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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF NORDIC COUNTRIES' RESPONSES TO THE UKRAINE-RUSSIA WAR

*Hasibul Alam*¹

¹ Department of History, Jahangirnagar University, Savar, Dhaka – 1342

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Abstract

The Nordic Countries have taken different approaches towards a shared goal of helping Ukraine's independence and sovereignty against Russia's invasion while securing the safety of the Nordic region. The Nordic countries have taken and resettled over 0.2 million Ukrainian refugees since the beginning of the war as of early 2024. The combined financial aid to Ukraine from the Nordic countries totals approximately €19.03 billion. Among the Nordic countries, Denmark and Finland have taken a military-centric approach by sending most of their funds towards military support, while Sweden took a more humanitarian approach. Iceland and Norway took a balanced approach maintaining equality in terms of providing humanitarian and military aid. Denmark, Norway and Sweden have taken a long-term initiative towards helping Ukraine. Even Iceland is also undergoing the approval of a five-year-long plan to help Ukraine in the war. All five of the Nordic countries are now members of NATO, as Finland and Sweden have joined recently, to ensure the security of the Nordic region. The Nordic countries have sided with Ukraine against Russia since the beginning of the invasion and plan on supporting it as long as it takes.

Keywords: *Ukraine-Russia War; Nordic Countries; Official Responses; Financial; Humanitarian; Military; Refugee*

Introduction

Europe has not seen a devastating war since World War II (1939–1945) until Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, with a massive military assault on Ukrainian cities (Khvostunova, 2022). This invasion has displaced the entire community and caused substantial damage to the environment and the people of Ukraine while imposing serious questions about the future of Europe and the credibility of NATO (Pifer,

2022). As of February 2024, 3.7 million people are internally displaced, 6.5 million people have fled from Ukraine and become refugees in their neighbouring countries and 14.6 million people need humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 2024). The welfare of these vulnerable communities is a major concern for the host countries and international organisations. Ukraine has been resisting the invasion while upholding its territorial integrity and sovereignty with the assistance

of the members European Union, NATO and the United Nations (Kusa, 2022). In response to the invasion, the majority of the countries have imposed economic sanctions on Russia and denied cooperation in almost every sector (Beauregard, 2021). The European Union established a Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for the refugees of war on March 17, 2022, as a humanitarian response to the Ukraine-Russia War (Dumbrava, 2022). According to this directive, members of the European Union would provide three years of asylum and other benefits to refugees from Ukraine (Beirens et al., 2016). The Nordic countries consisting of Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden are greatly concerned about Russia's aggression (Zeidan, 2024). These countries are members of the European Union except Norway, which is a close ally of the European Union and has been impacted greatly due to the invasion as they are close to the northeastern Russian border. This research paper will cover and compare the response in refugee resettlement, humanitarian aid and military aid of the five Nordic countries regarding the Ukraine-Russia War from the beginning of the war in 2022 up to early 2024.

The NATO Paradox and Russia's Selective Aggression on Ukraine

In 2014 in an unexpected turn of events, Russia annexed Crimea which was part of Ukraine (Suslov, 2014). About a decade later, Russia launched a full-scale military occupation of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, claiming to protect the Russian-speaking minorities in Donetsk and Luhansk region that had announced their independence back in 2014 (Ramani, 2023). Preventing Ukraine from joining NATO was another reason behind the invasion according to Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia (Vlamiš, 2022). NATO is a military alliance of 32 countries in Europe and North America established in 1949 by the North Atlantic Treaty also known as the Washington Treaty (NATO, 2022 b). Ukraine joining the European Union and NATO would pose a national threat to Russia as it would allow American and Western soldiers to position themselves near the borders of Russia. But recently, Finland and Sweden became

