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DFAT THEMATIC REPORT

HAZARAS IN AFGHANISTAN

18 September 2017

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1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

1.1 This Thematic Report has been prepared by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for protection status determination purposes only. It provides DFAT's best judgment and assessment at time of writing and is distinct from Australian government policy with respect to Afghanistan.

1.2 The report provides a general, rather than an exhaustive country overview. It has been prepared with regard to the current caseload for decision makers in Australia without reference to individual applications for protection visas. The report does not contain policy guidance for decision makers.

1.3 Ministerial Direction Number 56 of 21 June 2013 under s 499 of the Migration Act 1958 states that:

Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared a country information assessment expressly for protection status determination processes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country.

1.4 This report is based on DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources in Afghanistan, including the Afghan government, human rights organisations, civil society activists, UN agencies, and representatives of the international community. It takes into account relevant and credible open source reports, including those produced by the US State Department, World Bank, Transparency International, Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, the Committee to Protect Journalists, UN agencies, and credible news sources. Where DFAT does not refer to a specific source of a report or allegation, this may be to protect the source.

1.5 This report should be read in conjunction with the DFAT Country Information Report on Afghanistan, published on 18 September 2017. This report replaces the DFAT Thematic Report on Hazaras in Afghanistan published on 8 February 2016.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

2.1 The Hazaras are one of Afghanistan's fourteen recognised ethnic groups. Their name is Persian for 'one thousand', and relates to a myth that the Hazara descended from 1,000 troops that accompanied Genghis Khan during the Mongol conquest of Eurasia. The Hazaras tend to have distinct Asiatic features, which makes them visually distinguishable from other ethnic groups in Afghanistan. Hazaras living in rural Afghanistan tend to speak *Hazaragi*, a dialect of Persian that is mutually intelligible with Dari (Afghan Persian), the more commonly used of Afghanistan's two official languages. Hazaras residing in urban areas are likely to speak Dari as a first language, and may speak other languages such as Pashto, English, and regional varieties of Persian.

DEMOGRAPHY

2.2 Demographic data for Afghanistan is unreliable, and there are acute socio-political sensitivities around data related to ethnicity. Most sources place the Hazara population as being around three million, or approximately ten per cent of Afghanistan's total population. However, in June 2016 the Al Jazeera news network estimated the Hazara population as comprising up to 20 per cent of the population. Hazaras are generally accepted to be the third largest ethnic group in Afghanistan, after Pashtuns and Tajiks, and in similar numbers to Uzbeks. Outside of Afghanistan, sizeable Hazara communities are located in Pakistan, Iran, the Gulf States, Australia, the United States, and several European countries.

2.3 The traditional homeland of the Hazaras is the *Hazarajat*, a mountainous region consisting of the provinces of Bamiyan and Daykundi and parts of the provinces of Ghazni, Ghor, Uruzgan and Wardak. While population estimates vary considerably between sources, the GeoHive global population statistics website estimated the population of Bamiyan province at just under 450,000 and Daykundi at around 425,000 as of 2015/16. Both provinces have a Hazara majority of around 75 per cent, with Tajik and Pashtun minorities. Hazaras make up around 40 per cent of Ghazni province's estimated overall population of 1.2 million, which is 50 per cent Pashtun. The percentage of Hazaras living in the other provinces of the *Hazarajat* is much smaller.

2.4 Most major cities in Afghanistan, particularly Kabul, have sizeable Hazara populations. Common estimates put the Hazaras at between 40-50 per cent of Kabul's population, making them the largest ethnic group in the capital. Ethnic groups tend to cluster together in Afghan cities, and most Hazaras in Kabul live in the west of the city. Many live in informal and illegal settlements.

HISTORY

2.5 It is unclear exactly when the Hazaras first arrived in Afghanistan, but they have undoubtedly resided in the country for centuries. The Hazaras largely managed to maintain regional autonomy until the late 19th century, when the Pashtun Emir Abdur Rahman Khan launched a campaign to bring the *Hazarajat* under his control. The Emir responded to Hazara resistance to his rule by ordering the killing of all Hazaras in

central Afghanistan. As much as 60 per cent of the Hazara population was killed, sold into slavery, or forced into exile from the *Hazarajat*, resulting in a strong and lasting enmity between the Hazara and Pashtun communities. Abdur Rahman's successor granted amnesty to all those exiled by his predecessor in 1901, allowing the Hazaras to return. However, the Hazaras continued to face considerable social, economic and political discrimination through much of the 20th century.

