a statutory footing could assist strategic buy in at a local level through an ‘everybody’s business’ strategic approach and ensure that the right representatives attend and are present at meetings;
- A statutory footing would increase the sustainability of multi-agency arrangements, as there can be an element of uncertainty in some areas as to the continuation from year to year due to changes in priorities and funding;
- A statutory footing might facilitate a more coordinated approach and place multi-agency arrangements for protecting victims/survivors of domestic abuse on the same status as other public protection processes;
- There is a concern that if arrangements are placed on a statutory footing:
 - The scope and focus of Maracs will fall predominantly to statutory agencies and not the third sector which could result in a loss of domestic abuse expertise.
 - Some victims/survivors may be reluctant to engage with statutory organisations which could push women into the margins because they are fearful of e.g. immigration status;
 - Maracs could become subsumed into the process for wider public protection arrangements and lose its gendered analysis. Placing Marac arrangements on a statutory footing would require careful and thorough consideration to ensure that these risks are addressed.

Themes for Further Discussion

51. The following themes emerged from the deep dive session as key issues and possible actions to be explored. They will be considered as part of the Advisory Group's development of recommendations and an action/implementation plan:

i. What do we need to do to inform decisions on a potential statutory footing?

- This could require a more detailed assessment of any potential risks of placing Maracs on a statutory footing, how these can be addressed, and what any specific duties for statutory partners would look like and mean in practice (potentially with recommendations on these duties if needed).
- It could also entail investigation of what resources, including funding, would be needed across all local authority areas enable them to implement robust, multi-agency arrangements, taking into account the nuanced needs of areas that will have a high volume of referrals, or in which meetings that cover large geographical areas.

ii. What are the next steps in potentially developing SG/ COSLA/ PHS Marac guidance and national standards?

- This could involve consideration of what guidance and national standards would look like and how they would be used in practice, potentially with the use of self-assessment tools to help identify any gaps across Maracs in different local authorities.

11. Authentic Voice and Intersectionality

52. Attendees were asked to consider:

i. Authentic Voice

- How to ensure processes for assessing the risks and needs of victims/survivors are shaped by their authentic voice and experiences of domestic abuse; and
- How existing practice could be strengthened and any areas of good practice to learn from and expand.

ii. Intersectionality

- How to ensure processes like Maracs are inclusive and respond to the diverse and complex needs and experiences of all affected by domestic abuse;
- The extent to which they currently take into account the additional barriers faced by those with protected characteristics; and
- What is needed to strengthen current processes and interventions and if there are any areas of good practice to learn from and expand.

53. Key messages from the deep dive included:

- Intervention and action should always be informed by the lived experiences of women and children and the involvement of trained Idaas is crucial to bringing the experiences of women and children to the table;
- Training and interventions should be cognisant of women with varied and complex needs as well as the additional barriers faced by those with protected characteristics.

Key Discussion Points

Authentic Voice

54. When asked about Authentic Voice, attendees highlighted:

- Victims/survivors can sometimes be concerned about the level of information sharing that takes place through the Marac process. Organisations involved in Maracs should always be clear with victims/survivors when information is being shared, with whom, and why;
- The involvement of specialist support organisations, like Women's Aid groups and other specialist domestic abuse services, is crucial as they bring the real experiences of victims/survivors to the table. It is also important to consider how to ensure the voice of victims/survivors referred by other agencies are also represented within the process;
- In general, it takes a long time to build up a trusting relationship with a victim/survivor and authentic views emerge through strong relationships with support workers that develops over time, rather than in a few meetings;
- The extent to which agencies can effectively advocate for victims/survivors depends on the understanding of Marac processes from external bodies.

Intersectionality

55. When asked about Intersectionality, attendees highlighted:

- Minority ethnic women face additional barriers in being referred to Marac;
- Community-based minority ethnic organisations may not have experience of Maracs, but have bespoke specialist experience that can lead to effective partnership working with others;
- Maracs don't adequately capture sensitivities around immigration status;
- Depending on what and how they are applied, risk assessment processes may not currently sensitively capture how different groups experience domestic abuse, e.g. older women, disabled women etc.

Themes for Further Discussion

56. The following themes emerged from the deep dive session as key issues and possible actions to be explored. They will be considered as part of the Advisory Group's development of recommendations and an action/implementation plan:

- i. How can we ensure authentic voice and the experience of victims/survivors is woven through the Marac infrastructure and associated outcomes?
 - Responses could include work with equality organisations to develop or update training for Marac chairs, co-ordinators and representatives that is cognisant of the additional complexities of women and children with protected characteristics.
- ii. How can we tackle institutional discrimination and ensure that the needs and unique experiences of women and children from marginalised communities is reflected at Marac and associated processes?

