



Multilingual Writing in Iceland: Opportunities, Challenges, and Institutional Support

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1. Introduction

Literature and language are uniquely important in Icelandic culture, serving as central pillars to national identity. The history of this significance can be traced to a storytelling tradition dating back over a thousand years before Iceland's settlement. This storytelling tradition has remained consistent throughout Iceland's history. Both the scribing of the sagas and efforts to preserve the language have kept modern Icelandic closely connected to its medieval roots.

This legacy remains relevant today, evident in the special place books have in the community. Iceland consistently ranks among the world's highest consumers of books per capita, with Jólabókaflóðið (the Christmas Book Flood) tradition, numerous literary events, and a remarkably active and varied publishing industry. As Iceland's population has become increasingly diverse in the last two decades, this traditional literary landscape faces new opportunities and challenges. The country's growing multilingual population brings linguistic traditions of its own, along with new creative voices contributing diverse stories to the Icelandic literary scene. This shift has raised questions and challenges regarding inclusion, representation, and the role of language in authentic creative expression. The experiences of multilingual writers are as varied as the writers themselves, with many expressing a love for writing in Icelandic and a sense of empowerment when they feel able to do so. Yet, at the same time, many also express significant barriers in learning the language, or a desire to maintain connection either with their mother tongue or with other languages in which they choose to write.

This report examines some of the current opportunities and challenges multilingual writing currently faces in Iceland. Based on a series of interviews with multilingual authors currently living in or with a significant connection to Iceland, it explores the opportunities these authors have been able to access, including writing classes, publication opportunities, network-building, and digital tools. It also discusses some of the challenges related to publishing and connecting with the literary scene, as well as the opportunities that plurilingualism offers in education and community building.

The report begins with background information, as well as an overview of Ós Pressan's role in the Icelandic literary scene and in conducting the research. The methodology is then outlined, explaining how data was gathered from eleven language and literature professionals working

with the subject of multilingualism, including authors, researchers, academic, teachers, and project managers. The current context and literature review is then outlined. Analysis is provided in the form of stakeholder perspectives, drawing carefully from the transcribed interviews. Finally, identified gaps and recommendations are made.

Background

Within this report, *multilingual writing* is used as an umbrella term encompassing writing and creative linguistic expression that challenge the assumed alignment between place of origin, mother tongue, and the dominant language of a society. When we discuss *multilingual writers*, we focus on authors (1) who create and publish or publicly share literary work in more than one language; or (2) who draw on multiple languages and linguistic traditions within their writing; or (3) whose plurilingual identities shape their work and their sense of belonging within the creative environment, literary scene, and publishing industry. We understand multilingual writing not as a literary genre or category, but as an approach to writing that reflects diverse cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and plurilingual linguistic awareness.

In recent years, this approach to writing has become a more visible part of Iceland's literary landscape, introducing new voices and perspectives. Although individual foreign-born authors have lived in Iceland over the past centuries—such as the exiled German writer Albert Daudistel (1890–1955)—the presence of multilingual writing has become more apparent in the twenty-first century. The publication of the poetry collection *Fimmta árstíðin* (2007), by Toshiki Toma, and *Sjóarinn með morgunhestana undir kjólnum* (2010), by Elías Knörr, marked the beginning of a steady and growing stream of books, events, and projects highlighting authors born abroad and living in Iceland.

Since its designation as a UNESCO City of Literature (Bókmenntaborgin) in 2011, Reykjavík has played a key role in fostering Iceland's multilingual literary scene through institutional support, artistic initiatives, grants, and opportunities. A key outcome of this initiative—in collaboration with Women Of Multicultural Ethnicity Network (WOMEN) in Iceland and the Reykjavík City Library—was the creation of Ós Pressan, a multilingual literary collective and publishing house. This non-profit organization emerged from a group of diverse women participating in a multilingual writing workshop led by Angela Snæfellsjökuls Rawlings, a Canadian-Icelandic interdisciplinary artist-researcher. Launched in 2015, Ós Pressan has

contributed to the Icelandic literary scene over the past decade through numerous literary events, but most notably by publishing *Ós – The Journal*, a multilingual anthology of writing from Iceland, as well as four books by foreign-born authors: Helen Hafgnýr Cova, Ewa Marcinek, Virginia Gillard, and Maó Alheimsdóttir.

With the growing visibility of foreign-born authors living in Iceland, the discussion about diverse literature took on a new dimension through numerous books, as well as articles, essays, and poetry collections that not only featured work by foreign-born authors but also tackled themes of belonging and identity.¹ By the mid-2020s, the presence of foreign-born authors has become increasingly normalized in Icelandic media, literary events, competitions, and festivals.

In 2020, on the initiative of Anna Valdís Kro, the Ós Pressan collective embraced another aspect of multilingualism in literature. Between 2020 and 2023, four Visual Vernacular storytelling workshops—led by Ós Pressan and Elsa G. Björnsdóttir—offered participants fluent in Icelandic Sign Language, (íslenskt táknmál, ÍTM), a rare opportunity to explore creative storytelling through body language, facial expression, role-shifting, and rhythm. The workshops also raised important questions about space, support, and opportunities for creativity in ÍTM within Deaf and hard-of-hearing communities.

Having both witnessed firsthand and contributed to the emergence of multilingual literature in Iceland, and reflecting on the upcoming tenth anniversary of the Ós Pressan initiative, we set out to summarize our experiences and gather relevant data on the opportunities and challenges of multilingual writing in Iceland, as well as its role and significance as a tool for education and fostering social connection. This report would not have been possible without the support of the Erasmus+ Programme, as part of the Multilingual Writing LAB partnership project with Red Door, an independent gallery, creative space, and publishing house based in Copenhagen, which conducted complementary research and produced a corresponding report in Denmark. The findings from the Danish and Icelandic reports have also been compared and consolidated in a separate document. More information about the Multilingual Writing LAB and its research findings can be found at www.nomulab.org.

¹ The poetry collection *Póliþfónía af erlendum uppruna* (2021) and the essay collection *Skáldreki* (2023) can stand as exemplary publications.

Methodology

The methodology of the research was twofold. In the first stage, desktop research was conducted to identify, locate, and analyse documents, websites, and other materials relevant to multilingual writing in Iceland. These materials included policy documents, websites of educational institutions, as well as peer-reviewed articles and reports about the publishing industry in Iceland, the position of authors of foreign origin within it, and creative opportunities for the ÍTM users. The second stage of the research consisted of conducting eleven semi-structured interviews with relevant stakeholders in Iceland, including project managers, educators, and researchers (e.g., writing teachers and academics), as well as authors of foreign origin living in Iceland. The interviews were between 30 minutes and one hour long and based on an interview guide developed by the researchers involved in the project. Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to sign an informed consent form outlining the purpose of the research, how their data would be used, and their rights. The interviews were conducted by members of the research team in English, Icelandic, or ÍTM. After the interviews, the researcher taking the interview wrote a short summary of the interview, with relevant quotes. These reports, as well as recordings of all interviews, were shared among the research team members. When available, automatically generated transcripts created by the apps used to conduct the interviews were also shared with the other research team members. To analyse the data, the researchers engaged with the material by reading the transcripts and listening to the recordings, thus identifying topics commonly expressed in the interviews as well as revealing areas of agreement and disagreement between participants.

2. Current status and context

Iceland is becoming increasingly diverse. As of January 2025, there were 73,795 immigrants—people born abroad to foreign-born parents and grandparents—making up 18.9% of the population, up from 18.2% the previous year. Second-generation immigrants, born in Iceland to immigrant parents, rose from 7,351 in 2024 to 7,839 in 2025. Together, first- and second-generation immigrants now account for 21% of the population, the highest share ever recorded. Individuals with a foreign background, meaning one foreign-born parent, reached 7.3% ([Statistics Iceland, 2025](#)).

Poles are by far the largest immigrant group in Iceland, making up 31.1% of all immigrants. They are followed by people from Ukraine (5.6%) and Lithuania (5.2%) ([Statistics Iceland, 2025](#)).

Icelandic, spoken by 93.2% of the population, and ÍTM, the first language of about 300 individuals, are the official languages of Iceland. English is spoken by 98% and among other popular foreign languages are Danish, Norwegian, Swedish, French, German, and Spanish. Immigrant languages are Polish (spoken by 2.74% of the population), Lithuanian (0.43%), English (0.32%), German (0.31%), Danish (0.31%), Portuguese (0.28%), Filipino (0.24%), Thai (0.17%), Latvian (0.14%), and other (1.89%) ([Wikipedia, 2025](#)). The number of pupils with a foreign mother tongue in compulsory schools has been rising steadily. In autumn 2023, they made up 15.5% of all pupils ([Statistics Iceland, 2024](#)). This growing linguistic diversity has also increased the demand for accessibility, leading many official websites, public information services, and everyday digital platforms to offer content in English and, in some cases, Polish.

Immigrants in Iceland have the legal right to interpretation in key areas such as healthcare, police interactions, and court proceedings, with institutions generally responsible for arranging and covering the cost. Interpreters are also often provided in schools, social services, and other public services to ensure accessibility, though payment policies may vary depending on the institution, type of service, or specific circumstances.

ÍTM is one of the many sign languages in the world. Sign languages are not universal but

rather are developed spontaneously when deaf people communicate with each other. That means that ÍTM, the only traditional minority language in Iceland, was created by the Deaf community ([Samskiptamiðstöð heyrnarlausra og heyrnarskertra, n.d.](#)). In 2011, ÍTM was officially recognized by law as a first language, guaranteeing that those who rely on it—along with their families— the right to learn and use it from the earliest stages of language development or from the time deafness, hearing impairment, or deaf-blindness is diagnosed. The government is responsible for nurturing and supporting the language ([Althingi, 2011](#)).

Deaf people in Iceland now receive free interpreting services in ÍTM for most everyday situations, with video phone interpretation being the most common method for accessing services and transactions. However, the legal right to an interpreter does not yet extend to all areas of daily life, such as workplaces, leisure, and cultural events. Challenges for users of ÍTM include limited funding for everyday interpretation services and limited offerings from the Icelandic National Broadcasting Service (RÚV). More cultural materials in ÍTM are needed to raise public awareness and support language development for deaf and hearing-impaired children, including children of deaf parents ([Samskiptamiðstöð heyrnarlausra og heyrnarskertra, 2021](#)).

