

→ → Micro Loans for Internationally Trained Immigrants



2012 Report to the Community

Filling a critical need

→ The Immigrant Access Fund continues its critical work of helping Alberta's immigrants overcome the financial barriers they face in obtaining the Canadian training or accreditation they need to be able to work in their pre-migration field.

The value of immigration to Canada is huge. We are counting on immigrants for demographic growth and to help meet demands of the labour market. But we need to make sure we're taking advantage of the skills and education with which they come to Canada. According to a 2011 RBC report, simply paying Canada's immigrants the same wages and salaries as their Canadian peers with similar education levels could be worth as much as \$30.7 billion to Canada's economy.

By providing loans to help immigrants pay for the costs of becoming able to work in their field, IAF is helping people move from underemployment to full employment in their field, ultimately participating fully in Canada's economy.

In the past 12 months IAF has grown beyond what Dr. Maria Eriksen, IAF's founder, could have imagined when she and a small dedicated group started the grassroots organization in 2003. Her vision – that all immigrants have access to opportunities to work in their field – is coming to fruition.

Loans change lives

As the program matures and more borrowers complete their accreditation and become better able to work in their field, IAF more fully understands the impact of receiving an IAF loan.

Muhammad Rehman (featured in our *Salute to Success* section in this report) says IAF helped him achieve his life goals. He told us, "Now I am on track to complete my designation and I will be able to find further work and develop my skills and advance my professional position." That's a true testament to the value of our program.

Expansion with vision

Our growth is quite phenomenal. We now have offices in Edmonton and Calgary and are working toward significantly increasing the number of loans approved each year. And IAF is establishing itself outside of Alberta with a strong affiliate in Saskatchewan, under the capable leadership Wendy Morris, founder and catalyst for IAF Saskatchewan. We've also established IAF Canada – with support from the Foreign Credentials Referral Office of Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) – to increase access to IAF loans across the country.

Building on our relationships

Because of our demonstrated success, provincial and federal funders see IAF as a strong player in delivering micro loans. We have forged new relationships and strengthened existing ones with governments at the federal and provincial level, including Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), CIC and Alberta Enterprise and Advanced Education.

Our strategic relationship with our long-time partner Momentum continues. In addition to acting as a loan delivery agent for loans in Calgary and southern Alberta and providing



Kerry Longpré, IAF President

loan administration for all IAF loans, Momentum's expertise in micro lending and community economic development adds strength to IAF's work.

Vision and hard work

I was a founding director of IAF and feel proud to have helped build the IAF legacy. My predecessor Amal Umar, IAF's President from 2008 to June 2012, ensured IAF's vision and values are enshrined in all we do and led IAF with passion and clarity. The Hon. Peter Lougheed was one of IAF's greatest ambassadors and advocates; we are saddened by his passing and will miss him. When summoned by Maria Eriksen to help her on her quest for equality for all Canadians, Mr. Lougheed, Jim Gray and Brian Felesky stepped forward and formed IAF's advisory council, which continues to guide IAF's vision.

IAF is a great organization because of the hard work, diligence and dedication of many people. I would like to acknowledge my fellow board members and volunteers, IAF's Executive Director Dianne Fehr, the rest of the IAF team and the Momentum team, who truly represent IAF's clients in all of their diversity. Thank you.

On behalf of the Board of Directors,


Kerry Longpré



IAF Edmonton office opens

→ In January 2012 IAF officially opened its Edmonton office. With a staff of four, the office supports loan applicants and borrowers who live in Edmonton, Red Deer and northern Alberta. Edmonton staff are focused on strengthening and building IAF's referral network, and increasing the program's profile generally.

Prior to this, the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers served as Loan Delivery Agent, allowing IAF to thrive and prepare to take on this new challenge. IAF appreciates EMCN's ongoing support.

Helping to overcome barriers

→ A recent study led by Dr. Hieu Van Ngo of the University of Calgary examined the barriers that immigrants face when trying to enter the Canadian workforce in their field. The report also identified three types of benefits that IAF loans contribute to help immigrants overcome the barriers to economic and social integration.

