

ERRC ACTS TO ENSURE SAFETY AND ADEQUATE CONDITIONS FOR SERBIA'S BELVIL EVICTEES

On 3 May 2012, the ERRC sent a **letter** to Serbian authorities stating concern regarding a violent attack on a Romani settlement in Jabucki Rit, Belgrade, which happened around 9:00 AM on 1 May. The victims of this attack were Romani individuals who had been relocated to the container settlement after being evicted from Belgrade's Belvil settlement on 26 April 2012. During the attack, racist slogans were shouted and a swastika was drawn on one of the containers. At the time of sending the letter, only one perpetrator had been identified out of the approximately 15 to 20 masked individuals who were reported to have participated in the attack. The ERRC requested that the authorities carry out an effective investigation of the attack, bearing in mind its racial elements, and that they bring all the perpetrators to justice, and city authorities were called on to provide an elevated level of protection to all forcibly relocated Roma from the Belvil settlement.

The Belvil eviction, which affected more than 250 families comprising approximately 1,000 individuals, occurred on 26 April. After families were given eviction orders in March, they went through an informal consultation process with city authorities and Government representatives, but no adequate alternative accommodation options were provided and the date of the planned



Roma evicted from Belvil on 26 April are facing violence in their new accommodation.

PHOTO CREDIT: MATT LUTTON

eviction changed several times. In addition to the failure to provide families with adequate accommodation, the process of organising the eviction was carried out in such a way that families were denied adequate information, notice and legal remedies. Instead, on the day of the eviction, families from Belgrade, along with internally displaced people, were relocated to the container settlements of Kijevo, Dren, Jabucki Rit, Resnik and Makis on the outskirts of the city. Families with registered residences in other cities of Serbia were forcibly returned to those cities.

The ERRC and Serbian NGOs have monitored the eviction and the situation of evictees since the eviction was conducted. Some of the evicted Roma are facing

dire circumstances. There has been no adequate and regular distribution of food in any of the resettlement locations in Belgrade, many relocated families have been provided stoves which do not work in one of the settlements, no refrigerators were provided to anyone and the new containers and sanitary facilities are not wheelchair accessible. The ERRC and domestic organisations continue to monitor the situation on the ground and advocate with national and international authorities for sustainable and adequate housing solutions for affected Roma.

NIKOLIC v REP. OF SERBIA

A court hearing in the case of *Nikolic v Rep. of Serbia and City of Sabac*, litigated by the ERRC and its partner **Minority Rights Center** (MRC), took place on 10 May 2012 before the First Basic Court in Belgrade. All the plaintiffs in the case, as well as two officials, testified before the judge. In their testimony, the applicants described how they were being treated by the local communal inspection department and city officials, how their homes had been demolished and how, eventually, they were left homeless and forced to sleep out in the streets. Two officials from the Department for Inspection and Public Utilities testified as well.

In November 2010, local authorities in Sabac, a city in northwestern Serbia, evicted and demolished the homes of the Nikolic family, a Romani family including nine persons: one pregnant woman and eight minor children. Their homes had been built illegally on municipal land along with another 190 Romani houses, but only their homes were demolished. When invited to the office of communal inspection to sign the demolition decision, the Nikolics were "persuaded" that there was "no one to appeal to" and that contesting the demolition was "only a waste of time". They were told that if they didn't sign the order, the police would come for them and make them sign the document. The officials from the Department for Inspection and Public Utilities who later testified about the incident said that they were just explaining to the Nikolic family that the police can assist with eviction and demolition processes. The City of Sabac did not offer any form of alternative accommodation to the family, rendering them homeless. The Nikolic family was forced to sleep in the streets, in abandoned cars or at their neighbours' homes. After exhausting all other options, the family ultimately settled in an abandoned house that was missing part of the roof and which had no electricity or running water. In February 2011, the ERRC and MRC initiated a civil procedure for compensation for material and non-material damage before the national court.

ERRC PUBLICATION GIVE-AWAY

The ERRC is cleaning out its archive of past publications, including country reports, thematic reports and Roma Rights journals. Please contact Dzavit Berisha (dzavit.berisha@errc.org) if you would like more information or to receive copies.

