

# Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada

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## Responses to Information Requests

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20 April 2016

### AFG105491.E

Afghanistan: Situation of Hazara people living in Kabul City, including treatment by society, security situation, and access to employment; security situation for Hazara traveling to areas surrounding Kabul City to access employment (2014-April 2016)

Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

#### 1. Overview

According to sources, the Hazara people comprise approximately 9 percent of the population in Afghanistan (MRG n.d.; AP 23 Jan. 2014; SBS 3 Sept. 2013). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a sociology professor at the City University London, who has undertaken field research in Kabul with the Hazara minority, stated that while there has been no census in Afghanistan since 1979, "most estimates place Hazara at between 9 to 19 percent of the total population" (17 Apr. 2016). Sources indicate that the majority of Hazara are Shiite (MRG n.d.; AP 23 Jan. 2014). According to sources, they are considered "heretics" by Sunni Muslim extremists, such as the Taliban (ibid.; SBS 3 Sept. 2013).

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, an analyst with the Afghanistan Analysts Network (AAN), an independent non-profit organisation based in Kabul that provides research and analysis on contemporary Afghan affairs (AAN n.d.), stated that the "situation of Hazara living in Kabul varies depending on social class and background" and that "more so than other ethnic groups, Hazara tend to live in areas which tend to be on the outskirts of the city," although they are interspersed throughout other neighbourhoods, with Ismaili Hazara living closer to Kabul centre (AAN 13 Apr. 2016). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, the Deputy Director of the Civil Society & Human Rights Network (CSHRN), a network of 164 human rights organisations headquartered in Kabul (The Danish Institute for Human Rights n.d.), indicated that the Hazara typically live in the "West and central part of Kabul city" (CSHRN 2 Apr. 2016).

Sources report that Dashte Barchi [Dasht-e-Barchi] is a Hazara-majority neighbourhood in Kabul (AFP 5 Dec. 2015; International Development Consultant 12 Apr. 2016). The Associated Press (AP) reports that the Dasht-e-Barchi neighbourhood is located in western Kabul and "[h]undreds of thousands" of Hazaras from outside the city moved to Dasht-e-Barchi, which "sprang virtually out of the desert 10 years ago, and now is home to an estimated 1.5 million Hazara" (AP 23 Jan. 2014). The *Washington Post* also notes that there are "more than one million Hazaras living in the capital" (28 Dec. 2015). According to the Deputy Director, the majority of the Hazara living in Kabul are displaced people that have recently settled in the city (CSHRN 2 Apr. 2016). AP reports that, according to some estimates, the Hazara "now comprise half the population of the capital" (23 Jan. 2014). Corroborating information on the proportion of Hazara in Kabul City could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

#### 2. Treatment of Hazara People

In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a Kabul-based international development consultant stated that the high rate unemployment in Afghanistan, approximately 40 percent, "negatively affects all Afghans equally, including but not limited to, Hazaras" (International Development Consultant 12 Apr. 2016). According to the same source, persons, including Hazara, that are perceived to be involved in "any activity that is not supportive of the militants' destructive and violent agenda," such as working with the government, NGOs, or humanitarian groups, "are at risk from the Taliban, foreign militants and Taliban splinter groups" (ibid.).

According to the International Development Consultant, the Hazara participate in "local and national governments, institutions of higher education, civil society groups, media outlets, parliament and political parties" (12 Apr. 2016). The AAN analyst further indicates that the Hazara are "disproportionately represented" in schools and universities, and are often "the largest groups of enrolled students at state universities" (AAN 13 Apr. 2016). However, she noted that in some areas of Kabul, there are not enough state schools to accommodate them and private schools are not affordable for large parts of the Hazara population (ibid.).

The *Washington Post* reports that improvements in the situation of the Hazara "are being increasingly stymied by a combination of economic stagnation and ethnic discrimination" (28 Dec. 2015). In correspondence with the Research Directorate, a professor with the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, who has conducted field research in Afghanistan, stated that

the war has paradoxically allowed the Hazara to improve their overall situation, however, it was gained through a military, political, cultural and social struggle that remains very fragile. Other groups look at them with suspicion and jealousy. (Professor 3 Apr. 2016)

The City University Professor similarly states,

[i]ronically, the progress that Hazara have made in education and their higher profile in public life has made them vulnerable to anti-government elements who see them as supporters and main beneficiaries of the international forces/community in Afghanistan, and the target of resentment by some members of other ethnic groups. (17 Apr. 2016)

AP cites a Hazara community leader in Dasht-e-Barchi as stating that "Hazaras are treated like 'third-class citizens' in Kabul" and that areas of the city dominated by other ethnic groups "have more paved roads and access to schools, clinics and services" (23 Jan. 2014). According to Mothers for Peace, a Belgium-based international NGO that advocates for women's rights (Mothers for Peace n.d.a), which opened a health centre in Dasht-e-Barchi in 2011, the majority of the residents in Dasht-e-Barchi are "deprived of basic facilities," such as adequate water and sanitation, and suffer "from high levels of unemployment and poverty," with a "very small minority" being employed by the government or an NGO (ibid. n.d.b). The AAN analyst similarly stated that Dasht-e-Barchi is relatively poor, overcrowded, offers few work opportunities, and lacks sufficient government infrastructure, such as schools and roads (AAN 13 Apr. 2016).

