

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1186
Land:	Afghanistan
Kilde:	British Home Office
Titel:	Country Policy and Information Note – Afghanistan: Hindus and Sikhs
Udgivet:	marts 2021
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	27. april 2021



Home Office

Country Policy and Information Note

Afghanistan: Hindus and Sikhs

Version 6.0

March 2021

Preface

Purpose

This note provides country of origin information (COI) and analysis of COI for use by Home Office decision makers handling particular types of protection and human rights claims (as set out in the [Introduction](#) section). It is not intended to be an exhaustive survey of a particular subject or theme.

It is split into two main sections: (1) analysis and assessment of COI and other evidence; and (2) COI. These are explained in more detail below.

Assessment

This section analyses the evidence relevant to this note – i.e. the COI section; refugee/human rights laws and policies; and applicable caselaw – by describing this and its inter-relationships, and provides an assessment of, in general, whether one or more of the following applies:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- The general humanitarian situation is so severe as to breach Article 15(b) of European Council Directive 2004/83/EC (the Qualification Directive) / Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iii) of the Immigration Rules
- The security situation presents a real risk to a civilian's life or person such that it would breach Article 15(c) of the Qualification Directive as transposed in paragraph 339C and 339CA(iv) of the Immigration Rules
- A person is able to obtain protection from the state (or quasi state bodies)
- A person is reasonably able to relocate within a country or territory
- A claim is likely to justify granting asylum, humanitarian protection or other form of leave, and
- If a claim is refused, it is likely or unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.

Decision makers **must**, however, still consider all claims on an individual basis, taking into account each case's specific facts.

Country of origin information

The country information in this note has been carefully selected in accordance with the general principles of COI research as set out in the [Common EU \[European Union\] Guidelines for Processing Country of Origin Information \(COI\)](#), dated April 2008, and the Austrian Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation's (ACCORD), [Researching Country Origin Information – Training Manual, 2013](#). Namely, taking into account the COI's relevance, reliability, accuracy, balance, currency, transparency and traceability.

The structure and content of the country information section follows a [terms of reference](#) which sets out the general and specific topics relevant to this note.

All information included in the note was published or made publicly available on or before the 'cut-off' date(s) in the country information section. Any event taking place or report/article published after these date(s) is not included.

All information is publicly accessible or can be made publicly available, and is from generally reliable sources. Sources and the information they provide are carefully considered before inclusion. Factors relevant to the assessment of the reliability of sources and information include:

- the motivation, purpose, knowledge and experience of the source
- how the information was obtained, including specific methodologies used
- the currency and detail of information, and
- whether the COI is consistent with and/or corroborated by other sources.

Multiple sourcing is used to ensure that the information is accurate, balanced and corroborated, so that a comprehensive and up-to-date picture at the time of publication is provided of the issues relevant to this note.

Information is compared and contrasted, whenever possible, to provide a range of views and opinions. The inclusion of a source, however, is not an endorsement of it or any view(s) expressed.

Each piece of information is referenced in a brief footnote; full details of all sources cited and consulted in compiling the note are listed alphabetically in the [bibliography](#).

Feedback

Our goal is to continuously improve our material. Therefore, if you would like to comment on this note, please email the [Country Policy and Information Team](#).

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

The [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information](#) (IAGCI) was set up in March 2009 by the Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration to support him in reviewing the efficiency, effectiveness and consistency of approach of COI produced by the Home Office.

The IAGCI welcomes feedback on the Home Office's COI material. It is not the function of the IAGCI to endorse any Home Office material, procedures or policy. The IAGCI may be contacted at:

Independent Advisory Group on Country Information

Independent Chief Inspector of Borders and Immigration

5th Floor

Globe House

89 Eccleston Square

London, SW1V 1PN

Email: chiefinspector@icibi.gov.uk

Information about the IAGCI's work and a list of the documents which have been reviewed by the IAGCI can be found on the Independent Chief Inspector's pages of the [gov.uk website](#).

Contents

Assessment	6
1. Introduction	6
1.1 Basis of claim	6
1.2 Points to note	6
2. Consideration of issues	6
2.1 Credibility	6
2.2 Exclusion	6
2.3 Convention reason(s)	6
2.4 Risk	7
2.5 Protection	11
2.6 Internal relocation	12
2.7 Certification	12
Country information	13
3. History and origins	13
3.1 Hindu and Sikh communities in Afghanistan	13
4. Demography	14
4.1 Population	14
4.2 Reasons for migration	15
4.3 Location of communities	18
4.4 Socio-economic situation	20
4.5 Language	21
4.6 Gurdwaras and Mandir temples	22
5. Legal framework	24
5.1 Legal rights for minority religious groups	24
5.2 Apostasy and blasphemy	26
5.3 Citizenship and identity	27
6. State treatment and attitudes	27
6.1 State support and outreach	27
6.2 Political representation and employment in government	30
6.3 Access to education	31
6.4 Access to justice	33
7. Societal treatment and attitudes	34
7.1 Discrimination and harassment	34
7.2 Impact on women and girls	37
7.3 Land appropriation	38

7.4 Cremations	39
7.5 Attacks against communities	39
Annex A.....	42
Report by Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal, University of Birmingham.....	42
Annex B.....	45
Note from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.....	45
Terms of Reference.....	49
Bibliography	50
Sources cited	50
Sources consulted but not cited.....	53
Version control.....	54

Assessment

Updated: 23 March 2021

1. Introduction

1.1 Basis of claim

- 1.1.1 Fear of persecution or serious harm by the state or non-state actors because the person is Hindu or Sikh.

1.2 Points to note

- 1.2.1 Despite separate histories and religions, Hindu and Sikh communities in Afghanistan are interconnected and are frequently referred to as a single community (see [Hindu and Sikh communities in Afghanistan](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

2. Consideration of issues

2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).
- 2.1.2 Decision makers must also check if there has been a previous application for a UK visa or another form of leave. Asylum applications matched to visas should be investigated prior to the asylum interview (see the [Asylum Instruction on Visa Matches, Asylum Claims from UK Visa Applicants](#)).
- 2.1.3 Decision makers should also consider the need to conduct language analysis testing (see the [Asylum Instruction on Language Analysis](#)).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 Decision makers must consider whether there are serious reasons for considering whether one (or more) of the exclusion clauses is applicable. Each case must be considered on its individual facts and merits.
- 2.2.2 If the person is excluded from the Refugee Convention, they will also be excluded from a grant of humanitarian protection.
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the Asylum Instructions on [Exclusion under Articles 1F and 33\(2\) of the Refugee Convention](#), [Humanitarian Protection](#) and [Restricted Leave](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.3 Convention reason(s)

- 2.3.1 Actual or imputed religion.
- 2.3.2 Establishing a convention reason is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question is whether the particular person has a well-founded fear of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.3.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

2.4 Risk

2.4.1 The number of Hindus and Sikhs living in Afghanistan, which was approximately 220,000 in the 1980s, has declined considerably over the past 3 decades due to conflict, discrimination, the poor economic situation and lack of employment. Current population estimates vary considerably from between 44 to 100 families consisting of between 200 to 900 individuals (see [Population](#) and [Reasons for migration](#)), living primarily in urban areas of Kabul and Nangarhar, and often in temples due to lack of available or affordable housing (see [Location of communities](#) and [Gurdwaras and Mandir temples](#)).

a. State treatment

2.4.2 According to the constitution, Hindus and Sikhs are free to exercise and perform their religious rites, within the confines of the law (see [Legal rights for minority religious groups](#)). The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs (MOHRA) is responsible for managing religious affairs and has a dedicated office to support the faith traditions of Hindus and Sikhs. The ministry also facilitated pilgrimages for Hindus and Sikhs to India (see [State support and outreach](#)).

2.4.3 Narinder Singh Khalsa is the elected candidate for the single reserved seat for Hindu and Sikh communities in the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of parliament). In addition, a small number of Hindus and Sikhs serve in government positions, including one at the municipal level, one at the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, one as a presidentially appointed member of the upper house of parliament, one as a presidential advisor and one as a member of the Ministry of Transportation (see [Political representation and employment in government](#)). Although the government has built some schools for the community, Hindus and Sikhs report their children cannot attend due to insecurity and that schools are inadequately equipped to teach students. Instead, schooling is often provided in private schools or temples (see [Access to education](#)).

2.4.4 Efforts are made by the MOHRA to provide free water, electricity and repair services for some Sikh and Hindu temples. The government reportedly allocated funds for renovating Hindu and Sikh temples, although the gurdwara in Kabul attacked in March 2020 remains closed and in a state of disrepair, and there is a general feeling that the government lacks a suitable agenda to preserve property and religious sites. However, 2 other temples in Jalalabad and Ghazni were refurbished in 2020 (see [State support and outreach](#) and [Attacks against communities](#)).

2.4.5 Negative comments by the government against Hindu and Sikh communities are rarely reported. Government officials, including President Ghani, have expressed their support for the community and say they are committed to providing security following attacks against Hindus and Sikhs. The government has provided a specific area for cremations and security is provided. Following the March 2020 gurdwara attack, additional security forces were assigned to the area (see [State support and outreach](#), [Cremations](#) and [Attacks against communities](#)).

- 2.4.6 Hindu and Sikh communities face discrimination and delays in the judicial system (though delays are common for all groups, due to the general lack of capacity in the judiciary – see the [Country Background Note: Afghanistan](#)), particularly in relation to land disputes. Although mistrust in the justice system is reported to be a reason for not pursuing court action, a 2019 survey of Hindus and Sikhs found nearly half of respondents said they had confidence in the competency of state law enforcement and judicial processes if they were a victim of a crime. Over half of respondents to the same survey said they feared confronting the Afghan National Police but the majority also said they had never experienced police discrimination (see [Access to justice](#) and [Land appropriation](#)).
- 2.4.7 In the country guidance case of [TG and others \(Afghan Sikhs persecuted\) \(CG\) \[2015\] UKUT 595 \(IAC\)](#), heard on 31 March 2014 and 17 August 2015, promulgated on 3 November 2015, the Upper Tribunal held that ‘Members of the Sikh and Hindu communities in Afghanistan do not face a real risk of persecution or ill-treatment such as to entitle them to a grant of international protection on the basis of their ethnic or religious identity, per se. Neither can it be said that the cumulative impact of discrimination suffered by the Sikh and Hindu communities in general reaches the threshold of persecution’ (paragraph 119 (iii)).
- 2.4.8 Evidence continues to indicate that, in general, Hindus and Sikhs are unlikely to be subject to treatment or discrimination by the state, on the basis of their ethnic or religious identity, per se, that is sufficiently serious, by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution or serious harm.
- 2.4.9 Decision makers must consider whether there are particular factors specific to the person which would place them at real risk. Each case must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that they would be at real risk of serious harm or persecution on account of their actual or perceived religion.
- 2.4.10 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

b. Societal treatment

- 2.4.11 A 2019 survey found that the majority of Hindus and Sikhs predominantly live in Muslim neighbourhoods, work alongside Muslim colleagues (see [Location of communities](#)), as well as interact with their Muslim neighbours, for example, by attending parties and ceremonies together. However, societal discrimination is common and Hindus and Sikhs say they are often perceived as ‘outsiders’. Hindus and Sikhs report insults, harassment and discrimination due to their religion. Although there have been reports of objections and harassment from some Muslims when cremations take place, according to Sikh MP Narinder Singh Khalsa, cremations take place without difficulty in a designated site. Hindus and Sikhs claim they are frequently called to convert to Islam. Hindus report they face less harassment than the more visibly distinguishable Sikh population (whose men wear a distinctive headdress). Women of all faiths report harassment by Muslim religious

leaders if they do not comply with wearing conservative attire, including head coverings (see [Discrimination and harassment](#) and [Cremations](#)).

- 2.4.12 Some Hindus and Sikhs have been victims of illegal seizure and occupation of their land, most frequently by ‘Mafia or local commands’, according to the 2019 survey. There is a reluctance to pursue land disputes through the courts due to fear of retaliation, especially if powerful local leaders occupy their property. Although land disputes commonly occur throughout the country, and amongst all ethnic groups, Hindus and Sikhs report a reluctance to pursue cases in court due to lack of trust and discrimination in the judicial process (see [Land appropriation](#) and [Access to justice](#)).
- 2.4.13 Most Hindus and Sikhs are involved in small-scale family-run trade and businesses. Some Hindus and Sikhs face discrimination in the labour market and lack of employment opportunities was reported by Sikh leaders to be one of the main causes of emigration. Illiteracy, particularly amongst women, causes difficulties in obtaining work. Estimates from 2021 indicated that around 40% of the 200 Sikhs remaining in Afghanistan are employed or have means to a livelihood. Community members avoid sending their children to public schools because of harassment by other students and, since the 1990s, few have gone on to higher education (see [Socio-economic situation](#), [Reasons for migration](#) and [Access to education](#)).
- 2.4.14 The 2019 survey of Hindus and Sikhs found that most fear for their personal safety and many have faced attacks on their places of worship or cremation grounds. A different 2019 survey of all Afghan people showed that nearly 75% of people generally feared for their personal safety. Hindus and Sikhs can also be victims of crime because of their perceived wealth and are, according to Sikh MP, Narinder Singh Khalsa, ‘frequently targeted by criminals’ (see [Attacks against communities](#), [Cremations](#) and [Reasons for migration](#)).
- 2.4.15 In July 2018, a number of Hindus and Sikhs, including the then Sikh Member of Parliament, Avtar Singh Khalsa, who were part of a delegation travelling to meet President Ghani, were killed by a suicide bomber in Jalabalad. On 25 March 2020, at least 25 Sikhs were killed in an attack on a gurdwara in Kabul. Both attacks were claimed by Islamic State for Khorasan Province (ISKP). Sikh community members reported that ISKP threatened further attacks if they did not convert to Islam or leave the country within 10 days of the gurdwara attack (see [Attacks against communities](#)).
- 2.4.16 In the months following the March 2020 attack by ISKP, the Indian government facilitated the travel of around 200 Hindus and Sikhs to India. MP Narinder Singh Khalsa said that insecurity is the main reason for migration, followed by land appropriation (see [Reasons for migration](#) and [Land appropriation](#)).
- 2.4.17 In the country guidance case of [TG and others \(Afghan Sikhs persecuted\) \(CG\) \[2015\] UKUT 595 \(IAC\)](#), heard on 31 March 2014 and 17 August 2015, promulgated on 3 November 2015, the Upper Tribunal held (at paragraph 119) that:
- (i) ‘Some members of the Sikh and Hindu communities in Afghanistan continue to suffer harassment at the hands of Muslim zealots.

- (ii) 'Members of the Sikh and Hindu communities in Afghanistan do not face a real risk of persecution or ill-treatment such as to entitle them to a grant of international protection on the basis of their ethnic or religious identity, per se. Neither can it be said that the cumulative impact of discrimination suffered by the Sikh and Hindu communities in general reaches the threshold of persecution.
- (iii) 'A consideration of whether an individual member of the Sikh and Hindu communities is at risk real of persecution upon return to Afghanistan is fact-sensitive. All the relevant circumstances must be considered but careful attention should be paid to the following:
 - a. women are particularly vulnerable in the absence of appropriate protection from a male member of the family;
 - b. likely financial circumstances and ability to access basic accommodation bearing in mind
 - Muslims are generally unlikely to employ a member of the Sikh and Hindu communities
 - such individuals may face difficulties (including threats, extortion, seizure of land and acts of violence) in retaining property and / or pursuing their remaining traditional pursuit, that of a shopkeeper / trader
 - the traditional source of support for such individuals, the Gurdwara is much less able to provide adequate support;
 - c. the level of religious devotion and the practical accessibility to a suitable place of religious worship in light of declining numbers and the evidence that some have been subjected to harm and threats to harm whilst accessing the Gurdwara;
 - d. access to appropriate education for children in light of discrimination against Sikh and Hindu children and the shortage of adequate education facilities for them.

