

Action over Despair

REFLECTIONS ON 2019 AND
THE PATH FORWARD



ICORN

INTERNATIONAL CITIES OF REFUGE NETWORK

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Cartoon by Mana Nesteyani.

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Resilience and Community in Times of Uncertainty



Chris Gribble,
ICORN Board Chair

Given the challenges of recent months, it may seem at times that we live in an entirely changed world. Restricted movement, limitations on gatherings, uncertainty about the future, financial anxieties, and a real sense of insecurity in the air: no matter where we are in the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has felt like an unprecedented, but also globally shared experience.

And although the specifics of this world-wide crisis might be new to many, the feelings it has brought to the surface are not unfamiliar to the artists and writers that ICORN exists to support. They have lived through uncertainty and threats for months and years. They have seen everything that was familiar and constant around them disappear - and found ways to move forward.

Their stories are a testament to what can happen when individuals, communities, cities, and even countries with a commitment to solidarity come together. Stepping up in a moment of crisis is a long-standing concept for our network; starting from the resident artists and writers, moving to the cities and their coordinators, to the Secretariat in Stavanger and finally our tremendous partners and generous funders. It is undeniable the immense difference all of these actors make by choosing action over indifference or despair. ICORN works hard to anticipate and respond to both short and long-term needs, the small and the seemingly insurmountable. From securing safe spaces and social care, providing opportunities to write, create

and showcase work, delivering training, fundraising, offering emergency funding, representing our network across Europe and far beyond, the past year has been one of outstanding achievement towards our core aims. It has also been one of visionary progress: we are stepping up our work and pushing ourselves with a strategic plan that re-envision our outcomes framework, challenges us on gender equality and inclusion, and makes us prioritise enhanced communication across our membership and with a wide range of international partners.

As you will read in this report, our network is brimming with stories told and waiting to be shared. For me personally, the brilliantly hosted, curated and delivered Network Meeting in Rotterdam - gathering people from all over the world working towards the same goal - was a highlight; from the films, food and music to the conversations, debates and ideas generated. It is important to note that not all the stories were easy to tell or to listen to, but we made room for those stories.

These spaces that our network creates - locally, regionally, internationally, increasingly online - allow us to share, empathise and create resilient links so that artists and writers can continue to create without fear.

Perhaps one positive thing to come from the COVID-19 crisis is a more widespread acknowledgment of our universal vulnerability and the importance of community and shared understanding.

We view this report as an opportunity to pause, look back, and reflect on how those values drove our work in 2019. It is an honour to witness in every page of this report the many accomplishments achieved by this network made up of many partners, many cities, many communities, many individuals, and many stories. In times of uncertainty, ICORN serves as an example of how much can be done when we come together and act.



The ICORN Network Meeting in Rotterdam May 2019

Cities as Advocates for Human Rights and Freedom of Expression



Helge Lunde
ICORN Executive Director

As we approach the end of 2020 and ICORN enters the middle-point of its strategic plan, I have been reflecting on how much ICORN has grown and what lies ahead. In the past 10 years, we have expanded from 29 members to 72.

We have strengthened our knowledge and expertise, and deepened our belief that a holistic, global and interdependent approach is necessary to fulfil our vision.

It is no secret: ICORN's member cities represent the cornerstone of the network and its mission. Since the beginning in 2006, ICORN cities have hosted more than 240 persecuted writers, journalists and artists, offering them safe haven when they could no longer work safely and freely in their home country. The cities have joined at different times, and differ in their approach, the types of residents they can support, and the cultural initiatives and human rights work they can and want to lead. The network's strength lies in the multiplicity of resources and capacities our member cities encompass. Without them, it would be impossible to respond to the immense diversity of needs and talents present in the writers and artists we receive applications from. Every new member city and every residency offered is an acknowledgment that free expression enriches us and must be protected wherever we are.

Yet even if the residencies are the most visible part of our work, they are but a portion of what the network at large achieves. Before an artist or writer arrives in a city, there has been an extensive effort to build relationships with different city members, empowering them to be allies for free expression. During a residency, the physical safe space is a key component, but so is allowing the artist time for respite, and listening to that person's specific needs. The impact of an artist's time in a City of Refuge far surpasses that of a traditional residency. A crucial voice is protected, and we as a network become stronger in our aim to protect the right to speak out and create globally.

The need for ICORN's work is evident. We are seeing spaces for freedom of expression shrinking worldwide. Xenophobia and intolerance are spreading, new laws restricting our universal rights are introduced and new ways to silence opposing voices are incessantly being invented. This happens not only in autocracies, but in countries we perceive as democracies. As a result, and despite how much the ICORN network has grown, we still

receive far more applications than there are residencies to accommodate needs. To this day our network has received 1111 applications¹, and by the time you read this, we will have received many more. We see a great need to expand in order to respond more quickly to the increasing demands. ICORN is also investing strongly in building the network's capacity in order for cities to develop sustainable residencies and for artists and writers to receive the support they need. There is no template that fits every country, city or every resident artist or writer; but we continue to make great strides thanks to the patience, flexibility and creativity of our incredibly loyal and committed members.

The strategic plan issued in 2018 has been our roadmap to moving past challenges while we face these unprecedented times. The plan enables the organisation and its members to work with clearer and more concrete aims to ensure ICORN is a sustainable network organisation positioned to respond to resident writers' and artists' immediate and long-term needs. The implementation of the plan is already bearing fruit: the organisational and financial structure has been considerably strengthened and solidified. Most importantly, the plan's vision places persecuted and threatened artists and writers squarely at the center of all our activities and goals. It guides how we prioritise contributing to a healthier human rights ecosystem, where diverse voices are amplified, and issues like women's, LGBTQ, and minority rights are championed. And it leads us to work more effectively with free speech organisations and authorities which protect, advocate and assist persecuted journalists, writers, artists and human rights defenders worldwide.

The need for ICORN's work is evident. We are seeing spaces for freedom of expression shrinking worldwide.

What will ICORN look like next year or beyond the present strategic plan? It is hard to know. As a network made of a wide array of committed individuals, cities, cultural and human rights organizations, we will undoubtedly transform, shift and grow as time goes by. However, the essence of our mission will remain the same, and the power of our diverse network of cities committed to defending free expression will be unchanging.



Krakow - ICORN member city

¹ This number reflects the number of applications received by November 2020.

ICORN's Strategic Goals 2018-2022

- I ICORN is an accessible and sustainable international long term, temporary residency programme for persecuted writers and artists around the world.
- II Writers and artists in ICORN residencies are able to continue to work and express themselves freely
- III ICORN is a diversified network of member cities, with sufficient knowledge and resources to protect and promote persecuted writers and artists.
- IIII ICORN is a relevant and resilient network organisation, able to support, develop and adapt the membership and residency programmes in response to growth and global changes.

What We Stand For and Who We Are

ICORN, the International Cities of Refuge Network, is an independent organisation founded on the values and principles of Article 19 in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

VISION

Improved conditions for freedom of expression worldwide

MISSION

ICORN enables cities around the world to provide safe-havens for persecuted writers and artists, working together to:

- advance freedom of expression
- defend democratic values
- promote international solidarity

Who does ICORN support?

Any writer or artist who is threatened or persecuted for expressing their opinions or ideas, through professional and/or artistic work, can apply for an ICORN residency, including but not limited to: creative writers, musicians, visual and performative artists, nonfiction writers, journalists, bloggers, editors, publishers and translators.

Who makes up the ICORN network today?

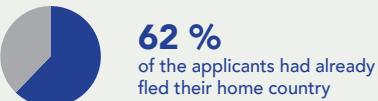
- 72 member cities ²
- 240+ current and alumni resident artists, writers and journalists
- 100+ city coordinators
- 6 Secretariat staff members
- 2 national coordinators, one in Sweden and one in Norway
- Hundreds of partners in the fields of arts and culture, human rights, media, and mobility, support ICORN's aims by engaging locally, regionally and internationally.

²This is the number of member cities as of December 2020.

Key Statistics: Then and Now

The applications ICORN receive and the residencies offered in the cities of refuge are a reflection of the gaps in the fields of free expression and human rights protection worldwide.

