

ANNUAL REPORT

20
23



ERRC

EUROPEAN ROMA RIGHTS CENTRE



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A MESSAGE FROM OUR MANAGEMENT

Amidst a world beset by ongoing conflicts in Europe, Africa, and Asia; shrinking civil space for activists at a global scale; and the looming far-right capture of democracies in the Global North – the rights of Romani people, Europe's largest and most marginalised ethnic minority group, were often neglected or relegated entirely from public and policy narratives in 2023. Despite an increasingly hostile environment for human rights activists in Europe, the European Roma Rights Centre has advanced rights-based gains in a number of key areas for Romani communities in Europe.

Between [bringing about changes](#) in laws to prevent statelessness, ensuring compensation for forcibly sterilised Romani women in the Czech Republic, scoring landmark decisions against [racist border profiling in North Macedonia](#), uncovering widespread anti-Roma discrimination at every stage of the [criminal legal systems](#) of Europe, and ensuring basic water and electricity for thousands of Roma across the Western Balkans; **2023 was in many ways a landmark year**. At the same time, we must remain cautious considering the existential threat a resurgent far-right pose to Roma and other racialised minorities.

One year after the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine, and amidst denials of discrimination from public authorities, the ERRC published the first and only human rights focussed [report](#) confirming widespread discrimination against Ukrainian Romani refugees in Europe. Further [ERRC reporting](#) uncovered the scandal of Romani children being amongst the thousands who were forcibly abducted from state institutions by Russian forces and sent to re-education and adoption centres in Russia. The ERRC also continued to facilitate legal support to Romani communities at risk of statelessness so they could obtain documentation essential to accessing aid or leaving the country.

While police brutality remained a systemic issue that governments and EU Institutions were unwilling to tackle, key ERRC cases in 2023 kept the issue alive on political agendas. Our commitment to following cases like the death of [Stanislav Tomáš](#) to the European Court has brought **visibility to racist policing across the continent**. In addition, our advocacy work has directly resulted in a [condemnation](#) from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe against racist police brutality - building pressure on EU institutions to do the same going into the new EU term in 2024.

The ERRC's long standing commitment to ending the segregation of Romani children in schools has resulted in **significant advances in several countries** in 2023. Our litigation before the European Court of Human Rights mandated governments to develop further, and more detailed, desegregation plans in several countries including the Czech Republic, Hungary, Albania, and North Macedonia. In addition, actions before domestic courts have resulted in amendments to education legislation in North Macedonia, while complaints to National Equality Bodies have brought about disciplinary actions, training, and wider awareness on multiple cases of racialised bullying in Serbia, as well as revisions to textbooks in Bosnia and Herzegovina to include Romani history.





In 2023, the ERRC made strong and cross-cutting commitments to supporting and defending LGBTQI+ rights within Romani communities. This included hosting our first ever event dedicated entirely to discrimination at the intersection of Romani ethnicity and sexual and gender identity, as well as hiring a dedicated LGBTQI+ Human Rights Monitor who is herself a Transgender Romani activist. The impact on the Roma Movement is profound as it gives LGBTQI+ Romani individuals a visible activist presence with a rights-based focus and provides a necessary **disruption to patriarchal and conservative norms** within elements of the movement and our society.

On an organisational level, the ERRC secured new donors in 2023 and negotiated continuing, multi-year support for its work in defending the fundamental rights of Roma in Europe. Crucially, this support includes funding for litigation which, despite many donors being hesitant to contribute to, is **absolutely essential for a robust defence of human rights**. As we contemplate Europe's fascist renaissance and its increasingly hostile environment to Roma Rights, support for human rights legal action is of more profound import than for many a decade. Now more than ever, we must step up our fight against antigypsyism in Europe's courtrooms, parliaments, newspapers, and streets.

WHAT DOES ■ THE ERRC DO?



We take racists to court

We take litigation cases across Europe with the aim of exposing and eliminating discriminatory structures that violate Romani people's human rights.

