

3.14.2. Individuals of Hazara ethnicity and other Shias

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: May 2024

This profile includes people who belong to the Hazara ethnicity and others belonging to the Shia religion. There are two main Shia communities in Afghanistan: the main Shia branch Ithna Ashariya ('the Twelvers') and the smaller Ismaili branch ('the Seveners'). Mostly, persons of Hazara ethnicity are of Shia religion [[Targeting 2022](#), 6.1., p. 126].

The majority of the Hazara population inhabits the Hazarajat. There are also major Hazara populations in the cities of Kabul, Herat and Mazar-e Sharif [[Targeting 2022](#), 6.4.1., p. 130].

The Hazara ethnicity can usually be recognised by the person's physical appearance.

COI summary

Hazaras have historically faced severe abuse, including enslavement, mass killings, and systematic discrimination under different rulers in Afghanistan. Under the previous Taliban rule in 1996-2001, several massacres of Hazaras took place [[Targeting 2022](#), 6.4.1., p. 132]. Since the fall of the Taliban regime in 2001, the Hazaras had improved their position in society. However, new security threats emerged for the Shia Muslim (Hazara) community from 2016 and onwards as the ISKP was established as a new armed actor in Afghanistan, carrying out attacks targeting, *inter alia*, Hazaras [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.5.3., pp. 85-86; [COI query on Hazaras, Shias](#), 1.1., p. 3; 1.2., p. 4; [Country Focus 2022](#), 2.4., p. 41; [Targeting 2022](#), 6.4.1., p. 132]. In December 2022, the UN Secretary General called on the *de facto* authorities to implement adequate protection measures due to the IED attacks against civilian targets and in civilian areas, and specifically mentioned places of worship and education facilities and the Hazaras as a community 'facing heightened risk' [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.2.2., p. 33].

a) Treatment by the Taliban

In the months following their coming to power, the Taliban held a series of meetings with Shia Hazara leaders from various parts of the country, promising to provide security for all citizens and expressing the willingness to avoid sectarian divisions [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.5.3., p. 85]. Shia Muslims were allowed to perform their religious ceremonies, such as annual celebrations of the Ashura. However, in 2023 it was announced that, for security reasons, large gatherings

would not be allowed during the celebration of Ashura. Also, Hazaras were appointed to posts in the new Taliban administration at central and provincial level to a very limited extent, and it was debated whether these people were regarded as true representatives of the Hazara minority since they had already been part of the Taliban insurgency [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.5.3., p. 85; [Targeting 2022](#), 6.4.2., p. 135].

Despite their promises to provide security, the Taliban failed to protect the Shia Hazara communities as several attacks have been carried out by the ISKP. Moreover, harassment and forced displacement of these communities have increased [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.5.3., pp. 85-88].

Members of the Hazara community have been killed during Taliban raids claimed to be targeting 'armed rebels', and in Ghazni Province the Taliban *de facto* security forces opened fire against a group of mourners assembled to commemorate the Shia Ashura ceremony. After the Taliban struck down the dissident Taliban member Mawlawi Mehdi, who was Hazara, in June 2022, reports followed of summary executions of civilians in the district of Balkhab (Sar-e Pul Province), an area with a large Hazara population, where Mehdi based his uprising [[Country Focus 2023](#), 2.3., p. 40; 4.3.3., pp. 69-70; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.1.1, p. 19].

Sources noted a discrepancy between the Taliban leadership's public stance towards Hazaras/Shias and the actual treatment of these communities by Taliban rank-and-file security forces. Hazaras have been facing discriminatory acts from Taliban members in local *de facto* administrative bodies and from the Taliban rank-and-file. According to a source, while the Hazaras have not been facing 'targeted discrimination' by the *de facto* authorities, the local Taliban would 'view Hazaras negatively and treat them with contempt (in line with historical norms)' as 'there is a view' that Hazaras 'benefitted too much' under the previous rule, which must be 'corrected' now. As a result, Hazaras have been 'systematically treated differently' by the local Taliban according to the same source. The lack of representation has also caused barriers to Hazaras in accessing passport services, and in accessing justice - for example in land disputes. Thousands of Hazaras have been evicted since the Taliban takeover, and in many decade-old land disputes which have reopened, the Taliban have tended to side with (Pashtun) Kuchi nomads [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.5.3., pp. 85-86; [Targeting 2022](#), 6.4.2., p. 134].

Since the takeover, 'a greater number' of Kuchi nomads, compared to previous years, has moved into Hazarajat, resulting in the forced evictions and displacement of local Hazara population. In some cases, these evictions have been ordered by Taliban local leaders, while in other cases Hazara residents were reportedly evicted by Kuchi nomads or by 'the Taliban and associated militias' [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.5.3., pp. 87-88; [Targeting 2022](#), 6.4.2., p. 134].

b) Treatment by ISKP

Over recent years, attacks by insurgent groups have mainly been attributed to ISKP. Their intention to target Shias from 'Baghdad to Khorasan' has been stated in Telegram channels run by the Islamic State. ISKP consider Shia Muslims to be apostates and, hence, a legitimate target for killing [[Targeting 2022](#), 6.4.5., pp. 143-144]. In September 2022, the UN Special Rapporteur stated that the recent years' attacks on Hazaras and non-Muslim Afghans, often claimed by

ISKP, appeared to be 'systematic in nature and reflect elements of an organisational policy, thus bearing the hallmarks of international crimes, including crimes against humanity' [[COI Update 2022](#), 3., p. 9].

