



Australian Government
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

DFAT Thematic Report

Hazaras in Afghanistan and Pakistan

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Contents

1.	Purpose and Scope	3
2.	Background Information	3
	Demography	3
	Recent history	5
3.	Treatment of Hazaras	6
	Religious Freedom	6
	Ethnicity	7
	Economic Situation	8
	Employment	9
	Health Care	9
	Education	10
	Political Opinion (Actual or Imputed)	10
	Western Influences	11
4.	Violence	12
	Violence by Province	12
	Travel Security	14
5.	Other Considerations	17
	State Protection	17
	Internal Relocation	17

1. Purpose and Scope

1.1 This Thematic Report has been prepared by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) for protection status determination purposes only. It provides DFAT's best judgment and assessment at time of writing and is distinct from Australian Government policy with respect to the source country.

1.2 The report does not represent an exhaustive country overview and has been prepared with regard to the current caseload for decision makers in Australia. The report does not contain policy guidance for decision makers.

1.3 Ministerial Direction Number 56 of 21 June 2013 under s 499 of the *Migration Act 1958* states that

Where the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has prepared a country information assessment expressly for protection status determination processes, and that assessment is available to the decision maker, the decision maker must take into account that assessment, where relevant, in making their decision. The decision maker is not precluded from considering other relevant information about the country.

1.4 This report is based on DFAT's on-the-ground knowledge and discussions with a range of sources. It takes into account relevant and credible open source reports. Where DFAT does not refer to a specific source of a report or allegation, this may be to protect the source.

1.5 This Thematic Report considers the situation for Hazaras in Afghanistan and Pakistan with respect to protection visa applications in Australia. For more information, see the March 2014 DFAT Country Report on Afghanistan, the November 2013 DFAT Country Report on Pakistan and the December 2013 DFAT Thematic Report – Pakistan – Shias in Pakistan.

2. Background Information

Demography

2.1 The Hazara are an ethnic group which are believed to have originally settled in Afghanistan's central highlands after Mongol invasions in the 13th century. They are a mixture of eastern and western Eurasian peoples, which makes them visibly distinct from many other ethnic groups in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Hazaras are overwhelmingly Shia Muslims, mostly of the Twelver Sect (*athna asharia*), with a small Sunni minority.

2.2 In addition to Afghanistan and Pakistan, sizable Hazara communities are found in Iran, the Gulf states, Australia, Europe and the US. DFAT assesses that the presence of Hazara diasporas abroad act as an important 'pull factor' for further emigration by Hazaras from Afghanistan and Pakistan.

2.3 Hazaras living in rural areas speak Hazaragi, a dialect of the Persian (Farsi) language. Many Hazaras in major urban areas such as Kabul, Mazar-e-Sharif and Quetta, no longer speak Hazaragi but speak regional varieties of Persian. Hazaras, particularly in urban areas, may also speak second and other languages, including Pashto, Urdu and English.

Afghanistan

2.4 An estimated three million Hazaras live in Afghanistan—approximately nine per cent of the country's population and the third largest ethnic group. Hazaras live mostly in the central highlands region of the country, particularly the Hazara-majority provinces of Bamiyan and Daikundi and

parts of Ghazni, Ghor, Uruzgan and Wardak provinces—referred to collectively as ‘Hazarajat’. Sizable Hazara populations are found in Kabul and other major urban areas in Afghanistan.

Hazarajat

2.5 Bamiyan’s population is estimated to be approximately 600,000, 75 per cent majority Hazara, with Tajik and Pashtun minorities.

2.6 Daikundi province was created in 2004 from the Hazara-majority districts of neighbouring Uruzgan province. The population of Daikundi is estimated to be approximately 400,000, with an ethnic composition similar to Bamiyan.

Ghazni

2.7 Ghazni is an ethnically-mixed province located south of Kabul. The population of Ghazni is estimated to be between 1.1 million and 1.5 million, around 50 per cent of which is Pashtun, 40 per cent Hazara and 10 per cent other ethnic groups. Due to its multi-ethnic composition, Ghazni will be treated separately from other parts of Hazarajat in this report.

Kabul

2.8 Kabul is the largest city and the capital of Afghanistan. There is no reliable data on the population of Kabul, but it is likely to be up to seven million people. Of this, the Hazara population may comprise between 1.7 and two million people, which would make Hazaras the largest ethnic group in Kabul—the majority of whom live in west Kabul. Kabul’s population also includes significant numbers of Tajiks, Pashtuns and other minority groups.

Pakistan

2.9 There are estimated to be between 600,000 and 900,000 Hazaras living in Pakistan—less than one per cent of the population. Most live in and around the city of Quetta in Balochistan Province. There are also small Hazara communities in the Kurram Agency of Pakistan’s Federally-Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and in large urban areas, including in Karachi, Lahore, Multan, Islamabad and Peshawar.

