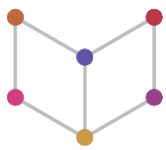# ICORN

International Cities of Refuge Network

Strategic Plan 2018-2022

05 September 2018.
Revision 1

ICORN

INTERNATIONAL CITIES OF REFUGE NETWORK

Introduction

The Strategic Plan 2018-2022 provides ICORN with a 5-year roadmap for the sustainable development of the network. It includes strategic priorities for ICORN's work during the period and serves as a guide for the future.

The Strategic Plan has been developed with input from ICORN staff members, Board Members, ICORN member cities, writers and artists, partners and supporters, and informed by the first external evaluation of ICORN. The strategic plan is intended for internal and external audience alike and works as a functional document for the ICORN Secretariat, the Board and the Membership. Based on this plan, result frameworks and annual plans will be developed.

Context

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right. Where free expression rights are violated, other rights violations inevitably follow.[1] The global clampdown on civil society has deepened and accelerated in recent years. A new global culture of silencing writers and artists is emerging,[2] and a record number of journalists reported imprisoned.[3] Perpetrators are typically governments and religious groups, but also political associations, criminal gangs and private actors. The persecution manifests itself through surveillance, censorship, threats, online trolling, legal action, financial constraints, travel bans, abductions, imprisonment, physical assault, and killings.

When other protection mechanisms are no longer enough, leaving one's own country is often a last option. But free movement between countries is becoming increasingly difficult. Barriers to cross borders are set up both by restrictive regimes oppressing citizens, and by the countries where most of ICORN's residencies are located.

ICORN aims to ameliorate the situation and lessen the pressure by providing safe residencies to persecuted writers and artists. Together with other organisations and institutions, ICORN is part of a world-wide network for protection of human rights and their defenders. ICORN mainly reaches out to the least developed and lower middle-income OECD/DAC countries, and countries where the freedom of the press situation is difficult or very serious.[4]

ICORN believes that cities and civil society institutions are well placed and equipped to take on the responsibility to defend freedom of expression by providing safe residencies where writers and artists can continue their work without fear of persecution. ICORN members take a stand to defend democratic values and promote international solidarity. ICORN residencies are flexible and diverse to be able to offer opportunities to the variety of professions and situations of the applicants to the ICORN programme. We fill a gap in the field of protection work, for writers, journalists and artists who are no longer protected and able to continue their work and express themselves freely in their home countries.

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[1] Jennifer Clement, President PEN International, 2017: http://pen-international.org/news/over-80-of-writers-believe-that-fake-news-and-censorship-is-on-the-rise
[2] Freemuse report *The State of Artistic Freedom* 2018. https://freemuse.org/resources/item/state-artistic-freedom-2018/
[3] Committee to Protect Journalists: https://cpj.org/
[4] Reporters Without Borders (RSF): https://rsf.org/en

ICORN has experienced an exponential growth in membership and applicants the last 10 years. This shows the need for the organisation and the willingness of cities to engage. The strategic plan 2014-2018 had as its main goal to establish the organisation as "the major long-term placement system for writers at risk, forming a dynamic, sustainable and global network, through assisting more writer applicants, recruiting more member cities and cooperating intensively with compatible organisations worldwide".

During the years 2018-2022, ICORN will consolidate and ensure the quality of our work and continue a planned and sustainable growth.

ICORN Vision and Mission Statement

Improved conditions for freedom of expression world wide

ICORN Vision

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

ICORN Mission Statement

Key Outcomes 2018-2022

The key outcomes for ICORN for the next five years are:

1: ICORN IS AN ACCESSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE INTERNATIONAL LONG TERM, TEMPORARY RESIDENCY PROGRAMME FOR PERSECUTED WRITERS AND ARTISTS AROUND THE WORLD.

2: WRITERS AND ARTISTS IN ICORN RESIDENCIES ARE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO WORK AND EXPRESS THEMSELVES FREELY

3: ICORN IS A DIVERSIFIED NETWORK OF MEMBER CITIES, WITH SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE PERSECUTED WRITERS AND ARTISTS.

4: 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.