It was described that there have been two patterns of attacks targeting Shia Hazaras after the Taliban takeover. The first pattern consists of attacks mainly targeting civilian passenger vehicles, particularly public transport minivans favoured by 'young, educated and professional Hazaras' such as government employees, journalists, and NGO staff. The second pattern consists of large-scale complex attacks, which have *inter alia* targeted Shia mosques, hospitals, and schools in Hazara-dominated areas, mainly in the cities of Kabul, Herat, Mazar-e Sharif, Kandahar, and Kunduz [[Targeting 2022](#), 6.4.3., p. 138].

According to the UN, from 30 August 2021 to 30 September 2022, there were 22 recorded attacks against civilians in Afghanistan, 16 of which targeted the Hazara population specifically. Attacks carried out by the ISKP and unknown actors have targeted the Shia Hazara community since the takeover. Human Rights Watch estimated that 700 individuals in total had been killed and injured in such attacks. Attacks in the form of IED explosions have targeted Shia Hazaras during the Ashura commemoration in 2022, and a deadly suicide IED attack targeted the Kaaj education center in a Hazara-dominated neighborhood on 30 September 2022. It caused 54 deaths and injured 114 - most were teenage Hazara girls and young women. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.5.3., pp. 87-88].

In 2023, the number of attacks against the Shia Hazara community decreased, and no major attacks were reported between January and September 2023 [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.5.3., pp. 87-88]. However, ISKP claimed responsibility for a suicide attack against a Shia Mosque in Pul-e Kumri in Baghlan province in October 2023, in which UNAMA reported 21 deaths and 30 injured. Between October 2023 and mid-January 2024, ISKP claimed responsibility for a string of IED attacks in Dasht-e Barchi, a Hazara dominated area in Kabul city. Estimates vary, however around 100 casualties, killing at least 19 people, were reported by UNAMA, and examples of incidents' locations included a sport club, two minibuses and a commercial centre. Three targeted attacks killing five Shia religious leaders took place in Herat city in October, November and December 2023. No one has claimed responsibility for these attacks [[COI Update 2024](#), 4., pp. 6-7]. Attacks against the Hazaras by the ISKP could be related to their Shia religion. Among other reasons, the ISKP also reportedly targets the Hazaras due to their perceived closeness and support for Iran and the fight against the Islamic State in Syria [[COI query on Hazaras, Shias](#), 1.3., p. 6; 1.4., p. 7; [Anti-government elements](#), 3.3., p. 32; 3.6.1., p. 34].

c) Treatment by the society

Hazaras and Shias have reportedly faced discrimination under the Taliban rule. There is also the perception within conservative parts of the Afghan society that the Hazara minority has embraced a culture not in line with the Taliban's definition of Islam [[COI Update 2022](#), 3, p. 9]. A source reported that Hazaras have historically tended to face societal discrimination in Afghanistan, from Pashtuns and also from Tajiks, Uzbeks and others. [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.5.3., pp. 85-86].

As a majority of the Shia Muslims in Afghanistan belong to the Hazara ethnic group, the Hazaras have been the main victims of sectarian targeting against Shias. However, other Shia groups have also become victims of targeted attacks, both before and after the Taliban takeover. For instance, some of the sectarian attacks against Shia Muslims have been carried out in areas that are not Hazara-dominated. A source also noted that the victims of the attack on a Shia mosque in Kandahar in October 2021 were not primarily Hazaras [[Targeting 2022](#), 6.4.5., p. 143].

Conclusions and guidance

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. killing, abduction, sectarian attacks). When the acts in question are restrictions on the exercise of certain rights of less severe nature or (solely) discriminatory measures, the individual assessment of whether they could amount to persecution should take into account the severity and/or repetitiveness of the acts or whether they occur as an accumulation of various measures.



What is the level of risk of persecution (well-founded fear)?

The individual assessment of whether there is a reasonable degree of likelihood for a Hazara and/or Shia applicant to face persecution should take into account their area of origin and whether ISKP has operational capacity there, with those from Hazara-dominated areas in larger cities being particularly at risk.

Being a Hazara may also be a risk-impacting circumstance in relation to other profiles, such as: [3.1. Members of the security institutions of the former government](#), [3.2. Public officials and servants of the former government](#), [3.10. Humanitarian workers](#), [3.12. Individuals perceived to have transgressed religious, moral and/or societal norms](#), [3.13. Individuals \(perceived as\) influenced by foreign values \(also commonly referred to as 'Westernised'\)](#), [3.15. Women and girls](#), [3.16. Children](#).



Are the reasons for persecution falling within Article 10 QD (nexus)?

Available information indicates that persecution of this profile may be for reasons of religion, (imputed) political opinion (e.g. links to the former government, perceived support for Iran), and/or race (ethnicity).

See other topics concerning ethnic and/or religious minorities:

- [3.14.1. Overview](#)
- *3.14.2. Individuals of Hazara ethnicity and other Shias*
- [3.14.3. Hindus and Sikhs](#)
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- [3.14.5. Tajiks](#)

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