Quetta

2.10 Quetta is the largest city and the provincial capital of Pakistan’s Balochistan Province. According to the most recent census in 1998, the population of Quetta was 560,000, but contemporary estimates are much higher, up to 1.3 million. Up to 450,000 Hazaras may live in and around Quetta, the population of which also includes significant numbers of Pashtuns, Balochis, Punjabis and other minority groups.

2.11 Within Quetta, Hazaras live predominantly within their own two communities—Hazara Town (also known as Brewery Road) and along Alamdar Road towards Mehrabad. These tend to be lower and middle-income areas on the outskirts of Quetta.

Parachinar

2.12 There are estimated to be 1200 to 1500 Hazaras living in Parachinar who are integrated into the broader Shia community, rather than living in a segregated community as they do in Quetta. Parachinar is in Kurram Agency, in the FATA, adjacent to the border with Afghanistan. FATA is nominally under the control of Pakistan’s Federal Government, but in practice the tribes largely operate independently.

Other Areas

2.13 Although no reliable information is available on the size of particular communities, there are Hazara communities in Karachi (up to 15,000), and smaller communities in Lahore, Multan, Islamabad and Peshawar.

2.14 Despite its name, the Hazara region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is populated by a Hindko-speaking ethnic group—not by ethnic Hazaras.

Recent history

Afghanistan

2.15 It is estimated that 60 per cent of the Hazara population of Afghanistan was killed or displaced in the late 19th century under the reign of the Pashtun Emir Abdur Rahman Khan. Enmity between Hazaras and Pashtuns has been strong ever since. The Iranian revolution and Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 led to an internal conflict within the Hazara community between ‘traditionalist’ forces and Iranian-influenced Islamist forces. Although Islamist forces prevailed, the situation was resolved in 1990 with the creation of a Hazara ‘Party of Unity’ (*hezb-e-wahdat*).

2.16 The 1992 fall of the Soviet-backed regime commenced a period of instability in Afghanistan, during which Hazara militias took part in fighting for Kabul. The takeover of Kabul and most of Afghanistan by the mostly Sunni Pashtun Taliban in 1996 resulted in a period of repression and conflict for Shia Hazaras. For example, thousands of fighters and civilians were killed in fighting for Mazar-e-Sharif in 1997–98, during which at least 2000 Hazaras were killed by the Taliban in reprisal for earlier killings of Taliban fighters. As a result of these incidents, many Hazaras fled Afghanistan to Pakistan and elsewhere. Following al-Qaeda’s 2001 attacks on targets in the United States, international forces led by the US launched Operation Enduring Freedom, which removed the Taliban from power.

2.17 Since 2001, a number of different anti-government insurgent groups, including the Taliban, have waged a guerrilla campaign against the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and Afghan forces. ISAF assumed security responsibility for the entire country in 2006. However, under a transition strategy beginning in 2011, Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) have incrementally taken over full responsibility for security in the country, ahead of the planned drawdown of most foreign troops by the end of 2014.

2.18 DFAT assesses that uncertainty about the future security, economic and political situation is an important driver of emigration from Afghanistan, including for Hazaras.

Pakistan

2.19 Hazaras are not indigenous to Pakistan, but have migrated from Afghanistan over the last century. Although a number of families can trace their origins back to the first Hazara arrivals in the late 19th century, the majority of the community arrived in two waves—the first during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan from 1979, and the next in 1996 following the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan. They initially stayed in mosques in Quetta, and then moved to homes with the help of Hazaras already living in Balochistan. These local networks allowed the Afghan Hazara refugees to bypass refugee camps and better integrate into local communities. Hazaras from Afghanistan have continued to arrive in Quetta and have also relocated to other urban areas in Pakistan. Hazaras have been subject to frequent sectarian attacks in Quetta, generally by anti-Shia militant groups (see ‘Violence’, below).

3. Treatment of Hazaras

Religious Freedom

3.1 DFAT assesses that there are no legal restrictions on freedom of religion for Shias, including Hazara Shias, in Afghanistan or Pakistan. There are no laws or Government policies that discriminate against Shias (i.e. 'official' discrimination). Further, broadly speaking, there is little community prejudice (i.e. societal discrimination) that would limit opportunities for Shias in daily life on the basis of their Shia religion. Any incidents of discrimination would likely be cases of local nepotism, favouritism or patronage, rather than evidence of a broader trend of societal attitudes.

Afghanistan

3.2 There is no reliable information on the size of religious groups in Afghanistan. However, according to unofficial estimates, approximately 99 per cent of Afghanistan's population are Muslim. Sunnis represent 80 per cent of the population and Shias approximately 19 per cent. Other minorities, including Christians, Sikhs, Hindus and Bahais constitute the remaining one per cent of the population.

3.3 Article 2 of Afghanistan's Constitution establishes Islam as the official religion. Article 131 provides that Afghanistan's courts shall apply Shia jurisprudence in personal cases involving Shias. In 2009, Afghanistan's Parliament passed a Shia Personal Status Law which recognised differing jurisprudential practices on issues like marriage, divorce and inheritance among Afghanistan's Shia community. The law commenced in July 2009, after being amended to reflect concerns about the rights of women in the Shia community.

