



ICORN international cities of refuge network

ICORN Strategic plan 2014-2018

ICORN GA 2014 Agenda item V

Aims and objectives

ICORN is an independent international organisation of member cities and regions, offering safe havens for persecuted writers¹; advancing freedom of expression, defending democratic values and promoting international solidarity.

The major aim for the period from 2014 to 2018 is to increase the outreach and the impact of the organisation. Through assisting more writer applicants, recruiting more member cities and cooperating intensively with compatible organisations worldwide, we aim for ICORN to become the major long term placement system for writers at risk, forming a dynamic, sustainable and global network.

To achieve this goal, we will work to

- Consolidate and further develop the governance of the organisation
- Strengthen the writer follow ups in all placement phases
- Stabilise the financial foundations, and develop effective funding strategies
- Develop new tools for communication and promotion
- Build and share knowledge on global mobility and immigration
- Extend and multiply partnerships and cooperation initiatives globally
- Explore potentials for expansion of scope
- Expand geographically

A consolidated and strengthened organisation

ICORN's resources are first and foremost found in the member cities. They are the base of the network's activities, both locally and internationally. It will be a main priority in the years to come to develop ICORN into a global forum for sharing, exchanging ideas, and learning. It is a goal to increase each member's sense of responsibility for, and ownership to the organisation.

Focussing on ICORN's core activities the administration centre will facilitate communication and capacity building in areas such as literary activities, freedom of expression, migration and exile, and social and artistic integration and exchange. ICORN has to be both solid and flexible to meet the challenges we are facing with rapid growth. The individual member cities constitute the backbone of ICORN, and their individual characters make ICORN flexible.

Concretely, measures will be taken: **a)** to develop the capacity of the ICORN cities' staff to link and collaborate transnationally in order to improve their own capacities, as well as to create improved mobility of ICORN writers and their work; **b)** to develop the capacity of the ICORN cities to support the professional development of the hosted writers, and improve

¹ The term writer at present includes, but is not limited to: novelists, non-fiction writers, playwrights, songwriters, bloggers, poets, editors, translators, publishers, journalists and cartoonists.

their employability locally, nationally and transnationally, and c) to test and disseminate information on sustainable models for providing the guest writers with skills and knowhow, contacts and access to other professional development opportunities in order to increase their ability to manage and sustain international careers.

A strengthened placement cycle

ICORN will increase its visibility and outreach, communicating the placement options to a maximum amount of relevant candidates.

Already a vital signature of the ICORN brand, its unique identification, application and qualification procedures will be further developed. The new agreement with PEN International WiPC (2014-2017) will be utilised to increase the amount of completed writer assessments, and the quality and effectiveness of the process will be considerably improved.

More resources will be mobilised for the ICORN administration centre to handle all writer applicants efficiently and in a timely manner. This includes follow-up of each writer and identifying and implementing good matches between the writer candidates and the member cities.

ICORN will work with the writer and the member city even before the placement begins, to prepare for an optimised stay, and identifying viable future steps for the writer when the placement comes to an end.

Stabilised finances, effective strategies for funding

ICORN must provide an effective, transparent and dynamic administration of the network. The administration centre must secure its short, medium and longer term funding through cooperation with a diversity of funding partners. Aiming for long term commitment, tangible results and reliability, ICORN will expand its focus on transparency, good governance and efficiency as essential in building trust with funders.

Upholding and building on the relations to its present funding partners, ICORN will work to establish a more solid base of core cost (unrestricted) funding. To keep the necessary autonomy and integrity of the organisation, we will enhance a proper balance between municipal/ governmental/intergovernmental and non-governmental/private funding.

ICORN will work further to attract project (restricted) funding, both to cover expenses for activities run by the network, and filling gaps where core cost coverage is not secured. Identifying new sources and ways of funding is also of high priority, matched with the sustained communication and expansion strategies covered by the present plan.

Intensified communication, diversified promotion

Communication is totally essential to an organisation like ICORN. Measures will be taken as of 2014 to stimulate and facilitate two-way communication between the organisation and the member cities, between the administration centre and the guest writers, as well as internally between the members and between the writers. The new ICORN web site (as of late 2014) will represent a major tool to improve and increase both the internal and external communication in the years to come.

ICORN works with the member cities and other partners to promote the guest writers and their work, locally, nationally and internationally. Additionally, through modern technology

made available by the host cities, an increasing amount of guest writers can reach media and audiences in their home countries that they were prevented access to before leaving.