the new members of NATO, which are also neighbours to Russia like Ukraine and yet Russia doesn't seem to take any action to prevent it or be bothered by it (Dickinson, 2023). Denmark, Iceland and Norway were already members of NATO but to defend the sovereignty of the Nordic Region and prevent Russia's further aggression Finland and Sweden had shown their interest in joining NATO after the invasion of Ukraine (NATO, 2022a). In 2023, Finland became the 31st member of NATO (NATO, 2023 a). The Swedish government has reinstated obligatory military service, moved soldiers to Gotland, and purchased new fighter jets and submarines while they were waiting for NATO membership approval (Day, 2024; Hofverberg, 2024; Torralba, 2023). On March 7 2024, Sweden officially became a member of NATO as their 32nd member ending their 200-year-long tradition of Non-Alignment in Europe (NATO, 2024). If Russia genuinely believed that NATO posed a national threat to Russia, it would have at least increased its military presence close to the Finnish borders. Instead, Russia reduced 80% of its troops deployment in that region which only means Russia is not concerned about NATO (Dickinson, 2023). So the actual reason behind Russia's invasion of Ukraine is still not clear. According to the United Nations Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine Report by Janowski (2023) on November 21, 2023, over ten thousand civilians have died including five hundred children and over eighteen thousand have been injured due to the selective aggression on Ukraine.

Strategic Interdependence and Security Dilemmas in the Nordic Response to Russian Aggression

Geopolitics is the field of study that shows how the geography of a region becomes a crucial factor behind diplomatic relations and foreign policies (Deudney, 2024). Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden are known as the Nordic countries as they are situated in the northern part of Europe (Zeidan, 2024). The Nordic countries are close to the borders of Russia and have a long history of cooperation (Mehedinți, 2013). They have maintained fairly good diplomatic relations

and cultural exchanges, including joint projects on nuclear safety, protecting the environment and Arctic research (Kelk, 2020). The Nordic countries are also dependent on Russia through various channels (Bella et al., 2022). Though the Nordic countries have diversified green energy sources such as hydro-power, wind and biomass, however, they are still dependent on Russia for importing Oil and Gas (Kral and Fennessy, 2022). Nordic countries are involved in substantial trade and investment with Ukraine and Russia in the areas of agriculture, industry and metals (Ruta, 2022). These diplomatic and commercial relationships were, regrettably, jeopardised as Russia's invasion of Ukraine has increased mistrust and suspicion. The Nordic states are concerned about the security consequences and regional extension of the crisis, given their proximity to Russia and Ukraine. So the Nordic countries have decided to side with Ukraine to prevent Russia's further aggression into Europe. To stabilise the area and increase Ukraine's defences, the governments of the Nordic countries are providing financial aid and implementing coordinated security measures. The national interests and strategic objectives have impacted the perspective of the Nordic states in terms of humanitarian and military aid. Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be seen as a geopolitical strategy for Russia's imperialistic ambitions. Theoretically, if Russia becomes successful in taking control of Ukraine it would open the path to expand further into Europe which includes the Nordic countries. Sir Patrick Sanders, the Chief of the General Staff of the UK, stated that the invasion of Ukraine could be a "1937 Moment" where Europe failed to confront Nazi Germany's ambition and territorial expansion, which led to World War II (Haynes, 2022). Moreover, Russia might use its forward position in the Black Sea and the Mediterranean to expand into the Baltic Sea and the Arctic region which are very important to the Nordic countries. The Baltic Sea is an essential trade route to the Arctic which has natural resources such as oil, gas, minerals, fish and much more (Vanags, 2011). Due to global warming and the melting of ice in the Arctic region, new trade opportunities for the Nordic Countries will open (Le Pan, 2020). So, Russia's aggression based on uncleared motivation poses a signif-

icant threat to the future economic development of the Nordic region.

Methodology

The methodology for this research is qualitative and based on secondary sources to look into the Nordic countries' aid programmes and policies. Secondary sources, like educational journals, government press releases, reports, newspapers, and other types of media coverage, give researchers access to a wide range of information that helps them understand things in more depth and breadth. Scholarly journals are very useful because they have pieces written by experts in the field that have been reviewed by other experts in the field. Government press releases and reports give official views and facts that are necessary to understand the policies' goals, how they were put into action, and the results. Newspapers and other forms of media coverage help put academic and government information in context by giving timely reports, public views, and editorial points of view. This mix of secondary sources gives a complete picture of the Nordic countries' aid efforts, showing not only the policies but also how they were received and how well they worked.

