

French Jews look to emigrate amid rising anti-Semitism

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*(The Christian Science Monitor)* On a gloomy winter's afternoon, a group of mothers chatted as they waited outside a primary school for their children to emerge. But it was not a typical Parisian scene: soldiers armed with automatic weapons patrolled the surroundings.

"I'm scared," said Vanessa Ganum, who came to pick up her daughter at Beth Hanna, a Jewish school.

After the murder of four Jews on January 9 at a kosher supermarket, many in France's Jewish community are thinking of emigrating, joining a rising tide of their coreligionists who have fled increasing anti-Semitism in recent years. Others hope that the attack, and its link to the earlier massacre at the *Charlie Hebdo* magazine, will finally force ordinary French people to face up to the fact that their fellow citizens commit more anti-Semitic crimes than any other European country.

"Now that France's core values have been attacked, people see that Jews are only the first target on a longer list," said Yonathan Arfi, deputy president of the Representative Council of Jewish Institutions. "I hope they will see that they have a responsibility for the problem we face."

France has the largest Jewish population outside Israel and the United States, more than 500,000 people. The community has been subjected in recent months to a mounting wave of anti-Semitic attacks, including arson and vandalism against Jewish schools, cemeteries, and grocery stores, as well as the recent rape of a Jewish woman and gunfire directed at a Paris synagogue.

In the first seven months of last year, the Jewish Community Protection Service reported 527 such acts, nearly double the number for the same period in 2013.

"We have the feeling that things are going downhill ever faster," Arfi said.

Although anti-Semitism still colors the thinking of some traditional supporters of far-right parties such as the National Front, police lay most of the recent anti-Semitic violence at the door of radical Islamist young men.

Amedy Coulibaly, who attacked the kosher market, was not the first such gunman to kill several French Jews. In 2012, Mohammed Merah shot and killed three Jewish children and one of their teachers at a school in the southern city of Toulouse.

Nearly 7,000 Jews left France for good last year, according to figures from the Jewish Agency for Israel; that is twice as many as emigrated in 2013. A poll last year by Siona, a French Jewish group, found that 74 percent of respondents had thought of emigrating, one-third of them because of rising anti-Semitism.

Sitting in a kosher bakery not far from the Beth Hanna school that serves as a meeting place for local Jews, plumber David Cohen said that his friends and neighbors have felt “for some time” that their future is not in France.

“France is a boat that is sinking,” he said, and he is considering following his parents, who emigrated to Israel two years ago.

The French government has addressed the scale of anti-Semitism.

“The awakening of anti-Semitism is a symptom of a crisis of democracy, a crisis of the Republic,” said Prime Minister Manuel Valls in a speech to parliament. “The national community . . . did not perhaps react sufficiently” to the recent wave of anti-Semitic incidents. “We were not indignant enough.”

Shimon Samuels, head of the Paris office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, sees the targeting of Jews as part of a wider danger.

“Government leaders are saying all the right things,” he said, “but now it has to filter down.”

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