

VULNERABLE SITUATION OF ROMANI CHILDREN HIGHLIGHTED

At a European conference hosted in Brussels on 30 June 2011, the ERRC and partner organisations **Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Milan Simecka Foundation** and **osservAzione** launched the report entitled, **Life Sentence: Romani Children in Institutional Care**, revealing that Romani children are overrepresented in institutional care compared to their proportion of the population as a whole in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Slovakia. The report is the final product

of a two-year multi-country research project supported by the **European Commission**.

At the conference, representatives from national governments, EU and international institutions, national and international civil society and Roma rights activists discussed the reasons for this overrepresentation and how to address it, as well as the basic human rights conditions of children in the institutions. Opening the conference, ERRC Executive Director

Robert Kushen stated, "The exclusion that marks the lives of many Roma starts early, with segregation in school, or, more seriously, separation from the family and placement in State care. The findings of this study point to the urgent need for targeted measures to prevent family break-up." Throughout the day, participants also explored policies and measures to be adopted by the EU and Member States to address the vulnerability of Romani children as outlined in the report.

ERRC TRAINING PROGRAMMES REACH YOUNG ROMA, TRAVELLERS AND SINTI

From 21-31 July 2011, the ERRC hosted 18 participants in Budapest at its eighth Roma Rights Summer School including young Romani and Traveller activists from Bulgaria, Kosovo, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden and the United Kingdom. The group included three interns from the ERRC's Romani Internship Programme, university students, recent graduates and several employed participants, all of whom demonstrated a prior interest and involvement in human rights and Roma rights work.

international human rights legislation and procedures, as well as human rights monitoring, debate, media, community organising and advocacy techniques and tools. The main goal of the Summer School is to develop the capacity of a new generation of Romani activists to use human rights instruments and mechanisms to advance the rights of Roma and to combat discrimination from the grassroots to national and international levels.

the concept of situational testing and how it can be used to produce evidence for human rights cases. The testing module focused on discrimination by non-State actors against Roma and Sinti in access to housing in Italy. The course provided participants with deeper knowledge of human rights tools, responding to the demonstrated commitment and involvement of the group in addressing the human rights problems experienced by Roma and Sinti in Italy.



18 participants from Bulgaria, Kosovo, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Sweden and the United Kingdom attended the ERRC's eighth Roma Rights Summer School for young Romani and Traveller activists in Budapest.

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

The Summer School offered an intensive ten days of workshops led by human rights experts and group discussions with young Roma from around Europe. It provided an introduction to human rights using non-formal education methodologies based on participatory and "learning by doing" principles as well as an excellent forum for the exchange of ideas, networking, innovation and expertise. Participants were introduced to domestic and

Earlier, the ERRC, in cooperation with **Roma Onlus**, hosted a 3-day training course on how to build a human rights campaign and situational testing to prove discrimination in Rome, Italy. From 28-31 May, the training course brought together 9 Romani and Sinti participants, Italian and non-

Italian, mostly from informal camps around Italy, to deepen their knowledge and skills following participation in an earlier ERRC human rights training programme in November 2010. In the first part of the programme, trainers introduced human rights campaign steps and techniques and guided the participants through practical exercises in which they simulated in-depth planning and delivery of a housing rights campaign. The second part of the course focused on

THE ERRC COMBATS RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ROMA AND EMPOWERS ROMA TO DEFEND THEIR OWN RIGHTS.