SINCE ICORN'S FOUNDING

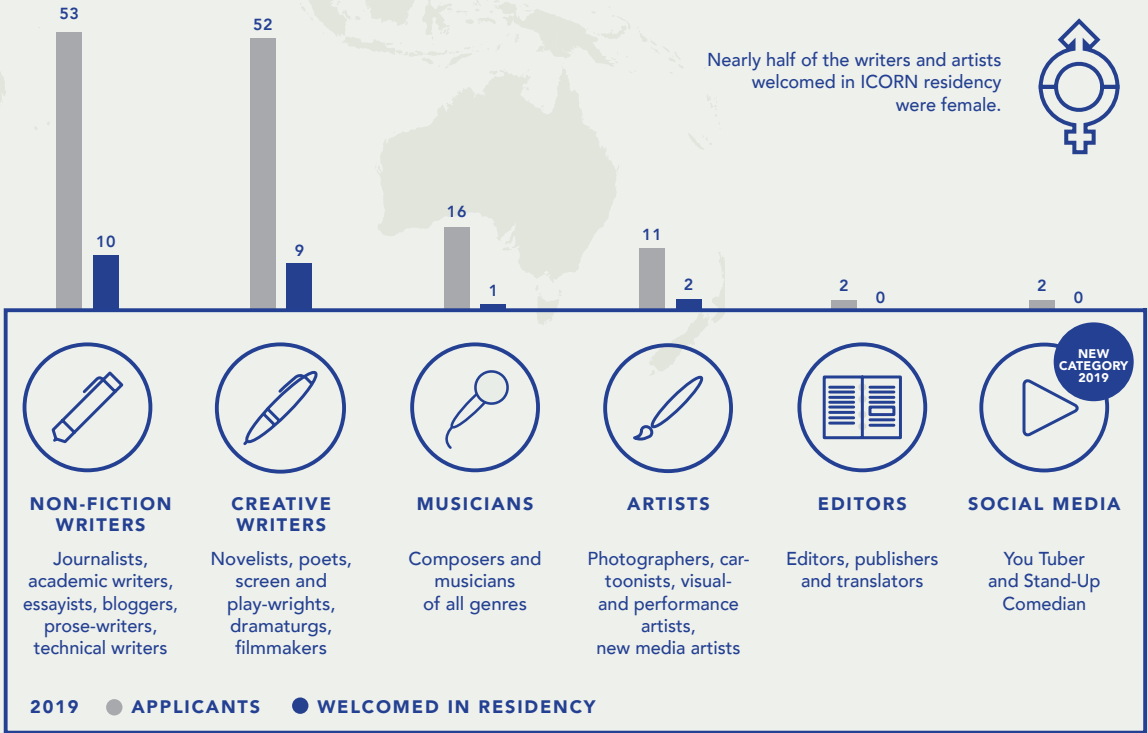


MAP

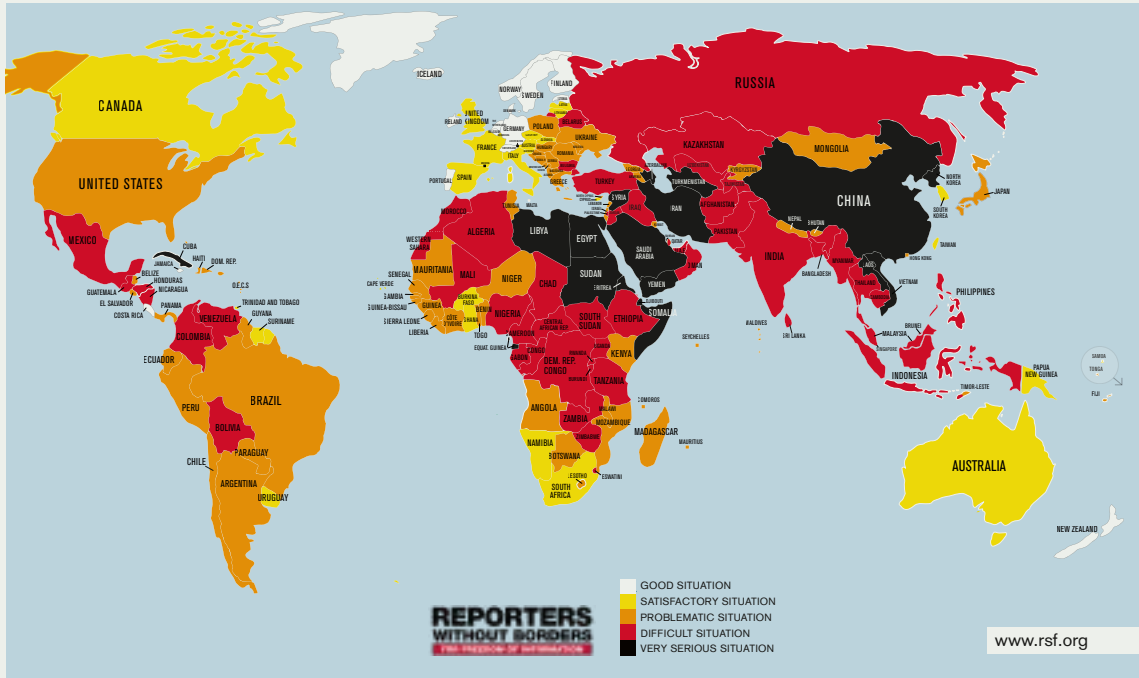
In 2019, ICORN received applications from 33 countries (marked in orange). Six countries represented 62% of applications: Iran (34), Syria (13), Yemen (12), Bangladesh (8), and Palestine (7) (marked in red).³

³ For a full list of the countries of origins of applicants and new residents in 2019, please see the Appendix.

FROM 2019



Challenges to Freedom of Expression in Applicant's Home Countries in 2019



Reporters Without Borders (RSF) - 2019 World Press Freedom Index

ICORN AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

ICORN is a part of a larger ecosystem of actors and organizations concerned with the defense of free expression, the protection of human rights defenders, and shining a spotlight on the role of journalism and the arts in human rights. Many of these organisations have advocated and raised the alarm for numerous writers and artists, some of whom eventually have no choice but to leave their country, and an even smaller portion of whom become ICORN residents. These organizations

perform important monitoring functions, publishing crucial reports like Freemuse's [State of Artistic Freedom Annual Report](#), RSF's [World Press Freedom Index](#) and Article 19's [Global Expression Report](#), among others.

All writers and artists who were offered a residency in 2019 come from or resided in countries that rank below 100 on Reporters Without Borders (RSF) [2019 Press Freedom Index](#), and are on the

[Development Assistance Committee's \(DAC\) list](#) to receive official development assistance (ODA)⁵. They are largely writers, artists or journalists with partners or families, individuals who have already fled their home country, have been seeking resettlement, have lost their main source of income and are struggling to make ends meet, and are navigating challenging legal processes while not even being in possession of official documents and their passports. All of these aspects emphasise their precarious situation when applying.

To fully understand the context of risks faced by applicants, and to verify that these are directly linked to their professional work, ICORN relies on its partner PEN International. They conduct thorough research on each application and have regional expertise and direct access to local information through their many PEN centres. Every 6 months, PEN International creates a report on the situation in the main regions applicants to the ICORN programme come from. Their report, as well as information from [UNESCO](#), [Freemuse](#) and the [Committee to Protect Journalists \(CPJ\)](#) identified the following trends in 2019.

PROTECTING PRESS FREEDOM: A GLOBAL IMPERATIVE

It should come as no surprise that journalists and nonfiction writers make up the highest number of applications to ICORN. **Attacks on journalists and media professionals** are all too common, and many pay a high price for protecting people's right to freedom of expression and information. Attacks on journalists are not only perpetrated in conflict areas, but also in non-conflict situations by, among others, organised crime groups, militia, and even authorities and local police who want to control what is and what is not reported. 2019 presented a lower number of journalists killed compared to the record numbers the year before. However this decline is not a sign that the situation for journalists is improving. RSF reported that more and more journalists are imprisoned (389) and kidnapped (57). The situation worsened, particularly in some countries previously considered safe to be a journalist, such as in the United States. There has also been an increase in killings of journalists in Europe in recent years, such as in Slovakia, Malta, Bulgaria and Russia.



"I believe in investigative journalism as an important and powerful tool in the struggle against devastating forces in our society. Becoming a journalist was a way for me to fight despotism, corruption, terrorism and human rights violations. I will never forget my love and commitment to investigative journalism, and I will never stop fighting for human rights."

MUKHTAR WAFAYEE,
AFGHAN JOURNALIST AND ICORN RESIDENT IN MALMÖ

CHALLENGES TO FREE EXPRESSION IN 2019: A REGIONAL PICTURE

The **Middle East and North Africa (MENA)** region is highly represented, as writers and artists here are particularly at risk for reporting on conflict, human rights violations and political turmoil. Protests in Iraq and Lebanon in the second half of 2019 exacerbated the risks in these countries, as well as continuous war and conflict in countries such as Yemen and Syria.

The number of Iranian writers and artists requesting protection with ICORN has been consistently high in recent years and is increasing. **Iran** has a high number of writers and artists in prison, targeted for peacefully expressing themselves. Renewed protests in the country late 2019 were brutally repressed by the Iranian government, which caused an increase in applications and will likely show a continuation of these trends.

In 2019, there has been an increase of requests for assistance in **South and East Asia** with a growth in applications from China and Vietnam, and the first applications from Myanmar and Sri Lanka since 2014. Bangladesh's deteriorating freedom of expression climate is likewise reflected in the high number of applications. The killing of secular bloggers and the passing of the new Digital Security Act in 2018 - criminalising many forms of freedom of expression - has caused a lack of protection and thus additional danger to writers, artists and journalists.

The state of free expression varied broadly in countries from **Europe and Central Asia** as the persecution of independent voices continued, with journalists and bloggers subjected to physical attacks, harassment and threats, often with impunity. Countries like Hungary and Russia used the excuses of anti-terrorism efforts and upholding traditional family values to persecute dissenting voices. Although a state of emergency was lifted

at the end 2018, Turkey continued to put journalists and activists behind bars, and to target Kurdish dissenting voices. The number of Turkish applicants remains low, but many applicants are temporarily relocated in Turkey when applying to ICORN, which has also received applications from Azerbaijan and Tajikistan.

A high scale of violence and threats against writers, artists and journalists has continued in **Latin America**, where political and economic discontent has sparked demonstrations in several countries, particularly in Nicaragua, Chile and Venezuela. Latin America is the second most lethal region to work as a journalist: in 2018 and 2019 alone, at least 23 journalists were killed. Mexico and Brazil are the two most dangerous countries to be a journalist, according to a 2019 report by the CPJ. There has been a slight increase in applications from these countries in recent years, particularly Honduras and Venezuela.

The number of requests for assistance and protection from writers and artists from **Sub-Saharan Africa** has been consistently high for many years, but there has been a drop in applications from the region of 32% in 2019. The number of applicants from Sudan has dropped drastically following a change of government after the people's protests in 2019. Applications from Ethiopia have also stagnated after Abiy Ahmed took over as prime minister in April 2018. But there continues to be a steady stream of applications from Eritrea, where the peace deal and opening of borders have not led to the same positive developments. Also, political conflict in Cameroon has resulted in a spike of new applications

For more context on the challenges journalists, writers, and artists face, please refer to the [PEN International's Case List 2019](#).



Self-portrait by photo-journalist Amira Al-Sharif with Yemeni soldier of coalition-backed militia among the ruins of an operational checkpoint in Aden.



Uyghur writer and linguist Weli Ayup was welcomed as ICORN resident in Bergen in July 2019. He had been detained in an "education camp" for more than a year for his work to promote Uyghur people's rights in the Xinjiang province in China, and was forced to flee to Turkey after his release.



Iranian writer Mohammad Bamm was welcomed for Poitier's inaugural residence in January 2019.

CHAPTER 1

Responding to Persecution of Writers and Artists Worldwide

The first outcome of ICORN's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan seeks to ensure is an accessible and sustainable international residency programme for persecuted writers and artists around the world, placing emphasis on a transparent application process, efficient relocation, and sustainable matches between qualified applicants and ICORN cities.



Cartoon by Pedro X. Molina, political cartoonist and journalist from Nicaragua, ICORN resident in Ithaca NY.

INTRODUCTION

The ICORN Secretariat receives over a hundred applications each year and each application tells a story of an individual whose work was so threatening to some sectors of society that their own lives are put on the line. With such a sense of urgency in many cases, it is key that ICORN is able to efficiently and effectively make qualified assessments of applications.