2.4.18 Similarly, but more recently, the European Court of Human Rights, in the case of [ASN and Others v. the Netherlands](#), heard on 9 July and 10 December 2019 and promulgated on 25 February 2020, held that Afghan Sikhs in general are not at risk on return of a breach of Article 3 of the ECHR. It would require an applicant to demonstrate special distinguishing features in order to establish risk on return which should be subjected to a detailed credibility assessment (paragraphs 107-112).

2.4.19 There have been 2 major attacks against Hindus and Sikhs since the promulgation of [TG and others](#), one in July 2018 and one in March 2020, as well as a few reported instances of crime against individual Hindus and Sikhs. However, the available country information does not indicate that there are very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to justify a departure from the conclusions at paragraph 119 (ii) of [TG and others](#).

2.4.20 However, decision makers must consider whether the cumulative effect of factors, including those set out at paragraph 119 (iii) of [TG and others](#), would place the person at real risk of discrimination, that is sufficiently serious by its nature or repetition, to amount to persecution or serious harm. Each case

must be considered on its facts with the onus on the person to show that they would be at real risk of serious harm or persecution on account of their actual or perceived religion.

- 2.4.21 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.5 Protection

- 2.5.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state they will not, in general, be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.
- 2.5.2 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, including 'rogue' state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.
- 2.5.3 In areas controlled by anti-government elements (AGEs), the state will usually be unable to provide effective protection (see Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Anti-government elements \(AGEs\)](#)).
- 2.5.4 In the country guidance case of [TG and others](#), the Upper Tribunal held that: 'Although it appears there is a willingness at governmental level to provide protection, it is not established on the evidence that at a local level the police are willing, even if able, to provide the necessary level of protection required in Refugee Convention/Qualification Directive terms, to those members of the Sikh and Hindu communities who experience serious harm or harassment amounting to persecution' (paragraph 119 iv).
- 2.5.5 Army personnel and additional police were assigned to the area of the March 2020 gurdwara attack and it was reported that members of the ISKP were arrested in response to that attack, for which ISKP had claimed responsibility. In addition, police security is provided at cremation sites and in August 2019 a protester against cremations was arrested (see [State support and outreach](#) and [Attacks against communities](#)).
- 2.5.6 Whilst efforts were made to provide additional protection following the gurdwara attack and there appears to be a general willingness by government officials to support Hindu and Sikh communities, law enforcement systems remain weak. As such there are not very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from the conclusion made in [TG and others](#). Although the state may be willing, in general it is unable to provide effective protection to Hindus and Sikhs who experience serious harm or harassment amounting to persecution.
- 2.5.7 See also the [Country Policy and Information Notes on Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation and Anti-government elements](#) and the [Country Background Note: Afghanistan](#).
- 2.5.8 For further guidance on assessing the availability of state protection, see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.6 Internal relocation

- 2.6.1 Where the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state and there is no safe part of the country where they would not be at risk from the state, they are unlikely to be able to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.6.2 Decision makers must give careful consideration to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person.
- 2.6.3 The country guidance case of [TG and others](#) found that it is a fact-sensitive assessment as to whether it is reasonable to expect a member of the Hindu or Sikh communities to relocate. The relevant factors to be considered include those set out at paragraph 119 (iii) of the determination, as cited in the risk assessment above. Given their particular circumstances and declining numbers, the practicability of settling elsewhere for members of the Sikh and Hindu communities must be carefully considered. Those without access to an independent income are unlikely to be able to reasonably relocate because of depleted support mechanisms (paragraph 119 v).
- 2.6.4 Whether relocation may be possible will depend on the facts of the case, taking into account the Court of Appeal's judgment in [SC \(Jamaica\) v Home Secretary \[2017\] EWCA Civ 2112](#), which held that 'the evaluative exercise is intended to be holistic and ... no burden or standard of proof arises in relation to the overall issue of whether it is reasonable to internally relocate' (paragraph 36).
- 2.6.5 For further information about the general situation for women in Afghanistan, see the Country Policy and Information Notes on [Afghanistan: Women fearing gender-based harm/violence](#), [Security and humanitarian situation](#) and [Anti-government elements](#)
- 2.6.6 For further guidance on internal relocation see the instruction on [Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

2.7 Certification

- 2.7.1 Where a claim is refused, it is unlikely to be certifiable as 'clearly unfounded' under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002.
- 2.7.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Country information

Section 3 updated: 23 March 2021

3. History and origins

3.1 Hindu and Sikh communities in Afghanistan

3.1.1 An Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN – an independent non-profit policy research organisation) report dated April 2020 noted:

‘Despite having separate histories, Afghan Hindus and Sikhs are nowadays usually referred to as a single community, and indeed they share places of worship, an elected MP in the parliament and a place in society. The Hindu presence in the country dates back to the pre-Islamic period: Kabul, for example, was the seat of a dynasty of Hindu rulers between 9th and 11th century. After the Muslim conquest and conversion of most people in the territories making up modern Afghanistan, other Hindus moved to Afghanistan in various capacities, from slaves to governors. However, the current community originates mainly from merchants and public servant whose destinies were closely intertwined with the Afghan state since its inception in mid-18th century.

‘Sikhs, on the other hand, have a long history of neighbourly relations with the Afghans, as trade (and sometimes conflict) between Punjab and the Afghan highlands rarely stopped. They probably constitute by now the majority among the Hindu-Sikh community.’¹

3.1.2 The Associated Press (AP) also noted ‘Although Sikhism and Hinduism are two distinct religions with their own holy books and temples, in Afghanistan the communities are interwoven, having been driven into a kinship by their tiny size, and they both gather under one roof or a single temple to worship, each following their own faith.’²

3.1.3 A survey of Afghan Hindus and Sikhs (programme period September 2018 to February 2019), by the Porsesh Research and Studies Organization (PRSO), an independent non-profit research organisation based in Kabul, noted ‘Before the civil war and reign of Mujaheddin, the Hindus and Sikhs used to be integrated into the politics, society, business and economy of the country throughout 20th Century, until Mujahideen took over Afghanistan in 1989 and followed by emergence of Taliban in 1994. Despite efforts by the international community and new democratic government, Hindus and Sikhs did not find the peace they enjoyed many decades ago.’³

3.1.4 Writing in October 2020, Inderjeet Singh, described as an amateur historian and regular contributor to the Sikh community website SikhNet⁴, as well as author of ‘Afghan Hindus and Sikhs: A History of a Thousand Years’⁵:

‘The majority of Afghan Sikhs belong to Arora and Khatri castes. Few are from Bhatia, Bhatra and Rajvanshi background. All are well known to an

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

² AP, ‘[Facing IS, last embattled Sikhs, Hindus leave Afghanistan](#)’, 27 September 2020

³ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (pages 8-9), February 2019

⁴ Singh, I., ‘[Afghan Sikhs – Tracing their origins and history](#)’, 29 October 2020

⁵ Indian Express, ‘[Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan — how many remain...](#)’, 28 July 2020

average Sikh except for the last one which are in majority among the Afghan Sikhs present in Afghanistan...

'The Afghan Hindus are also Khattris and Aroras. A small number of them are Brahmins and Bhatias. The present-day Afghan Sikhs are descendants of the Afghan Hindus who became Nanakpanthis when Guru Nanak came to Afghanistan in 1521. A large number of Afghan Sikhs shared their surname or sub-caste with Hindus.'⁶

- 3.1.5 For a more history of Afghan Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan, see the AAN report, dated 2013, '[The Other Fold of the Turban: Afghanistan's Hindus and Sikhs](#)'⁷ and the PRSO '[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)'⁸.

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 4 updated: 23 March 2021

4. Demography

4.1 Population

- 4.1.1 In 2019-2020 the total population of Afghanistan was estimated to be between 32 and 37 million^{9 10}.
- 4.1.2 During the 1980s the population of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan was estimated to be 220,000, dropping to 15,000 in the 1990s during the mujahideen rule and remaining at that level during the Taliban regime^{11 12}. By 2016, the Hindu and Sikh population had fallen to an estimated 1,350¹³.
- 4.1.3 According to the Independent Election Commission (IEC), 583 Hindus and Sikhs were registered to vote at the October 2018 elections¹⁴.
- 4.1.4 According to the US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report for 2019 (USSD IRF Report 2019), 'Sikh and Hindu leaders estimate there are 120 Sikh and Hindu families totaling approximately 550 individuals, down from 700 in 2018 and 1,300 individuals estimated in 2017, mostly in Kabul, with a few communities in Nangarhar and Ghazni Provinces. Hindu community leaders estimate there are 35 remaining Afghan Hindus, all male and primarily businessmen with families in other countries.'¹⁵
- 4.1.5 Whilst taking into account contested population figures, especially due to internal and external migration, at the time of the PRSO survey, published February 2019, it was estimated there were between 200 and 250 Hindu and Sikh households living in Afghanistan, based on consultation meetings with leaders of Hindu and Sikh communities¹⁶.

⁶ Singh, I., '[Afghan Sikhs – Tracing their origins and history](#)', 29 October 2020

⁷ AAN, '[The Other Fold of the Turban: Afghanistan's Hindus and Sikhs](#)', 23 September 2013

⁸ PRSO, '[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)' (pages 10-11), February 2019

⁹ NSIA, '[Afghanistan population estimates](#)' (page 1), June 2019

¹⁰ CIA World Factbook, '[Afghanistan](#)' (People and society), 10 September 2020

¹¹ Tolonews, '[Nearly 99% Of Hindus, Sikhs Left Afghanistan in Last Three decades](#)', 21 June 2016

¹² Al Jazeera, '[The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities](#)', 1 January 2017

¹³ Tolonews, '[Nearly 99% Of Hindus, Sikhs Left Afghanistan in Last Three decades](#)', 21 June 2016

¹⁴ BTI, '[2020 Country Report](#)' (page 10), 2020

¹⁵ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (section I), 10 June 2020

¹⁶ PRSO, '[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)' (page 75), February 2019

- 4.1.6 By September 2020 some sources estimated there were fewer than 100 families (around 650 Sikhs and 50 Hindus) remaining in the country^{17 18}.
- 4.1.7 In a report to the Country Policy and Information Team (CPIT), dated 9 November 2020, Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal, a senior lecturer in Sikh Studies in the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham, stated 'Whilst there may not be an exact figure of how many Sikhs and Hindus are left in Afghanistan, after speaking to Afghan Sikhs in the UK who are working with the community in Afghanistan one can estimate that there are probably between 600-800 Sikhs and less than 100 Hindus left (approximately 90-100 families) in Afghanistan.'¹⁹
- 4.1.8 In January 2021, an official from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) met with Narinder Singh Khalsa, a Sikh Member of Parliament, to discuss the situation for the Afghan Sikh community in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan. The FCDO provided a note to CPIT, dated 27 January 2021, with Mr Khalsa's responses, in which he stated that there were approximately 200 Sikhs (44 families) left in Afghanistan²⁰.

See also [Locations of communities](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

4.2 Reasons for migration

- 4.2.1 According to Inderjeet Singh, author of 'Afghan Hindus and Sikhs: A History of a Thousand Years', cited in the Indian Express in July 2020:
- 'The exodus started in 1992 when the Mujahideen took over. "The Soviet intervention, which started in 1979, lasted for a decade and Afghanistan became a battleground for the Cold War. The US and its allies started providing weapons to Mujahideen to fight a proxy war against the Soviet occupation. The Soviets withdrew in 1989... The Mujahideen captured Kabul in 1992 and deposed President Najibullah... A large number of Afghan Sikhs and Hindus started the exodus and left the country," ...'²¹
- 4.2.2 The Indian Express article added 'Under the Mujahideen, there were widespread kidnappings, extortion, property grabbing incidents, religious persecution, targeting Sikhs and Hindus which became the trigger point for exodus. After the Taliban took over Afghanistan, those who remained continued to face persecution.'²²
- 4.2.3 In 2016, Tolonews estimated 99% of the Hindu and Sikh population had left Afghanistan during the last 3 decades for reasons of religious discrimination and government neglect, particularly during the Taliban era²³.

¹⁷ Hindustan Times, '[200 Afghan Sikh families put up in gurdwaras across Delhi](#)', 7 September 2020

¹⁸ Indian Express, '[Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan — how many remain...](#)', 28 July 2020

¹⁹ Jhutti-Johal, Dr. J., [Report to CPIT](#), 9 November 2020

²⁰ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A1), 27 January 2021

²¹ Indian Express, '[Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan — how many remain...](#)', 28 July 2020

²² Indian Express, '[Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan — how many remain...](#)', 28 July 2020

²³ Tolonews, '[Nearly 99% Of Hindus, Sikhs Left Afghanistan in Last Three decades](#)', 21 June 2016

- 4.2.4 Inderjeet Singh stated that, before the Mujahideen completely took over Kabul, the Afghan government issued ‘speedy passports’ under a scheme known as the Aab Gang pilgrimage passport²⁴. Some 50,000 Hindus and Sikhs left for India under the scheme, subsequently moving to Europe and the United States²⁵.
- 4.2.5 The PRSO survey noted ‘The Hindu-Sikh community’s present position is constantly threatened by not only insecurity in general, but the targeted hostility from the other communities. There are growing threats against their property, faith, and religious practices due to growing religious extremism. The migration trend follows as internal displacement from villages and smaller cities to larger cities, and then to New Delhi or further European countries.’²⁶
- 4.2.6 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted that community leaders estimated around 200 Sikhs and Hindus left Afghanistan in 2019, compared with 500-600 in 2018, having travelled to either India or Western countries²⁷. The same source noted ‘Sikh leaders continued to state the main cause of Hindu and Sikh emigration was lack of employment opportunities...’²⁸ Both Sikh and Hindu communities stated emigration would continue to rise as economic conditions deteriorated and security concerns increased²⁹.
- 4.2.7 The PRSO survey, which interviewed 286 Hindus and Sikhs, found ‘Hindus and Sikhs are considerably less optimistic about the direction of Afghanistan, compared to the rest of Afghans. A vast majority (81.6%) of Hindus and Sikhs say they think Afghanistan is heading in the wrong direction, and only 13.1% say Afghanistan is heading in the right direction.’³⁰ The survey also found:
- ‘Overall, 60.7% of survey respondents expressed desire to migrate if they were given opportunity, while 37.9% expressed they would not leave. This figure is considerably higher than the rest of Afghans; in 2018, 36.8% of Afghans said they would leave the country if given the opportunity, according to the Survey of the Afghan People (2018). The tendency to migrate is higher among Hindu and Sikh men than women (67.9% vs. 53.3%). Furthermore, respondents from Nangarhar express greater desire to leave the country (78.5%) than respondents from Kabul (64.8%) and Ghazni (34.2%). Additionally, age has a weak but negative relationship with tendency to migrate: younger respondents expressed greater desire to migrate than older respondents.’³¹
- 4.2.8 As well as having relatives already living abroad being a strong pull-factor for outward migration³², the main reasons given for wanting to migrate were ‘[I]nsecurity/war/suicide attacks (67.9%), unemployment (31.0%), and for

²⁴ Indian Express, ‘[Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan — how many remain...](#)’, 28 July 2020

²⁵ Indian Express, ‘[Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan — how many remain...](#)’, 28 July 2020

²⁶ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 57), February 2019

²⁷ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section III), 10 June 2020

²⁸ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section III), 10 June 2020

²⁹ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section III), 10 June 2020

³⁰ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 2), February 2019

³¹ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 59), February 2019

³² PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 63), February 2019

education or because of illiteracy (19.6%). Insecurity and unemployment are cited more in Ghazni province (76.9% and 34.6%, respectively). Education is cited more among Nangarhar and Kabul respondents (29.2% and 17.6, respectively). Moreover, the top responses are similar to the national survey responses.³³

- 4.2.9 On 18 July 2020, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs offered to facilitate the travel of Hindus and Sikhs to India following a terror attack at a gurdwara in Kabul in March 2020³⁴.
- 4.2.10 The Associated Press (AP) reported 'In August [2020], a group of 176 Afghan Sikhs and Hindus went to India on special visas. They were the second batch since March, with the first 11 members arriving in India in July.'³⁵
- 4.2.11 On 5 September 2020, the Hindustan Times cited much higher numbers and said around 420 Afghan Sikh and Hindu **families** had arrived in India³⁶. A subsequent Hindustan Times report, dated 7 September 2020, referred to 200 **families** arriving in India³⁷ [CPIT emphasis – [population](#) estimates indicated there were between 100 to 250 families in 2019/2020, so the figures cited by the Hindustan Times **may** relate to individuals rather than families. The average size of a Sikh or Hindu family was not known].
- 4.2.12 Afghanistan's only Sikh MP, Narender Singh Khalsa, told Radio Free Afghanistan that insecurity was the primary reason for Sikhs and Hindus leaving the country³⁸. In October 2020 it was reported that all Hindus and Sikhs living in Ghazni province had left the area due to increasing insecurity³⁹ ⁴⁰. In January 2021, Narinder Singh Khalsa said that, aside from the security situation, many Sikhs had left the country because '... about 70% of the land was occupied by powerful people.'⁴¹

See also [Land appropriation](#).