In this issue:

Vulnerable Situation of Romani Children Highlighted	p.1
ERRC Training Programmes Reach Young Roma, Travellers and Sinti	p.1
ERRC Supports New Gender Research Fellows	p.2
ERRC Raises Women's and Children's Rights Issues before UN Treaty Bodies	p.2
ERRC Engages United Nations' Special Rapporteurs on Roma Rights Issues	p.3
ERRC Discusses Segregated Education with Slovak Youth	p.3
ERRC Seeks Justice for Romani Victims of Violence	p.3
ERRC Targets Committee of Ministers over Inadequate Judgment Implementation in Romania	p.4
ERRC in the Field	p.4
ERRC Welcomes Upcoming Changes to Executive and Board Leadership	p.4
Intern Reflections	p.5

ERRC SUPPORTS NEW GENDER RESEARCH FELLOWS

In June 2011 two young Romani women commenced Gender Research Fellowships with the ERRC. From 13-22 June 2011, the ERRC hosted Ms Sorina Sein and Ms Manjola Veizi at its office in Budapest where they were supported by ERRC staff members to define the scope and objective of their research, develop research plans and methodologies, budgets, questionnaires and community-based awareness raising actions to be implemented in conjunction with the research.

Ms Veizi will focus her research on the incidence and State response to domestic violence against Romani women in Tirana, Albania. As part of her research, she will interview Romani women beneficiaries of shelters for victims of domestic violence, among other stakeholders. Ms Sein will conduct research in her village of Banloc, Romania, on the prevalence of early marriages in her community and factors that enable this practice to continue.

Both fellowships involve a community-based action to raise awareness at the local level about the topics researched. The ERRC expects to make the final research reports publicly available via its website in early 2012. This is the second year that the ERRC has run its Gender Research Fellowship programme, which is unique in the Roma rights field, providing the opportunity for interested individual activists working locally to conduct research on gender equality issues.

ERRC RAISES WOMEN'S AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ISSUES BEFORE UN TREATY BODIES

During July 2011, the ERRC submitted parallel reports to two United Nations treaty monitoring bodies, the **Committee on the Rights of the Child** (CRC) and the **Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination** (CERD), addressing violations of Romani children's human rights in Italy, Greece and the Czech Republic. The ERRC's report to the CRC regarding **Italy**, submitted jointly with **Associazione 21 Luglio**, highlighted the strong negative impact of forced evictions and inadequate housing conditions on the access of Romani children to education, as well as their health status and their right to family life. The Committee's attention was also drawn to the continuing practice of child marriage in some Romani communities in Italy and the overrepresentation of migrant Romani children in the Italian child protection system. As concerns **Greece**, the ERRC submitted information to the CRC concerning the continuing segregation of Romani children in education around the country. In calling for adequate, integrated education in Greece, the report – referring to the results of extensive research conducted by the ERRC and the **Greek Helsinki Monitor** in 2010 – demonstrated the numerous obstacles that continue to negatively affect the ability of Romani children to access integrated education, including the refusal of school officials to enrol Romani students, protests of non-Romani parents against integrated education, inconsistent or absent transportation to and from school and the continued existence of segregated, Roma-only schools. The ERRC also focused on access to equal education in its submission to the CERD on the **Czech Republic**, raising concerns over the on-going segregation of Romani children in special education in the Czech education system.



The ERRC and its partners presented a submission to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on the human rights situation of Romani women in Italy during its sixth periodic review in New York in July.

PHOTO CREDIT: NILOFAR AHMEDZADEH

In the same month, the **United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women** (CEDAW) considered a submission by the ERRC and partners **Idea Rom Onlus** and Opera Nomadi Reggio Calabria on the human rights situation of Romani women in **Italy** during its sixth periodic review. The submission was based on primary research conducted by the ERRC and local Romani women in Rome, Turin and Reggio Calabria in 2011. An ERRC staff member and one of the Romani researchers attended the review session in New York, lobbying the Committee members and a delegation from the Italian government to raise awareness about critical human rights problems experienced by Romani women in Italy. The submission highlighted that, due to multiple discrimination, Romani women in Italy are vulnerable

to police abuse, domestic violence and discrimination in access to employment, education and health care by both State and non-State actors. With respect to Romani and Sinti women, in its **Concluding Observations** CEDAW called on the Italian Government to apply temporary special measures to redress under-representation in legislative, executive, administrative and political bodies, to enhance the system of data collection on all forms of violence against women and conduct surveys to assess the prevalence of violence, to “implement measures to decrease dropout rates amongst Roma and Sinti girls and to reintegrate them into the educational system”, to eliminate discrimination in access to education, health and employment and to “collect statistics on early marriages of Roma and Sinti girls.”