Results

Policies of the Nordic Countries on Refugee Resettlement

The Ukraine-Russia War has forced 6,479,700 people globally to leave the country as of 15 February 2024, causing a devastating humanitarian crisis (The Operational Data Portal, 2024). In response to this crisis, many countries have offered to resettle the refugees including the Nordic countries who have taken and resettled 3.3% of the Ukrainian Refugees. Regarding the issue of providing temporary asylum, the Nordic countries had to figure out the balance between being generous and practical while promoting international cooperation. This shows the consistency of the Nordic countries towards the Policies of the European Union. In this section, the resettling of Ukrainian Refugees since the beginning of the war in 2022 up to early 2024 will be compared and thoroughly analysed to point out the patterns of the resettlement process.

Table 1. *Refugee Statistics of Nordic Countries for Ukrainians as of February 2024*

Country	Data Date	Refugees from Ukraine recorded in the country as of 15 February 2024	Refugees from Ukraine who applied for Asylum schemes as of 15 February 2024	Acceptance Rate
Denmark	31 December 2023	37.160	48.680	76%
Iceland	28 January 2024	3.910	3.880	101%
Norway	2 February 2024	68.060	74.030	92%
Finland	31 January 2024	65.515	66.010	99%
Sweden	25 January 2024	42.040	64.900	65%
Total		216.685	257.500	84%

Note. The figure is from *The Operational Data Portal (2024)* which presents an aggregated estimate of the number of Ukrainian refugees who have sought asylum, temporary protection, or comparable notions in European countries since February 24 2022. The figures might include duplicate registrations of the same person in different European countries or registrations of refugees who have since left Europe

As of February 15, 2024, a total number of 216,685 refugees from Ukraine are resettled in the Nordic nations. This represents around 0.78% of the overall population of the Nordic countries, which is approximately 27.8 million people (Herning, 2024). Comparing the Nordic nations to other parts of the globe, it seems that they have been comparatively kind and hospitable in their acceptance of Ukrainian migrants. There are now 257,500 Ukrainian refugees who have applied for asylum, which is almost 18.7% higher than the total number of refugees officially registered in the Nordic countries. This can lead to confusion and concern for the refugees as well as difficulties for the authorities as it indicates that there is a large backlog of asylum applications that have not yet been reviewed or resolved. On average, the Nordic countries have accepted an average of 84% of the refugees who applied for temporary asylum. This number represents that the Nordic countries have been relatively fair and consistent in terms of granting the Ukrainian refugees based on their eligibility. Among the five Nordic countries, Iceland stands out as the country with the highest acceptance rate which is 101% showing that Iceland has accepted more refugees than the number of applicants that applied for asylum. Iceland's high acceptance rate represents its strong commit-

ment to human rights and international solidarity. But in numbers, Iceland has taken only 3,910 refugees which is the lowest among the Nordic countries. Although Sweden has taken 42,040 refugees, it has the lowest acceptance rate of 65% of the five Nordic countries. The reason behind the lower acceptance rate is that the number of applicants is quite high. Sweden has a policy of providing Refugees with a daily allowance which could be the reason behind the high number of applicants and high rejection rate (Swedish Migration Agency, 2024). Due to the higher number of applicants, Sweden has chosen to be cautious and practical with strict rules and regulations regarding the refugees. It can be assumed that Sweden doesn't allow any refugees that can't be taken care of by their initiative. Norway and Finland have accepted similar numbers of Ukrainian Refugees with 68,060 and 65,515 respectively. However, in terms of asylum applications, Norway has received more applicants than any other Nordic country. This could indicate that Norway is more attractive to seek refuge as Norway's policy towards refugees allows them to work freely in the country. Finland has the highest acceptance rate which is 99% while Norway has a 92% acceptance rate which represents both Norway and Finland's humanitarian commitment to the

people in Ukraine. After Norway and Finland, Denmark has a 76% acceptance rate which is the third highest among the Nordic countries. With a total of 37,160 refugees accepted from Ukraine since the beginning of the war with an acceptance rate, Denmark has become a strong ally of Ukraine despite being a small country. While it's lower than Finland and Norway, Denmark's acceptance rate of 76% is higher than Sweden's. The number of applicants Denmark received was 48,680 which suggests that Denmark is a preferred destination for refugees. While the Nordic countries have different policies and practices on refugee resettlement, they share some common values and principles such as generosity, fair-

ness, consistency and practicality to uphold their commitment towards humanitarianism.