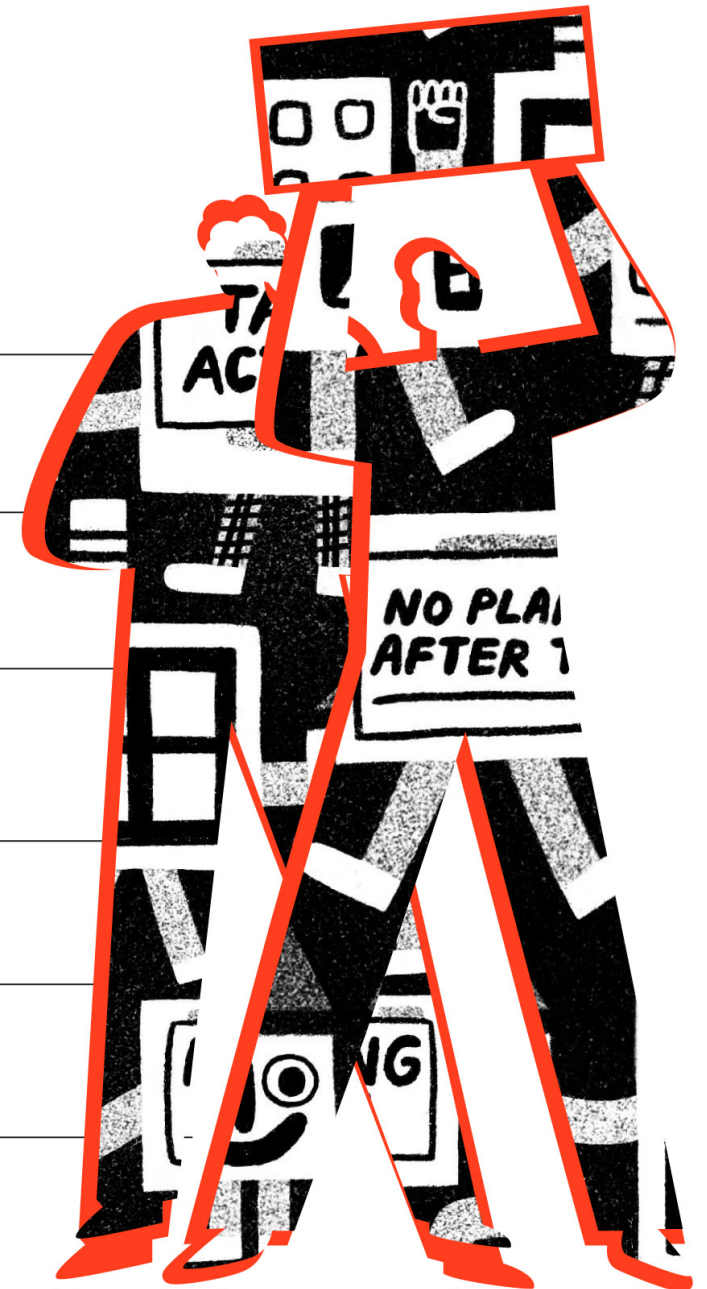
We ensure that human rights issues concerning Roma are firmly on the political agenda at the national and international level.

Our strategic litigation and advocacy and communications teams work together to identify, address, and communicate the issues that Europe's largest ethnic minority face.

2023

IN NUMBERS

- **165** cases pending before domestic & international courts
- **19** countries across Europe
- **10** new cases before European decision making bodies
- **8** research reports
- **90** volunteers across 6 countries
- **1** Roma Rights Summer School



WHERE WE WORK

	HUMAN RIGHTS MONITOR	LEGAL CONSULTANT	VOLUNTEER GROUP
Albania	█	█	█
Bosnia & Herzegovina	█	█	█
Bulgaria	█	█	█
Czech Republic	█	█	█
Hungary	█	█	█
Italy	█	█	█
Kosovo	█	█	█
Moldova	█	█	█
Montenegro	█	█	█
North Macedonia	█	█	█
Romania	█	█	█
Serbia	█	█	█
Slovakia	█	█	█
Turkey	█	█	█
Ukraine	█	█	█