2.6 The takeover of Kabul and most of Afghanistan by the predominantly Sunni and Pashtun Taliban in 1996 marked a period of considerable repression and hardship for Hazaras nationwide. The worst single recorded massacre in the country's recent history took place in Mazar-e-Sharif in August 1998, when the Taliban massacred at least 2,000 Hazaras. Many Hazaras fled Afghanistan during this period to escape Taliban oppression. US-led coalition forces removed the Taliban in late 2001, greatly reducing violence and discrimination against Hazaras.

2.7 Hazaras have made significant social, political and economic gains in Afghanistan since 2001, albeit from a low base. However, the continuing armed insurgency conducted by the Taliban and other groups, including in recent months a local affiliate of the Islamic State terrorist organisation, has raised questions over the sustainability of Afghanistan's progress. While Afghans of all ethnicities feel uncertain about Afghanistan's future, DFAT assesses that the Hazaras' previous experience of life under the Taliban and earlier episodes of discrimination have caused many to feel particular concern about the long-term prospects for their community. This concern is an important factor contributing to the decision of many Hazaras to leave Afghanistan.

ECONOMIC SITUATION

2.8 As noted in the DFAT Country Report on Afghanistan, unemployment and underemployment are very high across Afghanistan. People from all ethnicities regularly travel to find employment opportunities, including leaving Afghanistan – many Hazaras travel to Iran in search of work. DFAT assesses that poor economic opportunities act as a strong 'push factor' for both internal relocation in, and emigration from Afghanistan for Afghans of all ethnicities.

Hazarajat

2.9 The *Hazarajat's* mountainous terrain, geographic isolation and lack of arable land have combined to limit economic and employment opportunities. The *Hazarajat* depends heavily on agriculture for economic and employment opportunities, and is highly vulnerable to droughts and floods. Infrastructure in the region is severely underdeveloped – around 80 per cent of roads in Bamiyan province are unpaved, restricting the movement of goods and people. Access to electricity remains limited, despite construction of solar and hydroelectric facilities in the region. Lack of government infrastructure investment in the *Hazarajat* has led to considerable public dissatisfaction (see also '[State Protection](#)').

2.10 While Bamiyan province and (to a lesser extent) Daykundi province are largely secure, continuing armed insurgency has affected the provinces surrounding them. Road transportation links between the *Hazarajat* and major cities are far from secure (see 'Road safety' in DFAT Country Report on Afghanistan). This limits *Hazarajat* producers' access to large markets. It also affects Hazaras seeking to travel for seasonal work in other provinces, which is common for poor Afghans of all ethnicities.

Kabul

2.11 Due to its size, centrality and status as the national capital, Kabul offers a greater range of employment opportunities than other areas of Afghanistan, particularly in work related to government and the international community. However, the substantial drawdown of the international presence and associated reduced aid and other financial flows since 2011 has significantly affected Kabul's economy. The recent large-scale influx of internally displaced people and returnees from abroad has placed considerable pressure on Kabul's labour market (see DFAT Country Report on Afghanistan). While reliable statistics are unavailable, unemployment and underemployment are widespread in Kabul, as elsewhere in Afghanistan. However, wages and the quality and availability of public services still tend to be higher in Kabul than in other parts of the country. In addition to trade and other service industries, a small number of larger private businesses have established themselves in Kabul, including in food processing, textile production, and light manufacturing.

2.12 Hazaras living in Kabul participate in a wide variety of economic roles. Because of their traditional focus on education (see '[Education](#)'), Hazaras tend to be relatively well qualified for roles in the public service and the international community (see '[Women](#)'). However, Hazaras tend to be under-represented in senior civil service positions. This is largely due to the importance of familial, ethnic and tribal connections in Afghanistan: those making hiring decisions for both government and private sector positions commonly place more importance on such connections than on merit (see also '[Race/ Nationality](#)').