In the application stage, ICORN works closely with applicants to allow them to present and explain their protection needs, professional credentials, and personal circumstances. Once an application is complete, PEN International's Protection team undertakes a detailed assessment of each case, using their regional expertise and direct access to local information and resources through more than 150 affiliated centres and international partners. This process also draws on a number of external sources to verify the applicant's credibility and risk in relation to the general human rights situation in the country of origin. In the end, applicants with a high level of reliable information about their personal stories and the contexts in which they live and work are approved as candidates for ICORN residencies.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS – ACCESSIBILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

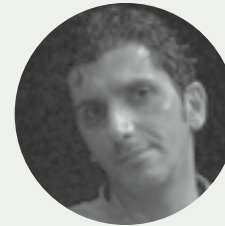
The number of residencies available each year in the 72 member cities is limited, especially considering that, unlike most other temporary artist residencies, ICORN residencies provide a writer or artist with a safe-haven for a period of up to two years in each city.

ICORN is working to improve the speed and precision of the application review to facilitate the matching process between writers or artists at risk and an appropriate host city. During 2019, the ICORN Secretariat increased its capacity to handle applications by hiring a protection officer. It also developed the application form to facilitate

more accurate information from applicants. Initial check-list screenings and tools for determining risk and needs were introduced in order to be able to evaluate more rapidly and thoroughly the urgency of the situation and vulnerability of the applicant.

The assessment for ICORN residencies focuses not only on protection needs and literary and artistic production, but also gives space for the applicants to tell their stories the way they feel they should be told. If the initial screening determines that the applicant would benefit more from other forms of assistance, the new applicant protocols enable ICORN to more quickly direct or recommend them to other relevant organisations. Recognizing that many applicants are facing time-sensitive and serious risks when applying, ICORN recommends that applicants pursue other options to find safety concurrently with their ICORN application. Towards that end, ICORN works with human rights and residency organisations to coordinate and try to ensure people in distress can receive the most appropriate form of assistance and find a longer-term solution even if they do not fall under ICORN's mandate. In this way, ICORN is able to better utilise its capacity on the individuals it is best able to support.

"THERE IS ALWAYS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE"



Basim Mardan
MENA Researcher at PEN International
and former ICORN Resident in Skien

Basim Mardan handles and verifies applications for ICORN residencies. He also works on assistance requests from Arabic speaking writers for PEN Emergency Funds, drafts asylum support letters, and provides counsel to persecuted writers.

The process he follows to review the applications ICORN receives is intensive and thorough. He begins his research by studying the information provided by the applicant and at least two independent references. He analyses selected examples of the published work of the applicants in order to establish a link between the literary, journalistic, or artistic work and the persecution. Finally, he conducts a thorough web search for mentions of persecution against the applicant or other similar cases in news reports, or in reports by other organizations.

What knowledge is necessary for you to conduct a thorough review of each application?

A good understanding of the applicant's country profile, their human rights records specifically for freedom of expression is key. However, that alone is not enough: it is essential to have an ongoing commitment to understand the literary and artistic movements, past and present, as well as keeping up with political updates from the country and the region.

In your opinion, what is the most important component of the assessment?

The most important thing for me is to identify and assess the risk that the applicant is facing, consider the threats and analyse the causes of vulnerability as thoroughly and accurately as possible. This can be very difficult considering the lack of official documentation available from applicants in

countries that are witnessing armed conflicts, where non-state actors threaten freedom of expression, or where the state systematically violates their citizens' legal rights.

"My goal as a researcher is to be able to tell a story, a story of a person, a writer, a journalist, an artist as accurately as possible in the context of their working field, society, legal frame, and country's swiftly and quickly changeable political realities."

How do you make sure the assessment of the application is holistic?

I always keep in mind that I am dealing with a human being, a writer, an artist, so there is always more than meets the eye. I make sure that my research and eventual assessment of risk is very precise, focused, and directed towards explaining why and how the interruption in the writer's life and career took place. It is extremely rewarding when I find out that the context and information I've provided on an application has helped a writer or artist to eventually find safety and move forward in their career.



Wali Arian, a war correspondent for TOLO TV in Afghanistan, came to Malmö with ICORN in 2017 after receiving serious threats from the Taliban. He has continued to work for TOLO TV, support his colleagues back home, and is active in the local media environment in Malmö.

EFFECTIVE AND SUSTAINABLE MATCHING PROCESS

ICORN works simultaneously with writers and artists and with hosting cities to facilitate mutually beneficial matches, and plan out the relocation process. Writers and artists represent a diversity of cultures, personal and professional backgrounds. The ICORN network's wide range of large and small cities offer flexible managing models and a wide array of resources to accommodate the many varying needs and wishes of writers and artists who seek protection through ICORN. Although efforts are made to ensure that a residency is able to support the personal and professional needs of an artist or writer, immigration considerations and each individual city's capacity to host an artist's partner or family weigh considerably in the matching process.

ICORN works consistently to improve this process, and in 2019 the Secretariat initiated frequent in-depth meetings to qualify the matching of available cities with candidates for residency. The Secretariat has also initiated a project to establish a new data management system, which will allow for more efficient and secure communication within the network, while optimising its digital security to protect confidential applicant information as well as reporting and processes.



"When we get to the process of matching applicants with potential residencies in ICORN member cities, we have a holistic picture of the applicants that goes beyond protection needs and vulnerabilities. We try to use this information to find candidates for an ICORN residency where they not only will find safety, but also an environment that allows them to thrive and flourish. With the information provided by ICORN, the member city decides who to invite based on who they are best able to support."

MARIANNE HOVDAN, ICORN PROTECTION MANAGER

THE RELOCATION PROCESS – A PERSONALISED AND HOLISTIC APPROACH

The improved capacity and effectiveness of the application and matching process, allows the ICORN network to confront the pervasive challenges of relocation. It allows cities to begin the process of preparing for a new residency more quickly, and for ICORN to cooperate more strategically with embassies and immigration authorities, partner and city organisations, and national and city authorities. For this, ICORN depends heavily on the knowledge and expertise of its members - to navigate laws, regulations and systems in its different cities of refuge.

With 72 cities dedicated to hosting, protecting and promoting writers and artists in 2-years residencies, approximately 35 residencies should take place each year. In the past years, the average number of residencies realised has been 22.

Often, the transition period between two residencies can be long. There is a wide range of circumstances outside of ICORN's control that can lengthen the time it takes between the invitation to the arrival of an artist or writer in a safe city. Political fluctuations (global, national, local), difficulties getting legal documents and leaving areas, local political decisions, funds needing to be allocated,

housing preparation, local staff capacity, bureaucracy around migration decisions can all impact ICORN's ability to facilitate a successful relocation.

Increasingly, political pressure, security concerns and economic factors are pushing many traditionally open countries towards implementing stricter border controls and intricate visa application procedures. In close collaboration with individual cities, ICORN maps requirements and possibilities for entry visas and residency permits in each country before selecting and suggesting candidates for a residency. In addition to professional merits and risk, the Secretariat collects and makes (confidentially) available other relevant categories of information about each applicant for a residency. At the same time, ICORN as a network continues to lobby and find cooperation points with national migration authorities, both directly through the member cities, and collectively with partner organisations.

Most ICORN members have established good working relationships with their national migration authorities. To assist the facilitation of such relationships, representatives from the ICORN Secretariat met in 2019 with migration authorities in Belgium, Norway and Sweden, and directly assisted visa and residency applications through contact with Ministries of foreign affairs, including embassies, in Germany, Finland, Sweden, Norway and Denmark. Personal contact and organisational trust is fundamental to these relations.

Invited candidates may still have their visas and residency permits rejected or delayed causing increased risk for writers and artists, and open residencies remain vacant for months. For this reason, ICORN places such importance in open and honest communication with applicants and host cities, ensuring that threatened writers and artists do not rely on ICORN as an emergency mechanism, but continue to seek other opportunities in parallel.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

> ICORN received and handled 137 applications from persecuted writers and artists in 2019. Though the application and relocation procedures were improved through the year, ICORN still works together with PEN International to reduce the often far too long timespan from first application to successful arrival in an ICORN residency.

> ICORN's diverse member cities allowed for the network to respond to a wide array of needs and talents by hosting a total of 66 persecuted artists and writers in 2019 (including those ending their residencies that year).

> The ICORN Secretariat and its member cities continued to build relationships with embassies and immigration authorities, partners and city organisations, as well as national and city authorities in order to offer an effective response to applicants' situations and overcome relocation challenges.



GLOBAL SOLIDARITY TO RELEASE AND RELOCATE A CARTOONIST IN DETENTION



Ali Dorani "Mr. Eaten Fish"
Iranian cartoonist, activist and ICORN resident
In Stavanger

Cartoonist and activist Ali Dorani, known as Mr. Eaten Fish, fled Iran in 2013 to seek asylum in Australia. Due to the country's strict immigration policy, Ali was interned in the Australian-run immigration centre on Manus Island, Papua New Guinea, where he spent five years in detention.

Despite the limited access to the outside world, Ali secretly created and distributed cartoons highlighting the inhumane conditions in the camp. Thanks to a broad solidarity [network of cartoonists](#) and activists who supported demands to " [Free Eaten Fish](#) ", Ali's cartoons were published extensively, including in the Guardian, Washington Post, ABC News , and gained global recognition.

The process to assess Ali's application and carry out his relocation was complex, as with many ICORN cases. It required building trusting

relationships; with Ali for him to share necessary and deeply personal and private information; and with cities and national immigration authorities. The work of PEN International, who documented the required information on the circumstances that led Ali to flee Iran and the persecution that he faced, was also indispensable. Thanks to these joint efforts, Ali was able to leave the island for [an ICORN residency in Stavanger](#) in December 2017.

Since the residency started, Ali has told his story to thousands of people and campaigned for the rights of people in the Australian immigration camps, as well as for refugee's rights worldwide. He has participated in [large exhibitions](#), been featured in [major news outlets](#) , and even inspired [a new musical composition](#) performed for a full Sydney Opera House in 2019.



"I was Mayor of Stavanger when Ali arrived. We in Norway often take our freedom of expression for granted. But meeting with Ali Dorani confirmed to me that it is important to always work for this right, through organisations like ICORN."

CHRISTINE SAGEN HELGØ, FORMER MAYOR OF STAVANGER



CHAPTER 2

Keeping the Fire of Resistance Burning

The second outcome of the ICORN Strategic Plan 2018-2022 seeks to ensure that the well-being and professional development of writers and artists in ICORN is supported so they can continue to work and express themselves freely in their host cities and beyond.

By ©Ahmed Falah, Iraqi artist and ICORN resident in Drøbak, Norway. Many members of the Iraqi diaspora, like Ahmed, supported through social media the protesters during the massive demonstrations in Iraq from October 2019; demanding economic redistribution, decrying the theft and corruption by the sectarian political system imposed after the US invasion in 2003.

