



Home Office

# Country Policy and Information Note Afghanistan: Sikhs and Hindus

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# 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 basis of claim](#) 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 on whether, **in general**:

- A person is reasonably likely to face a real risk of persecution or serious harm
- 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
- Claims are 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:

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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](#).

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# Assessment

Assessment updated: 11 April 2019

## 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 Sikh or Hindu.

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## 2. Consideration of issues

### 2.1 Credibility

- 2.1.1 For information on assessing credibility, see the [Asylum 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](#)).

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### 2.2 Exclusion

- 2.2.1 If there are serious reasons for considering that the person has been involved in committing a serious crime, decision makers must consider whether any of the exclusion clauses are applicable.
- 2.2.2 For further guidance on the exclusion clauses and restricted leave, see the [Asylum Instruction on Exclusion: Article 1F of the Refugee Convention](#) and the [Instruction on Restricted Leave](#).

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### 2.2 Convention reason

- 2.2.1 Race or religion.
- 2.2.2 Establishing a convention reason alone is not sufficient to be recognised as a refugee. The question to be addressed in each case is whether the particular person will face a real risk of persecution on account of their actual or imputed convention reason.
- 2.2.3 For further guidance on Convention reasons and particular social groups, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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### 2.3 Assessment of risk

- 2.3.1 Although the exact number of the Sikh and Hindu population in Afghanistan is not known, it is a small minority, estimated to be between 1,000 to a few thousand. Various sources agree there are between 200 - 300 Sikh and

Hindu families. Sikhs and Hindus live primarily in urban areas, particularly Kabul and Nangarhar. It is reported that Sikhs and Hindus identify closely with one another as non-Muslim minorities (see [Population](#)).

#### a. Treatment by the state

- 2.3.2 The constitution expressly protects freedom of religion for non-Muslims within the limits of the law, though these freedoms are limited in practice. The Penal Code provides punishments for anyone who prevents a person conducting their religious rituals or rites; damages places of worship; and for attacking followers of any religion (see [Legal rights](#)).
- 2.3.3 Leaders of both Hindu and Sikh communities reported discrimination in the judicial system, with the illegal appropriation of Sikh properties being the most common issue arising (see [Judicial system](#)).
- 2.3.4 Hindus and Sikhs are permitted to build places of worship and train members of their community to become clergy, and the government has allocated land to Sikhs and Hindus for cremation sites. Police support is provided to protect these communities while they perform their cremation rituals (see [Legal framework](#) and [Cremations](#)).
- 2.3.5 The Afghan government has provided a large area for Sikhs and Hindus at Police District 21 area of Kabul city where they can build residential units and a Shamshan (cremation ground). However District 21 has not been developed yet and members of the Sikh and Hindu communities have raised concerns about living there, citing security issues (see [District 21, Kabul](#)).
- 2.3.6 There have been reports of government officials stating that Sikhs and Hindus do not belong in Afghanistan. However, following a 2016 presidential decree, the law requires the reservation of a seat for Sikhs and Hindus in the Afghan parliament. In June 2017, the president invited leaders of the Sikh and Hindu communities to the palace for talks about what he termed their valuable role in the country. The Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs facilitates pilgrimages for Hindus and Sikhs to India. Following a Daesh suicide bomb attack on members of the Sikh and Hindu communities in July 2018, the president visited a Gurdwara in Kabul to offer his condolences and confirm his support for Sikh and Hindu communities (see [Political engagement](#) and [Governmental outreach and attitudes to the Sikh/Hindu community](#)).
- 2.3.7 In general, Sikhs and Hindus are not at risk of persecution or serious harm from the state, but each case should be considered on its individual merits.

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#### b. Societal treatment

- 2.3.8 Narinder Singh Khalsa, a Sikh elected to the Wolesi Jirga (the lower house of the Afghan national assembly), stated that the majority of the Muslim population is very supportive of the Sikh community, and that they have a positive relationship, with Sikhs able to practise their religion publicly. However, there are also reports that the Sikh and Hindu communities face societal intolerance, which some commentators have attributed to 'extremist elements' who have moved from the provinces to Kabul and other cities. There are claims of non-Muslims facing pressure to convert to Islam from

Muslim members of society. The Hindu population face fewer difficulties than the more visibly distinguishable Sikh population (whose men wear a distinctive headdress), with some Sikhs reportedly dressing as Muslims in order to avoid harassment. It is reported that some Sikhs have left for India due to economic difficulties and societal harassment, but others have no plans to leave, as they see Afghanistan as their home (see [Urban/rural differences](#), [Violence and discrimination](#) and [Pressure to convert](#)).

- 2.3.9 Some Sikhs and Hindus have reportedly been victims of illegal seizure and occupation of their land. It was reported in February 2019 that members of the Sikh and Hindu Councils had recently met with President Ghani to discuss this issue with him. Some community members choose not to pursue restitution through the courts due to fear of retaliation. Some Sikh families live in Gurdwaras as they lack housing (see [Housing and land](#) and [Judicial system](#)).
- 2.3.10 Some Sikhs and Hindus are reported to face discrimination in the labour market, and illiteracy can cause difficulties in obtaining work. Members of the Sikh and Hindu communities avoid sending their children to public schools, reportedly because of harassment by other students. There is a school for Sikh children in Kabul which is funded by the government. Some Sikh children attend private schools, although not all can afford it. Non-Muslims are not required to study Islam in state schools. There is evidence that some Sikhs suffer societal harassment when cremating their dead, although police protection is provided (see [Access to education and employment](#) and [Cremations](#)).
- 2.3.11 In addition, Sikhs and Hindus appeared to be targeted in a suicide bomb attack in July 2018 in Jalalabad. Daesh claimed responsibility for the attack. There have been no further reported insurgent attacks. There are also reports of a letter, in which it was claimed that it was from Daesh, which was received by some Sikhs and Hindus asking them to pay 'jizya,' a tax on non-Muslims (see [Violence and discrimination](#)).
- 2.3.12 In the country guidance case of [TG and others \(Afghan Sikhs persecuted\) \(CG\) \[2015\] UKUT 595 \(IAC\) \(3 November 2015\)](#), heard on 31 March 2014 and 17 August 2015, the Upper Tribunal found (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.'

2.3.13 There are not very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to justify a departure from the conclusions of [TG and others](#). Whilst there have been attacks on Sikhs and Hindus, notably the July 2018 suicide bomb attack in Jalalabad, they do not appear to have escalated to the point that the conclusion at (ii) above should change. Similarly, whilst Sikhs and Hindus do continue to experience discrimination, it has not escalated or changed to the extent that the conclusion at (ii) above should change.

2.3.14 For further guidance on assessing risk, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#). For further information about the situation for women in Afghanistan, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Women fearing gender-based harm/violence](#).

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## 2.4 Protection

2.4.1 A person who has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state will not be able to avail themselves of the protection of the authorities.

2.4.2 Where a person has a well-founded fear of persecution from non-state actors, decision makers must assess whether the state can provide effective protection.

2.4.3 In areas controlled by anti-government elements (AGEs), the state will be unable and unwilling to provide effective protection (see [Country Policy and Information Note Afghanistan: Security and Humanitarian Situation](#)).

2.4.4 In the country guidance case of [TG and others](#), the Upper Tribunal found 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' (para 119 iv).

- 2.4.5 The Afghan government has taken measures to improve its law enforcement and justice system since [TG and others](#), and its presence and control are generally stronger in the cities. However, these systems are still weak and there have been reports of abuse of Sikhs and Hindus by the Police. As such, in general, there are not currently very strong grounds supported by cogent evidence to depart from the conclusion above. In areas controlled by AGEs, the state will be unable and unwilling to provide effective protection. Each case must, however, be considered on its facts.
- 2.4.6 For further information about state protection see the country policy and information notes on [Afghanistan: Security and humanitarian situation](#) and [Afghanistan: Fear of Anti-government elements \(AGEs\)](#).
- 2.4.7 For further guidance on assessing the availability or not of state protection, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#).

