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**COI QUERY**

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Question(s)	1. Situation of Hindus and Sikhs (2018-2020) 1.1. General overview of the situation of Hindu and Sikh communities in Afghanistan 1.2. Treatment by Afghan authorities of Hindu and Sikh communities 1.3. Treatment by Taliban of Hindus and Sikhs, including documented cases of discrimination/mistreatment 1.4. Treatment by ISKP and other Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) of Hindus and Sikhs, including documented cases of discrimination/mistreatment
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The information provided in this response has been researched, evaluated and processed with utmost care within a limited time frame. All sources used are referenced. A quality review has been performed in line with the above mentioned methodology. This document does not claim to be exhaustive neither conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to international protection. If a certain event, person or organisation is not mentioned in the report, this does not mean that the event has not taken place or that the person or organisation does not exist. Terminology used should not be regarded as indicative of a particular legal position.

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The target audience is caseworkers, COI researchers, policy makers, and decision making authorities. The answer was finalised on 5 August 2020. Any event taking place after this date is not included in this answer.



COI QUERY RESPONSE

1. Situation of Hindus and Sikhs (2018-2020)

1.1 General overview of the situation of Hindu and Sikh communities in Afghanistan

There are no exact numbers available of Hindus and Sikhs currently living in Afghanistan.¹ The numbers have steadily decreased over the past years. It is estimated that there were around 700 000 Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan in the 70s, around 220 000 in 1992 and a few thousands today.² Majority of the community has emigrated³ and current estimates vary between some 10 000⁴ and 700⁵. The community is to be found mainly in the provinces of Nangarhar, Ghazni and in Kabul.⁶ Hindu Gozar and Karte Parwan are said to be traditional Hindu and Sikh neighbourhoods in Kabul.⁷ There is one *gurdwara* (a Sikh place of worship) in Jalalabad and one in Kabul.⁸ Jalalabad has a special religious significance for Sikhs because of the visit of Guru Nanak in the 15th century.⁹

Sources indicate that Hindus and Sikhs celebrate discreetly in order not to provoke attention of Muslims¹⁰ and have inconspicuous places of worship.¹¹ A survey released in February 2019 by the Porsesh Research and Studies Organisation (PRSO), a Kabul-based independent nonprofit research organisation, showed that almost all Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan fear for their personal safety (96.8 %).¹² The survey has also found that more than half of the Hindu and Sikh respondents fear participating in peaceful demonstrations.¹³ Most of the Sikh and Hindu respondents indicated that

¹ Al Jazeera, 'The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities,' 1 January 2017, [url](#); UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 30 August 2018, [url](#), p. 62

² Al Jazeera, 'The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities,' 1 January 2017, [url](#)

³ Australia, DFAT, DFAT Country Information Report Afghanistan, 27 June 2019, [url](#); Freedom House, Freedom in the World 2020 - Afghanistan, 4 March 2020, [url](#); TOLONews, Nearly 99% Of Hindus, Sikhs Left Afghanistan in Last Three decades, 20 June 2016, [url](#)

⁴ AIHRC, Assessing the Extent of the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in Afghanistan, 2019, [url](#), p. 19; BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Militants in deadly attack on Sikh temple in Kabul, 25 March 2020, [url](#)

⁵ Norway, Landinfo – Norwegian Country of Origin Information Centre, Afghanistan: Afghanske sikher og hinduer, 29 January 2020, [url](#), p. 4; PRSO, Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, February 2019, [url](#), p. 24; VOA News, Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan in Limbo after March Deadly Attack, 3 May 2020, [url](#)

⁶ Arab News, 'We don't want to leave': Sikhs consider future in Afghanistan, 28 February 2020, [url](#); Diplomat (The), The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban's Heartland, 26 September 2018, [url](#)

⁷ AAN, Kabul Unpacked; A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making, 19 March 2019, [url](#); Arab News, 'We don't want to leave': Sikhs consider future in Afghanistan, 28 February 2020, [url](#)

⁸ Arab News, 'We don't want to leave': Sikhs consider future in Afghanistan, 28 February 2020, [url](#); Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#); National (The), Afghanistan Sikh, Hindu community brave danger to vote, 20 October 2018, [url](#)

⁹ Al Jazeera, 'The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities,' 1 January 2017, [url](#); VOA News, Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan in Limbo after March Deadly Attack, 3 May 2020, [url](#)

¹⁰ Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#); National (The), Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Celebrate Diwali Without 'Pomp and Splendour' Amid Fear, 19 October 2017, [url](#)