ERRC ENGAGES UNITED NATIONS' SPECIAL RAPPORTEURS ON ROMA RIGHTS ISSUES

In June 2011, the ERRC sent a **letter** to the United Nations Special Rapporteurs on **health, torture and violence against women** (Special Rapporteurs) as part of its work to pressure the Czech, Hungarian and Slovak Governments to address the coercive sterilisation of Romani women. The ERRC informed the Special Rapporteurs about historical and persistent practices in each of the three countries, and raised concern about sterilisation by tubal ligation, an operation that can be easily performed by a doctor during caesarean section child delivery or during other obstetrical services against or without a woman's consent. It also warned that "financial or other incentives, intimidation, or misinformation tactics are used to compel women to undergo tubal ligation." The ERRC also highlighted the impact of involuntary sterilisation on Romani women including abandonment by partners and social isolation, permanent distrust of doctors and health care workers and "the potential to under-

mine reproductive and other public health initiatives." The ERRC called on the Special Rapporteurs to encourage the Czech, Hungarian and Slovak Governments to provide training for healthcare providers on the ethical guidelines of the **International Federation of Gynecology and Obstetrics** (FIGO), to raise awareness among health care providers that "informed consent" is a process of communication with women seeking their services, to educate patients about their rights and to establish clear procedural guidelines for following up on complaints of rights violations. In July, the ERRC distributed FIGO's updated **Ethics Guidelines** on Female Contraceptive Sterilisation to professional unions and health ministries in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia and urged the ministries to disseminate them and to bring their laws and practices into compliance.

On 23 May 2011, the ERRC facilitated a meeting of the United Nations **Special**

Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (Special Rapporteur), Mr Githu Muigai, with Romani and other NGOs at its office in Budapest to discuss human rights matters in Hungary. During the meeting, participants discussed: racially motivated violence and the State response to such; freedom of expression; racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance in public discourse; and civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights challenges with a focus on women, children, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. In addition, the ERRC and other Roma rights groups discussed the impact of human trafficking on Romani communities, the overrepresentation of Romani children in State care and segregation in education. The Special Rapporteur will present a country report on Hungary to the UN Human Rights Council and General Assembly in June 2012.

ERRC DISCUSSES SEGREGATED EDUCATION WITH SLOVAK YOUTH

On 20 July 2011, the ERRC participated in a meeting in Spišské Podhradie, Slovakia, to present the current challenges that Romani children face in accessing education. During the meeting, organised by the **National Democratic**

Institute with Romani and non-Romani leaders from youth organisations and political parties from all around Slovakia, various ways in which the situation of Romani children could be improved through changes in education

were discussed. Numerous participants were surprised to learn how deep-rooted the problems are and why Roma themselves can not address all of the problems in the absence of systemic changes.

ERRC SEEKS JUSTICE FOR ROMANI VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE

In recent months, ERRC lawyers have been busy supporting Romani individuals subjected to rights violations in Russia, Hungary, Ukraine and Serbia by taking appropriate legal action against relevant authorities to remedy the abuses.

In Russia, the ERRC has been working on a case to challenge police violence and the miscarriage of justice, which is wide-spread in the country with respect to Roma but quite rarely addressed through appropriate legal channels. The case concerns two young Romani men from Penza who were apprehended by police and charged with robbery. They were subsequently ill-treated in detention and subjected to violations of due process requirements. Domestic litigation efforts, in which the young men were convicted of robbery by the Second Instance Court, did not result in the investigation or prosecution of the persons responsible for the ill-treatment of the young Romani

men. The ERRC will therefore represent the men in a case before the **European Court of Human Rights** (ECtHR), due to be filed this month.