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

In this issue:

ERRC Acts to Ensure Safety and Adequate Conditions for Serbia's Belvil Evictees	p.1
ERRC: Italian State of Emergency is Not Back	p.2
ERRC Legal Action Against Evictions and Expulsions in France	p.2
ERRC Launches New Education Action in Macedonia	p.3
ERRC Active in Slovakia	p.4
ERRC Highlights Violence, Forced Evictions and Violations of Freedom of Movement	p.4
ERRC Participation in International Meetings	p.5
Tribute to Thomas Hammarberg	p.6
ERRC Educating the Public on Roma Rights	p.6
ERRC Advocacy Targets International Bodies	p.7
ERRC Convenes Human Rights Monitor Meeting in Budapest	p.7
ERRC Welcomes New Team Member	p.7
Intern Reflections	p.8

ERRC: ITALIAN STATE OF EMERGENCY IS NOT BACK

On 9 May 2012, Italy's highest administrative court, the Council of State, accepted the Italian Government's request to suspend the effects of its decision from last year in an ERRC case which had declared the State of Emergency illegal and unfounded. This controversial new decision gives the Italian Government authority to implement various contracts signed under the State of Emergency.

The **State of Emergency**, which deemed the presence of Roma and Sinti in Italy a threat to public security, gave State authorities the powers to implement certain practices which may violate international human rights standards. In practice, these measures have included monitoring Roma camps and carrying out censuses of the camps' residents (including children), taking photos and requesting documents to identify and

record residents. The State of Emergency saw Roma forcibly and relentlessly evicted, excluded from education, fingerprinted, segregated, harassed and expelled. Many of these actions constituted violations of their rights to adequate housing and education.

not reintroduce the State of Emergency; its impact is limited retroactively to administrative decisions and contracts which were made before 16 November 2011 when the Council of State made its original ruling. Italy's highest court, the

Court of Cassation, which is hearing the appeal in this case, will still review the substance of the original decision at a later date.

The ERRC has emphasised in its communications with Italian authorities and the Italian public that a "security-based" approach will not address the situation of Roma in Italy and urged Italian authorities to adopt a compre-

hensive policy, in line with international norms for Roma integration. The ERRC welcomes **Italy's National Roma Integration Strategy**, despite its shortcomings, as a positive step.

Timeline:

- In May 2008, authorities declared a State of Emergency in Lombardy, Campania and Lazio.
- In 2009, the State of Emergency was extended to Piedmont and Veneto.
- In 2008, prefects were appointed as Special Commissioners for the Roma Emergency in the regions of Lombardy, Lazio and Campania and in Veneto and Piedmont in 2009.
- The ERRC challenged the State of Emergency before Italy's Council of State in 2009.
- The State of Emergency was extended annually until December 2011.
- On 16 November 2011, the Council of State ruled that the State of Emergency was illegal and unfounded.
- In February 2012, the Italian Government appealed the Council of State decision before the Court of Cassation and requested that the decision of the Council of State be suspended until the appeal is resolved.
- On 9 May 2012, the Council of State partially suspended its original ruling.

The census-taking also raised grave concerns about **data protection**.

On 10 May, the ERRC issued a **statement** warning that this decision does

ERRC LEGAL ACTION AGAINST EVICTIONS AND EXPULSIONS IN FRANCE

The ERRC continued its efforts on the ground in France to support Romani migrants to challenge illegal evictions and expulsions. In past months, ERRC focused its efforts in the Paris region,

conducting outreach in migrant Romani communities, liaising with French lawyers and supporting them in launching legal challenges on behalf of Romani migrants facing eviction or deportation.

The ERRC documented the evictions and distribution of expulsion orders, collected all necessary papers for legal aid applications and other evidence from Romani individuals and then coordinated a group of French lawyers to provide court representation and attended several court hearings in March, April and May. In this way, ERRC has in the last three months given ongoing legal support to 1,600 migrant Roma from four informal settlements in the communes of Saint-Denis, Aubervilliers and La Courneuve whom the ERRC has previously supported to successfully challenge evictions and imminent homelessness during the winter months. As a result of ERRC interventions and collaboration with local lawyers, these families have maintained their residence in past months. In the period until May, the ERRC and French lawyers also provided legal support to a group of 250 Romanian Roma living in a suburb in the north of Paris to avoid their fourth forced eviction since moving to the area on 1 March. Currently, legal proceedings in this case are pending in court. In parallel, the ERRC is working with the affected families to negotiate with local authorities to ensure schooling and basic services to the settlement.



A Romani settlement in La Courneuve, France, faces eviction proceedings, 15 April 2012.