Benefits of receiving an IAF loan

Primary

- Access to timely financial assistance to jumpstart professional re-entry efforts
- Improved ability to take exams and courses that are prerequisites to accreditation and certification
- Increased ability to career plan

Secondary

- Increased access to complementary resources and services, social support, personal coaching and improved financial literacy
- Enhanced ability to deal with financial institutions, establish a credit history and achieve work-study balance
- Improved capacity to support family

Long-term

- Improved access to well-paid, stable employment resulting in a sustainable livelihood and a high standard of living
- Positive identity, personal growth and positive relationships with family
- Enhanced citizenship, social belonging and community participation

Increased capacity

→ In April 2012 the Government of Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Loans Pilot Project committed \$3.3 million to the IAF Alberta program, more than half of which is loan capital. The funding allows IAF Alberta to increase its target for new loans by more than 330 over the next two years, introduce learning plan and employment supports and strengthen services to immigrants living throughout the province.

Provincial nominees can now apply

→ People who have been nominated for immigration by the Province of Alberta and who have applied to CIC for permanent residency are now eligible to apply for IAF loans.

Calling all applicants!

→ We want to make sure that anyone who needs help paying for the costs of becoming able to work in their field knows about IAF loans. We know that to reach more prospective applicants we must promote the IAF program beyond our usual networks.

Based on what we know about the people we've already lent to and on research we conducted to find out how immigrants find information about working in their field, we will:

- Strengthen our relationship with our most prolific referral agencies – our "stars" – which currently refer about 50% of our applicants.
- Seek out new referral groups – our "rising stars" – from ethno-cultural, faith and occupation-based communities. This will help us receive more word-of-mouth referrals.
- Launch a campaign that will include transit, print and online advertising. This will help connect to prospective applicants who might not be referred or hear of the program from their community.

IAF exists to lend money to immigrants who are unemployed or underemployed in order to facilitate improvement in their employment situation so they are working at the level that they were trained for/employed at prior to coming to Canada.

If an applicant fits this profile, the key question becomes, "Why would we *not* give them a loan?"

Strategic Principles include:

- An understanding that IAF is helping immigrants to build on the personal assets they arrived in Canada with.
- People only acquire debt to support their best interests; a loan is approved when it is the appropriate tool for the applicant's circumstances.
- The loan portfolio is managed to achieve a repayment rate that attracts loan capital donors and guarantors and operating funds.
- The priorities of access, repayment, and labour market integration supersede commercial self-sufficiency of the portfolio.

Fundamental Principles upon which loans are assessed:

- The best interests of the applicant is the underlying guiding principle for all loan decisions.
- Overall integrity and sustainability of the loan fund by maintaining a high repayment rate is an equally important guiding principle.

→ IAF makes a difference by being different

IAF is unique.

We are not a bank.

We are a community.

→ IAF and its partners and supporters have a common vision to help immigrants return to the work they did before coming to Canada. We envision a Canada where immigrants have equal opportunities to participate in the workforce. We see them contributing their expertise and diverse experience to enrich Canada economically and socially. We also understand that newcomers face unique circumstances and challenges that can be barriers to their full participation in the workforce.

The IAF program is highly responsive to the needs of the population it serves. These are character-based loans. IAF lends to people who typically cannot access mainstream credit because they are unemployed or in low-paying “survival” jobs, do not have a credit history in Canada, and have no assets. IAF’s low write-off rate – less than 3% of funds disbursed – is proof that our loan recipients respect the trust we place in them.

We call our approach “value-added” because we refer loan applicants and recipients to other community supports that will help them integrate, explore pathways to working in their field in Canada and provide guidance outside of IAF’s expertise. We make them feel welcome.

Spotlight On our partner referral agencies

→ IAF values the relationships it has with agencies that work with newcomers. About 50% of IAF applicants are referred by organizations that are already supporting them on employment and accreditation matters. While there are many organizations across the province that refer their clients to IAF, IAF enjoys a special relationship with the following groups.

Edmonton

In Edmonton, IAF receives 25% of its referrals from the Edmonton Mennonite Centre for Newcomers (EMCN), and 23% from the Bredin Institute. We have had working relationships with both organizations since 2007, when we first focused efforts on delivering loans there.



