



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 migrant organizations and cultural mediators.

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

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



## RECOMMENDATION 1

Get to know the target group and the possibilities to effectively identify survivors and their needs, respond and refer in a culturally sensitive manner.

Identifying and supporting survivors becomes easier with basic knowledge about issues commonly faced by diverse groups. A culturally sensitive approach helps build trust, making it easier for survivors to share their experiences. Such an approach begins by getting to know each other in ways appropriate to the context and the professional or organizational role. This can be achieved by seeking contact or consulting available informational materials. Besides identifying cases, it is advisable for service providers to be aware of referral options so that migrants can receive the appropriate support. For instance, referrals can be made to Médecins du Monde Care Cafés or the National Psychotrauma Center ARQ, which provide tailored care for refugees with complex psychological trauma. Healthcare providers can use [interpreters](#) and get costs reimbursed through [various arrangements](#) after providing services to migrants without health insurance or a residence permit.

## RECOMMENDATION 2

Actively reach out to migrant communities by organizing information sessions and collaborating on an equal basis with cultural mediators, migrant organizations, community teams, and/or other 'informal' service providers. Compensate cultural mediators and migrant organizations for their time and expertise to reinforce an equal working relationship.

Reaching newcomers requires a proactive approach because they are often unfamiliar with available assistance and services in the Netherlands. Shame, fear, stigma, and mistrust of official institutions are also reasons for why migrants do not seek support after experiencing SGBV (de Schrijver et al., 2022). Therefore, it is recommended for service providers to proactively reach out to migrant communities, which can be done in various ways, such as involving migrant organizations in network meetings, presenting the organization's work to staff from other (informal) organizations, establishing dedicated contact points for migrant organizations, and involving cultural mediators in the organization. Newcomers also gain more trust in an organization when they can put a face to it.

## RECOMMENDATION 3

Start with basic information provision to effectively support migrants.

Newcomers sometimes do not know how service providers deal with sensitive information, for instance related to SGBV, because they are unfamiliar with the language, culture, social services, regulations and health-care landscape in a new country. Service providers can alleviate concerns by providing clarity. For instance, it helps when service providers explain their role (within the Dutch (care) system) and set expectations. What can the service provider do or not do for the survivor? It is also advisable to introduce questions and explain why sensitive questions are being asked. Lastly, clarify the rules and regulations related to confidentiality, as these practices might look different in countries of origin.

## RECOMMENDATION 4

Ensure diversity within your organization to reach different target groups, for instance by having a diverse staff or offering services and (anonymous) help lines in multiple languages.

Diversity within the organization offers many advantages: the organization can more easily respond to the specific needs of different target groups, appeals to a broader population, and diversity positively affects innovation (Hewlett, Marshall & Sherbin, 2013). Service organizations should assess the level of diversity within their staff, being aware of different cultural backgrounds or language skills. For example, is the assistance or information on the website available in different languages? Various guidelines, such as those from the [Dutch government](#) or the [Social and Economic Council](#), describe how organizations can take steps to become more diverse. A more diverse organization cannot be achieved overnight. In the meantime, cultural mediators can support cases which require intercultural expertise.



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