- 4.2.13 Dr Jagbir of the University of Birmingham stated in her report to CPIT dated November 2020 that, having spoken to Afghan Sikhs in the UK who work with the community in Afghanistan, it was clear that the number of Hindus and Sikhs left in Afghanistan would further decrease as those who were left want to leave due to increasing safety and security fears⁴². Dr Jagbir added 'They fear for their safety because they are acutely aware that the signing of the [Agreement for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan](#) on 29th February 2020 and the proposed withdrawal of US and International Troops is emboldening ISIS and the Taliban in their quest for power and control, which will inevitably

³³ PRSO, '[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)' (page 60), February 2019

³⁴ Ministry of External Affairs (India), '[On safe return of Shri Nidan Singh](#)', 18 July 2020

³⁵ AP, '[Facing IS, last embattled Sikhs, Hindus leave Afghanistan](#)', 27 September 2020

³⁶ Hindustan Times, '[420 Afghan Sikh and Hindu families evacuated to India](#)', 5 September 2020

³⁷ Hindustan Times, '[200 Afghan Sikh families put up in gurdwaras across Delhi](#)', 7 September 2020

³⁸ Gandhara, '[More Afghan Sikhs, Hindus Migrating To India From Afghanistan](#)', 11 August 2020

³⁹ Afghanistan Times, '[Facing persecution, last Sikhs leave Ghazni](#)', 20 October 2020

⁴⁰ Afghanistan Times, '[Human rights body criticizes government...](#)', 21 October 2020

⁴¹ FCDO, '[Note to CPIT](#)' (A22), 27 January 2021

⁴² Jhutti-Johal, Dr. J., '[Report to CPIT](#)', 9 November 2020

mean more trauma and hardship for them due to violence, persecution and discrimination.’⁴³

- 4.2.14 When asked if recruitment of Sikh minors by the Taliban was a problem, Narinder Singh Khalsa told the FCDO official, in January 2021, that this notion was ‘completely baseless and irrelevant.’⁴⁴

See also [Discrimination and harassment](#) and [Attacks against communities](#).

- 4.2.15 According to Khajinder Singh, head of Afghan Hindu Sikh Welfare Society in Delhi, quoted in the Indian Express in July 2020, “Approximately, there are 18,000 Afghan Sikhs living in India, of whom 50-60% have citizenship and the rest are living as refugees or on long-term visas. Most are living in Delhi followed by Punjab and Haryana”.⁴⁵
- 4.2.16 Narinder Singh Khalsa was unable to provide exact data on how many Sikhs had gone to live in India, but considered that most of the 1.5 million Sikhs who used to live in Kabul, and left because of the security situation, had migrated to India as it was the safest migratory route, and then travelled elsewhere⁴⁶.
- 4.2.17 Mr Khalsa noted that when Sikhs return to Afghanistan, the community provides shelter to them within gurdwaras as a temporary measure, and, if they hold the correct documentation, will then attempt to get their house or land back if it has been occupied by others⁴⁷.

See also [Gurdwaras and Mandir temples](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

4.3 Location of communities

- 4.3.1 According to the USSD IRF Report 2019, most Sikh and Hindu families lived in Kabul, with a few communities in Nangarhar and Ghazni Provinces⁴⁸.
- 4.3.2 The PRSO survey noted that most Hindu and Sikh communities lived in close proximity of each other and in certain areas of larger cities⁴⁹. The survey also observed ‘While most Hindu and Sikh population reside in Kabul, Nangarhar and Ghazni provincial centers, there are few Hindu and Sikh households in provinces of Herat, Khost, Kunduz, and Parwan.’⁵⁰
- 4.3.3 Speaking to the Hindustan Times in September 2020, regarding the planned evacuation of Sikhs and Hindus to India, Vikramjit Singh Sahney, the international president of World Punjabi Organization (WPO), indicated that Sikh and Hindu families lived in Kabul, Jalalabad, Kandahar and Ghazni⁵¹.
- 4.3.4 According to a July 2020 report in the New York Times ‘In the eastern province of Nangarhar, only 45 families remain from thousands before. In

⁴³ Jhutti-Johal, Dr. J., [Report to CPIT](#), 9 November 2020

⁴⁴ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A2), 27 January 2021

⁴⁵ Indian Express, [‘Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan — how many remain...’](#), 28 July 2020

⁴⁶ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A20), 27 January 2021

⁴⁷ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A23), 27 January 2021

⁴⁸ USSD, [‘2019 Report on International Religious Freedom’](#) (section I), 10 June 2020

⁴⁹ PRSO, [‘Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs’](#) (page 69), February 2019

⁵⁰ PRSO, [‘Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs’](#) (page 75), February 2019

⁵¹ Hindustan Times, [‘420 Afghan Sikh and Hindu families evacuated to India’](#), 5 September 2020

Paktia, another eastern province, only a single family remains – Jagmohan Singh, an herbal doctor, and his wife and two of their children.⁵² According to a Ghazni Sikh resident, cited in the Afghanistan Times in August 2020, there were around 100 Sikhs remaining in Ghazni⁵³. By October 2020 it was reported that all Hindu and Sikh families living in Ghazni had left the area due to increasing insecurity and had moved to Kabul or abroad⁵⁴. In January 2021, MP Narinder Singh Khalsa said that the 200 Sikhs remaining in Afghanistan lived mainly in Nangarhar and Kabul provinces⁵⁵.

See also [Population](#) and [Reasons for migration](#).

- 4.3.5 According to a query response on the situation of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan, compiled from a range of sources and published by the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) in August 2020, 'Hindu Gozar and Karte Parwan are said to be traditional Hindu and Sikh neighbourhoods in Kabul.'⁵⁶ Hindu Gozar is located in Police District 1 (PD1) and Kart-e-Parwan in PD2⁵⁷. According to the Hindustan Times, the Shor Bazar area of Kabul 'has a sizeable population of the Hindu and Sikh minorities.'⁵⁸ Shor Bazar (Shur Bazaar) is located in PD1⁵⁹ and was the location of the gurdwara attacked in March 2020⁶⁰ (see also [Attacks against communities](#) and [Gurdwaras and Mandir temples](#)).

- 4.3.6 The PRSO survey referred to the composition of communities and workplaces, which tended to be dominated by Muslim neighbours and colleagues⁶¹. The survey found:

'When asked about the areas they live, 85.5% of respondents say there are people from other ethnic groups that live in their area, 58.0% say there are other Hindu or Sikh families living in their area, and 27.6% say other family or relatives are living in their area. In their workplace, 91.2% say there are people from other ethnic and religious beliefs, 35.2% say there are other Hindu or Sikh persons, and only 11.3% say there are family members or relatives. This also indicate[s] that Hindus and Sikhs are largely assimilated in neighborhoods they live in and in areas they work at.

'In Kabul, a larger proportion of respondents indicate living in areas with neighbors from different ethnic groups and religious beliefs (96.2%). Comparatively, in Nangarhar, fewer respondents say they work with others from ethnic and religious backgrounds (68.8%). This might indicate that in Nangarhar, respondents are more concentrated in areas with only Hindu and Sikh neighbors.'⁶²

See [Socio-economic situation](#) for further information on employment.

⁵² New York Times, '[India Offers Escape to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Facing Attacks](#)', 19 July 2020

⁵³ Afghanistan Times, '[Insecurity in Ghazni forces hundreds of Hindus, Sikhs...](#)', 10 August 2020

⁵⁴ Afghanistan Times, '[Facing persecution, last Sikhs leave Ghazni](#)', 20 October 2020

⁵⁵ FCDO, '[Note to CPIT](#)' (A11), 27 January 2021

⁵⁶ EASO, '[COI Query Response](#)' (page 2), 5 August 2020

⁵⁷ AAN, '[Kabul Unpacked](#)' (pages 5-6), 2019

⁵⁸ Hindustan Times, '[25 killed in Kabul gurdwara attack; Islamic State claims...](#)', 25 March 2020

⁵⁹ AAN, '[Kabul Unpacked](#)' (page 5), 2019

⁶⁰ Hindustan Times, '[25 killed in Kabul gurdwara attack; Islamic State claims...](#)', 25 March 2020

⁶¹ PRSO, '[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)' (pages 69-70), February 2019

⁶² PRSO, '[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)' (page 70), February 2019

4.4 Socio-economic situation

4.4.1 Whilst noting that over half of all Afghans lived below the poverty line, the PRSO survey stated:

‘Overall, economic conditions of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan are expected to be slightly different to the rest of the country. Most Hindu and Sikh communities in Afghanistan are city dwellers where services are considered better. But they face more limitations than the rest of Afghans in obtaining education and entering job market. Most Hindus and Sikhs are involved in small-scale family-run trade and businesses.

‘A quarter of respondents report having difficulty purchasing simple and basic food stuff (24.5%). More than a third of respondents report having difficulty affording new clothes or social obligations, but can afford simple and basic food stuff (38.3%). A quarter of respondents report having difficult[y] affording new TV or refrigerator, but can afford simple and basic food stuff and social obligations (24.8%). Respondents from Ghazni, where Taliban led siege to their city two months before the interview, report considerably worse situations about their household well-beings. Respondents from Nangarhar, where one of Sikh leaders and candidate for the parliament was assassinated, report better situations about their household well-being than the two provinces [Ghazni and Kabul].’⁶³

4.4.2 In regard to employment, the PRSO survey found:

‘Almost all respondents mentioned owning or working in shops including apothecary shops as their household’s main source of income (89.7%). Working on the streets and other type of jobs are mentioned as sources of income but in much less frequent fashion. When asked about types of income, wage labor and salary jobs, more respondents say they depend on salary jobs (47.2%) than wage labor (22.2%). A small group of respondents say their household receive both types of income (4.6%).’⁶⁴

4.4.3 In January 2021, Narinder Singh Khalsa discussed the employment situation with a FCDO official and stated that, since a large Sikhs had left Afghanistan, there were only a few left who were involved in selling Greek medicine to all members of the community⁶⁵. Mr Khalsa estimated of the 200 Sikhs remaining in Afghanistan, around 40% were employed or had means to a livelihood⁶⁶. When asked how a Sikh would live financially, Mr Khalsa estimated they would earn an average wage of between 500-1000 AFN (£5-£10 GBP) per day⁶⁷. He also estimated the cost of accommodation at between 200-300 USD (£150-£220 GBP) per month⁶⁸.

4.4.4 According to the PRSO survey, 88.9% of respondents said they had never applied for a job and of the 26 who had applied for jobs, only 5 thought they

⁶³ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (pages 44-45), February 2019

⁶⁴ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 45), February 2019

⁶⁵ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A5 and A13), 27 January 2021

⁶⁶ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A6), 27 January 2021

⁶⁷ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A7), 27 January 2021

⁶⁸ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A8), 27 January 2021

were discriminated against⁶⁹. When asked what obstacles existed for Hindus and Sikhs in the job market, the PRSO survey noted ‘Unemployment and lack of job opportunities was cited by 31.5% of respondents, followed by various types of poor treatment from other fellow compatriots, such as insults and humiliation (17.8%), bigotry and discrimination (9.6%), and harassment (6.8%). Few also mention that buyers do not buy from them (5.6%).’⁷⁰

- 4.4.5 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted that ‘Sikh leaders continued to state the main cause of Hindu and Sikh emigration was lack of employment opportunities; they said one factor impeding their access to employment was illiteracy resulting from lack of access to education.’⁷¹ (see [Reasons for migration](#)).

- 4.4.6 The PRSO survey also referred to the difficulties faced by Hindu and Sikh women in the accessing the labour market:

‘From 286 respondents, only 1 report having a female member work outside their home. This is considered extremely small labor force participation for women, compared to the national average of 19.1% from the Survey of the Afghan People (2018). Widespread unemployment and a multitude of problems in labor market [i]n the way of Hindu and Sikh communities could explain why women do not work, particularly outside their homes. When respondents are asked about main obstacles facing women for working outside their home, not being allowed is top cited reason (38.1%) followed by illiteracy (25.2%), insecurity (13.7%), and customs and traditions (11.5%). Not being allowed and illiteracy are cited more among women than men, and customs and traditions is cited more among men than women.

‘Narindar Singh, Hindu and Sikh community representative mentioned that Afghanistan government has asked them to introduce women to work in the government offices but they failed to introduce capable women due to high illiteracy rate among them and lack of proper skill and social protection.’⁷²

See also [Access to education](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

4.5 Language

- 4.5.1 A 2006 Al Jazeera article cited an Afghan Sikh who said Punjabi was spoken at home in Afghan Sikh communities, but added the Afghan languages of Dari and Pashtun were also spoken⁷³. In January 2015, The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) noted, ‘At home [Afghan Sikhs] speak mainly Punjabi, the language of Sikhism’s religious texts that is native to the Indian subcontinent.’⁷⁴
- 4.5.2 However, other sources indicated that Punjabi was not always spoken by Afghan Sikhs. Writing in 2014, Dr Jasjit Singh, a research fellow at the

⁶⁹ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 72), February 2019

⁷⁰ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (pages 46-47), February 2019

⁷¹ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section III), 10 June 2020

⁷² PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 47), February 2019

⁷³ Al Jazeera, ‘[Sikhs quitting Afghanistan](#)’, 9 July 2006

⁷⁴ WSJ, ‘[Facing Intolerance, Many Sikhs and Hindus Leave Afghanistan](#)’, 12 January 2015

University of Leeds, stated, 'Viewing Afghanistan as their homeland and speaking Pashto and Dari, the Afghan Sikh community differs in a number of ways from the mainly Punjabi speaking Sikh community which settled in the UK throughout the 20th century.'⁷⁵

- 4.5.3 A blog on the history of Sikhs in Afghanistan, posted in October 2016, stated the Afghan Sikh language of choice was mainly Pashto, adding Hindi and Punjabi were spoken as supplementary languages⁷⁶.
- 4.5.4 In April 2018, history graduate, Sanmeet Kaur, wrote of her experiences as an Afghan Sikh living in the UK and noted, 'Unlike most Sikhs [who speak Punjabi], Afghan Sikhs speak a unique dialect known as "Kabli", which is an amalgamation of Persian Dari and Punjabi.'⁷⁷
- 4.5.5 According to the PRSO survey, most Hindus and Sikhs '... speak the language of the communities they live in. However, the Hindus' native tongue is either Hindi or Lahnda, and the Sikhs' native tongue is mainly Panjabi except those settled in Kandahar who speak Sindi and Riasti.'⁷⁸
- 4.5.6 According to Inderjeet Singh, writing in October 2020, Afghan Hindus and Sikhs speak fluent Pashto⁷⁹. He added that, in the home, Sikh communities in Kabul, Ghazni and Jalalabad speak Hindko, a dialect of Western Punjabi language and, at home, Hindus of Kabul speak a dialect of Hindi called Kabuli Hindi⁸⁰.
- 4.5.7 Ethnologue indicated that Dari was widely spoken, with around 8.6 million users as of 2017⁸¹. The same source noted that Pashto (Southern) had 10.5 million users and was preeminently spoken in Badghis, Farah, Helmand, Herat, Kandahar, Nimroz, Uruzgan, and Zabul provinces⁸². Pashto (Northern) was spoken in Nangarhar and surrounding regions, with 3 million users⁸³. Both Dari and Pashto were taught in schools^{84 85}.
- 4.5.8 Karinder Singh Khalsa stated in January 2021 that, as with all Afghan children, Dari, Pashto and English were the main languages taught in schools to Sikh children. He also noted that Sikhs speak Dari and Pashto, whilst within their own communities they speak Punjabi⁸⁶.