Health Care

2.13 The availability and quality of health care in Afghanistan has improved markedly since 2001, albeit from a very low starting point. While still limited in their scope, medical facilities tend to be better in Kabul than in other parts of the country. While basic medical treatment is free, medicines are often expensive and the poor are often unable to afford them. Hazaras in Kabul operate a number of relatively high quality private medical facilities for the benefit of their community.

2.14 Approximately 60 health facilities in the *Hazarajat* offer basic healthcare, but the overall quality of healthcare remains poor. Specialist care is generally not available, and doctors are not attracted to the region due to its isolation. Poor transport infrastructure and security concerns have inhibited transport of medical supplies to areas outside Kabul, including the *Hazarajat*, resulting in shortages. The deterioration of the security situation nationwide in recent years has limited the capacity of foreign donors to assist with the provision of health services (see '[Security Situation](#)').

Education

2.15 Hazaras have traditionally placed a high value on educational achievement, including for girls (see '[Women](#)'), which has represented a means to escape marginalisation in Afghan society. While reliable statistics are unavailable, credible sources report that a considerably higher percentage of Hazara children receive formal education than do the children of other Afghan ethnicities. Hazara children are generally encouraged to consider further education options where family circumstances allow. There are currently more than 350 schools operating in Bamiyan and Daykundi, attended by approximately 160,000 students of whom almost 50 per cent are girls. Bamiyan also hosts a small university with approximately 3,600 students, although the university has struggled to attract qualified lecturers.

2.16 Hazaras operate a number of private schools in Kabul for the benefit of their community. The quality of these schools tends to be higher than many other schools in Afghanistan, demonstrated by relatively high

university acceptance rates. Some families from the *Hazarajat* reportedly send their children to Kabul for instruction during the winter months.

SECURITY SITUATION

2.17 As outlined in the DFAT Country Information Report on Afghanistan of 18 September 2017, the security situation in Afghanistan is complex, highly fluid, and varies considerably by location. A number of groups remain engaged in a violent armed insurgency against the government and its international partners. These insurgent forces contest many areas of the country, and no part of Afghanistan can be considered free from conflict-related violence. This section focuses on the security situation in the *Hazarajat* and Kabul, where the majority of Hazaras reside.

Hazarajat

2.18 International and domestic observers agree that the security situation in the *Hazarajat*, particularly Bamiyan province, has been considerably better than in most other parts of Afghanistan in recent years. Hazaras comprise the vast majority of the population in most districts in these provinces, which reduces ethnic tension. As Hazaras are visually distinct, non-Hazaras have found it difficult to infiltrate these areas without detection. The mountainous terrain of the *Hazarajat* also offers a form of natural protection, with few routes for outsiders to traverse these provinces.

2.19 Some areas of the *Hazarajat* are more secure than others. The southern areas of Daykundi province bordering Uruzgan province tend to be less secure than the rest of Daykundi province as this area forms an unofficial border between majority Hazara and Pashtun communities, increasing localised ethnic violence. There is reportedly a greater Taliban presence in these areas, as is also the case (to a far lesser extent) in the north-eastern areas of Bamiyan province. The US State Department's 2015 Country Report on Terrorism reported that Ghazni province was one of the most violent provinces in Afghanistan in terms of attacks on defence forces, international forces and civilians.

2.20 In its 2016 Annual Report on the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, UNAMA reported that civilian casualties resulting from the armed conflict in Bamiyan and Daykundi provinces (the 'central highland region') increased in 2016 from 2015, although the overall number of fatalities decreased. UNAMA documented 115 civilian casualties (25 deaths and 90 injured) in 2016 compared to 58 civilian casualties (30 deaths and 28 injured) the previous year. UNAMA reported that the increase in civilian casualties in 2016 related to an increase in ground engagements in Daykundi province. By comparison, the south-eastern region (comprising Ghazni, Khost, Paktya and Paktika provinces) recorded 340 deaths and 563 injured in 2016, while the northern region (comprising Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Samangan and Sari Pul provinces) recorded 384 deaths and 978 injured).