WE'RE HERE WE'RE QUEER GET USED TO IT

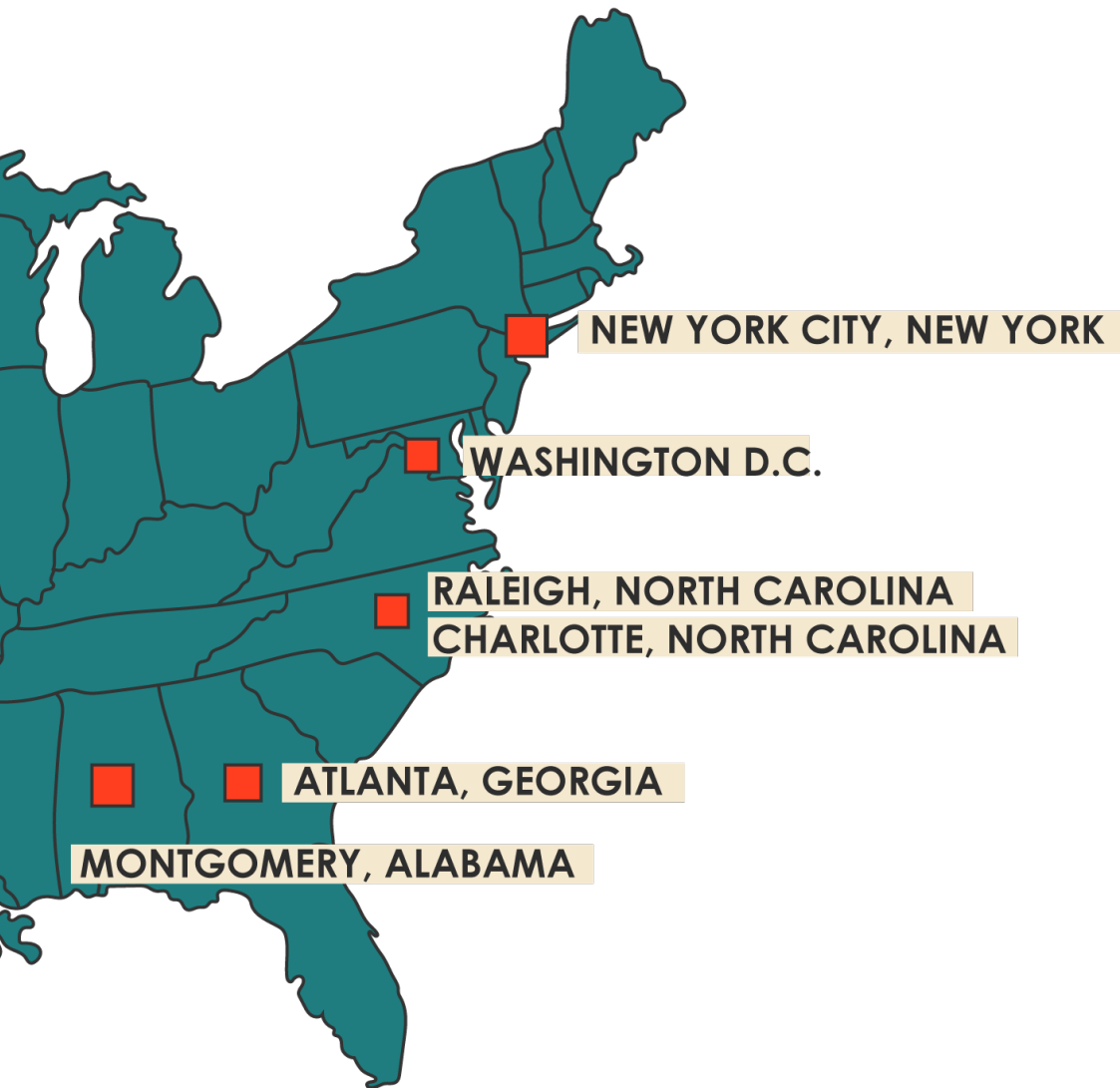
In 2023 we held the ERRC's **first ever** gathering of Romani LGBTIQ+ activists.

The two-day event was held in Chueca, Madrid's lively and inclusive gay neighbourhood, and focussed on rights violations of LGBTIQ+ Roma in the Balkans, intersectionality, and pride in this overlooked community.