How is this growing diversity reflected in Iceland's literary scene, education, and opportunities for multilingual writing? This chapter examines publishing, grant and institutional support, education, cultural policies, and spaces for sharing multilingual work, including the status of creative expressions in Visual Vernacular and ÍTM.

Publishing scene

Iceland's publishing industry is highly active and diverse, featuring numerous small and independent publishers. The Icelandic Writers' Union website lists 37 publishing houses (mostly based in Reykjavík and the capital area). However, this list isn't comprehensive. According to the 2024 Bókatiðindi catalog, at least 11 additional publishers or self-publishing platforms released novels that year. For poetry, the same issue includes six more publishers and two private individuals. Although diverse, the publishing market is largely dominated by the major player Forlagið, which controls a significant share of printed book publishing through labels like JPV and Mál og menning.

In the last two decades, foreign-born writers have gained visibility in Icelandic publishing, beginning with the self-publication of *Fimmta árstíðin* (2007) by Toshiki Toma, and the poetry book *Sjóarinn með morgunhestana undir kjólnum* (2010) by Elías Knörr, published by Stella. Since then, several local presses have published works by poets and authors of foreign backgrounds.

Based on the language and place of publication, foreign-born authors in Iceland fall into four main categories, each reflecting a distinct relationship to language, geography, and publishing practice.

The first group comprises published writers who have mastered Icelandic as a second language and produce original literary works in the local tongue. Examples include Elías Knörr (published by Benedikt, Mál og menning, Partus, Stella), Helen Hafgnýr Cova (Karíba, Ós Pressan), Jakub Stachowiak (Dimma, Páskaeyjan, Sæmundur útgáfa), Maó Alheimsdóttir (Forlagið, Ós Pressan), and Natasha S. (Benedikt, Una útgáfuhús).

The second group consists of authors who write in other languages, with their works translated into Icelandic. Notable examples are Ewa Marcinek (JPV), Francesca Cricelli (Dimma, Mál og menning, Sagarana), Helen Hafgnýr Cova (Karíba, Ós Pressan), Joachim Schmidt (Mál og menning), and Mazen Maarouf (Dimma, Mál og menning).

The third, smaller but no less significant group consists of writers who write and publish in non-Icelandic languages while living and working in Iceland. Among them are Ewa Marcinek, Helen Hafgnýr Cova, and Virginia Gillard—all of whom have published with Ós Pressan, with Cova also publishing through Karíba.

Finally, there is a more elusive cohort of foreign-born authors residing in Iceland—or those who maintain strong ties with the country—whose literary output is primarily published abroad, with some works published in translation in Iceland. Though more difficult to quantify, this group includes, for example, Angela Snæfellsjökuls Rawling (originally from Canada), Anne Carson (Canada), Eliza Reid (Canada), Francesca Cricelli (Brazil), Joachim B. Schmidt (Switzerland), Leslie Schwartz (USA), Mazen Maarouf (Lebanon), Satu Rämö (Finland), Sofie Hermansen Eriksdatter (Denmark), and Vilja-Tuulia Huotarinen (Finland).

These examples illustrate the intricate and multifaceted linguistic diversity, as well as the evolving and layered literary landscape shaped by immigrant and multilingual voices in Iceland.

Among the publishers, several have taken deliberate steps to engage with multilingualism and support foreign-born authors.

Ós Pressan, established in 2015 by a multicultural group of women writers and supported by Reykjavík UNESCO City of Literature, is a multilingual writing collective and publishing house. As of March 2026, it has published six issues of anthology *Ós – The Journal*, featuring multilingual writing from Iceland, as well as four books by foreign-born authors living in Iceland. The works are published in a mix of original languages and translations.

Sagarana Editora Forlag, founded in 2014 by the translator Luciano Dutra and active until 2021, was a multilingual publishing house specializing in publishing and translation between Nordic and Romance languages, with a particular emphasis on Icelandic and Brazilian Portuguese. Luciano Dutra, the founder and owner—recipient of Orðstír, an honorary award for translations of Icelandic literature into a foreign language—for many years maintained Facebook and Instagram profiles titled ‘Um poema nórdico ao dia’ (One Nordic Poem a Day), where he translated Nordic poetry into Portuguese.

Karíba Útgáfa, founded in 2022 by Icelandic-Venezuelan author Helen Hafgnýr Cova, is dedicated to bringing South American literature to Icelandic readers and publishing Icelandic literature in Spanish. Its publications—aimed at both adults and children—are available in English, Icelandic, and Spanish. Among its titles is the poetry collection *Ljóð fyrir klofið hjarta* (2023), which explores themes at the intersection of language and identity.

Dimma, founded in 1992 by writer and musician Aðalsteinn Ásberg Sigurðsson, initially focused on music publishing with occasional book releases. Since 2005, jazz became a central theme, and from 2010 onward, the press has increasingly emphasized both Icelandic and international fiction, especially poetry and poetry in translation.

Bókaforlagið Angústúra, founded in 2016, aims to publish interesting and beautiful books from around the world with high-quality translations, as well as notable Icelandic literature, having published thirty four books in this category to date (March 2026).

Forlagið, Iceland’s largest book publisher, releases around 150 titles annually under various imprints, including JPV and Mál og menning. The publisher has featured numerous foreign-born

authors living in Iceland, both through book publications and contributions to its prominent literary magazine, *Tímarit Máls og menningar*.

Thanks to publishing initiatives by UNESCO City of Literature Reykjavík, foreign-born authors have gained increased visibility in recent years. They were notably featured in the 10th anniversary collection of essays on writing *Erindi – Póetík í Reykjavík* (2021), published by Benedikt bókaútgáfa in 2021. That same year, Una útgáfuþús published *Pólífónía af erlendum uppruna* (2021), a poetry collection by a group of foreign-born authors. In 2023, the City of Literature initiated the publication of an essay collection by foreign-born writers living in Iceland that explores themes of belonging. This book was released in both Icelandic, as *Skáldreki*, and English, under the title *Writers Adrift*, published by Una útgáfuþús.

Informal Networks and Support from Local Authors and Translators

When considering the situation of multilingual writing in Iceland, local authors and literary translators play a significant role in supporting their foreign-born colleagues. Upon entering a new literary scene, the foreign-born writers often rely on the generosity and openness of local authors and translators. In some cases, these newly formed relationships extend beyond strictly professional arrangements, often evolving into personal or collegial bonds strengthened by a shared commitment to the arts and literature. In Iceland in particular, where social interactions are relatively informal and less hierarchical, and where professional boundaries within the artistic community are relatively fluid, the artistic environment can offer significant opportunities for newcomers. Icelandic authors are known to occupy multiple roles, often acting also as editors, educators, translators, literary critics, or cultural organizers, and thus possess various means to support newcomers indirectly. These new ties open doors to local opportunities through invitations, networking, sharing resources, translations, and publishing.

It would be valuable for research to examine this form of support, which is often personal and informal and thus mostly known to those directly involved. Further research and interviews could, for example, focus on the invitations and opportunities newcomers receive through relationships with local artists, as well as on translation assistance, guidance, encouragement, and other forms of symbolic support exchanged within the literary community between the natives and the foreign-born.

What is an Icelandic author?

A closer look at the diverse scene of multilingual and multicultural writing in Iceland reveals its complexity and resistance to the broad categories often imposed by language and culture. It also raises important questions about belonging and identity.

In 2016, Ós Pressan published their first anthology of multilingual writing, *Ós—The Journal*, through an open call inviting emerging and established writers of poetry, short fiction, and creative nonfiction “who are somehow related to Iceland”, openly signaling the publication’s inclusive approach to identity, belonging, and literary contribution.

The same year, the third issue of *Tímarit Máls og menningar* (2016), one of Iceland’s oldest and most prominent Icelandic literary magazines, was dedicated to the question *Hvað er íslenskur rithöfundur?* [What Is an Icelandic Author?, authors’ translation]. Edited by Sjón and Guðmundur Andri Thorsson, the issue explored the question from multiple perspectives, highlighting foreign writers who sought a foothold in the Icelandic literary community in the last century, Icelandic writers abroad throughout history, and selected works by authors who have settled in Iceland and enriched its literature.

In 2021, the same magazine, *Tímarit Máls og menningar*, featured several authors of foreign origin: Ana Mjallhvít Drekaóttir, Elena Ilkova, Francesca Cricelli, Helen Hafgnýr Cova, and Jakub Stachowiak. Additionally, Ewa Marcinek, a Polish-Icelandic author, shared her reflections on the topic of multilingual literature and belonging in her essays published in all four issues of the journal that year.

In the 2023 essay collection *Skáldreki* [Writers Adrift], ten foreign-born authors living in Iceland explore themes of belonging. Their essays touch on topics ranging from escaping the realities of their home countries and choosing to write in a new language, to navigating the separation between worlds shaped by different languages. They also reflect on the struggle for acceptance within the literary scene, strategies for fitting in, and deeply personal experiences—such as marriage, motherhood, and divorce—that shape both their writing and their relationship with Iceland. A defining feature of all the essays in this collection is the impact Iceland has had on the authors, and their reflective effort to understand it, come to terms with it, or find their place in relation to a new country and language.

In an 2020 article about Ós Pressan and its reception in Icelandic media, Lara Hoffmann, Randi Stebbins, and Angela Snæfellsjökuls Rawlings indicated that when Icelandic media reports on authors with an immigrant background living in Iceland, their nationality is often emphasized, and in one case was even misreported. Although foreign-born authors have become more established in the Icelandic literary scene, their position remains ambiguous and complex ([Rawlings et al., 2020](#)).

In her article ‘Skrifað í nýju landi’, Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir ([Guðmundsdóttir, 2025](#)) explored the ambiguous presence of foreign-born authors in Iceland, a complexity that becomes particularly evident in practical matters such as, for example, library classification. She highlighted the case of Ewa Marcinek’s book *Ísland pólerað* (*Polishing Iceland*), which is categorized as a Polish work in the National Library—even though it has neither been published in Poland nor written in Polish ([Guðmundsdóttir, 2025](#)). This issue raises fundamental questions about the position of foreign-born authors: Are they considered part of Icelandic literature? Should their work be classified by nationality, language, or place of residence? Do they fully belong to the Icelandic literary scene, or are they still viewed as outsiders?