ICORN applies for network funding from the EU and other sources to increase its ability to promote its writers. The administration centre will also facilitate for, and make recommendations to, its member cities to work together and apply for cooperation projects within EU's Creative Europe programme and/or other promotional schemes and programmes.

Furthermore, ICORN intensifies its work to promote and brand the organisation, both in the media, through partnerships, and within relevant larger networks and environments. The promotion targets organisations working for persecuted writers, other relevant organisations, potential funders and future members, decision makers and legal authorities on local, national and transnational levels, (including the EU and the UN), and the general public.

The ICORN Council of Writers and Experts (ICWE) was established in an early phase of the organisation's existence, but has been dormant the last two years. A new gathering of ambassadors at large will be re-established as from 2014 to promote the organisation, the guest writers and the member cities.

Global mobility and immigration

Being a long term placement system, obviously ICORN is vulnerable when confronted with barriers of visa, migration, and restrictions on movement between nations and continents.

Most of the work with immigration authorities, visa applications and resident permits is carried out by the individual cities. Still, both the administration centre and the network benefit from a deeper understanding of rules, regulations, laws and possibilities when it comes to international migration. As part of the capacity building and development of ICORN, both local coordinators and the administration centre staff will be enabled to assist and advise writers both within the network and on the waiting list on immigration and residency issues.

ICORN will continue to work with and receive advice and expertise on immigration related issues from expert bodies, such as the European Council of Refugees and Exiles (ECRE).

Multiplied partnerships and international cooperation

ICORN is an independent, but also in a vital sense an interdependent organisation, and is hence continuously extending its network of partners on all major sectors of its activities.

PEN International is still ICORN's most important partner. Additional to the formal agreement on application assessments, PEN's network is also important in recruiting new cities, and not the least in being a link to writers at risk worldwide. PEN's members, both individuals and local PEN clubs, are also a potential resource in building networks for writers in ICORN cities.

Furthermore, ICORN is extending and deepening its relations to an increasing number of Civil Society Organisations working with writers/human rights/freedom of expression, additional to relevant public, governmental and intergovernmental bodies. A strengthened, diversified and multiplied network of relevant cooperation partners will be a vital precondition for ICORN's further development and growth.

Expansion of scope

ICORN's growth and expansion especially since 2010 has made the organisation considerably better known with almost all organisations committed to global human rights/freedom of expression issues. Still true to its roots and identity as an organisation working first and foremost to protect and promote writers, ICORN has been exchanging ideas and experiences with actors involved in protecting human rights defenders on one side, and musicians and artists on the other.

ICORN will continue to work with the European Commission and other actors, developing cooperation platforms for sharing data, ideas and experiences. When realising that not only writers, but artists of all media are targets for persecution, and in need of shelter, several arts organisations are approaching ICORN for consultation and cooperation.

ICORN's writer definition has been expanded since the network was established. While the main focus in 2006 was on literary writers (novelists, poets), the attention soon turned to less literary genres; bloggers, publicists, editors, journalists. A more creative turn can be traced lately, with playwrights, filmmakers, singer/songwriters and cartoonists applying for ICORN placements. Several member cities are at present expressing a will to invite also other artists whose freedom of expression are severely threatened, including visual artist and musicians.

ICORN will work to further explore challenges and proposals to extend our organisation's outreach. Upon recognition by the 2014 General Assembly, a trial period allowing cities to invite persecuted visual artists and musicians will be implemented, provided equivalent application assessments and qualification procedures to the existing ICORN system is in place. An evaluation of the expanded scope will take place before the ICORN General Assembly in 2018.

Geographic expansion

Growing steadily since it began operating in 2006, ICORN has at present stabilised on approximately 40 member cities/regions. The aim for the next four years is to continue to consolidate, and grow considerably further. With a very solid Scandinavian base, activities are ongoing to recruit new member cities in other parts of Europe.

The last couple of years ICORN started to prepare recruitment also beyond Europe. In the years to come, this work will intensify. Priority will be given to recruiting new members in the Americas, but ICORN will continue its work with establishing cities of refuge in South Africa and Australia.

The recruitment endeavour includes finding possible candidate cities, identifying long term partners in the city, securing dedication to the ICORN charter and to the city's obligations as laid out in the membership agreement. While ICORN will continue to maintain unique bilateral relations to each and every member city/region, the global expansion strategy accentuates the need for certain levels of decentralisation and potential distribution of responsibilities to regional hubs. ICORN will in cooperation with present and future member cities implement test projects for the purpose of maintaining an effective, sustainable and comprehensible development of the organisation.