3.4 There are some sectarian tensions between Sunnis and Shias in Afghanistan, but other than insurgent attacks, these rarely result in violence. Because of their linguistic and religious links with Iran, Hazaras are sometimes viewed with suspicion by other groups in Afghanistan. For example, debates in 2012 about the 'unlawfulness' of the Shia spring equinox Nawruz celebrations were used by some radical Sunni scholars to criticise Iranian influence in Afghanistan. However, Nawruz remains a national, cross-ethnic event throughout Afghanistan.

Pakistan

3.5 Approximately 95 per cent of Pakistan's population identify as Muslim. Sunnis represent approximately 75 per cent of the population and Shias 20 per cent. Other minorities, including Christians, Hindus and Ahmadis constitute the remaining five per cent of the population. Hazaras are the only ethnic group in Pakistan that is majority Shia. For more information, see the December 2013 DFAT Thematic Report – Pakistan – Shias in Pakistan.

3.6 Pakistan's Constitution states, 'subject to law, public order, and morality, every citizen shall have the right to profess, practice, and propagate his religion'. The Constitution also establishes Islam as the state religion, and requires that laws be consistent with Islam.

3.7 Although they are generally free to practice their religion, DFAT assesses that the greatest threat for Hazara Shias in Pakistan is in the form of targeting by militants or, at times, sectarian clashes in the community (see 'Violence', below).

Ethnicity

Afghanistan

3.8 Article 22 of Afghanistan's Constitution, introduced in 2004, forbids any kind of discrimination and distinction between the citizens of Afghanistan. In practice, ethnic, tribal and family affiliations are important factors in almost every aspect of life in Afghanistan, particularly in rural areas. For the majority of Afghans, this kinship is central to identity and acceptance in a community, including for finding shelter and employment. As such, Afghans prefer to live in areas where their ethnic group constitutes the local majority. Outside of major urban areas, most Afghans are organised into ethnic-based communities with their own traditions and mores. Even within ethnically-mixed urban areas, Afghans tend to live alongside members of their own ethnic group.

3.9 DFAT assesses that since the removal of the Taliban regime in 2001, minorities in Afghanistan have made significant gains, albeit from a low base. Afghanistan's Hazara community has taken advantage of the opportunities available to them since then, particular in politics and education. Afghanistan's Hazaras are active participants in Afghanistan's civil society.

3.10 DFAT has no evidence of any official policy of discrimination pursued by the Government on the basis of ethnicity. However, societal discrimination exists. Most commonly, societal discrimination tends to be in the form of nepotism in favour of particular ethnic and religious communities. Although Hazaras do face societal discrimination by other ethnic groups, equally these groups face discrimination in Hazara-dominant areas.

3.11 Tensions between ethnic groups tend to occur along ethnic demarcation lines or as a result of long-term demographic changes or short-term seasonal movements. For example, the seasonal migration of Pashtun Kuchi herders from southern parts of Afghanistan to pastures in the central highlands has frequently been the cause of ethnic conflict with the region's Hazara population. Hazara communities have expressed concern about the aggressive and militarised way Kuchis assert their traditional access to grazing lands. This has led local Hazaras in some areas to prevent Kuchis' transit through parts of Ghazni. This has resulted in armed clashes. In 2010, armed Kuchis reportedly displaced 2500 Hazara families in Daimirdad for several weeks. The Government has worked to ease these tensions through an annual mediation commission and through compensation payments to Kuchis denied access to grazing lands.

3.12 The Hazara community's focus on education has also resulted in tension with other ethnic groups that have not enjoyed similar educational achievements. For example, Hazara students at Kabul University staged an eight-day hunger strike in front of Parliament in May 2013 in protest about ethnic discrimination, being denied academic posts and nepotism among the university's leadership. To counter a perceived Hazara domination of higher education, in July 2013 the Government proposed to replace the current merit-based system with a provincial quota system for university entrance. This would limit some ethnic groups' access to higher education. Legislation to implement the change has not yet passed Parliament.

Pakistan

3.13 Section 36 of Pakistan's Constitution guarantees 'the legitimate rights and interests of minorities, including their due representation in the Federal and Provincial services'. With the exception of large urban areas, many Pakistanis tend to live within ethnically homogenous communities, but ethnicity has often been a source of communal tension. But despite constitutional provisions, Pakistan still faces serious human rights issues. The previous government took a number of measures to create new human rights structures and pass important human and women's rights legislation. In May 2012, former President Asif Zardari enacted the National Human Rights Commission Act, which provides the legislative framework for establishing a human rights

commission in line with the Paris Principles. However, implementation of these measures has been slow.

