

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

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## FRA report confirms the dire housing situation of Roma and Travellers in the EU

**O**N 20 October 2009, the ERRC organised a conference hosted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in Brussels to launch its report "Housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in the European Union". The report, by ERRC in collaboration with the Pavee Point Travellers Centre under a service contract, brought together the results of RAXEN data collection in 24 Member States, case studies of good practice and a statistical analysis of the FRA's EU-

primary action areas for Member States to improve the housing situation of Roma Travellers: the urgency of collecting ethnically disaggregated data, the need to ensure a strong focus on desegregation in all housing policies and the necessity of actions to end forced evictions.

Good practice examples from the research were discussed, focusing on the importance of direct Roma and Traveller participation, accurate needs assessments, mainstreamed housing efforts that include Roma and non-Roma and comprehensive

multifaceted strategies that focus on housing as well as employment, education and other related areas.

Widespread concerns about the housing situation of Roma and Traveller communities are confirmed in the FRA report. The EC request for and publication of this report indicates a clear commitment by the European Union to develop its competencies in the area of housing rights and non-discrimination and to bring its legal framework in line with other international

standards in this area. The comparative report illustrates that Roma and Travellers across the Union experience grave violations in the area of housing rights, which requires an EU level response. The ERRC and Pavee Point support the FRA's call for the development of a European Framework Strategy on Roma Inclusion.

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*The FRA report entitled "Housing conditions of Roma and Travellers in the EU" was launched at a conference in Brussels on 20 October 2009. Over 110 participants attended the conference from across the EU.*

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

MIDIS survey. Over 110 participants came from across the EU representing civil society, different levels of government and many European institutions.

The findings of this study confirm that, despite the efforts made on the part of some governments, the overall housing situation of many Roma and Travellers in the EU is grim. FRA, ERRC and Pavee Point presenters highlighted three

## Free movement study launched in Vienna

**A**T a conference jointly organised by the European Union Agency of Fundamental Rights (FRA), the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights) in Vienna on 9 and 10 November, the FRA launched the results of its report on “Respecting, Protecting and Promoting the Right to Free Movement and Residence in the Member States of the European Union: The Case of Roma”.

This study, prepared by the ERRC in consortium with the Fundación Secretariado Gitano, European

Dialogue, Finnish League for Human Rights, European Roma Information Office and Fédération nationale des associations solidaires, mostly concerns the movement of Roma from the new Member States to the old Member States. A comprehensive report, best practices report and five case studies have been developed based on desk research and extensive primary research. The full study is available at: [http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/products/publications\\_reports/pub\\_cr\\_roma-movement\\_en.htm](http://fra.europa.eu/fraWebsite/products/publications_reports/pub_cr_roma-movement_en.htm).

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## ERRC seeks direct involvement in development of Roma inclusion policy in Italy

**D**URING a roundtable meeting hosted by the NGO coalition Tavolo Rom and the European Commission Delegation in Milan on 3 November, the ERRC discussed the human rights concerns of Roma and Sinti with various government representatives, including the Vice-Prefect in charge of the state of emergency for the Region of Lombardia. Drawing on discussions the previous day with Roma living in extremely precarious conditions and noting that the state of emergency is itself not a social policy, the ERRC called for cooperation in developing an adequate policy framework for an inclusive and cohesive Milan. In the absence of such a policy, the ERRC also called for a moratorium on the forced eviction of Roma and Sinti, which often results in homelessness, and for transparency and consultation in the allocation of funds available for Roma and Sinti programming.

Following the meeting, the ERRC continued visits to various Romani camps around Milan to monitor the impact of the state of emergency. Notably, the presence of police in the camps was constant

in the year since the “nomad census” was conducted while no local authorities have visited to discuss any social inclusion measures with the inhabitants. Approximately bi-monthly police visits reportedly have taken place within the context of new census activity, while other visits related to general controls and checks.



*Roma communities face severe problems in Italy. Most of the Roma and Sinti population of the country live in formal and informal settlements in substandard conditions.*

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

## ERRC hosts a meeting of the Council of Europe's Human Rights Commissioner

ON 12 October 2009, the ERRC hosted a meeting of Thomas Hammarberg with a group of Hungarian NGOs at its office in Budapest. Among the NGOs represented were the Hungarian Helsinki Committee, the Hungarian Civil Liberties Union, the Chance for Children Foundation and the Legal Defense Bureau for Ethnic Minorities.