Even in the context of this research, defining and categorizing foreign-born authors proved challenging and inherently problematic. We might even be tempted to reframe the original question from the *Tímarit Máls og menningar*, “What is an Icelandic author?” as “What is a foreign-born author?” The issue is multifaceted, encompassing nuanced cases such as bilingual authors of mixed heritage or Icelanders (those born abroad and in Iceland) who choose to write in a language other than Icelandic. Questions of language and birthplace become even more complicated when considering Icelandic authors who write in another language due to emotional needs, artistic choice, or practical considerations related to publishing opportunities. When approaching the topic purely for statistical analysis—such as determining which authors on grant lists can be counted as foreign or how to acknowledge the identities of those who may not personally identify as having a foreign background—the complexity becomes even more apparent.

These examples illustrate how multilingual literature in Iceland not only challenges rigid definitions of national and linguistic identity but also demands a more inclusive understanding of belonging. As the literary landscape continues to diversify, it becomes increasingly important to

adapt cultural and institutional frameworks to reflect this evolving reality.

Literary policy (Bókmenntastefna)

Iceland's growing immigrant population is gradually shaping its literary landscape, as reflected in cultural policies. The proposal for a parliamentary resolution on literature policy for the years 2025–2030 was first submitted for Alþingi Parliament's 155th legislative assembly by the Ministry of Culture and Trade ([Althingi, 2024](#)). It identifies as one of its main objectives the efficient support of creativity and publishing, while taking into account rapid technological developments and social change. The accompanying action plan proposes that, on an annual basis, a range of projects promoting reading and creativity should be supported, particularly targeting children and young adults as well as individuals for whom Icelandic is not a first language. In addition, Item 14, which addresses the dissemination of cultural heritage, recommends supporting collaboration between institutions and organizations working in the field of Icelandic literature and cultural heritage, with the aim of strengthening dissemination and innovation for both the Icelandic population and international visitors.

The introduction to the literary policy proposal mentions:

the necessity to, at the beginning, remove any doubt about what literature in this literary policy means since the meaning of the concept can be very narrow, for example when the concept is used about literature for adults (fagurbókmenntir), or when it is broad and used about a large body of literature. In this literary policy a broader meaning of the concept is used to cover literature for adults, as much as entertainment literature, romantic stories as much as books of science, poetry as much as free speech and literature aimed for adults as much as those written for children and youth. Literature here means the full body of literature regardless of what they are about or who they are for. In this context, it is appropriate to keep in mind that even though most of the Icelandic literature is created in Icelandic it is not necessary. Literature that is written in another language can also be seen as such if the creation takes place in Iceland or is about Icelandic reality. The concept is also regardless of in what way the literature is shared and applies to literature in the form of printed books, audio books or e-books. ([Althingi, 2024](#), authors' translation from Icelandic)

The proposal was revised and submitted to the Parliament's 156th legislative assembly (2025)

by the Ministry of Culture, Innovation and Higher Education ([Althingi, 2024-2025](#)). Key updates included reviewing the working conditions of authors in Iceland who write about Icelandic realities but do not have Icelandic as their first language, and considering ways to support the publication of work important for Icelandic language and culture.

The proposal was discussed in Parliament and then sent to the General and Educational Affairs Committee, where relevant organizations and stakeholders were invited to provide input.

Both reports conclude with a summary of the consultation process (March 8–18, 2024), which received 23 comments from participating stakeholders. The feedback highlighted the importance of including groups not currently addressed in the policy, such as people who are blind or visually impaired, deaf or hard of hearing, and those using sign language, as well as authors from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds working in Iceland and writing about Icelandic realities.

Courses available

Desk research indicates that most creative writing courses available to new writers in Iceland are taught in Icelandic and primarily designed for those who write in the language. Applying to a creative writing programme at the University of Iceland (Háskóli Íslands) requires Icelandic proficiency; however, there are individual courses in English available to students enrolled in English, Literature, Culture and Media, Inter-American Studies, or Applied Inter-American Studies. For new writers with different backgrounds that write in languages other than Icelandic, the opportunities to find fitting creative writing courses are few. Looking at the greater capital area of Reykjavík (Reykjavík, Garðabær, Hafnarfjörður, Kópavogur), creative writing courses in Icelandic can be found at libraries, educational centers, the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Iceland, and knowledge academies and private companies specializing in creative writing and storytelling (online or onsite). In 2025, two new projects launched. One is a collaboration between Kvennaskólinn college in Reykjavík and the Reykjavík City Library for young immigrant women learning Icelandic using various methods, including literature. The other is a project organized by WOMEN in collaboration with various educational and health care organizations for immigrant women learning Icelandic with the use of literature.

In East Iceland there have been creative writing workshops available in English, taught by Nanna Vibe Spejlborg Juelsbo, a local author, journalist, and project manager at the library in Seyðisfjörður. Workshop participants can write in the language of their choice. In the West part of Iceland, workshops are offered through the Department of Continuing Education located in Akranes and Borgarnes. In the Westfjords, Greta Lietuvninkaitė, a local writer, project manager, and workshop facilitator, has been hosting and facilitating various workshops since October 2022. She is the founder of the Write It Out initiative. There have also been several workshops at various libraries in the West and Westfjords area, or at educational centers. In the north of Iceland, there have been several opportunities at the Library in Akureyri; for example, a continuing weekly meeting open to anyone and writing in any language since 2021. Another example is a creative writing workshop offered as a collaboration between the Department of Continuing Education in Eyjarfjörður (SÍMEY) and the vocational school in Akureyri (VMA) for immigrant students. There is also a creative writing course available online from the Department of Continuing Education at the University of Akureyri. In March 2026, a new initiative was launched by Reykjavík UNESCO City of Literature and a non-profit ALO Ísland in collaboration with local authors. The Ritrymi í Reykjavík (Reykjavík in Writing) project offers free, multilingual, community-driven writing workshops twice a month at Mengi, a creative and experimental music and art space in downtown Reykjavík. The first six sessions serve as a trial and are co-led by local authors and poets in the languages of their choice, with additional language support available on-site.

Visual Vernacular and ÍTM

Creative courses in ÍTM have not been offered, except for the four workshops in Visual Vernacular storytelling (VV-sögur) organized and facilitated by Ós Pressan and Elsa G. Björnsdóttir, poet, teacher, academic, and actress. This course was offered in collaboration with Reykjavík UNESCO City of Literature and the Reykjavík City Library in the years 2020–2023, and was funded by the Library Fund and Reykjavík City Council for Human Rights, Innovation and Democracy. The first three workshops were offered to people in the Deaf community, two for women (beginners and advanced) and one for men (beginners). One non-binary person also attended the workshop. The fourth workshop was open to anyone fluent in ÍTM. Participants were of all ages, and of various backgrounds (deaf, hearing, foreign-born, native, teachers, researchers, sign language interpreters, self-employed, artists, and principals). They learned how

to create their own visual vernacular ([Kro, 2023](#)) by building a storyline, creating characters, role-shifting, and using non-manuals, facial expression, slow-motion/speed, rhythm, and different points of view by using only their body. Although sign language literature has always been an important part of Deaf culture, for most participants this was their first time working creatively, receiving instruction in visual vernacular, and communicating with the teacher and other participants—giving and receiving feedback—all in their language.

There have been no opportunities for the Deaf community to attend workshops in Icelandic Sign Language (ÍTM) where they can learn to be creative in their own language. For anyone within this community who wants to attend creative writing workshops, the only option is a workshop taught in spoken Icelandic, where they have to rely on interpretation between voiced Icelandic and ÍTM. A written response from the Communication Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (Danielsdóttir, personal communication, 2026) states that: “*Free-of-charge interpreting services: Interpreting services that do not fall under interpreting services provided on the basis of law and are paid for by the relevant state or municipal authorities*” ([Menningar- og viðskiptaráðuneytið, 2024](#)) are paid for by the institution and come from its annual budget. The funding is divided into quarters, 30% for the 1st and 3rd quarters and 20% for the 2nd and 4th quarters, in accordance with directives from the Ministry of Culture, Innovation and Universities. The institution is then authorized:

to provide free-of-charge interpreting services for daily life and to pay for the travel costs of a sign language interpreter both within and outside the capital area for that purpose, on the basis of a special appropriation in the budget each year. When processing requests on the basis of this authorization, equality between users of the service shall be ensured, taking into account the appropriation available at any given time. ([Menningar- og viðskiptaráðuneytið, 2024](#)).

The response also states that if funds are fully utilized before the end of a quarter, it will not be possible to fulfill the interpreting requests received that fall under free-of-charge interpreting services for daily life, and the service will therefore be closed. When this situation arises, the institution sends out a notification to that effect, which leads to fewer interpreting requests being received. However, the interpreting requests that were received before the closure are fulfilled. In 2025, the institution had to close this interpreting service after the first two quarters as funds were then fully utilized ([Samskiptamiðstöð heyrnarlausra og heyrnarskertra, 2025](#)). These

limitations mean that opportunities for development in one's own language and access to knowledge and potential continuing education are few. The only students with access to courses on sign language literature and the creation of VV stories have been those enrolled in the BA program in Sign Language Linguistics and Sign Language Interpreting at the University of Iceland, the majority of whom are hearing.

Opportunities to share writing

Opportunities for multilingual authors in Iceland to share their writing have been steadily expanding, with spaces emerging for both new and established voices to connect, present their work, and take an active part in the writing community.

An interesting example is Ritver, the writing salon at the University of Iceland, where participants can meet with writing coaches and other writers. In an interview in *the Reykjavík Grapevine* magazine ([Magnúsdóttir, 2024](#)), Dr. Jessica Murphy and Beth Cortese, who both teach creative writing and English literature at the University of Iceland, explain that they “wanted to be available to the university community at large.” Participants of Ritver can receive feedback on their writing and gain insights from their peers, regardless of their academic background. The aim is to bring together people with similar interests, including both writers and those simply interested in creative writing.

