SGroup Intercontinental Academic Exchange Programme – ICon

Programme Guide
2022

Index

1. THE ICON PROGRAMME

1.1. DESCRIPTION

The **InterContinental Academic Exchange Programme (ICon)** finds its origin in long-lasting collaboration links between the SGroup network and its members, and institutions located in strategic regions linked to the Think Tank Academy. **As part of this mobility programme, the academic and administrative staff of full-member universities of SGroup can apply for a SGroup scholarship** for a short mobility period **in a partner institution of their choice outside Europe.** The participants and the activity programmes financed by the ICon programme must represent the quality standards and values inherent to SGroup.

1.2. AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The aim of ICon programme is to promote, facilitate and/or strengthen collaboration between SGroup institutions and their overseas partners, contributing to SGroup's mission of expanding collaboration opportunities in education and research through the transfer of knowledge and the development of strategic alliances.

The strategic objectives of the ICon programme are the following:

- Facilitate collaboration in research and education between the EU and the Think Tank Academy regions (Latin America, China and Africa), as well as between SGroup European members and associate members;
- Encourage contact-making leading to the development of joint projects that can be submitted for EU-funding and other relevant programmes;
- Promote new or reinforce existing intercontinental partnerships;
- Support the professional development of staff and the internationalisation strategies of SGroup member institutions;
- Strengthen links between institutions conducting to the establishment of co-tuition double/ multiple/joint degrees;
- Contribute to SGroup's goals of fostering university excellence in education and research and promote the continuous adjustment to educational and societal needs in a creative and innovative way.

2. CALL FOR APPLICATIONS FOR 2022

The ICon programme for the year 2022 will provide 14 grants for applications from academic and/or administrative staff, and 1 additional grant to be awarded as part of a SGroup competition for PhD students. The amount of **each grant is maximum 1000 EUR** (upon presentation of proof of expenses).

2.1. CALL PERIOD

The call is open from January to 31 May 2022 or until all scholarships have already been granted. Applications will be judged according to eligibility and award criteria on a first-come-first-served basis and until all grants have been assigned.

SGroup Liaison Officers are expected and encouraged to disseminate the call and the relevant information about ICon within their respective institutions.

2.2. GRANTS DISTRIBUTION

In 2022, available grants are distributed according to the destination of the mobility, in the following manner:

ICon Grants for the Think Tank regions	Latin America	3 grants
	China	2 grants
	Africa	2 grants
ICon Grants for Internal Networking (Grants for mobility in SGroup associate member universities)	Shanghai International Studies University, China	1 grant
	Yerevan State Medical University, Armenia	1 grant
	University of Los Andes, Colombia	1 grant
	La Trobe University, Australia	1 grant
	Stellenbosch University, South Africa	1 grant
	Ohio State University, United States of America	1 grant

ICon Grant for Doctoral Education	Special grant created in 2022 to be awarded to the winner of SGroup's Think Tank for Doctoral Education (this grant is therefore not open to applications). The grantee will be able to choose the host institution in any region as long as it proves to be relevant for his/her research.	1 grant

To know which grants have already been awarded, check the SGroup website page on ICon here.

Important note: A maximum of four applications (one for each Think Tank region and one for Internal Networking) from each SGroup full-member institution will be considered for evaluation.

2.3. REDISTRIBUTION OF GRANTS

In case not all grants have been awarded **once the selection period has finished, the ICon Evaluating Committee can redistribute the remaining grants to applications received within the call of 2022**, provided they meet the eligibility and award criteria but did not receive a grant (i.e. because the application was submitted after all the grants for that region had been awarded). During the redistribution process, the maximum number of grants per Think Tank region or host associate member (for ICon Internal Networking grants) does no longer apply.

Candidates who are awarded a grant during the redistribution process will be informed by June 17.

If after this procedure there are still grants to be awarded, the SGroup Executive Committee will decide whether to transfer them to the following year or allocate the funding to other activities.