PHOTO CREDIT: GREGOIRE COUSIN

Latest in the hundreds of actions to challenge expulsion orders, in the period the ERRC also worked with a group of 20 Romanian Roma facing deportation following the distribution of expulsion orders on 5 April in a small settlement in Noisy-le-Grand. According to the residents, the police arrived at 7:00 AM that day, checked all the residents and issued an expulsion order to

each adult. The police operation lasted about two hours. The ERRC provided legal advice to the families on the consequences of the decisions and has since supported 16 people to gather the necessary documentation and complete the forms to challenge the expulsion orders before the administrative tribunal. A French lawyer working with the ERRC subsequently filed appeals on behalf of

the families, whose deportation is suspended pending a decision of the court.

This work aims to protect families against deportation and promote integration processes, while at the same time challenge the practice of French authorities to expel Roma en masse, in violation of several international and regional laws, including the EU **Directive on Free Movement**.

ERRC LAUNCHES NEW EDUCATION ACTION IN MACEDONIA

From 15-18 May 2012, the ERRC and its Macedonian partner organisation **National Roma Centrum** completed the first stage of an action launched by the ERRC in Macedonia entitled, "No to Special Education for Roma". The action aims to address the over-representation of Romani children in special education in the country and to promote inclusive, quality education for Romani children. This first phase of this action included two types of activities:

- Two short training courses for Romani activists: one aimed at raising awareness of the over-representation of Roma children in special education schools and its consequences, and the second to equip young Romani activists with the knowledge and skills necessary for human rights campaigning and information gathering.
- A series of interviews to be used to create a video message for raising awareness and educating the general public about the over-representation of Romani children in special schools and the importance of inclusive education.

The two training courses included 54 Romani participants from all Macedonian cities that have a special education facility, with an emphasis on participants from cities in which initial research clearly showed over-representation of Romani



Romani activists come together to work on desegregating education and will go back to their communities to help Romani children access good quality education.

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

children in special education. The training courses employed informal education methodologies to offer both theoretical information, such as an introduction to advocacy and its elements, and more concrete guidance for setting up human

rights campaigns. Participants engaged in a series of practical exercises in which they developed their interview skills while filling in a targeted questionnaire and then ran a simulation on the complexity and nuances of the issue and addressing the positions of various stakeholders.



The ERRC aims to make progress on desegregated education in Macedonia by training and supporting Romani activists at the grassroots level.

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

The next phase of the action includes extensive human rights canvassing in Romani communities throughout Macedonia to raise awareness among Romani parents about the limitations posed by special education to their children's future and encourage them to seek the transfer of their children back into mainstream education. At the same time, the activists will conduct a survey among the parents of Romani children in special education to gather extensive information on the practice in Macedonia. This will be followed up with additional data-gathering by the ERRC from official sources, reporting and various forms of legal advocacy on this issue.

ERRC ACTIVE IN SLOVAKIA

On 11 May 2012, ERRC staff members and our local monitor conducted a field mission to Plavecký Štvrtok, Slovakia, to examine the situation of a local Romani community which is threatened with forced eviction because their houses, constructed informally, are located on allegedly active gas pipelines, and, as such, can be subject to demolition at any time. In fact, demolition orders were already served on the community once in 2010. These were later revoked due to the failure of the Municipality to comply with relevant procedures prior to demolition. At any time, the Municipality may resurrect its plan to demolish the settlement where about 540 local Roma live. Should this happen, the families will be left without any place to live.

The violations of the right to adequate housing facing this community include discrimination. Various homes inhabited by non-Roma are also situated on the pipeline in question. However, the Municipality has never questioned or acted against the legality of these. The ERRC is continuing to closely monitor the situation in Plavecký Štvrtok to prevent the eviction of the local Romani community and the demolition of their homes.

Early, in March 2012 the ERRC travelled to Prešov, Slovakia, to visit a Romani community affected by the construction of a gate to separate them from a non-Romani neighbourhood. The gates were constructed in 2010 by the local authority and are currently kept locked most of the time; only non-Romani individuals have

keys to unlock the gate. Local authorities have justified the gates as a safety mechanism in response to a dangerous hill separating the neighbourhoods, but there is no expert opinion to corroborate this assessment. The gates effectively preclude Romani individuals from entering the non-Romani neighbourhood and cause them considerable difficulties in their everyday lives, especially in autumn

municipal leaders to discuss the present situation and ways to resolve it. An agreement was reached whereby the Municipality would conduct a detailed assessment of the situation, taking into account all circumstances and negative consequences. The Municipality further agreed to provide the ERRC with the results in a timely manner. On 22 May 2012, the ERRC received an official response from



Slovakia: a Roma community is barred from entering the local neighbourhood by a locked gate.