[Back to Contents](#)

4.6 Gurdwaras and Mandir temples

- 4.6.1 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted that Hindus and Sikhs reported they were free to build places of worship, although only a few temples for those

⁷⁵ The Conversation, '[Explainer: who are the Afghan Sikhs?](#)', 20 August 2014

⁷⁶ The Better India, '[TBI Blogs: Tracing the History of the Thriving Sikh ...](#)', 13 October 2016

⁷⁷ Media Diversified, '[Afghan Sikhs: persecution, resistance and life in diaspora](#)', 17 April 2018

⁷⁸ PRSO, '[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)' (page 75), February 2019

⁷⁹ Singh, I., '[Afghan Sikhs – Tracing their origins and history](#)', 29 October 2020

⁸⁰ Singh, I., '[Afghan Sikhs – Tracing their origins and history](#)', 29 October 2020

⁸¹ Eberhard, David M, and others, '[Ethnologue: Languages of the World](#)' (Afghanistan-Dari), 2021

⁸² Eberhard, David M, and others, '[Ethnologue: Languages of the World](#)' (Afg-Pashto Southern), 2021

⁸³ Eberhard, David M, and others, '[Ethnologue: Languages of the World](#)' (Afg-Pashto Northern), 2021

⁸⁴ Eberhard, David M, and others, '[Ethnologue: Languages of the World](#)' (Afghanistan-Dari), 2021

⁸⁵ Eberhard, David M, and others, '[Ethnologue: Languages of the World](#)' (Afg-Pashto Southern), 2021

⁸⁶ FCDO, '[Note to CPIT](#)' (A16), 27 January 2021

communities remained open⁸⁷. The same source noted 'According to the Sikh and Hindu Council, which advocates with the government on behalf of the Sikh and Hindu communities, there were 12 gurdwaras (Sikh temples) and four mandirs (Hindu temples) remaining in the country, compared with a combined total of 64 in previous years.'⁸⁸

4.6.2 As noted by the Indian Express in July 2020:

'Till the beginning of the 1990s, there used to be at least 63 functional gurdwaras in Afghanistan. Now barely ten of them are functioning, with hardly anyone left to do sewa [selfless service⁸⁹]. The main ones are: Gurdwara Har Rai Sahib (now closed after March 2020 attack [see [Attacks on communities](#)]), Gurdwara Dashmesh Pita Sri Guru Gobind Singh ji Singh Sabha Karte Parwan (central gurdwara), Gurdwara Baba Sri Chand, Gurdwara Khalsa ji, Gurdwara Baba Almast, Gurdwara Baba Mansa Singh Ji – all in Kabul.

'Asamai Mandir and Dargah Peer Rattan Nath Mandir in Kabul, Dargah Mathura Dass in Jalalabad, Dargah Peer Rattan in Ghazni and some in Kandahar are among a few temples functional in Afghanistan.'⁹⁰

4.6.3 The EASO query response, based on a range of sources, on Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, dated August 2020, indicated 'There is one gurdwara (a Sikh place of worship) in Jalalabad and one in Kabul. Jalalabad has a special religious significance for Sikhs because of the visit of Guru Nanak in the 15th century.'⁹¹ According to a March 2020 Al Jazeera article, there were 3 temples for Sikhs and Hindus remaining in Kabul⁹². The Hindu American Foundation (HAF), a human rights NGO advocating for the rights of Hindu Americans, published a blog in August 2020 by Udeerna Tippabhatla, a HAF Advocacy Fellow, who indicated there were 2 to 4 gurdwaras and 1 Hindu temple left in Afghanistan⁹³.

4.6.4 Speaking to an FCDO official in January 2021, Narinder Singh Khalsa stated there were about 72 gurdwaras and temples across Afghanistan, and named the 13 major ones, although not all were active: 'Ghazni – five (5) not active, Khost – one (1) not active, Jalalabad – two (2) active and Kabul – five (5) active. Similarly, there are three (3) Temples in the country one (1) in Jalalabad and two (2) in Kabul all active.'⁹⁴

4.6.5 According to community leaders, efforts had been made by the Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs (MOHRA) to provide free water, electricity and repair services for a few Sikh and Hindu temples⁹⁵. According to the EASO query response, based on a range of sources, 'In February 2020, the

⁸⁷ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (sections II and III), 10 June 2020

⁸⁸ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (section III), 10 June 2020

⁸⁹ BBC, '[Ways of Sikh Living](#)', no date

⁹⁰ Indian Express, '[Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan — how many remain...](#)', 28 July 2020

⁹¹ EASO, '[COI Query Response](#)' (page 2), 5 August 2020

⁹² Al Jazeera, '[Solidarity for Sikhs after Afghanistan massacre](#)', 26 March 2020

⁹³ HAF, '[5 things to know about Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan](#)', 28 August 2020

⁹⁴ FCDO, '[Note to CPIT](#)' (A3), 27 January 2021

⁹⁵ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

government has reportedly allocated [US]\$650 000 for renovations of Hindu and Sikhs temples in the country.⁹⁶ (see also [State support and outreach](#)).

- 4.6.6 The PRSO survey noted that many Hindus and Sikhs live in dharamsalas (gurdwaras)⁹⁷. According to the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) 2020 Annual Report, covering 2019 events, 'A number of Sikh families have resorted to living in gurdwaras due to lack of available housing...'⁹⁸ Similarly, the USSD IRF Report 2019 said 'Sikh leaders said many families in Kabul lived at community temples (gurdwaras and mandirs) because they could not afford permanent housing.'⁹⁹ The HAF blog also stated '[T]emples and gurudwaras have turned from just religious complexes to living quarters in the past few years as the Hindus and Sikhs fear going out into the public.'¹⁰⁰
- 4.6.7 About 40 or 50 families reportedly lived on the compound of the gurdwara [located in Shor Bazar¹⁰¹] that was attacked in March 2020^{102 103 104}. The news portal, Sikh24.com, which provides a platform for members of the Sikh community to report on incidents from their local society, noted that, following the attack on Gurdwara Har Rai Sahib in March 2020, the Sikh families living there moved to Gurdwara Sri Guru Singh Sabha in Kabul district of Karte Parwan¹⁰⁵. Narinder Singh Khalsa noted in January 2021 that Sikhs live in gurdwaras due to lack of shelter or the financial means to own or build a home¹⁰⁶.
- 4.6.8 The USCIRF 2020 report also noted 'Hindus – as well as Christians – have also abandoned visually distinctive houses of worship in favor of plain, non-descript buildings to avoid potential reprisals from extremist groups.'¹⁰⁷

See also [Attacks against communities](#) and [Location of communities](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 5 updated: 23 March 2021

5. Legal framework

5.1 Legal rights for minority religious groups

- 5.1.1 Afghanistan is an Islamic Republic and, according to the Constitution, no law shall contravene the tenets and provisions of Islam¹⁰⁸. The Constitution states that followers of other religions are free to exercise and perform their religious rites within the confines of the law¹⁰⁹. However non-Muslims

⁹⁶ EASO, '[COI Query Response](#)' (page 5), 5 August 2020

⁹⁷ PRSO, '[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)' (page 30), February 2019

⁹⁸ USCIRF, '[2020 Annual Report – Afghanistan](#)', April 2020

⁹⁹ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (section III), 10 June 2020

¹⁰⁰ HAF, '[5 things to know about Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan](#)', 28 August 2020

¹⁰¹ Hindustan Times, '[25 killed in Kabul gurdwara attack; Islamic State claims...](#)', 25 March 2020

¹⁰² The Hindu, '[For Afghan Sikhs, it's between violence and exodus](#)', 28 March 2020

¹⁰³ Al Jazeera, '[Solidarity for Sikhs after Afghanistan massacre](#)', 26 March 2020

¹⁰⁴ Singh, I., '[Afghan Sikhs – Tracing their origins and history](#)', 29 October 2020

¹⁰⁵ Sikh24.com, '[Persecuted Afghan Sikhs Quit Gurdwara Sri Guru Har Rai ...](#)', 31 March 2020

¹⁰⁶ FCDO, '[Note to CPIT](#)' (A17), 27 January 2021

¹⁰⁷ USCIRF, '[2020 Annual Report – Afghanistan](#)', April 2020

¹⁰⁸ [Constitution](#) (Articles 1 and 3), 2004

¹⁰⁹ [Constitution](#) (Article 2), 2004

reported they were restricted in practising such rites openly and Hindus and Sikhs reported interference in performing cremations in accordance with their customs^{110 111}. There is no law requiring the licensing and registration of religious groups^{112 113}.

See also [Cremations](#).

- 5.1.2 A 2016 PRSO report on the status of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan's legal system noted:

'Afghanistan's civil law, which regulates the private life and transactions of citizens, has been developed on the basis of Islamic law. Therefore, non-Muslims are left out of the circle. Paragraph 2 of Article 1 of the [Civil Law](#) states that, in cases where there is no law, the court will use the general principles of Hanafi Islamic jurisprudence to attain justice in the best manner possible. Article 2 states that in cases where general principles of Islamic Hanafi law jurisprudence does not exist, the court will issue a judgment in accordance with common practice provided this practice is not contrary to the provisions of law or the principles of justice. This happens despite the fact that Hindus and Sikhs do not have a personal status law to conform with in order to settle family matters'¹¹⁴

- 5.1.3 According to HAF, 'Laws in Afghanistan discriminate against non-Muslims. Hanafi Sunni jurisprudence is still used by some judges even in cases dealing with religious minorities. Non-Muslims face an inherent disadvantage in dealing with Islamic law, since they do not subscribe to it or live by it in their daily lives. When courts pass judgement in adherence to Islamic law, it is unfair and biased against non-Muslims, leading to further discrimination.'¹¹⁵

- 5.1.4 The USSD IRF Report 2019 referred to the 2017 Penal Code and its provisions relating to religious rights, noting that the law criminalises verbal and physical assaults on religion and protects individuals' right to exercise their beliefs for any religion¹¹⁶. The same source added:

'Another article of the penal code states persons who forcibly stop the conduct of rituals of any religion, destroy or damage "permitted places of worship" (a term not defined by the code) where religious rituals are conducted, or destroy or damage any sign or symbol of any religion are subject to imprisonment of three months to one year or a fine ranging from 30,000 to 60,000 afghanis (\$390-\$770). In cases where killings or physical injury result from the disturbance of religious rites or ceremonies, the accused individual is tried according to crimes of murder and physical injury as defined by law.'¹¹⁷

¹¹⁰ DFAT, '[Country Information Report – Afghanistan](#)' (paragraph 3.18), 27 June 2019

¹¹¹ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

¹¹² DFAT, '[Country Information Report – Afghanistan](#)' (paragraph 3.19), 27 June 2019

¹¹³ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

¹¹⁴ PRSO, '[Ignored Identities...](#)' (page 8), 2016

¹¹⁵ HAF, '[5 things to know about Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan](#)', 28 August 2020

¹¹⁶ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

¹¹⁷ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (section II), 10 June 2020

- 5.1.5 The USSD IRF Report 2019 also noted the mass media law, prohibiting ‘the production, reproduction, printing, and publishing of works and materials contrary to the principles of Islam or offensive to other religions and denominations.’¹¹⁸

[Back to Contents](#)

5.2 Apostasy and blasphemy

5.2.1 According to the USSD IRF Report 2019:

‘While apostasy [conversion from Islam to another religion] is not specifically provided for under the penal code, it falls under the seven offenses making up the hudood as defined by sharia. According to the penal code, perpetrators of hudood are punished according to Hanafi jurisprudence. According to Sunni Hanafi jurisprudence, which the constitution states shall apply “if there is no provision in the constitution or other laws about a case,” beheading is appropriate for male apostates, while life imprisonment is appropriate for female apostates, unless the individual repents. A judge may also impose a lesser penalty, such as short-term imprisonment or lashes, if doubt about the apostasy exists. Under Hanafi jurisprudence, the government may also confiscate the property of apostates or prevent apostates from inheriting property.’¹¹⁹

- 5.2.2 The PRSO survey stated, ‘Referring to law, the Constitution and penal code are silent on apostasy and blasphemy, which gives free hand to the courts, relying on their interpretation of Sharia Law, to punish alleged offences, even where this violates the country’s international commitments to the UDHR and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.’¹²⁰

- 5.2.3 According to an EASO July 2020 report on criminal law and customary justice, sources indicated that, under hudud (hudood) crimes, the punishment for apostasy was repentance within 3 days or face death, banishment or imprisonment¹²¹.

- 5.2.4 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted ‘Blasphemy, which may include anti-Islamic writings or speech, is a capital crime, according to the Hanafi school. Accused blasphemers, like apostates, have three days to recant or face death, although there is no clear process for recanting under sharia.’¹²²

- 5.2.5 According to the DFAT report of June 2019, the standard of proof for hudud crimes was high, noting ‘For most crimes, witnesses must corroborate claims before guilt can be established. Factors determining the veracity of witnesses include gender (disadvantaging women), community standing, the content of the statement, and the number of witnesses present.’¹²³

¹¹⁸ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹¹⁹ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹²⁰ PRSO, ‘[Ignored Identities...](#)’ (page 9), 2016

¹²¹ EASO, ‘[Criminal law, customary justice and informal dispute...](#)’ (pages 12-13), July 2020

¹²² USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹²³ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report – Afghanistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.25), 27 June 2019

- 5.2.6 Whilst noting that persons accused of blasphemy or apostasy were highly susceptible to societal discrimination, which may take the form of extreme violence, the DFAT report added ‘Prosecutions and convictions for apostasy or blasphemy have been relatively uncommon since 2001. The last arrests or prosecutions in relation to apostasy or blasphemy of which DFAT is aware occurred in 2014.’¹²⁴ Similarly, the USSD IRF Report 2019 commented ‘As in the previous five years, there were no reports of government prosecutions for blasphemy or apostasy...’¹²⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

5.3 Citizenship and identity

- 5.3.1 According to the USSD IRF Report 2019 ‘The government’s national identity cards indicate an individual’s religion, as well as nationality, tribe, and ethnicity. Individuals are not required to declare belief in Islam to receive citizenship.’¹²⁶
- 5.3.2 Further information on citizenship rights, identity cards (tazkiras) and other forms of documentation can be found in the [Country Information Note: Afghanistan](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 6 updated: 23 March 2021

6. State treatment and attitudes

6.1 State support and outreach

- 6.1.1 According to an article by AAN on Afghan Hindus and Sikhs, dated April 2020. ‘... almost no Afghan government or political group has indulged in openly discriminating or abusing the only recognised non-Muslim minority of the country.’¹²⁷ According to the PRSO survey, ‘In one instance, a Member of Parliament referred to Hindus and Sikhs as outsiders and guests on public television.’¹²⁸ (see [Discrimination and harassment](#)).
- 6.1.2 The EASO query response, based on a range of sources, stated ‘After the 2018 attack in Jalabalad [sic – Jalalabad], president Ghani condemned it and called Hindus and Sikhs “pride of the nation” and declared support of the communities by his government. Representatives of Hindu and Sikh community can meet with the president and raise their concerns.’¹²⁹ (see also [Attacks against communities](#)).
- 6.1.3 Citing the 2018 attack in Jalalabad, the Bertelsmann Stiftung BTI 2020 Country Report, covering the period from 1 February 2017 to 31 January 2019, noted ‘Although there is no systematic political-social discrimination