### 3. Employment

In 2014 article, AP reports that in the past, the Hazara had "taken the lowest-status jobs in Afghan cities," however, they have done "far better" since the removal of the Taliban regime, enrolling in universities and finding employment with international agencies (AP 23 Jan. 2014). Agence France-Presse (AFP) reports in a 2015 article that "[e]ducated and hard-working, the Hazaras have formed a new Afghan middle class" (AFP 5 Dec. 2015). According to the AAN analyst, Hazara "overall have the same access to jobs as other groups," however they have been "more affected" from the general economic decline as it is more difficult to access government employment "unless a Hazara is in the leadership of the department" (AAN 13 Apr. 2016). The source further states that, while NGOs had been a source of employment for the Hazara, with less aid going to Afghanistan, many NGOs are cutting wages and jobs, which disproportionately affect the Hazara (ibid.).

According to the Deputy Director, there is a "perception" that other ethnic groups give lower paid positions to Hazara (CSHRN 2 Apr. 2016). The same source further notes that an ethnicity quota system, as opposed to a merit-based system, is used for hiring processes in Afghanistan, which increases the risk of unemployment for the Hazara (ibid.). The AAN analyst states that the Hazara "sometimes report discrimination during the hiring process because they can be easily identified by their names...except for NGO or IO positions, where merit-based hiring is actually enforced" (AAN 13 Apr. 2016). According to the City University Professor, job recruitment is "overwhelmingly conducted through personal networks," which "disproportionally impacts groups who have traditionally been excluded from education and employment...Hazaras have limited access to professional networks because of historical and current discrimination" (Professor 17 Apr. 2016).

#### 4. Security Situation

According to the International Development Consultant, the

Hazara-dominated areas within Kabul City have largely remained peaceful and free of sectarian violence over the past few years. There have been few reported cases of targeting of Hazaras on the basis of their religious beliefs, political affiliations or ethnic identity in Kabul City. (12 Apr. 2016)

The Deputy Director of the CSHRN states that the Hazara "provinces and districts...were secure and peaceful," but more recently, "conservatives, the Taliban, ISIS, fundamentalists and extremists are targeting [the Hazara] because of ethnic discrimination" and their support for "modern values" and that since 2013 there have been "many cases" of insurgents stopping vehicles and public buses to capture or kill Hazara people (2 Apr. 2016).

According to the AAN analyst, there is a "threat in Kabul for all population groups, including Hazara" (AAN 13 Apr. 2016). The same source further states that while it is "less of a problem now" for Hazaras to be directly targeted due to their ethnicity, they "often have to travel significantly longer to reach their place of work; this indirectly makes them more vulnerable to random acts of violence by passing areas near parliament or the city center where explosions have taken place more frequently" (ibid.).

Further information on the treatment of the Hazara people in Kabul, including specific instances of violence, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

#### 5. Travel Outside of Kabul City

The AAN analyst stated that because of their identifying physical features, Hazara are "more likely to be targeted" when traveling outside of Kabul city, including neighboring districts; insecurity while travelling by road "to their final destination is often the biggest [security] concern" for the ethnic group (AAN 13 Apr. 2016). The source further specifies that travelling from "Kabul to Ghazni, Kabul to Daykundi and Bamyam often pose a significant security challenge" (ibid.). According to the Professor at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva, the areas outside Kabul, such as the road to Ghazni, are "extremely unsafe" (Professor 3 Apr. 2016). The Deputy Director similarly stated that it is "not safe" for Hazara living in Kabul to travel outside to their province of origin and they have been "targeted by Taliban and ISIS while travelling" (CSHRN 2 Apr. 2016). According to sources, the Taliban have support among the population living in the areas outside of Kabul (Reuters 21 Oct. 2015; *Washington Post* 11 Oct. 2015).

Concerning travel related to employment, the AAN analyst stated that

many Hazaras have found work in the NGO sector...this type of work frequently requires some sort of travel to districts and provinces outside of Kabul City...during their work trips, they are often more at risk than their colleagues from other ethnic groups. Hazara have reported that they have quit jobs that required them to travel to areas deemed as unsafe, in particular if repeat trips were required (ibid.).

AFP reports that "[w]est of the Afghan city of Maidan Shar is a 40-kilometre stretch of paved highway known as 'Death Road', where drivers say the country's ethnic Hazara minority are slaughtered by militants 'like sheep and cows'" (AFP 5 Dec. 2015). According to Spiegel Online, a German news website, Maidan Shahr is a town located 30 kilometers southwest of Kabul and is one of two roads used to travel to Bamiyan [Bamyan] (Spiegel Online 30 Sept. 2014). Sources state that Bamiyan is a Hazara-majority area (ibid.; AFP 5 Dec. 2015; AP 23 Jan. 2014). AP reports that the Kabul-Beshud Highway is the "main route" between the capital and "Hazarjat, the informal name" of the area where "Hazaras have traditionally settled" (ibid.). According to the AAN analyst, Hazara working in Kabul often only travel to Bamiyan by air "as the road through Wardak is perceived as too dangerous" (AAN 13 Apr. 2016).

Further information on the situation of Hazara travelling outside of Kabul for employment purposes, including specific acts of violence in close proximity to the city, could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate within the time constraints of this Response.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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**Internet sites, including:** Afghanistan Investment Support Agency; *Afghanistan Times*; Al Jazeera; Amnesty International; The Asia Foundation; Asian Human Rights Commission; Asian Review; Bertelsman Transformation Index; ecoinet; Factiva; Human Rights Watch; International Crisis Group; International Rescue Committee; Kabul Press; *Kabul Tribune*; Khaama Press; *Outlook Afghanistan*; United Nations – Refworld; United States – Department of State.

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