3.14 DFAT assesses that Pakistan's Hazara community is not subject to official Government policies of discrimination and there is little discrimination at the community level. The Government recognised the Hazara tribe as 'local' in 1962 and Hazara residents at that time became citizens of Pakistan. However, more recent Hazara arrivals from Afghanistan, because they are citizens of Afghanistan and not Pakistan, may not be able to legally acquire Pakistani National Identity Cards (NICs), which are required to access government and other services. The UNHCR negotiated an agreement with the Government to allow remaining registered Afghan refugees (including some registered Hazaras) to reside in Pakistan legally until 31 December 2015. Under the agreement, registered refugees will have access to some government services.

Economic Situation

Afghanistan

3.15 The mountainous terrain, geographic isolation and a lack of arable land in Hazarajat combine to limit economic opportunities and makes finding employment difficult. For example, 80 per cent of roads in Bamiyan are unpaved, which makes commerce and the movement of people more difficult. Despite the construction of several solar and hydro-electric facilities in the region, access to electricity is limited.

3.16 Income from agriculture, which constitutes 90 per cent of the economy in Bamiyan, is affected by droughts and floods. The development of a high-quality iron ore deposit at Hajigak in Bamiyan is hampered by the deposit's isolation from steel-making facilities or other markets. Bamiyan also has deposits of coking coal at Kahmard.

3.17 The closure of New Zealand's Bamiyan-based and Poland's Ghazni-based Provincial Reconstruction Teams has negatively affected the local economies of those provinces. Hazara communities have complained that the Hazarajat region has received insufficient development assistance for education and public infrastructure from the Government and international donors. DFAT notes that many areas of Afghanistan—not only Hazara-majority areas—are frustrated at inadequate development assistance and infrastructure.

3.18 Although many Hazaras seek employment and other opportunities outside of Hazarajat, some of those who have settled in Kabul and elsewhere in Afghanistan also derive income from seasonal work in the central highlands and in other provinces, especially during the spring and summer when there are returns from farming activity. Like any other ethnic group in Afghanistan, those Hazaras who rely on irregular day-work in Kabul tend to suffer poor economic and social conditions.

Pakistan

3.19 Balochistan province—where most Hazaras live in Pakistan—has generally lower levels of development, infrastructure and living standards than other Pakistani provinces. This is due in part to an unsettled security situation, a small population spread across a large area, a lack of water for agriculture and low levels of human resources.

3.20 Balochistan has substantial natural resources, including a number of developed natural gas fields at Sui and large, undeveloped deposits of copper and gold at Chagai. Balochistan has a long, relatively undeveloped coastline.

Employment

3.21 There are no reliable employment statistics in Afghanistan or Pakistan but unemployment and underemployment are both likely to be high. This lack of opportunity in both countries is frustrating for their people, particularly for well-educated Hazaras. DFAT assesses that the low-level of development and perceived lack of economic opportunity in Afghanistan and Pakistan acts as a primary 'push factor' for external migration for the Hazara community.

Afghanistan

3.22 As a result of slowing economic growth due to the ongoing drawdown of international forces and decreasing private sector investment, employment and earning opportunities in Afghanistan are limited. Many Hazaras operate their own small businesses.

3.23 Many ethnic groups (including, but not limited to, Hazaras) continue to voice complaints that they do not have equal access to local government jobs, particularly in provinces where they are a minority. DFAT understands that Hazaras are under-represented in government ministries and within the Afghan National Security Forces, but their representation is improving.

Pakistan

3.24 In Pakistan's Balochistan province, there are relatively few employment opportunities for Hazaras or other ethnic groups. Many Hazaras are self-employed in small businesses. Some are employed in banking and telecommunications, reflecting their higher levels of education.

3.25 Some Hazaras are employed in the civil service of the Government of Balochistan and serve in Balochistan's police force. In 1972, the Government of Balochistan introduced a quota system for appointments to positions in the civil service in Balochistan. The replacement of the previous merit-based system resulted in the reduction in the number of Hazaras in the civil service from 50 per cent in the 1970s to five per cent in 2011, despite Hazaras' consistently high entrance exam scores.

Health Care

Afghanistan

3.26 DFAT assesses that the health system in Afghanistan has improved since 2001 and Hazara communities often enjoy better health facilities than some other ethnic communities. This is due, in part, to the relative ease of access international donors have to Hazara-majority districts compared to districts in areas contested by insurgents.

3.27 There are approximately 60 health facilities in Bamiyan and Daikundi that offer basic health care, primarily funded by international donors. Immunisation rates are very good, but specialist medical care is not available in the central highlands. Attracting doctors to the region has been difficult because of its isolation.

3.28 In Kabul, public health care is free but demand for services is high. Better quality services are provided by private practices. The Hazara community operates a number of good private medical facilities that offer a range of basic and specialist services. Medical facilities in Kabul have improved significantly since 2001.