¹²⁴ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report – Afghanistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.26), 27 June 2019

¹²⁵ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹²⁶ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹²⁷ AAN, ‘[Blood in the Abode of Peace: The attack on Kabul’s Sikhs](#)’, 1 April 2020

¹²⁸ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 74), February 2019

¹²⁹ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 5), 5 August 2020

against Afghanistan minorities, the state appears rather helpless in protecting them from attacks.¹³⁰

- 6.1.4 The DFAT report noted ‘The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs [MOHRA] has primary responsibility for managing religious affairs.’¹³¹ According to the USSD IRF Report 2019, the ‘MOHRA has an office dedicated to assisting the faith practices of religious minorities, specifically Sikhs and Hindus.’¹³² Efforts were made by the MOHRA to provide free water, electricity and repair services for a few Sikh and Hindu temples and the ministry also facilitated pilgrimages for Hindus and Sikhs to India¹³³.
- 6.1.5 The government reportedly allocated funds for renovating Hindu and Sikh temples¹³⁴. However, according to the PRSO survey, the Afghan government lacked a proper agenda to preserve the property and religious sites of Hindus and Sikhs¹³⁵.
- 6.1.6 Despite the allocated funds for renovating temples, in August 2020, Sikh MP, Narender Singh Khalsa, told Radio Free Afghanistan that the government had done nothing to reconstruct the gurdwara hit by an attack in March 2020¹³⁶, which remained shut¹³⁷. The AP reported in September 2020 that ‘A senior Sikh community leader told The Associated Press that the group is in negotiations with the government over its security needs and the repairing of the temple after it was destroyed in March’s attack.’¹³⁸
- 6.1.7 In contrast to the apparent lack of repairs to the damaged gurdwara in Kabul, Inderjeet Singh referred to the government funding and wrote in October 2020 that, during the year, the Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar in Jalalabad and Dargarh Peer Rattan Nath Mandir in Ghazni were refurbished¹³⁹.
- 6.1.8 According to a May 2020 article in the Voice of America (VoA), reporting on Hindus and Sikhs following the March 2020 gurdwara attack:
- ‘[The] Afghan government says they are doing their best to protect them from militant attacks. “The Afghan Security Council has started some measures and they will take serious actions for their security,” Dawa Khan Menapal, a spokesman for the Afghan president, told VOA. Menapal said the country in the past few years under President Ashraf Ghani has made significant progress to address the issues these communities face. He said Hindus and Sikhs have two members in the Afghan parliament “who raise the voices and concerns of their constituencies”.’¹⁴⁰
- 6.1.9 The AP report of September 2020 noted ‘At a press conference last month [August 2020], President Ashraf Ghani’s spokesman, Sediq Sediqqi, said

¹³⁰ BTI, ‘[2020 Country Report](#)’ (page 29), 2020

¹³¹ DFAT, ‘[Country Information Report – Afghanistan](#)’ (paragraph 3.19), 27 June 2019

¹³² USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹³³ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

¹³⁴ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 5), 5 August 2020

¹³⁵ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 30), February 2019

¹³⁶ Gandhara, ‘[More Afghan Sikhs, Hindus Migrating To India From Afghanistan](#)’, 11 August 2020

¹³⁷ New York Times, ‘[India Offers Escape to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Facing Attacks](#)’, 19 July 2020

¹³⁸ AP, ‘[Facing IS, last embattled Sikhs, Hindus leave Afghanistan](#)’, 27 September 2020

¹³⁹ Singh, I., ‘[Afghan Sikhs – Tracing their origins and history](#)’, 29 October 2020

¹⁴⁰ VoA, ‘[Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan in Limbo after March Deadly Attack](#)’, 3 May 2020

that members of the Afghan Sikh and Hindu community will return once peace is restored. ... “We will use all our facilities to provide security to the people,” Interior Ministry spokesman Tariq Arian said, without elaborating. “We are committed and responsible for their (Sikhs and Hindus) mental and personal security”.¹⁴¹

- 6.1.10 According to HAF Advocacy Fellow, Udeerna Tippabhatla, ‘Politicians in Afghanistan often show up to support Hindus and Sikhs after attacks have occurred in an attempt to show support for secularism. However, discrimination and violence against Hindus and Sikhs still persists and the systemic bias has not been addressed.’¹⁴²
- 6.1.11 On 28 March 2020, Sikh24.com reported that, following the gurdwara attack, more than 200 Afghan soldiers were deployed to the vicinity¹⁴³. According to a New York Times article, dated July 2020, a few additional police officers had been assigned to the area¹⁴⁴. A local resident, Warjet Singh, who runs a shop by the temple and lost family members in the March 2020 attack, said some police checkpoints had been set up though he still feared another attack¹⁴⁵. Mr Singh also added he had received financial assistance from the government¹⁴⁶.

See also [Gurdwaras and Mandir temples](#) and [Attacks against communities](#).

- 6.1.12 The USCIRF 2020 Annual Report noted ‘In November 2019, the Afghan government also instituted visa-free travel for Afghan-origin Sikhs and Hindus currently residing in India.’¹⁴⁷
- 6.1.13 As noted in the USSD IRF Report 2019, the government provided land to use as cremation sites although ‘Sikh leaders stated the distance from any major urban area and the lack of security in the region continued to make the land unusable.’¹⁴⁸. According to the same source, Hindus and Sikhs received local authority support for security during cremation ceremonies and police provided security during such rituals¹⁴⁹. In August 2019, a person protesting against the cremations was arrested¹⁵⁰ (see also [Cremations](#)).
- 6.1.14 On 21 October 2020, the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) called on the government to protect Hindus and Sikhs, saying their lives and properties were under threat. The call came following news of a mass migration of Hindus and Sikhs leaving Ghazni province, which, according to the AIHRC, indicated the government did not consider their protection important¹⁵¹.

¹⁴¹ AP, [‘Facing IS, last embattled Sikhs, Hindus leave Afghanistan’](#), 27 September 2020

¹⁴² HAF, [‘5 things to know about Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan’](#), 28 August 2020

¹⁴³ Sikh24.com, [‘Afghan Sikhs asked to quit Afghanistan within 10 days or get...’](#), 28 March 2020

¹⁴⁴ New York Times, [‘India Offers Escape to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Facing Attacks’](#), 19 July 2020

¹⁴⁵ New York Times, [‘India Offers Escape to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Facing Attacks’](#), 19 July 2020

¹⁴⁶ New York Times, [‘India Offers Escape to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Facing Attacks’](#), 19 July 2020

¹⁴⁷ USCIRF, [‘2020 Annual Report – Afghanistan’](#), April 2020

¹⁴⁸ USSD, [‘2019 Report on International Religious Freedom’](#) (Summary and section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁴⁹ USSD, [‘2019 Report on International Religious Freedom’](#) (Summary and section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁵⁰ USSD, [‘2019 Report on International Religious Freedom’](#) (Summary), 10 June 2020

¹⁵¹ Afghanistan Times, [‘Human rights body criticizes government...’](#), 21 October 2020

- 6.1.15 Narinder Singh Khalsa indicated in January 2021 that no government or non-governmental support or assistance had been received by the Sikh community¹⁵².

See also [Locations of communities](#), [Reasons for migration](#) and [Societal treatment and attitudes](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

6.2 Political representation and employment in government

- 6.2.1 For information on the political system in general, refer to the [Country Background Note: Afghanistan](#).
- 6.2.2 Since 2016¹⁵³, one seat in the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of parliament) has been reserved for Sikh and Hindu communities¹⁵⁴. Article 62 of the Constitution states that the president and vice president must be Muslim¹⁵⁵, thus a member of Hindu and Sikh community cannot nominate themselves for the presidency or vice presidency¹⁵⁶. Before assuming office, all government ministers must swear an oath to protect the principles of Islam¹⁵⁷.
- 6.2.3 Reporting on the results of the 2018 general elections, the AAN named Narender Singh Khalesa as the elected candidate for the single reserved seat for the Hindu and Sikh communities in the Wolesi Jirga¹⁵⁸. BBC News reported that Narinder (Narender) was the only Sikh candidate in the elections and that he was 'standing in place of his father, Avtar Singh Khalsa, who was killed in a suicide blast in Jalalabad last July [2018]'.¹⁵⁹ (see [Attacks against communities](#)).
- 6.2.4 According to the Independent Election Commission (IEC), 583 Hindus and Sikhs were registered to vote at the October 2018 elections¹⁶⁰. According to a report in The National, an English-language news site based in the UAE, the Hindu and Sikh community came out 'in full strength' to vote for their candidate, Narinder Singh Khalsa¹⁶¹. However, a Hindu businessman cited some logistical problems, saying that, despite families registering together to vote, not all names appeared on the voters list¹⁶².
- 6.2.5 The PRSO survey of Hindus and Sikhs noted:
- 'More than half of eligible-to-vote respondents, both men and women, report having voted in the previous national elections. Participation in election was lowest among Kabul respondents and highest in Nangarhar. A third (34.8%) of respondents say they feel they can influence their local government's

¹⁵² FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A9), 27 January 2021

¹⁵³ USCIRF, '[2020 Annual Report – Afghanistan](#)', April 2020

¹⁵⁴ Al Jazeera, '[Understanding Afghanistan's elections 2018](#)', 20 October 2018

¹⁵⁵ [Constitution](#) (Article 62), 2004

¹⁵⁶ PRSO, '[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)' (page 9), February 2019

¹⁵⁷ [Constitution](#) (Article 74), 2004

¹⁵⁸ AAN, '[The Results of Afghanistan's 2018 Parliamentary Elections: ...](#)', 17 May 2019

¹⁵⁹ BBC News, '[Afghanistan elections: "I want to fulfil my slain father's dreams"](#)', 17 October 2018

¹⁶⁰ BTI, '[2020 Country Report](#)' (page 10), 2020

¹⁶¹ The National, '[Afghanistan Sikh, Hindu community brave danger to vote](#)', 20 October 2018

¹⁶² The National, '[Afghanistan Sikh, Hindu community brave danger to vote](#)', 20 October 2018

decisions a lot or some. This is considerably lower than the national average of 52.9% who believe they have some or a lot of influence over local government decisions, an indicator for their [Hindus and Sikhs] poor representation in government administration.¹⁶³

- 6.2.6 The PRSO survey noted that 8 of the 286 respondents reported having a member of family working within government¹⁶⁴. According to the USCIRF 2020 Annual Report, some Hindus and Sikhs have been employed in government service¹⁶⁵. The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted ‘A small number of Sikhs and Hindus continued to serve in government positions, including one at the municipal level, one at the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industries, one as a presidentially appointed member of the upper house of parliament, one as an elected member in the lower house, one as a presidential advisor, and one as a member of the Ministry of Transportation.’¹⁶⁶
- 6.2.7 Dr Jagbir of the University of Birmingham, stated in her report to CPIT, dated November 2020, that although the government has some Sikh representation, such as Senator Dr Anarkali Kaur Honaryar and Member of Parliament, Narinder Singh Khalsa, they ‘... have not managed to provide a suitable level of security for the Hindu and Sikh community.’¹⁶⁷
- 6.2.8 In January 2021, MP Narinder Singh Khalsa confirmed there was a Sikh (female) senator in the Upper House, a Sikh employed in the Administrative Office of the President and another working as an Advisor to the President in the Presidential Palace¹⁶⁸.
- 6.2.9 The BTI 2020 Country Report stated:
‘Traditional, informal jirga (assemblies of leaders) and shura (community councils) play a representative role in governing communal life and regulating conflicts. Typically, these groups continue to be represented by people who were or are close to noted political parties or strongmen, and the groups generally represent a particular ethnolinguistic base. Religious minorities (e.g., Hindus and Sikhs) are rarely represented in such groups. Accordingly, their interests remain underrepresented.’¹⁶⁹

See also [Discrimination and harassment](#) and [Attacks against communities](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

6.3 Access to education

- 6.3.1 When asked about problems facing the Hindu and Sikh youth, the PRSO survey noted 67.6% gave the reason given as they ‘cannot go to school, lack of school facilities or illiteracy.’¹⁷⁰
- 6.3.2 According to the survey:

¹⁶³ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 3), February 2019

¹⁶⁴ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 41), February 2019

¹⁶⁵ USCIRF, ‘[2020 Annual Report – Afghanistan](#)’, April 2020

¹⁶⁶ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (Section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁶⁷ Jhutti-Johal, Dr. J., [Report to CPIT](#), 9 November 2020

¹⁶⁸ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A6), 27 January 2021

¹⁶⁹ BTI, ‘[2020 Country Report](#)’ (page 15), 2020

¹⁷⁰ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 18), February 2019

‘Even though the government has built some schools for the community... due to insecurity the children cannot go to these schools, said by the Hindu and Sikh community representative in Ghazni. Also, the fact that very few of Hindu and Sikh students remain to attend school is another reason why these schools are not operational.

‘Furthermore, the content of school curriculum are big topics of contention for the community. In an interview, Ruchi Kumar highlighted that during her discussions with Hindus at the temple and Rawil Singh, they stated that their history is not taught in the schools, public schools are not plural enough, which means not a lot of Afghans know about their history and community. Their own children don’t get the chance to study their own history and that is why for them the education system feels incomplete and they run a separate school in the temple and Gurdwaras for their children. Also bullying and harassment of Hindus and Sikhs children in public schools were raised by other key informants.’¹⁷¹

6.3.3 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted:

‘According to members of the Sikh and Hindu communities, they continued to refuse to send their children to public schools due to harassment from other students, although there were only a few private school options available to them due to the decreasing sizes of the two communities and their members’ declining economic circumstances. The Sikh and Hindu Council reported one school in Nangarhar and one school in Kabul remained operational. Sikh and Hindu representatives, however, again said these schools were underequipped to teach students.

‘Sikh leaders continued to state the main cause of Hindu and Sikh emigration was lack of employment opportunities; they said one factor impeding their access to employment was illiteracy resulting from lack of access to education.’¹⁷²

See also [Reasons for migration](#).

6.3.4 In January 2021, Narinder Singh Khalsa told an official at the FCDO that, although education was available to all children, Sikh children did not attend public schools due to bullying, a problem which was not addressed by the authorities¹⁷³. As a result, Sikh children go to private schools, at a cost of between 1,000-7,000 AFN per month¹⁷⁴ (1,000 AFN is approximately £9.00 GBP¹⁷⁵).

6.3.5 According to Inderjeet Singh, writing in October 2020, ‘There is hardly anyone in the [Hindu and Sikh] community who has studied beyond schooling after 1990s.’¹⁷⁶

See also [Discrimination and harassment](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

¹⁷¹ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 18), February 2019

¹⁷² USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (Section III), 10 June 2020

¹⁷³ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A10), 27 January 2021

¹⁷⁴ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#) (A10 and A15), 27 January 2021

¹⁷⁵ Xe.com, [Currency converter](#), as at 8 March 2021

¹⁷⁶ Singh, I., ‘[Afghan Sikhs – Tracing their origins and history](#)’, 29 October 2020

6.4 Access to justice

6.4.1 For information on the justice system in general, refer to the [Country Background Note: Afghanistan](#).

6.4.2 According to the USSD IRF Report 2019:

‘Representatives from non-Muslim religious minorities, including Sikhs and Hindus, reported a consistent pattern of discrimination at all levels of the justice system. ... Non-Muslims said they continued to risk being tried according to Hanafi jurisprudence. Sikhs and Hindus again reported their community members avoided taking civil cases to court because they believed they were unprotected by dispute resolution mechanisms, such as the Special Land and Property Court. Instead, their members continued to settle disputes within their communities.