¹¹ USCIRF, USCIRF 2020 Annual Report; USCIRF – Recommended for Special Watch List: Afghanistan, April 2020, [url](#)

¹² PRSO, Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, February 2019, [url](#), p. 24

¹³ PRSO, Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, February 2019, [url](#), pp. 2-3, 25-26

they would fear to encounter the ISKP (90.6 %), the Taliban (68.9 %) and the Afghan National Police (53.1 %).¹⁴

An article by the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN) released in April 2020 indicates that Hindus and Sikhs can be victims of crime because of their perceived wealth.¹⁵ Without referring specifically to Hindus or Sikhs, another 2020 AAN report about criminality in Kabul finds that businessmen and moneylenders in Kabul have been increasingly victims of kidnappings by organised armed groups.¹⁶ Afghanistan's Hindus and Sikhs were traditionally active in business and finance.¹⁷ Hindus and Sikhs are also reported to be victims of land-grabbing.¹⁸ They reportedly avoid to seek justice because of fear of retaliation¹⁹ and extensive delays in the court proceedings²⁰.

Instances of crimes against Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan in the reference period include:

- On 28 February 2020, a Hindu woman was robbed and killed in a Karte Parwan district of Kabul.²¹
- In March 2019, a Sikh man was kidnapped and later killed in Kabul. The police has arrested two suspects afterwards.²²
- On 22 June 2020, it was reported that an Afghan Sikh leader was kidnapped, reportedly by 'terrorists'. No further details about the case were disclosed by the sources.²³ An Indian source indicated that 'local land mafia' was behind the incident.²⁴ He was reportedly released on 18 July 2020.²⁵

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) did not report on any specific security incidents targeting Hindus and Sikhs in 2018 and 2019 annual reports²⁶. In the first quarter of 2020, UNAMA reported on one incident killing 26 persons and injuring 11 (see section 1.4 of this query response).²⁷ Following the attack, sources indicate that India has offered visas to remaining Hindus

¹⁴ PRSO, Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, February 2019, [url](#), p. 27

¹⁵ AAN, Blood in the Abode of Peace: The attack on Kabul's Sikhs, 1 April 2020, [url](#)

¹⁶ AAN, Kabul's Expanding Crime Scene (Part 2): Criminal activities and the police response, 21 February 2020, [url](#)

¹⁷ Huffington Post, The Few Remaining Hindus and Sikhs In Afghanistan Fight For One Seat In Its Parliament, 24 September 2016, [url](#); PRSO, Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, February 2019, [url](#), p. 22

¹⁸ Al Jazeera, 'The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities,' 1 January 2017, [url](#); PRSO, Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, February 2019, [url](#), p. 29

¹⁹ USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 10 June 2020, [url](#), pp. 1, 10; Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), p. 80

²⁰ USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 10 June 2020, [url](#), p. 12

²¹ TOLONews, Afghan Hindu Woman Killed in Kabul by Armed Robbers, 28 February 2020, [url](#)

²² TOLONews, Police Accused Of Neglect In Rescuing Afghan Sikh, 14 May 2019, [url](#); USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 40

²³ Hindustan Times, India condemns abduction of Sikh community leader in Afghanistan, 22 June 2020, [url](#); Pajhwok Afghan News, Singh abduction: Delhi says in touch with Kabul, 22 June 2020, [url](#); Wire (The), India Condemns Abduction of Sikh Community Leader in Afghanistan, 22 June 2020, [url](#)

²⁴ Indian Express (The), Sikh man's abduction case in Afghanistan gets murkier, now 'local land mafia' suspected behind act; family has no info on his whereabouts yet, 3 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁵ Tribune India, Kidnapped Sikh leader Nidan Singh released in Afghanistan, 18 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁶ UNAMA, 2019 Annual Report, February 2020, [url](#); UNAMA, 2018 Annual Report, February 2019, [url](#)

²⁷ UNAMA, 2020 Quarterly Report, April 2020, [url](#), p. 4

and Sikhs in Afghanistan, with first group of 11 persons reaching Delhi at the end of July 2020.²⁸ The New York Times (NYT) quoted Indian foreign ministry saying that 'India has decided to facilitate the return of Afghan Hindu and Sikh community members facing security threats in Afghanistan to India'.²⁹

1.2 Treatment by Afghan authorities of Hindu and Sikh communities

An April 2020 article about Afghan Hindus and Sikhs by the AAN stated that 'almost no Afghan government or political group has indulged in openly discriminating or abusing the only recognised non-Muslim minority of the country'.³⁰ Communities of Hindus and Sikhs have one seat in the Afghan parliament.³¹ Head of the state has to be a Muslim.³²

