

The ERRC combats racism and discrimination against Roma and empowers Roma to defend their own rights.

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ERRC meets repatriated Roma at Budapest airport

ON 25 and 26 June, ERRC staff members, together with OSI and independent activists, met groups of Romanian Roma being repatriated from Northern Ireland as they passed through Budapest's Ferihegy Airport. The ERRC sought information concerning the circumstances of the paid return of EU citizens to their country of origin and information on violent attacks targeting Romanian

which started on 12 June. Three days after the initial attacks, anti-racism demonstrators protested against the attacks. The demonstrators were attacked by a racist group that threw bricks and bottles at them.

After several days of wide media coverage of the incidents, the Northern Ireland's Social Development Ministry decided to pay the costs of the Romani families' return to Romania.



More than 100 Romanian Roma left Northern Ireland after violent attacks on their homes in Belfast which started on 12 June.

PHOTO CREDIT: MTI

Roma in Belfast, Northern Ireland, leading to the return operation. Stopping en route to their homes in various Romanian towns, three groups of Romanian Roma who arrived in Budapest numbered more than 100 in total.

The ERRC met the group following violent attacks in Belfast on the homes of Romani citizens from Romania

Some reported a desire to return to Northern Ireland despite their economic hardships and threats to their lives. Some of the affected Roma noted that they intend to leave their children in safe custody in Romania and return to Belfast. After their arrival at the Budapest Airport, the groups left in mini-vans waiting specifically for them, refusing

to provide any contact information.

The following week the ERRC traveled to Romania to meet and talk with some of the Roma to clarify the circumstances that led the group to leave Northern Ireland and to assess whether additional ERRC intervention is appropriate.

ERRC testifies about violence against Roma at US congressional hearing

ON 9 June 2009, four Roma delegates from Europe testified about violence against Roma in their home countries before the US Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, also known as the Helsinki Commission. The independent agency organised a briefing, entitled “Hard Times and Hardening Attitudes: The Economic Downturn and the Rise of Violence against Roma,” over concerns that anti-Romani hate speech, reported attacks on Roma and racially motivated killings of Roma are on the increase in Europe.

Witnesses at the briefing included Stanislav Daniel, ERRC research consultant from Slovakia, Katalin Barsony, a filmmaker and project manager from Hungary, Isabela Mihalache, ERRC Board member and senior program manager at the Open Society Institute’s Roma Initiatives Office from Romania, and Andrzej Mirga, advisor on Romani issues at the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights from Poland.

The ERRC outlined the key factors contributing to the increased anti-Romani racism in Slovakia and the Czech Republic, stressing that one of the chief issues is the widespread manipulation of anti-Romani attitudes by far-right politicians to gain political support. It also affirmed that “in cases of attacks on Roma reported by

media, politicians only rarely defend the Roma; usually they frame their statement in a conditional form, linking the attack to the alleged criminality of Roma or other patterns of negative social behaviour.”

The delegates emphasised that the committed interest of the Helsinki Commission and US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in Roma issues is invaluable for European Roma in raising their profile and getting their message heard across Europe and on a global platform. It was suggested that the US should continue its commitment to promote protection of



During the hearing of this bi-partisan Commission of the US Congress, four experts working on Romani human rights issues discussed the effects of the ongoing global economic crisis on Roma communities, focusing on inter-ethnic tensions and the escalation of violence in Europe. The experts present at the hearing were (from left to right) Katalin Barsony, Stanislav Daniel, Isabela Mihalache, and Andrzej Mirga.

PHOTO CREDIT: LÁSZLÓ HOFER MTI

the human rights of Roma through bilateral communications with European countries in which Roma face serious abuses and through proactive involvement in international platforms, most importantly the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Finally, the witnesses stressed that the US could intervene to improve the situation of the Roma in Europe through financial assistance that would support the establishment and work of civil society organisations and programmes.

For the full text of the testimonies, media coverage and other relevant information, please see: [Helsinki Commission Hearing](#).