PHOTO CREDIT: ERRC

and winter. Walking around the gates triples the distance they must travel to reach basic services including kindergartens and shops. After consulting the Romani community, ERRC staff met with

the Municipality; the requested expert opinion stated that the hill is not a public path so the municipality bears no responsibility. No further assessment supporting the Municipality's argument was provided.

ERRC HIGHLIGHTS VIOLENCE, FORCED EVICTIONS AND VIOLATIONS OF FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

The ERRC sent several letters of concern between 1 March and 31 May 2012, drawing attention to Roma rights violations at the national and international levels.

Most recently, on 18 May the ERRC sent a letter to Italian authorities regarding the threat of vigilante violence against Romani citizens in Pescara. The events in Pescara began after a murder on 1 May 2012 in which an Italian Romani man is the primary suspect. Following the murder, an unidentified individual threw two petrol bombs at the suspect's home. On 5 May the funeral of the murder victim became a focal point for anti-Roma sentiment with many of those who attended the funeral shouting verbal attacks against Roma, including death threats and calls to expel

the Roma from Pescara. The day after the funeral, thousands of people attended a demonstration against Roma, chanting slogans under a banner that read "Hunt Roma for Five Days". Local Romani individuals have been scared to leave their homes, visit local shops or send their children to school. The ERRC sent a letter in **English** and in **Italian**, calling on authorities to take all necessary measures to protect Romani citizens.

In Vaulx-en-Velin, Lyon, France, the ERRC responded on 4 March in support of a migrant Romani community faced with multiple forced evictions and racist violence. On 27 February, a group of Romani families, comprised of 130 individuals including 35 children, were evicted from a school

building after their previous accommodation was burned down in unexplained circumstances. According to local activists, authorities have repeatedly evicted these families. On 4 March, an unidentified attacker threw a Molotov cocktail at the location to which the community had relocated, destroying a car. The ERRC wrote to local and regional authorities, calling on them to provide safe and secure accommodation for the Romani community, who are at immediate risk. The letter, available in **English** and **French**, also asked the authorities to investigate the attacks adequately and prosecute those involved.

The Czech Republic has also been the scene of violent manifestations and anti-Romani sentiment in the last quarter.

On 1 March, the ERRC, together with **Amnesty International** and the Hate Is No Solution Coalition, sent a **letter** to Czech authorities urging them to act against anti-Roma violence in the Czech Republic. The organisations called on Czech authorities to prevent further attacks against Roma, protect Roma from violence and effectively prosecute all those who took part in the attacks. According to media reports, there have been 23 violent attacks against Roma resulting in three deaths in the last six months. Additionally, at least 16 anti-Roma rallies have taken place in the last year.

In April of this year, the ERRC focused its attention on discriminatory treatment of Romani individuals on European borders. Although citizens of many non-EU Balkan countries enjoy visa-free travel to the Schengen zone, some Romani individuals are prevented from exercising this right in discriminatory circumstances. For example, in March 2012 five Romani musicians travelling to Germany to play at a wedding were stopped at Macedonia's Tabanovce border. Although they

possessed all the requisite documentation, border guards did not allow them to leave the country. Moreover, the guards put marks in three of their passports, which may prevent them from travelling freely in the future. All of the musicians were denied the right to leave the country, a human right enshrined in many international standards, as well as in the Macedonian Constitution. In 2011, the ERRC documented 10 other cases in which Romani people were denied the right to exit Macedonia at border crossings to Bulgaria and Serbia. On 20 April the ERRC sent a **letter** to Macedonian authorities urging them to investigate and stop any official or informal measures that directly or indirectly discriminate against Roma crossing the border to travel outside of the country and review all proposed laws, policies and practices and ensure non-discrimination and compliance with international human rights standards.

Finally, 2012 saw a positive development for the Roma rights movement in the Czech Republic when the Government's

Human Rights Council adopted a decision on 17 February urging Czech authorities to introduce a compensation mechanism for victims of involuntary sterilisation. The decision proposes that women who were subjected to forced sterilisations between January 1972 and May 1991 be entitled to compensation. Women who were sterilised illegally after 1991 would also be entitled to compensation if they were unable to sue in civil court before the three-year statute of limitations expired. On 6 March, the ERRC, Group of Women Harmed by Forced Sterilization and **Life Together** sent a **letter** welcoming this decision. However, the NGOs emphasised that compensation should cover all victims of unlawful sterilisation in the Czech Republic, irrespective of their age, ethnicity, nationality or the particular period when they were sterilised. The ERRC and its partners first raised the issue of forced sterilisations of Romani women in 2003. Since then, the Czech Human Rights Council has discussed three motions on the issue. This is the first time it has made comprehensive and detailed recommendations to the Government.