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## 2.5 Internal relocation

- 2.5.1 If the person has a well-founded fear of persecution from the state, it is unlikely to be reasonable to expect them to relocate to escape that risk.
- 2.5.2 The country guidance case of [TG and others](#) found that whether it is reasonable to expect a member of the Sikh or Hindu communities to relocate is a fact sensitive assessment. The relevant factors to be considered include those set out at paragraph 119 (iii) of the determination (see 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).
- 2.5.3 However, in all cases, careful consideration must be given to the relevance and reasonableness of internal relocation on a case by case basis, taking full account of the individual circumstances of the particular person.
- 2.5.4 For further guidance on internal relocation, see the [Asylum Instruction on Assessing Credibility and Refugee Status](#). For further information about the situation for women in Afghanistan, see the Country Policy and Information Note on [Afghanistan: Women fearing gender-based harm/violence](#).

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## 2.6 Certification

- 2.6.1 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.
- 2.6.2 For further guidance on certification, see [Certification of Protection and Human Rights claims under section 94 of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 \(clearly unfounded claims\)](#).

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# Country information

Section 3 updated: 8 March 2019

## 3. Demography

### 3.1 Current population

- 3.1.1 The US Department of State's International Religious Freedom Report for 2017 (USSD IRF Report 2017), published May 2018, noted, 'The U.S. government estimates the total population at 34.1 million (July 2017 estimate). [...] [Non-Muslim] religious groups, mainly Hindus, Sikhs, Bahais, and Christians, constitute less than 0.3 percent of the population. Sikh and Hindu leaders estimate there are 245 Sikh and Hindu families totaling 1,300 individuals in the country.'<sup>1</sup>
- 3.1.2 In 2018, the Australian Institute of International Affairs, an organisation dedicated to reporting on international relations, noted: 'Current estimates put the Sikh community at around 300 families.'<sup>2</sup>
- 3.1.3 In February 2019, an official from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) met with Narinder Singh Khalsa, since elected to the Wolesi Jirga (lower house of the Afghan national assembly<sup>3</sup>). Mr Khalsa stated that there are currently about 1,000 Sikhs in Afghanistan, consisting of about 220 families<sup>4</sup>.
- 3.1.4 In 2018 Reuters reported that, 'The Sikh community now numbers fewer than 300 families in Afghanistan.'<sup>5</sup>

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### 3.2 Changes to population size over time

- 3.2.1 In 2017 Al Jazeera reported, '[...] the population of Hindu and Sikh minorities has seen a drastic decline over the past several decades. Although there is no census data available in the country to estimate exact numbers due to years of war and conflict, the community members themselves speculate that there are perhaps no more than a few thousand Hindus and Sikhs left in Afghanistan today.'<sup>6</sup>
- 3.2.2 The Diplomat released an article in 2018, which reported: 'The Sikhs have always been a small but native minority in Afghanistan; according to one account, prior to 1992, there were about 220,000 Hindus and Sikhs in Afghanistan with another putting that number as low as 50,000. By now, the very few remaining are concentrated in the provinces of Nangarhar, Kabul, and Ghazni.'<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> USSD IRF Report 2017, Afghanistan, Section I, 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of International Affairs, 'A Precarious State [...]', 11 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>3</sup> WolesiJirga.website, [url](#)

<sup>4</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019, [Annex A](#)

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, "'We cannot live here' [...]", 2 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>6</sup> Al Jazeera, 'The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities,' 1 January 2017, [url](#)

<sup>7</sup> The Diplomat, 'The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban's Heartland,' 26 September 2018, [url](#)

- 3.2.3 An undated note from a contact at Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar in Southall stated 'The numbers may vary and decline as the community is disappearing due to the fear of safety in Afghanistan.'<sup>8</sup>

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### 3.3 Emigration (and return) of Sikhs and Hindus

- 3.3.1 In January 2016, Al Jazeera reported:

'The most significant Sikh exodus from Afghanistan occurred during the civil war (1989-1996) and during the subsequent Taliban rule (1996-2001), during which thousands, like many other Afghans, sought refuge in neighbouring countries.

'Life under the Taliban was a particularly dark time. Officially, Taliban commanders were ordered by their leadership to respect Sikh and Hindu communities, on the condition they didn't proselytise and paid jizya, a religious tax imposed on non-Muslims. But they also required Sikhs to publicly identify themselves, by wearing yellow patches on their breast pocket or armbands, and to mark their homes and businesses with yellow flags.

'They were allowed to continue daily prayers at the gurdwaras so long as they couldn't be heard from the street, but it also wasn't uncommon for errant Taliban to harass or beat them, Kuljit [an Afghan Sikh] said.

'Even after the fall of the Taliban, however, and promises by both the Karzai and Ghani governments to do more to protect their communities, each year the number of Sikh families continues to shrink.

"'Before the wars we were integrated in local communities,'" said Sivender [an Afghan Sikh]. "But with the passing of time the prejudice against us has increased. People were really radicalised by the civil wars and the Taliban.'"<sup>9</sup>

- 3.3.2 In October 2018, the news outlet 'The National' stated, 'Despite official political representation and freedom of worship, many face prejudice and harassment as well as violence from militant groups, prompting thousands to move to India, their spiritual homeland. India has issued long-term visas to members of Afghanistan's Sikh and Hindu communities.'<sup>10</sup> The same article stated that the Hindus remaining in Afghanistan are those who are too poor to leave<sup>11</sup>.
- 3.3.3 The USSD IRF Report 2017 noted that both Sikh and Hindu communities stated emigration would continue to increase as economic conditions worsened and security concerns increased<sup>12</sup>.
- 3.3.4 In July 2018 the BBC reported that increasing numbers of Sikhs and Hindus had moved to India due to persecution and repeated threats<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar, Southall, undated information provided in email dated 22 Feb 2019

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

<sup>10</sup> The National, 'Afghanistan Sikh, Hindu community brave danger to vote,' 20 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>11</sup> The National, 'Afghanistan Sikh, Hindu community brave danger to vote,' 20 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>12</sup> USSD, IRF Report 2017, Afghanistan, (Section III), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>13</sup> BBC, 'Sikhs among 19 dead in Jalalabad suicide attack,' 1 July 2018, [url](#)

- 3.3.5 In August 2018, The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that, 'Although reliable data about the current size of the Sikh and Hindu communities in Afghanistan are not available, large numbers of Sikhs and Hindus are believed to have left Afghanistan as a result of the severe difficulties they faced.'<sup>14</sup>
- 3.3.6 When an FCO official met with Narinder Singh Khalsa in February 2019, Mr Khalsa stated that about 75,000 Sikhs had left Afghanistan and gone primarily to India. However, about 40 to 50 families returned during Hamid Karzai's presidency. Some Sikhs had rented out their houses<sup>15</sup>.
- 3.3.7 In July 2018, The Times of India reported that some members of the Sikh community do not plan to leave Afghanistan, as they consider the country their home<sup>16</sup>.

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### 3.4 Location of communities

- 3.4.1 In January 2017, Al Jazeera reported that it was estimated that Hindus and Sikhs made up around 3,000 Afghans scattered across provinces of Kabul, Nangarhar and Ghazni<sup>17</sup>.
- 3.4.2 An undated note from a contact at Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar in Southall stated:  
'According to the information received from the Gurudwaras in Kabul and Jalalabad approximately 180-200 members of Afghan Sikh and Hindu community remain in Kabul. The numbers are much less in Jalalabad with an estimated number 65-75 families. Around 25 to 30 families remain are in Ghazni and according to the information received there are some families living in Khost, Herat, Paktiya, Khandahar, Herat and Mazar-e-Sharif. The total number will be no more than 1200.'<sup>18</sup>
- 3.4.3 When an FCO official met Narinder Singh Khalsa in February 2019, Mr Khalsa stated that the majority of Sikhs were settled in Kabul and Nangarhar<sup>19</sup>. According to Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), reporting on the elections that took place in October 2018, 759 Hindus and Sikhs were registered to vote in Kabul<sup>20</sup>.
- 3.4.4 World Gurudwaras, a website that details the location of Gurdwaras around the world, noted: 'Sikhism in Afghanistan is limited to small populations, primarily in major cities, with the largest numbers of Afghan Sikhs living in Jalalabad, Kabul, and Kandahar.'<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> UNHCR, 'UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines [...]', 30 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>15</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019, [Annex A](#)

<sup>16</sup> Times of India, 'Afghan Sikhs torn over the option of relocating to India,' 3 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>17</sup> Al Jazeera, 'The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities,' 1 January 2017, [url](#)

<sup>18</sup> Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar, Southall, undated information provided in email dated 22 Feb 2019

<sup>19</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019, [Annex A](#)

