

ERRC LAUNCHES NEW AND IMPROVED WEBSITE

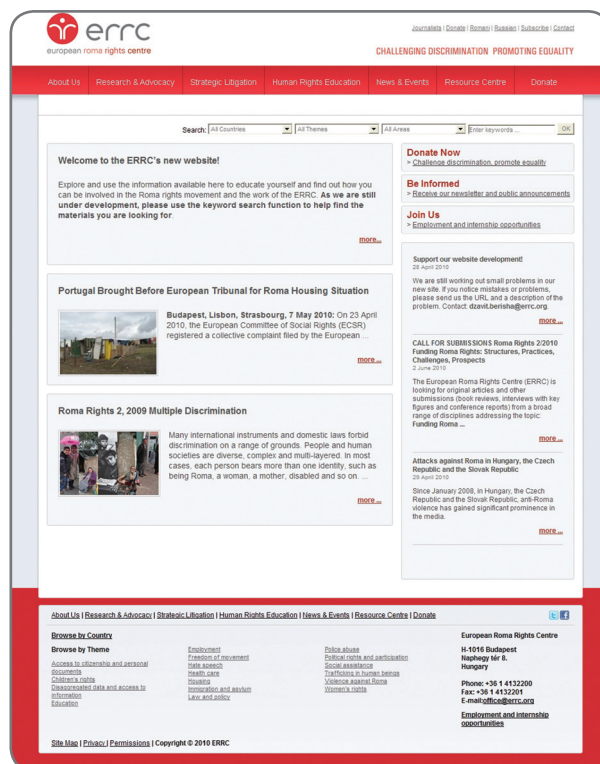
In April 2010, the ERRC launched its new website as the final component of the organisation's new institutional identity, which includes a logo, new publication formats and other institutional materials. The new website features several new sections and powerful search tools which enable readers and researchers to easily access the ERRC's vast Roma rights archive and browse the content based on theme or country selections.

Along with enhanced navigation and usability, the new website offers visitors access to a growing collection of resource materials, including research reports, advocacy submissions, legal texts, public announcements and project and event information. New sections include items such as the Resource Centre, which features basic facts for newcomers to the field and a section for journalists with timely information and resources. It is a crucial component of our communications strategy and our primary means

of disseminating materials about discrimination against Roma in Europe.

The ERRC encourages supporters and interested readers to visit the new website, explore the new features and provide their feedback. Input from users is particularly valuable during the transition process to identify any problems and ensure a fully functioning platform.

Supporters can also sign up for more information about our work on the website and learn how to follow us on Facebook and Twitter.



BULGARIAN GOVERNMENT AND NGOS DISCUSS DECISION IMPLEMENTATION AT ERRC WORKSHOP

On 4 March 2010, the ERRC, the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (BHC) and the Bulgarian Committee for the Protection against Discrimination hosted a workshop in Sofia to discuss implementation of three decisions by the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) in

complaints challenging Bulgaria's treatment of Roma in the areas of housing, health care and social assistance. During the workshop, participants examined the decisions, dating from 2006 to 2009, and the Bulgarian government's response, in three parallel sessions.



From centre-right: ERRC Managing Director Rob Kushen, Public Policy Advocacy Centre Director Rumyan Russinov and Bulgarian Helsinki Committee Chair Krassimir Kanev greet participants at the opening of the workshop.

PHOTO CREDIT: SINAN GÖKÇEN/ERRC

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

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Activists attending the workshop praised the efforts of the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to restore coverage of social assistance and health insurance for Roma and others, but insisted that more needed to be done to protect the rights of both Roma and all Bulgarian citizens in general. A law to end the arbitrary time limit on social benefits and health insurance imposed by the Government in 2006 will not take effect until 2011. To address this gap, Minister of Labour and Social Welfare Totyu Mladenov pledged to provide targeted social assistance within the framework of existing programmes. Participants also expressed disappointment with the lack of progress to address the deplorable housing situation of Roma, calling on the government to simplify the legalisation of informal settlements as a means to prevent eviction.

