

3.13. Individuals (perceived as) influenced by foreign values (also commonly referred to as 'Westernised')

COMMON ANALYSIS

Last update: May 2024

This profile refers to persons who may be (perceived as) influenced by foreign values (also commonly referred to as 'Westernised') due, for example, to their activities, behaviour, appearance and expressed opinions, which may be seen as non-Afghan or non-Muslim. It may also include those who return to Afghanistan after having spent time in Western countries.

This profile may largely overlap with the profile [3.12. Individuals perceived to have transgressed religious, moral and/or societal norms](#), for example in relation to norms associated with dress code. See also the sub-section [a. Restrictions of rights and freedoms under the Taliban](#) under the profile [3.15. Women and girls](#) and profile [3.11. Individuals considered to have committed blasphemy and/or apostasy](#).

COI summary

After the takeover, the Taliban announced that they intended to act on the basis of their principles, religion and culture, and emphasised the importance of Islam and that 'nothing should be against Islamic values' [[Country Focus 2022](#), 1.2.3., p. 17].

The re-establishment of the MPVPV increased the enforcement of a wide range of directives related to extramarital relationships, dress code, attendance at prayers, and music [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2., pp. 24-25; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.3., pp. 41-43; [Country Focus 2022](#), 1.4., p. 25].

The Taliban's views on persons leaving Afghanistan for Western countries remain ambiguous. On the one hand, the Taliban have said that people flee due to poverty and that it has nothing to do with any fear of them, adding that they were attracted by the economically better life in the West. Another narrative about persons leaving Afghanistan has been about the elites that left. They were not seen as 'Afghans', but as corrupt 'puppets' of the 'occupation', who lacked 'roots' in Afghanistan. This narrative could also include, for example, activists, media workers and intellectuals, in addition to former government officials. According to the source that described this, these narratives also existed among the general population, as there was an anger towards the previous government and elites due to corruption and failures [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.11.3., pp. 97-98; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.5., p. 50].

Although the Taliban did not systematically restrict migration at overland crossing, obstacles have been created for people wanting to leave. For example, documents related to travelling abroad have become monetised, and bribes for passports have increased significantly. Senior Taliban officials called upon Afghans to stay in Afghanistan, and reportedly asked citizens to refrain from using smugglers and illegal pathways to go to foreign countries. The Taliban Deputy Minister for Refugees and Repatriations also stated

that it was not ‘appropriate’ for Western nations to facilitate Afghans’ departure by inviting them and promising asylum. On 27 February 2022, the Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid stated that persons leaving Afghanistan had ‘no excuse’ and that the Taliban were preventing them from leaving. On 1 March 2022, Mujahid clarified on social media that he had meant that persons with legal documents and invitations could travel from and return to Afghanistan [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.11.3., pp. 97-98; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.5., pp. 50-52].

Taliban officials have repeatedly called on Afghans to return to Afghanistan. They have also communicated that former officials returning from abroad will be ensured safety and established a commission for the ‘Return and Communications with Former Afghan Officials and Political Figures’ in March 2022. There have been reports about Afghans returning voluntarily to Afghanistan, to relocate there, for business, to visit family, and to go on holiday – including from Europe and the US [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.1.1., pp. 57-58; 4.11.1., pp. 96-97].

It is reported that the Taliban have minimal background information on returning individuals and a source described the Taliban’s approach towards returnees as ‘lenient’. However, a human rights activist stated that high-profile individuals might face problems if they would return. An anonymous organisation with presence in Afghanistan stated that sometimes people were targeted when they returned to Afghanistan, but the source did not see any clear connections simply to the fact that these individuals had left the country. Rather, the targeting seemed to be connected to the reason for their initial departure from Afghanistan. Similarly, another source noted that it was not his impression that Afghans returning from the West would be subject to targeting by the Taliban, unless it was a result of a personal dispute or vendetta [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.11.4., p. 99; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.5.2., p. 55].