<sup>20</sup> AAN, 'Election Day Two: A first hand account ... of second-day voting', 23 Oct 2018, [url](#)

<sup>21</sup> World Gurudwaras, Afghanistan, undated, [url](#)



### 3.5 Sikh and Hindu communities in Afghanistan

3.5.1 In January 2015, The Wall Street Journal noted that, ‘Afghanistan’s Sikhs and Hindus stay in small, tight-knit communities and participate in many of the same religious rituals held in a temple both faiths use.’<sup>22</sup>

3.5.2 The Al Jazeera article of 2017 also noted:

‘Afghanistan’s history is full of [...] anecdotes and lore about a substantial thriving community of Hindus and Sikhs who have called this country their home over the centuries. “There is a place in Jalalabad where it is believed Guru Nanak visited in the 15th century and is very sacred to the Sikhs in Afghanistan,” says Rawail Singh, an Afghan Sikh civil rights activist, adding that Jalalabad, to the east of Kabul, continues to have a substantial Sikh population.’<sup>23</sup>

3.5.3 In 2017, the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) reported ‘Kabul is an ethnically diverse city with communities of almost all ethnicities. Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbeks, Turkmen, Baluchs, Sikhs and Hindus all reside there with no group clearly dominating. As people tend to move to areas where they already have family, or into particular districts as part of a larger group with the same ethnicity, different neighbourhoods have become associated with different ethnic groups.’<sup>24</sup>

3.5.4 With reference to a suicide attack of July 2018, which targeted Sikhs and Hindus in Jalalabad and was believed to have been carried out by Daesh, Foreign Policy, an online website dedicated to reporting and analysing international foreign policy, and part of an American newspaper conglomerate, noted: “Within a few minutes, a significant part of our fraternity was wiped out: our leaders, elders, and mentors,” said Sachdeva Omprakash, an Afghan Hindu attending the mass funeral on Monday at the Bagh Bala Gurdwara in Kabul, one of a handful of temples left in the city. Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan closely identify with each other’s communities, both politically and socially, as non-Muslim minorities.’<sup>25</sup>

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### 3.6 Languages

3.6.1 In January 2015, The Wall Street Journal noted, ‘At home [Afghan Sikhs] speak mainly Punjabi, the language of Sikhism’s religious texts that is native to the Indian subcontinent.’<sup>26</sup>

3.6.2 However, other sources indicated that Punjabi was not always spoken by Afghan Sikhs. Writing in 2014, Dr Jasjit Singh, a research fellow at the 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

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<sup>22</sup> The Wall Street Journal, ‘Facing Intolerance, [...]’, 12 January 2015, [url](#)

<sup>23</sup> Al Jazeera, ‘The decline of Afghanistan’s Hindu and Sikh communities,’ 1 January 2017, [url](#)

<sup>24</sup> EASO, ‘Country of Origin Information Report’, Afghanistan, 2017, [url](#)

<sup>25</sup> Foreign Policy, ‘We Belong To Afghanistan,’ 6 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>26</sup> The Wall Street Journal, ‘Facing Intolerance, [...]’, 12 January 2015, [url](#)

UK throughout the 20th century.<sup>27</sup> The Telegraph published an article in August 2014 about a group of Afghans discovered in a shipping container at Tilbury docks which stated, 'If the arrivals really have come from Afghanistan, then they would probably know Pashto, the language of the biggest ethnic group, or Dari, the nearest thing the country has to a lingua franca.'<sup>28</sup>

- 3.6.3 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 languages.<sup>29</sup>
- 3.6.4 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.'<sup>30</sup>

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### 3.7 Gurdwaras and Mandirs

- 3.7.1 Hindus and Sikhs are permitted to build places of worship<sup>31</sup>.
- 3.7.2 In 2018, the Australian Institute of International Affairs, an organisation dedicated to reporting on international relations, noted there were '... only two gurdwaras (Sikh temples) remaining operational in the country: one in Kabul, another in Jalalabad.'<sup>32</sup> The news outlet 'The National' stated that there were two gurdwaras, or places of worship, in Afghanistan, one each in Jalalabad and Kabul<sup>33</sup>.
- 3.7.3 However, when an FCO official met with Narinder Singh Khalsa in February 2019, Mr Khalsa stated that there were 5 Gurdwaras and one temple in Police District 1 in Kabul, with a further Gurdwara located in Police District 2 in Kabul, plus a temple in the Jadaye Asmaye area<sup>34</sup>.
- 3.7.4 A contact at Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar in Southall provided the following information in an undated note:

'The Sikh community have 65 Gurdwaras in Afghanistan. Most of them are in derelict conditions and some have been turned into rubble due to rocket attacks. They are not habitable at all. However, there are only 2 functioning Gurudwaras in Kabul. There is Khalsa Gurudwara which is being again used as refuge compound by poor Sikh and Hindu families. There is one of the Hindu mandir in capital city is partially functioning. Most of the Gurudwaras are being used by the Community as a safe resident compound and women spend their life within these compounds like a prisoners.

<sup>27</sup> The Conversation, 'Explainer: who are the Afghan Sikhs?', 20 August 2014, [url](#)

<sup>28</sup> The Telegraph, 'Afghan Sikhs: one of the most vulnerable [...]', 17 August 2014, [url](#)

<sup>29</sup> The Better India, 'TBI blogs: Tracing the history [...]', 13 October 2016, [url](#)

<sup>30</sup> Media Diversified, 'Afghan Sikhs: persecution, resistance and life in diaspora', 17 April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>31</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>32</sup> Australian Institute of International Affairs, 'A Precarious State [...]', 11 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>33</sup> The National, 'Afghanistan Sikh, Hindu community brave danger to vote,' 20 October 2018, [url](#)

<sup>34</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019, [Annex A](#)

'In Jalalabad there are two Gurudwaras but only one is fully functioning and the other is in partial use. Only one Gurudwara in Ghazni is functioning on a part time basis. There is another historic site known as "Shri Chashmae Sahib" (a place of Guru Nanak Dev Ji). This place is again used on a few occasions in a year by the community members. These visits are also used to repair the damages and keep the holy site clear of debris and damage.'<sup>35</sup>

- 3.7.5 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated 'According to minority religious leaders, the decreasing numbers of Sikhs, Hindus, and other religious minorities had only a few places of worship. 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 2 mandirs (Hindu temples) remaining in the country, compared with a combined total of 64 in the past.'<sup>36</sup>
- 3.7.6 The New Delhi Times reported on the visit of an Indian national to Kabul in January 2019: 'The next morning began [...] at the Karte Parwan Gurudwara, a modest building located in the heart of Kabul. As I walked inside, I was expecting to see a deserted prayer hall. To my utter surprise, there were over two dozen men and women paying their respects to the Guru Granth Sahib.'<sup>37</sup>
- 3.7.7 See [Housing and land](#) and [Women and Children](#) for further information on these issues, including the subject of persons taking up residence within Gurdwaras and mandirs.

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Section 4 updated: 8 March 2019

## 4. Legal rights

### 4.1 Legal framework

#### 4.1.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 noted:

'The constitution declares Islam the official state religion and says no law may contravene the beliefs and provisions of the "sacred religion of Islam." It further states there shall be no amendment to the constitution's provisions with respect to adherence to the fundamentals of Islam. According to the constitution, followers of religions other than Islam are "free to exercise their faith and perform their religious rites within the limits of the provisions of the law."<sup>38</sup>

#### 4.1.2 The same report also noted further legal provisions, stating,

'The law prohibits the production, reproduction, printing, and publishing of works and materials contrary to the principles of Islam or offensive to other religions and denominations. It also prohibits publicizing and promoting religions other than Islam and bans articles on any topic the government deems might harm the physical, spiritual, and moral wellbeing of persons,

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<sup>35</sup> Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar, Southall, undated information via email dated 22 February 2019

<sup>36</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Executive summary), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>37</sup> New Delhi Times, 'Epitaph for an Afghan Sikh,' 9 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>38</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)



especially children and adolescents. The law instructs National Radio and Television Afghanistan (RTA), a government agency, to provide broadcasting content reflecting the religious beliefs of all ethnic groups in the country. The law also obligates RTA to adjust its programs in light of Islamic principles as well as national and spiritual values.<sup>39</sup>

4.1.3 Chapter 18 of the Penal Code addresses ‘Crimes against Religion’, and prescribes the punishments (terms of imprisonment and fines) for: forcefully preventing a person of any religion conducting their rituals or rites; damaging signs, symbols or places of worship of any religion; and attacking a follower of any religion who performs their religious rituals ‘publicly’<sup>40</sup>.