‘Leaders of both Hindu and Sikh communities continued to state they faced discrimination in the judicial system, including long delays in resolving cases, particularly regarding the continued appropriation of Sikh properties.’¹⁷⁷

6.4.3 The PRSO survey found ‘Only 7.0% of Hindu and Sikh respondents say anyone in their family have gone to court for legal remedies. It is unclear from the survey whether such low visit to courts is due to lack of legal cases, lack of trust in judiciary system, or lack of awareness.’¹⁷⁸

6.4.4 The PRSO survey found the most common cases brought before the courts were disputes over land and traffic accidents¹⁷⁹. It reported mixed satisfaction levels on dispute outcomes, noting:

‘Of those who report a family member visiting court for legal remedies, six respondents say the case was resolved in their favor. Five respondents think the other side of dispute bribed and won the case. Furthermore, 4 respondents think courts did not solve their case. Additionally, twelve respondents provide they did not go to court because they lacked trust that the case could have been resolved due to bribery.’¹⁸⁰

See also [Land appropriation](#).

6.4.5 The survey also noted that in some cases, respondents had to prove their Afghan nationality before the court took on their case¹⁸¹.

6.4.6 According to the PRSO survey, 53.1% of respondents expressed ‘a lot of fear’ when encountering the Afghan National Police (ANP)¹⁸², although the majority of respondents also stated they never faced discrimination when meeting the police¹⁸³. The survey also asked respondents about their confidence in the competency of state law enforcement and judicial processes if they were a victim of a crime¹⁸⁴. It found ‘About half (47.0%) of

¹⁷⁷ USSD, [‘2019 Report on International Religious Freedom’](#) (Section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁷⁸ PRSO, [‘Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs’](#) (page 52), February 2019

¹⁷⁹ PRSO, [‘Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs’](#) (page 53), February 2019

¹⁸⁰ PRSO, [‘Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs’](#) (pages 52-53), February 2019

¹⁸¹ PRSO, [‘Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs’](#) (page 53), February 2019

¹⁸² PRSO, [‘Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs’](#) (page 27), February 2019

¹⁸³ PRSO, [‘Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs’](#) (pages 73-74), February 2019

¹⁸⁴ PRSO, [‘Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs’](#) (page 32), February 2019

respondents overall said they have a lot or some confidence. Confidence was considerably higher in Nangarhar (78.5%) than in Ghazni (35.8%) and Kabul (27.5%), which indicates a reverse relationship to confidence and experiences of crime, which was reported to be highest in Kabul and lowest in Nangarhar.’¹⁸⁵

[Back to Contents](#)

Section 7 updated: 23 March 2021

7. Societal treatment and attitudes

7.1 Discrimination and harassment

7.1.1 A 2015 AP article indicated that Afghan Hindus and Sikhs felt they were perceived as foreigners and more often regarded as Indian or Pakistani¹⁸⁶. A 2016 Reuters article similarly stated that they were viewed as outsiders¹⁸⁷.

7.1.2 The PRSO survey noted:

‘Discrimination in the public space toward Hindus and Sikhs is common. Sometimes, Hindus and Sikhs are called outsiders and strangers. In one instance, a Member of Parliament referred to Hindus and Sikhs as outsiders and guests on public television.

‘One of [the] Hindu and Sikh representative affirms the discriminatory interaction of the civilians. He states “This is just because of our inability to defend ourselves. We are poor, minority and we don’t have money and weapon like many others who have powerful allies who defend them. We are not powerful enough to be heard”.’¹⁸⁸

7.1.3 In its human rights and democracy report for 2019 the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) recognised that Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan continued to face ‘widespread discrimination and insecurity.’¹⁸⁹

7.1.4 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted:

‘Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, and other non-Muslim minorities reported continued harassment from Muslims, although Hindus and Sikhs stated they continued to be able to publicly practice their religions. Members of the Hindu community continued to report they faced fewer cases of harassment, including verbal abuse, than Sikhs, which they ascribed to their lack of a distinctive male headdress. Both groups attributed fewer cases of harassment of members of their communities to the continued emigration of Sikh and Hindu residents.’¹⁹⁰

7.1.5 Dr Jagbir of the University of Birmingham stated in her report to CPIT, dated November 2020:

‘The last four decades, whether it was under the Mujahedeen, Taliban or leadership of President Karzai or President Ashraf Ghani, Sikhs and Hindus have seen their non-Muslim “Kafir” religious identity result in violence and

¹⁸⁵ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 32), February 2019

¹⁸⁶ AP, ‘[Afghanistan's Sikhs feel alienated, pressured to leave](#)’, 10 June 2015

¹⁸⁷ Reuters, ‘[Afghanistan's dwindling Sikh, Hindu communities flee new abuses](#)’, 23 June 2016

¹⁸⁸ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 74), February 2019

¹⁸⁹ FCO, ‘[Human rights and democracy...](#)’ (Chapter 4, section 6.1), 16 July 2020

¹⁹⁰ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (Section III), 10 June 2020

discrimination. Sikhs and Hindus have historically had to pay the jizya, a religious tax for their non-Muslims status, wear a piece of yellow cloth in public, or mark their homes and businesses with a yellow label/mark to identify their religious identity. Since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 many of these requirements have been dropped, however, from speaking to Afghan Sikhs in the UK it is clear that the situation in Afghanistan continues to be precarious for Sikh and Hindu communities in Kabul, Jalalabad and Ghazni because of their “Kafir” status.¹⁹¹

- 7.1.6 It was noted in the USSD HR Report 2019 that ‘As Taliban representatives engaged in peace process discussions, some Sikhs and Hindus expressed concern that in a post-conflict environment, they might be required to wear yellow (forehead) dots, badges, or armbands, as the Taliban had mandated during its 1996-2001 rule.’¹⁹²
- 7.1.7 An AAN report indicated that, whilst there were widespread reports on the issue, the edict to wear yellow did not appear to be widely implemented, if at all¹⁹³.
- 7.1.8 The EASO query response of August 2020 based on a range of sources noted ‘In July 2018, the ISKP [Islamic State for Khorasan Province] reportedly issued a letter asking Afghan Hindus and Sikhs to pay the religious tax, jizya. Another source ascribed the letter to unnamed “insurgents”. No further information about the letter or about its enforcement could be found in the consulted and used sources.’¹⁹⁴
- 7.1.9 Dr Jagbir also noted that Hindus and Sikhs were ‘being asked to pay jizya by the Islamic State of Khorasan in some regions such as Ghazni.’¹⁹⁵
- 7.1.10 When asked about their personal experience of discrimination in public places, respondents to the PRSO survey said:
 ‘At schools, 34.9% say they have been discriminated often or sometimes, while 40.1% never been to school. At universities, more than two-third of respondents say they did not go to university (69.4%), and 20.4% of them say they have been discriminated there. Furthermore, 23.6% of respondents say they face discrimination in their neighborhood often or sometimes. Similarly, 20.2% say are often or sometimes discriminated in public transport.’¹⁹⁶
- 7.1.11 As well as personal experiences, respondents were asked about their perception of discrimination, in which it was found ‘[S]chools are perceived to be the most discriminatory place for Hindus and Sikhs, with 61.0% saying often or sometimes their community face discrimination. Workplace and public transport are also other places where respondents feel Hindus and Sikhs face more discrimination (33.1% and 27.0%, respectively).’¹⁹⁷

¹⁹¹ Jhutti-Johal, Dr. J., [Report to CPIT](#), 9 November 2020

¹⁹² USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (Section II), 10 June 2020

¹⁹³ AAN, ‘[Blood in the Abode of Peace: The attack on Kabul’s Sikhs](#)’ (footnote 3), 1 April 2020

¹⁹⁴ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 6), 5 August 2020

¹⁹⁵ Jhutti-Johal, Dr. J., [Report to CPIT](#), 9 November 2020

¹⁹⁶ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 74), February 2019

¹⁹⁷ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 74), February 2019

- 7.1.12 VoA reported in May 2020 that, according to the Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC), Hindus and Sikhs face institutional and cultural discrimination:

‘Zabihullah Farhang, a spokesperson for AIHRC, told VOA that Hindus and Sikhs “face a lot of discrimination in the public places, with their children in schools, with employment and work opportunities.” Farhang said that Hindus and Sikhs were not given the same rights as Afghan Muslims, and the minority groups felt increasingly targeted. “One of the main reasons that they are leaving their country, without doubt, is cultural issues,” he added.’¹⁹⁸

See also [Access to education](#).

- 7.1.13 The PRSO survey also posed questions relating to incidents of crime or violence and noted:

‘When asked about receiving death threats or other types of threat, personally or a family member, 16.1% report receiving them. When respondents are asked who have threatened them, don’t know (23.3%) and unidentified men (18.6%) are top responses. When asked about beating and/or injuries, 18.3% report, with Taliban (30.4%), don’t know (15.2%), and Jalalabad attack (13.0%) as top responses. Few (5.6%) also report kidnappings of themselves or a family member, which is mostly concentrated in Kabul (14 out of 16 cases reported).’¹⁹⁹

- 7.1.14 Dr Jagbir stated in November 2020 ‘When speaking to Afghan Sikhs in the Diaspora who have family in Afghanistan it is clear that Sikhs and Hindus have continued to face persecution and discrimination in the realm of education, employment, continue to have land and property forcibly confiscated and face the threat of violence, especially gender violence by Islamists.’²⁰⁰

- 7.1.15 In correspondence with CPIT, dated 9 November 2020, Dr Jasjit Singh, Associate Professor at the University of Leeds, referred to the assistance he had provided to 20 Afghan Sikh asylum claims since 2018, and said:

‘This has involved interviewing Afghan Sikh families about their lives in Afghanistan, their journeys to the UK and about their religious beliefs. The interviewees have highlighted that Sikhs in Afghanistan often live in fear of persecution and are unable to practice their religion freely. Interviewees have also highlighted ill-treatment and harassment at school of their Sikh children as a consequence of their non-Muslim status, leading many to stop their children from attending. The harassment faced, in particular by their children has led many Afghan Sikh families to seek to flee Afghanistan.’²⁰¹

See also [Attacks against communities](#), [Access to education](#), [Socio-economic situation](#), [Land appropriation](#) and [Impact on women and girls](#).

- 7.1.16 As noted in the USSD IRF Report 2019:

‘Community leaders said they perceived the large number of butchers selling beef near a Sikh temple in Kabul as a deliberate insult because neighbors

¹⁹⁸ VoA, ‘[Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan in Limbo after March Deadly Attack](#)’, 3 May 2020

¹⁹⁹ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 28), February 2019

²⁰⁰ Jhutti-Johal, Dr. J., [Report to CPIT](#), 9 November 2020

²⁰¹ Singh, Dr. J., Correspondence with CPIT, 9 November 2020

were aware that Sikhs and Hindus do not eat beef for religious reasons. Sikh and Hindu leaders also reported neighboring residents tended to place household trash in their temples of worship. Although they filed official complaints to police, neither local authorities nor local imams took action to remedy the situation.²⁰²

- 7.1.17 When meeting with an FCDO official in January 2021, MP Narinder Singh Khalsa's expressed very positive views about the vast majority of the Muslim community and, in contrast to some of the negative experiences reported by other sources, Mr Khalsa said that the Sikh community interacted with their Muslim neighbours, by attending parties and ceremonies together, without limitation or complication²⁰³.
- 7.1.18 According to the USSD IRF Report 2019, 'Some Sikhs and Hindus reported that they faced frequent calls to convert to Islam...'²⁰⁴

[Back to Contents](#)

7.2 Impact on women and girls

- 7.2.1 The USSD IRF Report 2019 indicated that women of different faiths, including Islamic women, wore burqas or other conservative clothing when in public in rural areas and some districts in urban areas, to avoid harassment over their attire from local Muslim religious leaders, 'Almost all women reported wearing some form of head covering. Some women said they did so by personal choice, but many said they did so due to societal pressure and a desire to avoid harassment and increase their security in public.'²⁰⁵
- 7.2.2 Dr Jagbir (University of Birmingham) referred to the threat of gender violence by Islamists and noted:
- 'As a researcher with a special interest in sexual violence, gender rights and mental health, it is clear that the fear for the safety of Sikh and Hindu women and young girls is very real. I have been informed that there have been incidences of women and young girls being abducted, attacked and forced to convert and marry Muslim men. This violence is not spoken about or highlighted publicly due to notions of honour (izzat) and shame. The mental impact that fear and such traumatic experiences would have on these women and girls must be immense and needs to be on the radar of all those working and engaging with these two communities.'²⁰⁶
- 7.2.3 When responding to a question on the situation for Sikh women, for example, whether they could travel without a male escort or if they have to wear the burka or veil, MP Narinder Singh Khalsa stated in January 2021 that Sikh women wear their traditional scarfs (showal) and are seen as part of the community so do not face any problems. In provinces other than Kabul, men may have to accompany women when going out²⁰⁷.

²⁰² USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (Section III), 10 June 2020

²⁰³ FCDO, '[Note to CPIT](#)' (A18), 27 January 2021

²⁰⁴ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (Section III), 10 June 2020

²⁰⁵ USSD, '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)' (Section III), 10 June 2020

²⁰⁶ Jhutti-Johal, Dr J, '[Report to CPIT](#)', 9 November 2020

²⁰⁷ FCDO, '[Note to CPIT](#)' (A12), 27 January 2021

- 7.2.4 For further information on the situation for women in Afghanistan, see the [Country Policy and Information Note on Afghanistan: Women fearing gender-based violence](#).

[Back to Contents](#)

7.3 Land appropriation

7.3.1 According to the PRSO survey:

‘Hindus and Sikhs are widely believed to have been victim of land-grabbing. The respondents were asked if they had lost property to anyone since the fall of the Taliban and start of Karzai’s government. 16.3% of respondents overall, 29.2% in Kabul, 13.4% in Ghazni, and 4.4% in Nangarhar report having lost a property. For the first time, it was during the reign of Mujaheddin that land grabbing and forced sale of Hindus and Sikhs’ property become a common currency, which still occurs.

‘The most common type of property taken or forcefully sold is land (10.1%) and house (7.3%). Mafia or local commands (41.4%), and ordinary-local people (17.2%) were cited as the most common perpetrators for illegally and forcefully taking land. Similarly, Mafia or local commands (33.3%) is cited as the top perpetrator for illegally and forcefully taking a house, with few mentioning government as well – in Kabul.’²⁰⁸

- 7.3.2 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted ‘Hindu and Sikh community members said they continued to avoid pursuing land disputes through the courts due to fear of retaliation, especially if powerful local leaders occupied their property.’²⁰⁹

- 7.3.3 The PRSO survey indicated ‘The community has filed many cases in the court to gain back their seized properties and they even wrote complaint letter to president. In different provinces, mostly warlords and local commands have captured their houses, lands, seized properties belonging to temples and Dharamsals.’²¹⁰

- 7.3.4 The USSD IRF Report 2019 observed ‘Members of the Hindu and Sikh communities said the list of seizures of their places of worship in Ghazni, Kandahar, and Pakiya Provinces they submitted to MOHRA [Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs] in 2016 remained unresolved at year’s end.’²¹¹

- 7.3.5 According to a December 2017 EASO report, based on a range of sources, land disputes were common due to the fragmented regularisation/registration of land, large population movements and rapid urbanisation, the protracted conflict situation, and a weak rule of law. They occurred all over the country, and among all ethnic groups. In rural areas, land conflicts expanded to include whole families, communities, ethnicities and tribes²¹².

See also [Access to justice](#) and [Gurdwaras and Mandir temples](#).

²⁰⁸ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (pages 29-30), February 2019

²⁰⁹ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (Section II), 10 June 2020

²¹⁰ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 30), February 2019

²¹¹ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (Section II), 10 June 2020

²¹² EASO, ‘[Afghanistan individuals targeted under societal and legal...](#)’ (section 6), December 2017

7.4 Cremations

7.4.1 The USSD IRF Report 2019 noted ‘Hindus and Sikhs reported continued interference in their efforts to cremate the remains of their dead by individuals who lived near the cremation sites.’²¹³ The USCIRF 2020 report also noted that Sikhs faced restrictions in performing cremations, a practise opposed by local Muslim communities²¹⁴. According to the PRSO survey, Hindus and Sikhs were ‘unable to cremate their dead’s [sic] according to their traditions as most of the cremation sites are captured by warlords, and people living in the neighboring areas prevent them by means such as throwing rocks.’²¹⁵

7.4.2 However, whilst not providing a name or its location, in January 2021, Narinder Singh Khalsa told the FCDO official that since the Government of Afghanistan had assigned a specific area, cremations could take place with ease²¹⁶.