The variety of open mic events where participants can read their writing has been growing over the past two years. Reykjavík Open, a monthly series of events at Mengi that emerged from the same writer’s collective that hosts RVK Poetics, has made clear how truly large the community of writers living in the Reykjavík capital area is. Some other local groups have also started hosting open mic events, such as at the Skálða bookstore, organized by the writers’ collective Morgundöggin, at SKÝ bar, organized by R.E.C. Arts Reykjavík, a collective of artists and performers at Port9 wine bar, and the Poetry Slam (Ljóðaslamm) competition at the Reykjavík City Library.

In 2024, the event series Becoming Us was held at the Student Cellar (Stúdentakjallarinn), organized by Juan Camilo Roman Estrada, project manager of Sprettur, a project at the University of Iceland that supports immigrant participation in higher education, and Lara Hoffmann, teacher and researcher at University of Iceland and a member of Ós Pressan. The series functions partly as an open mic event for students. In March 2025, the Karíba publishing

house organised and hosted the first Literary Festival in Flateyri, a village situated in Iceland's Westfjords. For four days writers and the audience could attend various events about topics that included children's literature, being an immigrant author in Iceland, panel discussions with authors, readings by authors, a comedy show, and an open mic.

While awareness of opportunities to share writing is not equally distributed and many events are concentrated in Reykjavík, the increasing number of open mic events, workshops, and festivals—most of which are grassroots initiatives—indicates a vibrant and progressively more inclusive literary culture in Iceland.

Grants and institutional support

The most significant literary grant in Iceland is awarded through the Artists' Salary Fund (Listamannalaun). The fund had its first allocation in 1993. The target groups are designers, visual artists, authors, performers, musicians, and composers. Its objective is “to enhance art and the making of art in Iceland. Funding is decided by the yearly budget of the parliament. ([Alþingi, 2009](#))”. The fund is open for application once a year.

Angela Snæfellsjökuls Rawlings, a Canadian-Icelandic multidisciplinary artist, became the first foreign-born writer living in Iceland to receive Listamannalaun in 2017, awarded for a three-month period ([Olgeirsson, 2017](#)). In the following years, several other foreign-born authors were granted salaries ranging from three to six months, reflecting a growing recognition of their contributions to Iceland's literary and artistic landscape.

Year	Recipient(s)	Duration
2017	Angela Snæfellsjökuls Rawlings	3 months
2018	Elías Knörr	3 months
2020	Mazen Maarouf	6 months
2021	Lani Yamamoto	3 months
2022	Ewa Marcinek, Maó Alheimsdóttir	3 months each
2023	Mazen Maarouf	6 months

	Ewa Marcinek, Jakub Stachowiak, Natasha S.	3 months each
2024	Jakub Stachowiak, Natasha S.	6 months each
	Joachim B. Schmidt	3 months
2025	Mazen Maarouf, Natasha S.	6 months each
	Maó Alheimsdóttir, Joachim B. Schmidt	3 months each
2026	Mazen Maarouf, Natasha S., Maó Alheimsdóttir	6 months each

Table 1: Foreign-born authors – beneficiaries of the Artists’ Salary Fund, by year ([Rannís](#), n.d).

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Authors – total	83	79	79	82	94	80	81	80	79	85
Authors – foreign background	1	1	0	1	1	2	4	3	4	3
Months awarded – total	555	555	555	555	646	555	555	555	566	620
Months awarded – foreign background	3	3	0	6	3	6	15	15	18	18

Table 2: Distribution of Listamannalaun by Author Background ([Rannís](#), n.d).

Despite this representation, the share of artists’ salaries awarded to foreign-born authors remains small—18 out of the available 620 months in 2026, or approximately 2.9%. However, the number of recipients and the total months granted to the poets and writers of foreign origin have been steadily increasing, indicating a positive upward trend.

Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir concludes that, based on her research, it is not easy for authors to enter into and be a part of the literary community here in Iceland. Many native authors share that experience. But when you add to it being of foreign origin, or writing in a language other than Icelandic, she says: “things get pretty difficult“ ([Guðmundsdóttir, 2025](#)). In *Writers Adrift: Essays by Foreign-Born Writers in Iceland* (2023), authors Joachim B. Schmidt and Helen Hafgnýr Cova both discuss their experiences with the allocation of artists’ salaries in their essays. Joachim B. Schmidt opens his essay, aptly titled *Application Rejected*, with a striking

scene:

Laughter breaks out in Gunnarshús, the headquarters of the Writers' Union of Iceland. I'm the only one who isn't laughing, instead, I'm sitting dumbfounded and looking around the room in confusion. Have I inadvertently made some kind of joke?

The author recounts the audience's reaction at an informational meeting after he asked whether a grant application for a novel written in a language other than Icelandic could succeed. From this moment and the further discussions, the essay develops the argument that state-funded artists' salaries are informally reserved for established, Icelandic-language writers, prompting a broader reflection on exclusion, language, and belonging within Iceland's literary culture.

In her essay *Parasitic Conflict*, Helen Hafgnýr Cova describes the participation in the Icelandic literary and publishing scene as climbing a mountain:

This community has celebrated my successes, full of good intentions and good will. And yet it has been, as in my example, very hard to build the name that has been welcomed; for people to recognize me as a writer, let alone an Icelandic one. My mountain to climb was, has always been, and will always be higher, steeper, and rockier than that of my Icelandic colleagues and that's more or less OK. I do not feel entitled to any special treatment, nor do I want it, but I would like my reality to be known. Just that, known.

Cova reveals that while she has long been ethically hesitant to apply to the Artists' Salary Fund, practical realities have forced her to do so. This highlights how immigrant writers—despite carrying untold stories and significant creative potential—remain largely unseen and unsupported, and arguing that true equity will only emerge when their struggles are fully acknowledged.

Gunnþórunn Guðmundsdóttir concludes that “the choice between working in a supermarket and writing stories isn't really a choice at all—it all ends in the jæjastore” ([Guðmundsdóttir, 2025](#), authors' translation from Icelandic), using a term coined by writer Elena Ilkova, derived from the Icelandic *jæja*, a word that conveys exasperation and quiet frustration.

When analysing the broader context of support for multilingual authors, it is useful to consider institutions such as the **Writers' Union of Iceland (Rithöfundasamband Íslands)**, a professional and ideological organization representing authors. Founded in 1974, the Union now has 650 members, including poets, novelists, literary translators, dramatists, scriptwriters, writers of young adult and children's books, and authors of academic works. The Union offers working grants (Starfstyrkur) from its fund, which are allocated once a year. Active authors can apply regardless of Union membership, including authors of children's literature, screenwriters, playwrights, poets, novelists, and short story writers, authors of literature for young adults, translators, biographers, and other writers. Among the 650 members, 30 are of foreign origin.

Year	1990	2002	2004	2006	2008	2012	2013	2014	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
New Members	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	4	4	1	3	2	3

Table 3: Number of foreign-born members joining the Writers' Union of Iceland by year ([Rithöfundasamband Íslands](#)).

The first foreign-born member of the Writers' Union of Iceland was Knut Arne Ödegård, a poet and translator, who joined in 1990. The next was Coletta Maria Bürlin, a translator, in 2002. Subsequent new foreign-born members joined sporadically in 2004, 2006, and 2008. After 2012, the number of foreign-born members joining the Writers' Union increased more consistently, reflecting a gradual diversification of the literary community in Iceland. This steady growth indicates a broader inclusion of authors from diverse backgrounds over recent years. At the time of writing, the latest members added in 2024 were Yeonji Ghaim, author of children's books, Katarzyna Bobola and Piotr Roslaw, both non-fiction writers, and Maó Alheimsdóttir, a novelist and poet. The largest group of foreign-born members, nine in total, are translators. There are also seven poets, six non-fiction writers, four authors of children's books, and four fiction novelists. Some of the members write across more than one genre. In recent years, the Writers' Union, in collaboration with the Gunnar Gunnarsson Institute, has organized English-speaking events specifically aimed at engaging foreign-born authors—inviting them to visit Gunnarshús, where the union is based, and encouraging them to join.

Another key player in institutional support for literature in Iceland is the **Icelandic Literature Center (Miðstöð íslenskra bókmennna)**. A government-funded office, the Center works to raise awareness of Icelandic literature at home and abroad and to promote its distribution. Foreign publishers can apply for translation subsidies, and authors, publishers, or literary event

organizers can request support for Icelandic authors travelling abroad to promote their work. The Center supports the publication of Icelandic and translated literature, as well as the broader advancement of literary culture in Iceland. It offers several grants for authors, including: the Auður grant for children's and young adult literature, awarded once a year; the Publication Grant, awarded annually to publishers as a partial reimbursement of book publishing and dissemination costs (this grant supports exclusively Icelandic-language works); Grassroots Grants (Nýræktarstyrkir) for emerging writers, regardless of age, to encourage further development (in 2021, two Polish-born authors, Jakub Stachowiak and Maó Alheimsdóttir, received this grant); and finally the Translation Grants into Icelandic offered to publishers twice a year (this grant also supported foreign-born authors: in 2022 Ewa Marcinek's short-story collection *Ísland pólerað* received funding for translation from English, and in 2024 Francesca Cricelli's poetry collection *Eignatal* from Portuguese). The policy framework of the Icelandic Literature Centre ([Miðstöð íslenskra bókmennta, 2007](#)) supports Icelandic literature and its promotion abroad, with no specific provisions for multilingual literature beyond the publication of foreign works in Icelandic ([Miðstöð íslenskra bókmennta](#)).

The most intentional and sustained source of support for projects and events promoting multilingual literature in the Capital Region has been Reykjavík City. Since its designation as a **UNESCO City of Literature (Bókmenntaborgin)** in 2011, this support has been focused and purposeful, delivered through a combination of grassroots funding and diverse activities: literary projects, events, exhibitions, festivals, and publications. The project managers representing Bókmenntaborgin have played an active role in fostering diversity within the literary scene and supporting multilingual authors. Concrete outcomes of their commitment include the founding of the Ós Pressan collective and its multilingual publications (since 2015), the creation and ongoing support of the multilingual literary event series RVK Poetics since (2023), the multilingual community writing workshops Ritrymi í Reykjavík (2026), and the publication of the essay collection *Skáldreki* (2023), published also in English as *Writers Adrift*, which presents the perspectives of ten foreign-born authors living in Iceland. The Reykjavík UNESCO City of Literature follows the cultural policy List og menning í Reykjavík 2030 ([Reykjavíkurborg, 2021a](#)) that “aims to provide all residents equal opportunities to enjoy arts, culture, and cultural heritage” and states that “the city's cultural and artistic life should reflect its diverse population, not be uniform”. The document complies with the Reykjavík City human rights policy Mannréttindastefna Reykjavíkurborgar ([Reykjavíkurborg, 2016](#)) in supporting equality

regardless of “origin, nationality, class, language, skin colour, religion, atheism or non-religious convictions, political opinions, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, sex characteristics, age, disability, body build or type, health, ability or other status”. Neither the cultural policy nor its action plan *Aðgerðaáætlun menningarstefnu 2021–2023* ([Reykjavíkurborg, 2021b](#)) explicitly addresses support for multilingual writing or plurilingual artistic expression.