Pakistan

3.29 DFAT assesses that the health system in Pakistan is generally constrained by a lack of funding. The geographic constraints of providing services in Balochistan limit the quality of health

care available to all, including Hazara communities there. Hazaras in Quetta have access to medical facilities, generally provided from within their own communities.

Education

Afghanistan

3.30 Access to education in Afghanistan has improved greatly since 2001, particularly for girls. Many Hazaras place a high value on education, including for girls and women, so the Hazara community has been one of the main beneficiaries of these improvements. Almost 90 per cent of Hazara children now receive education and are encouraged to consider further education options, where family circumstances allow. Girls constitute almost 50 per cent of students in Bamiyan.

3.31 There are currently more than 350 schools operating in Bamiyan and Daikundi, attended by 160,000 students. Bamiyan also hosts a small university, reportedly with 3600 students, but has struggled to attract qualified lecturers.

3.32 In addition, some families send their children to Kabul for courses during the winter where the Hazara community operates a number of private schools. DFAT has observed that some of these have good facilities, teacher training and educational outcomes for students, demonstrated by very high university acceptance rates.

Pakistan

3.33 Since the implementation of the 18th Constitutional Amendment in 2010 which devolved certain federal powers, education is the responsibility of provincial governments. Funding remains a major constraint for Pakistan's education sector, including in Balochistan.

3.34 Many Hazara children in Quetta attend private schools within Hazara communities. For example, there are at least 18 private schools in Quetta that are attended only by Afghan Hazaras. These schools are not formally recognised by the Government of Balochistan, but are recognised and accredited by the Afghan Consulate-General in Quetta. Some schools might attract funding from Iran.

Political Opinion (Actual or Imputed)

Afghanistan

3.35 Since 2001, Hazaras have become very active in politics in Afghanistan. Compared to many other ethnic groups, Hazaras typically have high rates of voter turnout and participation, which has resulted in a disproportionate representation of Hazaras in the lower house of the Afghan National Assembly. For example, Hazara candidates won all the lower house seats in Ghazni, despite being a minority of the province's population. In addition, Afghanistan's current Second Vice President Mohammad Karim Khalili, an ethnic Hazara from Wardak Province, was appointed in 2002 and subsequently elected to this post in 2004.

3.36 Hazaras often vote for members of various Hezb-e-Wahdat factions, and have voted for members representing the Shia (but not exclusively Hazara) Harakat-e-Islami party.

Pakistan

3.37 Due to their small population, Hazaras have relatively little political influence in Pakistan. Hazara politicians have been successful in local government elections (last held in 2002) and have

also been elected as members of the Balochistan Provincial Assembly and Pakistan National Assembly.

3.38 The Hazara Democratic Party (HDP) is most associated with the Hazara community in Pakistani politics, but Hazaras have also been elected as members of other parties, including the Balochistan National Party (BNP) and the Peoples' Party of Pakistan (PPP). Some Hazaras may also vote for Majlis Wahdat-e-Muslimeen Pakistan (MWM), a Shia religious political party that is particularly active in Karachi, but has representation all over the country.

Western Influences

3.39 DFAT assesses that there is no evidence to indicate that low-profile individuals are subject to discrimination or violence as a result of them having spent time in western countries.

Afghanistan

3.40 DFAT assesses that individuals working for, supporting or associated with the Government and the international community are at high risk of violence perpetrated by insurgents. Due to the improvements in the situation of the Hazara community since 2001, Hazaras are widely perceived to be affiliated with both the Government and the international community. Many Hazaras have expressed concern that they are targeted by insurgents as a result of this perception (see 'Violence', below).

3.41 More broadly, many Afghans—including Hazaras—regularly travel abroad, to Iran, Pakistan and also to Europe and other western countries to seek work and greater economic or educational opportunities. Even under the Taliban regime, Afghans continued to travel abroad to work or study, and then returned to the country.

Pakistan

3.42 Despite a growing Islamisation, western influence remains pervasive in many parts of Pakistan, particularly in major urban areas. Many Pakistanis—including Hazaras—have relatives living in western countries. Many living abroad return to Pakistan frequently to visit relatives and are not at any increased risk because they have spent time in western countries.

4. Violence

4.1 Historical feuds, resource disputes, criminality, political alignment, ethnic tension and religious differences are all important drivers of conflict and violence in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Violence by Province

Afghanistan

4.2 The historical enmity between Afghanistan's Hazara and Pashtun communities, particularly during the Taliban regime, contributes to the Hazara community's uncertainty about the security situation in Afghanistan ahead of the ISAF drawdown in 2014.

4.3 The Hazara community's fears of violence must also be viewed in the context of the generalised environment of criminal and insurgent violence in Afghanistan which affects many other ethnic groups, including Tajiks, Uzbeks and Turkmen. Violence is particularly high in Pashtun-majority areas of Afghanistan—these are the areas most contested between the Taliban and the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and the International Security Assistance Force, (ISAF) and from which the greatest number of civilians are internally displaced. In this security environment, Hazaras have been killed in recent ethnic violence but have also reportedly killed members of other ethnic groups either as instigators or in reprisal attacks.