The event served as an announcement of the ERRC's intent to work proactively in support of Romani LGBTIQ+ rights in Europe, to promote diversity and unity, and to commit to LGBTIQ+ Roma as an integral part of the Roma Rights movement.



FROM NEW YORK TO ALABAMA



In 2023 an ERRRC team undertook a learning trip to the United States as part of our project focussing on Roma in the criminal legal system. We met with human rights organisations in 4 states - from New York City down to Montgomery, Alabama - to learn and exchange experiences.

The focus of the trip was racialised injustices in the criminal legal system and wider debates regarding police brutality, institutional discrimination, and access to justice for racialised minority communities.

US based human rights organisations have long-standing experience in addressing these issues through innovative means, and so this trip was invaluable in showing us new ways of fighting for Roma Rights.

STRATEGIC LITIGATION



The ERRC uses litigation as a fundamental tool to ensure the rights of Romani people across Europe are being respected. Our strategic litigation team is led by our Legal Directors; two female Romani lawyers who are pushing our litigation to reflect the intersectional lived experiences of Romani people and ensuring that Romani people themselves can lead the fight against antigypsyism.

We are active on the domestic and international level, working wherever and however we can to make sure Romani people are being heard; we provide legal representation, intervene in cases, and take cases in our name or that of Romani litigants.

When domestic courts don't provide justice we take it further, bringing cases to the European Court of Human Rights.

In 2023 the ERRC supported 51 new cases in total and had 165 cases pending before decision making bodies.

51 NEW CASES CHALLENGING 7 HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUE AREAS



WE HAD SOME KEY VICTORIES

Over ten years on, the Košice Regional Court ruled in favour of nine Romani plaintiffs who were forcibly evicted from their homes in the district of Nižné Kapustníky, Košice in 2012.

They were evicted under the pretext of waste removal by the city authorities and their homes were demolished. As they were offered no alternative accommodation, they were left homeless.

The Court upheld the previous judgment of the District Court Košice II, that authorities had **discriminated against the community** on the basis of their ethnicity and that they violated the plaintiffs' human dignity and right to private life.

The Košice Regional Court upheld the first instance decision, stating that the actions of the city of Košice “reduced their [the plaintiffs] self-worth, accentuated their feelings of inferiority and helplessness as human beings and citizens”. The plaintiffs were awarded a total of €9,000 in compensation.



KHEROVNIPE
ENVIRONMENT

Forced Eviction in Nižné
Kapustníky, Slovakia
Final Judgment: September 2023



SHINGALE POLICE

Following an investigation by the Slovak Public Defender of Rights, police officers who executed a brutal intervention in 2019 against several members of a Romani family when they raided the municipality of Milhost' in eastern Slovakia were deemed to have **violated their fundamental rights**.

According to [the findings of the Ombudsman](#), the behaviour of the police was disproportionate and constitutes humiliating treatment, violating the European Convention on Human Rights. The Public Defender of Rights also wrote to the director of the Regional Police Directorate in Košice with the recommendation that the officers be disciplined and trained in human rights restrictions with regard to the use of force.

**Police Brutality in Milhost', Slovakia
Positive Judgment: 1 June 2023**

After his efforts to be admitted to a non-segregated school failed, a Romani man complained to the ECtHR that he was enrolled in a segregated primary school. The [court found violation](#) of Article 14 of the Convention taken in conjunction with Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 to the Convention and the applicant was awarded €7,000 for non-pecuniary damage.

This is a **unique case** where the court invoked article 46 as a general obligation for Hungary to develop a national desegregation plan.

**Szolcsan v. Hungary
Judgment: 30 March 2023**



SICLJOVIPE EDUCATION

BUT SOMETIMES THE COURTS STILL FAIL TO BRING JUSTICE

This case concerned the forced eviction of over 300 Roma from Coastei Street, in the heart of Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The families were evicted in 2010 just a week before Christmas in freezing temperatures, without proper notice, and then taken from their city. Some of the families were given poor quality accommodation on the site of the city rubbish dump while others were given nothing and instructed to build something themselves on the same site.