Outcome 1

1: ICORN IS AN ACCESSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE INTERNATIONAL LONG TERM, TEMPORARY RESIDENCY PROGRAMME FOR PERSECUTED WRITERS AND ARTISTS AROUND THE WORLD

Baseline

Outreach: The largest number of applicants to ICORN originate in countries on the OECD/DAC list. All originate in countries with noticeable, difficult or very serious freedom of the press issues.[5] ICORN is aware of and prioritizes the particular vulnerability of some applicants; for example, women, LGTBQI, religious and ethnic minorities, and severely persecuted applicants. However, as of yet, ICORN does not have a systematic strategy for recruiting specific applicant groups/categories of applicants. Persecuted writers and artists mainly find information about ICORN through the Internet, collaborating organisations and networks, and/or by word of mouth.

Criteria/applicant profile diversity: The criteria for being eligible for a residency in an ICORN city is persecution directly related to the applicants' professional work as a writer or an artist. Professional merit, excellence and the quality of the work are never irrelevant factors, but not seen as absolute criteria. ICORN applicants represent a large diversity in artistic genre, in language proficiency, profession, legal status and family situation, severity and reasons for persecution.

Global movement/migration: In the last five years, the world has seen a considerable escalation of migratory flows and refugee crises. Perceptions of migration as an economic threat have shifted to that of a security threat. Draconian visa procedures have been introduced, borders re-established and ethnic profiling or calls for revocation of nationality widely made. The restrictions on freedom of movement are also used in some countries as a tool of repression and censorship. In addition, these conditions create hostile environments in hosting countries and cities.

Matching applicants with host cities: A two-year residency requires a large amount of trust, and the more reliable information available, the better the possibility for a good match between the city's resources and the applicant's needs. There exists some discrepancy between the resources in the member cities and the professional background and needs of the applicants. To be able to offer the relevant residency for each applicant or recommend alternative assistance, ICORN needs thorough and reliable information about each applicant, and each hosting member.

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[5] Reporters Without Borders (RSF): https://rsf.org/en

Output 1.1
An accessible, secure and transparent application process

- Map and implement targeted outreach, including towards more vulnerable groups.
- Ensure thorough communication with all applicants throughout the application process; strengthen secretarial resources in line with increase of applications and develop relevant security measures in all parts of the process.
- Communicate secure and effectively with the main assessment agent (PEN International); quicker and more regular return of assessments to ICORN; annual reviews of procedural effectiveness and efficiency.
- Communicate and follow up systematically with approved applicants, including referral to sister networks. Annual review in regard to volume and operative criteria for maintenance of waiting lists.

Output 1.2
Efficient, secure and predictable relocation process

- Improve communication between the applicant, the inviting city and the Secretariat throughout the relocation process, including post residency preparations.
- Stay updated on relevant national, regional and global migration rules and regulations, and work with national immigration offices for more secure/efficient relocation.
- Increase cooperation with relevant resources, including NGOs, EU, UNHCR, advocating for a more open and hospitable society.

Output 1.3
Effective and sustainable matching between qualified applicants and ICORN cities

- Map resources in member cities and needs among the persecuted writers and artists; reduce gaps between what cities can offer and needs among the approved applicants.
- Increase awareness of host cities about possibilities and limitations of running ICORN residencies; share best practices; manage expectations.
- Reduce the time gap between residency exit and reception of new residents.

Outcome 2

2: WRITERS AND ARTISTS IN ICORN RESIDENCIES ARE ABLE TO CONTINUE TO WORK FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ON A GLOBAL SCALE.

Baseline

Protect: Relocating to a safe environment is essential for most writers and artists in ICORN residencies to be able to continue to work. A remarkable amount of ICORN residents hits the ground running. But not all ICORN residents are ready to start working and producing immediately after relocation. Practical, cultural and psychosocial issues often need to be resolved first.

Facilitate opportunities: The ICORN cities are diverse when it comes to resources and capacities to facilitate opportunities and promote the residents and their work. Still, each resident and each residency are unique, and planning for the unknown is often required. The full ICORN network, including residents, cities, secretariat and partners, have great resources, however they can be utilized to a greater extent across the network.