In Hungary, the ERRC, in cooperation with the **Hungarian Civil Liberties Union** (HCLU), is finalising another case to be submitted to the ECtHR on behalf of a Romani woman who was ill-treated by police officers in late 2010. The woman was celebrating with family and friends in the garden of her house in northeastern Hungary when several police officers entered to complain about loud music. Police officers indiscriminately used truncheons and sprays against the people present, including children, and grabbed the Romani woman, pulling her across the floor and spraying her in the eyes. As a result, she suffered injuries to her back, neck and eyes. The investigation into the case was closed, concluding that no criminal offence had been committed. The ERRC and HCLU are in the process of

filing an application to the ECtHR, alleging violations of Article 3 (prohibition of torture) in conjunction with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) and Article 13 (effective remedy) of the **European Convention on Human Rights**.

To challenge hate crimes in Ukraine, the ERRC recently engaged in litigation representing the son of a Romani woman who was stabbed to death in late November 2010 in Makeevka, Donetsk region, allegedly by two brothers belonging to a nationalist group. During investigation of the case, the brothers confessed that they killed the Romani woman "to keep the Ukrainian nation clean of any kind of dirt." The case, in which the accused are charged with murder aggravated by racial hatred, is now pending before domestic court. The charge in this case is a positive development in Ukraine, where there are currently very few indictments or court decisions based on legal provisions concerning hate crime.

In Serbia, the ERRC and the **Minority Rights Center** (MRC) submitted a request to the Novi Sad Public Prosecutor's Office on 1 August 2011 to initiate criminal investigations against six police officers accused of severely beating a Romani boy in July. According to documentation gathered by the ERRC, the boy and his friend were visiting a village where a local celebration was taking place when two police officers approached the boy, pushed him against a wall and started beating him for no reason. Later, the police officers took

the boy to another place where nobody could hear or see them and continued to beat him, joined by more officers and a child who alleged that the boy had stolen 200 Serbian Dinars (2 EUR) from him. The officers took the boy to a police station in Novi Sad, shouting racist remarks such as, "All you Gypsies and Albanians should be killed!" At the police station officers also assaulted the boy with knives and a gun to force him to admit to possession of a gun. Eventually the Police Inspector ended the abuse but did not take action to censure the officers involved.

Upon his eventual release, the boy's family immediately took him to a medical centre where they requested a report documenting the marks of the beating. The ERRC and MRC requested that the prosecutor investigate the officers involved for several criminal acts including ill-treatment and torture; instigating national, racial and religious hatred and intolerance; abuse of office and dereliction of duty, and the Police Inspector for failing to take any action against the police officers after the boy reported the abuse in detail. The request is pending.

ERRC TARGETS COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS OVER INADEQUATE JUDGMENT IMPLEMENTATION IN ROMANIA

On 19 July 2011, the ERRC submitted a **memorandum** to the Council of Europe's **Committee of Ministers** highlighting the Romanian State's failure to comply with European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgments against Romania in **Moldovan and others v Romania (Nos.1 & 2)**, **Gergely v Romania and Kalanyos and Others v Romania**. All of the cases involve anti-Roma pogroms from the early 1990s. In its memorandum, the ERRC outlined the Romanian Government's continued failure to rebuild infrastructure in affected communities and to address the interethnic tension, as the European Court of Human Rights prescribed through general measures. Although it has been more than six years since the first of these

judgments and nearly twenty years since the pogroms, the devastated and divided communities have yet to receive the promised support. The ERRC called on the Committee of Ministers to place the three cases under its "**enhanced supervision**" procedure which allows the Committee to focus on judgments meriting priority attention. The ERRC argued that these cases represent major structural and complex problems and are characterised by repeated and serious delays in implementation, asking that all three cases be reviewed at the Committee's next meeting in September 2011.

At the national level, the ERRC and **Romani CRISS** are supporting several applicants in Moldovan 1 and 2 cases,

as well as other members of the Romani community of Hădăreni, Romania, where the case began, in domestic legal proceedings against the Romanian Government. On 14 June 2011, the applicants lodged an administrative complaint with the Government, requesting proper justification for its failure to implement the general measures set out in the ECtHR decisions, in particular for its failure to implement a Government decision approving a community development programme in Hădăreni in the period 2006-2008. The applicants will also eventually lodge an administrative claim requesting that domestic courts oblige the Government to resume carrying out the unimplemented measures and to award the applicants compensation.