→ EMCN enhances the quality of life for newcomers and all Canadians by helping to make Edmonton a welcoming community in which to make a home. EMCN has a spectrum of programs and services to meet any settlement need, including referring clients to IAF.

“It’s part of the network we tap into to meet our clients’ purposes,” says Executive Director Erick Ambtman. “IAF is unique in that it has the expertise to understand the challenges newcomers are up against and the ability and the capacity to respond.” emcn.ab.ca



→ Bredin is a non-profit organization established in 1976 to work with unemployed and underemployed Albertans by offering employment services and training. Bredin works with immigrants primarily by helping them attain Canadian workplace experience and complete the Canadian certification and licensing process.

“There can be huge exam costs for some required exams,” says Executive Director Debbie MacDonald. “Sometimes newcomers need transitional assistance to pay those costs so they can get over a hurdle and succeed. IAF helps them do that.” bredin.ca

Calgary



→ The Centre for Newcomers in Calgary is a key referrer to the IAF program, referring 12% of IAF’s Calgary applicants.

The Centre for Newcomers takes pride in supporting newcomers realize their aspirations through services and initiatives either offered at the Centre or in partnership with other organizations sharing similar vision for newcomers’ integration in their communities.

“IAF is one such resource that plays a vital role in enabling newcomer clients reach their career and employment goals in Canada,” says Programs Manager Admasu Tachble.

“The affordable and character-based loans that clients access from IAF pave the way to further their educational and designation pursuits in a timely manner.” centrefornewcomers.ca

Vision

Skilled immigrants are equitably integrated into the workforce and contributing their expertise to the economic and social success of Canada.

- For more information or if you wish to apply for a loan, please see the IAF website: iafcanada.org
- Or call us on our toll-free number: 1-855-423-2262 (1-855-IAF-CANA)

Newcomer reaches for the sky

→ Almost immediately after he finished his project management certification at Grant MacEwan University, **Magnus Saramago** got a job that launched his professional career in Canada. He works as a project manager for a large camp services and accommodation company.

He says the education, which he was able to complete partly because he received a loan from IAF, probably

cut down by two years the time it would take him to get a job in his field.

"I'm a confident, well educated man," says Magnus, who holds a Law degree and a Masters in Business Administration from Brazil. "But having this certification made me more comfortable competing in the Canadian job market and it certainly expedited the process of getting a good job."

Magnus arrived in Edmonton in May 2010 with his wife and their two children. In Brazil, he managed a large franchise and the family lived comfortably. But he and his wife wanted their children to have more opportunity and security than Brazil could provide. They chose Edmonton because of its social stability and favourable economic situation. Magnus knew there was a shortage of skilled professionals in Edmonton and has stepped in to fill that gap.

"My immediate goal is to try to get a position similar to what I had in Brazil," Magnus says. "For the midterm, I know I need to gain more Canadian experience to get an upper managerial position in an organization."

He says the IAF loan is a good vehicle to get newcomers like him back into the job market as soon as possible and he recommends it to others. "You are able to manage your life while you are studying, so you can commit to the program and choose your own course. Then, the sky's the limit."

Magnus Saramago on vacation in Canada with his wife, Myrna; son, Caio; and daughter, Clara. On his left is his mother Ana.





Doctor finds welcome at IAF

→ **Elena Kumar** was just making ends meet as her husband, Amit, completed his residency in South Africa. The couple immigrated to Edmonton in 2009 and survived on Elena's income as a clinical aid at a Medcentre. Then Elena had an opportunity to write a critical professional exam, which required that she reduce her work hours in order to study – and shell out a hefty exam fee of \$2,000, too much for the couple's tight budget to accommodate.

"Sometimes it becomes really tough," Elena says. In Russia, she had already completed her residency and a Masters degree in internal medicine, but those credentials are not recognized in Canada. "You don't know how much hope you have of succeeding. And you don't need financial stress on top of the stress going through exams, dealing with the licensing issues and unpredictable changes in rules about qualifications, and all of the other obstacles that block your way."

IAF came to Elena's rescue – and not just with the loan that covered the exam fee.

"I'm very glad IAF exists," Elena enthuses. "All of the people I met there were so friendly and welcoming to international medical graduates, like me. They helped me with every step of the application – writing it, figuring out income and outputs and presenting it. I really appreciate the welcome I received there."

