

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	577
Land:	Afghanistan
Kilde:	Minority Rights Group International
Titel:	State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous People 2015 - Afghanistan
Udgivet:	2. juli 2015
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	2. oktober 2015



State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2015 - Afghanistan

Publisher [Minority Rights Group International](#)

Publication Date 2 July 2015

Cite as Minority Rights Group International, *State of the World's Minorities and Indigenous Peoples 2015 - Afghanistan*, 2 July 2015, available at:
<http://www.refworld.org/docid/55a4fa6915.html> [accessed 21 September 2015]

Disclaimer This is not a UNHCR publication. UNHCR is not responsible for, nor does it necessarily endorse, its content. Any views expressed are solely those of the author or publisher and do not necessarily reflect those of UNHCR, the United Nations or its Member States.

In 2014, Afghanistan's presidential election consumed the country. Marred by allegations of fraud, the months-long electoral process eventually resulted in a power-sharing agreement between the two leading candidates, Abdullah Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani, who became president. Amid this political uncertainty, civilian casualties reached record levels in 2014. Nevertheless, at the end of 2014 NATO formally declared an end to its 13-year combat mission in Afghanistan. This has provoked uncertainty over what the end of this phase of foreign intervention will mean for Afghans, not least for the country's minority populations such as the Hazara, who – as both a sectarian and visible ethnic minority – have been targeted by the Taliban.

Tensions surrounding issues of 'identity' in Afghanistan came to the fore during the election, which saw the politicization of identity along predominantly ethnic lines. Although Ghani has avoided using his tribal name for official purposes since his election, during the campaign his identity was mobilized in efforts to appeal to Afghanistan's majority Pashtun voters. Meanwhile, Ghani's first vice president, former Uzbek warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, warned minority Uzbek and Turkmen tribes in Baghlan province they would be considered 'traitors' if they did not vote for Ghani. However, the election also provided an opportunity for minorities to challenge Afghanistan's hierarchical political system, with Hazaras playing a particularly prominent role in the election – a reflection of their improved status over the last decade. Although the Hazara vote was split, the majority of voters lent their support to Abdullah Abdullah – who is of mixed Pashtun and Tajik ethnicity but is identified with the latter – and who represented a vote for change in the eyes of many. Following the parliamentary rejection of a presidential decree proposing a reserved seat for Hindus and Sikhs in December 2013, political representation of these groups remained limited in 2014. However, in a historic appointment, in May 2014 the previous Afghan government selected a representative from the dwindling Hindu community for the diplomatic rank of ambassador for the first time.

Although violence along ethnic lines has greatly reduced since the 2001 toppling of the Taliban government, violent attacks continue to be perpetrated against certain groups, particularly Hazara. In July 2014, for instance, Taliban stopped a bus travelling to Kabul for Eid, separated Hazara passengers and shot them, killing 15, including three women and a child. More recently, in late February 2015, masked gunmen kidnapped 31 Hazara men travelling through Zabul province on a major road from Herat to Kabul. Following this kidnapping, the country has seen a rise in similar attacks on travellers on Afghanistan's main highways, including the reported abduction of eight

Hazara in March 2015 on a road between Jaghori District and Ghazni City. Also in March 2015, a rare attack was perpetrated on a minority Sufi mosque, viewed as heretical by hardline Sunni groups, killing at least six people. Allegations that these recent sectarian attacks may be connected to ISIS have stoked fear among many Afghans, and in particular members of the country's minority groups.

Persistent discrimination against Afghanistan's Hindus and Sikhs also compelled hundreds of members of these dwindling religious groups to leave Afghanistan during the year, including 35 Sikhs who arrived in the UK in a shipping container in August 2014. While no longer forced to wear yellow arm-bands to identify themselves, as was required under Taliban control, members of the Sikh community have reported worsening conditions since 2001. For example, Sikhs continue to suffer verbal and physical abuse during funeral cremations – a practice forbidden in Islam – and, while the Ministry of Education has opened two primary schools exclusively for Hindu and Sikh students in Kabul and Jalalabad, those not separated into designated schools continue to suffer discrimination in the country's public schools.