Another significant and impactful funding source has been the **Immigration Development Fund** (Próunarsjóður innflytjendamála), established in March 2007 and operated by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour. The fund supports research and development projects addressing immigrant issues, with the aim of facilitating immigrants’ integration into Icelandic society and helping society better accommodate them. In 2022–2023, a total of 19 projects and studies received just over 40 million ISK in funding. Notable past projects include the Many Languages of Art initiative at the Reykjavík Art Museum, the “Mother Tongue is Power” project organized by the Móðurmál Association for Bilingualism, and the Women’s Story Circle at the Reykjavík City Library. Although this funding has strengthened linguistic accessibility, Icelandic language learning, and the promotion of multilingualism, it has only indirectly supported multilingual writing itself. ([Stjórnarráð Íslands](#))

The remote and sparsely populated Westfjords region—home to just 7,341 inhabitants in 2026 ([Statistics Iceland, 2026](#))—benefits from a well-structured cultural funding model through the **Westfjords Development Fund** (Uppbyggingarsjóður Vestfjarða). The fund supports cultural, business development, and innovation projects, as well as start-up and operating costs for cultural institutions in the region ([Vestfjarðastofa](#)). One notable recipient is Greta Lietuvninkaitė-Susickė, a Lithuanian-born author based in Ísafjörður, who received funding for her reflective writing studio Write it Out, where she hosts regular writing sessions. The initiative fosters plurilingual therapeutic writing and provides an open, multilingual literary space for the local community.

Municipal funding often provides the most immediate opportunities for grassroots initiatives supporting multilingual writing. A notable example is [Bókmenntahátíð Flateyrar](#), a literary

festival that held its first edition in 2025, organized by Karíba—an independent publishing house based in Flateyri—and supported, among others, by a grant from the Flateyri Development Fund (Þróunarsjóður Flateyrar). The festival brings writers and readers together in this remote Westfjords village and, over four days, celebrates literature and diversity through a rich program for both children and adults. All events are free and open to the public, featuring a wide range of activities alongside art and literary exhibitions running throughout the festival. The program places particular emphasis on diversity, showcasing works by authors from minority groups in Iceland, including individuals of different nationalities, religions, sexual orientations, and gender identities.

Institutional and municipal support systems in Iceland are gradually adapting to the growing diversity of the literary landscape, with increasing—though still limited—support for foreign-born and multilingual authors. Below are several examples of institutionally supported community art projects that embrace plurilingualism.

Kærleiksorðræða (Love Speech) is an ongoing project launched in 2024 at the Reykjavík City Library with support from the Immigration Development Fund and the educational startup fund Sprotasjóður. Through a series of meetings and workshops, the project focuses on lived experiences, emotional literacy, and shared ownership of the Icelandic language. Participants are invited to create new Icelandic words that reflect their lived realities. The new vocabulary is collected in a growing dictionary housed at the library. Alongside the dictionary, Kærleiksorðræða creates a platform for open conversations about lived experiences of communication across languages. Through discussion, community engagement, and creativity, the project critically engages with Icelandic language purism and the established institutional frameworks for creating new words ([Borgarbókasafn Reykjavíkur](#)).

Að verða við is a series of intercultural events hosted by the University of Iceland and curated by Juan Camilo Román Estrada—poet, educator, and storyteller—in his role as the University’s intercultural officer and project manager of Sprettur, a program that supports immigrants in accessing and succeeding in higher education. The series invites participants to celebrate the diversity of cultures, languages, accents, arts, poetics, narratives, and lived expressions that inhabit, pass through, and enrich the University of Iceland. The events have been organized in collaboration with Ós Pressan, the University of Akureyri, and the Akureyri

Municipal Library ([Ós Pressan](#)).

Rótarskot was a project and event held during the 2024 Reykjavík Arts Festival that brought together foreign-born writers and scholars from the Árni Magnússon Institute to explore the evolving landscape of the Icelandic language. The program featured poetry readings by multilingual authors, a panel discussion, and a performative reading—a contemporary reinterpretation of *Landnáma*, the medieval text describing Iceland’s settlement. Foreign-born participants were invited to share their own “settlement stories” in Iceland, which were typed live into a document projected on screen. The event was curated by writer Pedro Gunnlaugur Garcia and organized in collaboration with Árnastofnun and the Reykjavík City Library. The event served as an excellent example of how established cultural narratives such as *Landnáma* can be recontextualized to foster dialogue between Icelandic scholars and foreign-born writers, highlighting the increasingly multilingual character of contemporary Iceland ([Marcatili, 2024](#)).

In November 2025, the **Gunnar Gunnarsson Institute** held an event at Veröld – hús Vigdísar in Reykjavík to mark 50 years since the author’s death. The day began with the seminar “Að tilheyra engum bókmenntum” (“To belong to no literature”), curated by Skúli Björn Gunnarsson, director of the Institute. The seminar explored Gunnar Gunnarsson’s role as an immigrant writer in Denmark a century ago and connected his career to the work and experiences of foreign-born writers living in Iceland today. This was followed by a simultaneous reading of the novella *Advent* in 21 languages, each presented in a different space within the building. Attendees were free to move between rooms and experience the reading in multiple languages. The event was made possible through the participation of poets, translators, and volunteers who read the novella in their native languages, as well as the collaboration between the Gunnar Gunnarsson Institute, the University of Iceland, Reykjavík UNESCO City of Literature, and the Árni Magnússon Institute, with support from the Ministry of Culture, Innovation and Higher Education, and the Norwegian, Finnish, Swedish, and Danish Embassies in Iceland. The event offered a strong example of how nationally significant commemorations can meaningfully include multilingual voices, broadening participation while preserving Iceland’s cultural narrative ([Gunnarsstofnun](#)).

These examples and evolving support reflect a broader recognition of the value of multilingual voices within Icelandic literature and the inclusive potential of literary events.

Visibility and representation

Our media text analysis using digital archives shows that the presence of foreign-born authors living in Iceland has been noticed by the Icelandic press over the past two decades. The sources include articles, news, and listings in daily newspapers such as *Morgunblaðið* and *Fréttablaðið*, as well as articles in the English-language cultural magazine *the Reykjavik Grapevine*. These reach back to the late 2000s, at first mentioning visiting authors who later settled in Iceland, and from the early 2010s, covering the emergence of these new voices. However, as the authors of the 2020 *Multilingual Writing in Iceland* article ([Rawlings et al., 2020](#)) point out, when featuring news about foreign-born authors media coverage tends to emphasize the nationality or country of origin and the length of time they have lived in Iceland. In practice, this is reflected in highlighting the author's nationality—sometimes including Icelandic—or their country of origin and adding a form of “búsettur á Íslandi” (residing in Iceland). The foreign origin is omitted in very short mentions, such as events listings, where these authors are mentioned among others, though in some texts occasionally an adjective such as “Reykjavík’s poet(s)” is used instead, or the emphasis is placed on Icelandic citizenship when reporting on international successes. An example is the 2019 *Morgunblaðið* article celebrating Mazen Maarouf's nomination for the Man Booker Prize. The lead of the article states: “Annar Íslendingurinn sem hlýtur tilnefningu til verðlaunanna” (“The second Icelandic to be nominated for the award”) ([Morgunblaðið, 2019](#)). The emergence of Ós Pressan in 2015 and publications such as multilingual poetry collection *Pólifónía af erlendum uppruna* in 2021, mark the beginning of press articles discussing the growing presence of foreign authors, their literary successes and place within Icelandic literature. The titles of the articles themselves are significant:

“Fjölmála skáldasamfélag” [Multilingual Community of Poets, authors’ translation] ([Guðjónsson, 2016](#))

“Tuttugu tungumál í potti” [Twenty languages in a pot, authors’ translation] ([Haraldsson, 2016](#))

“The Outsiders: Ós Press Tackles The Icelandic Publishing Industry” ([Halldórsson, 2017](#))

“This is Ós. Ós Pressan continues to challenge what counts as ‘Icelandic literature’” ([Petzold, 2018](#))

“Bók sem er þakklætisgjöf til íslenskunnar” [A Book That Is a Gift of Gratitude to the

Icelandic Language, authors' translation] ([Bergþórsdóttir, 2021a](#))

“Raddir innflytjenda” [Voices of Immigrants, authors' translation] ([Bergþórsdóttir, 2021b](#))

“Pólska bókmenntavorið runnið upp” [Polish Literary Spring Has Arrived, authors' translation] ([Helgason, 2022](#))

“Besta ljóðabók ársins er eftir skáld af erlendum uppruna” (The Best Poetry Book of the Year Is by a Poet of Foreign Origin, authors' translation] ([Birgisdóttir, 2026](#)).

Among the mainstream media outlets, in-depth coverage on multilingual writers living in Iceland has been provided by the national broadcaster RÚV and the cultural news section on RÚV's website. Radio programmes such as Orð um bækur and Bara bækur, as well as the television show Kiljan, have paid particular attention to multilingual writing: reviewing books, reporting from events, and inviting authors to share and discuss their work. The variety of RÚV's online articles also covering the topic is reflected in the following selection of titles:

“Bókmenntir í ljósi hreyfanleika” [Literature in the light of mobility, authors' translation] ([Sigurðardóttir, 2017](#))

“Húmor og bernska gegn stríði” [Humor and Childhood Against War, authors' translation] ([Sigurðardóttir, 2019](#))

“Æskuminningarnar ásóttu hann í Reykjavík” [Childhood Memories Haunted Him in Reykjavík, authors' translation] ([Halldórsson, 2019](#))

“Pólskir höfundar íslenskra bókmennta sækja fram” [Polish Authors of Icelandic Literature Are Coming Forward, authors' translation] ([Sigurðardóttir, 2022](#))

“Eitt fyrsta skáldið af erlendum uppruna til að stíga fram með íslenska ljóðabók” [One of the First Poets of Foreign Origin to Come Forward with a Book of Icelandic Poetry, authors' translation] ([Aradóttir, 2023](#))

“Lyfta upp áður óheyrðum röddum” [Raising Previously Unheard Voices, authors' translation] ([Björnsdóttir, 2023](#))

“Finna fyrir miklum áhuga á bókmenntum innflytjenda” [Feel a Strong Interest in Immigrant Literature, authors' translation] ([Björnsdóttir and Ólafsson 2023](#)).