The workshop was attended by numerous government officials, including Minister Mladenov, representatives of the European Committee of Social Rights, and Romani and pro-Romani activists.

The ERRC and the BHC called on the Bulgarian government to undertake all the necessary measures, including law reform, to secure the country's full compliance with the European Social Charter.



The workshop was attended by numerous government officials, representatives of the European Committee of Social Rights, Romani and non-Romani human rights activists.

PHOTO CREDIT: SINAN GÖKÇEN/ERRC

ERRC AND REF CO-HOST EUROPEAN COMMISSION SEMINAR ON ROMA POLICY

On 1 March 2010, the ERRC and the Roma Education Fund (REF) organised a working seminar on behalf of the European Commission (EC) in Budapest, Hungary, at which the preliminary findings of the forthcoming EC study on "Activities to improve the impact of policies, programmes and projects aimed at the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU" were discussed. Present were experts from the European Commission, international organisations, national, regional and local level authorities, academics and Romani and non-Romani NGOs. The participants represented all 18 Member States involved in the study.

During the seminar, attendees provided input on the draft report, focusing on the main aspects of the study: favourable policy conditions, successful funding programmes and successful project models. The day was marked by lively



Panellists discussed the preliminary findings of the European Commission study entitled, "Activities to improve the impact of policies, programmes and projects aimed at the social inclusion and non-discrimination of Roma in the EU".

PHOTO CREDIT: SINAN GÖKÇEN/ERRC



Experts from the European Commission, international organisations, national, regional and local level authorities, academics and Romani and non-Romani NGOs attended the one day workshop.

PHOTO CREDIT: SINAN GÖKÇEN/ERRC

discussion among the stakeholders, reinforcing the importance of combating anti-Gypsyism as a means to promote Roma inclusion, and the responsibility of the Member States to ensure the equality of their citizens.

Following the seminar, the ERRC and REF worked to incorporate key messages from the seminar into the study, which is expected in print later this year.

ERRC MISSION TO TURKEY

At the end of March 2010, ERRC and the Edirne Roma Association (EDROM) conducted field research in Çorlu, Turkey. This is the first research targeting the approximately 12,000 member Çorlu Romani community. During the mission, the research team conducted interviews with various residents, the Mayor and the Governor of Çorlu, representatives of the Çorlu chamber of commerce, and health care and education professionals.

The research revealed discrimination against Roma in Çorlu, particularly in access to the labour market, with many Romani interviewees recounting negative experiences of being denied employment due to their residence in a known Romani neighbourhood. As a



Roma in Çorlu live in sub-standard housing and are largely unemployed.

PHOTO CREDIT: SINAN GÖKÇEN/ERRC

result of this discrimination combined with other factors, the unemployment rate among Roma in Çorlu is reportedly as high as 95%, and many members of this community live in poverty. This

research was the last phase of a field study on behalf of the EC led by the Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) together with the ERRC and EDROM. The results are expected in late 2010.

ERRC RENEWS LINKS IN RUSSIA

In the second half of February 2010, ERRC staff travelled to Russia to refresh contacts

and renew work in this vast country. During the mission, the ERRC met with representatives of Romani organisations, Roma rights activists, general human rights NGOs and practicing human rights lawyers in Moscow, Saint Petersburg and Rostov-on-Don.



ERRC lawyer Darya Alekseeva met with local Romani activists in Rostov-on-Don, Russia, in late February 2010. Romani representatives underlined the need to educate human rights lawyers about bringing cases to the European Court of Human Rights.

PHOTO CREDIT: ELENA KONSTANTINOVA

During the mission, NGOs stressed the need of educating human rights lawyers about bringing cases to the European Court of Human Rights, advocating for the adoption of anti-discrimination law and working directly with Romani communities. Romani NGO representatives focused on the lack of networking and cooperation between general human rights NGOs, Romani NGOs and governmental authorities in Russia.