ERRC IN THE FIELD

During the summer of 2011, ERRC teams continued visiting target countries to monitor and document the situation of Roma for further action. Between 23 May and 2 June 2011, an ERRC staff member travelled to Italy where she joined the organisation's local monitor for a series of meetings in Milan and Rome with local NGOs, activists, lawyers and journalists, visiting formal, informal and semi-formal camps in both cities. The main goal of this trip was to fortify local partnerships for future advocacy and strategic litigation campaigns.

During the visit, the ERRC also met the Council of Europe's **Commissioner for Human Rights**, Thomas Hammarberg, in Milan to discuss the human rights situation of Roma in Italy. The ERRC accompanied the Commissioner during his visit to an informal Romani settlement and a formal Romani camp near Milan. On 7 September, the Commissioner's **report** on his visit to Italy was made public, with a significant focus on measures needed to redress serious human rights issues faced by Roma and Sinti in the country.

The ERRC also travelled to Plavecký Štvrtok, Slovakia, as part of its efforts to address housing and education problems experienced by members of the local Romani community. Staff members collected updated information about threatened evictions, water availability and segregated education. According to the local residents, their problems persist but the committed presence of ERRC staff members revives their hope in the fight for justice.

ERRC WELCOMES UPCOMING CHANGES TO EXECUTIVE AND BOARD LEADERSHIP

On 19 September 2011, Dezideriu Gergely will become the next Executive Director of the ERRC. He joins the ERRC from the Romanian National Council for Combating Discrimination, where he served for six years as a Member of the Steering Board and Secretary of State. Dezideriu is a com-

mitted human rights lawyer and a member of the Bucharest Bar. He began his career as an intern at the ERRC, and then worked in private practice before he became the head of the Human Rights Department at Romani CRISS, one of the most distinguished legal advocacy organisations

in the region. He has lectured widely on anti-discrimination law in Romania. He represented Romania by serving on the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers and was twice elected Chair of the Committee. Dezideriu holds a bachelor's degree in science of law

from Babes Bolyai University Law School and was a human rights fellow at Columbia University School of Law.

Robert Kushen, who served as Executive Director of the ERRC for the past three years, will step down from that position and assume the post of Chair of the Board of the ERRC in September 2011. He will take over the position from Jenő Kaltenbach,

who will remain an active Board member. With respect to the transition, Rob stated: "It has been a great honour to serve the ERRC these past few years, and I want to thank Jenő Kaltenbach for his calm and assured leadership during that time. I am very excited to be handing over the position to Dezideriu Gergely, who in addition to his legal skills brings to the job his extensive knowledge and experience of the region

and of Romani communities." Mr Kaltenbach, the outgoing Board Chair, said: "It was a great pleasure to serve the ERRC as the Chair of the Board. I would like to thank all of the members of the Board and all staff members. I think all of you have done a great job. I would like to thank especially Rob for leading the organisation in critical times. I wish him and Dezideriu, and all of my colleagues the very best for the future."

INTERN REFLECTIONS



Marek Balaz

I am currently studying at the St Elizabeth University of Health and Social Work in *Banská Bystrica*, Slovakia, focusing on social work in Romani communities. I have been working in the NGO sector since 2005, doing volunteer work related to the education and development of Romani children. In September 2010, I started working for the County Association of Roma Initiatives, a Romani NGO, on projects to improve early care and development for Roma to enhance school readiness and subsequent life opportunities, and to improve access to quality early care and development services for disadvantaged Romani children.

I am a Romani man who would like to be active in the field of Roma rights, so coming to the ERRC was a natural step for me. Working at the ERRC has allowed me to gain a complex view of issues that Roma face across Europe and contributed to my personal development. I was also able to attend the ERRC's Roma Rights Summer School and meet other activists from all over Europe. It was a really energising experience.