This may involve:

- Including more organisations that work with marginalised communities at Marac and associated processes
 - Consulting with victims/survivors from marginalised communities
 - Research to pinpoint direct barriers to access Marac, and creating an action plan with stakeholders to overcome them.
- iii. How can we develop an understanding of how well current systems and structures respond to the needs of women with protected characteristics and/or complex needs, and identify gaps or areas for improvement?
 - This could involve organising a mapping/analysis of current systems and structures.

12. Next Steps

57. A small steering group will be initiated to oversee the next steps of Marac development. made up of SafeLives, Scottish Women's Aid and a range of stakeholders with practical knowledge of MARAC operation.

58. In addition, workshops will be held periodically with a broader group of stakeholders to ensure work is progressing appropriately.

59. Aligned to the recommendations, SafeLives a will undertake a mapping exercise that aims to provide an accurate picture of current Marac provision in Scotland, and illustrate the benefits and impact of the model for victims of domestic abuse, stakeholders and the whole system response.

13. Useful Resources

Violence Against Women and Girls and Domestic Abuse

60. Equally Safe is the Scottish Government and COSLA's co-owned strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls in Scotland. It was last updated in April 2018 and a further refresh will be published in Autumn 2023. The strategy was developed by the Scottish Government and COSLA in association with a wide range of partners from public and third sector organisations. It provides an overarching framework for change and outlines our vision for a Scotland in which every woman and girl is safe and free from gender-based violence in all its forms.

- [Equally Safe: Scotland's strategy to eradicate violence against women - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

61. In order to help us realise this vision, we published an Equally Safe [delivery plan](#) which ran from 2017 to 2021⁴. In June 2022 the Scottish Government and COSLA published a new short-term [Equally Safe Delivery Plan](#), containing 33 actions, which will run until Autumn 2023 (a new Equally Safe Delivery Plan will be drafted over the course of 2023). The short-term Delivery Plan continues to promote a collaborative approach that recognises the different roles and expertise of organisations from the public, private and third sectors.

62. The Scottish Government worked with SafeLives to develop an e-learning resource for professionals in housing, social work, health and schools to ensure that they have a shared understanding of domestic abuse and know where to access further support.

63. The [Domestic Abuse Awareness Raising Tool \(DAART\)](#) builds on the DA Matters Scotland programme developed for Police Scotland in collaboration with partners [ASSIST](#), [the Caledonian System](#), [SACRO](#) and [Scottish Borders Safer Communities team](#) as part of the implementation of the Domestic Abuse (Scotland) Act.

SafeLives Marac Resources

64. Through the Marac Development Programme, SafeLives have produced a range of resources to support the effective operation of Scottish Maracs. A selection of resources is linked below and there are more resources available at the [SafeLives Website](#) (www.safelives.org.uk):

- [Marac in Scotland – Update report 2020](#) – an overview of current Marac provision in Scotland and some of the current challenges for effective operation;
- [Scotland Marac Toolkit](#) – for anyone involved in the Marac process in Scotland;
- [Marac Overview Scotland](#) – overview of the evaluated Marac model and its operation in Scotland, including the 10 principles for an effective Marac;

⁴ The Equally Safe: Final Report (November 2020) provides an overview of progress made since the publication of the previous 2017-21 Delivery Plan and actions taken during the COVID-19 pandemic.