See [State support and outreach](#) for information on efforts made by the state to help protect cremation sites.

7.4.3 On 26 March 2020, an explosive device went off a short distance from a cremation site in the district of Qalacha²¹⁷. The explosion disrupted the funeral service that was taking place following the deaths of 25 members of the Sikh community, who were killed during an attack in their gurdwara the previous day²¹⁸. Qalacha is located in Police District 8 (PD8)²¹⁹.

See also [Attacks against communities](#).

7.5 Attacks against communities

7.5.1 When asked ‘How often do you fear for your own personal safety or security or for that of your family these days?’, a 2019 Asia Foundation Survey of Afghan people found that 74.5% said that they always, often or sometimes feared for their or their families’ personal safety²²⁰.

7.5.2 However, in response to the same question, the PRSO survey indicated that that almost all Hindu and Sikh respondents (96.8%) feared for their or their families’ personal safety ‘always, often or sometimes.’²²¹

7.5.3 Whilst not identifying the perpetrators of attacks, the PRSO survey asked respondents if their place of worship and burial places had been attacked. The survey found:

²¹³ USSD, ‘[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom](#)’ (section II), 10 June 2020

²¹⁴ USCIRF, ‘[2020 Annual Report – Afghanistan](#)’, April 2020

²¹⁵ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 23), February 2019

²¹⁶ FCDO, [Note to CPIT](#), 27 January 2021

²¹⁷ Hindustan Times, ‘[Blast near cremation site of Sikhs in Kabul; one Indian...](#)’, 27 March 2020

²¹⁸ RFERL, ‘[Blast Rocks Funeral Services For Sikhs Killed In Kabul Attack](#)’, 26 March 2020

²¹⁹ AAN, ‘[Kabul Unpacked](#)’ (page 12), 2019

²²⁰ Asia Foundation, ‘[Survey of the Afghan People in 2019](#)’ (section 2.1), November 2019

²²¹ PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 24), February 2019

‘Overall, 39.0% of respondents say that their places of burial have been attacked. The attacks on places of worship was reported the highest in Kabul (83.0%), not so much in Ghazni (25.9%), and it was not reported at all in Nangarhar. Moreover, 22.6% of respondents say their places of worship have been attacked and 12.2% say they were forced to close a place of worship in the past. These incidents are reported the highest in Kabul (57.5% and 22.6%, respectively), followed by Ghazni (3.5% and 11.8%, respectively). Respondents in Nangarhar province did not mention of any attack on their places of worship.’²²²

- 7.5.4 An article by AAN, dated April 2020, indicated that Hindus and Sikhs can be victims of crime because of their perceived wealth, as well as due to their lack of protection and political influence²²³. Sikh MP, Narender Singh Khalsa, indicated his community was ‘frequently targeted by criminals’ and cited the case of a Sikh family who fled Afghanistan after their daughter was kidnapped in Kabul in 2019 and held in the northern province of Panjshir for 10 months²²⁴.

- 7.5.5 The EASO query response of August 2020, based on a range of sources, cited some other instances of crime against Hindus and Sikhs in the reporting period (2018-2020):

‘On 28 February 2020, a Hindu woman was robbed and killed in a Karte Parwan district of Kabul.

‘In March 2019, a Sikh man was kidnapped and later killed in Kabul. The police has arrested two suspects afterwards.

‘On 22 June 2020, it was reported that an Afghan Sikh leader was kidnapped, reportedly by “terrorists”. ... An Indian source indicated that “local land mafia” was behind the incident. He was reportedly released on 18 July 2020.’²²⁵

- 7.5.6 Reporting on the release of the Sikh leader kidnapped in June 2020, a press release by India’s Ministry of External Affairs, named him as Mr Nidan Singh Sachdeva and stated he was abducted from Chamkani district, Paktia province²²⁶. The Taliban denied any connection to the abduction and said it would punish the perpetrators²²⁷.

- 7.5.7 According to the EASO COI report on the security situation in Afghanistan, published September 2020, there was a general increase in criminal activity during 2019 and into 2020 in some of Afghanistan’s major cities, including Kabul²²⁸.

- 7.5.8 Dr Jagbir (University of Birmingham) noted in her report to CPIT in November 2020:

‘The discrimination and physical attacks have recently become more prominent by the appearance of ISIS (Daesh) in Afghanistan. ... Physical

²²² PRSO, ‘[Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs](#)’ (page 31), February 2019

²²³ AAN, ‘[Blood in the Abode of Peace: The attack on Kabul’s Sikhs](#)’, 1 April 2020

²²⁴ Gandhara, ‘[More Afghan Sikhs, Hindus Migrating To India From Afghanistan](#)’, 11 August 2020

²²⁵ EASO, ‘[COI Query Response](#)’ (page 3), 5 August 2020

²²⁶ Ministry of External Affairs (India), ‘[On safe return of Shri Nidan Singh](#)’, 18 July 2020

²²⁷ The Hindu, ‘[Taliban says it will punish kidnappers of Afghan Sikh, denies role...](#)’, 25 June 2020

²²⁸ EASO, ‘[COI Report: Afghanistan – Security Situation](#)’ (page 42), September 2020

attacks on religious life-cycle practices and religious symbols of the faith remain a constant threat. For example, on 25th March 2020, Gurdwara Guru Har Rai Sahib in Kabul's Shor Bazaar was attacked killing 25 worshippers. The disdain for non-Muslims practices is evident when militants attacked the cremation ceremony of the victims killed in the Gurdwara attack. Such attacks on religious minority communities, is part of the strategy and effort by supporters of ISIS ideology to weaken and destroy the very religious and cultural fabric of these communities, and ultimately erase any evidence of their long history and existence in Afghanistan.'²²⁹

7.5.9 In a query response dated 5 August 2020, EASO noted incidents of violence (occurring between 2018-2020), perpetrated by ISKP, which included:

'On 1 July 2018, a suicide bomber killed some 20 people in Jalabalad, 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. The attacked were a delegation intending to meet the President Ghani. The only Sikh parliamentary candidate was amongst those killed.

'On 25 March 2020, at least 25 Sikhs were killed in an attack on a temple in Kabul. The ISKP claimed the attack and declared that the attack was a revenge for Muslims in Kashmir. Sources provide different views on number of attackers and on who was behind the attack, some suggesting a possible involvement of the Haqqani network. One child was injured after an explosion near a Sikh crematorium in Kabul the next day. On the contrary, RFE/RL reported that no one was hurt by the explosion.'²³⁰

7.5.10 According to members of the Sikh community, following the gurdwara attack, ISKP threatened Sikhs to either convert to Islam or leave Afghanistan within 10 days or face further attacks^{231 232}. It was not clear from media reports if the explosion near the crematorium the day after the gurdwara attack, which denotated in a nearby house and was described as small, was connected to ISKP or directly targeting the funeral as no one appeared to claim responsibility^{233 234 235}.

7.5.11 Whilst not elaborating further, the Voice of America (VoA) stated in an article published on 18 April 2020, 'In the immediate aftermath of last month's [March 2020] gurdwara attack, they [Sikhs] faced two more failed attacks. A Sikh man in Kabul, who spoke to VOA on a condition of anonymity for fear of his safety, was present at all three locations.'²³⁶

7.5.12 AAN noted that, in reaction to the attack March 2020 attack, the Afghan government announced on 4 April 2020 that Mawlawi Abdullah Orakzai,

²²⁹ Jhutti-Johal, Dr. J., [Report to CPIT](#), 9 November 2020

²³⁰ EASO, [COI Query Response](#) (page 6), 5 August 2020

²³¹ Sikh24.com, [Afghan Sikhs asked to quit Afghanistan within 10 days or get...](#), 28 March 2020

²³² United Sikhs, [Immediate Action Needed To Resettle Sikh and Hindu Victims...](#), 30 April 2020

²³³ The Wire, [A Day After Gurudwara Terror Attack, Blast Near Cremation Site...](#), 26 March 2020

²³⁴ RFERL, [Blast Rocks Funeral Services For Sikhs Killed In Kabul Attack](#), 26 March 2020

²³⁵ Hindustan Times, [Blast near cremation site of Sikhs in Kabul; one Indian...](#), 27 March 2020

²³⁶ VoA, [Save Afghan Sikhs and Hindus from genocide activists urge](#), 18 April 2020

leader of ISKP, and 19 members of its leadership were arrested in Kandahar province²³⁷.

[Back to Contents](#)

Annex A

Report by Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal, University of Birmingham

9 November 2020

Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal – Bio

Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal is a senior lecturer in Sikh Studies in the Department of Theology and Religion, University of Birmingham. She has over 20 years' experience in teaching and research, and provides extensive knowledge and experience in Sikh theology, inter-faith dialogue and contemporary issues facing the Sikh community. Her research covers issues of gender inequality, Sikh identity in the diasporic community, mental health, representation within gurdwaras, racialization and mistaken identity and other contested issues that confront the Sikh community nationally and globally. Her work in the Edward Cadbury Centre for the Public Understanding of Religion looks at public policy, social and political engagement issues as they affect and are affected by the British Sikh community.

Dr Jhutti-Johal was a Commissioner on The Commission on Religion and Belief in British Public Life (CORAB), convened in 2013 by The Woolf Institute. She is currently a steering group member on the UK Freedom of Religion or Belief Forum. She is a board member and trustee on a number of organisations and is very involved in voluntary work within the community, especially around gender and children issues.

CPIN NOTE

The last four decades, whether it was under the Mujahedeen, Taliban or leadership of President Karzai or President Ashraf Ghani, Sikhs and Hindus have seen their non-Muslim 'Kafir' religious identity result in violence and discrimination. Sikhs and Hindus have historically had to pay the jizya, a religious tax for their non-Muslims status, [wear a piece of yellow cloth in public](#), or mark their homes and businesses with a yellow label/mark to identify their religious identity. Since the overthrow of the Taliban in 2001 many of these requirements have been dropped, however, from speaking to Afghan Sikhs in the UK it is clear that the situation in Afghanistan continues to be precarious for Sikh and Hindu communities in Kabul, Jalalabad and Ghazni because of their 'Kafir' status.

²³⁷ AAN, '[A Request to Delay: Another Afghan government attempt to prevent ...](#)', 13 May 2020

When speaking to Afghan Sikhs in the Diaspora who have family in Afghanistan it is clear that Sikhs and Hindus have continued to face persecution and discrimination in the realm of education, employment, continue to have land and property forcibly confiscated and face the threat of violence, especially gender violence by Islamists. As a researcher with a special interest in sexual violence, gender rights and mental health, it is clear that the fear for the safety of Sikh and Hindu women and young girls is very real. I have been informed that there have been incidences of women and young girls being abducted, attacked and forced to convert and marry Muslim men. This violence is not spoken about or highlighted publicly due to notions of honour (izzat) and shame. The mental impact that fear and such traumatic experiences would have on these women and girls must be immense and needs to be on the radar of all those working and engaging with these two communities.

The discrimination and physical attacks have recently become more prominent by the appearance of ISIS (Daesh) in Afghanistan. Once again, they are being asked to pay jizya by the Islamic State of Khorasan in some regions such as Ghazni. Physical attacks on religious life-cycle practices and religious symbols of the faith remain a constant threat. For example, on 25th March 2020, [Gurdwara Guru Har Rai Sahib in Kabul's Shor Bazaar](#) was attacked killing 25 worshippers. The disdain for non-Muslims practices is evident when [militants attacked the cremation ceremony](#) of the victims killed in the Gurdwara attack. Such attacks on religious minority communities, is part of the strategy and effort by supporters of ISIS ideology to weaken and destroy the very religious and cultural fabric of these communities, and ultimately erase any evidence of their long history and existence in Afghanistan.

Sikhs and Hindus have been subjected to persecution for many years in Afghanistan, and the government which has included some Sikh representation, such as Senator Dr. Anarkali Kaur Honaryar and Member of Parliament, Narinder Singh Khalsa (son of Avtar Singh Khalsa who was killed in 2018 Afghan terror attack) have not managed to provide a suitable level of security for the Hindu and Sikh community. There are probably a number of reasons for this, including competing priorities for resources within the country and general level of lawlessness. The gradual and steady decrease in the size of both communities in Afghanistan is playing right into the hands of Islamic extremists, with the Afghan government unlikely to want to invest significant resources to address equality and security issues for the Sikh and Hindu community because they know they will eventually leave.

Whilst there may not be an exact figure of how many Sikhs and Hindus are left in Afghanistan, after speaking to Afghan Sikhs in the UK who are working with the community in Afghanistan one can estimate that there are probably between 600-800 Sikhs and less than 100 Hindus left (approximately 90-100 families) in Afghanistan. From these conversations, it is also clear that these numbers are likely to reduce further because those who are left want to leave due to increasing safety

and security fears. They fear for their safety because they are acutely aware that the signing of the Agreement for [Bringing Peace to Afghanistan on 29th February 2020](#) and the proposed withdrawal of US and International Troops is emboldening ISIS and the Taliban in their quest for power and control, which will inevitably mean more trauma and hardship for them due to violence, persecution and discrimination.

Dr Jagbir Jhutti-Johal OBE
Senior Lecturer in Sikh Studies
School of Philosophy, Theology and Religion
University of Birmingham

[Back to Contents](#)

Annex B

Note from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office

27 January 2021

An official with the FCO [from the British Embassy, Kabul] met with Narinder Singh Khalsa, since elected to the Wolesi Jirga, to discuss the current situation on the ground facing the Afghan Sikh community both here in Kabul and more widely across Afghanistan. Mr Khalsa responded to a number of questions, interpreted below.

Q1. Do you have an idea of how many Sikhs are in Afghanistan? Last recorded numbers were 1000 people around 220 families.

A1. With the current security situation of the country the overall number left in the country is 200 approximately 44 families.

Q2. Another popular claim is of forced recruitment of minors by the Taliban. Is this still a widespread problem?

A2. This is completely baseless and irrelevant.

Q3. Details of the Gurdwaras and people who work there. What buildings are next door, across the road etc.? It appears as though Karte Parwan is the only Gurdwara left in Kabul, can this be verified?

A3. There are about 72 Gurdwaras and Temples around Afghanistan, however out them 13 Gurdwaras are the major once, Ghazni – five (5) not active, Khost – one (1) not active Jalalabad – two (2) active and Kabul – five (5) active. Similarly there are three (3) Temples in the country one (1) in Jalalabad and two (2) in Kabul all active.

Q4. Cremating deceased family members allegedly causes problems with Muslims. Is there a specific site where cremations can take place peacefully? If such a site exists, does it have a name, and what is its location?

A4. It used to be a problem, not now because the Government of Afghanistan has assigned a specific area, so now we can easily cremate our deceased's.

Q5. What employment opportunities are available to the Afghan Sikhs?

A5. As a large portion of the Sikh community fled to other countries, therefore a minimal number of them currently involved in the retail business of the Greek medicine. However if the situation prevails and we have peace then we can also be involved in the import and export business as well.

Q6. The number of Afghan Sikh currently employed or in business?

A6. Roughly out of the 200 left in the country I can say around 40% are employed or have means to a livelihood. We have a female senator in the upper house, I am a Member of the Parliament, one of our brothers is employed in the Administrative Office of the President and one is working as an Advisor to the President in the Presidential Place (ARG).

Q7. How do Afghan Sikh financially maintain themselves in Afghan on average (source of income)?

A7. It would be a bit difficult to answer, but roughly between 500 to 1000/AFN per day because the poorest are still in the country.