Now, Amit is working as a doctor in Edmonton and Elena, having passed her exam, is working as a clinical assistant in the Royal Alexandra Hospital. Because of the long waits and intense competition for residency positions in Alberta, plus the time and expense, Elena plans to assess carefully whether she will pursue her doctor's license, or whether she will stay on in her current position.

"It's a very good position," she says. "I feel that I've already accomplished a lot. We are settled and I want to keep working in Edmonton and buy a house. Then, hopefully, having children will be the next step."



Elena Kumar and her husband, Amit.

"I really appreciate
the welcome I received."



"The loan allowed me to focus on my studies."



Pharmacist realizes dream

→ **Abiodun Adebayo Lawal** is fulfilling his lifelong dream to live in Canada and practise his profession as a pharmacist. His path in pursuit of the dream started in Nigeria, traversed three continents and tested his ambition. There were times when he despaired.

"Sometimes late at night in the library, coming to Canada seemed like an adventure that should not have been taken," Abiodun says.

In Nigeria, Abiodun worked for an international pharmaceutical company. He applied to immigrate to Canada, but the process proved difficult and long. He and his wife went to England where Abiodun studied for his Masters of Drug Delivery Science. While there, their immigration papers came through. Abiodun completed his studies and in October 2009 the family, expanded to include two children, headed to Calgary to begin their new life.

"We fell in love with Calgary," Abiodun says. His wife had a job waiting for her; Abiodun took a part-time position as a customer service representative at Walmart and began pursuing his Canadian credentials. He found a bridging program for internationally trained pharmacists that he knew would be helpful to his Canadian career. But it was expensive and because his wife worked, Abiodun only qualified for partial funding.

"Even if you have a clear idea of how you can proceed on your path, if you have no funds you will not move from where you are" Abiodun muses. "And it is very difficult getting funds when you are new to the country. You have no credit history, no job and no guarantee you will pay back the loan."

He heard about IAF through the bridging program. After meeting with a loan facilitator, setting his budget and determining the funds required, Abiodun secured the loan, which he used for living expenses, books and other training-related costs.

"The loan allowed me to focus on my studies without the distraction of a second job and financial stress," Abiodun says.



SASKATCHEWAN

Career and life goals on track

→ Every morning **Muhammad Rehman** wakes up at 6 a.m. to prepare for his full day of family, work and study. He does so with his focus clearly levelled on living a better life with more security and a more promising future — the same aspiration he had when he emigrated from Pakistan to Canada in June 2010.

“The system and the laws are fair in Canada,” Muhammad says.

“In our country, we fear the police. Here it is not like that.” The promise of Canada inspires Muhammad to push forward to attain his dreams.

From 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. he works in his contract position as an accountant at the Saskatchewan Workman’s Compensation Board in Regina. It’s a substantial advance towards his goal and a critical step in his pursuit to gain Canadian experience while he studies to complete his CGA (Chartered General Accountant) accreditation. Since arriving in Saskatoon from Toronto in 2011

Muhammad has had one short-term accounting contract and part-time positions. This contract will last several months.

After work Muhammad goes home to spend time with his wife and their three-year-old son before settling in for another two hours of studying. He often studies on weekends too. If he can continue at this pace, Muhammad will have his CGA designation in about three years.

He thought he would have to delay his education when banks repeatedly refused his loan applications because he didn’t have a guarantor. When workers at the Open Door Society in Saskatoon suggested that Muhammad was a good candidate for an IAF loan, he wasted no time in applying.

“Now I am on track to complete my designation,” he says. “I will be able to find further work and develop my skills and advance my professional position.”

Muhammad is also on track to achieving the life he dreamt of when he left his home to come to Canada.



“Now I am on track
to complete my
designation.”

Welcome, IAF Saskatchewan!