The Difference in the Nordic Countries' Priorities for Military and Humanitarian Aid for Ukraine

The priorities of the Nordic countries in providing humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine can be understood from socio-economic and geopolitical factors including their relationship with both Russia and Ukraine. The responses are shaped by their differences but towards a shared goal. The combined figures of the humanitarian aid to Ukraine amount to €19.03 billion, with a slightly higher percentage going towards military aid (54.34%).

Table 2. Nordic Countries' Humanitarian and Military Aid Contributions in Early 2024

Country	Data Date	Humanitarian Aid (€ billion)	Military Aid (€ billion)	Total Aid (€ billion)	Humanitarian Aid Percentage	Military Aid Percentage	Humanitarian/Military Aid Ratio
Denmark	January 2, 2024	0.41	4.5	4.91	8.37%	91.63%	0.09
Iceland	February 28, 2024	0.021	0.017	0.038	55.01%	44.99%	1.22
Norway	February 7, 2024	1.32	1.34	2.66	49.62%	50.38%	0.99
Finland	February 28, 2024	0.589	1.8	2.39	24.69%	75.31%	0.33
Sweden	December 12, 2023	6.35	2.68	9.03	70.32%	29.68%	2.37
Total		8.69	10.34	19.03	45.66%	54.34%	0.84

Note. This table is based on the most recent press releases from the Government of Iceland, (2024a), Government Offices of Sweden (2023b), Government Offices of Sweden, (2023 c), Ministry of Defence of Finland (2023), Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, (2024b) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark (2024c) which provides a visual understanding of the Nordic countries' different priorities in the Ukraine-Russia War

Denmark has donated a total of €4.91 billion, with €0.41 billion towards humanitarian aid and 91.63% towards military aid. With a total of €4.5 billion, Denmark is the highest military aid provider to Ukraine among the Nordic countries. The ratio of humanitarian aid to military aid is 0.09 which indicates Denmark's strategic decision to prioritise Ukraine's defensive capabilities. Denmark is one of the 12 founding members of NATO and has a long tra-

dition of supporting NATO initiatives (NATO, 2023b). The substantial military aid towards Ukraine can be interpreted as a continuation of this policy to keep the balance of power in Europe. Russia always had a keen interest in the high seas and Denmark's position at the entrance to the Baltic Sea could impose a national threat if Ukraine fell to Russia which could also be the reason behind the military-centric policy towards Ukraine (Holtmark, 1994).

Iceland doesn't have its military, instead, Iceland uses the Icelandic Coast Guard for Defence, a civilian agency that is responsible for search and rescue, maritime safety and security surveillance, and law enforcement in the seas surrounding Iceland (Mah, 2017). So, Iceland couldn't help Ukraine directly by sending troops through NATO initiative even if it were necessary. But Iceland has taken several steps to aid Ukraine which includes transporting military equipment. Iceland has taken a balanced approach towards Ukraine with total aid amounting to €0.038 billion with a slight preference towards humanitarian aid. About 55.01% of the aid is provided towards humanitarian while 44.99% is towards military aid. This shows Iceland's traditional foreign policy towards humanitarian initiatives. The humanitarian aid to military aid ratio which is 1.22 further underscores this balanced approach.

Norway has been criticised for profiting from the global economic sanction against Russia. But it has also taken a balanced approach similar to Iceland's between humanitarian aid and military aid totalling €2.66 billion. Norway has donated €1.23 billion in humanitarian aid and €1.34 billion in military aid since the beginning of the war in 2022. The humanitarian aid to military aid ratio is 0.99 which indicates a clear balance in their initiative. This balanced approach is a diplomatic initiative that shows a carefully calibrated response to the Ukraine-Russia War as Norway shares a close border with Russia.

Finland has taken a military-centric approach similar to Denmark allocating 75.31% of their aid towards Ukraine's defence. Finland has donated about €1.8 billion in military aid and €0.589 towards humanitarian aid totalling €2.39 billion. The humanitarian aid to military aid ratio is 0.33 which further indicates the military-centric approach of Finland. Finland shares the closest border with Russia which has become the most significant factor in their foreign policy.