ERRC participates in a FRA/CoE expert meeting on the free movement of Roma

ON 9 July 2009 in Strasbourg, ERRC staff members and consultants participated in an expert seminar on Roma and the right to freedom of movement and residence in the EU. The ERRC discussed emerging findings of a study it is currently implementing on behalf of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) on Roma exercising the rights contained in EU Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States. The discussions largely centred on the explicit linking of the right of free movement and residence to employment. Such linkage may

negatively impact the ability of Roma, and other groups of EU citizens which experience discrimination in the area of employment, to enjoy on an equal basis the rights contained in the Directive. During the session, ERRC staff and consultants presented preliminary findings from the study on the difficulties experienced by Roma in accessing employment, housing, education and health care in other EU Member States. The session was intended to be a preparatory seminar for a larger meeting on the same topic to be co-hosted by the FRA, the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner and the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities in November 2009.

ERRC hosts legal and policy research workshop on trafficking in human beings

IN May 2009, the ERRC and its Slovak partner People in Need conducted a workshop on legal and policy research methodology within the framework of the project entitled "Trafficking Romani youth and women in Eastern and Central Europe: Analysing the effectiveness of national laws and policies in prevention, prosecution and victim support" funded by the European Commission. The aim of the workshop, held in Budapest, was to prepare researchers from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia to undertake research on the discrepancies between agreed-upon international and regional conventions and their effective implementation and to identify existing gaps within national legislation, policies, and governmental structures.

Researchers will also identify how laws and policies in the chosen countries might, directly or indirectly, negatively or positively affect Romani victims or potential victims of trafficking, and gain a better understanding of the phenomenon of trafficking of Romani adults and children. Finally, the

research will also look at whether relevant anti-trafficking and related legislation contains adequate anti-discrimination provisions.

The legal and policy research will serve as the basis for subsequent field research on the trafficking of Roma. Desk and field research will be developed



Researchers from Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia attended the training workshop held in Budapest within the framework of an EU-funded project on trafficking.

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

into a published report on the subject. The study will be disseminated at a closing conference to take place in 2010. For more information please contact: ostalinda.maya@errc.org.

ERRC commences housing rights documentation in Western Balkan countries

IN June 2009, the ERRC, in collaboration with grassroots Roma activists, commenced documentation on the housing situation of Romani communities in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovakia and Romania. This work is part of a two-year project called “Empowerment of Roma to Fight Rights Deprivation” supported by the UN Democracy Fund. Over the next year the Roma activists and the ERRC will conduct an in-depth analysis of housing rights and forced eviction concerns of Roma, with a view towards supporting the development of strategic litigation and advocacy actions in these areas. Housing is consistently noted to be a primary area of concern for Roma, and this research aims to ignite action to improve the overall housing situation of Roma.

Through this work, the ERRC also aims to capacitate the local activists to better utilize human rights law and policy to combat racial discrimination and to promote the application of international human rights standards regarding housing rights in national legislation.

Currently, the research is concentrated on outlining the legal and policy framework in the target countries and on collecting secondary data and information from official and unofficial sources. Once this is complete, the research team will move into nine months of field research, which will be essential in bringing to light cases of discriminatory treatment and housing rights violations of Romani people in the target countries.

Update on ERRC work on FRA housing and free movement studies

ERRC and partners have been busy in the last months preparing 11 case studies exploring various aspects of the housing situation of Roma and Travellers and on the ability of Roma to exercise their right to freedom of movement and residence in the EU. The case studies are part of two larger studies that the ERRC, in consortium with partners across Europe, is conducting on behalf of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA).

The free movement study, “Respecting, Protecting and Promoting the Right to Free Movement and Residence in the Member States of the European Union: The Case of Roma”, focuses on the movement of Roma from Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia to Finland, France, Italy, Spain and the UK. Researchers conducted extensive primary research in five locations in each destination country, carrying out interviews with members of Romani communities, local government representatives and NGOs. From this data, five case studies which detail information

concerning both the efficacy of policies and the reality of experiences related to free movement of Roma who are EU citizens are being finalized, and a comparative report is under development. A full summary of the study and its implementing team is available at: <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=3018>.