ERRC PARTICIPATION IN INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS

In past months ERRC representatives participated in several important national and international events.

At the end of April, the ERRC attended the annual seminar of the **European Association for the Defense of Human Rights (AEDH)** on "**Roma People in Europe**", organised with the **Czech Helsinki Committee** in Brno, Czech Republic. In line with a recent study undertaken by the AEDH, the focus of the seminar was on violence and discrimination against Roma and the importance of allowing Roma to realise their rights and affirm their dignity. The ERRC participated in a panel on "Discrimination Against Roma" with representatives from **Open Republic Poland** and LPDH-Civitas Portugal. The ERRC highlighted the many forms of discrimination faced by Roma across Europe, including violence against Roma and impunity of many perpetrators, restrictions on freedom of movement and the marked increase in anti-Roma hate speech by extremist political groups. The ERRC also emphasised the continuing problem of systematic segregation in education despite numerous rulings by the **European Court of Human Rights**, widespread residential segregation and forced evictions. Finally, the ERRC explored some of the

impacts that such widespread discrimination causes, including, notably, the inordinately high number of Romani victims of **human trafficking** and the disproportionately high number of Romani children in **State care** across Europe.

Also in the Czech Republic, the ERRC took part in a meeting in Ostrava convened by Life Together and the Group of Women Harmed by Forced Sterilisation on 26 April. The NGOs met with the Czech Commissioner for Human Rights and representatives of the Czech Ombudsman's Office to discuss a motion currently under final ministerial review which sets out a compensation mechanism for victims of forced and coerced sterilisation. The ERRC expressed its support for establishing a compensation scheme without further delay, but noted concern about the intention to establish different measures for women sterilised under the Communist regime and women sterilised in the post-Communist period, urging that such distinctions be abandoned. The ERRC also expressed its concern over the inclusion of any requirement of additional proof from victims of this harmful practice. Overall, however, the ERRC welcomed the motion as a step in the right direction in addressing the human rights violations suffered by Romani women affected by coerced or forced sterilisations.

Earlier in April, the ERRC took part in a civil society meeting convened by the **OSCE** on "Monitoring and Reporting Hate Crimes, Racism and Intolerance" in Vienna. New measures to improve and centralise hate crime reporting were discussed as was the role of civil society in confronting intolerance. The ERRC contributed to the dialogue with examples drawn from the current context of anti-Gypsyism in Europe whereby anti-Roma hate speech is used by many politicians, extremist movements and media reporting on Roma. The ERRC noted that under-reporting of hate crimes by Roma is exacerbated by the lack of effective response from law enforcement agencies dealing with hate crimes, the low level of prosecutions, and inadequate sentencing for those found guilty. At the meeting, a set of recommendations for States was developed which included developing legislation on hate crimes, developing protocols on investigating hate crimes and collecting, publishing and analysing disaggregated data on hate crimes.

On 22 March 2012, the **Extraordinary European Platform on Roma Inclusion** was held in Brussels to discuss the ongoing implementation of national Roma integration strategies, with a focus on sustainable processes for Roma inclusion. The ERRC participated in the meeting

in which other organisations and representatives of Roma civil society met with EU Member State representatives and Members of the European Parliament for a forward-looking discussion of how integration strategies can be made efficient and sustainable. The ERRC submitted a fact sheet on the human rights perspectives of the **national strategies** submitted to the European Commission, which highlighted some of the shortcomings of the national strategies. Major shortcomings included weak or absent measures addressing racial or ethnic discrimination, a lack of references to relevant international human rights treaties and the **Charter of Fundamental Rights** of the European Union and failure to address hate speech and violence against Roma. Moreover, details regarding the financing of strategy implementation were missing from numerous strategies, while many

others included some plan for financing but lacked specific budget lines.

In addition to participating in the platform, the ERRC also took part in a civil society preparatory meeting the day before, organised by the **European Roma Policy Coalition** and the **Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat**. Discussion centred on the need for Roma civil society to be included in national policy-making processes, the failure of national strategies to effectively address anti-Gypsyism and the necessity of involving EU accession countries in the **EU Framework** process.