When it comes to presenting literary work through Icelandic events and festivals, multilingual authors are not overlooked either. Over the past six years, the **Reykjavík International Literary Festival** (Bókmenntahátíð í Reykjavík) has featured several multilingual authors,

including Mao Alheimsdóttir, Natasha S., Ewa Marcinek, Mazen Maarouf, Joachim Schmidt, and others. However, collected data suggests that smaller, community-driven initiatives sometimes focus their programming primarily on Icelandic-born authors and authors who use Icelandic as their literary language. For instance, the **New Year's Reading 2025** hosted in Mengi in Reykjavík featured thirty participants, yet none were from the foreign-born community, aside from a visiting American poet. This stands in a slight contrast to the **Ljóð og vinir** poetry event series hosted also at Mengi in Reykjavík, where across twelve events (from June 2023 to October 2025), eight of the eighty-four participating poets were foreign-born, which is almost ten percent.

Individual foreign-born authors also find opportunities to represent Iceland at festivals, competitions, and publications abroad. In 2021, Ewa Marcinek and Francesca Cricelli, and in 2023, Helen Hafgnýr Cova, were among the Icelandic poets featured in *The Best Non-Required Nordic Poetry*, an annual anthology presenting the year's best poems chosen by young poetry enthusiasts across the Nordic countries (Siercke et al., 2023, 2024). In 2022, works by Elías Knörr and Ewa Marcinek were selected for the Croatian publication *Syjetlucaju ledene perle*, which presents “twelve excellent Icelandic writers, poets, experimenters of all generations and the most diverse expressions,” (Sjón; Buljević, 2022.) curated by the Icelandic poet Sjón. In 2023, a poem by Helen Hafgnýr Cova was selected as a representative of Iceland for the international cultural archive project the Lunar Codex in a NASA-led mission to the moon's northeast quadrant. The same year, Natasha S. was selected by the Writers' Union of Iceland to be one of two representatives of Iceland at the renowned Biskops Arnö Writing Workshop 2023. The most recent example is Slamovision 2025, hosted in Dublin, where Marjón Poilvez presented *Nobody's dóttir*; a poem mixing Icelandic and English to reflect a linguistic reality shared by many migrants in Iceland. Marjón Poilvez (pen name Marion) won the Poetry Slam 2025 hosted at Reykjavík City Library. The poem honours the intelligence embedded in what may be perceived as “broken” speech and underscores the chaotic, often disorienting experience of navigating life and language as a migrant in Iceland.

Grassroot initiatives and advocacy

Community-led initiatives are nowadays recommended as the most effective in fostering agency and providing opportunities for empowerment among their members (Khalatbari, 2024), especially when addressing social marginalisation or inequality. This approach has also

proven effective in Iceland regarding multilingual writing. Grassroot initiatives go hand in hand with support offered through the public sector, such as local grants, libraries, and cultural centres. Both in the capital area and in rural regions, initiatives such as RVK Poetics, Ós Pressan, Write it Out, and the Flateyri Literary Festival demonstrate how individual initiative, supported by public funds and organisational structures, can generate impressive results and foster sustainable platforms for multilingual voices. Together, these efforts have created a unique environment in Iceland in which the work of multilingual authors is able to maintain visibility and gradually gain momentum. As Joachim B. Schmidt writes about immigrant writers in Iceland in his essay “Application Rejected” (Schmidt, 2023):

They take their limitations as a challenge, observe society from an entirely new perspective. And how they build bridges! I marvel at my courageous colleagues who fight for their place in the literary scene and roll out the red carpet for themselves. They’re bridge-builders and seafarers, celebrating literature.

However, when artists and authors are expected to take on the roles of organisers or advocates for their own communities, this adds substantial responsibility and workload, often leaving them with less time and energy for their creative practice. Over time, these demands can contribute to serious consequences, including burnout, feelings of over-responsibility, social withdrawal, and, in more severe cases, growing disillusionment or cynicism toward society and its institutions. In the context of the multilingual writing scene in Iceland, this dynamic raises two important questions. Does this writer-led model of organising reflect a genuine desire among authors to initiate and lead such activities, or does it instead expose gaps in the availability of supportive and truly inclusive cultural spaces? And if the latter is true, what measures are required to establish a more sustainable and equitable framework for the future?

3. Stakeholders’ perspectives

In this part, we present common topics identified in the interviews with writers and other creatives and experts on literature and multilingualism in Iceland. The participants constituted a diverse group of creatives. Some were well-established in the Icelandic literary scene and had received recognition for their work in the form of publishing contracts, awards, and grants, while other interlocutors spoke about writing or other creative work as their leisure time activity or

hobby. The experts in the cultural field interviewed for this study included researchers and teachers in the higher education sector as well as professionals (e.g., project managers) in the cultural sector. We identified the following topics commonly expressed in the interviews: “Language and Emotions”, “Infrastructure for foreign writers”, “Social communities for foreign writers”, “Opportunities in rural areas vs. the capital area”, “Digital networks”, “What is Icelandic literature?”, “Learning through literature”, and “Language policy and politics”. Some of the direct quotes included in the text below are translations of the authors from Icelandic.

Language and emotions

Many of our interlocutors spoke about the emotional aspects of writing, including feeling connected or disconnected to specific languages, feeling that specific languages simply “fit best” in certain contexts, without this being a rational choice, and the challenges and potential of being creative in a second, third, or fourth, language as overcoming pressures and negative experiences in the language learning processes. For multilingual individuals, choosing which language to write, or be creative in, was often based on feelings towards or associations with specific languages. As one participant, an Icelandic poet, said: “I get a silly feeling thinking about creating a poem in English, and I imagine some people get the same feeling when they think about writing in Icelandic”. Another participant, a bilingual poet, explained that she was waiting to publish until she found a publisher who had agreed to release her first book as a bilingual edition: “I felt like I couldn’t put it out into the world in only one language because it needed to be in both versions”. The same participant also mentioned connecting with a young Icelandic poet who chose to write in English, explaining to her, “Icelandic is too harsh; I need to write in another language.” The sensation that language was not a rational choice but something that simply “felt right” in a given context was highlighted also by a respondent who created artistic work in Icelandic, ÍTM, and English, switching seamlessly between the languages on a case-by-case basis in her creative work. One participant emphasized the intimacy she feels when writing in her mother tongue: “Writing in my mother tongue feels like a thread linking me back to my roots and my upbringing. But at the same time, I felt like I was missing the whole crowd—the social element of it—and in a way it became almost self-isolating.”

While participants’ own migration experiences served as a source of inspiration for their creative practice in some cases, other foreign-born writers emphasized that, even though they had migrated to another country, this experience did not feature prominently in their work or they

had, after initially addressing migration as a theme in their writing, moved away from migration towards other topics. Iceland and its nature has not only influenced the writing of our interviewees and been a source of inspiration. It often appears in the work of foreign-born authors, even when their books are primarily intended for publication outside Iceland. As one of the participants, a novelist who has settled in Iceland and writes for readers in her country of origin, remarked: “Now that I’m working on my third book, which is still in its early draft stages, I’ve realized that I’m once again writing about Iceland.” Although this interviewee said she does not feel comfortable writing about Iceland from the perspective of Icelanders or locals, she believes in the value of contribution foreign-born authors can make: “I can offer the point of view of a foreigner, a newcomer, some sort of outsider, and discover the beauty, the unique aspects, the raw elements of Iceland in a completely different way than the locals, because I was brought up somewhere else.”

The participants who chose to use the Icelandic language in their creative work often spoke about this process as experimentation, (re-)claiming ownership and permission for using it, and their creative work as a way to overcome, or counteract, the pressures they experienced as non-native speakers, for example in formal language learning settings such as language courses. One participant stated: “I felt a lot of pressure from society. So I just need to play with the language”. Being creative in Icelandic, sharing one’s work, and gaining recognition served as an important counterbalance to everyday experiences of using Icelandic as a second language and, as one participant put it, “feeling like a baby talking.”

For foreign-born authors, language learning and writing were often deeply intertwined in their creative practices. One learner of Icelandic mentioned writing “something long” (e.g., a long novel) in Icelandic as an important life goal and proof of having mastered the language. Learning a new language was seen as enhancing creativity and imagination. For example, a bilingual poet shared a story about creating an erotic piece that reworked the fish-in-the-mouth image from Zbigniew Herbert’s poem *The Tongue* using in her version Icelandic words and Icelandic fish. A writing instructor spoke about how being creative in an additional language gave “people the freedom to recreate themselves, become someone else, and learn this language” and how the students’ experience writing creatively in Icelandic felt often liberating. Another participant explained that they were motivated to experiment with writing in another language to engage with other poets and forge a stronger connection with local readers. Multilingual authors generally described the use of multiple languages as both enriching and inspiring for their

writing, and as a source of empowerment: “Now, I no longer feel the need to justify or translate everything; I can simply write in different languages and feel comfortable with that.” The potential of multilingual writing practices was summarized in the narration of one individual, who said in awe “how many colors are available to decorate the text when working with different languages.”

Infrastructure for foreign-born writers

While experimenting with the Icelandic as a second language was recognized as enriching creative practice, participants also spoke about hurdles writers of foreign origin faced when trying to enter the Icelandic literary scene. These were often related to limited infrastructure and support systems for writers using a language other than Icelandic or for those using non-standard forms of the language in their work. Writing in languages other than Icelandic or in non-standard Icelandic, according to participants’ accounts, limited their opportunities to get published and thus gain recognition for their work, as expressed by one participant saying that “It is difficult to get published if you don’t write in Icelandic, or even if you write in Icelandic, and if you write in broken Icelandic”. Another participant shared her challenges in navigating the Icelandic publishing world as a newcomer: “Is there a chance to find a translator? Is it possible to get a grant? Do I have to, you know, put aside my savings for it? There are just so many practical questions”, admitting that she feels lost and finds entering the publishing scene as a foreign writer to be a challenging step.