The participants briefed Commissioner Hammarberg about the most pressing Roma rights issues in Hungary today, including (racially motivated) violence, racist sentiments among law enforcement professionals, hate speech legislation and implementation, treatment of and conditions facing asylum seekers, lack of proper political representation and lack of will and funding for monitoring school integration in the Office of Public Education.

With regard to the recent increase of violence against Roma, the NGOs called for a professional, unbiased response and investigation by law enforcement officials and political and legal accountability. Participants also called for condemnation of widespread occurrences of hate speech by public officials from across the political spectrum. The participants noted a variety of reasons contributing

to the rising popularity of far right elements in the political sphere, primarily the disillusionment in politics/the process of democratic transition within the general population.

Following this meeting, Commissioner Hammarberg spent several days meeting with government representatives, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Justice, the State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, the Parliamentary Committee on National Ethnic Affairs, the Prime Minister and the Member of Parliament serving as the head of the Human Rights Committee. In addition, he visited a school with a significant Romani population.

According to a news release issued by Commissioner Hammarberg's office, the Commissioner discussed with Hungarian authorities the observed rise of extremism, intolerance and racist manifestations that have targeted, in particular, members of the Romani minority. See: [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR762\(2009\)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=PR762(2009)&Language=lanEnglish&Ver=original&BackColorInternet=F5CA75&BackColorIntranet=F5CA75&BackColorLogged=A9BACE). The ERRC anticipates a strong forthcoming report on Hungary from the Commissioner's office.



*The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg was briefed by Hungarian human rights organisations about the situation of Roma in the country.*

PHOTO CREDIT: MTI

# ERRC representative opens the first Decade meeting under the Slovak Presidency

**T**HE ERRC has fought the segregation of Romani children in education since its establishment. Current developments show how important political will and decisions at the top political level are. Two years after the landmark victory at the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in the case *D.H. and others v. the Czech Republic*, in which the Court confirmed that Romani children were indirectly discriminated against, the practice of segregation continues unabated. Even after many reforms in systems of education in many European countries, young Roma are still being channeled into parallel systems of education under the pretext of *special educational needs*.

Stanislav Daniel of the ERRC drew attention to these issues in his opening address at the 17th International Steering Committee of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in Spisska Nova Ves, Slovakia. Referring to the case of “Little Rock Nine” and the desegregation process in the United States, Mr Daniel highlighted the need for strong political will to change the contemporary situation of Roma in Europe.

Following the landmark 1954 US Supreme Court decision in the case “Brown v. Board of Education”, in which the court confirmed that separate education yields inequality, the desegregation processes started at many schools in the US. In Little Rock, Arkansas, a plan of gradual desegregation was to be implemented during the 1957 school year. Nine black students, later named the “Little Rock Nine”, started attending the

exclusively “white” Little Rock Central High. Segregationists, opposing the federal court decision, held protests aided by the local authorities and barred the entrance of the black students to the school. A so-called “Constitutional Crisis” ensued for about a month until then President Eisenhower used his Executive power to support the integration of black students.



*ERRC consultant Stanislav Daniel delivering his opening speech at the Steering Committee meeting of the Roma Decade.*

PHOTO CREDIT: ROMANO NEVO LIL

Mr Daniel appealed to political leaders present at the meeting to declare an immediate moratorium on admissions of Romani children into special schools or otherwise segregated environments. Government representatives did not respond to this call, but later in the meeting Slovakia’s Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights and Minorities implied rejection of the idea when he suggested that segregated boarding schools for Roma were a useful tool to help integration of Romani children.

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## Upcoming Roma rights research in Turkey

**I**N December 2009, the ERRC kicks off research in a new project implemented on behalf of the European Commission in Turkey, led by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) and in partnership the Edirne Roma Association EDROM. Primary research will be conducted in three locations: Bandırma, Zonguldak and Antakya. This

research takes place within a study entitled, “Understanding employment and decent work challenges in Turkey – the situation of Roma in Turkey”. The purpose of the study is to provide background and expert information on the situation of the Roma in Turkey while stressing policy options to ensure better social inclusion and fight against de facto discrimination.

## From the field: the ERRC meets Romani activists in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro

**E**RRC staff members recently traveled to Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro, to consult with local human rights and Romani organisations in order to define its work in these countries. The ERRC team sought to revitalise relationships and establish new ones, while obtaining an overview of the situation of Roma in these countries.