Finally, on 15-16 March, the ERRC spoke at a conference on **'Bringing the Charter to Life'**. The event, which took place in Copenhagen, was organised by the Danish EU Presidency and the **Fundamental Rights Agency** and

addressed the practical applications of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. Participants represented a broad spectrum of groups and organisations, encompassing the judiciary, academia, IGOs, NGOs and NHRIs. The ERRC spoke during a panel on the NGO perspective, pressing the point that it will be difficult for the Charter to gain the strength it should have in courts and as an advocacy tool as long as the European Commission does not take a firm stance on the legal enforcement of breaches of fundamental rights. The ERRC shared the opinion of participants from across the board that the Charter is to be welcomed, but that technical knowledge and general awareness must be improved amongst all stakeholders before it can hope to realise its potential as a potent and accessible human rights instrument.

TRIBUTE TO THOMAS HAMMARBERG

Thomas Hammarberg, a very prominent and passionate advocate for human rights generally and Roma rights in particular, recently stepped down from the post of Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe. The ERRC issued a statement on 3 April 2012 to express its warmest thanks to Mr Hammarberg. In recognition of his term in office and particularly his work highlighting rights violations against Roma, Mr Hammarberg received the 2012 **European Civil Rights Prize of the Sinti and Roma**. The award was presented to him during a ceremony at the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin on 3 April 2012. Mr Hammarberg announced his intention to donate the prize honorarium to the ERRC. Mr Hammarberg was a strong supporter of Roma rights throughout his six years as Commissioner. His term was marked by alarming levels of racism directed at

Roma throughout Europe, and he worked tirelessly to raise awareness and compel governments to act. He has been a close ally of civil society and has consistently stressed the need for a comprehensive



Thomas Hammarberg, former Commissioner for Human Rights at the Council of Europe.

PHOTO CREDIT: MTI

programme to improve the situation of human rights for Roma and Sinti in Europe,

a call recently echoed by the European Union's Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies.

"Thomas Hammarberg has been the most prominent voice in the Council of Europe on the situation of Roma," said ERRC Executive Director Dezideriu Gergely. "He has been a dedicated advocate for Roma rights and a very courageous figure in pushing Governments to protect the rights of all. It has been an honour to work with him on these issues, and we look forward to continuing our collaboration."

The Council of Europe recently published a comprehensive **report** prepared by Commissioner Hammarberg on the human rights situation of Roma and Travellers in 47 countries in Europe. The report is a legacy that will last far beyond his time in office.

ERRC EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ON ROMA RIGHTS

Between March and May 2012, the ERRC hosted seven study groups involving more than 200 people. Generally, these involved groups of students enrolled in university programmes in political science, law and humanities. The ERRC welcomed these groups for talks on the organisation's work as well as on Roma issues more generally. Discussion topics included a broad look at Roma rights in Europe and specific thematic topics like education, housing, freedom of movement and State violence against Roma. Others

focused on the situation of the Roma in a specific country.

The ERRC received groups from programmes based in Hungary including ELTE University, Roma English Language Program, **Roma Access Program** and the Nationalism MA Programme at **Central European University** as well as from **Colgate University** and the **University of Washington** from the United States. The organisation also hosted a group of fellows from **Pilnet**, the global network for public interest law.

In addition to wanting to learn about the daily work of an NGO, participants expressed considerable interest in the human rights-based approach of the ERRC, as well as in the challenges, results, and impacts of the ERRC's work. Students were also very curious about the advocacy work the ERRC carries out on the international level and its empowerment component aimed at Romani individuals, organisations, political parties and networks. These visits served as an opportunity for the ERRC to be challenged and to be exposed to a diversity of approaches from the academic sphere.

ERRC ADVOCACY TARGETS INTERNATIONAL BODIES

In the last period, the ERRC, in cooperation with domestic partners, submitted parallel reports concerning the Czech Republic and Ukraine to the Human Rights Council, within its Universal Periodic Review.

The **parallel report** on the Czech Republic, penned by the ERRC, Life Together and the Group of Women Harmed by Forced Sterilisation, was submitted in April and highlights some key human rights concerns facing Roma in the country. It focuses on the continuing segregation of Romani children in the Czech education system, the insufficient State response to cases of anti-Roma violence and the Government's continuing failure to adequately

address forced and coercive sterilisation of Romani women. The report also provided several recommendations for actions to be taken by the Czech Government.