Safe, but not silent: ICORN writers and artist are professionals, representing a wide variety of expressions, including poets, academics, musicians, visual artists and filmmakers. About 50% of the applicants are journalists. When relocating to a safe residency, many find themselves without their trusted networks of peers, family and friends, in an unfamiliar environment, a different culture and language. Contact with publisher, producers, and other professional networks are stalled, and access to home audiences cut, at least temporarily. Internet and digital technology counters these obstacles, but are marred because of the threat of surveillance and online trolling. Some residents choose not to be public about their whereabout in consideration of families and friends back home. Some are still able to continue working without a public profile.

Output 2.1

A safe and adaptable residency base able to accommodate primary needs to accompany support for professional development and networks

- With priority to safety and individual adaptation, identify and offer relevant support systems in the host city.
- Develop a diverse and competent resource network in the city pertinent to the residents needs and professional profile.
- Offer capacity building programmes for writers and artists in ICORN residencies, including building new professional networks and audiences in the city and internationally, how to promote own work in a new environment, as well as preparations for post-residency.

Output 2.2

Appropriate conditions for continuation and promotion of the resident's work

- Develop adaptability of host cities to accommodate a variety of needs and genres that the ICORN residents represent.
- Conduct early discussions between the city and each resident about professional ambitions and plans, so the city can provide relevant tools, conditions and contacts.
- Improve coordination of outreach efforts between resident, the host city and the Secretariat and external professional resources.
- Set up post-residency strategies taking into consideration professional, personal, legal, financial and security needs.

Output 2.3

International outreach and impact

- Map and facilitate relevant local, national and international outreach and promotion opportunities, to new and existing audiences.
- Support outreach to home-country audiences.
- Enhance synergies between actors in the network to optimize outreach; cooperate with relevant external resources.

Outcome 3

3: ICORN IS A DIVERSIFIED NETWORK OF MEMBER CITIES, WITH SUFFICIENT KNOWLEDGE AND RESOURCES TO PROTECT AND PROMOTE PERSECUTED WRITERS AND ARTISTS.

Baseline

Membership resources: The ICORN cities make up the core resources of the network. They offer persecuted writers and artists a safe place and the opportunity and means to continue to work. Writers and artists granted an ICORN residency often bring new energy to the host cities. They raise awareness, build bridges between countries, cultures, politics and people, and contribute with insight and new perspectives to the local debate. Each member city runs the ICORN programme independently. The membership is diverse and can offer a variety of professional opportunities to the writers and artists hosted. But resources and potentials within the network are not always systematically explored and exploited.

Capacity building and communication: With the growth of the network, the Secretariat's follow-up of member cities has become more time consuming. Because of its relatively small size and scarce secretarial resources, the network has not developed systematic training of, or guidelines and manuals for, the different stakeholders in the network. ICORN organises an annual meeting for the whole network in cooperation with one of the member cities, to share knowledge and experiences, and create opportunities, partnerships and cooperation across the network. It is important to have systematic training, procedures and documentation, so as not to risk loss of routines, knowledge or competence within the cities. ICORN developed a new website in 2015 and joined Twitter in 2014.

Growth and matching needs: ICORN has experienced an immense growth in member cities the last five years. Current members are in Europe and the Americas. With 65 members hosting writers or artists (2018) for two years before inviting a new resident, ICORN can offer residencies to between 20-30 applicants each year. Despite the growth in members in recent years, the number of available residencies does not match the growing number of applicants to ICORN.

Output 3.1
Anchor the ICORN membership status and residency programme locally to safeguard committed and effective member cities, and to ensure win win situations.

- Strengthen the sense of ownership and belonging to the organization, and the understanding of working towards the same goals.
- Map and use resources in cities and encourage and facilitate cooperation between cities in the network.
- Ensure transparency of network priorities and activities for all stakeholders, and communicate sufficiently and effectively within the organisation based on a communication strategy.
- Identify and establish strategic partners and cooperation with other organisations in cities.
- Raise awareness on municipal level, of plights and benefits of being a city of refuge.

