



People fleeing conflict or persecution face an increased risk of becoming survivors or witnesses of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) before, during, and after their journey (IOM, MMC & UNHCR, 2024). This has significant negative impacts on the well-being of newcomers in the Netherlands (Pharos, 2018b).

Project **SAMEN**, carried out by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and Médecins du Monde the Netherlands (Mdm) from September 2022 to August 2024, aims to raise awareness of SGBV among migrants and professionals in the Netherlands and to guide affected newcomers to support services.

The recommendations report outlines the lessons from two years of **SAMEN**. This infosheet summarizes the recommendations for Dutch municipalities.

Visit the [project website](#) for more information on the SAMEN project.

[Click here for the full report.](#)



## RECOMMENDATION 1

In a decentralized system such as in the Netherlands, whereby municipalities are important partners in establishing reception facilities, it is important for municipalities to contribute to sufficient and sustainable reception centers to promote the well-being of migrants by, for example, facilitating the search and identification of suitable locations for long-term reception centers.

Due to limited capacity, asylum seekers are regularly moved between locations: within the first six months, a person moves an average of once, but this can increase to four relocations over time (CBS, 2023). At the same time, this group often struggles with (mental) health issues: approximately 13-25% of refugees suffer from PTSD and/or depression (Pharos, 2018b). Asylum seekers have the right to mental health care, but due to relocations, they often find themselves moving from one waiting list to another, assuming they are even actively seeking formal support. Due to feelings of distrust, fear, and shame, only 4% of asylum seekers pursue such assistance (de Schrijver, et al., 2022). A long-term stay at the same place offers stability and the opportunity to build a supportive social network. Additionally, sustainable reception ensures continuity of healthcare support or treatments.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

Provide consistent, high-quality support for newcomers by sustaining effective initiatives. The **SAMEN** project highlights that a combination of engaging cultural mediators and creating an accessible environment is highly effective in reaching and assisting newcomers. It is furthermore crucial to offer continuous support to those awaiting mental health treatment.

By sustaining successful initiatives, newcomers can receive continuous support. Municipalities can provide structural funding for low-threshold services and cultural mediators, and appoint permanent points of contact within the municipality. An up-to-date social map, providing an overview of available services in the region, is often mentioned by professionals as a helpful tool in finding appropriate support for migrants. The central role of municipalities allows them to manage and maintain this map, ensuring it is kept current and known among professionals in the region.

## RECOMMENDATION 3

Foster inclusivity in network approaches by involving a diverse range of organizations, such as migrant and diaspora groups, cultural mediators, LGBTQIA+ organizations, and organizations which support individuals with intellectual disabilities.

Several municipalities have successfully used network approaches to address gender-based violence, such as sexual and domestic violence. It is essential to include diverse voices in a network approach, including people with and without a migration background, people with diverse SOGIESC identities, and people of different ages and socioeconomic backgrounds. Diversity increases the likelihood that the approach will be effective for a broad group. Additionally, involve migrant or diaspora organizations and cultural mediators in the meetings or ask them to organize a session. Representation within the municipality itself is also important for effectively reaching different target groups. Lastly, a migrant ambassador advisory board can help ensure that initiatives or policies align well with the diverse needs of migrants.

## RECOMMENDATION 4

Exchange ideas and collaborate with other departments within the municipality and with other municipalities on developments and initiatives to address issues holistically and facilitate knowledge exchange.

The increase in initiatives and network approaches against sexual and gender-based violence across the country is a positive development. However, coordination and exchange are sometimes lacking, which can leave migrants' needs unaddressed. This issue also results in disparities between well-resourced municipalities and those with limited resources, affecting the support available to newcomers. These differences can create challenges for individuals who frequently move between municipalities. By exchanging information, municipalities can share ideas and create synergies that benefit multiple municipalities. Collaboration saves time, reduces costs, and provides opportunities to support more survivors of SGBV. Additionally, internal cooperation between municipal departments is crucial to addressing complex and multidisciplinary issues.