Q8. If an Afghan Sikh is given up to £1,500 for voluntary return via VARRP scheme, how would they be able to establish a source of income in Afghan? Is it easy for them to establish a business? How would they be able to access accommodation (what are the cost of the cheapest accommodation)?

A8. Given our background of the work in the country it's really impossible to start a small business with £1,500, moreover the cost of living especially in Kabul with the security issues for us is really difficult. Therefore it's totally not enough and the cost of accommodation lies between 200 to 300 USD per month, therefore the allocated amount is not enough.

Q9. What support is provided by the government to Afghan Sikh, also what other supports are available by third parties (e.g. IOM, NGO)?

A9. Unlike other majorities of the country none of the Sikh people have received any support or assistance from the either the government or the NGO communities. Now that we are in the government so we are trying our best to be heard by the authorities. It's difficult and near to impossible sometimes.

Q10. What education is available for Afghan minors?

A10. Education is available to all, and our children does not attend the Public Schools because of regularly being bullied in school and resulting complaints to teachers and the authorities went unheard with the only option to those who could afford it was to remove them from public funded schools that is why we only use Private schools for our children.

Q11. In order to show support available for Afghan Sikhs, where are the majority Sikh located in Afghan? And how many of them are there? I am aware that many Afghan Sikh have returned from Pak to Afghan.

A11. As I have already mentioned, the remaining 200 Afghan Sikhs are mainly in Nangarhar and Kabul Provinces.

Q12. Current position on Sikh women in Afghanistan.... for example: Are they able to go out (with or without a male escort); do they have to wear the Burka/veil; do they work?

A12. As our women wear their traditional scarfs (SHOWAL) therefore no issues, because they are part of the communities as the rest of the people in the country. The people of Afghanistan accepts us as their nation and so far we have not saw any issue from our Muslim brothers and sisters. It depends on the province as well, Kabul for example no issues most of the time however other provinces there are some issues and therefore we do accompany them.

Q13. Who do they sell the Greek medicine to and how?

A13. All the people within the country know that how good Sikhs are in providing and selling the Greek Medicine legally within the country, therefore our customers are all types of people within the country.

Q14. What language are the children taught in at school?

A14. As the rest of the Afghan children, Dari, Pashto and English Languages are the major languages that our children learn in the schools. Except the children who were born in India the rest speaks the country's main languages.

Q15. Private Schooling fees (where are they taught?)

A15. Because of certain issues explained above all our children attend the private schools, with the fee ranging from 1000 to 7000/AFN per month.

Q16. Do most Afghan Sikhs speak Dari (or are there a number who speak only Punjabi)?

A16. All of us speak Dari and Pashto within the community, however internally we communicate in our own language Punjabi. The government did promise to build schools for the Sikhs communities but because the number of children are limited because of migrations therefore it never happened.

Q17. Is there any substance to stories whereby it is alleged that Afghan Sikhs live only in the Gurdwara and never venture outside?

A17. These stories are not allegations our people do live within Gurdwaras because of lack of shelters or the financial capabilities to have or build houses within the communities. This is the only reason that our people live within Gurdwaras.

Q18. [Do] Afghan Sikhs interact with those outside of the Sikh community (I suggested this is the case given how he was very positive about the vast majority of the Muslim commonality).

A18. There are no limitations to us and not to our Muslim brother, we do attend the parties and ceremonies and do they with us. No limitation or complications in this regard.

Q19. In relation to the Gurdwaras – can you provide details of neighbouring building/offices and those opposite or anything unique (for example, is it situated next door to a particular hotel or Government building)?

A19. It's really difficult to provide you with all the addresses, however the one in Kabul, House of late marshal Mohammad Qasem Fahim; hospital and office of Jamyat Islami is located around gurdwara or temple

Q20. How many Sikhs went to live in India?

A20. It's difficult to provide you the exact numbers, however the overall population of the Sikhs Communities only within Kabul were more than 350,000 families that formed over 1.5 million and they all migrated to India because of the security situation. From there they went to other countries, because the safest migratory routes for our people is Afghanistan to India and then elsewhere.

Q21. How many returned and over what timeframe?

A21. There are no specific numbers of the returns, however between a period of 1-10 years our people came and migrated again to India. Now we only have 200 of them in the country.

Q22. What happened to their homes and businesses in Afghanistan while they were living in India?

A22. This the other main reason for our people to flee because about 70% of the land was occupied by powerful people within the country and around 30% have sold their properties or land. We are trying our best to release their properties and lands.

Q23. How did they manage to access housing and work on their return?

A23. As temporary measure we provide shelter to them within the Gurdwaras and then we try to take back their house or land if occupied with proper documentations that they hold.

To Note -This letter has been compiled by staff of the British Embassy in Kabul entirely from information obtained from the sources indicated. The letter does not reflect the opinions of the author(s), nor any policy of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. The author(s) have compiled this letter in response to a request from the Home Office and any further enquiries regarding its contents should be directed there.

[Back to Contents](#)

Terms of Reference

A 'Terms of Reference' (ToR) is a broad outline of what the CPIN seeks to cover. They form the basis for the [country information section](#). The Home Office's Country Policy and Information Team uses some standardised ToR, depending on the subject, and these are then adapted depending on the country concerned.

For this particular CPIN, the following topics were identified prior to drafting as relevant and on which research was undertaken:

- History – brief overview
- Demography
 - Population, including fluctuation due to migration, location of communities
 - Sikh and Hindu communities in Afghanistan, including socio-economic situation, languages used
 - Gurdwaras and Mandirs, how many, accessibility
- Legal framework
 - Legal rights for minority religious groups
 - Apostasy and blasphemy, charges of
 - Citizenship and identity cards
- State treatment and attitudes
 - State support and outreach, including access to land, places of worship, and cremation sites
 - Political representation
 - Employment in government
 - Access to education
 - Access to justice
- Societal treatment and attitudes
 - Community relations
 - Harassment and discrimination
 - Cremations
 - Housing and land – land appropriation
 - Women and Children
 - Attacks against communities

[Back to Contents](#)

Bibliography

Sources cited

Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN),

[‘A Request to Delay: Another Afghan government attempt to prevent an ICC war crimes investigation?’](#), 13 May 2020. Last accessed: 21 October 2020

[‘Blood in the Abode of Peace: The attack on Kabul’s Sikhs’](#), 1 April 2020. Last accessed: 21 October 2020

[‘Kabul Unpacked: A geographical guide to a metropolis in the making’](#), 2019. Last accessed: 30 October 2020

[‘The Other Fold of the Turban: Afghanistan’s Hindus and Sikhs’](#), 23 September 2013. Last accessed: 21 October 2020

[‘The Results of Afghanistan’s 2018 Parliamentary Elections: A new, but incomplete Wolesi Jirga’](#), 17 May 2019. Last accessed: 21 October 2020

Afghanistan Government, [Constitution](#), 2004. Last accessed: 2 October 2020

Afghanistan Times,

[‘Facing persecution, last Sikhs leave Ghazni’](#), 20 October 2020. Last accessed: 6 November 2020

[‘Human rights body criticizes government for carelessness on Sikhs’ rights’](#), 21 October 2020. Last accessed: 6 November 2020

[‘Insecurity in Ghazni forces hundreds of Hindus, Sikhs to flee hometown’](#), 10 August 2020. Last accessed: 6 November 2020

Al Jazeera,

[‘Sikhs quitting Afghanistan’](#), 9 July 2006. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

[‘Solidarity for Sikhs after Afghanistan massacre’](#), 26 March 2020. Last accessed: 30 October 2020

[‘The decline of Afghanistan’s Hindu and Sikh communities’](#), 1 January 2017. Last accessed: 20 October 2020

[‘Understanding Afghanistan’s elections 2018’](#), 20 October 2018. Last accessed: 7 October 2020

Associated Press (AP),

[‘Afghanistan’s Sikhs feel alienated, pressured to leave’](#), 10 June 2015. Last accessed: 3 November 2020

[‘Facing IS, last embattled Sikhs, Hindus leave Afghanistan’](#), 27 September 2020. Last accessed: 3 November 2020

Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), [‘Country Information Report – Afghanistan’](#), 27 June 2019. Last accessed: 6 October 2020

BBC News,

[‘Afghanistan elections: “I want to fulfil my slain father’s dreams”’](#), 17 October 2018. Last accessed: 22 October 2020

[‘Ways of Sikh Living’](#), no date. Last accessed: 5 March 2021

Bertelsmann Stiftung, [‘BTI 2020 Country Report — Afghanistan’](#), 2020. Last accessed: 6 October 2020

The Better India, [‘TBI Blogs: Tracing the History of the Thriving Sikh Community in Afghanistan and Georgia’](#), 13 October 2016. Last accessed: 21 October 2020

CIA World Factbook, [‘Afghanistan’](#), 10 September 2020. Last accessed: 2 October 2020

Eberhard, David M, Gary F Simons, and Charles D Fennig (editors), SIL International, [‘Ethnologue: Languages of the World’](#), Twenty-fourth edition, 2021. Last accessed: 24 March 2021

European Asylum Support Office (EASO),

[‘COI Query Response: Afghanistan – Situation of Hindus and Sikhs \(2018-2020\)’](#), 5 August 2020. Last accessed: 29 October 2020

[‘Afghanistan: Criminal law, customary justice and informal dispute resolution’](#), July 2020. Last accessed: 9 October 2020

[‘Afghanistan: Individuals targeted under societal and legal norms’](#), December 2017. Last accessed: 5 March 2021

[‘Afghanistan: Security Situation’](#), September 2020. Last accessed: 4 November 2020

Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) UK,

[‘Human Rights and Democracy: the 2019 Foreign and Commonwealth Office report’](#), 16 July 2020. Last accessed: 29 October 2020

[Note from Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office](#), 27 January 2021

Gandhara, [‘More Afghan Sikhs, Hindus Migrating To India From Afghanistan’](#), 11 August 2020. Last accessed: 22 October 2020

The Hindu,

[‘For Afghan Sikhs, it’s between violence and exodus’](#), 28 March 2020. Last accessed: 30 October 2020

[‘Taliban says it will punish kidnappers of Afghan Sikh, denies role in abduction’](#), 25 June 2020. Last accessed: 29 October 2020.

Hindu American Foundation (HAF), [‘5 things to know about Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan’](#), 28 August 2020. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

Hindustan Times,

[‘200 Afghan Sikh families put up in gurdwaras across Delhi’](#), 7 September 2020. Last accessed: 20 October 2020

[‘25 killed in Kabul gurdwara attack; Islamic State claims responsibility’](#), 25 March 2020. Last accessed: 30 October 2020

[‘420 Afghan Sikh and Hindu families evacuated to India’](#), 5 September 2020. Last accessed: 20 October 2020

[‘Blast near cremation site of Sikhs in Kabul; one Indian among the dead’](#), 27 March 2020. Last accessed: 30 October 2020

Indian Express, '[Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan — how many remain, why they want to leave](#)', 28 July 2020. Last accessed: 20 October 2020

Jhutti-Johal, Dr J, University of Birmingham, '[Report to Country Policy and Information Team](#)', 9 November 2020

Media Diversified, '[Afghan Sikhs: persecution, resistance and life in diaspora](#)', 17 April 2018. Last accessed: 21 October 2020

Ministry of External Affairs (India), '[On safe return of Shri Nidan Singh](#)', 18 July 2020. Last accessed: 30 October 2020

The National, '[Afghanistan Sikh, Hindu community brave danger to vote](#)', 20 October 2018. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), '[Afghanistan population estimates](#)', June 2019. Last accessed: 5 October 2020

New York Times, '[India Offers Escape to Afghan Hindus and Sikhs Facing Attacks](#)', 19 July 2020. Last accessed: 20 October 2020

Porsesh Research and Studies Organization (PRSO),

['Ignored Identities \(The Status of Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan's Legal System\)'](#), 2016. Last accessed: 26 October 2020

['Survey of the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs'](#), February 2019. Last accessed: 21 October 2020

Radio Free Europe Radio Liberty (RFERL), '[Blast Rocks Funeral Services For Sikhs Killed In Kabul Attack](#)', 26 March 2020. Last accessed: 30 October 2020

Sikh24.com,

['Afghan Sikhs asked to quit Afghanistan within 10 days or get ready to be killed'](#), 28 March 2020. Last accessed: 3 November 2020

['Persecuted Afghan Sikhs Quit Gurdwara Sri Guru Har Rai Sahib Ji Amid Continuous Threats'](#), 31 March 2020. Last accessed: 3 November 2020

Singh, I, (SikhNet), '[Afghan Sikhs – Tracing their origins and history](#)', 29 October 2020. Last accessed: 6 November 2020

Tolonews, '[Nearly 99% Of Hindus, Sikhs Left Afghanistan in Last Three decades](#)', 21 June 2016. Last accessed: 20 October 2020

United Sikhs, '[Immediate Action Needed To Resettle Sikh and Hindu Victims of Religious Persecution in Afghanistan](#)', 30 April 2020. Last accessed: 3 November 2020

US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), '[2020 Annual Report – Afghanistan](#)', April 2020. Last accessed: 22 October 2020

US Department of State (USSD), '[2019 Report on International Religious Freedom: Afghanistan](#)', 10 June 2020. Last accessed: 20 October 2020

Voice of America (VoA),

['Save Afghan Sikhs and Hindus from genocide activists urge'](#), 18 April 2020. Last accessed: 23 March 2021

[‘Sikhs and Hindus of Afghanistan in Limbo after March Deadly Attack’](#), 3 May 2020. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ), [‘Facing Intolerance, Many Sikhs and Hindus Leave Afghanistan’](#), 12 January 2015. Last accessed: 21 October 2020

The Wire, [‘A Day After Gurudwara Terror Attack, Blast Near Cremation Site in Kabul’](#), 26 March 2020. Last accessed: 4 November 2020

[Back to Contents](#)

Sources consulted but not cited

Asia Times, [‘Sikhs in Afghanistan a neglected, vanishing minority’](#), (Opinion), 1 April 2020. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

BBC News, [‘Afghanistan conflict: Militants in deadly attack on Sikh temple in Kabul’](#), 25 March 2020. Last accessed: 30 October 2020

Central Asia Caucasus Institute, [‘ISIS Reaps Gains From the Pakistan-India Rivalry in Afghanistan’](#), 21 July 2020. Last accessed: 4 November 2020

Deccan Herald, [‘Sikhs and Hindus left in Afghanistan face persecution’](#), 8 November 2013. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

The Diplomat, [‘Longing to Belong: Afghan Sikhs and Hindus in India’](#), 19 August 2016. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

Institute of War and Peace Reporting (IWPR),

[‘Afghan Sikhs and Hindus Face Discrimination at School’](#), 28 July 2011. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

[‘Tough Times for Afghan Hindus and Sikhs’](#), 11 July 2013, ARR Issue 459. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

Jakara Movement, [‘Plight of Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan’](#), no date. Last accessed: 3 November 2020

Outlook, [‘Kabul Gurdwara Attack: Bringing Back Sikhs Could Damage Indo-Afghan Ties’](#), 2 April 2020. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

Religion News Service, [‘Afghanistan can’t protect its Sikhs from terror. It’s time for America to step up’](#), 27 March 2020. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

Reuters,

[‘Afghanistan's dwindling Sikh, Hindu communities flee new abuses’](#), 23 June 2016. Last accessed: 3 November 2020

[“‘We cannot live here’ – Afghanistan’s Sikhs weigh future after suicide bombing’](#), 2 July 2018. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

The South Asia Collective, [‘South Asia State of Minorities Report 2019’](#), 2020. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

The Week, [‘Afghan Sikhs are targeted by the Taliban and unable to even bury their dead’](#), 2 November 2019. Last accessed: 2 November 2020

[Back to Contents](#)

Version control

Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **6.0**
- valid from **26 March 2021**

Changes from last version of this note

Updated assessment and country information.

[Back to Contents](#)