

## NOTES FROM AROUND EUROPE: ICELAND

# RSÍ

## *Raising awareness of the role of professional writers and translators in society*

*Þórunn Hafstað*

The Writers Union of Iceland (Rithöfundasamband Íslands – RSÍ) is a professional rights holders' organisation and a trade union, representing authors and translators since 1974. One of its main roles is to safeguard Icelandic literature and language.

Out of 658 members of RSÍ, 11% are active translators. Because of the small number of union members, genres are not split into sections. Instead, the union represents all its members as a single section; poets, novelists, literary translators, audiovisual translators, dramatists, scriptwriters, writers of young adult/children's books and authors of academic works. It is a noticeable characteristic of RSÍ's members that most of them qualify for more than one professional category. In fact, the majority of Icelandic literary translators are writers as well.

Translators and interpreters do have their own professional association, THOT, which is a close collaborator of RSÍ. However, RSÍ alone handles all standard negotiations on behalf

of translators. RSÍ also creates a reference rate for translators to take as guidance when the standard ones are not applicable. Nonetheless, this does not apply to technical translators and interpreters, who are not members of RSÍ.

### Current issues facing RSÍ

One of the most pressing matters in current negotiations between RSÍ and the Icelandic Publishers' Association is to try to guarantee that translators get a share of royalties from publishers' contracts with subscription services for audio and e-books (e.g. Storytel).



*The board and office staff of RSÍ*  
*Photo: Valgarður Gíslason*





*Þórunn Hafstað is a Project Manager of RSÍ. As such, it is her responsibility to monitor translators' affairs and to be their main adviser on negotiations and other rights issues.*

**Þórunn Hafstað**  
**Photo: Yrsa Rocca Fannberg**

The current agreement is from 2011 and does not include the distribution of translations through such services. The Union regards subscription services as a new kind of right of use, which is not specified in the current agreement and therefore must be negotiated. Publishers have not been forthcoming on the matter, and negotiations have been difficult. Storytel (Storyside) is the largest publisher of audio and e-books in Iceland. Despite being a member of the Icelandic Publishers Association, Storytel is offering translators half of RSÍ's lowest standard contract rate. Another big current concern is AI and the effects this new technology will have on translators' job environment in Iceland. In collaboration with other artists' associations, RSÍ recently organized a big conference on AI and the arts and literature in Iceland. The conference was very well attended and kick started a discussion on the importance of legislation about AI. RSÍ is eager to enter meaningful dialogue and to take part in advancing legislation on copyright issues in the age of AI.

#### **Association info**

**Name:** Rithöfundasamband Íslands (RSÍ) (**The Writers Union of Iceland**)

**Founded:** 1974

**Number of members:** 658, of which ca 11% are literary translators