Romani representatives stressed that the main problems of Roma in Russia today are the lack of personal documents, educational segregation and forced evictions. Police abuse was also listed as a fundamental problem, specifically in Volzskii, Volgograd region. The possibility of legally challenging instances of police abuse was discussed with a number of human rights lawyers. The ERRC also explored the possibility of pursuing legal actions on housing and education matters in partnership with local human rights lawyers and Romani NGOs.

ERRC AND PARTNERS LAUNCH NEW STUDY ON ROMA AND CHILD PROTECTION

In January 2010, the ERRC commenced implementation of a new study entitled, "Protecting the Rights of Romani Children in the Child Protection System in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Italy, Romania and Slovakia", supported with a European Commission grant. The ERRC has already developed methodologies for the legal review, policy review and field research. Additionally, the ERRC has convened two

meetings in Budapest with ERRC research consultants from the Czech Republic and Romania and our international project partners: the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the Milan Simecka Foundation (Slovakia), and osservAzione (Italy).

The study expands earlier ERRC research on this issue conducted in Hungary which revealed significant

over-representation of Romani children in state care. This study aims to both expand this research to five other EU countries and update the data on Hungary. At present, researchers are mapping the legal and policy frameworks of the target countries and field work is about to start. A regional report of the research findings is expected to be published in June 2011.

ERRC TRAINS YOUNG ROMANI RESEARCHERS ON HOUSING RIGHTS DOCUMENTATION

Between 19 April and 11 May, the ERRC conducted in-field training and monitoring missions to Romania, Montenegro and Slovakia in pursuance of a project to teach young Romani grassroots researchers how to document housing rights violations.

The project, "Empowerment of Roma to Fight Rights Deprivation", is supported by the United Nations Democracy Fund and covers Albania, Slovakia, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia. Since June 2009, the ERRC has been working with grassroots Romani activists to document the housing rights situation of Roma in the target countries and to develop their research capacities. The ERRC will publish a regional report profiling results of the young researchers later in 2010.

In Romania, joint research was conducted from 19-23 April 2010 in Cluj Napoca, where the local authority is exploring the relocation of some parts of the Pata Rat Romani community. The ERRC research team interviewed various members of this

community, academics and the Deputy Mayor of Cluj Napoca, Mr Radu Moisin. Roma residing in the notorious Pata Rat settlement, located on a garbage dump, reported that they had little information about the local authority's plans. They are not willing to move unless the municipality offers them appropriate housing. Conditions throughout the settlement are substandard; Pata Rat lacks basic infrastructure and the houses are made of wood, plastic, recycled cardboard and other materials collected from the garbage.

In Montenegro, joint research was carried out in Podgorica, Ulcinj and Budva from 26-30 April. Substandard conditions prevail in the Romani settlements visited, with little prospect for improvement because of the lack of registration and ownership of the housing. During the mission, the ERRC team also encountered cases in which Roma were refused rental accommodation with open acknowledgment that the houses were not available to Roma on account of their ethnicity.

In Slovakia, joint research was conducted in Michalovce, Letanovce and Kosice's Lunik IX and Demeter districts from 6-11 May. Spatial segregation is a defining characteristic of many Romani communities in Slovakia. Lunik IX is a highly overcrowded Roma-only ghetto. The research team encountered situations with 30 people living in one flat. Electricity and water are cut off or infrequently available for many residents. Demeter houses Roma living in informal shacks and social flats. None of the shacks have legal electricity provision or running water, and the residents of one block of social flats face eviction for unpaid water bills despite the fact that they have never received warm water though its provision is stipulated in their contracts. The settlement in Letanovce is a partially legalised assortment of shacks lacking all public utilities. Residents were offered newly constructed housing in a block of flats for Roma, but construction has been delayed and no one has moved.