2.21 In its Midyear Report for 2017, UNAMA reported that conflict-related casualties continued to remain lower in the central highland provinces in comparison with the rest of the country. Virtually all of the civilian casualties in this region (seven deaths and 14 injured) occurred in Daykundi, and were the result of explosive remnants of war, targeted killings, and ground engagement. Bamiyan experienced just one conflict-related injury, resulting from explosive remnants of war. In comparison, the south-eastern region recorded 177 deaths and 340 injured; while the northern region recorded 137 deaths and 332 injured.

2.22 DFAT assesses that Bamiyan and Daykundi provinces continue to remain safer for Hazaras than most other parts of Afghanistan. Insurgent attacks that occur within these areas tend target government and international interests rather than being ethnically motivated.

Kabul

2.23 The Afghan government has limited capacity to address security concerns in Kabul. The city is a significant target for suicide and complex attacks against both civilian and non-civilian targets carried out by non-government elements. Attacks are often directed against specific targets, including government institutions, political figures, Afghan and international security forces, demonstrations, foreign diplomatic missions, and international organisations. However, the methods of attack can be indiscriminate and often result in civilian casualties. UNAMA reported that 77 per cent of all civilian casualties arising from suicide and complex attacks in 2016 occurred in Kabul city: 16 incidents resulting in 1,514 civilian casualties (308 deaths and 1,206 injured), a 75 per cent increase compared to 2015 (see also 'Shi'a').

2.24 In its Midyear Report for 2017, UNAMA reported that 219 conflict-related deaths and 829 injured in Kabul in the first six months of 2017. Suicide and complex attacks continued to be the leading cause of casualties, followed by improvised explosive devices and targeted killings.

2.25 The Afghan National Defence and Security Forces (ANDSF) and international forces have put in place a range of counter-measures to prevent and respond to insurgent attacks in Kabul. These include numerous checkpoints along highways leading into Kabul, at major intersections and outside government and international institutions. These checkpoints provide a deterrent to insurgent attacks by increasing the probability of detection of insurgents before they are able to carry out their attacks. Nevertheless, these checkpoints vary in their effectiveness, and violent attacks within the city are common.

2.26 DFAT assesses that Hazaras, like other Afghans, are vulnerable to the threat posed by indiscriminate methods of attack against specific targets in Kabul. However, ordinary Hazaras who reside in Hazara-majority areas of Kabul and do not have open affiliations with the government or international community (see 'People associated with the government or the international community') are unlikely to face any greater threat than are Afghans of other ethnicities.

Other provinces

2.27 Conflict-related violence occurs in most areas of Afghanistan to varying degrees, and the resulting high levels of insecurity affects people of all ethnicities. The Taliban and other insurgent forces have a significant presence in many areas bordering the *Hazarajat*. DFAT assesses that Hazara minorities living in these areas face a higher risk of being affected by conflict-related violence than do Hazaras living in Kabul or in the *Hazarajat*.

Kidnappings/ Abductions

2.28 As noted in the DFAT Country Report on Afghanistan, ('Kidnapping/ Abductions'), kidnappings and abductions of Afghan civilians by anti-government elements occur regularly, particularly on Afghanistan's highly insecure road network. People from all ethnic groups are vulnerable to these attacks. DFAT concurs with the assessment of UNAMA and other international sources that the primary motivations for these abductions include taking hostages for ransom or prisoner exchange, or to target those with connections to the government or international community. Ethnicity is rarely the primary motivating factor in these incidents.

2.29 UNAMA reported a decline in the number of Hazara civilians abducted in 2016, recording 16 incidents involving the abduction of 85 Hazara civilians in comparison to 26 incidents in 2015 involving the abduction of 224 Hazara civilians. In 2016, UNAMA documented the abduction of Hazara civilians in Baghlan, Uruzgan, Sari Pul, Daykundi, Maidan Wardak and Ghor provinces. These provinces all border the *Hazarajat*.

Anti-government elements released most abductees unharmed, although five were killed (three in Sari Pul, one in Ghor and one in Baghlan). In 2015, fifteen abducted Hazaras were killed.