Sweden particularly stood out among the Nordic countries with the total aid of €9.03 billion which is almost half of the total aid provided by the Nordic countries. With a 70.32% towards humanitarian aid, Sweden is the only country among the Nordic coun-

tries which prioritised humanitarian aid instead of military aid. Sweden has a 200-year long tradition of non-alignment which explains this approach. Perhaps the Swedish government's internal political principles which centre on protecting human rights, influenced the choice to prioritise humanitarian aid over military support. Although in terms of numbers, Sweden has provided the 2nd highest amount towards military aid €2.68 billion. But as Sweden became the 32nd member of NATO, the priority could shift in the upcoming years, but it is a commitment towards ensuring their national security (Persson and Widmalm, 2023). Sweden's humanitarian focus may be rooted in its culture of neutrality and peacekeeping, in contrast to the large military help provided by Finland and Denmark, which may be viewed as a reaction to perceived security concerns.

From a historical sense, Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be compared with Nazi Germany's expansion policy before the Second World War. Before Nazi Germany invaded Poland which started the second world war, Nazi Germany was taking Austria, Czechoslovakia and other neighbouring countries while European Countries did not intervene until it was already too late. But when Russia invaded Ukraine, almost every European country, including the Nordic countries sided with Ukraine to stop the aggression from further expanding into Europe. Therefore, the Nordic countries' humanitarian and military aid stems from the deeply rooted concern of Russia's aggression which will impact the overall security of Europe.

The Interconnection Between Combined GDP of 2022–23 and Aid Contributions Among the Nordic Countries to Ukraine

Ukraine's sovereignty and stability are strongly supported by the Nordic countries based on shared values of human rights and international law. The Nordic countries had a long history of cooperation and solidarity in promoting global peace and global development by taking part in several International Organisations. The Nordic countries understand the humanitarian needs of the Ukrainians and know the value and importance of the sovereignty of Ukraine and its people as well as the necessity of preventing Russia's further aggression towards Europe.

Table 3. *A comparison between the combined GDP of the Nordic Countries and the total aid provided to Ukraine since 2022*

Country	2022 GDP (€ billion)	2023 GDP (€ billion)	Combined GDP of 2022 and 2023 (€ billion)	Total Aid (€ bil- lion)	Aid as Percent- age of Com- bined GDP
Denmark	365.02	382.93	747.95	4.91	0.66%
Iceland	25.54	27.82	53.36	0.037	0.07%
Norway	527.27	497.56	1024.83	2.66	0.26%
Finland	257.64	278.18	535.82	2.39	0.45%
Sweden	538.18	543.37	1081.55	9.03	0.83%
Total	1713.66	1729.85	3443.51	19.03	0.55%

Note. The table from IMF (2023) shows the interconnection between the five Nordic Countries' combined GDP of 2022 and 2023 and the total aid provided since the beginning of the war. As there's no reliable source that will provide how much aid was provided to Ukraine each year by the Nordic countries, a combined GDP of 2022 and 2023 was used to calculate the aid percentage

According to the IMF (2023), the Nordic countries had a high level of GDP in both 2022 and 2023 which indicated their sufficiency to donate such a significant amount of financial aid to Ukraine. The countries have different GDPs as per their differences in sizes and economic structure which reflects their contribution to Ukraine as aid. In total, the Nordic countries have provided €19.03 billion, which is 0.55% of their combined GDP. Sweden has the highest GDP and the highest percentage of humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine among the Nordic countries, following Denmark, Finland, Norway and Iceland. Sweden has donated approximately €9.03 billion which is 0.83% of its combined GDP of 2022 and 2023 indicating its commitment to supporting Ukraine's development and stability. Denmark is the second largest donor among the Nordic countries, contributing €4.91 billion which is 0.66% of the combined GDP. Finland was the third largest donor, contributing approximately €2.39 billion which is 0.45% of the combined GDP. Norway has the second lowest aid percentage which is 0.26% despite its second highest combined GDP among the Nordic countries contributed €2.66 billion. Iceland has the lowest GDP among the Nordic countries as Iceland is a small island nation and has provided 0.07% of its GDP, the lowest among the Nordic countries. As Denmark, Norway and Sweden have the highest number in terms of GDP which