ERRC BRINGS UKRAINE BEFORE THE EUROPEAN COURT IN MOB VIOLENCE CASE

On 1 April 2010, the ERRC filed a case against Ukraine on behalf of 19 Romani applicants with the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). The case concerns denial of justice for the members of 18 Romani families expelled in September 2002 from the village of Petrivka in the Odessa oblast by a mob of angry ethnic Ukrainians after a 17-year-old ethnic Ukrainian boy was beaten to death, allegedly by several Romani men. Following the incident, the village council passed a resolution to evict all Roma from Petrivka. On the night of 9 September 2002, a mob of several hundred people attacked the Romani families, setting their houses on fire and destroying their belongings and

personal documents. Ukrainian authorities did not take any actions to prevent the attack or to protect the Roma and their houses even though they were informed about the planned attack before it began. As a result of this violence, the village's whole Romani population, 18 families (57 persons) in total, was forced to abandon their homes and live in substandard conditions without proper documents in the nearby Berezivka settlement.

The ensuing police investigation has been ongoing for 8 years and brought no resolution. No one was prosecuted or punished, the affected Romani families have not received any kind of compensation for the

damage to them and their property and they continue to live in substandard conditions, having been unable to return to Petrivka. In its ECtHR submission, the ERRC claimed the violation of a number of articles of the European Convention of Human Rights: the right to private life, right to property, failure to provide access to justice, inhuman and degrading treatment and the right to be protected against illegal discrimination. With this case, the ECtHR has the opportunity to address the issue of unlawful evictions and mob violence in Ukraine and the wholly inadequate reaction of government and law enforcement authorities in Ukraine to crimes against Roma and to further clarify its stance on equality.

ERRC DISCUSSES ROMA HOUSING IN BARCELONA

On 6 May 2010, the ERRC participated in a conference entitled, "Housing Rights: from Theory to Practice", organised by FEANTSA and partners in Barcelona, Spain, which explored the theoretical background of housing rights at the international, national and regional levels. The conference provided a forum to share experience on the practical implementation of housing rights and brought

together current and potential members of the **Housing Rights Watch network**.

At the conference, the ERRC delivered a presentation on the housing rights situation of Roma across Europe, highlighting common types of abuse (such as grossly inadequate standards of housing, hazardous living conditions, segregated settlements and evictions)

and discussing examples of strategic litigation pursued by the ERRC addressing discrimination against Roma in access to housing. The ERRC emphasised its readiness to support housing rights cases for Roma, to exchange knowledge with other members of the network and to inform the network about important developments related to the housing rights of Roma in Europe.

The Housing Rights Watch network is an interdisciplinary network of European associations, lawyers and academics from different countries set up by FEANTSA in 2008. This network shares

information on legislative and judicial initiatives, supports judicial proceedings at local, national and international levels, monitors and intervenes in the systemic denial of housing rights and

monitors the development of the housing situation from a rights-based perspective to support change in public policies for the better realisation of the right to housing.

ERRC LODGES COLLECTIVE COMPLAINT ON HOUSING AGAINST PORTUGAL

On 23 April 2010, the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) registered a **collective complaint** filed by the ERRC against Portugal concerning

the housing situation of Roma in the country. On the basis of field research, documentation and continuous monitoring in Portugal over the last five years,

the ERRC submitted that Portugal has failed to meet its human rights obligations under the Revised European Social Charter (RESC).



Based on field research conducted in Romani settlements in Portugal, the ERRC submitted that Portugal has failed to meet its human rights obligations under the Revised European Social Charter.

PHOTO CREDIT: IDAVER MEMEDOV/ERRC

The collective complaint addresses widespread housing-related injustices in Portugal, including problems of inadequate policy which fails to address the precarious housing situation of Roma, problems in access to social housing, substandard quality of housing, lack of access to basic utilities, residential segregation of Romani communities and other systemic violations of the right to housing. These problems are compounded by a lack of practical access to effective legal remedies for redress. The ERRC asserts that the sum of housing-related injustices in Portugal constitutes a violation of Articles 16 (the right of the family to social, legal and economic protection) and 31 (right to housing) of the RESC. Furthermore, the living conditions of Roma in Portugal demonstrate their social exclusion, in violation of Article 30 (right to protection against poverty and social exclusion). Each of these violations may be read alone or in conjunction with Article E (non-discrimination) of the RESC.