4.1.4 Hindus and Sikhs are permitted to build places of worship and train other Hindus and Sikhs to become clergy<sup>41</sup>.

4.1.5 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, dated 30 August 2018, noted:

‘Non-Muslim minority groups, particularly Christian, Hindu, and Sikh groups, continue to suffer discrimination under the law. [...] in situations where the Constitution and Afghanistan’s codified laws do not provide guidance, the Constitution defers to Hanafi Sunni jurisprudence. This applies to all Afghan citizens, regardless of their religion. The only exception is for matters of personal law where all parties are Shi’ites [...] There is no separate law for other religious minorities.’<sup>42</sup>

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## 4.2 Registration

4.2.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated:

‘Licensing and registration of religious groups are not required. Registration as a group (which gives the group the status of a shura or council) or an association conveys official recognition and the benefit of government provision of facilities for seminars and conferences. By law anyone who is 18 years of age or older may establish a social or political organization. Such an entity must have a charter consistent with domestic laws as well as a central office. The Ministry of Justice (MOJ) may dissolve such organizations through a judicial order. Groups recognized as shuras or councils may cooperate with one another on religious issues. Associations may conduct business with the government or the society as a whole. Both groups and associations may register with the MOJ. According to the MOJ database, [...] the Sikh and Hindu National Shura has one council registered with the MOJ and another with the Ministry of Border and Tribal Affairs because of the council’s location.’<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>40</sup> Government of Afghanistan, ‘Penal Code’, 17 October 1976, [url](#)

<sup>41</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>42</sup> UNHCR, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines [...],’ 30 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>43</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

### 4.3 Apostasy

#### 4.3.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated:

‘The constitution establishes Islam as the state religion but stipulates followers of religions other than Islam are free to exercise their faith within the limits of the law. Conversion from Islam to another religion is considered apostasy, which is punishable by death, imprisonment, or confiscation of property according to the Sunni Islam’s Hanafi school of jurisprudence, which the constitution states shall apply “if there is no provision in the constitution or other laws about a case.” Converts from Islam to other religions reported they continued to fear punishment from the government as well as reprisals from family and society.

‘There is no definition of apostasy in the criminal code. Apostasy falls under the seven offenses making up the hudood as defined by sharia. 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 they repent. 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. This guidance applies to individuals who are of sound mind and have reached the age of maturity. Civil law states the age of majority for citizens is 18, except it is 16 for females with regard to marriage. Islamic law defines it as the point at which one shows signs of puberty.

‘Conversion from Islam to another religion is apostasy according to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence applicable in the courts. If someone converts to another religion from Islam, he or she shall have three days to recant the conversion. If the person does not recant, then he or she shall be subject to the punishment for apostasy. Proselytizing to try to convert individuals from Islam to another religion is also illegal according to the Hanafi school of jurisprudence applicable in the courts and subject to the same punishment.’<sup>44</sup>

#### 4.3.2 The same report noted that there were no reported prosecutions for apostasy in the year 2017<sup>45</sup>.

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### 4.4 Blasphemy

#### 4.4.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated that, ‘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. Some hadiths (sayings or traditions that serve as a source of religious law or

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<sup>44</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Exec summary and Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>45</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Executive summary), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

guidance) suggest discussion and negotiation with an apostate to encourage the apostate to recant.<sup>46</sup>

- 4.4.2 The same report noted that there were no reported prosecutions for blasphemy in the year 2017<sup>47</sup>.
- 4.4.3 A representative from Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar in Southall wrote to the Home Office in February 2019, citing a self-declared “highly reputable Immigration Law Solicitor in West London” that “[in his] practice [they] haven’t come across any reports where asylum seekers have been persecuted due to “blasphemy”. However, any comments or opinions against the faith of the main stream population can be termed as blasphemy resulting in harm to life.<sup>48</sup> CPIT is unable to verify this information.

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## 4.5 Judicial system

- 4.5.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated:

‘Minority religious groups reported the courts still did not apply the protections provided to those groups by the law and the courts denied non-Muslims the access to the courts or other legal redress as Muslims, even when the non-Muslims were legally entitled to those same rights. According to media reports and representatives from non-Muslim religious minorities, some members of these communities were told they did not have equal rights because they were “Indians,” not Afghans, even when they were citizens of the country. Members of minority religious communities reported the state, including the courts, treated all citizens as if they were Muslims, and some basic citizenship rights of non-Muslims remained uncodified. They said the result was non-Muslims continued to risk being tried according to Hanafi jurisprudence. [...]

‘Leaders of both Hindu and Sikh communities continued to report discrimination, including long delays to resolve cases in the judicial system. The illegal appropriation of Sikh properties remained the most common judicial problem.<sup>49</sup>

- 4.5.2 The same report stated, ‘[Sikh and Hindu] community members continued to avoid pursuing land disputes through the courts due to fear of retaliation, especially if powerful local leaders occupied their property.<sup>50</sup> The report added that Sikhs and Hindus believed they were unprotected by dispute resolution mechanisms such as the Special Land and Property Court and they settled disputes through community council or mediation<sup>51</sup>.
- 4.5.3 See [Housing and land](#) for further information on seizures of land.

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<sup>46</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>47</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>48</sup> Letter from Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar to Home Office, 18 February 2019, available on request

<sup>49</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>50</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>51</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

## 4.6 Citizenship and identity cards

- 4.6.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 noted that national identity cards indicate an individual's religion. Individuals are not required to declare belief in Islam to receive citizenship<sup>52</sup>.

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Section 5 updated: 12 March 2019

## 5. State treatment and attitudes

### 5.1 Governmental outreach and attitudes to the Sikh/Hindu community

- 5.1.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated, 'On June 25 [2017], the president invited Sikh and Hindu leaders to the presidential palace for a dialogue on the importance of these minority religious communities and their long-standing presence and valuable contributions to the country.'<sup>53</sup>

- 5.1.2 The same report noted that 'MOHRA [Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs] also continued to facilitate pilgrimages for Hindus and Sikhs to India, but it did not collect any revenue for or from non-Muslims.'<sup>54</sup>

- 5.1.3 In April 2018, Tolonews noted that Government officials had been invited to attend a Sikh/Hindu festival:

'Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh residents were preparing for 320th Vesak Festival by holding events in Kabul on Friday. Known also as Buddha Day, the festival is celebrated by music and dance in Kabul and other provinces where the Hindu and Sikh residents are living. Government officials have been invited to attend the event in Kart-e-Parwan area in Kabul. "Comparing to the past, their (Hindus and Sikhs) problems have been resolved recently. I want their educated ones to be hired in government departments," Mohammad Yaqoob Ahmadzai, deputy minister for borders and tribal affairs, said.'<sup>55</sup>

- 5.1.4 AfghanHinduWordpress reported on the President's reaction following a Daesh attack which targeted a convoy of Sikhs and Hindus in July 2018:

'Afghan President Ashraf Ghani on Thursday said the deadly attack targeting Sikhs and Hindus in the eastern city of Jalalabad will be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators will face trial as he visited a Gurdwara in Kabul and offered condolences to the minority community.

'President Ghani visited the Gurdwara in Kart-e-Parwan area of Kabul city and offered condolences to the Sikh Community members, the Office of the President, ARG Palace, said.

'An ISIS suicide bomber targeted a convoy of Sikhs and Hindus on their way to meet the Afghan president in the eastern city of Jalalabad on Sunday.

'At least 20 people, including 17 Sikhs, were killed in the attack. Avtar Singh Khalsa, a longtime leader of the Sikh community who had planned to run in the parliamentary elections set for October, was also killed in the blast.

<sup>52</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>53</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>54</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>55</sup> Tolonews, 'Hindus, Sikhs Preparing For Vesak Festival,' 13 April 2018, [url](#)

“President Ghani called the attack a catastrophe and promised that the incident would be thoroughly investigated and the perpetrators would face trial for the crime,” the ARG said in a statement.

‘Calling the Sikh and Hindus communities the pride of the nation, President Ghani said the government remains committed to support the Afghan Sikhs and Hindus.

‘At the Gurdwara, Surpal Singh thanked President Ghani on behalf of the Afghan Sikh community for offering condolences. [...]