3. APPLICATIONS

3.1. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

To be eligible, **applicants must:**

- Be a member of academic (teaching or research[1]) or administrative staff at a SGroup full member university (associate members can participate in the ICon as hosts but cannot apply for grants);
- Have a relevant background regarding cooperation with the region where they aim to conduct their mobility activities;
- Be willing to generate or consolidate cooperation links between SGroup and the given region;
- Obtain and submit support letters issued by both their home and host institutions at the stage of the application;
- Set realistic but relevant goals for a mobility period in 2022 and report on them after the mobility;
- Identify the outcomes and impact of the ICon grant both at personal and institutional levels and possible multiplier effects;
- Represent the standards of excellence of the SGroup network and its members;
- Be interested in cooperating with SGroup after the mobility (e.g. in the dissemination of the ICon programme; by providing feedback and suggestions of projects, events or other activities).

Previous ICon grantees who wish to re-apply can do so, as long as they get approval from their home institution.

3.2. PREPARING AN APPLICATION

After verifying the **eligibility criteria** (described in the previous point), interested applicants should contact the SGroup Liaison Officer of their institution, who will provide guidance concerning the interpretation of the ICon Programme Guide and criteria.

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[1] In the context of ICon, researchers are only considered staff if there is a clear employer-employee relationship, a status (e.g. contract) within the university ensuring they work in the Faculty and take part in university activities, even if part time. PhD candidates working remotely without fixed hours and not taking part in normal working activities are not considered staff, and therefore cannot apply.

Since each full-member of SGroup cannot apply for more than 1 grant per region and one for Internal networking, if more than one application for each is received simultaneously, Liaison Officers will be required to do a preselection among the applications from their institution.

Once an applicant receives a confirmation of support to their application from the Liaison Officer, they should start preparing their work programme for the mobility and respective support documents (see 3.3.).

3.2.1. MOBILITY PERIOD AND DURATION

Applicants determine the period of their mobility, which is required to take place in 2022, at any time from January to December. Therefore, activities to be developed in 2023 are only eligible for funding through the 2023 ICon Call for Applications.

To be eligible, work programmes proposed for an ICon mobility should cover at least 5 working days (not including travel days). There is no maximum duration.

If a mobility needs to be postponed due to *force majeure*, the ICon Evaluating Committee will consider the possibility of allowing the grantee to carry out the activities in 2023 on a case-by-case basis.

3.2.2. HOST INSTITUTIONS

In the 2022 edition, **any nationally accredited Higher Education institution that offers all three levels of tertiary education (Bachelor, Master, and PhD) in Latin America, China, and Africa is eligible for hosting ICon grantees for the Think Tank region,** if the proposed work programme is in accordance with the goals explained in the present guidelines. SGroup member institutions participating in the ICon project are provided with a unique opportunity of establishing bilateral relations with a university of their preference. There is no list or pre-determined protocols as such. However, **it is recommended that the visit concerns HE institutions that either the home university or the individual applicant have already established relations** regarding joint research projects or educational activities.

As for the ICon grants for Internal Networking, applicants are advised to contact the SGroup Liaison Officer of the associate member institution to prepare the mobility. The Secretariat is available to facilitate this contact-making if necessary.

3.3. Submission of applications

Applicants shall submit their candidacy via email to the SGroup Secretariat at sgroup@sgroup-unis.eu, including their Liaison Officer in copy. To be accepted, applications must include the following documents:

- **Application form** (available here) including the **work programme** to be carried out during the stay at the host institution lasting at least 5 working days (excluding travel days);
- **CV**, short version (maximum 2 pages);
- **Motivation Letter** including the objectives, impact and possible benefits of the proposed work programme both for the candidate and the involved institutions;
- **Statement of the home institution** with a brief description of the professional activity of the applicant;
- **Two letters of support: one from the home institution of the applicant and one from the host institution** provided by a department head, faculty dean, PhD supervisor or similar person with authority. They should know the candidate's work personally.