4.4 In general, DFAT's current assessment is that there is currently a low risk of criminal or insurgent violence for Hazaras in Afghanistan relative to the overall security situation. Hazaras are not currently at any greater risk of violence than other ethnic groups in Afghanistan.

4.5 The security situation in Afghanistan remains fluid and varies from district to district within individual provinces. DFAT notes any categorical assessment on the security in a particular area could be rendered quickly inaccurate.

Kabul

4.6 DFAT assesses that the Government maintains effective control over Kabul, despite the substantial threat of insurgent or criminal violence. Although insurgents regularly conduct high profile attacks in Kabul and elsewhere, they are not capable of disrupting the overall effective control of the Government. The ANSF and international forces have put in place a range of effective counter-measures to prevent and respond to insurgent attacks in Kabul.

4.7 The security situation for Hazaras in Kabul does not differ significantly from that experienced by the general population of the city and Hazaras are not disproportionately targeted by criminals or insurgents in Kabul. The bombing of the Shia Abu Fazl mosque in Kabul during Moharram in December 2011 reportedly killed at least 70 people, many of whom were Shia Hazaras. DFAT assesses this to be an isolated incident and has no information about other recent attacks against the Shia or Hazara community in Kabul.

Hazarajat

4.8 DFAT assesses that there is a low threat of insurgent or criminal violence in Hazara-majority districts of Bamiyan and Daikundi provinces. The Gizab district and the Shibar district of Bamiyan Province demonstrate higher threat levels than surrounding areas of Daikundi and Bamiyan provinces, although these are still comparatively low in national terms. This assessment was affirmed to DFAT by contacts in international agencies, civil society and local government authorities in Bamiyan. DFAT has observed the security situation in Bamiyan town to be secure and assesses that there is a low risk of violence for Hazaras.

4.9 DFAT assesses that a number of factors make most districts of Bamiyan and Daikundi relatively secure for Hazaras. First, because they make up the overwhelming majority of the population in Bamiyan, there are fewer sources of ethnic tension. Second and related to this, because they are ethnically distinct, non-Hazaras would find it difficult to infiltrate Bamiyan without detection. Third, the region's mountainous terrain offers relatively few routes for outsiders to traverse the province.

4.10 DFAT understands that the local Hazara population and international community are able to move freely and safely through most of the province. However, security on the roads linking Kabul to Bamiyan is considered to be less safe (see 'Travel Security', below).

Ghazni Province

4.11 At least 11 Pashtun-majority districts of Ghazni Province are not considered to be safe. The threat level in these districts is high due to the presence of Taliban and other insurgent groups. However, the threat level in Hazara-majority districts of Ghazni, including Nawur, Malistan and Jaghori remains low. Security is provided by the Afghan National Police (ANP), without any Afghan National Army (ANA) deployments to these districts. DFAT assesses that there is a low risk of violence for Hazaras in these particular areas.

4.12 There have been incidents of conflict between Hazara factions in Ghazni, primarily revenge attacks. However, the Government had asserted effective control over the main Hazara districts of the Province in recent years, including by preventing the dissemination of weapons, the confiscation of weapons, and the detention of individuals responsible for violent crime.

4.13 The comparatively good security environment in Ghazni's Hazara districts means that government officials and the international community have relative freedom of movement in these areas. These districts therefore enjoy relatively good access to services and a permanent presence of government officials—including from the Departments of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, and Education. However, security on roads linking Hazara-majority districts of Ghazni to Kabul and other parts of Afghanistan is less safe.

Other Provinces

4.14 DFAT assesses that Hazara minorities living in Pashtun-majority areas in Uruzgan, Helmand and Kandahar are less safe than those living in Kabul or Hazara-majority areas of Hazarajat. These Pashtun-majority areas typically experience higher levels of violence, which affects all Afghans in these areas, including Hazaras. Hazaras living in these areas typically avoid travel outside their immediate communities.

Pakistan

4.15 Long-term demographic changes in Quetta have also resulted in ethnic, sectarian and politically-motivated violence. This affects not just the Hazara community, but also Pashtuns, Punjabis and Balochis. Internal migration from other parts of Pakistan to Karachi has occasionally brought Hazaras into conflict with Pashtuns, regularly resulting in violence.

4.16 DFAT assesses that the major threat to Shias in Pakistan (including Hazaras) comes from anti-Shia and militant groups, including Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) and Jundullah. Because they are ethnically distinct, Hazaras are readily identifiable as Shia Muslims and have been targeted by sectarian militants on this basis.

Balochistan

4.17 There is a high level of generalised violence in Balochistan and a low level of general law and order. Federal and provincial authorities do not exercise effective control outside of urban areas and cantonments. Balochistan has experienced frequent terrorist attacks by militants and separatists that affects members of many other ethnic groups, including Punjabis, Pashtuns and Balochis.