‘Former Afghan president Hamid Karzai also visited the Gurdwara to offer condolences for Sikhs who lost their lives in the terrorist attack.

[...]

‘Meanwhile, residents in Kabul staged a protest against the killing of Sikhs in Jalalabad. The protesters carried banners and posters depicting the pictures of those killed in the attack. They slammed the Afghan government and demanded that the perpetrators must be brought to justice.’<sup>56</sup>

- 5.1.5 In its Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan of August 2018, the UNCHR stated that, ‘High-ranking government officials are reported to have told Sikhs that they were “not from Afghanistan”, that they were “Indians”, and that they “did not belong here.”’<sup>57</sup> The same report stated that, ‘Although the Sikh and Hindu communities are allowed to practise their religion publicly, they reportedly continue to face discrimination at the hands of the State, including when seeking access to justice, political participation and government jobs.

‘While the police are reported to provide protection to Hindu and Sikh communities during burial rituals, members of the two communities report feeling unprotected by State authorities in other contexts, including in relation to land disputes.’<sup>58</sup>

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## 5.2 Employment in government

- 5.2.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated that a small number of Sikhs and Hindus continued to serve in government positions<sup>59</sup>.

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## 5.3 Police

- 5.3.1 The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Afghanistan, dated 30 August 2018, noted:

‘The small number of Sikhs and Hindus who are reported to remain in Afghanistan have reportedly been left even more vulnerable to abuse,

<sup>56</sup> AfghanHinduWordpress, ‘Afghan President Visits Gurdwara [...],’ 5 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>57</sup> UNHCR, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines [...],’ 30 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>58</sup> UNHCR, ‘UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines [...],’ 30 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>59</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Executive summary), 29 May 2018, [url](#)



particularly by the police and by extremist elements of the Muslim community. [...]

'While the police are reported to provide protection to Hindu and Sikh communities during burial rituals, members of the two communities report feeling unprotected by State authorities in other contexts, including in relation to land disputes.'<sup>60</sup>

- 5.3.2 In January 2019, The New York Times reported: 'The new interior minister, Amrullah Saleh, and an earlier influx of new security commanders, including General Roshandil, the authorities have begun a concerted effort to restore order in Kabul and to reinforce police forces that have been crushed by record casualties and weakened by a reputation for corruption, abuse and acting as the extended arm of warlords as well as the elite.'<sup>61</sup>
- 5.3.3 In 2017, the Institute for War and Peace Reporting stated, 'Security forces in Baghlan provinces have pledged themselves to afford Hindus and Sikhs the same protection as any other Afghan citizens. "We do our duty and treat people equally," said Zabiullah Shuja, head of the Baghlan police media department. "Hindus and Sikhs living in Baghlan province just like other ethnicities and we will defend their rights if they face any trouble."<sup>62</sup>
- 5.3.4 In September 2018, the news magazine 'The Diplomat' reported:  
"We have complained to the police about [harassment by members of the community], but they cannot prevent it," Satnam [Singh, an Afghan Sikh] alleges. This was contested by Mohammad Zamon, the spokesman of the police in Helmand: "There are no problems between the Sikhs and other residents of Lashkar Gah. And if there should be any, the Sikhs can call the police and the police will – as in the case of any other resident – help them."<sup>63</sup>

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## 5.4 Political engagement

- 5.4.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 noted that, pursuant to a 2016 presidential decree, the law mandates an added seat in parliament's lower house be reserved for a member of the Hindu and Sikh community<sup>64</sup>.
- 5.4.2 Making reference to the parliamentary elections which took place in October 2018 in an article dated June 2018, Tolonews stated, 'According to the Independent Election Commission (IEC), until now, over 600 Sikhs and Hindus have registered to vote in the elections.'<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> UNHCR, 'UNHCR Eligibility Guidelines [...]', 30 August 2018, [url](#)

<sup>61</sup> The New York Times, 'In Chaotic Afghan Capital, Crackdown on Crime [...]', 16 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>62</sup> IWPR, 'Afghan Sikhs and Hindus still struggling,' 30 November 2017, [url](#)

<sup>63</sup> The Diplomat, 'The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban's Heartland,' 26 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>64</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>65</sup> Tolonews, 'Afghan Sikh Minority Prepares for Elections,' 5 June 2018, [url](#)

## 6. Societal treatment and attitudes

### 6.1 Relations with other members of the community

- 6.1.1 When an FCO official met with Narinder Singh Khalsa in February 2019, Mr Khalsa stated that the majority of the Afghan Muslim community are very welcoming and supportive; for example, when his father died, he received countless messages of condolence from the Muslim community. He further stated that Afghan Sikhs have a very positive relationship with other members of the Afghan community; for example, Sikhs and Muslims attend one another's parties and ceremonies<sup>66</sup>.
- 6.1.2 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated, 'Sikhs, Hindus, Christians, and other non-Muslim minority groups reported continued harassment from some Muslims, although Hindus and Sikhs stated they were able to practice their respective religions in public.'<sup>67</sup>
- 6.1.3 In January 2019, the New Delhi Times reported that some Afghan Sikhs may wish to conceal their identity as Sikhs in order to avoid harassment from Muslims:
- 'I noticed an [Afghan Sikh] parking his motorcycle in the front yard. He had wrapped his face with a cloth, only revealing his eyes. As he walked his way to the Gurudwara [in Kabul], he slowly uncovered his face, revealing his blue Keski (small turban). He wasn't the only one. Most devotees – men and women visiting the temple would try to camouflage themselves as the local Muslims, draping themselves in the local attire. Rawail Singh [an Afghan Sikh], however seemed fearless. He flaunted his turban and his identity.'<sup>68</sup>
- 6.1.4 A representative from Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar in Southall wrote to the Home Office in February 2019, citing a self-declared 'highly reputable Immigration Law Solicitor in West London' as having been told that 'Sikhs, Hindus and all other minorities are compelled to live in a Ghetto in their cities in Afghanistan be it Kabul, Jalalabad, Kunduz, Kandahar etc. Unless the entire ghetto moves, internal relocation is not possible.'<sup>69</sup>
- 6.1.5 He further adds that in his view, 'relocation does not offer any safety to Sikhs and Hindus in any part of Afghanistan. The persecution is based on core religious value which is endorsed by the majority of Afghani population. This core value of the majority is the actor of persecution. There is no such place in Afghanistan which can be classified as a safe place for the minorities.'<sup>70</sup> CPIT is unable to verify this information.
- 6.1.6 See also [Location of communities](#).

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<sup>66</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019, [Annex A](#)

<sup>67</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section III), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>68</sup> New Delhi Times, 'Epitaph for an Afghan Sikh,' 9 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>69</sup> Letter from Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar to Home Office, 18 February 2019, available on request

<sup>70</sup> Letter from Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar to Home Office, 18 February 2019, available on request

## 6.2 Violence and harassment

### 6.2.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 report stated:

‘Members of the Hindu community continued to report they faced fewer incidents of harassment than Sikhs, which they ascribed to their lack of a distinctive male headdress. Since religion and ethnicity are often closely linked, it was often difficult to categorize many incidents as being solely based on religious identity.

‘There were several media reports of local religious leaders forcing young men to fast during Ramadan. In one instance, a mullah who worked for Balkh Province’s Prevention of Vice Commission shaved the head of a young man to shame him for not fasting.’<sup>71</sup>

### 6.2.2 The USSD IRF Report 2017 further noted that, ‘According to the leader of the Sikh community, a new mosque next to a Sikh temple deliberately aimed its loudspeakers at the temple to harass non-Muslim worshippers.’<sup>72</sup>

### 6.2.3 In an article dated September 2018, The Diplomat, a current affairs magazine for Asia-Pacific, described the experience of Satnam, a Sikh man in Lashkar Gah who claimed he was knocked off his motorcycle because of his Sikh faith. The report continued: ‘[...] Satnam asserts though that, while the time under the Taliban was tough for Sikhs, things were worse in the preceding civil war – and the situation is also worse now. This was corroborated by other reports citing Afghan Sikhs.

‘Hence, the exodus of Lashkar Gah’s Sikhs only began after the overthrow of the Taliban regime by the U.S.-led intervention, which was supposed to bring greater freedom for all Afghans, including minorities. “Since 2001 many left. And about three years ago, almost all of the remaining around 30 families of Sikhs decided to leave together,” Satnam said during an interview in July 2018. [...] When asked why all the other Sikhs, including his family, had left, Satnam’s first reply is, “It is the harassment by the people.”