My internship has also allowed me to view my previous Roma rights experience from a new perspective, and I am glad that I could enhance my knowledge of human rights. I look forward to bringing what I have learned back to Slovakia with me and continuing to assist Roma in pursuing greater educational opportunities.



Zoe Carey

I began my internship with the ERRC in April of this year. During coursework for my Masters in Nationalism Studies at the Central European University, the oppression and marginalisation of Roma through various nation-building projects in Central and Eastern Europe was frequently discussed. Tired of the pervasive narrative of the perpetually oppressed, I was interested in learning what was being done to reverse institutional discrimination and improve the situation of Roma in Europe. As one of the leading NGOs focusing on Roma rights issues, the ERRC's internship programme provided an invaluable opportunity to expand my knowledge and gain practical experience in the promotion of human rights.

Working within the Programmes Department, I contributed to research for presentations, reports and submissions to treaty monitoring bodies, and edited reports, official correspondence and educational materials for the Roma Rights Summer School. I also had the opportunity to work on activities outside of the office. In support of the ERRC's new report on **child protection**, I assisted ERRC staff members at a conference in Brussels in June. I also spent 10 days living and working with young Romani activists at the European Youth Centre Budapest during the Roma Rights Summer School. These two activities exposed me to a variety of work pursued by the ERRC, from liaising with European Parliamentarians in order to influence policies and raise awareness, to developing human rights knowledge and advocacy skills among young Romani activists. Through my internship at the ERRC I have learned about practical methods for Roma rights promotion and protection from the grassroots all the way up to the international settings.



Helen P. Chalmers

I was drawn to apply for an internship at the ERRC through the NYU School of Law International Human Rights Summer Fellowship programme because I wanted to gain hands-on experience supporting public interest strategic litigation. I thought it would be useful to work abroad in order to develop a comparative sense of the kinds of anti-discrimination work the ERRC is performing in contrast to the strategies that are currently popular in the US. I have really enjoyed the opportunities I had over the summer to research case law for specific litigation projects, as well as to conduct background and advocacy-oriented research. I have been involved in researching housing, water and sanitation rights to facilitate the development of strategies on how best to approach

the realisation of these rights for the most marginalised Romani communities. It has been a great experience to be exposed to the work that the legal and programmes staff of the organisation does in tandem to further the ERRC’s mission to creatively engage in multifaceted advocacy projects to promote Roma rights across Europe.



Charlotte Thomas

I was motivated to join the ERRC for a two-month legal internship this summer by a desire to learn more about strategic litigation and the workings of European institutions, as well as by a broader commitment to minority rights and interest in the development of human rights movements. I had only basic knowledge of Roma rights questions and was interested to learn more. In seeing how the human rights law I had studied in theory was applied on the ground, I was most struck by how important it was for the ERRC lawyers to have a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve in each case, whether it be to challenge an entire system or achieve justice for a smaller group of individuals, and by how often the focus returned to the meaning and mission behind the work they were taking on. My lasting memory of the ERRC will be of how committed and engaged both the staff

and the other interns were, not only to their own work, but also to each other’s varied perspectives. I feel fortunate to have spent two months in the company of such an interesting and diverse group of people and I hope to see the ERRC continue to flourish.



Natasha Lamoreux

I grew up steeped in feminism and anti-racism, and have been a human rights activist since a very early age. Yet I didn’t realise that, in the heart of modern and “civilized” Europe, Roma face discrimination more reminiscent of Jim Crow-era black people in the US or the sort of poverty you might more readily expect to see in a developing country. It wasn’t until I was an exchange student in Debrecen, Hungary in 1994 that I became aware of the endemic racism and anti-Gypsism that exists throughout Europe. Since then, the plight of the Roma has been of particular interest to me. When I finally decided to return to school to earn my Masters in Human Rights from New York University, I knew that Roma, and Romani women in particular, would be my primary

focus. However, I quickly realised that reading academic research and anecdotal accounts about Roma was simply not enough. Much of what I had been reading was from the ERRC, and when I realised that the ERRC is based in Budapest, a place dear to my heart, I knew I had to come.