The lack of infrastructure for foreign writers (and creatives in general) was brought up by several participants, both educators and writers. This included educational opportunities, inclusion of writers of foreign origin into the Icelandic literary scene, but also access to practical information. For example, one of the authors located outside of the capital area spoke about a photography project she was currently working on which would conclude with a public display of the photographs taken in an exhibition. She had struggled to find answers to her questions about copyright in Iceland and had turned to the person responsible for supporting and advising immigrants at the local municipality office. However, she didn’t get any help from the municipality because the person she contacted, although well-versed in immigration issues, was not familiar with this specific matter related to the arts and creativity. This example demonstrates the importance of social networks and contacts for people involved in the creative fields that not only lead to collaborations and opportunities, but can also help answering simple practical

questions. However, some of the interviewees praised the Icelandic grant system. A writer living in one of the most remote parts of Iceland received local and national grants to start-up and develop a community writing initiative: “The opportunity to receive substantial grants is something I’ve never seen in my home country. Many of my friends [...] are amazed at what Iceland offers to foreigners and newcomers, people who are just starting out, with only an idea, not even solid experience. Iceland allows you to try, fail, and build your project without necessarily having prior knowledge.”

However, there appeared to be a gap between knowledge on the local and on the national level. Some participants, well-embedded in their place of residence (e.g., the infrastructure and financial support provided by their municipalities), were less familiar with support and the infrastructures on the national level. Furthermore, a lack of connections and language barriers posed challenges in accessing support systems. As one individual based in a rural area said: “You know, I only know the local support, so I don't know national support. So, I miss a lot of the information because of the language perhaps or [...] the connections”.

A subtopic within the subject of “infrastructure for foreign writers” relates to financial concerns. Financial support was seen as key to feeling recognized and accepted into the Icelandic literary community, both on the local and on the national level. Some participants emphasized good and fruitful collaboration with their local municipality, providing support for their creative work. One participant said that the increase in multilingual publications had wider implications and were, for example, reflected in the allocations of the Artists’ Salary Fund (Listamannalaun). This individual said: “there was a more diverse range of authors. And, of course, naturally, what's in focus is reflected in the allocations from the salary fund and such. You know, there's a very strong desire to get more diverse voices here into the Icelandic scene”.

Changes in the infrastructure, for example, the possibility of people to apply to be on the committee of the Icelandic literature prize, was also recognized by participants. One participant said: “The Icelandic literature prize used to be similar year after year, but now people can ask to be on the committee, and maybe that is changing something”. Participants also reflected on the value of international voices entering the Icelandic literary scene. As one participant put it, cultural environments risk becoming diminished when they are too isolated, and benefit from offering space and platforms to people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds—individuals who bring diverse perspectives and are willing to share their ways of

thinking, writing, and creating.

Social communities for foreign writers

All participants spoke about the importance of social contacts and support systems. Many of the writers participating in the interviews had created their own initiatives, for example, storytelling workshops, festivals, and so on. This benefited not only their communities but also gave them a sense of being acknowledged and of contributing to the community, as one participant expressed: “the biggest feeling is to be acknowledged to be embraced and it's something I would also like to do for other people”. The same participant articulated a wish for stronger connections with others, saying: “For me it's needed to get better connections with other people. Sometimes I feel very isolated”. Another participant stated: “I never wanted to write in Icelandic, but I wish I had mastered it better and been more active among Icelandic writers, not for writing in Icelandic, but simply for being with them and speaking in Icelandic with them.” Isolation from the writing community was, however, not always been due to migration. One participant expressed having nobody to talk to about her writing but emphasized that this was the case both in her country of origin and in Iceland. This participant found online networks helpful for sharing information about her writing.

The multilingual writing scene has become a safe space for some foreign-born authors. One of them, a bilingual poet, expressed it this way: “People never really knew where to place me, you know, how to categorize me, because I was so unconventional. Being in Iceland, in our group of international writers, made me feel so at home, because we were all kind of unconventional.” One participant, who had started a community event in their place of residence, described the process and the importance of community and perceived lack thereof:

What was essentially missing wasn't just this space for some kind of other voices or whatever it is. There was simply no space for any voices at all. I didn't have this realization until I was hosting guests here from other cities. Then you start meeting people for coffee or dinner or something. These were perhaps foreign authors, and they ask: Where's the poetry scene or where's the literary scene? Where do I go to meet writers and listen to readings and such? And I was, of course, just like: you don't go anywhere. You don't do anything because, you know, authors sit at home and write, and they know each other, and they might pop up with some readings around publication time or something. But there's no scene here. It's not, you know, you can't

just assume that on Wednesdays you can go there and something will be happening. And a little bit based on this; we're not somehow catering to this branch of literature either. We're just trying this to do something. But it turns out there was no scene.

Opportunities in rural areas vs. the capital area

Participants located outside of the capital area especially spoke about a lack of resources and community. They said that most opportunities were located in Reykjavík. Work and family commitments in their places of residence, travel costs, and a lack of free or affordable places to stay in Reykjavík made it difficult to use such opportunities for those writers. In one rural area of Iceland, a group of women started to meet, often driving long distances between the small remote villages, to engage in creative work. The initiator herself, one of our participants, spoke about being surprised about how much this idea resonated with the community. Another participant started a local journaling gathering, which gradually became a popular socialising event, especially for the multicultural residents in her region, and turned into a community hub: “It’s really more about social connection, and writing is just the excuse that brings people together in that way.”

Digital networks

Writers in all regions used digital tools to meet and connect with fellow creatives, but particularly those areas outside of the capital area used online communities to connect. Some participants communicated through social network groups with other writers abroad (e.g., on social media platforms), often with individuals they did not know personally, while others used social media to meet and connect with writers in Iceland. In one case, this led to a joint collaboration between two creatives who were both based in a remote village in rural Iceland. For one participant, online writing communities provided a means of overcoming the lack of connections with other individuals interested in writing, both in their place of residence and in their country of origin. One interviewee praised a foreign online platform for professional writing that allowed her, a young mother living in one of the most remote and rural parts of Iceland, to learn and connect with other writers. The teachers interviewed used various online resources. The ÍTM teacher mentioned GoReact

a program where you can film yourself signing. The students record themselves and then send the video to me. With GoReact I can watch the recording, play forward and

backward, and play it slowly and stop the video at the exact moment where I need to correct. This is a great technique that helps students see where in the video I am correcting them and what it is about. In the recording they can see where in the video I have given them feedback.

What is Icelandic literature?

Participants with immigrant backgrounds discussed how they position themselves and represent their creative work. Many of the authors interviewed for this study pondered whether their work was best described as “immigrant literature”, whether they were part of “Icelandic literature”, whether they should be described with another label, or if they preferred not to be assigned any label at all. One author asked rhetorically “if it's necessary to talk about minority [writers] or just to talk about writers”, but later on the interview concluded that “talking about minorities in the world that we live in is still important”. One researcher interviewed for the study had interviewed Mazen Maroof, a Palestinian-Icelandic author born in Lebanon, who, according to our respondent, said that “[he]] thought it inappropriate to talk about immigrant literature, that it was morally questionable”. Another author said she struggles with feeling professionally credible in Iceland: “It’s hard to find yourself recognized when you’ve only been published in your own country. So you can present yourself as a writer, you might feel very much of a writer, but nobody has read your work.” She admits that, because of the language barrier, she feels a void in not knowing how to share her work with the people around her, including those in her closest circle. “ I feel like I'm ‘almost a writer’ here.”

The idea of Icelandic literature as written monolingually in Icelandic was confronted in many of the interviews. One participant discussed this addressing the creative practice of Icelandic native speakers, mentioning the fact that Icelanders also wrote in English, thus arguing that literature and other creative work in Iceland had in fact always been multilingual:

between the years 2005 and 2015 I noticed kids that were writing their texts in English. Like Alexander Dan [Vilhjálmsson], a fantasy author and novelist who composes his books in English, even though he is fluent in Icelandic. Songwriters in Iceland have for a long time been writing their lyrics in English, and that genre has always been bilingual, or multilingual, in Iceland. That sometimes you’d be writing about something that would sound strange in Icelandic, but much better in English.

Authenticity was discussed as crucial for participation in the Icelandic literary scene by one participant who said that “if one wants to become a part of the Icelandic literary scene, they need to be able to express themselves in a way that can be understood and believable by the reader but still be true to themselves”.

Multilingual expression seems to offer relief from the tension between Icelandic and non-Icelandic literature produced in Iceland. As one of our respondents concluded: “I don’t think it matters which language you’re writing in. You’re always reaching for this concentration of expression [...] unifying sound and thought [...] a literary language that makes sense to us, that we just connect to.” The same participants also highlighted the potential of literary expression to foster social connection between natives and newcomers in Iceland: “Maybe we can write poems to each other and, you know, express our feelings?”

Learning through literature

Creative writing in different languages and presenting different cultures were seen as having a lot of potential for intercultural communication, generating understanding of different cultures. One teacher said: “If you understand someone’s culture you will understand that person better and their struggles.” Another teacher observed that

literature provided some kind of opportunity to talk about society in a certain way, not necessarily easier but it's different than talking about it from, when you're talking about fiction, then you're in a slightly different gear, I think. Society is also like the picture we're drawing. You know, can I show you the picture I drew? And then we talk about the picture, and I know full well that we're talking about the truth in our hearts.

Similarly, an Icelandic language teacher described how she uses literature in her courses, drawing on a range of texts—including short stories and newspaper articles—to teach about Icelandic society and culture.

One interviewee also praised creative writing workshops as a tool for reducing language anxiety and encouraging creativity over perfection in the process of learning Icelandic.

However, according to one of our interviewees—a researcher in education—the majority of local educators do not fully tap into the potential of plurilingualism in their teaching practices.