Within the framework of a two-year long project sponsored by the United Nations Democracy Fund, the ERRC is working with grassroots Romani activists to assess the current status of anti-discrimination law (ADL) in Albania, Macedonia and Montenegro, among other countries. In each country, the ERRC has trained young Romani activists to conduct substantive research in the respective countries about ADL process and progress.

The ERRC team met government representatives involved in the drafting of the anti-discrimination

legislation and discussed the current status of the laws. They also opened a dialogue with local human rights and Romani organisations, the Ombudsman's office and individual lawyers, assessing their involvement in the drafting process. In addition, the ERRC explored possibilities to pursue legal action in partnership with local human rights and Roma organisations in the future on housing rights matters.

In Montenegro, the ERRC is also renewing relationships and cooperation with organisations, individuals and authorities working on discrimination against Roma in Montenegro.

Discussions also revolved around the housing situation of Roma in Montenegro – particularly concerning instances of segregation in housing and the lack of security of legal tenure. It is hoped that these discussions will materialise into potential cases for litigation.

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## ERRC discusses education and violence at the OSCE HDIM meeting

**O**N 7 October 2009, ERRC representatives participated in this year's OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, highlighting continuing segregation of Romani children in education. In plenary sessions organised by the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues (CPRSI) on early education, the ERRC called upon national governments to immediately stop placing Romani children in "special schools" or "special classes" for the mentally disabled, to refrain from establishing early education programmes in segregated facilities and to

provide free-of-charge compulsory early education programmes in integrated school environments. Later, in a packed side event co-hosted with the CPRSI and Romani Criss, the ERRC highlighted factors contributing to violence against Roma in Hungary and the limited response of states authorities. The Hungarian National Police Headquarters spokesperson discussed the investigative efforts of the national police. The response of state authorities to questions showed a clear lack of inter-state cooperation in responding to incidents of violence against Roma and a need for civil society involvement.



*Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues, Romani Criss and ERRC organised a side event on Roma issues during the OSCE HDIM meeting.*

PHOTO CREDIT:  
DAN DOGHI

## ERRC conducts grassroots training initiative in Odessa, Ukraine

**O**N 25 September 2009, the ERRC held a workshop in Odessa, Ukraine, in the suburban Roma community in Kotovskogo to provide the local Romani population information about their rights and what can be done if rights are violated. The workshop was a step towards the mobilisation of local communities to address their concerns independently.

ERRC experts, assisted by local activist Sasha Kovalenko, assembled Romani men, women and children of all age groups, in the yards of their homes. Approximately 25

people attended the day-long workshop, simultaneously translated by former ERRC intern Fedor Kondur. The ERRC provided information about human rights and how rights may be claimed in case of violation. Throughout the workshop, the participants engaged in a constant dialogue about what they can do to address the particular problems they experience.

Despite the tough conditions that they face, the participants affirmed that the workshop provided them with the opportunity to gain a greater understanding of their rights and how to claim them.



*ERRC experts and local activists informed the members of Romani community in Odessa's Kotovskogo neighbourhood about their rights and what they can do if rights are violated.*

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

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## ERRC trains young Turkish Roma

**F**ROM 6-13 September 2009, the ERRC organised a workshop for local Romani activists and university students in Antalya, Turkey, entitled "Capacity Building for Roma Rights Advocacy." Nineteen participants from around Turkey received tutoring in general human rights concepts and were presented with a framework for how to advocate Roma rights.

Rights consciousness in Roma communities is newly developing in Turkey and the ERRC has placed priority on contributing to the development of Romani civil society organisations there.

The workshop's chief instructor was the ERRC's Larry Olomofoe, who worked with Michael Simmons and Tim Jones. Mr Simmons talked about his



*Participants from different parts of Turkey attended the ERRC's one week capacity building workshop in Antalya.*

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

experience in the US civil rights movement and Mr Jones summarised the European legal framework for human rights litigation. Local experts and activists also took part. One of the leading figures of Turkey's Roma rights movement, Erdiñ Çekiç, the President of the Edirne Roma Association and the President of the Federation of Roma Associations of Turkey provided an overview of Roma rights activism in Turkey. Cihan Baysal of the Roma Memorial

University provided information about scholarship opportunities for Romani students. Hilal Küey, one of the leading Roma rights litigators in Turkey, discussed the local legal framework, narrating examples from her own experiences. Ms Küey's presentation was tailored to provide the young activists with practical knowledge for initiating litigation on their own. Lastly, Professor Suat Kolukırık lectured on the history of Roma in Europe and Turkey.

