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## **HATE CRIMES ON THE RISE IN CZECH REPUBLIC DESPITE REFUGEE PROGRESS**

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From Syria to an integration centre and finally to a new home in Prague. A refugees path may rake this route. But life for Arabs in the Central European country also has its dark sides. EurActiv Czech Republic reports.

There are not many Arabs seeking international protection in the Czech Republic. Some of them successfully integrate and find a new home, but others are facing attacks.

For each person, the process of integration is different. It is very important at what time the person or family came and also for which reason, Jitka Nováková of Pragues integration centre told EurActiv.cz. Integration is more difficult especially for Syrians and Iraqis who arrived recently.

One of them is a Syrian man from Homs, who gained subsidiary protection because he would face a real risk of harm if he returned to Syria.

Better not to think about Syria

He came to the Czech Republic by an ordinary airline. I spent the first week in a reception centre in the town of Zastávka u Brna. Then they sent me to Havířov for two months and a half. I was waiting there for the decision on the protection, says the refugee, who wishes to remain anonymous. It was a tough experience, but I received help, so now I remember that in a good light.

The third stop on his journey through the Czech Republic was an integration centre in Jaroměř. His wife and daughter also arrived there. We lived in the centre for refugees and learned the Czech language. Local staff was very kind, as well as officers in Zastávka u Brna or policemen, he told EurActiv.

It is better for us not to think about return to Syria. We lost our house, work □ everything. Now we have to focus on our life in the Czech Republic, says the refugee who has first hand experience from the war in Syria.

His whole family including his brother and parents, currently live in the Czech Republic. We are building a new life. I found a job, we moved to Prague and started to live like normal people, he says with a smile on his face.

The Syrian with a diploma from an engineering university now works as a mechanic in a car components factory. Despite the tough working conditions, he is grateful. At the same time, he dreams about a new job, where he could use his knowledge.

## Hatred against Arabs

Jitka Nováková pointed out that Czech society has problems with integration of Arabs. Women wearing veils can especially feel that. It is understandable that if a woman or family feels that they are not welcomed, it will have an impact on the process of integration, the NGO worker explains.

## CZECH PRESIDENT ATTENDS ANTI-ISLAM RALLY ON VELVET REVOLUTION ANNIVERSARY

Milos Zeman, the President of the Czech Republic, attended a rally against refugees and Islam in Prague on Tuesday (17 November) on the anniversary of the 1989 Velvet Revolution, which peacefully toppled Communism in then Czechoslovakia.

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According to Marek Čaněk from the Multicultural Centre in Prague, attacks on Arabs are increasing. He emphasises there are no radicalised people behind the attacks, but ordinary Czechs thinking that they can insult somebody who looks different. It is a reflection of media rhetoric and politicians who says that Islam is a threat, Čaněk stressed.

Political scientist Milan Znoj, who teaches at Charles University in Prague, confirms this idea. Only a few civil initiatives, a minority of journalists and intellectuals, and a minimum of politicians opposed this wave of hatred against Muslims, he said. A majority of politicians used xenophobia and hatred for their political benefit.

## CZECH FINANCE MINISTER BLAMES MERKEL'S MIGRATION POLICY FOR BERLIN ATTACK

Czech Finance Minister Andrej Babis said on Tuesday that German Chancellor Angela Merkel bore responsibility for the attack on a Berlin Christmas market and that migrants had no place in Europe.

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## How integration works in the Czech Republic

Last year, 1,475 people applied for international protection in the Czech Republic. The Czech government granted asylum to 148 applicants and 302 people gained subsidiary protection.

Applicants and persons granted protection are enjoying the facilities of The Refugee Facilities Administration of the Ministry of Interior (SUZ). In the reception and residential centres, they can learn the Czech language, and do sport or art.

The work with the clients is based on mutual trust. Cooperation can be successful only if both sides strive for it, said Kateřina Tomanová from the SUZ. Language barriers are overcome because they are working – not only social workers but also translators.

The ministry manages a special facility for foreigners who don't want to stay in the Czech Republic or are waiting for expulsion. In detention centres, we have to explain to the people their situation

and try to fill their free time, Tomanová said.

Before the refugee crisis, there was only one detention centre in the Czech Republic, in Bělá-Jezová. Now there are three of them. The one in Bělá-Jezová was transformed into a facility dedicated to vulnerable migrants, especially families with children and women.

There are also two reception centres and two facilities providing accommodation for applicants. SUZ also manages four integration centres, where the refugees study Czech, in order to find jobs and housing.

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