It is a crime in Afghanistan to discriminate on the grounds of religion and to 'intentionally insult a religion or disrupt its rites or destroy its permitted places of worship or any symbols respectable to followers of a religion'.³³ There is no separate Hindu or Sikh personal law in Afghanistan and in a case of lack of codified laws, Hanafi Sunni jurisprudence could apply to these minorities as well.³⁴ Sources indicate that instances of societal discrimination against Hindus and Sikhs have taken place in Afghanistan³⁵ including in the fields of employment³⁶, education³⁷ and performance of religious

²⁸ DNA India, First batch of 'facilitated' Afghan Sikhs to reach India on Sunday; optimistic about citizenship, 25 July 2020, [url](#); NYT, India Offers Escape to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Facing Attacks, 19 July 2020, [url](#); TOLONews, Indian Embassy: Visas Provided for Afghan Sikhs, 26 July 2020, [url](#)

²⁹ NYT, India Offers Escape to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Facing Attacks, 19 July 2020, [url](#)

³⁰ AAN, Blood in the Abode of Peace: The attack on Kabul's Sikhs, 1 April 2020, [url](#)

³¹ Reuters, Deadly blast hits eastern Afghan city, targeting Sikh minority, 1 July 2018, [url](#); USCIRF, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom 2020 Annual Report; USCIRF – Recommended for Special Watch List: Afghanistan, April 2020, [url](#)

³² Afghanistan, Islamic republic of, The Constitution of Afghanistan, 26 January 2004, [url](#), art. 62; PRSO, Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, February 2019, [url](#), p. 35

³³ UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 30 August 2018, [url](#), p. 59

³⁴ AIHRC, Assessing the Extent of the Implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in Afghanistan, 2019, [url](#), p. 31; UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 30 August 2018, [url](#), p. 59; USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 10 June 2020, [url](#), p. 11

³⁵ Al Jazeera, 'The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities,' 1 January 2017, [url](#)

³⁶ Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), p. 80; PRSO, Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, February 2019, [url](#), p. 35; USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 40

³⁷ Al Jazeera, 'The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities,' 1 January 2017, [url](#); Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#); Netherlands (The), Ministry of Foreign Affairs: Country of Origin Report Afghanistan, March 2019, [url](#), p. 81; PRSO, Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, February 2019, [url](#), p. 19; USDOS, Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2019 - Afghanistan, 11 March 2020, [url](#), p. 40

rituals³⁸. Lack of proper crematorial sites in the country has led to conflicts with Muslim communities in residential areas.³⁹

The government provides security for cremation ceremonies⁴⁰. In August 2019, the police arrested one protester objecting the cremation.⁴¹ The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs is supposed to assist minority faiths as well, including assistance with the pilgrimages for Hindus and Sikhs.⁴² In February 2020, the government has reportedly allocated \$650 000 for renovations of Hindu and Sikhs temples in the country.⁴³ After the 2018 attack in Jalalabad, president Ghani condemned it and called Hindus and Sikhs 'pride of the nation' and declared support of the communities by his government.⁴⁴ Representatives of Hindu and Sikh community can meet with the president and raise their concerns.⁴⁵

1.3 Treatment by Taliban of Hindus and Sikhs, especially of those living in the Taliban-controlled areas, including documented cases of discrimination/mistreatment

Under the Taliban rule in the period of 1996 - 2001, Hindus and Sikhs could reportedly discreetly practice their faith if they didn't proselytise, paid a special religious tax (*jizya*) and wore yellow identification batches in public.⁴⁶ A September 2018 article by the Diplomat indicated that in Helmand, reported at the time to be 'the Taliban's heartland', last two Sikhs remained.⁴⁷ Hindus and Sikhs are currently mostly found in Nangarhar, Ghazni and in Kabul.⁴⁸ The Taliban have distanced themselves from the attack on the Sikhs from 25 March 2020.⁴⁹ After the abduction of a Sikh man in June 2020, the Taliban condemned the incident and declared that they will punish the perpetrators.⁵⁰

No further information on the treatment of Hindus and Sikhs by the Taliban in the reference period could be found in the consulted and used sources.