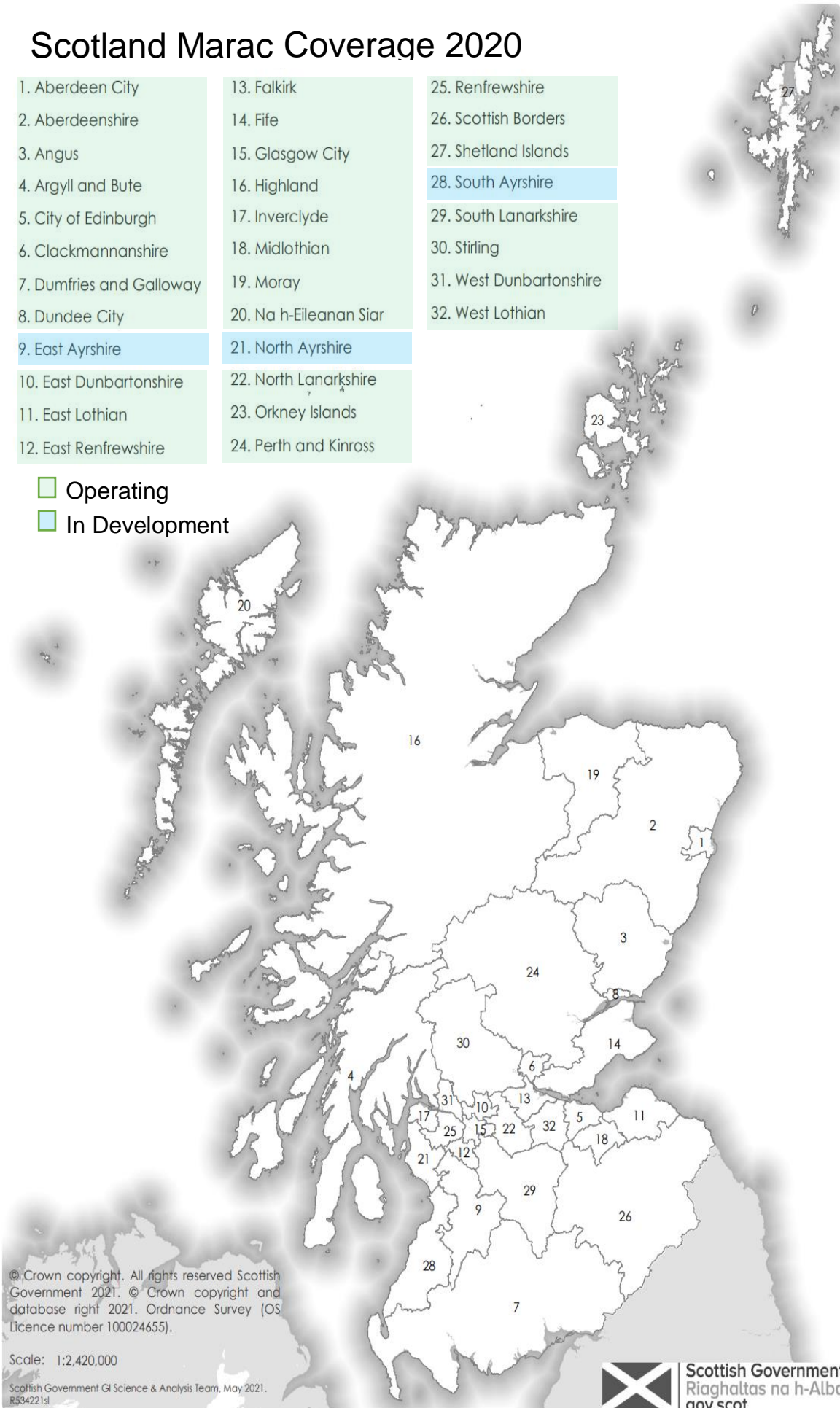
- [Marac Information Sharing Toolkit](#) – a guide to GDPR and information sharing in a multi-agency context (including Marac) in relation to domestic abuse;
- [SafeLives guidance for Maracs on sharing immigration information 0.pdf](#)- Guidance for Maracs on sharing information in relation to victims/survivors who may have insecure immigration status;
- [Authentic Voice Discovery Report](#) – final report of the Authentic Voice: Embedding Lived Experience in Scotland programme (led by SafeLives, Improvement Service and Resilience Learning Partnership in partnership with survivors of domestic abuse and trauma and funded by the Scottish Government)

Appendix A: Scotland Marac Coverage 2020

Scotland Marac Coverage 2020

1. Aberdeen City	13. Falkirk	25. Renfrewshire
2. Aberdeenshire	14. Fife	26. Scottish Borders
3. Angus	15. Glasgow City	27. Shetland Islands
4. Argyll and Bute	16. Highland	28. South Ayrshire
5. City of Edinburgh	17. Inverclyde	29. South Lanarkshire
6. Clackmannanshire	18. Midlothian	30. Stirling
7. Dumfries and Galloway	19. Moray	31. West Dunbartonshire
8. Dundee City	20. Na h-Eileanan Siar	32. West Lothian
9. East Ayrshire	21. North Ayrshire	
10. East Dunbartonshire	22. North Lanarkshire	
11. East Lothian	23. Orkney Islands	
12. East Renfrewshire	24. Perth and Kinross	

- Operating
- In Development



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Scale: 1:2,420,000

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