

Returning to Fragility: Assessing Resettlement Conditions for Afghan Returnees

Introduction

Since 2015, more than 2 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan in the midst of continued conflict and instability. The returnees are largely from Pakistan and Iran with a considerable number arriving from different parts of Europe. Marred by conflict for four decades, Afghanistan's capacity to resettle these returnees remain minimal as violence and internal displacement escalate in the country.

Afghanistan has seen heightened incidents of conflict-related violence over the last two years. The continuous and spontaneous nature of repatriation to Afghanistan puts them at risk of physical harm in addition to prolonging their resettlement. Most returnees find themselves in urban areas and do not always make it to their planned destination. Staying in overcrowded urban settlements strains the collective resources available. Given these security and stability concerns, this project aims to identify optimal areas of resettlement for Afghan returnees. Here, suitability is defined in terms of access to services and proximity from conflict. With an understanding that keeping returnees from physical danger is crucial for their long term resettlement, the project studies returnees' mobility, access to health services in a country that continues to be in "active" conflict.

Spatial Questions

Through a geospatial suitability analysis framework, the project asks:

1. Where are Afghan returnees concentrated in the country?
2. Which areas in Afghanistan are best suitable for returnee resettlement?
(Best suitable = High access to services and Low conflict)

Methodology

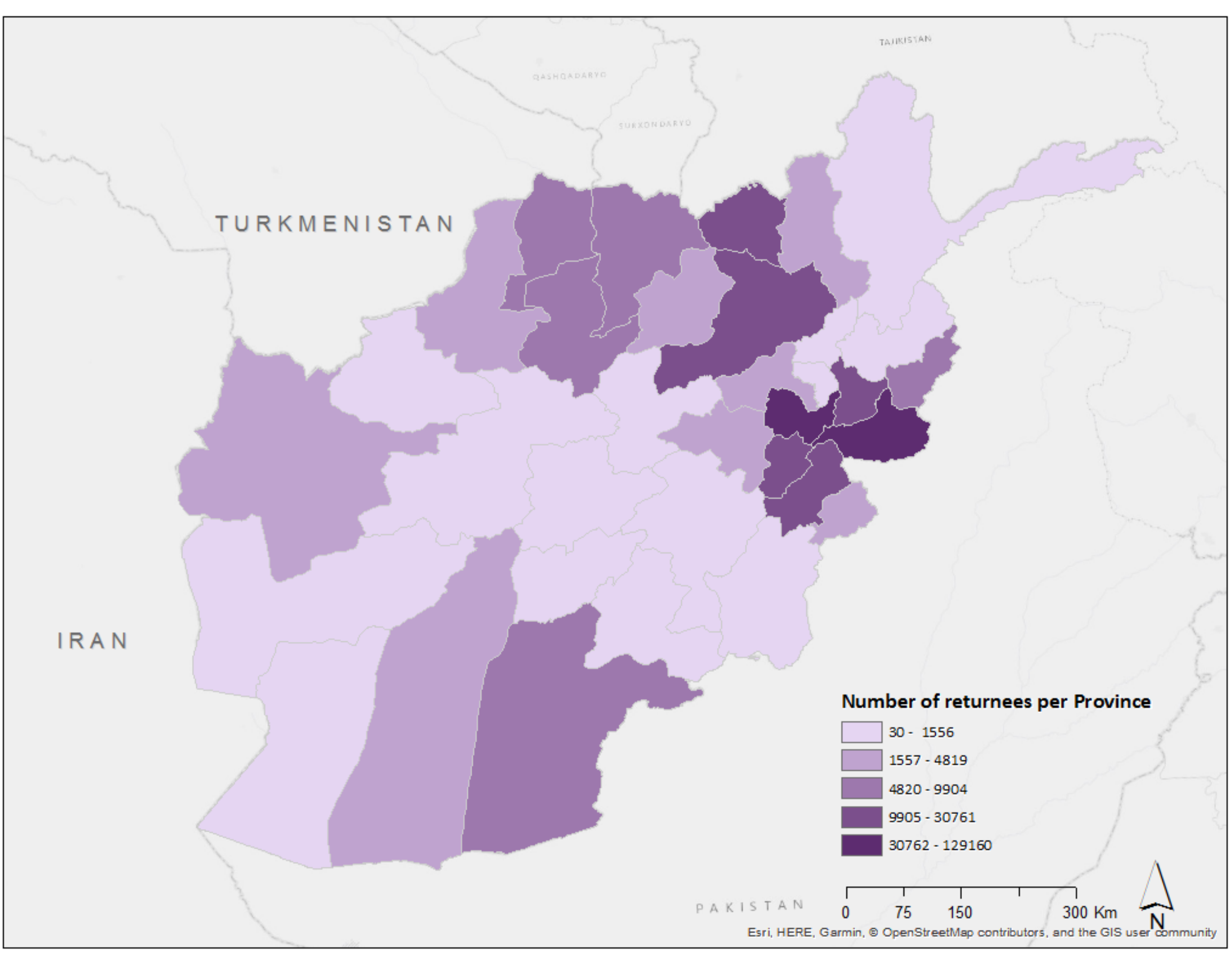
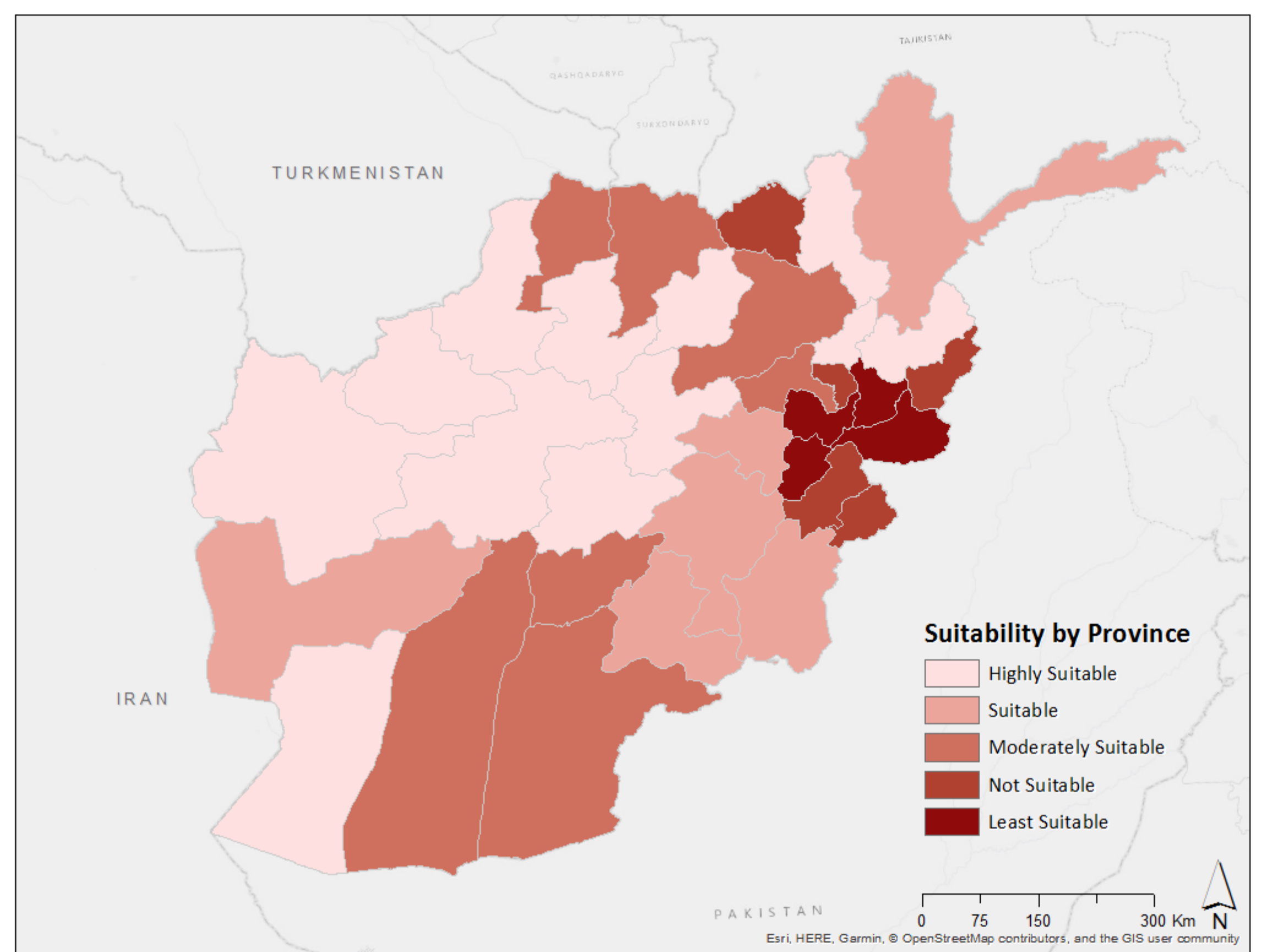
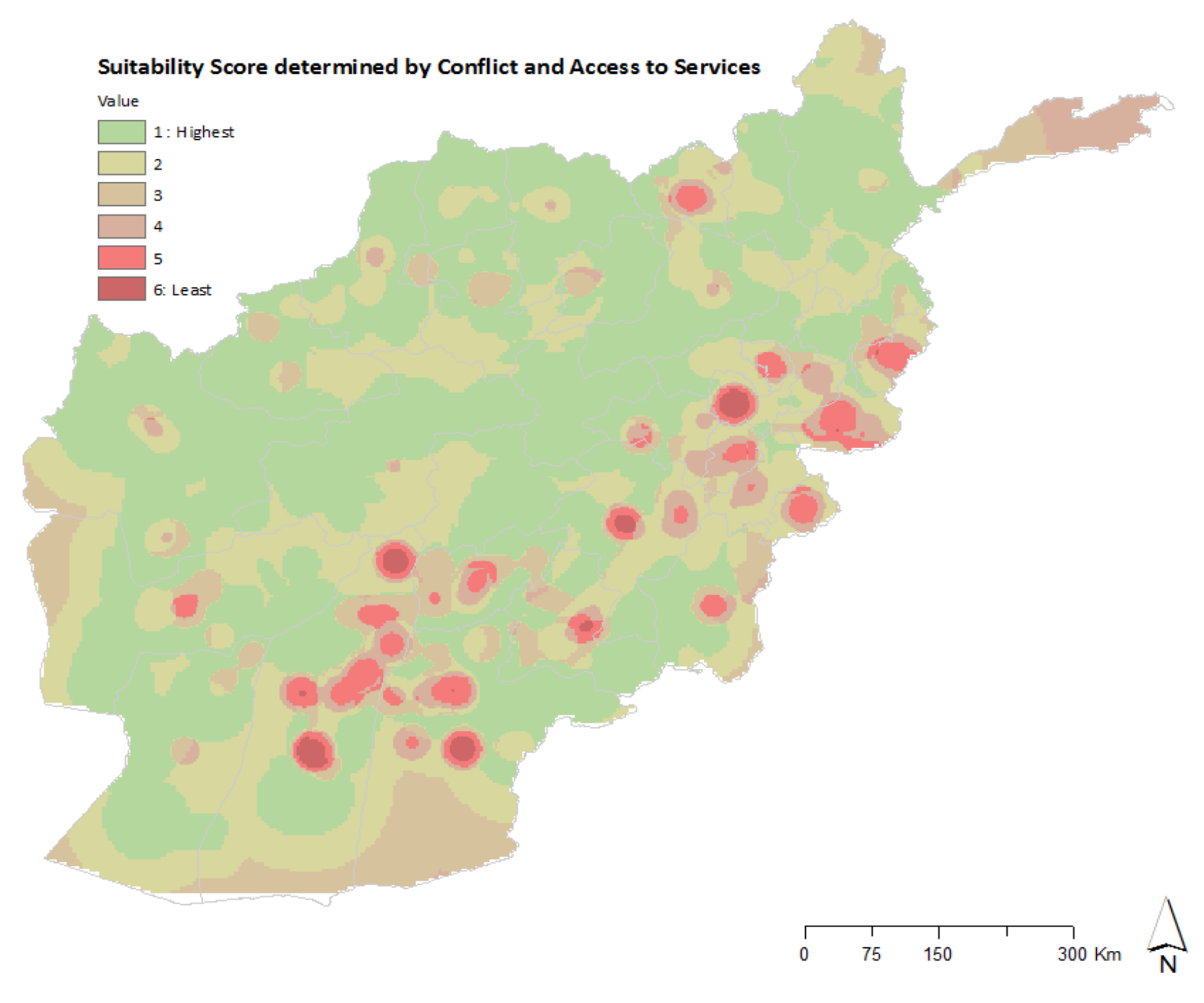
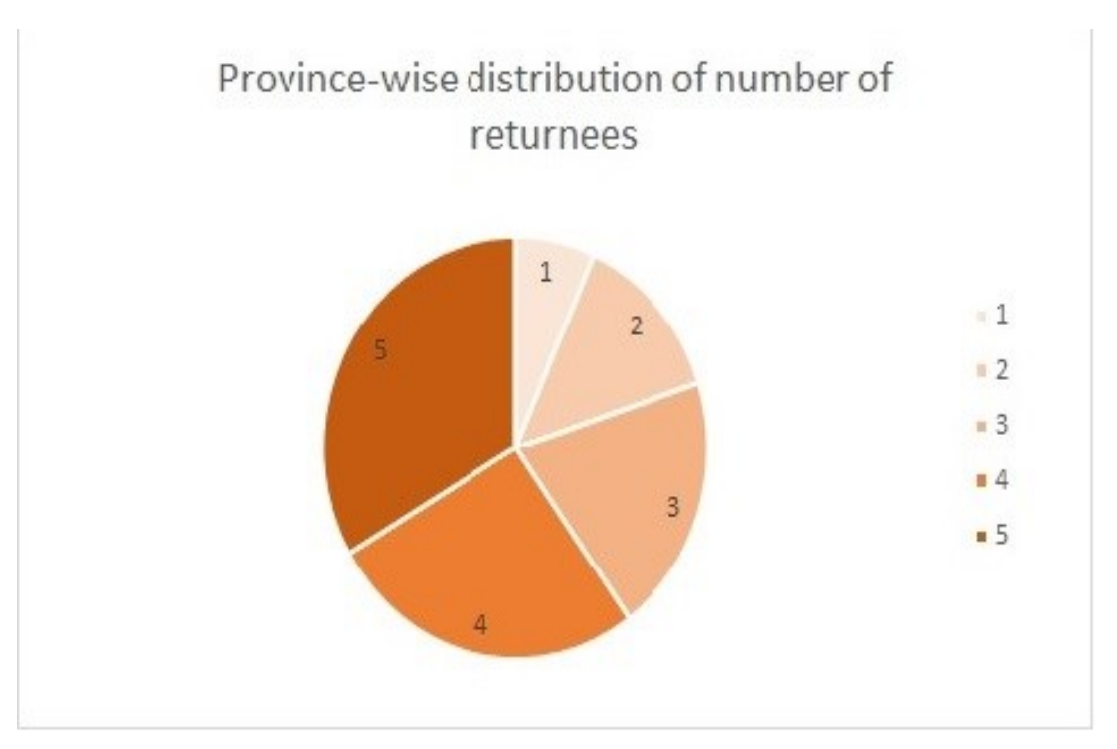
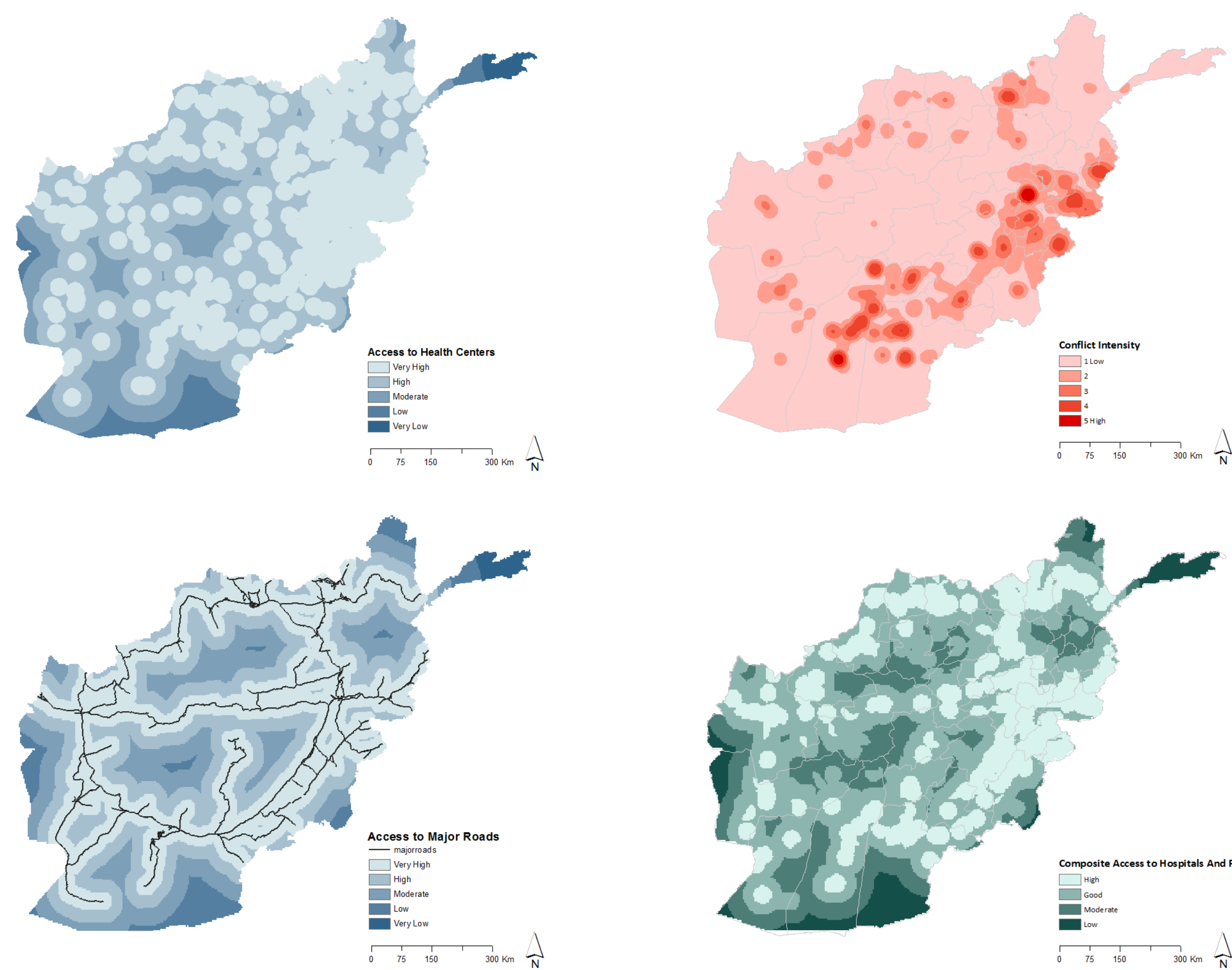
To answer the research questions, a suitability assessment was conducted with data collected at the province level. A score is given for each identified indicator to finally determine the suitability score for each province.