INTRODUCTION

Writers and artists in ICORN residency have had to pay a high price for exercising their basic human right to freedom of expression, and have faced life or death decisions when considering staying or leaving their home country. It will always be a difficult decision. It will impact their lives and careers drastically as relocating not only offers safety and new prospects, but also new challenges.

ICORN and its host cities strive to provide not only protection, but also appropriate conditions to continue to work. An ICORN residency offers a space for up to two years where writers and artists can find refuge and respite as well as space to be inspired and build resilience - knowing they are part of a community passionate about defending freedom of expression everywhere. Through its years of operation, the ICORN network has grown in understanding the challenges that uprooted and displaced writers and artists face before, during and after their residency, and the necessary components to connect with peers, create and contribute to their new communities.

To witness what several generations of ICORN resident artists and writers have achieved before and after the reprieve of an ICORN residency spe-

aks to how critical these voices are for their home countries and free expression worldwide. They have stood up to and continue to stand up against repressive regimes and fundamental groups while promoting individual rights and free societies; they report on life and atrocities under dictators-hips; cartoon warlords and oppressors; document violations and protests and advocate on behalf of detained and threatened colleagues; insist on translating and publishing secular and free thinking writers in societies that are repressive; highlight violations of the rights of ethnic minorities and other groups in society, like women and LGBTQ people.

Many resident writers and artists become even more outspoken and daring in their work after leaving their countries, both because of their guaranteed safety, but also because many perceive it as their responsibility to be a voice on behalf of friends, colleagues and people back home who are not safe. The Sudanese political cartoonist [Khalid Albaih](#) became known for his scathing criticism of authoritarian regimes during the Arab Spring. His work led him to be rebutted from traditional media and publications and forced into exile. However, from abroad he has been able to capture internati-



“Exiled Sudanese writers and artists had a huge impact on what happened in Sudan last year when a peaceful revolution toppled the 30-year dictatorship of Omar Al-Bashir. What we did, as part of a large diaspora community, is try to magnify and tell the world about this place called Sudan, where most of the news you hear is negative. Sudan has been cursed with military dictatorships, but it has also been gifted with a young population that uses its creative resistance to win back power.”

KHALID ALBAIH, SUDANESE ARTIST, POLITICAL CARTOONIST AND ICORN RESIDENT IN COPENHAGEN



“If exile was a person, I would thank her. I can see the whole picture from a distance. But there is a longing for my country. ”

NADA AL KHAWWAM, IRAQI POET, JOURNALIST AND ICORN RESIDENT IN BERLIN

onal attention, shine a light on Sudanese protests, and support their struggles and demands. His work has since been published widely in international publications including *The Atlantic*, *PRI*, and *NPR* and he has written social and political commentaries for publications such as *The Guardian* and *Al Jazeera*. Work by ICORN residents like Khalid not only raises awareness about the struggles in their home countries, but also inspires host communities to be free expression advocates.

RESIDENCIES THAT RESPOND TO IMMEDIATE AND LONG-TERM NEEDS

The members of ICORN commit themselves to providing a holistic support system for the resident artists or writers. This begins with identifying a network of relevant partners and a coordinating institution that will jointly support the artist or writer; establishing financial backing, and providing accommodations to the resident and their family. The exact management model of the residency varies from city to city to account both for differing levels of capacity, but also a city's strength to uplift a particular resident's profile and needs.

The need for flexibility also lies in the various conditions writers and artists in ICORN residency leave and what they carry with them from years of war and conflict, dictatorships and suppression - conditions which do not mend overnight or even over the course of two years. With residencies in 19 different countries, it is not possible to provide a common roadmap for all residents and cities on these matters. Plans for the first months of transition in a new residency, the approach the host city will take to connect the resident with local communities, as well as post-residency plans, must all be

considered from the very beginning and adapted to each individual. Over time, ICORN has gained a wealth of knowledge and through its strategic plan is working to incorporate these lessons to support cities develop qualified short-term and long-term visions and strategies for each residency. A key commitment for 2019 has been to build expertise and address both the mental and physical well-being of residents as vital components in building long term resilience during and after the residency.

The first months of a residency can be challenging for individuals who have lived in constant fear and persecution, been forcibly displaced, and suffered losses caused by uprooting. There are many new things happening, such as settling in, attention from the media and the local community, and starting language lessons. Whereas the safety and security of the artist or writer and their family are fundamental, without social support, relevant networks and environments that can instigate predictability, safety will not feel as a secure condition. For that, ICORN, member cities, and close partners continuously explore different ways residents can restore the integrity of interpersonal bonds and find wider social support. One aspect of this is being able to meet with both local and distant colleagues to connect and create the basis for ongoing communication. Larger international meetings where the whole network gathers for several days always offer many opportunities to form and strengthen these links.

Beyond facilitating these forms of communal support, ICORN has increased its focus on ways member cities can support, and residents can address, the high levels of stress and trauma caused by the threats and attacks experienced

prior to their ICORN residency, as well as related feelings that often surface while in relocation.

In 2018 and 2019, ICORN took part in a research collaboration led by the Centre for Applied Human Rights (CAHR) at the University of York, with Justice and Peace Netherlands, The Martin Roth Initiative, Professor of psychology Adam Brown of The New School in New York, and independent expert on human rights and civil society, Sasha Koulaeva. Nine ICORN residents from Palestine, Syria, Iran, Bangladesh, and Yemen, as well as coordinators and mental health professionals, participated in workshops and interviews exploring issues of well being and ways of practicing well-being in human rights work globally. Significant among the findings was that 85 % of the residents were likely to carry complex traumas, but that their ability to still function was much higher than normal. An important factor attributed to this capacity was that they were working for something bigger than themselves. This underlined the importance of providing a space for safety, rest and respite, but also for professional continuity. Based on this research, the [Barcelona Guidelines](#) were launched at the [EU-TRP meeting](#)⁵ in October 2019, and are available in English, Arabic, Spanish, Russian, and German.

⁵ The EU Human Rights Defenders Relocation Platform (EUTRP) is a global platform of national, regional and international organisations involved in programmes for the temporary relocation of Human Rights Defenders.



Partners and contributors to the development of the Barcelona Guidelines during a meeting in Barcelona 2019.

WHAT SETS ICORN RESIDENCIES APART?

Unlike most artistic residencies, ICORN residencies are developed around the goal of giving persecuted artists and writers space to rest and rebuild capacity to work and plan their next steps. For this reason, ICORN residencies last a standard period of two years, during which time the Secretariat and the host city can contribute to sustainable and relevant support systems. During this time, ICORN residents not only have a space to work, but they are supported to address their well-being, develop their skill sets, and amplify their work with a network committed to defend freedom of expression.



Milagros Socorro receives the PEN Oxfam Novib Award for Freedom of Expression 2018.

"THE FIRST THING HAS BEEN TO REST."



Milagros Socorro
Venezuelan journalist
and ICORN resident in Århus

Milagros Socorro is an award-winning journalist and author from Venezuela who arrived in an ICORN residency in Århus, Denmark in 2019. She is the author of 13 books, including the novels *El abrazo de tamarindo* (2008) and *Vacas en las Nubes* (2008). Her work has appeared in a number of anthologies of Latin American literature, and she has edited several literary collections, like *Las Voces Secretas: El Nuevo Cuento Venezolano* (2006). When asked about her experience at the beginning of her ICORN residency she responded:

"The first thing has been to rest. I don't talk about any tiredness. And I don't mean physical or mental exhaustion. It is something deeper. It is something in the depths of the psyche, where fear, anger, desolation, pain lodge. This is completely non transferable. I do not expect to be understood. Anyone can understand muscle fatigue after a particularly demanding day; and we have all experienced that blunting of ideas that leave several days of conflict and difficulties.

But those who have lived in Venezuela in recent years know that there is a fatigue of the soul, a grief for which there are no words. It is what it feels like to see your country destroyed day after day, young people marching to emigration (a route they take on foot on a walk that takes them through several countries), separated families, people eating from garbage, the sick without medicines or hospitals, children killed due to lack of attention, the dejected consumption of hyperinflation, hopelessness in people's faces ...

The first thing is, then, to recover from the tribulations of that kind of war that Venezuelans have suffered for so long. The second is to live, remember what life was like. And the third, not necessarily in that order, write."

A NETWORK READY TO SUPPORT AND PROMOTE FREE VOICES

ICORN member cities have spearheaded new initiatives and collaborations to enhance opportunities for ICORN resident artists and writers to develop skills and professional networks for a larger outreach.

Planning for the future can provide a greater sense of calm and security for the individual, and thus agency to continue working. An emphasis in 2019 has been to guide cities and resident artists into laying out the groundwork for post-residency plans. Early planning allows each writer and artist hosted in the network to make these deeply personal, life changing decisions.

As national and local regulations often frame future opportunities, ICORN's Protection team considers post-residency connections when matching candidate residents and host cities. The Secretariat and local hosts then work closely together with the artist and writer throughout the residency period to map out potential future opportunities. With city coordinators and collaborating organisations' knowledge of country specific opportunities, the Secretariat navigates shifting country specific guidelines and seeks opportunities within the international network.

Post-residency planning is a part of the organisation's resilience training, where efforts are made to empower host cities to provide relevant support, and to ensure that ICORN residents have the tools to assess if they can return safely to their home country and to plan for that transition. In the case that a resident cannot return safely to their home countries, they can seek work permit or claim refugee status (asylum). In the latter cases, the ICORN Secretariat cooperates with PEN International to issue statements supporting refugee claims when appropriate.

During the Network Meeting in Rotterdam, At Home Everywhere, a workshop was organised on the topic of relocation and safe return as part of ICORN's ongoing efforts for building agency, capacity and resilience. Security advisors from Justice & Peace Netherlands facilitated two workshops for writers and artists and coordinators with a method to allow individuals to advance their digital security awareness and skills as well as developing security management in a holistic perspective. Their discussion was grounded on the belief that security planning could be thought of as "well-being in action", to sustain work and build resilience. In conjunction, a three day help desk was organised by the journalist and blogger Le Thanh Trung and Nik Williams of Scottish PEN to give participants advice and hands on assistance to help protect their digital devices and privacy



Digital security workshop in Rotterdam during the Network Meeting



Resilience planning and digital security training by security advisor Manon Muti, Justice & Peace.