The housing study, “Comparative Report on the Housing Conditions of Roma and Travellers in the EU”, focuses on the impact of law and policy on the housing situation of Roma and Travellers in the EU. Researchers are finalizing six case studies examining good practices in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Slovakia, Spain and the UK, and a comparative report examining this data and the results of 24 thematic studies on housing prepared by the FRA’s RAXEN network. A full summary of the study is available at: <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=3010>.

The results of both studies are expected to be disseminated by the FRA in the fall of 2009. For more information, please contact: catherine.twigg@errc.org.

ERRC hosts women's rights training workshop for Ukrainian Romani women

ON 8-10 June 2009, the ERRC held a training workshop in Odessa, Ukraine, for eight field researchers on methods of conducting research on the situation of Romani women. The selected participants will interview Romani women of different ages and socio-economic situations in several areas of Ukraine including Donetsk, Odessa, Transcarpathia, Kiev and Kharkov. The research will look at patterns of discrimination against Romani women in the areas

of employment, health and education as well as issues of violence against women. It will serve as the basis of a report to be submitted to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) at its 45th session when Ukraine's compliance with the Convention will be reviewed. The aim of the report is to provide information to the Committee about how multiple discrimination issues affect Romani women. For more information please contact: ostalinda.maya@errc.org.

ERRC hosts study visit of Balkan Romani women in Budapest

FROM 25-30 May 2009, the ERRC, in cooperation with Care International, hosted a group of Romani women from Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina on a study trip in Budapest. The visit

was part of a three-year project being implemented by Care International with Romani women's organisations in the Western Balkan region aiming to strengthen the position of Romani women in these countries.

During the course of the study trip, the ERRC organised a series of meetings with relevant stakeholders working on Romani issues such as the Roma Education Fund, Roma-versitas, the Secretariat of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, a group of Hungarian Romani NGOs and the Department of Roma Integration in Hungary. The goal of the meetings was to learn more about the work of the other stakeholders, to hear about the challenges that they face in their work as well as to exchange information on good practices.

In addition to the meetings, the ERRC conducted a workshop which addressed the fundamental distinctions in terms of approaches to Roma rights advocacy and activism, discussing the major differences between the "rights-based" and the "needs-based"

approaches to advocacy. Throughout the workshop, the participants contemplated the concept of effective advocacy and how to ensure that their actions will have a longer-lasting impact for the people and interests that they are representing. During the workshop, the Human Rights Trainer employed the methodology of an "interactive group" in which participants were encouraged to provide individual insights as well as to discuss topics

amongst themselves. This allowed the topics to be examined in greater detail and provided the participants with the opportunity to acquire a more nuanced understanding of the rights-based approach and how Roma rights issues fit within this paradigm.



ERRC organised a series of meetings with relevant stakeholders working on Romani issues for the group of Romani women from Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina visiting Budapest on a study trip.

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

ERRC and experts train lawyers on Roma rights litigation in Strasbourg

ON 28-29 May 2009, the ERRC and the Directorate General of Social Cohesion (DGII), Migration and Roma Department, organised the 13th annual study session on the European Convention on Human Rights targeting persons involved in legal assistance to Roma and Travellers on the premises of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.

Fifteen practitioners from Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Romania, Sweden, Ukraine and the United Kingdom participated in this year's programme. The intensive two-day training programme included an overview of the European Convention on Human Rights with a special focus on articles most often referred to in cases involving Roma.

ERRC staff attorney Theodoros Alexandridis gave a detailed presentation of Articles 2 and 3 of the European Convention, and Judge Giovanni

Bonello from Malta explained the case law of the European Court concerning Roma and Travellers.

Independent expert professor Luke Clements held a useful and informative session regarding different technical and advocacy requirements to follow when presenting a case before the European Court of Human Rights. Eva Hubalkova from the Court Registry outlined the rules and procedures of lodging an application with the Court.

The legal, technical and practical sessions were a lead-up to the moot court exercise which enabled the participants to engage actively in a fictional case with factual circumstances that raise issues under the European Convention on Human Rights. Split into two groups representing both applicant and government, participants were assisted by ERRC staff and independent experts Luke Clements, Gloria Jean Garland, Andi Dobrushki and Branko Plese in preparing and arguing their cases before a panel of judges in the actual court room of the European Court of Human Rights.



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