The indicators are: 1) Access to health centers; 2) Access to major roads; 3) Proximity from conflict.

After analyzing the indicators separately, a spatial analysis was conducted to determine composite access to services (roads + health centers). This was further measured against conflict hotspots, and finally aggregated to determine how suitable each province is. By determining the returnee distribution in each of these provinces, the suitability score determined by conflict and access to resources was aggregated to see how suitable these areas are for residing returnees.

Conclusion

Most returnees are concentrated in eastern Afghanistan in Kabul and Nangarhar provinces. Being urban centers, they are close to major roads and health centers but also highly prone to conflict. The other least suitable areas in the north are also high returnee-receiving provinces. The analysis demonstrates that more than 50 percent of returnees live in provinces that are unsuitable for resettlement. With more people returning on a daily basis, tensions are likely to grow and pressure on scarce resources will increase, exacerbating inequalities in this unstable and fragile country. Sending Afghans back to volatile areas will likely result only in more displacement



Coordination System: WGS 1984 UTM 41N
Data Sources : UNHCR Refugee Data, Uppsala Conflict Data Program, Database of Global Administrative Areas, Tufts Geodata, Afghanistan Information Management Services.

Limitations

Much of the data collected is at the provincial level. Hence, this doesn't give us a better picture of the resources available to returnees at the district level. Further, resettlement cannot be defined by the indicators used in these project alone. Using other indicators for long-term resettlement was beyond the scope of this project.