“They throw stones at our houses, smash windows, and spray nasty graffiti on our walls,” he continues. Those allegations are proven by the dents and washed out scribbles on the wall of the house in a sleepy dusty street, where Satnam and Charan live and where they renovate the last remaining Gurdwara (Sikh place of worship) in Lashkar Gah. [...] “And this harassment is not done by Taliban, but by ordinary local people,” Satnam adds, voicing desperation about the fact that he and his fellow Sikhs are treated like unwanted strangers in their own birthplace. Slowly, over time, this has become intolerable.’<sup>73</sup>

### 6.2.4 CurrenTriggers, a news website ‘dedicated to covering news seldom covered by others,’ published the following in July 2018:

‘Afghan Hindus and Sikhs continue to live in fear in Afghanistan.

‘A letter issued in Pashto by the Islamic State of Khorasan has issued a threat to the Afghan Hindus and Sikhs and told them to pay Jizya.

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<sup>71</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section III), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>72</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section III), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>73</sup> The Diplomat, ‘The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban’s Heartland,’ 26 September 2018, [url](#)



'The letter also says that if the Afghan Hindus and the Sikhs fail to pay up the Jizya then they must be ready to face the consequences.

'Afghan Hindus and Sikhs have been told to get in touch with a man "Khaled" for details on the amount they will have to pay in case they wish to live alive.'<sup>74</sup>

#### 6.2.5 The Diplomat also reported on threats and more serious incidents, stating:

'There are also threats. One letter that Satnam received demands all remaining Sikhs to pay a tax for non-Muslims and threatens that "bad things" will happen otherwise, with the original Pashto language implying that this is a death threat. The letter was sent in the name of insurgents, but its authenticity is unclear.

'The fact that on July 1 [2018] a suicide bomber specifically targeted Sikhs in an attack in Jalalabad, the capital of the eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar, that killed at least 19 people (most of them Sikhs) and wounded 20 more, shows that threats have to be taken very seriously. It should be noted, though, that said attack was claimed by the self-declared Islamic State, a group that is known for much more ruthlessly targeting civilians and religious minorities than the Taliban. Hence, as the self-declared Islamic State has no known presence in Helmand, such an attack against Sikhs appears significantly less likely here than in Nangarhar. [...]

'Another Afghan and member of the (Muslim) Hazara minority that is also targeted by extremists summed up how bad the overall situation for the Sikh in Afghanistan is: "To be a member of a minority in Afghanistan is hell; but to be a Sikh means being in the innermost circle of hell," he said.'<sup>75</sup>

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### 6.3 Pressure to convert

6.3.1 Foreign Policy released an article in 2018 which noted 'Singh [an Afghan Sikh] witnessed a once tolerant and diverse Afghan society becoming more and more divided. "They [Muslims] keep asking me to convert to Islam because they consider our religion as something less. It's not always forceful, but it's there everywhere," he said, recalling conversations with even government officials and ministers who have "strongly suggested" he convert to live a better life.'<sup>76</sup>

6.3.2 Hindustan Times reported in 2018: 'Following the Jalalabad attack, some Sikhs have sought shelter at the city's Indian consulate. "We are left with two choices: to leave for India or to convert to Islam," said Baldev Singh, who owns a book- and textile shop in Jalalabad.'<sup>77</sup>

6.3.3 The New Indian Express reported a similar story in 2018: 'As many as 25 Sikh families from Afghanistan have urged the Congress-led Punjab government to provide them Indian citizenship and give houses to stay [...]. Currently residing in Ludhiana, these families apparently came back to India from Kabul in Afghanistan a few years ago after they were "continuously"

<sup>74</sup> CurrenTriggers, 'Alarming: Islamic State [...] pay Jizya,' 23 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>75</sup> The Diplomat, 'The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban's Heartland,' 26 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>76</sup> Foreign Policy, 'We Belong to Afghanistan,' 6 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>77</sup> Hindustan Times, "'Leave for India or convert to Islam" [...],' 3 July 2018, [url](#)

forced to convert to Islam.’ The article quoted Simmi Singh, one of the members of the 25 families as saying “I was running my own business in Afghanistan. However, the people there always forced me and my family to become Muslims. Not just that, we were even asked to handover the female members of our families to them. That’s why I came back to India,”<sup>78</sup>

- 6.3.4 The Network of Sikh Organisations, a charity dedicating to linking the Gurdwaras from around the world, together with regular news reporting of Sikh Events, noted: ‘Sikhs and Hindus need police protection to cremate their dead as it is deemed offensive to Muslims, they are forced to pay the jizya or “tax of humiliation” [a tax which may be required of non-Muslims], and are fearful their women and daughters will be kidnapped and converted to Islam.’<sup>79</sup>

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## 6.4 Urban/rural differences

- 6.4.1 Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty published an article in August 2014 which noted, ‘Some blame the increasing intolerance toward Sikhs and Hindus on “extremist elements” who have moved from the provinces to Kabul and other cities in recent years. Ahmad Saeedi, a former professor of political science at Kabul University, says the original city dwellers have always been tolerant as they grew up in an ethnically diverse place.’<sup>80</sup>
- 6.4.2 In a report dated July 2018, The World Sikh Organisation of Canada noted: ‘Sikhs and Hindus who lived in more isolated areas or in smaller communities such as Helmand have now largely either moved to other cities or left Afghanistan.’<sup>81</sup>

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## 6.5 Cremations

- 6.5.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated:  
‘Although the government had provided land to use as cremation sites, Sikh leaders stated the distance from any major urban area and the lack of security in the region continued to make the land unusable. Hindus and Sikhs reported continued interference in their efforts to cremate the remains of their dead from individuals who lived near the cremation sites. In response, the government continued to provide police support to protect the Sikh and Hindu communities while they performed their cremation rituals. The government promised to construct modern crematories for the Sikh and Hindu populations.’<sup>82</sup>
- 6.5.2 Narinder Singh Khalsa met with an FCO official in February 2019 and stated there is an area in Kabul named Tank Logar Qalacha Khumdan which has been dedicated to use for cremations. Security measures must be used in order to prevent offensive or disruptive behavior from some individuals.

<sup>78</sup> The New Indian Express, ‘Punjab: 25 Sikh families from Afghanistan [...],’ 8 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>79</sup> Network of Sikh Organisations, ‘The plight of Sikhs and Hindus in Afghanistan,’ 13 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>80</sup> RFE/RL, “‘When Are You Going Back?’ [...],’ 19 August 2014, [url](#)

<sup>81</sup> World Sikh Organisation of Canada, ‘The plight of Sikhs and Hindus [...],’ 13 July 2018, [url](#)

<sup>82</sup> USSD, ‘IRF Report 2017’, Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

There used to be a larger area of land set aside for cremations, but it has been taken over and has not been returned, despite appeals to the government<sup>83</sup>.

- 6.5.3 Media Diversified.org, an independent news website with a mission to address the under-representation of black and minority ethnic communities in UK media, reported in April 2018: 'As cremation is a practice forbidden in Islam, Sikh funerals have been a focal point of dispute, with protestors frequently disrupting funeral processions.'<sup>84</sup>

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## 6.6 Housing and land

- 6.6.1 In January 2016, Al Jazeera stated, 'During the civil war [1989-1996], local commanders from different sides illegally confiscated housing and land from many Sikhs, and Muslims were also discouraged from doing business with them, impoverishing the minority.'<sup>85</sup>
- 6.6.2 When an FCO official met with Narinder Singh Khalsa in February 2019, Mr Khalsa stated that some Sikhs had rented out their houses on leaving Afghanistan, but many were taken by force during their absence, and members of the Sikh and Hindu Councils had met with President Ghani very recently to share these issues with him<sup>86</sup>.
- 6.6.3 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated, 'Following past seizures of their places of worship by residents of Kandahar, Ghazni, Paktya, and other provinces, the Hindu community had presented the list of its places of worship to MOHRA [Ministry of Hajj and Rural Affairs] in an effort to stop further seizures and to reclaim the land and buildings previously lost. Members of the Hindu and Sikh communities said these problems remained unresolved at year's end.'<sup>87</sup>
- 6.6.4 In March 2017, Tolo News reported that, 'Community members [...] claim their land is simply being usurped. "For instance, the lands which are grabbed have three documents, but when a Hindu or Sikh citizen consults a department, they are told that this land needs several other documents," said a Sikh resident in Nangarhar Rajbir Singh.'<sup>88</sup>
- 6.6.5 In an article dated January 2017, Al Jazeera noted that, 'Kamal Sadat, Afghanistan's minister of culture and information, agrees that the treatment of the minority groups hasn't been fair, but says the government is taking necessary steps to address the matter. [He added] that the government was looking into all allegations of land grabbing made by Sikhs and Hindus.'<sup>89</sup>
- 6.6.6 See also [Governmental outreach and attitudes to the Sikh/Hindu community](#) for further information on this subject.