Local women's rights organizations have aptly pointed out that – to differing extents – all sides of conflict in Afghanistan have had a role in undermining women's rights. Nevertheless, as Oxfam highlighted in a 2014 report, any future peace talks with the Taliban must not undermine those important, if limited, gains that have been made with respect to women's rights in recent years. As reported by Amnesty International in early 2015, women human rights defenders continue to suffer threats, harassment and intimidation on a daily basis. Although Ghani nominated three women to join his cabinet – one more than his predecessor Karzai, but one less than initially promised – high levels of discrimination persist in the country, which itself puts women appointed in such positions at risk. Gender-based discrimination and growing religious intolerance intersected in what was described by the newly elected president as a heinous attack in March 2015, when a mob killed a young woman after she allegedly burned a copy of the Qur'an.

In light of persistent insecurity, as well as other factors such as environmental disasters and limited economic and social opportunities, many minorities have been determined to leave their homes for more stable environs. Yet, with countries such as Pakistan and Iran taking an increasingly exclusionary stance towards Afghan refugees in 2014, many relocated within the country itself. From January to September the UNHCR documented an increase of more than 38,340 internally displaced (IDPs) in Afghanistan, bringing the total to over 755,011. The majority of these IDPs, as well as Afghan refugees returning from neighbouring countries, have chosen urban areas as their destinations, in turn greatly contributing to Afghanistan's rapid urbanization in recent years. This largely unchecked and unplanned growth has meant that the majority of residents in and around Kabul are based in informal settlements or slums. Kabul is now the fifth fastest growing city in the world.

Minorities have been among the many Afghans contributing to this process of urbanization which has, in certain ways, changed the face of the country. Although, broadly speaking, Afghanistan's ethnic groups continue to occupy geographically distinct regions, with Pashtuns in southern and eastern areas, Tajiks occupying the north-west and north-east, Turkmen and Uzbeks in the north, and Hazara living predominantly in the centre, the movement of diverse populations to urban areas has complicated this picture. In slums in and around Kabul, Pashtuns as well as minorities such as Hazara, Tajiks and Uzbeks from across the country live among one another. Yet while this diversity has encouraged cooperation and coexistence in certain locales, structures of exclusion and discrimination have also been reproduced in urban areas.

For Hazara, the journey to Kabul from Hazarajat in the centre of the country has proven dangerous. The main roadway between the two areas – dubbed 'Death Road' – has been the site of kidnappings and other deadly Taliban attacks on Hazara in recent years. As a result, having

successfully arrived in Kabul, Hazara have often been unable or afraid to return to their previous homes. This violence on the main roadway has further isolated and thereby stalled the development of Hazarajat, which requires labour and materials from Kabul to build facilities such as schools and clinics. Both these factors have contributed to the high numbers of Hazara currently residing in Kabul, with many concentrated in one overcrowded area, Dasht-e-Barchi. Although life in Kabul has relatively improved for Hazara since 2001, they have continued to occupy lower-status jobs and have faced harsh discrimination, including in access to facilities and provision of services.

Meanwhile, for Kabul's tiny Sikh population conditions continue to worsen, their small population dwindling to an estimated 300 families. Socially ostracized, Sikhs living in Kabul reportedly face economic hardship, with many refusing to conduct business with them, but also due to land grabs in areas in which Sikhs have historically resided. In addition to daily economic and social discrimination – sometimes manifesting as physical and verbal abuse – freedom to practise their religion has also been curtailed. Kabul was once home to eight Sikh places of worship or *gurdwaras*, but only one remains today.

Members of Afghanistan's Kuchi minority – a diverse nomadic community representing a variety of tribal and ethno-political affiliations – who have more recently adopted a sedentary lifestyle on the periphery of major cities have similarly faced discrimination. Urban Kuchis have typically lacked access to 'serviced' areas of the city and have instead lived on the outskirts, often occupying infertile land or, as has been the case near Kandahar, permanently residing in refugee camps. These shabby living conditions have not only disadvantaged those living in such settlements, but have also fuelled increasingly widespread negative perceptions of Kuchis, further undermining their social status within Afghanistan.

Copyright notice: © Minority Rights Group International. All rights reserved.

Search Refworld

by keyword

and / or country

[Advanced Search](#) | [Search Tips](#)

Countries

- [Afghanistan](#)

Topics

- [Hazara](#)
- [Minorities](#)
- [Minority rights](#)
- [Religious discrimination](#)