Many teachers are unaware of their students' home languages or how to incorporate them meaningfully into the learning process. They often lack adequate support in the form of training, teaching resources, assessment tools, and curricula tailored for second language learners. The interviewee also pointed out that while visual and technological tools to support multilingual learning do exist, they are often underused due to insufficient support and training offered to educators.

Language policy and politics

Policies and politics of language in both the education and cultural sectors reveal a complex interplay between prevailing ideologies and emerging multilingual realities. One of our interviewees, an academic in the field of education, observed that while official policies in Iceland formally support multilingualism in education, practice often tells a different story. In their opinion, Iceland has strong language policies on paper, but implementation remains inconsistent. While the National Curriculum Guide supports the use and maintenance of mother tongues, and Nordic education policy promotes the learning of societal, global, and minority languages, these ideals are not always reflected in classroom practice. There is a notable gap in teacher training and support, which limits the practical application of these policies. Moreover, some contradictions in national policy—particularly around the role of plurilingualism in education—can create confusion and hinder progress.

Our interviewee's research found that educators who incorporate plurilingual repertoires demonstrate the pedagogical value of multilingualism, yet many of these teachers report feeling insecure due to societal expectations and institutional pressures that favour Icelandic-only instruction. This tension reflects broader language ideologies, where purist views of Icelandic frequently clash with more inclusive or English-tolerant approaches. Although plurilingualism is sometimes perceived as incompatible with Icelandic language acquisition, in their perspective, the two can coexist and mutually reinforce one another. Our interviewee's research shows that support for multilingual practices varies between schools and individual educators, but early and sustained encouragement enables students to become confidently plurilingual—using Icelandic for education and professional life while preserving home languages as essential tools for identity and cultural belonging.

4. Identified needs and gaps

- *Limited educational infrastructure for non-Icelandic writers.* This report highlights multiple opportunities for multilingual authors; however, the majority of opportunities are “offered in Icelandic, for people who write in Icelandic”.
- *Publishing barriers for multilingual authors.* Multilingual authors who do not write in Icelandic, or who feel their Icelandic is not sufficiently developed, have limited opportunities to be published in Iceland.
- *Lack of practical support for multilingual authors.* Finding and understanding important practical information about writing, publishing, copyrights law, and the support system for writers in Iceland can be challenging for migrants.
- *Lack of accessible information.* Information about publishing opportunities, grants, and community activities are challenging to access for authors who are less familiar with Icelandic.
- *Social isolation from writing communities.* Some authors felt there were insufficient spaces for multilingual writers to express themselves and to build connections with other writers; further community building was needed.
- *Geographic inequality in opportunities.* Lack of support, community, and information—or difficulty finding and accessing these—is exacerbated for authors living outside of the metropolitan area.
- *Inadequate institutional recognition of alternative voices.* Despite progress in recognition of foreign-born authors, representation in terms of publishing figures, grant recipients, and other metrics do not match Iceland’s changing demographics.
- *Ambiguous classifications.* Multilingual authors living and writing in Iceland are being identified as international authors by publishers, libraries, and other relevant institutions, which does not reflect their identity.
- *Language learning pressures.* While the pressure to learn Icelandic can lead to experimentation, expectations of “native” level Icelandic may cause some to hesitate sharing their work.
- *A lack of adequate teacher training.* Insufficient teaching materials, curricula, and assessment tools for second language learners creates a systemic issue where home languages are typically acknowledged only superficially and seldom incorporated into teaching practices.

- *Lack of a designated office or official administrative advocate for multilingual writers.* Although individual initiatives by institutions and organizations exist, and ongoing support is provided especially within the Reykjavík area, there is no formal institutional responsibility or policy framework to formalize or sustain this support.
- *Grant structures favor publication in Icelandic.* National financial support in the form of partial publishing-cost refunds for publishers is limited to Icelandic-language books, resulting in a lack of financial support for non-Icelandic and multilingual publications produced in Iceland.

5. Recommendations

Following our analysis, we propose the following recommendations to improve support for multilingual writing in Iceland:

- *Expand multilingual creative writing programs.* Develop courses welcoming writers in any language, based on successful models identified in this report.
- *Provide targeted training and resources for educators.* This includes developing curricula, assessment tools, and teaching materials that supports teachers in incorporating elements of plurilingualism in their teaching practice.
- *Create dedicated funding streams.* Establish grants or opportunities targeting multilingual literature and foreign-born authors to encourage contributions to the literary sector.
- *Develop comprehensive resources.* Produce practical resources in multiple languages that cover a range of aspects of creative work in Iceland, including copyright, publishing processes, grants and opportunities, and more.
- *Establish regional writing networks.* Support regional writing hubs and networks, including local literary festivals, writers' salons, workshops and other initiatives through resources and funding.
- *Strengthen digital connectivity platforms.* Enhance online communities and tools to connect geographically dispersed authors and authors with other accessibility needs for whom face-to-face opportunities might not be viable.
- *Expand publisher engagement.* Encourage more publishing houses to consider multilingual works, translations, and non-standard Icelandic writing. Resource

translations of texts written in Iceland by non-Icelandic authors.

- *Integrate multilingual voices into cultural policies and institutions.* Ensure multilingual voices are included in the development and implementation of cultural policies; increase the opportunities for foreign-born authors to participate on selection panels for grants, awards, and publications.
- *Establish or assign an existing office to formally advocate for and sustain support for multilingual writers.* Formalized, policy-based institutional support would ensure sustained backing, providing continuity, visibility, and strategic direction for multilingual contributions.
- *Create mentorship and peer support systems.* Continue forums, such as that offered by the Writers Union of Iceland, to build networks between multilingual authors in Iceland, and foster the creation of mentorships and other peer support systems.
- *Develop inclusive classification frameworks.* Authors living and working in Iceland should be categorised as Icelandic authors; develop inclusive guidelines for publishers, wholesalers, bookstores, libraries, and others to reflect this classification system.
- *Support digital integration.* Leverage digital tools and platforms to enhance the visibility of multilingual writing.
- *Establish outreach and capacity-building programmes.* Develop inclusive frameworks within literature and arts institutions that recognise and support the presence and literary contributions of multilingual authors.
- *Bridge the gap between writing communities.* Establish and support collaborative initiatives that foster exchange, mutual understanding, and social connection between native-language and multilingual authors.
- *Expand eligibility beyond dominant languages.* Ensure equitable distribution and representation in grants and support programs.

6. Conclusions

This study reveals the growing multilingual and multicultural complexity of the Icelandic literary landscape and highlights both the creative potential and the structural challenges that

come with it. Multilingual writers in Iceland, whether foreign-born, using ÍTM, or navigating multiple languages through lived experience, contribute richly to the cultural fabric—but they also face systemic barriers that limit recognition, participation, and sustainability in the field.

Our interviews with writers, educators, project managers, and multilingual professionals point to deep emotional and linguistic layers within the creative process and learning. Language choice in writing and learning is often driven not by practical reasoning but by emotional attachment, cultural resonance, or personal history. While many authors see creative writing as a liberating space to reclaim and experiment with Icelandic or other languages, expectations of linguistic “correctness” and native-level proficiency can create hesitation, exclusion, or self-censorship.

At the same time, there is a visible gap between the vibrant creativity unfolding at the grassroots level and the institutional infrastructure available to support it. Participants noted limited educational offerings for non-Icelandic writers and creatives, barriers to publishing work in non-Icelandic or non-standard forms of the language, and practical challenges in navigating copyright, grant systems, and other basic components of the creative ecosystem. Even when policies formally support multilingualism and cultural diversity, implementation often lags behind. Existing policies do not specifically address multilingual literary contributions. Teachers and cultural workers alike struggle with a lack of training, tools, and resources to meaningfully engage with plurilingual realities. The result is a situation in which multilingualism is acknowledged in principle, but often unsupported in practice.

Information access and social connection were also recurring concerns. Writers spoke about the scarcity of accessible information on publishing and grant opportunities, especially for those unfamiliar with Icelandic or the workings of the cultural sector. Others felt isolated from writing communities—especially outside Reykjavík—and expressed a desire for more inclusive social and professional spaces. Many had started initiatives themselves, often online or locally, but these efforts lacked structural support or visibility. The contrast between rural and capital-area opportunities was particularly stark, underlining the need for a more decentralized and equitable support network.

Classification and recognition also emerged as complex issues. Despite being deeply embedded in the Icelandic context, many multilingual writers are categorized as “foreign” authors by publishers, libraries, or funding bodies, creating a disconnect between their creative identity and their institutional representation. Meanwhile, literary gatekeeping continues to favor

monolingual or normative Icelandic work, despite the fact that many Icelandic-born authors also write in other languages, including English. As one interviewee reflected, Icelandic literature has long been multilingual, yet this is still not fully acknowledged in dominant narratives or publishing norms.

Finally, our findings reinforce the urgent need for more structural support. Stakeholders emphasized that funding, visibility, mentorship, and inclusion must go beyond symbolic representation. What is required is sustained structural support: dedicated multilingual programs, inclusive educational tools, funding streams that prioritize linguistic and cultural diversity, and comprehensive resources for navigating the practical aspects of creative life in Iceland. Teachers and schools should play a key role by supporting multilingual creativity and writing across both official and home languages, helping students reach their full creative potential and supporting those at risk of social marginalisation. Publishers and cultural institutions must recognize multilingual authors as full participants in the Icelandic literary field and actively engage with their work as part of the nation's evolving cultural canon. Direct engagement with the subject of multilingual literary contributions within the policy framework of public cultural institutions, along with the designation of an office responsible for these issues, should be the first step in ensuring sustained support for multilingual writing in Iceland.

Looking ahead, literature and education in Iceland can work together to address the challenges highlighted in this report. Literature provides a space where multilingualism is a strength, connecting cultures, exchanging perspectives, and fostering inclusion. When schools integrate creative writing practices into the classroom, they create more inclusive and supportive environments for second-language learners. This helps all students, especially those from migrant backgrounds, feel seen and valued. When educational and cultural institutions recognize and support stories in many languages, they help normalize and celebrate linguistic diversity while strengthening the sense of belonging among all residents. In this way, literature can serve dual purposes: as a tool for social connection in education and as a means of building stronger communities. Supporting multilingual voices in Iceland's schools and literary spaces is not only vital for cultural richness, it is essential for the sustainable development of Icelandic society.

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