would explain their long-term initiative for Ukraine. In March 2023, Denmark established the Danish Ukraine Fund which was dedicated to financing future aid for Ukraine (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2023b). As of January 15 2024, Denmark's committed funds are about €8 billion, spanning from 2023 to 2028 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, 2023c). Even though Norway has the second lowest aid-to-GDP percentage ratio, the country established a multiyear scheme in February 2023 which is called the Nansen Support Program (Office of the Prime Minister, 2023). The Nansen Program amounts to €1.3 billion which covers both humanitarian and military assistance over five years from 2023 to 2027 (Office of the Prime Minister, 2023). Sweden also initiated their multi-year program called the Recovery and Reform Cooperation Agreement for Ukraine which will provide €522 million from 2023 until 2027 (Ministry for Foreign Affairs, 2023). Aside from Denmark, Norway and Sweden, Iceland is also planning to initiate a multi-year program but it's still undergoing approval from the parliament (The Government of Iceland, 2024b). It shows that the Nordic countries are bound by their common goal towards maintaining peace in Europe.

Discussion

Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Finland and Sweden have all spoken out politically and

diplomatically against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Most of the official relations between Russia and the Nordic Countries were terminated after the invasion. More than that, they are standing by the independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The countries have resettled a significant sum of the refugees who fled from Ukraine. About 216,685 Ukrainians found refuge in the Nordic countries which shows the dedication to humanitarianism and respect for international law. Furthermore, donating humanitarian aid and military support to Ukraine during this crisis demonstrates Nordic Countries' commitment to peace. Considering the geopolitical situation, Denmark and Finland took a military-centric approach while Sweden took a humanitarian-centric approach. Iceland and Norway took a balanced approach to helping Ukraine. Denmark, Norway and Sweden's multiyear initiative to aid Ukraine is a diplomatic agreement against Russia to safeguard the interests of the Nordic region. As part of the reaction to the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, Sweden and Finland officially joined NATO to further safeguard their national interests. Since the beginning of the war, the Nordic countries have provided an average of 0.55% of their combined GDP in 2022 and 2022 with Sweden having the highest percentage (0.83%) while Iceland has the lowest percentage (0.07%). Some of the Nordic countries even announced a long-term support programme for Ukraine. Therefore, these countries are committed to bringing global peace by stopping Russia through their collective sanctions, humanitarian aid, military aid and their support for diplomatic solutions. To further encourage peaceful settlement processes, the Nordic nations have initiated economic sanctions against Russia which affected their trade and collaboration. Security and defence cooperation between NATO and all of the Nordic countries has been

enhanced and this alliance will surely provide a hand to Ukraine. All of the Nordic countries are part of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group led by the US and has been providing military support to Ukraine (US Mission to NATO, 2022). In the joint statement of the Nordic-Ukrainian Summit in Oslo on 13 December 2023, the Nordic nations have declared their unwavering support for Ukraine as long as the war continues (Government Offices of Sweden, 2023a). As a contingency measure for Russia's increasing military activities, the Nordic countries have fortified their military forces. At the Helsinki summit on March 3, 2023, the five Nordic countries and Ukraine denounced Russia's behaviour politically, economically, in terms of humanitarian aid, and militarily, should the necessity arise, the Nordic countries have promised to support Ukraine (Office of the President of the Republic of Finland, 2023). Nordic countries demanded a political and diplomatic resolution based on human rights and international law to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict peacefully and protect Ukraine's independence and territory. However, the responses of the Nordic countries to the Ukraine-Russia War might be impacted by several factors including historical ties, geopolitics and preventing potential future conflicts that would affect the Nordic Nations. Therefore, the Nordic countries have provided military and security cooperation, diplomatic assistance as well as refugee resettlement as part of their response to the crisis. The common dedication to democracy and human rights across the Nordic nations is the foundation of many humanitarian efforts, including assisting civilians, mediating peaceful settlement and resettling refugees. As a result, democratic principles, human rights, and adherence to international law have been explicitly recognized by governments in the Nordic countries.

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Contact: hasibulalam998@gmail.com