EDUCATION IS PRIORITISED IN SLOVAKIA AND CZECH REPUBLIC

Impeded access to quality education for Romani children is one of the fundamental problems of Romani communities in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. In April and May 2010, the ERRC participated in several meetings in Bratislava and Prague to discuss strategic responses to this issue.

D.H. FOLLOW-UP IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

On 9 April 2010, the ERRC participated in a meeting of the Czech NGO coalition "Together to School" to discuss the results of the **report** by Czech School Inspection (CSI), a government body monitoring the school system in Czech Republic operating under the Czech Ministry of Education. The report reflects the findings of a CSI investigation and evaluates the impact of the Czech School Act on the education of pupils in the former special schools (practical schools). The report criticises the

failure of the Czech school system to address discrimination against Romani children. "Together to School" is the strongest NGO initiative combating the educational discrimination that Romani pupils encounter. The CSI cooperated with the Coalition in developing its thematic study.

On 30 May 2010, representatives of Czech and international NGOs, including the ERRC and the Open Society Justice Initiative (OSJI), met the Czech Ministry of Education to discuss measures taken by the Ministry to implement the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgment D.H. and Others v the Czech Republic, which confirmed the existence of discrimination against Romani pupils in Czech schools by channelling them into practical schools for children with mental disabilities. The Ministry presented its National Action Plan for Inclusive Education, legislative

changes and other minor programmes that the Ministry is currently developing to support the inclusion of Romani children in the mainstream education system. NGO representatives expressed their appreciation of measures promoting inclusive education, but raised concerns that they do not directly address the discrimination criticised by the Strasbourg court. The ERRC also participated in a meeting convened by OSJI to explore methods of mobilising Romani parents to combat the segregation of Romani children in practical schools.

SLOVAK NGO COALITION: FOR EQUALITY IN EDUCATION

The ERRC provided input on a joint submission prepared by the Slovak NGO coalition "For Equality in Education" under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities to express concern

about the Slovak Prime Minister's proposal that Romani children be taught in boarding schools as the only effective way to address low educational levels in excluded Romani communities.

The joint submission was developed at a round table meeting organised by the

coalition in Bratislava on 26 May 2010, attended by the ERRC. The Slovak NGO coalition was established to pressure the Slovak government to implement inclusive education measures, introduce quality education for all children and address discrimination against Romani children in the Slovak education system

Earlier, on 10 March 2010, the ERRC issued a **letter of concern** addressed to Prime Minister Robert Fico, calling on the Slovak government to adopt measures to integrate Romani children into mainstream education.

ERRC PARTICIPATES IN FORGOTTEN VICTIMS CONFERENCE IN PRAGUE

On 22-23 April 2010, the ERRC participated in an international conference on hate crimes, hate violence and victim assistance in the Czech Republic, delivering two presentations. In its first contribution, the ERRC presented its work monitoring the law enforcement response to recent attacks targeting Roma in Hungary. ERRC representative Stan-

islav Daniel also discussed his personal experience in dealing with the police as a victim of violence. The conference was well attended by organisations working with hate violence and hate crime victims, including the police, Ministry of Interior and other key actors in the protection of individuals from hate crimes. During the two-day conference, several activists

contributed to the discussions with their own experience in dealing with authorities and pointed at failures of a system that does not provide adequate protection. The conference was designed to initiate discussion about the political, legal and socio-cultural changes needed to more effectively address and eventually eliminate hate crime and hate violence.

NEW ERRC STAFF MEMBER



Anca Sandescu is the ERRC Human Rights Trainer. She is from Romania and holds an LLM in International and European Law from the University of Amsterdam and an MA in Human Rights from Central European University, Budapest. Her interests are human rights in Europe, non-discrimination, minority rights, gender and peace education. She worked for several Central and Eastern Europe organisations such as the Romanian Peace Institute (PATRIR), the former Soros Foundation in Romania, the Ethno-Cultural Diversity Resource Centre (EDRC), the Human Rights Initiative (HRSI) in Hungary and the United Network of Young Peace Builders (UNOY) in the Netherlands. As Human Rights Trainer, she is responsible for capacity building courses on a variety of human rights topics and for Romani internships.