In September 2023 a single judge declared the application inadmissible.

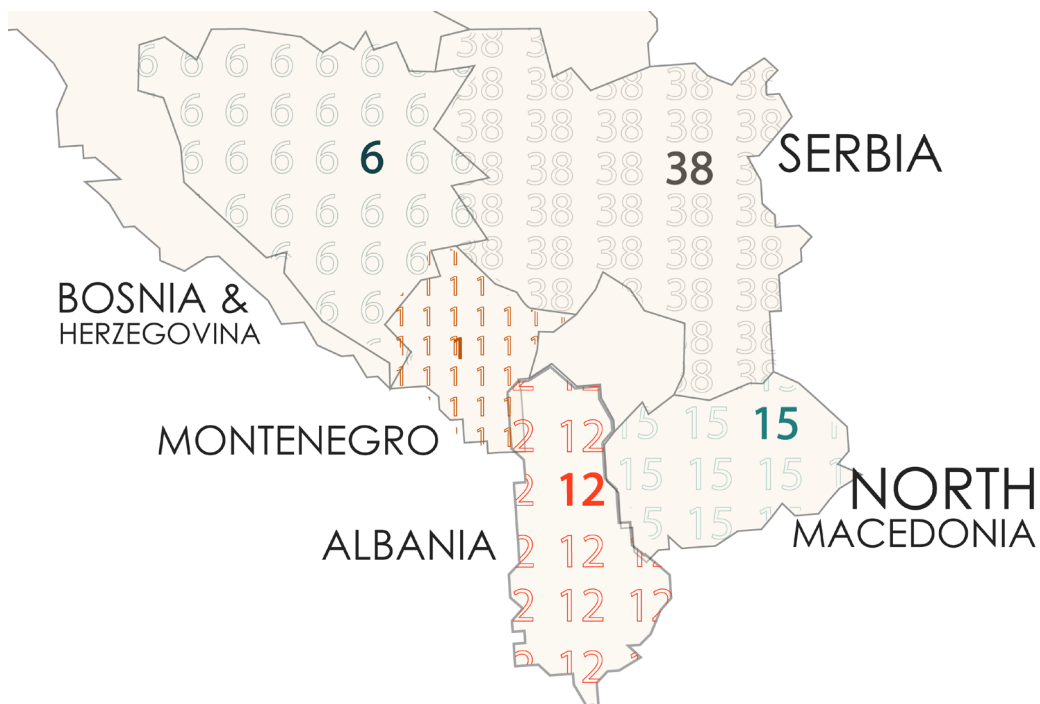
**Kovacs and Others v. Romania
(European Court of Human Rights)**

**Kovacova and Others v. Slovakia
(European Court of Human Rights)**

This application concerned coercive measures taken against three Romani women by the police on 16 April 2017 during an intervention in a Romani community in Zborov, Slovakia. The incident was filmed.

Unfortunately the court declared the case inadmissible, stating that the examination of the complaint of the applicants revealed no issue of ill-treatment, lack of an effective investigation or discrimination. The judgment stated that the recording available does not depict the police intervention in its entirety and shows no restrictive measures having been taken in respect of the applicants. The applicants did not report any ill-treatment and there is no medical evidence of any injuries. As there is no appearance of any ill-treatment in relation to these applicants, there is no question of discrimination being the reason for it.