"Colleague to Colleague created an opportunity for me to get to know some of the writers in my new hometown Uppsala. We take walks and talk about the troubles in my home country Iran, and the differences between the two countries. My new colleagues give me ideas about work life in Sweden and show me alternative ways to find work."

ASHRAF BAGHERI, IRANIAN JOURNALIST, POET AND ICORN RESIDENT IN UPPSALA

A project initiated by ICORN's cooperation partner, RSF Sweden, in 2019 sought to enhance professional networks and mutual benefits between writers and journalists in ICORN residencies and local writers in Sweden. The project [Colleague to Colleague](#) engaged three ICORN cities during its pilot run: Västra Götaland, Jönköping and Uppsala. Eight ICORN resident writers and journalists participated and it was co-organised by journalist resident in Stockholm, Mohammed Ashraf. Among the participating ICORN residents was Supriti Dhar a feminist activist, journalist and founder of the digital platform [Women Chapter](#), living in Norrköping since April 2018. Given the links ICORN residents still have to their networks and activism back home, this project gives ICORN residents the opportunity to activate and widen their network in Sweden and bring visibility on protracted issues like the persecution of activists in Bangladesh. The collaboration is looking to expand to other ICORN cities to identify and develop strategies and opportunities that can be transferred and adjusted to fit different contexts.



colleague to colleague meetup in Uppsala, Sweden

Another initiative directed at a specific profession was the project [Act for Global Change: A Global conversation from the arts to the world \(ACT\)](#). ICORN and The Festival Academy joined forces with support from the Creative Europe programme of the European Union to provide training and network-building opportunities for festival organisers and cultural producers. The programme's aim is to build bridges between different fields of actions, being the artistic, social, political and business world and provides a global professional network that is relevant. During the period of 2019 to 2021, several ICORN resident writers and artists are participating, and more are planned to take part in events in 2021. So far 6 writers and artists and two ICORN staff representatives have taken part in different ateliers; they received training in cultural production, gained global professional networks, and contributed new perspectives on aspects of cultural association, censorship and freedom of expression to a wide range of festival organisers and other cultural professionals.



The festival academy

The challenge of finding and connecting with new audiences makes translations of new and existing work of writers an important component of how cities can support and promote residents' work in their new country. Norwegian PEN initiated in 2015 the translation project *Tekst i flukt* to couple writers and musicians with Norwegian translators to work on translation of ICORN residents' works. This not only contributes to increasing ICORN residents participation in festivals and book projects, but introduces them to a wider professional literary network and audience - and vice versa. Since the start of the project, 21 writers and artists from the network as well as 16 translators, have taken part in the project.

The collaboration led to the publication of the anthology *Å kysse en ørken, Å kysse en myr*, launched at the [Norwegian Festival of Literature in Lillehammer](#) in May 2019. A selection of the texts was published in English in *Unexpected Crops: Seven Writers in*



Book Review of the anthology *Å kysse en ørken, Å kysse en myr* in Klassekampens book magazine 8 June 2019.

Norwegian Cities-of-Refuge that featured works by 6 of the 13 writers represented in the anthology. The collection of poems was hailed for its ability to put into words experiences and feelings that are impossible to speak about. Klassekampen, one of Norway's most important newspapers, listed it "[one of the best books of the year](#)." The anthology publication not only increased the visibility of the authors, but has led to further opportunities at larger publishing houses for several of the writers. Thanks to this resounding accomplishment, another Nordic translation project *Ratatosk* received funding in 2019 to carry out similar projects in Norway, Sweden and Denmark.

REACHING A WIDER INTERNATIONAL AUDIENCE

The strength of ICORN lies in the dual passion that its members have for the arts and human rights, something that is reflected and amplified in its partners. The ICORN Secretariat and member cities are always seeking opportunities for outreach beyond the network and to raise the visibility of the work being done by and together with residents. It is however important that all parties involved respect the decision by a resident writer or artist if they do not want or have the capacity to continue to work, or if they want or need to stay anonymous and thus not take part in promotional activities. During the matching process, as well as during residencies, the ICORN Secretariat works closely with cities to ensure all precautions are taken to guarantee the safety of residents' information.

While the ICORN Secretariat organises some events and promotes writers and artists in the international arena, cities are the primary motors seeking to create awareness about the work of residents they host. Promotional information is circulated in the network via email, letters, internal Facebook groups and Twitter, as well as through social media, newsletters, and events of

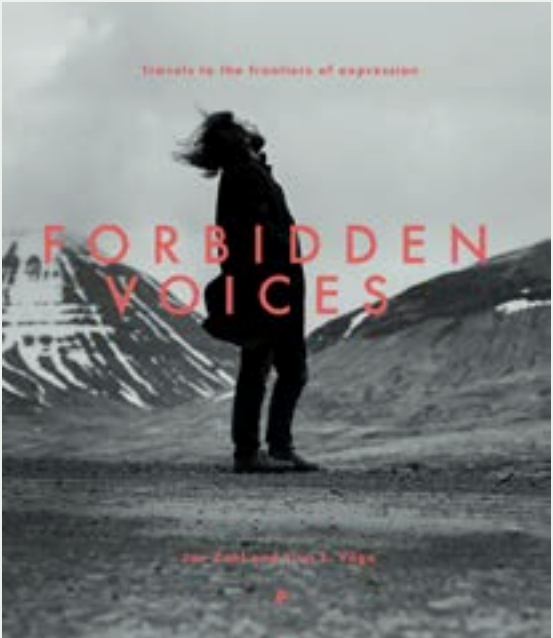
partner organizations like PEN international and its many centers, IFEX, Protect Defenders, African Defenders (Pan-African Human Rights Defenders Network), and MRI.

In October 2019, ICORN was invited to the [Frankfurt Book Fair](#) on the occasion of Norway being its 2019 Guest of Honour. Under the title **Safe not Silent**, ICORN hosted its own stand, and writers and artists and city representatives contributed largely to the fair-programme, introducing the network to a large international audience. This opportunity was made possible with the collaboration of the City of Stavanger, Sølvberget Cultural Centre and other local actors, as well as [NORLA](#) and the Norwegian Ministry of Culture.

At the Frankfurt Book Fair, Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård, launched the book [Forbidden Voices – travels to the frontiers of expression](#) published by [Pelikanen Publishing](#) in cooperation with ICORN. The book is based on interviews by Stavanger Aftenblad journalists Jan Zahl and Finn E. Våga, and features 7 former ICORN writers in residence. Zahl and Våga visited the writers and artists in their cities of refuge and then visited their home countries in an attempt to understand the conditions under which the writers, journalists, artists and activists have lived and worked. Their visits took them to Cuba, Bangladesh, Turkey, Iran, Palestine and Sri Lanka as well as their exile experience in seven new cities.

The year 2019 saw an increase in attention to the significance of artistic freedom of expression, and ICORN residents and members have been taking active part in those discussions. UNESCO produced a video to mobilise and raise awareness of how threats to human rights and artistic freedom diminish and weaken the diversity of cultural expressions. Several ICORN artists were invited to share experiences of artistic freedom in their home and host countries, among them the Iranian poets, Mehdi Mousavi and Fatemeh Ekhtesari, residents in the city of Lillehammer. During the Frankfurt Book Fair,

ICORN representatives and two resident writers took part in a meeting with the UN Special Rapporteur Karima Bennouna to inform the preparation of a [report on cultural rights defenders](#) that was later presented to the Human Rights Council in March 2020.



Forbidden Voices – Travels to the frontiers of expression, by Jan Zahl and Finn Våga, Stavanger Aftenblad.



Still from UNESCO video featuring ICORN resident artists Mehdi Mousavi and Fatemeh Ekhtesari.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

> ICORN member cities strengthened their understanding of pre-residency preparations to include resources for mental health and well-being, strategies for introducing residents to support networks, and considering post-residency plans early on.

> ICORN and its member cities spearheaded numerous initiatives to support artists and writers build networks and acquire new skills, such as a digital security and resilience training at the 2019 ICORN Network Meeting in Rotterdam and the Colleague to Colleague programme for journalists in Sweden.

> ICORN and its member cities worked strategically to increase the visibility of its resident artists and promote their work, including at the Frankfurt Book Fair, in a UNESCO campaign video, and through the publication of translations and launch of music albums and exhibitions



Frankfurt panel with Boos, Bennouni, Albaih, Søreide, Norsk PEN Stavrum

Untitled

On the pavement a headless corpse.
An inexplicable, puzzling sight.
I look around. Everyone else has got their head on,
except the headless corpse.
Next to it is a severed head staring the opposite way.
I go home and look at my family.
They have got their heads on.
The head of the pretty girl next door sits where it ought to.
The head of our cat still lies by the doorstep sleeping.
I check if my head is in place and I think
I'm afraid they will sever the new year, perhaps, the ones
who keep severing heads,
the big-headed ones, standing by the bridgehead,
looking at our heads.
I have never looked at them,
never turned my head in their direction.
I'm just thinking about the corpse.
The corpse without a head.
How shall it find its way home?

BY ALI HAYDER, IRAQI POET, JOURNALIST
AND ICORN RESIDENT IN KRISTIANSAND.

TRANSLATION JOHANNE FRONTH-NYGREN
Å KYSSE EN ØRKEN Å KYSSE EN MYR /UNEXPECTED CROPS



CHAPTER 3

An Empowered and Locally Anchored Network of Cities

The third outcome of the ICORN Strategic Plan 2018-2022 seeks to ensure ICORN is a diversified network of cities with sufficient knowledge and resources to protect and promote persecuted writers and artists, placing emphasis on anchoring residencies locally and facilitating further training of ICORN coordinators and city teams.



"By establishing a safe haven for endangered writers in a community, ICORN cities strive to do more than give an exiled writer or artist a place to live and work. They encourage new lines of communication, cultural exchange, and collaboration that can transform the lives of both the hosted artists and the community to combat intolerance and isolation."

HENRY REESE, FOUNDER OF CITY OF ASYLUM PITTSBURGH AND ICORN BOARD MEMBER

INTRODUCTION

The ICORN member cities are the cornerstones of ICORN and their participation and efforts are what enables ICORN to have impact. Cities and its civil society institutions are well equipped to defend and promote freedom of expression and international solidarity by providing safe residencies where writers and artists can continue their work without fear of persecution. In 2019, ICORN cities were hosting 66 resident artists and writers, including both those that were ending residencies and those just beginning. Many of the cities also continue to support and cooperate with the writers and artists hosted long past the residency period. In order to strengthen and expand in a sustainable manner, ICORN needs to ensure cities are engaged, committed and empowered. ICORN's role is to support its members and to facilitate durable and fruitful exchanges that encourage and increase cooperation between member cities, sister organisations and external partners around the world. Along with the immense local expertise and capacity that the cities embody, this contributes to creating an environment where mutually beneficial situations can emerge: cities that invest in the protection and promotion of ICORN residents are enriched by their work and the experiences they share.

