

Annual Report 2024

FLH – ICELANDIC DRAMATISTS UNION

FLH – The Icelandic Dramatists Union – founded in 1974, currently has 125 members. The guild represents Icelandic screenwriters (film and TV writers) and playwrights, and its main purpose is to support and protect the rights of dramatic writers on a broad level.

FLH is a member of:

- The Federation of Artists in Iceland
- The Film Council of Iceland
- Performing Arts in Iceland
- NDU
- FSE
- IHM (national CMO)

FLH is managed by a board of five volunteer members, we have no staff. Until recently, our only source of income was our moderate membership fees (aprox. 6.000 € in total per year), but a few months ago we entered an agreement with the Writers Union of Iceland that certain payments collected through our CMO, and which can't be fairly distributed on individual basis, go into a special fund managed by FLH. This new arrangement enables us to take a significant step forward, and finance work and projects for the greater good of our profession. The agreement also includes free legal services for our members – 4 hours per contract, plus access to lawyers with regards to guild matters. In the future, we aim to have all our members' contracts go through the lawyers.

Contracts, negotiations and guerilla warfare

We have no general agreements on writing of Film and TV in Iceland. For years, we've wanted to update a long obsolete contract with RÚV, the National Broadcaster, but still we've not managed to bring negotiations about. However, the plan is still to try and get RÚV into talks as soon as possible. Although RÚV is usually just a small co-producer of projects, and writers work under contracts with independent producers, we believe it's essential that we have in place an official agreement with RÚV that can be used as a reference.

It's been our feeling lately, that instead of improvement and normal development in the field of contracts and fees (film and TV), we are experiencing a severe regression. Fees and terms offered to writers these days seem to have not only come to a stand still, but in many cases we hear figures that are lower than we've seen for many years, even decades. At the same time, film crew wages have gone up by 40–50% in recent years.

The situation is of course unacceptable, and it's not only the writers who experience this fallback, but also directors. We've been in close dialogue with the directors' guild about how to react to this. The directors have in vain tried to bring the Producers' Association to the negotiating table, but the PA's response has been that since they (the directors) are a guild and not a union, they don't have a mandate to negotiate for anyone, and/or that competition law prohibits it.

We however, the writers and the directors, finally decided to take matters into our own hands, and a few weeks ago, we “leaked” a document with an unofficial tariff, for both writers and directors, to the members of FLH and the directors’ guild. I believe the Writers’ Union of Iceland has distributed the document as well. This means that a few hundred people – the majority of writers and directors in Iceland – have seen the tariff, with figures that we consider to be fair minimumism as well as suggestions about profit share percentages etc. In all of our guilds there are actually quite a few producers who are members, so we can assume that the document, or at least its content, has reached the producers’ circle. The idea is to follow up on this “guerilla act” soon, by f.ex. holding an open presentation and/or a workshop for writers and directors on contracts and negotiations. Although we are aware that it will take time and effort to steer the ship back on course – towards a more normal and acceptable destination – at least the “Sisyphus feeling” is fading a bit, now that we witness the strong, positive response from our members and peers, and with increasing awareness. We’re finally discussing things more openly – these numbers have been sent out in public and they can’t be unseen. From the producers corner, so far there’s been no response.

Artists Salaries Fund – a new Film Authors’ Fund

Last spring, the Icelandic Parliament approved changes to the Artists Salaries Law, that includes the addition of a new fund, the Film Authors Fund, meant for screenwriters and directors. Although it’s a big victory that filmauthors are finally eligible in the artists salary program, it’s a very small fund of only 60 months, which means that f.ex. 10 authors can receive 6 months salary yearly, but at least it’s a start.

The Icelandic Film Fund

The entire film industry is fuming over the governments’ proposed 30% cuts of the Film Fund and the Film Centre’s budget in next year’s financial bill. In recent years, the tax rebate has been raised up to 35%, in order to increase the attraction of Iceland as a location for international productions, and much effort has been put into promoting Iceland as a country with a competent and healthy film industry. However, we can only conclude, that all this is at the cost of domestic production, even though all research and reports state, that in order to maintain a competitive and sustainable service industry, the local production industry must be well nurtured and supported. This is a concern of the filmmaking community as a whole, and if the authorities stick to their plan to keep our Film Fund somewhere at or below the poverty line, it’s inevitable that some actions will be taken.

Various projects and activities in the past year

A brief summary of what we’ve been up to over the last year.

Iceland hosted the Nordic Dramatists Union annual meeting this year, August 29th – September 1st in Reykjavík, where delegations from all the Nordic guilds came together for a very good meeting. The strong alliance of the Nordic guilds is very important and something that we hold very dear. The same applies of course to the participation in FSE.

A lot of time and effort has gone into attempts within the CMO to bring about a settlement between the rightholders' groups on a renewed division of cable fees. The dispute has now been referred over to arbitration of a judge.

Last autumn, a conference was held on the subject of AI by various guilds and groups of creators and performers. Among the speakers was David Kavannagh, former Executive Officer of FSE.

FLH has been involved in the European Writers Club projects, since the beginning, for the last two years or so. Three of our members have taken part in various EWC projects, both as consultant writers and with projects of their own.

We've also had members selected for the European Showrunner Program, run by The International Filmschool of Köln, same number here, three members have done the ESP.

LINKS:

FLH website: <https://leiskald.is/>

IHM (CMO): <https://www.ihm.is/English/>