2.30 Notwithstanding the general decrease in the number of incidents of abduction targeting Hazara civilians in 2016, UNAMA recorded seven incidents involving the abduction of 34 Hazara civilians in Maidan Wardak province compared to two incidents in 2015. UNAMA attributed the increase to continuing land disputes in the area between Hazara residents and Kuchi tribal members. UNAMA also documented an increase in abductions of Hazara civilians in Ghor province to three incidents involving nine Hazara civilians in 2016, compared to no incidents the previous year. UNAMA reported that in Ghor and Maidan Wardak provinces, Hazaras carried out retaliatory counter-abductions of Tajik or Pashtun civilians in an attempt to secure the release of abducted Hazara civilians. Although several abductions of Hazaras in Ghazni province occurred in 2015, UNAMA did not record any such incidents in 2016.

2.31 In its Mid-Year Report for 2017, UNAMA noted one major incident of abduction involving Hazara civilians in the first six months of 2017. On 6 January, unidentified anti-government elements stopped a bus carrying mainly Hazara coal mine workers in Baghlan province, shooting and killing eight and shooting and injuring three others. The motivation for the attack remains unclear.

2.32 DFAT notes that the UNAMA reports cover only abduction incidents perpetrated by parties to the conflict. They exclude incidents perpetrated by criminals, and by tribal and other groups that do not have a connection to the conflict. It can be difficult to ascertain the motivation for attacks, and to separate criminal attacks from insurgent activity connected to the conflict.

2.33 DFAT assesses that ethnic targeting can play a role in the selection of victims once an abduction is in progress. There have been recent cases in which Hazaras have been singled out for special attention during an abduction. For example, in November 2015, militants stopped a number of buses travelling through Zabul province en route from Kandahar to Kabul. The militants demanded identification from passengers, and reportedly took away only the Hazara passengers. DFAT is aware of credible anecdotal reports of ‘spotters’ at bus stations calling ahead to tell insurgents or criminals which buses are carrying Hazaras. As a result, some bus companies have reportedly refused to sell tickets to Hazaras because of a perception that having them on board increases the probability that insurgents or criminals will stop their buses.

2.34 It is unclear whether the targeting of Hazaras is due to their ethnicity, because of a perceived association with the government or international community (see ‘People associated with the government or the international community’), because Hazaras are perceived to be more wealthy than other ethnicities (and therefore more likely to be able to pay ransoms), or because Hazaras represent a lower risk target from the abductors’ perspective than other ethnicities.

2.35 DFAT assesses that abduction while travelling by road is a risk for Afghans of all ethnicities. Notwithstanding the decline in the number of incidents of abduction affecting Hazaras in 2016 compared to 2015, DFAT assesses that Hazaras remain likely to be selected for abduction or violence if a vehicle carrying a mix of ethnic groups is stopped. Noting that all of the abductions in 2016 occurred in provinces bordering the *Hazarajat*, as did the January 2017 incident, DFAT assesses that Hazaras travelling to and from the *Hazarajat* are particularly at risk in this regard.

3. TREATMENT OF HAZARAS

RACE/ NATIONALITY

3.1 As noted in the DFAT Country Report on Afghanistan, released 18 September 2017, Article 22 of the Constitution forbids any kind of discrimination or distinction between the citizens of Afghanistan. DFAT is not aware of any official policy of discrimination against Hazaras or any other group based on ethnicity. Hazaras are active in the Afghan community, particularly in politics, education, sport, and civil society. At the date of publication, the Governors of Bamiyan and Daykundi provinces were both Hazaras, and Ghor and Samangan provinces have previously had Hazara Governors. Kabul University has previously had a Hazara chancellor.

3.2 However, societal discrimination based on ethnicity remains widespread at the community level in Afghanistan. As noted in the DFAT Country Report on Afghanistan, this discrimination most commonly manifests in the form of nepotism and/or positive discrimination in favour of family, tribal or ethnic group members, including when making hiring decisions for both private sector and government positions. Because Hazaras have traditionally had a low social status in Afghanistan they are therefore less likely than members of other ethnicities (Pashtuns in particular) to be in positions whereby they are able to positively discriminate in favour of other Hazaras (outside of the *Hazarajat*). In particular, Hazaras tend to be under-represented in senior civil service positions. The historical enmity between Afghanistan's Pashtun and Hazara communities has contributed to the Hazara community's strong perception that they are subject to continuing discrimination and are targeted for violence.