3.3. Evaluation criteria and weighting factors

Applications will be evaluated according to the following criteria and weighting factors:

- Motivation of the candidate – 15%
- Previous experience and relevance of the work programme – 20%
- Expected impact for the home institution (SGroup member) – 25%
- Expected impact for the host institution (SGroup associate member or other) – 20%
- Relevance of the proposal for the SGroup network – 20%

Each criterion will be evaluated on a scale of 0 to 100 points.
The SGroup ICon Selection Committee is formed by the regional Think Tank Academy coordinators and the associate members, respectively, assisted by the SGroup Operations Manager and the SGroup President.

3.4. Selection and communication of results

The SGroup ICon Selection Committee will evaluate the candidates within 15 working days (around 3 weeks) after the submission of the application. The candidate, the home and host institutions will receive the results by email as soon as they are available.

The grants are awarded on a first come first served basis if approved.

4. FUNCTIONING OF ICON MOBILITIES

4.1. PRACTICAL ARRANGEMENTS BEFORE DEPARTURE

Successful applicants are responsible for the practical organisation of the mobility and for ensuring the implementation of the work programme defined in their application. Namely, ICon grantees are expected to ensure the communication with the contact person at the host institution, doing the necessary travel arrangements (transport, insurance, accommodation, procedures, etc). The mobility can start as soon as the approval of the application is announced.

4.2. DURING THE MOBILITY

Once the mobility has started, the grantees have to notify SGroup of this via email. During the implementation of the work programme, in the case of host institutions is not an associate member of SGroup, the grantee shall present the network to the host institution (support materials will be provided).

ICon grantees are encouraged to send short updates about the period of their stay abroad, via email to the Secretariat, and contribute to the visibility of the ICon Programme by tagging SGroup – Universities in Europe (LinkedIn, Twitter or Facebook) and using #sgroup_unis in case they do posts about their mobility.

4.3. AFTER THE MOBILITY

Grantees will be required to evaluate the mobility through a final report based on a self-assessment with a special emphasis on the accomplished goals, both personal and institutional, and impact on the network. The final report should make use of the corresponding template (download here) and be submitted electronically to sgroup@sgroup-unis.eu.

To ensure the maximum impact of the programme, the results of the evaluation will be analysed by the Executive Committee to make informed decisions about renewing the mobility scheme and assigning financial support accordingly on an annual basis. The yearly results of the ICon programme will be shared during the SGroup Annual Meetings.

ICon grantees are invited to share their experience by writing a short testimonial of their experience to be shared on SGroup's communication channels (i.e. website, newsletter, social media) and in a relevant event of the Think Tank Academy.

4.4. GRANT PAYMENT

The grant is paid out through reimbursement to the selected candidates after the mobility period against presentation of their boarding passes and relevant invoices/proof of payment of up to 1 000 EUR and after approval of their end-of-mobility report by the SGroup ICon Selection Committee.

Eligible costs:
The grant is meant to partially cover the main expenses such as travel, accommodation, visas, local transportation or fees related or the academic program. It is expected that these expenses will add up to the maximum amount reimbursed (1000 EUR) so grantees will not need to collect tickets/recipes from small purchases. However, if there is a remaining budget, it can be used for other expenses, like meals and food, on presentation of proof of payment.

4.5. GRANT SUSPENSION/WITHDRAWAL

SGroup has the right to **suspend or withdraw the scholarship** in case of one or more of the following situations:

1. Failure to complete the full duration of the mobility period defined approved, except in case of *force majeure* (which must be communicated to SGroup via email);
2. Failure to submit the final report and proof of expenses;
3. Breach of the internal regulations of the home or the host institution;
4. Insufficient achievement of the objectives defined for the mobility period (as elaborated in the application).

5. CONTACT AND SUPPORT

For any questions or requests for support related to the ICon Programme, please contact the SGroup Projects Manager via direct message on Slack or by sending an email to joana.freitas@sgroup-unis.eu.