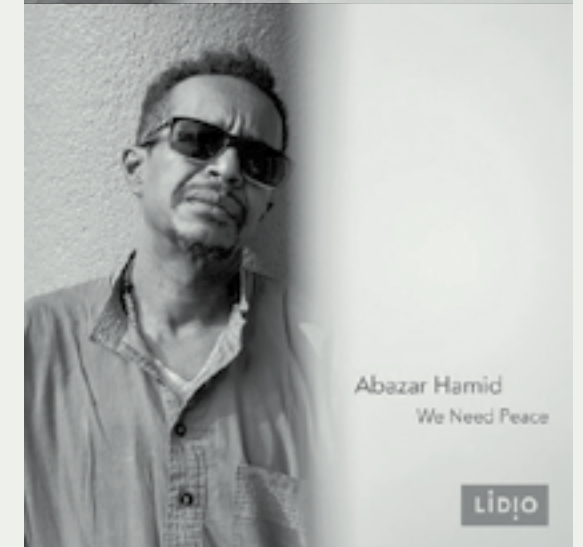
LOCALLY ANCHORED AND SUPPORTED RESIDENCY PROGRAMMES

For an ICORN residency to be sustainable in the long run, it needs to be strongly rooted in its host city, and recognised and supported by local stakeholders. A well anchored ICORN residency programme allows the host city to leverage partnerships more effectively at the local, regional, national and international level. When the ICORN residency becomes well-known by city administrators and different departments, as well as local civil society and arts organisations in the member city, it anchors the residency in the community and allows for new opportunities and acquaintances. Host cities will thus have access to additional resources and tools to face unexpected challenges that can arise when planning for and hosting a resident artist or writer, especially regarding immigration and relocation logistics. A network of strongly rooted residency programmes also creates a strong base for cooperation across cities based on shared cultural and human rights goals and values.

The City of Harstad is a City of Refuge specialised in hosting musicians and had by 2019 welcomed 4 musicians in ICORN residency. They have established a diverse professional steering group to manage the ICORN programme in the city and across the

region. The non-profit organisation [Safemuse](#), which dedicates its work to fight for artistic freedom, is part of Harstad's support group and works closely with the hosted musicians offering professional development and promotion from the very start. In 2019, they released the album [Dai Raft](#) with Afghani musician Hamid Sakhizada, launched at the Oslo World festival. The album highlights Hamid's talent with the Dambora and his tireless efforts to preserve and share the Hazara cultural heritage. Earlier in the year, Safemuse also released the EP "[We Need Peace](#)" by former ICORN resident musician Abazar Hamid and produced by renowned guitarist Knut Reiersrud. The albums were released on LIDIO – a record label run by Safemuse and dedicated to releasing music from persecuted artists, and a sub label to Grappa, Norway's largest independent record label.

Coming together over a shared set of values, cities in the ICORN network have launched several cooperation projects between cities and across country borders. They have created platforms and greater possibilities for newly arrived cultural workers and encouraged more diversity in the arts, education and the media. Four ICORN cities launched the EU supported project [ENGAGE! Young Producers Building Bridges to a Freer World](#) to promote the participation and empowerment of young, underrepresented groups in literary cultural life. Led by ICORN's partner in Barcelona, [PEN Català](#), the project counts among its partners outstanding cultural organisation already part of the ICORN network, and the [UNESCO Creative Cities Network: Det Fria Ordets Hus](#) (Växjö, SE), [Krakowskie Biuro Festiwalowe](#) (Krakow, PL) and [National Centre for Writing](#) (Norwich, UK). This is but one of many examples of how member cities cooperate to stimulate healthy conditions where freedom of expression and democratic values can flourish.



Hamid Sakhizada (above) and Abazar Hamid (below) have both released music supported by their host city of Harstad and Safemuse's record label LIDIO.



ENGAGE's First project meeting group at ICORN GA in Malmö

AN ENDURING SPIRIT



Amira Al-Sharif,
Yemeni photo-journalist
and ICORN resident in Paris

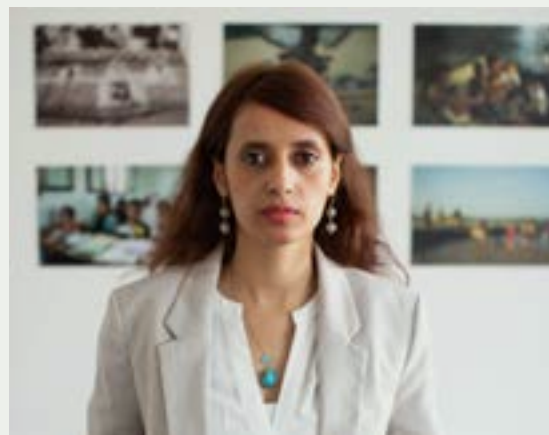
Amira Al-Sharif is a Yemeni photographer who is a resident artist in Paris at Cité Internationale des Arts since September 2019. Through her internationally acclaimed documentary projects Amira has a long track record of highlighting the resilience of Yemeni women and now has turned her gaze to migrant women in France. She shares her thoughts of what she has been able to achieve in 2019/2020 thanks to her ICORN residency:

Tell us about your process of transition in Paris and how that has impacted your work. I am currently studying the French language with three inspiring French teachers. My commitment to learning the French language has helped me gain acceptance into the final year of a BFA program at Beaux-Arts de Paris, where I will explore visual storytelling through the prism of art rather than journalism. Now, I have a thesis to complete, which will be the first body of work that I will bring to life since arriving in France. This past year, and at present, my residency with Cité internationale des arts has immersed me in an environment — not to mention, in the heart of a city — that values and celebrates free artistic and self-expression.

My thesis at Beaux-Arts is a photo project on the resilience of women in France, entitled "Grâce à Elles" or "Thanks to Them," including inspiring and pioneering artists, politicians, humanitarians, mothers, and survivors of a range of hardships. This project is in part born of my desire to photograph women who reflect where I am both geographically and spiritually. I photographed Yemeni women with enduring spirits when I was living in Yemen, and I photographed American women with

free spirits when I stayed in the United States. Now that I'm living in France, I will work to capture the spirits of French women so I may truly connect where I am (France) with who I am becoming (photojournalist-turned-artist).

Another crucial layer of "Grâce à Elles" is that, just like me, these women were born elsewhere in the world — in countries less prosperous and safe than France — but are now living out their dreams and plans here. They immigrated to France, coming from the Middle East, Africa, Asia and elsewhere in Europe, and eventually made deep and meaningful connections between where they are and who they have become. I am like these women who once came to France not knowing what was waiting for them; all we knew was that it was time for us to leave our countries, maybe because war scared us away or dreams called us to them, maybe both.



Photojournalist from Yemen, Amira Al Sharif, at her open studio in Paris September 2019.

EMPOWERED HOST CITIES AND CITY COORDINATORS

As cities continue to be at the forefront of hosting and championing resident artists and writers, the ICORN Secretariat sought to create further strategies and opportunities for capacity building in each city and for the network as a whole. The vast majority of ICORN's capacity building happens in one-to-one consultations between coordinators and the ICORN staff, on a daily basis and during city visits. But many of these opportunities come in the form of events that allow cities to network, and exchange ideas and successful outcomes, while also providing a space for the ICORN network to invite and engage with city level politicians and administrators, and other relevant partners.

In 2019, ICORN organised several gatherings in order to increase the capacity, network and training of its city members, city coordinators, writers and artists, and their visibility among city representatives and external partners.

During the 28-30 of May, the **ICORN Network Meeting & PEN International WiPC Conference** was held in Rotterdam under the theme of [At Home Everywhere](#). The annual network meeting gathers the whole network, creating a sense of community around our common goals. Hosting more than 300 people from around the world from 40 different countries, the meeting consisted of 3 days of panels, workshops, keynotes, as well as a rich cultural programme by and for city coordinators, writers and artists, city associates and partners. In addition to digital security training and resilience planning, sessions were organised around specific country contexts, awareness about gender and minority discrimination, censorship, hate speech, campaigning for free expression, and how to approach translation and literary initiatives in different countries.

The sessions were building blocks to the larger discussion of how shelter and relocation programmes can contribute towards enhancing civil-society

initiatives and critically cultural scenes. The Secretariat also organised a four-hour course for new coordinators of the programme addressing relevant topics.

The annual **Swedish Network Meeting** was organised on the 22 and 23 of October by the National ICORN Coordinator in Sweden and the City of Piteå, in cooperation with ICORN and relevant partners. It gathered 70 representatives from member cities, writers and artists and Swedish partner organisations. Topics discussed were city involvement, best practice models for residency, and sharing of network projects. The Barcelona Guidelines for Wellbeing were presented, with an awareness session on consequences of long term stress. The [Cities of Refuge - A handbook for Sweden's Cities of Refuge within the ICORN network](#) - produced and published by the National ICORN Coordinator in Sweden and the Swedish Arts Council - was presented and launched.



2019 ICORN Network Meeting & PEN International WiPC Conference held in Rotterdam.

The annual Norwegian Network Meeting was organised on the 4 and 5 of November by the National Coordinator of the Norwegian Cities of Refuge in cooperation with the City of Tønsberg, Vestfold County and ICORN. 60 participants from Norwegian ICORN cities, relevant partners and professionals took part in the programme, which consisted of translation workshops and courses on how to establish oneself as a writer or artist in Norway. Psychologist Randi Dybdahl and representatives from [Health and Human Rights Info Norway \(HHRI\)](#) presented tools to address stress and trauma and resources available. The meeting was held in conjunction with the city's literary and cultural festival connecting the artists to its programme.

In each of these ICORN gatherings, a lot of emphasis was placed on the capacity building and closer collaboration of city coordinators and coordinating teams. Each City of Refuge appoints a coordinator or a team of individuals to support the writer or artist in legal, practical and promotional matters throughout the residency. Outside of the network events, ICORN works with member cities to provide the relevant resources to follow up with writers and artists in residency.