As an intern, it gives me great satisfaction to know that I’m contributing, even if in a small way, to support the tremendously needed work of the ERRC on behalf of Roma throughout Europe. In return, I am gaining first-hand knowledge and insight that is invaluable as a researcher, student and activist. I have been able to focus much of my work here on Roma, gender and Romani women’s rights and activism. Being able to speak with Romani women and men, and long-time Roma rights activists and Romani feminist activists, has helped shape and enhance my understanding of the complexity and difficulty of the road ahead towards true Roma equality in Europe.

Through my work here, I have become part of a network of professional advocates, Romani feminists and activists. What is more, the lessons and strategies that I have learned through my experience with the ERRC are applicable in other parts of the world, on behalf of other marginalised people. I view my work, and the work of the ERRC, as part of a larger human rights narrative; we are not just working for the betterment of Roma here in Europe, but for a global future in which the rights, and indeed the perspectives, of all are equally protected and valued.



Ann Niehaus

As an international relations and public policy major at Princeton University, I spent a lot of time learning about human rights violations in the classroom from a somewhat detached, academic perspective. I chose to spend my summer interning at the ERRC because I wanted to see how the discourse of human rights is translated into action on a day-to-day basis, and I have certainly been able to do that. Working with the research and advocacy team of the ERRC, I have been able to work on and assist in the production of several research reports and submissions, specifically on the topics of child protection and early marriages in Romani communities. Not only has this work taught me a tremendous amount about Romani issues themselves, I have also gained

invaluable insight into the ways in which human rights organisations such as the ERRC combat human rights abuses in a real way. Aside from the knowledge and experience I have gained from working at the ERRC, I think the most important asset that I take with me is a newly-formed critical eye for the traditional practices and State actions that construct the status quo in even the most “developed” countries today.

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Owen Daniels

Recently, some new Hungarian friends asked me why I chose to work at the ERRC in Budapest. As I paused to think of a reply, one suggested that I follow local etiquette and answer, “because Hungary is the most beautiful country in the world!” Actually, I chose to intern at the ERRC for several slightly more practical reasons. I wanted to gain experience working in an international setting; to familiarise myself with NGO work, international and European governing bodies and the career opportunities available therein and, of course, to build on a very limited knowledge of Romani culture and life. I can gladly say all of the expectations I had for my internship experience have been met.

In my time at the ERRC I have gained a more concrete understanding of the breadth and scope of discrimination against Roma. Working on submissions to the Committee on the Rights of the Child exposed me to the struggles for adequate housing and equal education, and to the open stereotypes and prejudice that Roma throughout Europe continually face from members of the public as well as European governments. In the process, I was also able to learn about the workings of United Nations treaty bodies and the role that NGOs play in facilitating institutional action and change. As an undergraduate student yet to choose a final career path, my internship at the ERRC has most definitely proven to be an invaluable and eye-opening experience.

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Christina Lee

Prior to coming to the ERRC I had mostly worked on migration and refugee issues in the United States. I first learned about Roma rights issues while studying in Brussels, Belgium, and I was shocked to learn about pervasive human rights abuses occurring in modern Europe. The level of discrimination faced by Roma seems like an intractable problem. Working with such a diverse and dedicated group of people has shown me that addressing these issues may take time, but nothing is impossible. Working at the ERRC has opened my eyes to many intersectional facets present in a social movement. For instance, it is impossible to discuss Roma rights issues thoroughly without also addressing women’s rights, statelessness, language rights, etc. As they say, “here comes everybody.” However, that is what makes the Roma rights movement so relevant. It is impossible to separate the problems faced by Romani communities from those facing all democratic societies as we seek to balance diversity and tolerance, freedom and justice. My time at the ERRC has been an exciting challenge, and I am certain that this organisation contributes to this balance.