Output 3.2
A trained group of ICORN coordinators that have the necessary knowledge, support and tools to run the ICORN programme.

- Plan and offer systematic follow-up and training programmes for coordinators and other relevant personnel in the cities of refuge.
- Facilitate exchange of knowhow and competences within the membership and produce and share best practice and guidelines.
- Explore possibilities of communication for the Secretariat to inform and interact with the membership community, and for the membership community to interact with each other.
- Establish systematic reporting between ICORN member cities and the Secretariat.
- Continue to organise annual network meetings for the whole organisation, in cooperation with one of the member cities.

Output 3.3
A relevant and effective mobilization and recruitment strategy for ICORN membership, responsive to increase in applications and the diverse needs and profiles of the applicants.

- Develop a recruitment strategy for ICORN, strategically exploring potential members, considering geographic location, economic stability, security situation, laws and regulations, political environment, capacity and cultural/professional credentials.
- Reach out globally, exploring possibilities for establishing ICORN cities, also by affiliating with sister networks.
- Mobilize the existing membership to be flexible in criteria and effective in the placement process.
- Develop a strategy for members recruiting and supporting new members.
- Map resources, knowledge and other required needs for further growth.

Outcome 4

4: 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.

Baseline

New network, new model: As of January 2010, ICORN has been an independent, international organisation of member cities and regions. The General Assembly is ICORN's highest governing body, an executive board governs the organisation between the assemblies, and the day to day running of the organisation is done by the Secretariat in Stavanger.

Organisation: The Secretariat has currently a staff of 5,8 people, including a full position supporting the Swedish members. With rapid growth in membership and applications, a potential overburden of staff has become a serious challenge. National networks of members are emerging with different support structures. A certain distribution of responsibilities between the members, the board and the Secretariat is established, but has more potential.

Funding is key: The largest part of ICORN's funding is mobilised in and by the members cities, setting up and running the residencies. The Secretariat is mainly funded by grants from various sources, parts of its income come from the membership fee. ICORN's key funders, the ministries of foreign affairs of Sweden and Norway, have raised their contributions significantly in recent years. There is currently a clear imbalance between public and private funding.

Cooperation and partners: In only 10 years, ICORN has gained a considerable position globally. Priority has been given to expanding the number of cooperation partners: NGOs, governmental and intergovernmental bodies. An increasing number of organisations, projects and other actors approach ICORN with ideas for cooperation and collaboration. ICORN needs to keep ownership of its clear and distinct brand, while continuing to grow and be open to collaboration with others.

Output 4.1

Diversified, satisfactory and sustainable funding; a stable, transparent, adaptable financial organisation

- Maintain and develop relations with current funders, systematically research and secure new funding possibilities to enable delivery of yearly budget targets in the plan period.
- Establish a funding committee, to make targeted strategies for securing funding from a diversity of funders.
- Strengthen the Reserve fund to make the organisation less vulnerable for yearly fluctuations, and increase the capability of the Emergency funding.
- Establish a transparent, activity based accounting system, and further develop a clear and communicative reporting regime.
- Secure continued solid secretarial anchorage and services at Sølvberget Cultural Centre/the Municipality of Stavanger.

Output 4.2

A transparent and participatory governance model; a professional, communicative and motivated secretariat

- Maintain and advance a strong, participatory model for running the organisation, with high level of ICORN city and resident involvement.
- Strengthen the governance structure, update and structure documentation of key processes, secure effective distribution of tasks and responsibilities, develop the organisational structure, - all based on continued improvement and theory of change.
- Strategize for capacity building of secretariat, avoidance of burnout, included planning of staff resources.
- Analyze how the organisation can tackle growth, and in what pace. Grow based on this knowledge and recommendations.
- Set up monitoring and reporting mechanisms.
- Maintain a goal oriented, holistic approach in all secretarial and governance policies.

Output 4.3

Strategic positioning to open for new opportunities

- Maintain and strengthen relations with key partners.
- Identify and build cooperation with relevant organisations and institutions in areas key to ICORN (professions, FoE, HR, migration, residencies, etc).
- Develop and implement a branding process and strategy.