In 2019, several cities established teams made up of individuals with diverse professional expertise to follow up on different aspects of the residency instead of relying on the work of only one coordinator. This reflects a network-wide effort to provide better and more holistic support to resident artists and writers. In this way, city coordinators are supported by professionals with expertise in the areas of relocation and social security, cultural and professional development, communication, public anchoring and more. Several cities have successfully implemented this approach already. Coordinators also initiated cooperation between cities of refuge in the same country or internationally to share knowledge, strengthen the support, and increase resources and professional opportunities available for each resident.



Mayor of Rotterdam Ahmed Aboutaleb speaks about the importance of welcoming new people to the cities during his welcome to the ICORN Network Meeting & PEN International WiPC Conference in Rotterdam 2019.



Cartoonists meet in Rotterdam

BARCELONA: A CITY WITH A LONG-STANDING COMMITMENT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION



Raffaella Salierno,
General Secretary of PEN Català
and ICORN coordinator

Raffaella has coordinated the Writers in Prison Committee of PEN Català since 2001, at the same time that she started working with ICORN. Barcelona had already hosted persecuted writers within the Cities of Asylum network until its close in 2005 and was eager to continue their commitment to supporting artists and writers once ICORN was founded.

You have followed ICORN since the start. Could you share your perspective on the development of the organisation and the network seen from Barcelona?

Fourteen years have elapsed since the network was established, and in that period of time the number of cities that have joined has increased exponentially. The good thing about ICORN is that it has managed to convey the idea that, besides being an act of solidarity, to be a City of Refuge within the network means to broaden the cultural life of the city, also providing new views and possibilities to local writers. In certain cases it is also an opportunity to approach the culture of immigrant groups, building bridges of communication and knowledge.

Another reason for ICORN success, as I see it, is that within certain terms, every city may offer a residency adapted to the specificities of the city. This means that the ICORN Programme may present differently because of the laws of the hosting country, or depending on the coordinator, the City Council itself, or a cultural association involved to ensure the programme's success.

Why is it important for Barcelona and PEN Català to be part of ICORN?

In the first place, being part of ICORN brings along the necessary support to ascertain that the candidate writers who may become guest writers are truly censored voices in their country and also that they need a place of refuge in order to be able to continue practicing their literary profession.

At the same time it also conveys the possibility to share doubts and difficulties with other cities in the network, and being able to promote literature in all its forms as an indispensable element for human progress. To be part of an international network strengthens and adds prestige to the Guest Writer Program. This has helped stimulate other cities in Catalan linguistic areas to join the network, as Palma and Girona did.

What have you found most challenging during your time as an ICORN coordinator?

The most challenging part of the work as coordinator was to me the initial process to get the selected guest writer in the country, and more specifically the long and complex process to get the visa for each one of them. The same could be said about the end of her or his residency, namely when a guest writer who has decided to remain here—because it is not safe for them to go back to their country—has to confront with a very uncertain economic situation in a country like Spain where the job situation is precarious for everyone.

DEVELOPING ICORN'S MEMBERSHIP STRATEGICALLY

Despite the growth in members in recent years, the number of available residencies is dwarfed by the growing number of persecuted writers and artists applying to ICORN for protection. ICORN works closely with member cities to increase the number of residencies available; either by running simultaneous or overlapping residencies or by encouraging cities to consider a wider range of professional genres and personal circumstances when inviting, thereby increasing matching opportunities and reducing the waiting time for a potential residency to take place.

In order to effectively respond to a growing need for safe spaces, ICORN actively reached out to recruit new member cities; considering a city's geographic location, economic stability, security situation, laws and regulations, political environment, capacity, and cultural and professional credentials. It is normally a long process from the first encounter with a potential new member until the agreement is signed, hence the need to work with multiple candidates at different stages in the recruitment process simultaneously. Political willingness in the cities is often a determining factor, while sudden geopolitical developments can empower a city and give them the last push to make the concrete and symbolic act of becoming a City of Refuge.

By the end of 2019, 71 cities had joined the network, building upon five years of rapid growth. In a period when nation states increasingly crack down on free expression, the addition of Pontassieve, Katowice, and South Bahia in 2019 was significant. The national governments in Poland and Brazil have developed increasingly authoritarian tendencies, limiting free expression and civil rights while encouraging atmospheres that go against the rights of minorities. The commitment at a city level to protect free expression and create a safe space for artists and writers exemplifies the value

of local action, even when the national discourse can be discouraging. As a UNESCO Creative City of Music, Katowice is particularly determined to become a City of Refuge for persecuted musicians. The city of Pontassieve's membership sends a strong message in favour of a more diverse and vibrant society, building upon many years of work by the region of Tuscany to protect human rights and free speech.

The strategic growth of the ICORN network involves three key elements: sustaining committed, capable and independent member cities; encouraging organic growth with cities interested and connected to existing resources; and exploring the possibilities and risks of establishing cities of refuge in the Global South. As the network continues to grow, the follow-up of member cities and residents becomes more demanding. It is imperative that sustaining the membership and implementing efficient and effective procedures remains a vital part of our growth strategy.

The majority of ICORN members are situated in Europe with key members and partners also in the US, Latin America and Canada. In recent years, ICORN has worked closely with local and international organisations, as well as universities, to explore possibilities and risks of establishing cities of refuge in areas closer to the applicant's country of origin. Member cities and other actors are also active in motivating cities to become members. This is not only imperative to being a truly diverse and global network of cities, but to encourage and actively support initiatives that allow strong, creative minds and dissenting voices to remain close to the areas they work in. If they must relocate, a closer City of Refuge makes the transition easier in terms of language, culture, community and professional networks. This is part of ICORN's long-term strategic vision as there exist challenges related to security, structural capacity and support, and economic sustainability.



Joana Guimarães Luz signs the city agreement alongside Chris Gribble.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

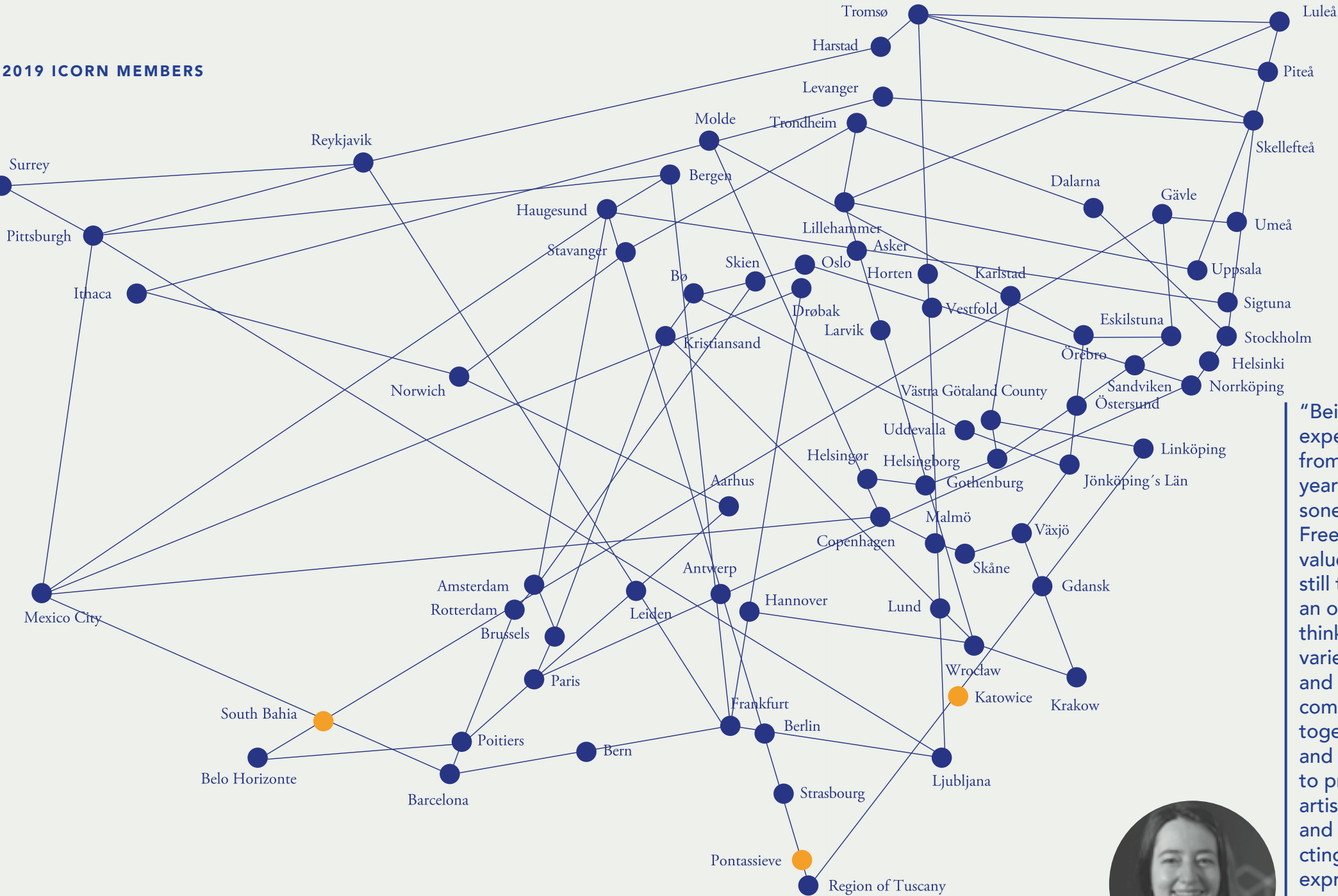
> ICORN organised four main network events in 2019 to encourage member cities to exchange knowledge and experiences, to engage with city-level politicians and administrators, and connect in professional networks.

> Member cities increasingly developed local teams with relevant professional backgrounds to work on ICORN residencies, bringing together resources on relocation issues, professional development and promotion.

> Increased communication and trainings with city coordinators has led to more cross-city initiatives to learn from each other and better support writers and artists.

> ICORN welcomed three new cities in 2019. The new cities were Pontassieve, Italy; Katowice, Poland; and South Bahia, Brazil.

2019 ICORN MEMBERS



● New in 2019



“Being part of ICORN has been an experience of great value. I come from a country where less than 50 years ago a famous writer was imprisoned for carrying a forbidden book. Freedom of expression and democratic values remain vulnerable and we are still transitioning from the legacy of an overwhelming state and uniform thinking. ICORN gathers an incredible variety of people of different views and backgrounds, different skills and competences and yet all working together for the common concern and focus of the organisation: how to provide persecuted writers and artists around the globe with shelter and a chance to speak freely, protecting at the same time freedom of expression in their own countries.”