3.3 DFAT assesses that Hazaras are more likely than other ethnic groups to be excluded from senior civil service positions due to their ethnicity, even if there is no official policy of discrimination against them. DFAT assesses that Hazaras are subject to a moderate risk of societal discrimination in practice, as they are generally less likely than other groups to be in a position to benefit from ethnically based positive discrimination. This is, however, less likely to be the case in the *Hazarajat*.

RELIGION

Shi'a

3.4 Although there are some Hazara Sunnis, the overwhelming majority of Hazaras are Shi'a Muslims. Most are from the Twelver sect, although a small minority are Ismailis. As noted in 'Political Opinion (actual or imputed)', there are also some Afghan Shi'a who are not Hazaras. The Constitution and legislation recognise some separate legal rights for Shi'a. Article 131 of the Constitution provides that Afghanistan's courts shall apply Shi'a jurisprudence in certain civil cases where all parties are Shi'a. A 2009 Shi'a Personal Status Law recognises different practices on issues such as marriage, divorce and inheritance among the Shi'a community (see also 'Personal Status Laws').

3.5 There has not traditionally been a significant sectarian divide between Sunni and Shi'a in Afghanistan. Conflict between communities has instead tended to be along either ethnic or political lines. Between 2001 and 2016, religiously motivated attacks on Shi'a were rare, if not unheard of, and were generally carried out by external parties rather than Afghanistan-based groups. For example, a Pakistan-based militant group, Lashkar-e Janghvi, claimed responsibility for the bombing attack of a major Shi'a mosque in Kabul in December 2011 that killed 70 people. This group has carried out a number of similar attacks against Shi'a in Pakistan.

3.6 In late 2016 and early 2017, however, a series of deliberate sectarian attacks against Shi'a targets raised concerns that Shi'a may now be vulnerable to being targeted based on their religious identity by Afghanistan-based groups. UNAMA reported five separate attacks against Shi'a Muslim gatherings and mosques in the second half of 2016 and three in the first half of 2017. Since the publication of UNAMA's most recent report in July 2017, two additional attacks have occurred in August 2017. Five of the attacks took place in Kabul, one in Balkh province, and four in Herat city. The first attack in Kabul was the deadliest to occur in Afghanistan since 2001.

3.7 In chronological order, the anti-Shi'a attacks were:

- Two suicide bombers targeted a peaceful political demonstration in Kabul on 23 July 2016, killing at least 85 demonstrators and injuring 413 others (see also 'Political Opinion (actual or imputed)');
- A gunman wearing an Afghan national security force uniform opened fire on worshippers at a landmark Shi'a mosque in Kabul during the Ashura religious festival on 11 October 2016, killing 19 and injuring 60;
- A blast from an improvised explosive device (IED) at the entrance to a Shi'a mosque in Balkh province on 12 October 2016 killed 18 and injured 67 others, including 36 children;
- A suicide attack at a Shi'a mosque in Kabul during observance of the religious celebration of *Arbeen* on 21 November 2016 killed at least 40 and injured 74 others, including many children;
- In two separate attacks on 22 November 2016 and 1 January 2017, remote-controlled IED blasts at Shi'a mosques in Herat city killed one and injured a combined total of nine others;
- A remote-controlled IED attack outside of a bakery near a religious gathering in Herat city on 12 May 2017 killed seven and injured nine;
- A suicide bombing at a mosque in Kabul during a religious commemoration on 15 June killed five and injured seven;
- A suicide bombing at a mosque in Herat on 1 August killed at least 30 and injured 64; and
- A combination attack by a suicide bomber and two gunmen at a Shi'a mosque in Kabul on 25 August killed at least 28 and injured at least 50.

3.8 A local group, Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP), claimed responsibility for all of the attacks in Kabul and the first attack in Herat. In claiming responsibility, ISKP emphasised that the attacks were religiously motivated, using derogatory languages against Shi'a and calling for further attacks on them. As of the publication date, no group had claimed responsibility for the attack in Balkh province or the other attacks in Herat city.

3.9 DFAT assesses that the number and scale of the attacks in late 2016 and early 2017 demonstrate that Shi'a, both Hazara and non-Hazara, now face a risk of being attacked by ISKP based on their religious affiliation. DFAT assesses that Shi'a are particularly vulnerable when assembling in large and identifiable groups, such as during demonstrations or when attending mosques during major Shi'a religious festivals.