³⁸ Al Jazeera, 'The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities,' 1 January 2017, [url](#); Australia, DFAT, DFAT Country Information Report Afghanistan, 27 June 2019, [url](#), p. 27; Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#)

³⁹ IWPR, Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Still Struggling, 30 November 2017, [url](#); PRSO, Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, February 2019, [url](#), p. 23; USCIRF, USCIRF 2019 Annual Report; Country Reports: Tier 2 Countries: Afghanistan, April 2019, [url](#); USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 10 June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁴⁰ Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#); UNHCR, UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, 30 August 2018, [url](#), pp. 62-63; USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 10 June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁴¹ USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 10 June 2020, [url](#), p. 3

⁴² Misal Foundation, South Asia State of Minorities Report 2018, The State of Minorities in Afghanistan, 2018, [url](#), p. 282; USDOS, 2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan, 10 June 2020, [url](#), p. 8

⁴³ Arab News, 'We don't want to leave': Sikhs consider future in Afghanistan, 28 February 2020, [url](#)

⁴⁴ AfghanHinduWordpress, Afghan President Visits Gurdwara; Promises Action Against Jalalabad Blast Perpetrators, 5 July 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁵ Australian Institute of International Affairs, A Precarious State: the Sikh Community in Afghanistan, 11 July 2018, [url](#); Current Triggers, Afghan Hindus and Sikhs meet with President Ghani, raise issue of land grabbing, 11 December 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁶ Al Jazeera, Inside the little-known kitchen of Afghanistan's Sikhs, 9 January 2016, [url](#)

⁴⁷ Diplomat (The), The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban's Heartland, 26 September 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁸ Arab News, 'We don't want to leave': Sikhs consider future in Afghanistan, 28 February 2020, [url](#); Diplomat (The), The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban's Heartland, 26 September 2018, [url](#)

⁴⁹ AAN, Blood in the Abode of Peace: The attack on Kabul's Sikhs, 1 April 2020, [url](#)

⁵⁰ Hindu (The), Taliban says it will punish kidnappers of Afghan Sikh, denies role in abduction 25 June 2020, [url](#)

1.4 Treatment by ISKP and other Anti-Government Elements (AGEs) of Hindus and Sikhs, including documented cases of discrimination/mistreatment

In July 2018, the ISKP reportedly issued a letter asking Afghan Hindus and Sikhs to pay the religious tax, *jizya*.⁵¹ Another source ascribed the letter to unnamed ‘insurgents’.⁵² No further information about the letter or about its enforcement could be found in the consulted and used sources.

Incidents involving the ISKP in the reference period include:

- On 1 July 2018, a suicide bomber killed some 20 people in Jalalabad, mostly Sikhs and Hindus. Deutsche Welle (DW) reported that 17 persons out of 19 killed were Hindus and Sikhs and Reuters noted that ‘at least’ 10 of the dead were Sikhs. The attack was later claimed by the ISKP.⁵³ The attacked were a delegation intending to meet the President Ghani. The only Sikh parliamentary candidate was amongst those killed.⁵⁴
- On 25 March 2020, at least 25 Sikhs were killed in an attack on a temple in Kabul. The ISKP claimed the attack⁵⁵ and declared that the attack was a revenge for Muslims in Kashmir.⁵⁶ Sources provide different views on number of attackers and on who was behind the attack, some suggesting a possible involvement of the Haqqani network.⁵⁷ One child was injured after an explosion near a Sikh crematorium in Kabul the next day.⁵⁸ On the contrary, RFE/RL reported that no one was hurt by the explosion.⁵⁹

⁵¹ Current Triggers, Alarming: Islamic State notice tells Afghan Hindus and Sikhs to pay Jizya, 23 July 2018, [url](#)

⁵² Diplomat (The), The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban’s Heartland, 26 September 2018, [url](#)

⁵³ BBC News, Afghanistan Blast: Sikhs Among 19 Dead in Jalalabad Suicide Attack, 1 July 2018, [url](#); DW, Afghanistan: Suicide blast targets Sikhs, Hindus, 2 July 2018, [url](#); Reuters, Deadly blast hits eastern Afghan city, targeting Sikh minority, 1 July 2018, [url](#)

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⁵⁵ AA, Turkey condemns attack on Sikhs in Afghan capital, 25 March 2020, [url](#); BBC News, Afghanistan conflict: Militants in deadly attack on Sikh temple in Kabul, 25 March 2020, [url](#); DW, Gunmen attack Sikh temple in Kabul, 25 March 2020, [url](#). UNAMA reported on 26 civilians killed, see: UNAMA, 2020 Quarterly Report, April 2020, [url](#), p. 4

⁵⁶ Jamestown Foundation: Islamic State-Khorasan Remains Potent Force in Afghan Jihad, Terrorism Monitor Volume: 18 Issue: 11, 3 June 2020, [url](#)

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⁵⁹ RFE/RL, Blast Rocks Funeral Services For Sikhs Killed In Kabul Attack, 26 March 2020, [url](#)



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