In the same month, the ERRC and partner "Chiricli" submitted a **parallel report** on Ukraine, in which the organisations highlighted several issues relating to the current situation of the Roma minority in Ukraine. In particular, the report noted persistent problems with the lack of personal documents, segregation in schools or low-quality education, substandard housing and discrimination in access to employment. The parallel report also included a list of recommendations for the Ukrainian Government to ad-

dress these problems, including adopting an anti-discrimination law, passing efficient legislation on national minorities, tackling the lack of personal documents problem and providing for equal access to education and employment.

The UN Human Rights Council will review both the Czech Republic and Ukraine during its 14th session scheduled for 22 October to 5 November 2012.

The ERRC also recently submitted a series of reports on the human rights situation of Roma in **Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey** to the European Commission, as a part of its accession **progress reporting cycle**.

ERRC CONVENES HUMAN RIGHTS MONITOR MEETING IN BUDAPEST

On 8-9 March 2012, the ERRC met with its human rights monitors from the Czech Republic, France, Italy, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovakia in Budapest. The two-day meeting focused on the challenges faced in the field and lessons learned throughout 2011 as well as on identifying and sharing techniques and tools to help the monitors overcome some of the common issues they encountered in their work over the past year. The ERRC monitors shared their main achievements and identified best practices that could potentially be replicated in other ERRC focus countries. ERRC staff members also used this meeting with the monitors to discuss in-depth working plans for 2012. In addition to these six countries, the ERRC has also engaged a monitor in Ukraine and will soon be hiring monitors in Romania and Turkey.



ERRC country monitors come to Budapest to share learning and ideas from the field.

PHOTO CREDIT: MUSTAFA ASANOVSKI

ERRC WELCOMES NEW TEAM MEMBER



Andrea Čolak
Legal Consultant

In April 2012, Andrea Čolak joined the ERRC team as a legal consultant covering the Western Balkans. Andrea graduated with a degree in International Law from the Faculty of Law at the University of Belgrade. As an Open Society Institute fellow in 2004/05, she attended the undergraduate exchange programme at Slippery Rock University in Pennsylvania, USA. She has been working on Roma rights issues since 2007 and since 2009 served as Executive Director of Minority Rights Center (MRC), a Belgrade-based human and minority rights NGO.

During her work with MRC, she was involved in project management and in monitoring implementation of Roma-related policies and anti-discrimination legislation, particularly in relation to hate crimes, discrimination in education, health care and housing. She also has experience in representation before domestic courts and administrative bodies. She has authored and co-authored several publications on various human rights topics including hate crimes, Roma rights violations in Serbia and discrimination in education.

INTERN REFLECTIONS

Bidhata Poudel

My journey with ERRC meant a great deal to me both personally and for the development of my career. I belong to a singular community, a community that is marked by a special distinction. My community is the Dalit community, a community that is facing centuries of discrimination based on the arbitrary caste system of my native country Nepal. Before coming to the ERRC, I had little knowledge of Roma and was unaware of what this distinct population faced. I was completely unaware of their suffering, their unique issues and their human rights status in Europe. Through my work at the ERRC, I gained knowledge and an understanding of the Romani community. I was surprised that the issues, concerns and sufferings of this community, a community that is half-way around the world, are so similar to my own Dalit community in Nepal. I believe that the knowledge and experience I gained from working at the ERRC have helped me gain a new perspective. It has helped provide me with a renewed focus for my career goals and broadened my knowledge base, helping me to understand the universality of the plight of human suffering. My work here has helped me to move forward and has strengthened my resolve to work on the human rights issues of my still marginalised community.



One of the things I loved most about working for the ERRC was that it is all-inclusive; in one location, the organisation retains advocates, policy analysts, public relations specialists, attorneys, etc. Due to the distinct structure of the organisation, the ERRC possesses the unique ability to address every aspect of systemic problems plaguing the Roma community. Through its analysis of policies, advocacy for change and, when necessary, litigation to improve unjust conditions, the ERRC has proved its longevity as a leading non-profit organisation. I believe that a great deal of the ERRC's success is related to the organisation's ability to reinvent itself.

I feel that the ERRC's ability to balance direct services with larger public policy goals (i.e. campaigns against discrimination and inequality) will be essential to the organisation's advancement. The organisation made a very good impression on me. My time with the ERRC was short, but whatever I came across and whatever I did within that time had a meaningful influence on both my personal and professional career. I had a wonderful time at the ERRC and learned an incredible amount. Thank you for this great opportunity to engage in stimulating work and to meet all of you.

* * *



Clemens Kohl

I started my internship at the ERRC in March 2012 because I wanted to learn more about Roma rights issues and the situation of the Roma population in Europe nowadays. My work on the vast archive on the ERRC website exposed me to a lot of information about the continuing discrimination and racism against Roma by society as well as the fight of NGOs and the Roma themselves for equal education, adequate housing, health care and non-discriminatory employment.