POLITICAL OPINION (ACTUAL OR IMPUTED)

3.10 Hazaras have been very active participants in politics since 2001. Their high rates of voter participation have resulted in a disproportionately high representation of Hazaras in the lower house of the Afghan National Assembly. DFAT notes, however, that often-quoted figures showing high levels of Hazara electoral success may be misleading as the government conflates Hazara and Shi'a, despite the existence of non-Shi'a Hazara and non-Hazara Shi'a. For example, the Minister for Commerce, Trade, and Industry, Hamayoun Rasa, is ethnically a Bayat (Turkic Shi'a), and the Minister for Communications and Information Technology, Abdul Raziq Wahidi, is ethnically Tajik but religiously Shi'a – the government considers both Hazara.

3.11 While the Afghan Constitution prohibits political parties from being formed or operated on the basis of tribalism, parochialism, language or religious sectarianism, there are a number of parties that represent the interest of Hazaras (as there are for other ethnic groups). DFAT assesses that there are no barriers to Hazaras' participation in formal political processes.

3.12 Since 2001, Hazara groups have been able to assemble and demonstrate freely in Kabul and other major urban centres. For example, hundreds of protesters gathered in Kabul and Ghazni city in March 2015 in an attempt to pressure authorities to rescue a group of Hazaras kidnapped the previous month. Neither the government nor insurgent groups have disrupted previous Hazara demonstrations. However, as noted in 'Shi'a', a peaceful demonstration on 23 July 2016 by Hazaras protesting a decision relating to a cross-country power line project was attacked by two suicide bombers, killing at least 85 civilians and injuring 413. While the motivation for this attack was religious rather than political, it nevertheless had the effect of ending large-scale political demonstrations by all Afghans, at least in the short term.

3.13 DFAT assesses that the ability of Afghans of all ethnicities to conduct peaceful political demonstrations against the government has been severely reduced by the threat of violence, which authorities have a limited ability to prevent (see also 'State Protection'). As noted in 'Shi'a', DFAT assesses that large and identifiable assembled groups of Shi'a are particularly vulnerable to attack by ISKP.

WOMEN

3.14 Hazaras are regarded as progressive by Afghan standards in relation to women's rights. As noted in 'Education', Hazara girls are far more likely to be able to access education than girls are of other ethnicities. Hazara women and girls are also far more likely to be able to participate in sport and the workforce than women and girls of other ethnicities. Because of their educational qualifications and the support of their community, Hazara women are particularly likely to be able to pursue employment opportunities with the international community, or with the government, police and army (see 'People associated with the government or the international community'). The current governor of Daykundi province is a Hazara woman, and Bamiyan has previously had a female Hazara governor. The Independent Election Commission also includes a female Hazara commissioner.

3.15 Despite their relatively strong position within their own community, DFAT assesses that Hazara women—like all women in Afghanistan—experience high levels of societal discrimination and gender-based violence, including sexual assault and domestic violence, irrespective of where they live. Hazara women and girls living outside the *Hazarajat* are subject to the same societal restrictions as other Afghan women (see 'Women' in the DFAT Country Report on Afghanistan, released 18 September 2017). All Afghan girls attending school face a risk of violent attack, although this risk is likely to be lower for Hazara girls attending schools in the *Hazarajat*.

PEOPLE ASSOCIATED WITH THE GOVERNMENT OR THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

3.16 The overall situation of Hazaras in Afghanistan has improved dramatically since the removal of the Taliban in 2001. Due to these improvements, most Afghans perceive Hazaras to be affiliated with the government. As noted in 'Economic Situation – Kabul', many Hazaras have employment with either the government or the international community. This is particularly the case for Hazara women, who anecdotally make up a disproportionate percentage of female recruits in the police and army, notwithstanding the relatively small numbers of women actually serving in these roles. In addition, the large Hazara communities residing outside of Afghanistan mean that a higher percentage of Hazaras are likely to have an international connection of some kind than Afghans of other nationalities.