## Legal victory before the Slovak Supreme Court in an ERRC supported case

**O**N 17 September 2009, the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic issued a final judgment in a landmark case finding seven police officers guilty for beating a Romani man to death on 5 July 2001. The case concerned the death of Mr Karol Sendrei at the police station in Revúca, Eastern Slovakia, following his brutal beating by the officers. The Court sentenced the officers to imprisonment of between 1.5 and 8.5 years each. The case, litigated by Dr Columbus Igboanusi of the League of Human Rights Advocates and supported by the European Roma Rights Centre, focused on the torture, inhuman and degrading treatment resulting in Mr Sendrei's death.

The case was initiated after three male members of Mr Sendrei's family – he and his two sons – were taken to the police station in Revúca and brutally beaten by the police. Though the sons were eventually released, Mr Sendrei was held. Autopsy and forensic reports confirmed heavy internal bleeding and lethal injuries caused by third persons. There was a strong indication

that most of the time, and even at the moment of death, the victim was handcuffed to radiators in the station.

The legal battle that followed stretched for more than eight years. After the regional and district courts, the case became part of the agenda of the Special Criminal Court in Banska Bystrica – established to deal with crimes of special concern and gravity, including organised crime. In its judgment of 28 February 2009, the Special Court established the guilt of all seven accused policemen. Nevertheless, the perpetrators challenged the decision and appealed to the Supreme Court. Finally, on 17 and 21 September 2009, the Supreme Court of the Slovak Republic confirmed the legal qualification of crimes and sentences of the Special Criminal Court.

As part of the decision, the Court granted the sum of 19,800 Slovak crowns (623 EUR) to Mr Sendrei's wife as compensation for the costs of the burial and requested that the victims file their claim for compensation with the civil court.

## Isabela Mihalache appointed ERRC Deputy Director

**I**SABELA MIHALACHE joined the ERRC on 1 September 2009 as Deputy Director after serving on the ERRC Board of Directors since 2007. Previously, she worked as the Senior Program Manager of the Open Society Institute's Roma Initiatives in Budapest for six years, developing extensive experience in the field of Roma integration. Her work covered the countries of Central and Southeastern Europe, such as Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia and, more recently, the rest of the Western Balkans. She managed grant-making to Romani organisations and Romani women's initiatives across Central and Eastern Europe, while leading and supporting mobilisation of Roma.

Her professional expertise includes evaluation of project proposals on insti-



*Deputy Director Isabela Mihalache*

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

tutional NGO capacity building, social and economic empowerment of Romani communities, access to rights and provision of services with a focus on education, health care, housing and gender empowerment. Her responsibilities and expertise extend to monitoring the effective implementation and sustainability of Roma NGO projects and evaluating the impact of governmental and EU policies and programmes.

Between 2004 and 2009, she coordinated initiatives aimed at empowering Romani women at the national and local level through a series of initiatives; increasing Romani women's participation at the national and international levels; facilitating the inclusion of Romani women in the labour market; addressing the issue of early marriages; and supporting activities related to Romani women IDPs and refugees.

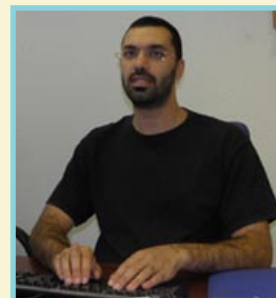
## Djordje Jovanovic takes on coordination of ERRC research programmes

**I**N November 2009, Djordje Jovanovic joined the ERRC as Research Coordinator. He holds a bachelor's degree in preschool education and a degree in Romology Studies from the University of Novi Sad. Currently, Mr Jovanovic is completing his final year of studies in primary education and attending courses at the Psychotherapy School of Transactional Analysis, where he holds a degree as a Teaching Assistant practitioner. Djordje's long relationship with the

ERRC began when he was an intern in 2001 and has included work on several research projects over the years, including as a staff member in 2003.

*Research Coordinator Djordje Jovanovic*

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC



## Aniko Orsos joins ERRC programmes team

**I**N August 2009, Aniko Orsos joined the ERRC as Programmes Assistant. Ms Orsos studied Human Management in PTE-FEEK and completed an international programme in NGO Management, Advocacy and Public Campaign Facilitation at the International Peoples' College in Helsingor, Denmark. Before joining the ERRC in 2009, she worked

as a regional coordinator at the National Educational Integration Network and at the Amrita Association for Integrated Education of Roma Youth in Hungary. Her experience includes work with PHARE and HEFOP projects, and numerous research projects.

*Programmes Assistant Aniko Orsos*

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC



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