



5. PACE Grassroots Gender Equality Leadership Program

The PACE Leadership program is an evidence-based, grassroots, inclusive, community-led initiative developed by MCWH in 2009. PACE, which stands for Participate, Advocate, Communicate and Engage, strengthens the way migrant and refugee women and gender diverse leaders take the lead within their workplaces, communities and everyday lives.

Distinct from other gender equality leadership programs, PACE defines leadership through the lived experience of migrant and refugee women, and is guided by what leadership means to them. The program does not limit itself to training participants for Boards or senior leadership positions. Rather, it is tailored to meet a broader definition of leadership, which is more collective and expansive than individual advancement.

By redefining the idea of leadership, PACE opens spaces for migrant and refugee women and gender diverse people to participate within their own spheres of influence and feel empowered to create lasting change in their lives and communities.

The PACE program builds migrant and refugee women and gender diverse people's capacity to:

- Participate in the workforce, civic and community life
- Advocate on issues that concern them to make positive change
- Communicate leadership qualities and skills, and
- Engage with issues and others in the community for the purposes of providing ongoing support to other migrant women and gender diverse people

To date, PACE has been delivered across Victoria, to almost 500 program graduates. All participants of PACE Leadership are linked into the PACE network, a community of migrant and refugee women and gender diverse people who are leaders, advocates and change makers in their communities. There are almost 400 migrant and refugee women and gender diverse people in our PACE network which provides a platform for ongoing connection, professional development, engagement and other leadership opportunities.

PACE can be delivered in a range of tailored formats that increase access for participants who would otherwise be prevented from attending leadership programs. This includes a mix of remote and in-person sessions, including outreach locations. There is potential to deliver PACE across a broader demographic, reaching migrant and refugee women and gender diverse people in each state and territory.

How do we know PACE works?



500

migrant and refugee women
and gender diverse people
trained through PACE



400

people are part
of the PACE
network

100%

of participants reported
**improved
confidence
and increased
advocacy skills**

100%

of participants stated that
they were
**satisfied with
the training
program**

In 2026-27 MCWH calls upon the Australian Government to:

Provide ongoing funding to MCWH to deliver PACE Leadership nationally and to resource and sustain the PACE Leadership network.

Over 4 years \$3,617,800.

After joining PACE, I felt more empowered to connect with my local council to seek some support to meet the needs of my own community. We started the Arabic playgroup every fortnight and we started to have Arabic books in our local library."

- PACE participant

Being part of the PACE network helped me reconnect with my sense of purpose and community. Each conversation made me feel seen, heard, and empowered, reminding me that mental wellbeing is rooted in support, trust and collective growth"

- PACE Participant

PACE leadership program is helping to challenge gender norms, make workplaces safer and more equal by supporting women and gender diverse Victorians to reach their leadership potential."

- Natalie Hutchins MP, Former Victorian Minister for Women

Migrant and refugee women face additional barriers and are very underrepresented in leadership. I'm so delighted that we (Victorian Government) were able to fund PACE (until June 2025). It takes a group of people who haven't been traditionally invested in, and really helps to build their capability, and provide them with engagement opportunities to think about they can help their community. Having bespoke courses that are really designed to meet the wonderful women where they are [...] makes the investment in PACE uplifts the entire community."

- Michelle Clark, Director, Office for Women Victoria