GRASSROOTS LEGAL MOBILISATION



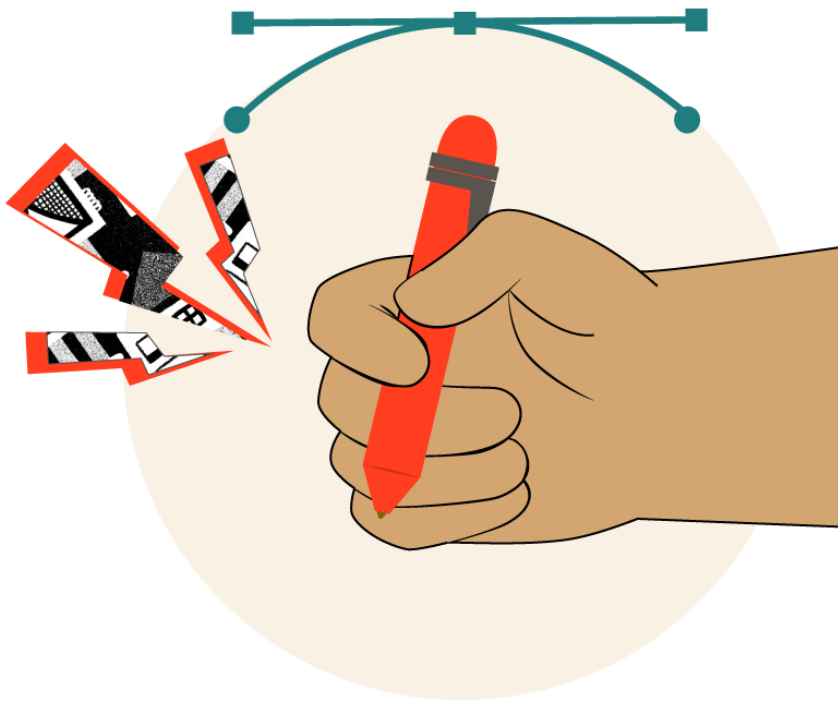
In 2023 we continued to work at the grassroots, supporting Romani communities in the Western Balkans as part of our **Community Legal Project**. The aim is to flood decision-making institutions, such as courts and equality bodies, with legal complaints to make the issues impossible to ignore.

This large-scale legal activism exposes patterns of discrimination, revealing overarching inequality. Our approach uses mechanisms that are free or cheap and usually don't need a lawyer. This places legal advocacy into the hands of Romani communities and allows them to fight for their rights themselves on issues that really matter to them.

Complaints covered issues from helping Romani people access identity documents, to having racist graffiti removed, to organising after-school initiatives to bridge education gaps experienced by Romani children.

In 2023, we submitted 72 new Community Legal Actions to relevant bodies. Of those, 46 remain active while 26 have been concluded. 2023 was also the year we won our first successful actio popularis (collective complaint) case in Serbia, related to children in state care.

ADVOCACY & COMMUNICATIONS



Our Advocacy and Communications team works alongside our legal team, bringing the issues of racism and inequality against Romani people to the European and international agenda, and holding those in power accountable for their discriminatory actions.

Through direct advocacy, media outreach, advocacy submissions, documentary video-making, and research we ensure that our Roma Rights message reaches as far as possible.

We are also committed to supporting the next generation of Roma Rights Defenders. Our Roma Rights Summer School and Volunteer Programme provide young Romani activists with a space to learn, come together, and grow.

We **broke the news** that Romani children were among the thousands of children abducted by Russia from children's state care facilities in Ukraine during the war against Ukraine. Our researchers, our monitor in Ukraine, and our volunteers were able to confirm the facts on the ground. The inclusion of Romani children among those that were abducted was mostly overlooked, but the ERRC's coverage ensured a record of this and other war crimes.



The Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly passed a motion condemning racist police brutality which was **directly the result of the ERRC's intervention**, and which included and endorsed the ERRC's findings and recommendations in this area. Such a strong statement from an elected European body will go a long way in supporting our continued advocacy efforts on police brutality at an international level.

OUR WORK HAD A REAL IMPACT

We briefed the Commissioner for Human Rights prior to her 5 day visit to the Czech Republic to **ensure talks with the government** included the topics of Romani refugees from Ukraine, the inadequate compensation mechanism for Romani victims of sterilisation, and the lack of action on the segregation of Romani children from mainstream education.

IN 2023 WE REACHED 905,595 PEOPLE ACROSS DIFFERENT SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS



23,658 FOLLOWERS

660,779 REACH



↑ 5.9% increase in reach

80% of content was ERRC produced



6,061 FOLLOWERS

39,779 REACH

Largest audience among Roma Rights accounts

↑ 51% increase in posts



6,424 FOLLOWERS

373,200 REACH

Engagement rate is 3.0% which is higher than the median rate

RESEARCH & PUBLICATIONS

In 2023 we released 8 research reports, exposing discrimination across Europe's criminal legal systems, state care systems, online spaces, and the continuing war in Ukraine.