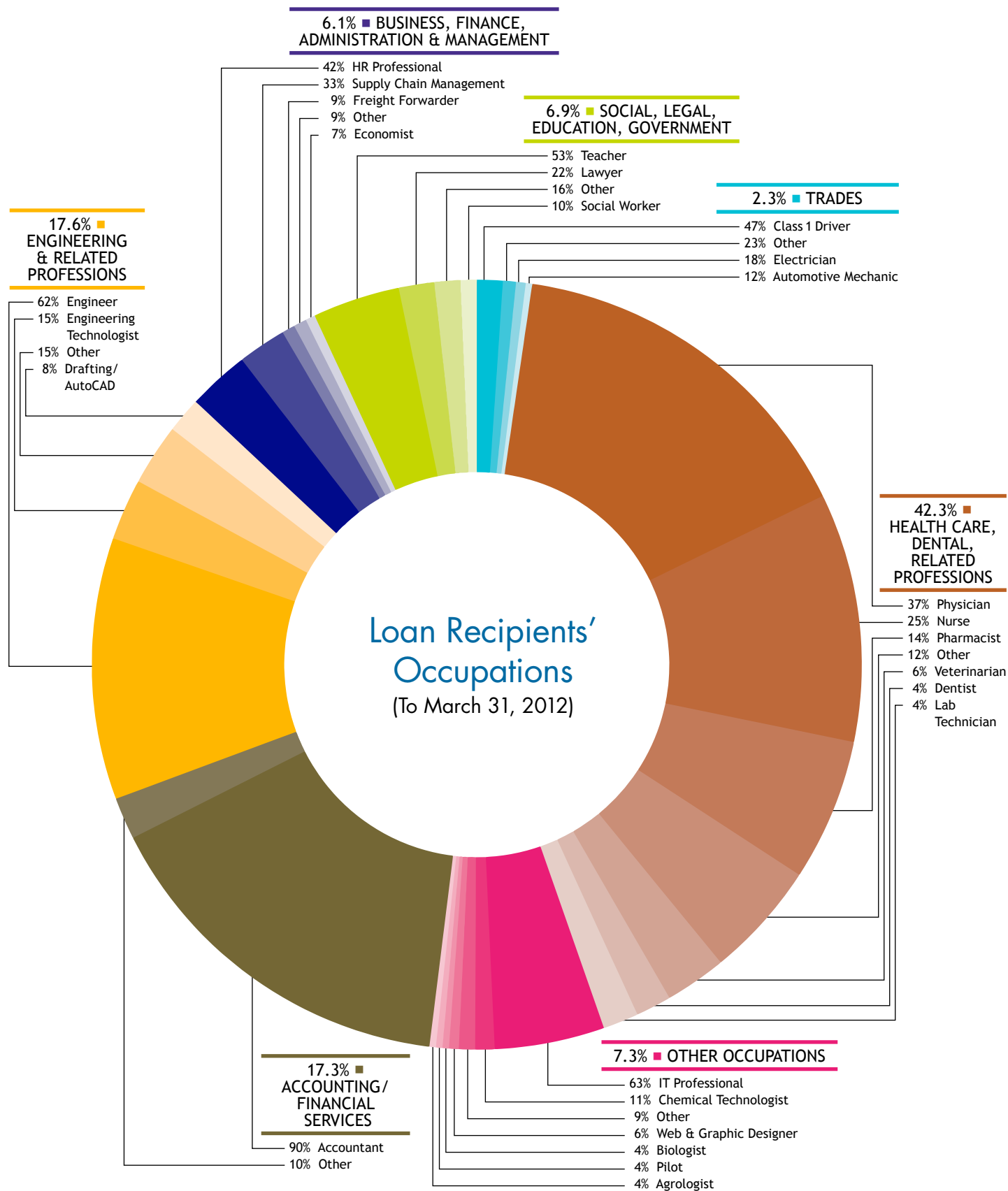
IAF Alberta is proud to introduce IAF Saskatchewan, which opened its doors February 22, 2012, with the announcement that it was selected under the Government of Canada’s Foreign Credential Recognition Loans Pilot Project. IAF Saskatchewan is also supported by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and Immigration and private donors.

It took several years to arrive to where IAF Saskatchewan is today.

IAF Alberta began exploring expansion of the program beyond Alberta in March of 2011, looking at various operating and delivery models. The conclusion was that a decentralized model would best support IAF’s values and community focus.