3.17 As noted in the DFAT Country Information Report on Afghanistan of 18 September 2017, insurgent and terrorist groups explicitly target people working for, supporting or associated with the government or the international community. Such people are often subject to intimidation, threats, abduction and killing. These attacks occur throughout Afghanistan, and can include Hazara targets; in June 2016, the Taliban claimed responsibility for shooting dead the district governor of Sayghan in Bamiyan province.

3.18 DFAT assesses that Hazaras who are openly affiliated with the government or the international community by way of employment, public statements or other associations, face a high risk of being targeted by anti-government elements. This risk, however, is true for other ethnicities in the same situation. DFAT assesses that Hazaras who have international connections face a low risk of violence as a result, provided they do not openly highlight their links. This is true for those Hazaras who have spent time in western countries.

4. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

State Protection

4.1 The continuing armed insurgency and deteriorating security situation nationwide has challenged the government's ability to exercise effective control over large parts of the country, particularly outside major urban centres and provincial capitals. As a result, the government lacks the ability to adequately address human rights issues, protect vulnerable groups, and prosecute human rights violators in some areas of the country. In rural areas, many Afghan groups, including Hazaras, maintain their own local militias to protect themselves from criminals and insurgents, in the absence of effective state protection mechanisms.

4.2 The increase in the number and scale of major attacks that have taken place in Kabul since the beginning of 2016 demonstrate the limits of the government's ability to protect its citizens even in a place where its security infrastructure is strongest. Hazaras, like other Afghans, are vulnerable to the threat posed by indiscriminate methods of attack against specific targets in Kabul. Hazaras are particularly vulnerable to religiously motivated attacks, as demonstrated by the series of attacks carried out against Shi'a in Kabul and other locations in late 2016 and early 2017.

Internal Relocation

4.3 As noted in the DFAT Country Report on Afghanistan, released 18 September 2017, there is no legal impediment to internal movement within Afghanistan, and Afghans of all ethnicities can and do relocate internally for a variety of reasons. Large urban centres are home to communities from virtually all of Afghanistan's ethnic groups, including Hazaras, and offer greater opportunities for employment and security. Presidential Decree 104/2005 stipulated that all IDPs and returnees should return to their home province. However, the Ministry of Returns and Rehabilitation has confirmed to DFAT that there is currently no legal requirement for them to do so.

4.4 As the capital and largest urban centre, Kabul provides the most viable option for internal relocation and resettlement for most Afghans, including Hazaras. Given the considerable growth of Kabul's population since 2001, many Hazaras are likely to have members of their extended family resident in Kabul who can assist with their relocation. However, the cost of living is higher in Kabul than elsewhere in the country, there are considerable strains on infrastructure and services, and Kabul regularly experiences serious security incidents, including attacks directly targeting the Shi'a community (see '[Security Situation – Kabul](#)' and '[Shi'a](#)').

4.5 As noted in '[Security Situation – Hazarajat](#)', the security situation in the *Hazarajat*, particularly Bamiyan province, has been considerably better than in most other parts of Afghanistan in recent years. However, the continuing armed insurgency and deteriorating security situation has limited the ability of Afghans to travel safely from one part of the country to another by road. As noted in '[Kidnappings/Abductions](#)', DFAT assesses that Hazaras face a greater risk than other ethnic groups of being targeted for abduction or violence if a vehicle carrying a mix of ethnic groups is stopped, particularly while travelling to or

from the *Hazarajat*. In addition, economic and employment opportunities may be more limited in the *Hazarajat* than in other parts of the country (see '[Economic Situation – Hazarajat](#)').

4.6 DFAT assesses that while there are generally options available for internal relocation in Afghanistan, there are considerable security and economic factors that limit the ability of Hazaras to relocate safely and successfully.

Treatment of Returnees

4.7 Returnees from western countries almost exclusively return to Kabul. There are no tracking mechanisms for returnees, so it is difficult to assess the conditions they face. DFAT understands that many returnees choose to remain in Kabul for economic or security reasons rather than return to their home provinces. DFAT assesses that Kabul's size and diversity mean it would be unlikely for Hazara returnees to be more vulnerable to violence based on their ethnicity or religion than for other Hazaras living in Kabul, or returnees from other ethnic groups (see DFAT Country Information Report on Afghanistan of 18 September 2017).