JASMINA RIHAR, COORDINATOR OF THE ICORN PROGRAMME IN LJUBLJANA, FORMER ICORN BOARD MEMBER

CHAPTER 4

A Resilient Network Organisation Prepared to Lead in Unprecedented Times

The fourth outcome of the ICORN Strategic Plan 2018-2022 seeks to ensure that ICORN is a relevant and resilient network, able to support, develop and adapt in response to growth and global change.



INTRODUCTION

The ability of the ICORN network to be flexible and responsive depends on secure, diversified and dependable funding and a transparent and efficient governance structure. Only when these components are in place can the organisation and membership fully dedicate themselves to fulfilling the mission. During 2019, the Secretariat has gone through a monitoring and evaluation process to determine and prioritise strategic plans and actions with a result based management (RBM) framework; enhanced outreach work and professionalised funding applications.

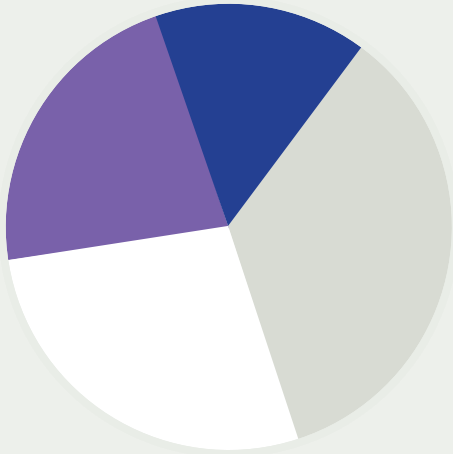
RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP
AND COMMITTED SUPPORTERS

Thanks to its members, donors, funders, and supporters, ICORN has been able to successfully steward its funds to advance in the four core areas laid out in its strategic plan. In 2019, the organisation:

In 2019, the organisation had a total revenue of **NOK 9.008'**. 16% of the total revenue came from membership fees. The remaining income came from the ICORN sponsors. Its expenses amounted to **NOK 8.971'**. ICORN delivered a small excess of **NOK 37'** which was transferred to ICORN's Emergency Fund.

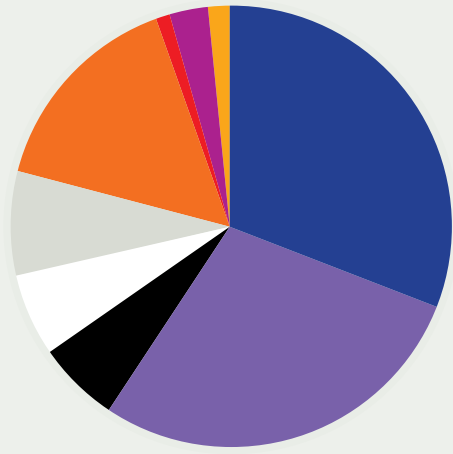
The statutory accounts were audited by Rogaland Revisjon. The complete copy of the annual accounts and the accompanying independent audit report is available upon request.

TOTAL EXPENSES 2019



International long term, temporary residency programme	3132
ICORN is a diversified network of member cities	2506
ICORN is a relevant and resilient network organisation	1996
Writers and artists in ICORN residencies	1337
OUTCOMES TOTAL	8971

TOTAL REVENUE 2019



SIDA	2 785
MFA	2 550
Fritt Ord	550
Stavanger Municipality	550
Sølvsberget, in kind	685
ICORN Membership Fees	1 410
EU/European sources	77
Other	264
Gaveforsterking-Norwegian Dept of Culture	138
REVENUE	9 008

THE ICORN BOARD 2018-2020

The ICORN Board was elected by the General Assembly 2018 in Malmö for a two years period. Representatives from PEN International, Sølvberget Cultural Centre and an ICORN writer/artist representative are invited to attend board meetings as observers.

In 2019, the Board held four meetings: Stavanger (12-13 February), Rotterdam (28 May), Norwich (27-28 August), and Berlin (26-27 November).



CHRIS GRIBBLE
Norwich, Chair,
elected in 2016 for 4 years.



ANNIKA STRÖMBERG
Uppsala, Vice Chair,
elected in 2018 for 4 years.



HENRY ANDERSEN
Harstad, Board member,
elected in 2018 for 4 years.



SABINE GIMBRERE
Amsterdam, Board member,
elected in 2018 for 4 years.



HENRY REESE
Pittsburgh, Board member,
elected in 2018 for 2 years.



JASMINA RIHAR
Ljubljana, Board member,
elected in 2016 for 4 years.

THE ICORN SECRETARIAT

The ICORN Secretariat is situated in Stavanger, Norway. It is responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation and acts as the central hub for the network's member cities and the residency programmes worldwide. The Secretariat had a staff of 5.8 full time positions by end 2019.

Vidar Ekehaug started working as Protection Officer in September 2019. In addition to processing the large number of applications for ICORN residency, and particularly those from Iran and the Horn of Africa, Ekehaug prepares refugee dossiers to the Norwegian Directorate of Immigration (UDI). Ekehaug comes from a position at the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. He worked in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Malawi as well as at the headquarters in Geneva. Ekehaug has particularly

been involved in the work to research and analyse the human rights situation in countries from which people are fleeing. Ekehaug also worked with children and young people's rights at UNICEF and the Global Youth Action Network in NYC. ICORN's member city Uppsala, hosts the position of the National ICORN Coordinator in Sweden, held by Karin Hansson. ICORN's close partner Norwegian PEN also hosts the position of National Coordinator for the Norwegian ICORN Cities, held by Ingeborg Kværne in Oslo. Their tasks are to strengthen the coordination of the Swedish and Norwegian cities of refuge, to facilitate opportunities and promotion, follow political developments, and to advise city coordinators as well as writers and artists in ICORN residency in Norway and Sweden.



HELGE LUNDE
Executive Director



MARIANNE W. HOVDAN
Protection Manager



ELISABETH DYVIK
Programme Director



ANNE LØRUP
Financial Manager



VIDAR EKEHAUG
Protection Officer



CATHRINE HELLAND
Communication Manager

**OPPORTUNITIES: STRATEGIC
POSITIONING AND NEW NETWORKS**

Together with a growing number of partner civil society organisations, governmental and inter-governmental actors, ICORN is in a continuous process of assessing and identifying better ways to advance the landscape of protection. At the same time, ICORN's work is rooted in its long-term collaborations with core partners like PEN International who it relies on for handling and assessing applications from persecuted writers and artists around the world.

In 2019, ICORN strengthened its interaction and co-operation with human rights and artist freedom organisations and participated actively in the development and restructuring of the EU's temporary relocation platform for human rights defenders. In 2019, ICORN was welcomed as a member of International Freedom of Expression Exchange (IFEX). Connecting more than 100 organisations globally, IFEX "advocates for the free expression rights of all, including media workers, citizen journalists, activists, artists, scholars" and provides an important space for ICORN to continue to champion the defense and protection of freedom of expression.

MAIN TAKEAWAYS

> With a strengthened RBM framework, strategic approach and skilled, diverse Board, ICORN continued to count on the generous support of its member cities, supporters, and donors. In 2019, it delivered a small excess of NOK 37' which was transferred to ICORN's Emergency Fund.

> A new staff member joined ICORN Secretariat as Protection Officer in September 2019 to work with processing the increasing requests and applications for ICORN residency. His expertise adds relevant knowledge and competence necessary to cope with the increasing and complex demands for assistance.

> ICORN's outreach was enhanced with strengthened strategic cooperation with free speech, human rights, cultural and relocation initiatives, and as a new member of IFEX.



ICORN was voted in as a new member of IFEX at the IFEX 2019 Strategy Conference in Berlin 8-9 April.

Appendix

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF
2019 APPLICANTS

Iran (34)
Syria (13)
Yemen (12)
Iraq (9)
Bangladesh (8)
Palestine (7)
Egypt (5)
Eritrea (5)
Cameroon (4)
China (4)
Afghanistan (3)
Azerbaijan (3)
Turkey (3)
DR Congo (3)
Burundi (2)
Vietnam (2)
Jordan (2)
Nigeria (2)
Angola (2)
Tajikistan (1)
Rwanda (1)
Chechnya (1)
Morocco (1)
Kazakhstan (1)
Ivory Coast (1)
Cuba (1)
Georgia (1)
Israel (Palestine) (1)
Somalia (1)
Colombia (1)
Lebanon (1)
Myanmar (1)
Sri Lanka (1)
Total: 137

COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN OF 2019
INCOMING ICORN RESIDENTS

Iraq (4)
Iran (2)
China (2)
Afghanistan (2)
Yemen (2)
Syria (1)
Palestine (1)
Azerbaijan (1)
Ethiopia (1)
Sudan (1)
Belarus (1)
Kazakhstan (1)
Nigeria (1)
Tajikistan (1)
Venezuela (1)
Total: 22

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- Article 19 - [2019/2020 Global Expression Report](#)
- [Cities of Refuge](#) - A handbook for Sweden's Cities of Refuge within the ICORN network
- Committee to Protect Journalists - [2019 Global Impunity Index](#)
- [ENGAGE! Young Producers Building Bridges to a Freer World](#)
- The Festival Academy - [Act for Global Change: A Global conversation from the arts to the world \(ACT\)](#)
- Freemuse - [2020 State of Artistic Freedom Annual Report](#)
- Human Rights Defenders Hub - [Barcelona Guidelines on Wellbeing and Temporary International Relocation of Human Rights Defenders at Risk](#)
- ICORN - [2018-2020 Strategic Plan](#)
- PEN International [Case List 2019](#)
- Reporters Wlthout Borders - [2019 Press Freedom Index](#)
- Reporters without Borders/Sweden - [Colleague to Colleague Programme](#)
- UNESCO - [Video: A Question on Artistic Freedom](#)
- UN Special Rapporteur in the field of cultural rights - [Report on Cultural Rights Defenders \(A/HRC/45/50\)](#)
- Verhalenhuis Belvédère - [Rotterdam, City of Refuge 2019: In Word and Image](#)

STAY SAFE NOT SILENT.

FUNDERS & PARTNERS

Thank you for supporting our work.



FRITT ORD



City of
Stavanger



European Instrument
For Democracy and
Human Rights



Sølverget
BIBLIOTEK OG KULTURHUS



Norwegian Ministry
of Foreign Affairs



Sida

icorn.org



ICORN

INTERNATIONAL CITIES OF REFUGE NETWORK