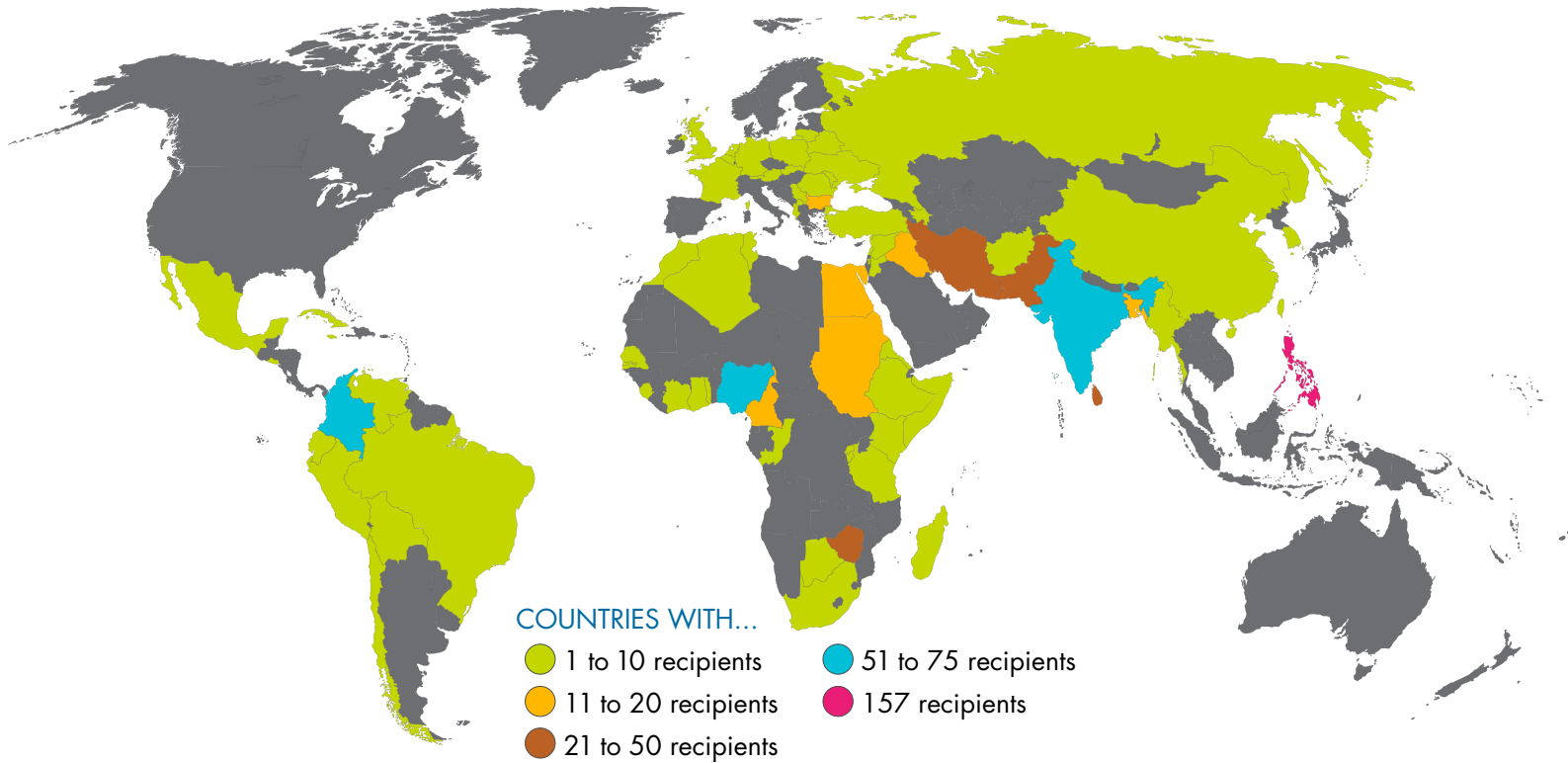
That work has reaped tangible results. IAF Saskatchewan is an independent organization with its own board, connected to IAF through an Affiliation Agreement.

With its main office in Saskatoon and a satellite office in Regina, IAF Saskatchewan provides loans to immigrants living anywhere in the province. True to the IAF model, IAF Saskatchewan collaborates with newcomer organizations, post-secondary institutes and the private sector to encourage referrals and to add value to applicants and borrowers by connecting them to helpful community resources.