Already before the Taliban takeover in 2021, there were accounts of a stigma of those being returned. There was reportedly a common perception that a person must have committed a crime to be deported, or that people returning from Europe were ‘loaded with money’. Out of fear of being harassed or robbed, some did not disclose that they were returnees. A source noted that when people left for Europe, applied for asylum and then involuntarily returned or were deported, they could raise suspicion and questions as regards to what extent they had been ‘contaminated’ by European ways of living. After the takeover, many states suspended deportations of Afghans, while IOM and Frontex have stopped activities facilitating or accompanying returns to Afghanistan. Therefore, no recent information is available about individuals being deported or returned from the EU [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.11.4., p. 98; 4.11.5., p. 100; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.5.1., p. 51].

One source reported that those who left after 2021 were often seen as traitors and sinners by the Taliban as, according to their vision, Afghans should stay to give their contribution to the country. The same source also reported that the Taliban have harassed family members of people who left the country and gave examples of neighbours asking questions about deported individuals’ time in the West, inspecting behaviours, seeking for signs of change, and making assumptions about how they had been impacted. The same source emphasised that apparently minor accusations, such as someone having had a girlfriend or having drunk alcohol in Europe, easily spread and may lead to conflicts [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.11.3., pp. 97-98; 4.11.5., p. 100].

The Taliban reportedly have the aim to ‘purify’ Afghan society and eject foreign influence from Afghanistan. Sources noted that individuals seen as ‘Westernised’ may be threatened by the Taliban, relatives, or neighbours. In some cases, men were reportedly harassed by Taliban fighters for wearing Western style clothes or attacked in public because they were seen as ‘traitors’ or ‘unbelievers’ [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.12.1., p. 101; [Security 2022](#), 1.2.3, p. 31; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.5.1, pp. 50-53]. Even though no general dress code for men has been issued, some sources described cases of men stopped and harassed by Taliban fighters for wearing Western style clothes or shaving their beards, and reportedly the Taliban have imposed on government employees to grow beards and wear traditional clothing [[Country Focus 2023](#), 1.2.2., p. 25; 4.12.1., p. 101; [Targeting 2022](#), 1.3.2., pp. 43-44; 1.3.3., pp. 47-48].

Already before the takeover, women who worked outside the home could be seen as ‘Westernised’, faced frequent sexual harassment and abuse at the workplace and could be considered by society as transgressing moral codes, as bringing dishonour to the family (e.g. women in law enforcement), and as being non-Afghan or Western (e.g. women in journalism). Women in public roles commonly faced intimidation, threats, violence, or killings [[Targeting 2022](#), 5.1.3., pp. 88-89; [Country Focus 2022](#), 2.1., p. 33; [COI query on westernisation](#), 1.2., p. 8; [Society-based targeting](#), 8.10., p. 106]. Reportedly, the supreme leader is determined to implement the Taliban’s version of *sharia* to ‘purify’ Afghan society. In this view, the policy of the Taliban around education is not only against female education, it is against Western education altogether, and in this context, the *de facto* authorities have invested vast resources in building mosques and *madrassas* across the country [[Country Focus 2023](#), 4.9., p. 94; 4.12.1., p. 101].

Other links to the Western countries, such as the teaching and learning of English language could also lead to violence by the *de facto* authorities. On 18 August 2021, two students were reportedly beaten by the Taliban while attempting to go to English classes, as it was considered ‘infidels language’. [[Targeting 2022](#), 12.3., p. 187]. In March 2022, foreign drama series were also prohibited [[Targeting 2022](#), 1.3.2., pp. 43-44].

Conclusions and guidance⁶

Do the acts qualify as persecution under Article 9 QD?

Some acts reported to be committed against individuals under this profile are of such severe nature that they amount to persecution (e.g. violence, or killings). 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 the applicant to face persecution should take into account risk-impacting circumstances, such as: the behaviour adopted by the applicant, visibility of the applicant, area of origin and conservative environment, gender (the risk is higher for women), age, duration of stay in a western country, etc.



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, and/or membership of a particular social group. The latter could be based on shared characteristic, such as a common background which cannot be changed (perceived past behaviour) and a distinct identity in the context of Afghanistan, linked to their stigmatisation by the surrounding society, or a belief that is so fundamental to identity or conscience that they should not be forced to renounce it (opposition to cultural, social or religious norms and the unwillingness to comply with them).

Take note that a request for preliminary ruling concerning the topic is currently pending at CJEU, [Case C-646/21](#). See Opinion of the Advocate General Collins from 13 July 2023.

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