4.18 There have been frequent attacks against the Hazara community in Balochistan. Most attacks on Shias in Balochistan have been against the Hazara community (see the December 2013 DFAT Thematic Report – Pakistan – Shias in Pakistan). For example, on 17 February 2013, at least 86 people, mostly Hazaras, were killed when a bomb exploded in a vegetable market in Quetta. A series of bombings in January 2013 targeted Hazaras in Quetta and claimed more than 90 lives. Responsibility for both these attacks was claimed by the anti-Shia LeJ.

4.19 As a result of these attacks, Hazaras have retreated into the two predominantly Hazara enclaves in Quetta where they enjoy a greater degree of security. However, DFAT has observed that, during daylight hours, Hazaras are generally able to move about within Quetta. To defend their communities, some Hazaras maintain their own licensed weapons.

4.20 The visibility of Shias increases when they are engaged in Shia religious festivals, including Moharram (a one-month mourning period) and during pilgrimages to Iran. During Moharram, a number of Shias participate in Ashura processions, which have been specifically targeted by militant groups and triggered communal violence. However, there have been no major incidents during Ashura processions in Quetta since 2004.

Karachi

4.21 A number of Hazaras have been killed in both targeted and random attacks in Karachi in the context of a high level of generalised violence. This is often related to clashing business, political and criminal interests—sectarian violence has been just one feature of the political landscape in the city.

Travel Security

Afghanistan

4.22 Afghanistan's road network, particularly in the mountainous central highlands, is generally poor. Travel in winter is even more difficult and roads at higher altitudes can be cut by snowfalls for long periods during winter. Speeding and unsafe driving further aggravates the problem—the majority of deaths on Afghan roads are caused by traffic accidents.

4.23 Insecurity compounds the poor condition of Afghanistan's limited road network, particularly those roads that pass through areas contested by insurgents. Taliban and criminal elements target the national highway and secondary roads, setting up arbitrary armed checkpoints. Official ANP and ANA checkpoints designed to secure the road are sometimes operated by poorly-trained officers known to use violence to extort bribes. More broadly, criminals and insurgents on roads target all ethnic groups, sometimes including kidnapping for ransom. It is often difficult to separate criminality (such as extortion) from insurgent activity.

4.24 Individuals working for, supporting or associated with the Government and the international community are at high risk of violence perpetrated by insurgents on roads in Afghanistan. Carrying documentation that would indicate employment or another connection with the Government is dangerous. Because Hazaras are perceived to be affiliated with either the Government or international community, those Hazaras travelling these routes who work for the Government or international community frequently take precautions to ensure that, if they are stopped, they could not be identified as such.

4.25 Hazara MPs and several credible civil society contacts have told DFAT that 'dozens' of Hazaras were killed on roads to and from Hazarajat in 2013. However, DFAT has no reliable evidence to indicate that insurgents disproportionately target Hazaras on roads in Afghanistan. Hazaras are often the main travellers on roads to Hazarajat, so higher numbers of victims could also reflect the higher volume of traffic.

Kabul–Bamiyan

4.26 The most direct route from Kabul to Bamiyan is north through Bagram or Charikar, and then west, passing through parts of Parwan Province on the Bamiyan–Charikar Highway. This is a serviceable, two-lane route passing through mountainous terrain and over the Shibar Pass. This road was closed in July 2013 for four days as a result of fighting between ANSF and insurgent forces and closed again in October 2013 after being blocked by rocks placed by insurgents.

4.27 There are a number of ANP checkpoints along this route. DFAT understands that, from time to time, illegal checkpoints are established by insurgents on this route, searching for those suspected of working for the Government or the international community. Former Bamiyan Provincial Council head Jawad Zahak, an ethnic Hazara, was killed in June 2011 in Parwan while en route to Kabul. The Taliban claimed responsibility for his killing.

4.28 Drivers of trucks sometimes have to pay tolls to pass through these checkpoints, which add to the cost of goods in Bamiyan. DFAT understands that, in some cases, Hazaras with heavy machinery (for roadworks, for example) are not allowed to pass through these checkpoints; only Pashtun drivers are allowed to pass.

4.29 Despite these risks, many Hazaras use this route every day to travel between Bamiyan and Kabul and other parts of eastern Afghanistan. The route is also used for commerce—for importing produce and consumer goods into Bamiyan and by Hazaras and others leaving Bamiyan including, for example, those seeking specialist medical care in Kabul.

4.30 There are two other, more circuitous routes to Bamiyan—a relatively secure northern route through the Salang Pass that takes approximately nine hours, and a less secure southern route through Wardak Province.

4.31 Hazaras unwilling to take the risk of travelling by road and able to afford the cost have the option to fly on a weekly service to Kabul from a serviceable, paved airstrip in Bamiyan for a fare of approximately USD 100.