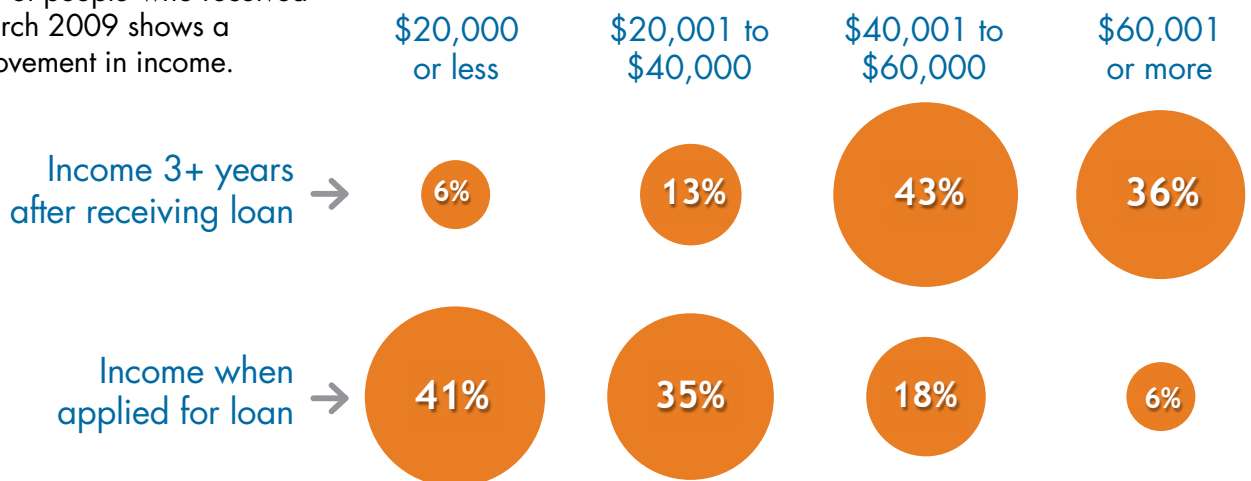


Loan Recipients' Origins (737 loans, to March 31, 2012)



Loan Recipients' Income

A recent survey* of people who received IAF loans to March 2009 shows a significant improvement in income.



*Completed in December 2011 with 77 respondents



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We welcome your donations

IAF welcomes donations for program delivery and operating costs or for our loan capital fund. Donations may be made by cheque or online.

Visit iafcanada.org or contact Dianne Fehr, IAF Alberta Executive Director at 403 228 9981 X222 or email dianne@iafcanada.org.

Immigrant Access Fund Society of Alberta is a registered charity (BN/Registration 862367182RR0001).

Donors who would like their gift to be directed to benefit IAF Saskatchewan's work may specify that preference.

To apply for a loan

For information about applying for a loan, visit iafcanada.org

Every Woman Can – A Legacy

→ Dr. Maria Eriksen received many awards and honours for her efforts to change the "status quo", including an honorary doctorate from the University of Calgary, the Governor General's Persons Award and the Order of Canada. She was the founding chair of IAF.

The *Maria Eriksen Every Woman Can Memorial Bursary* funds professional development or technical training at an accredited institute to support the successful transition of an immigrant woman's life in Alberta. Over 60 women applied this year; three received a bursary of \$1,000 each.

Yi Hua and her husband have lived in Edmonton since April 2012. In China Yi had obtained a Bachelor of Communication and worked as a senior tax accountant for an international firm. As a first step in her new life in Canada, she has enrolled in the Accounting Diploma program at NAIT.

Pom Meyers came to Calgary from France in 2011 with a Bachelor (Honours) of International Trade and a Master of Accounting & Information Systems. Pom is determined to succeed in Canada and is taking SAIT's Accelerated Accounting Diploma program, participating in an accounting mentorship program and volunteering with the Canadian Red Cross.

Teodora Uddin came to Canada from the Philippines in 2008 with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and over 11 years of nursing experience. Teodora is pursuing her nursing career in Canada by working as a nursing attendant while completing specialized nursing training.

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