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<sup>83</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019, [Annex A](#)

<sup>84</sup> Media Diversified, 'Afghan Sikhs: persecution, resistance and life in diaspora,' 17 April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>85</sup> Al Jazeera, 'Inside the little-known kitchen of Afghanistan's Sikhs,' 9 January 2016, [url](#)

<sup>86</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019, [Annex A](#)

<sup>87</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section III), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>88</sup> Tolo News, 'Hindu And Sikh Community "Losing" Land In Nangarhar,' 22 March 2017, [url](#)

<sup>89</sup> Al Jazeera, 'The decline of Afghanistan's Hindu and Sikh communities,' 1 January 2017, [url](#)

- 6.6.7 In January 2019, The New Delhi Times reported that the Asha Mayi mandir, the only Hindu temple in Kabul, has been guarding and sheltering Hindu families from groups such as the Taliban<sup>90</sup>.
- 6.6.8 In January 2016, Al Jazeera reported that, 'The [Karte Parwan] gurdwara rooms, which once stored hundreds of bags of flour and rice to feed thousands of worshippers, are now simple bedrooms for dozens of Sikhs with nowhere else to go.'<sup>91</sup>
- 6.6.9 See [Judicial system](#) for information about how land disputes may be dealt with by the Sikh/Hindu communities. See [District 21, Kabul](#) for information about this area allotted to the Sikh/Hindu community.

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## 6.7 District 21, Kabul

- 6.7.1 Institute for War and Peace Reporting published the following in July 2013:
- 'Honaryar [Anarkali Kaur Honaryar, a Sikh member of the upper house of parliament] said she was behind an initiative to build a purpose-built settlement in eastern Kabul complete with schools, a crematorium and other facilities for the Sikhs and Hindus in the city. But so far, the response had not been enthusiastic. "Now that we've launched the town, no one is prepared to go there," she said. "The municipality calls me every day and says construction work needs to get started there."
- 'Hindus and Sikhs living in Kabul said moving to new homes would not solve their problems, and they would face more security threats if they were outside the capital. "We aren't safe in the heart of Kabul even with all its police and laws," resident Manpal Singh said. "How are we going to be able to live in a desert 20 kilometres outside from the city? What will the people in [other] villages do to us? Was there nowhere else in Kabul, so that they had to send us to deserts and mountains?"'<sup>92</sup>
- 6.7.2 The British Embassy in Kabul wrote to the Home Office on 5 February 2017, stating, 'Majority of the people from the Hindu/Sikh community weren't in favour of residing in the area far away from the main city, citing security issues. The land is allotted to the community and they may think of developing it in the future although the municipality was ready to work with them on the development of the area.'<sup>93</sup>
- 6.7.3 A contact at the Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar in Southall sent an undated note to the Home Office on 25 February 2019, noting that District 21 was not developed<sup>94</sup>.
- 6.7.4 See [Housing and land](#) for further information on this subject.

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<sup>90</sup> New Delhi Times, 'Epitaph for an Afghan Sikh,' 9 January 2019, [url](#)

<sup>91</sup> Al Jazeera, 'Inside the little-known kitchen of Afghanistan's Sikhs,' 9 January 2016, [url](#)

<sup>92</sup> IWPR, 'Tough times for Afghan Hindus and Sikhs', 11 July 2013, [url](#)

<sup>93</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 5 February 2017, [Annex B](#)

<sup>94</sup> Note from Gurudwara Guru Nanak Darbar, undated, to Home Office on 25 February 2019, [Annex C](#)

## 6.8 Women and children

### 6.8.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated:

'Women of several different faiths, including Islam, reported harassment from local Muslim religious leaders over their attire. As a result, the women said, they continued to wear burqas in public in rural areas and in some urban areas, including Kabul. 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. MOHRA [Ministry of Hajj and Religious Affairs] and the National Ulema Council both continued to state there was no official pressure on women regarding their attire.'<sup>95</sup>

### 6.8.2 In a meeting with an FCO official in February 2019, Narinder Singh Khalsa stated that Sikh women do not have a good life in Afghanistan because they were unable to go outside or dress in accordance with their culture<sup>96</sup>.

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Section 7 updated: 8 March 2019

## 7. Access to education and employment

### 7.1.1 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated:

'According to the constitution, the "state shall devise and implement a unified educational curriculum based on the provisions of the sacred religion of Islam" and develop courses on religion based on the "Islamic sects" in the country. The national curriculum includes materials designed separately for Sunni-majority schools and Shia-majority schools, as well as textbooks that emphasize nonviolent Islamic terms and principles. The curriculum includes courses on Islam, but not on other religions. Non-Muslims are not required to study Islam in public schools.'<sup>97</sup>

### 7.1.2 The same report noted:

'A government-sponsored school for Sikh children continued to operate in Kabul. It received proportionate funding from the government to cover staff salaries, books, and maintenance. The MOE [Ministry of Education] also provided the curriculum for the Sikh school, except for religious studies. The community appointed a teacher for religious studies, while the MOE paid the teacher's salary.

'A privately funded Sikh school continued to operate in Jalalabad with funding from the Swedish Committee for Afghanistan. Sikh children continued to attend private international schools; Hindu children often attended Sikh schools.'<sup>98</sup>

### 7.1.3 The report further 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

<sup>95</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Executive summary), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>96</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019, [Annex A](#)

<sup>97</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>98</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section II), 29 May 2018, [url](#)



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 two schools in Kabul remained operational.<sup>99</sup>

- 7.1.4 When an FCO official met with Narinder Singh Khalsa in February 2019, Mr Khalsa stated that the majority of Sikh families are unable to afford private school fees, which range from 4,000 to 5,000 afghani per child. Children are taught in the Pashto, Dari and English languages; in private, Afghan Sikhs speak Punjabi amongst themselves, and Dari or Pashto with others<sup>100</sup>.

See also [Languages](#).

- 7.1.5 Reporting on the employment situation in September 2018, the news magazine 'The Diplomat' stated:

'Another reason [besides societal harassment] for the Sikh exodus is the dire economic situation, [...]. "I left Lashkar Gah for India about two and a half years ago," Atar Singh, another Sikh who was visiting Lashkar Gah in July 2018, told The Diplomat. "The reasons were the war, the harassment, and the fact that there was no work," Atar, who used to be a cloth seller in his native Lashkar Gah, added.

'The importance of this economic component becomes clear from the explanation for Atar's visit. "I came back to Lashkar Gah to see whether I can return and set up shop again here," he said. "The life in our exile in India is very difficult. We barely find any work to support our families and, although we are refugees, we don't receive any help from anyone. This is why I wanted to come back. But unfortunately the rents for shops in Lashkar Gah are high and the market in general is down. So I can't move back here."

'This was corroborated by Satnam [Singh, an Afghan Sikh], who sells herbal medicine in his small store in Lashkar Gah: "Work has become very bad. However, the work here is still better than in India, where I wouldn't know what to do. So I stay."<sup>101</sup>

- 7.1.6 The USSD IRF Report 2017 stated, 'Sikh leaders reported the main cause of Hindu and Sikh emigration remained a lack of employment opportunities; they said one factor impeding their access to employment was illiteracy.'<sup>102</sup> The USSD HR Report 2017 stated that Sikhs and Hindus faced discrimination when applying for jobs<sup>103</sup>.