ERRC research is invaluable and contributes to awareness-raising, policy developments, and strategic litigation. Our monitors and researchers collect reliable, necessary data on the human rights situation of Roma across Europe supporting ERRC advocacy campaigns and litigation.

In addition, our Advocacy & Policy Manager and Advocacy & Communications Director authored two publications with outside organisations; [*Unnatural Disaster: Environmental Racism and Europe's Roma*](#) for Civil Rights Defenders and the OSCE's latest practical guide on [*Understanding Anti-Roma Hate Crime*](#) respectively.

BREAKING NEWS

The ERRC is a trusted source for news about Roma Rights issues. Our in-country monitors update us with unfolding stories of Roma right violations. In 2023 we published **22 [press releases](#)** and **46 [news posts](#)** related to topical news and our ongoing work.

We also run a volunteer programme, the ERRC Newsroom, to support Roma-created content. We provide young Romani writers with editorial support and a platform to publish articles on issues that matter to them, and us.





ROMA RIGHTS DEFENDERS

The ERRC's volunteer program brings together young activists in the fight against antigypsyism.

In 2023 we had **90** volunteers working in **6** countries:

ALBANIA
BULGARIA
CZ REPUBLIC

ROMANIA
SERBIA
SLOVAKIA

Our Roma Rights Defenders have been involved in our Challenging Digital Antigypsyism project, aimed at identifying and addressing online hate speech against Roma on social media platforms.

What they have encountered on social media has led our volunteers to decide that it's not enough to be **not racist**, you have to be **anti-racist** to challenge hate speech and make a real difference.

They have gone above and beyond just finding and reporting hate speech; they have also sent complaints to public broadcast regulators, written to news editors to advise on positive media representation, and engaged in human rights education for their communities on online hate speech.

The hate speech they have identified online has even been **used as evidence in litigation**, leading to criminal charges being brought in some cases.

ROMA RIGHTS SUMMER SCHOOL CLASS OF 2023

WHERE: Tirana, Albania - organised by the ERRC, hosted by the ERRC's Albanian volunteer group Pandezohu

WHEN: 10 day residential summer event

WHO: Young Romani participants from 9 countries

WHY: To learn about advocacy, litigation, Roma Rights history, and tackling the challenges of modern antigypsyism

HOW: ERRC staff and experts designed and led practical sessions

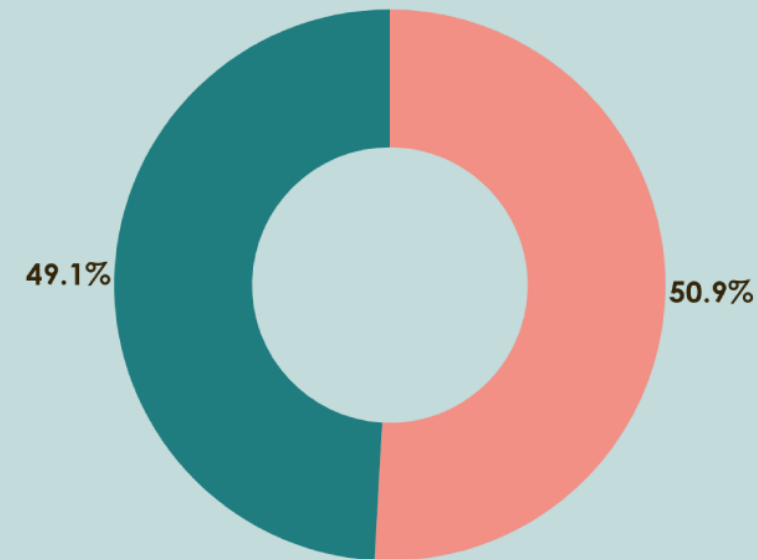


OUR FINANCES

The ERRC receives funding from **private foundations, individual donors, and governmental and nongovernmental agencies including the European Union**. The Swedish International Development Agency is a long-standing core funding supporter of the ERRC.

Total income in 2023:

€2,156,315.52



■ Project-based funding
■ Core funding