Kabul–Ghazni

4.32 There are two well-established routes from Kabul to Ghazni city. One is short and insecure, via Maidan Wardak. The other passes through parts of Parwan Province on the Bamiyan–Charikar Highway. This is more secure, but long and arduous.

4.33 There are three routes from Ghazni city to the Hazara-majority Jaghori district. The most frequently used road passes through Nawur district, and is considered secure. The second route through Qarabagh district is considered less secure. A third through Muqur is insecure due to a Taliban presence, with occasional checkpoints and security incidents. DFAT understands that local residents with ties to the province and knowledge of the area—including Hazaras—are generally able to travel between Ghazni City and Hazara districts without incident and thousands of vehicles use these roads daily.

Pakistan

4.34 Travel in some parts of Pakistan can be dangerous for all Pakistanis irrespective of ethnicity or religion. Travellers in remote areas of Pakistan which are distant from police and security forces are at greater risk of criminal or militant violence. Many roads in Balochistan province fit this profile.

4.35 Pakistani media frequently report on Hazaras being attacked on roads in and around Quetta. Representative incidents include an attack in September 2011 in which 26 members of the Hazara community travelling by bus to Iran to visit Shia holy sites were forced to disembark by gunmen near the town of Mastung and shot dead. Three others were killed as they took the injured to a hospital. Anti-Shia militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) claimed responsibility for this attack. A

suicide attack in June 2012 on a bus carrying pilgrims returning from Iran, also claimed by LeJ, killed 15 Hazaras and wounded 30 others.

4.36 Although DFAT is not able to verify this information, Hazara community leaders have reported that travel by road to Zhob or through Bolan in Balochistan and to Dera Ghazi Khan in Punjab is dangerous for Hazaras. As a result of these risks, many Hazaras able to afford the cost choose to fly out of Quetta to reach other destinations in Pakistan. This is considered to be a safer alternative to road travel.

5. Other Considerations

State Protection

Afghanistan

5.1 The ongoing insurgency, particularly in the south and east of Afghanistan means that the Government struggles to exercise effective control over parts of the country. As a result, the Government lacks the ability to adequately address human rights issues, protect vulnerable groups and prosecute human rights violators in those areas.

5.2 Despite these challenges, DFAT assesses that the Government maintains effective control over major urban areas—particularly Kabul, all provincial capitals including Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar and the majority of district centres.

5.3 Many Afghans, including Hazaras, have expressed their concern about security in Afghanistan post-2014. In the absence of effective state protection outside of major urban areas, DFAT assesses that many local communities, including Hazaras, maintain their own militias to protect themselves from criminals and insurgents.

Pakistan

5.4 Pakistan's laws and Constitution provide for state protection of people's property, lives and religious beliefs and places. Though implementation of human rights legislation has been slow, broadly DFAT assesses that there is a willingness by Pakistani authorities to protect Hazaras. During Muharram for example, provincial authorities and the Ministry of Interior are known to provide security for participants in Ashura processions.

5.5 However, Pakistani authorities face capacity constraints. A lack of resources limits the federal and provincial governments' respective abilities to protect the Hazara community at all times and in all places. DFAT has also observed that while Pakistan has made efforts to capture and prosecute members of sectarian outfits such as the LeJ, conviction rates remain low. The capacity of Pakistani authorities to provide effective state protection is highest in major urban areas and well-protected cantonments. Many Hazaras are themselves members of the Balochistan Police.

Internal Relocation

5.6 DFAT assesses that, because of the countries' size and diversity, in most cases, there are options available for members of the Hazara community to be able to relocate to areas of relative safety elsewhere in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Afghanistan

5.7 In Afghanistan, Hazara-majority areas in Hazarajat are the safest areas for internal relocation. Large urban areas, such as Kabul, are home to mixed ethnic and religious communities. Urban areas offer greater opportunities for employment, access to services and a greater degree of state protection than many other areas. They also offer a higher degree of anonymity for returnees. In practice, internal relocation to urban areas can be limited by a lack of financial resources. Internal relocation to urban areas is generally more successful for single men of working age. Unaccompanied women and children are least likely to be able to relocate to urban areas without the assistance of family or tribal networks.

5.8 DFAT assesses that there are currently no significant protection issues for Hazara returnees to Afghanistan beyond the generalised environment of criminal and insurgent violence. In

particular, DFAT assesses that it is relatively safe for Hazaras to return to Hazara-majority areas in Hazarajat and Kabul.

Pakistan

5.9 Some Hazaras in Quetta and Parachinar have relocated to other parts of Pakistan, including Lahore and Karachi, although the journey and the destinations were not without their own security risks. To mitigate these risks, many Hazaras able to afford the cost choose to fly from Quetta or Parachinar to other destinations in Pakistan.

5.10 Afghan Hazaras may choose to stay in Pakistan rather than return to Afghanistan because of better economic prospects and uncertainty about the security situation in Afghanistan ahead of the International Security Assistance Force drawdown in 2014.