- 7.1.7 When an FCO official met with Narinder Singh Khalsa in February 2019, Mr Khalsa stated that Sikhs tend to be amongst the poorer members of society. Their main source of income is the sale of Greek medicines, which are purchased by Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims<sup>104</sup>. In June 2016, Reuters reported: 'For centuries, Hindu and Sikh communities played a prominent

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<sup>99</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section III), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>100</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019, [Annex A](#)

<sup>101</sup> The Diplomat, 'The Last 2 Sikhs in the Taliban's Heartland,' 26 September 2018, [url](#)

<sup>102</sup> USSD, 'IRF Report 2017', Afghanistan, (Section III), 29 May 2018, [url](#)

<sup>103</sup> USSD, 'HR Report 2017, Afghanistan, 20 April 2018, [url](#)

<sup>104</sup> Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019, [Annex A](#)

role in merchant trade and money lending in Afghanistan, although today they are known more for medicinal herb shops.<sup>105</sup>

- 7.1.8 For further information about Sikhs leaving Afghanistan, see [Sikhs leaving Afghanistan](#).

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<sup>105</sup> Reuters, 'Afghanistan's dwindling Sikh, Hindu communities flee abuses,' 23 June 2016, [url](#)

# Annex A

Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 4 February 2019



British Embassy  
Kabul

4 February 2019

An official with the FCO 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? Our last estimates (2016) ranged from 1350 to 3000.

A1. Around 1000 people across Afghanistan consisting of appx 220 families.

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

A2. This was totally refuted.

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 5 Gurdwaras in PD1 along with 1 temple, a further Gurdwara is located in PD2 along with a temple in the Jadaye Asmaye area (again in PD2).

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. There is one area inside Kabul dedicated for cremations which is named Tank Logar Qalacha Khumdan; before any cremations can take place they first need to arrange for security measures to be put in place otherwise they face offensive/disruptive behaviour from certain factions of the community including stone throwing during the cremation. They used to have a larger area of land set aside for



this purpose however the land has since been overrun and taken over; despite several appeals to the Afghan Government to have this land returned to them.

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

A5. The majority of Afghan Sikhs fled to several Countries (mainly India) following the war with those remaining having little access to any form of education. Employment opportunities for those who remained suffered inline primarily due to the lack of education.

Following the July 1<sup>st</sup> attack on one of their parliamentary candidates the Afghan Government approached the Sikh community with an employment opportunity within the Ministry of Public Works, currently this is the only Afghan Sikh working at a Government level.

The Sikhs used to trade before the war in Afghanistan however they now don't have the money in hand to continue their ancestor's businesses, hence they are left amongst the poorer members of society.

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

A6. Unable to provide an accurate number.

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

A7. The main source of income for Sikhs is in retail business where they sell Greek medicines.

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. £1500 may not be sufficient to establish any permanent business/accommodation in Afghanistan as the cost of the cheapest accommodation here is more than \$200 per month.

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. There is little or no support from the authorities or NGO's alike. The community do not have any relationship with the Government nor a focal point inside. He hopes to address this if he is elected to Parliament. NGO's or third parties have not approached them to offer assistance or support in any way.

Q10. What education is available for Afghan minors?

A10. Education is available to all minors however he was quick to point out that Sikh children are often regularly 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 into private run establishments; an option that is not open to the majority of the Sikh families.

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. The vast majority are located in the provinces of Kabul and Nangahar.

Mr Khalsa went onto explain that their grievances are solely with the Afghan Government for their lack of action on their social, economic and educational welfare and NOT the vast Afghan Muslim community who as a whole he states are very welcoming and supportive. Following the death of his father he received countless messages of condolence from the Muslim community.

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. Sikh women don't have a good life here. They can't go outside they can't dress as their culture, and can't go outside for sightseeing with their families.

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

A13. Sikhs have a community that registers the Greek medicine. most of the Greek medicine sellers are professional and have official patent. These medicines are bought by Sikhs, and Hindu and Muslims people.

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

A14. The children are taught in Pashto, Dari, and English languages.

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

A15. Those who have week financial status, their children study in public school and those who have good financial status, there children in private schools; and the fees for private schooling ranges from 4000-5000 AFN/ Head.

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

A16. Afghan Sikhs speak Punjabi with each other but in community they speak Dari and Pashto with people.

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

A17. Most of them live in Gurdwara or temple and those with good financial status live in rental houses, and there is no attention from the government for them to provide a

good shelter it would be better if government provide them a town. There is no substance to stories that they live in Gurdwara; however if someone visits he/she may observe it.

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. Yes – indeed they have a very positive relationship with Afghans, for instance; Sikhs attend Muslim parties and Muslims attend SIKH parties, occasions and ceremonies – in a party recently commander of NDS [National Directorate of Security], head of NDS Kabul and advisor to president attended the Baba nanak 550th Birthday, who is a known figure of Sikh community.

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. 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. Most of them have flee the country because of security issues and those who are here can't go because they can't afford it. About 75,000 flee and migrated in different countries Mostly India.

Q21. How many returned and over what timeframe?

A21. Around 40 to 50 families returned during Hamid Karzi presidency.

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

A22. They gave it for rent and most of them are taken by force from them. A few days ago some of Hindu and Sikhs council members met Mr. President Ashraf Ghani and shared their issues to his excellency.

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

A23. All lived in Gurdwara and houses were captured and most were working as juniors in the shops.

To Note -This letter has been compiled by staff of the British High Commission 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.

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# Annex B

Letter from British Embassy, Kabul, 5 February 2017



British Embassy  
Kabul

Wazir Akbar Khan 15<sup>th</sup> Street Roundabout  
Kabul  
Tel no: +93 (0) 0700102000  
Email: [BritishEmbassy.Kabul@fco.gov.uk](mailto:BritishEmbassy.Kabul@fco.gov.uk)

Date: Sunday 5th February 2017

To whom it may concern,

In response to an official request from the Home Office regarding Afghan Sikhs and Hindus the following information was obtained from Senator Anarkali Hunaryar:

With regard to the Sikh Gurudwaras, all seven listed in the letter from the British Embassy, Kabul, dated 8th February 2015 are operational. Majority of the Hindus and Sikhs reside within these Gurudwaras and very few of them live outside these Gurudwaras.

**Temples:** They could confirm the presence of Baba Har Shri Nath Mandir and Asmayee Darga and weren't sure about the remaining two mandirs. They promised to confirm that soon.

**District 21:** Majority of the people from the Hindu/Sikh community weren't in favour of residing in the area far away from the main city, citing security issues. The land is allotted to the community and they may think of developing it in the future although the municipality was ready to work with them on the development of the area.

- They were still using the Shamshan Ghaat in Qalacha area for the cremation but had to inform the police prior to conducting the services. Government has ordered some modern machines to be used for cremation purposes which would arrive within a month or two. Hindus and Sikh were happy with the idea and would solve their problems with regard to the cremation of their dead bodies.
- The recent efforts of the government to provide official land/property deeds to those owning lands and houses in Kabul has highly been welcomed by the general population. Majority of the properties in Kabul are sold through informal means without the involvement of a registered property dealer or any other governmental entities, which paved the way for land grabbing and other

illegal businesses. Issuing the property deeds on one hand would identify the real owners of the properties (grabbed during last 30 years) and would also prevent such practices in the future.

- Hindus and Sikhs may also benefit a lot from this initiative. Likewise other Afghans, lot of houses belonging to the Hindus and Sikhs (that fled the country during the civil war) were also grabbed in most of the cases by former war lords. They are likely to receive their properties back, if they still possess any such document that could demonstrate their ownership over the property.

[redacted]

Migration Delivery Officer  
British Embassy  
Kabul

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## Annex C

Extract from undated note sent to the Home Office on 25 February 2019 by a contact at Gurdwara Guru Nanak Darbar.

See CPIN – agree and wish to add the following  
o District 21, Kabul

The letter from the Embassy mentioned in the CPIN is outdated. District 21 was not developed.

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# 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 ToRs, 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:

- Demography
  - Population
  - Sikh and Hindu communities in Afghanistan
  - Location of communities
  - Gurdwaras and Mandirs
- Legal rights
  - Apostasy
  - Blasphemy
  - Citizenship and marriage
- State treatment and attitudes
  - Land, places of worship, and cremation sites
  - Employment in government
  - Community relations
  - Political representation
- Societal treatment and attitudes
  - Violence and discrimination
  - Urban/regional differences
  - Cremations
  - Housing and land
  - District 21, Kabul
  - Women and Children
- Access to education and employment

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# Version control

## Clearance

Below is information on when this note was cleared:

- version **5.0**
- valid from **22 May 2019**

## Changes from last version of this note

Updated country information and revised assessment.

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