My work provided me with an insight on how NGOs, and in particular the ERRC, work and how they tackle the problems Roma face in Europe. This really helped me to understand the human rights-based approach and the complexity and the interconnection of Roma rights issues. There is still a lot I have to learn, but my internship at the ERRC will serve as a solid base from which I am planning to continue to work.

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Ana Rozanova

I came to the ERRC as a Romani intern in December 2011 and stayed for six months until June 2012.

Prior to my internship I was very aware of the work the ERRC has been doing in the field of litigation, research and capacity building and I was eager to join the organisation to enhance my knowledge in the organisation's professional environment and through daily work with experienced staff.

My internship gave me a solid basis in doing research and tackling the day-to-day activities of a dynamic NGO working in the field of human rights. During my stay, I had the opportunity to attend many events and to meet important activists and stakeholders both within the ERRC and from other organisations and institutions around Europe and the US.

I was also very happy to get to know other young Romani activists and to build friendships and professional relationships, which will hopefully last beyond this internship into our future work in the field.

I am extremely grateful to the ERRC for giving me and other young Romani activists this opportunity. Please keep up the great work!



Ramon Flores

I started my internship at ERRC in March 2012, and I was here for three months. This is the first part of my internship, because I am going to extend it until August.

During my first three months, I have learned about many interesting topics related to human rights and how to link human rights with Roma rights. Before arriving here, these concepts were a bit abstract for me.

I think the internship is a very good opportunity to continue improving my understanding not only of human rights topics, but also of all the topics included in the projects of the ERRC.

As a future sociologist, I know that this kind of training will be very useful for me and for my future career. In my position at the ERRC, I had the opportunity to participate in different projects related to human rights and many ERRC activities.

I have been involved with projects on the meaning of citizenship for Romani youth, a human rights-based analysis of several national Roma integration strategies in different European countries and organising a small public talk on Roma youth.

I strongly believe that from now on, I will have a clear picture of the meaning of human rights and how to link them with Roma rights.

I think that this opportunity will really help me to develop better skills for my future profession as a Romani activist.



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Ana Martinovic

I started my internship at the ERRC in March 2012 and spent three months here.

The first time I visited the ERRC was in November 2010 as a masters student and member of the University of Belgrade, Faculty of Law Legal Clinic for Issues of Discrimination. We were given the precious opportunity to attend ERRC advocacy training. With no previous experience in how the NGO sector works, I left Budapest with the impression that civil society can make a significant impact on current social issues. That was one of the reasons I decided to begin my career in this sector and one of the reasons I applied for this internship.

Given that my personal approach to human rights issues is seen mostly through a litigation lens, I am more than satisfied with what I have managed to gain from this internship in terms of case-related work. The working environment is professional, and I think it is a valuable experience for a young person. Most of all, people are passionate and supportive when it comes to solving everyday issues.

I would strongly recommend that everyone apply and spend three (or more) amazing months with the ERRC.

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Carolina Prandelli

I started my internship at ERRC in February 2012 and was here for three months. This has been a thought-provoking and meaningful career-related experience. First of all, I had the opportunity to develop my understanding of the main problems Romani communities face all around Europe. Second, I gained very useful working and interpersonal skills and relevant information that will help me with future ideas for interventions on social inclusion.

I am also completely satisfied with the internship because I was involved with a dynamic and engaging working environment, and because I felt welcomed by the friendly atmosphere. Meeting people from different countries, collaborating with researchers and lawyers and sharing ideas with all the ERRC staff afforded me the opportunity to understand how a public interest law organisation works and builds networks.

The stereotypes, confusion and uncertainty that often surround the Roma issue, as in Italy, made my main goal here understanding how a public interest law organisation could contribute by spreading reliable, undeniable and little-known data, in addition to convincing and powerful evidence of gross violations, which are useful in destroying widespread *clichés*. By working on letters of concern and country reports as well as maintaining contacts with other organisations, I saw this expectation fully satisfied.

I will certainly take advantage of all the information concerning Roma rights and violations I gained while working for the ERRC, both when I work in the same or a similar field dealing with these issues or when I discuss the topic with people in my country more informally.

I have the feeling that the ERRC perfectly and positively takes advantage of the resources, ideas and motivations that interns and young activists can provide and treats them in a very professional way. I felt very comfortable working surrounded by this atmosphere.

