

# Study on the Long-Term Effects of Political Persecution and Migration: A Case-Control Study of Belarusian Refugees and Migrants

## Introduction

After the 2020 presidential election in Belarus, widespread protests erupted due to allegations of election fraud. The government responded with a harsh crackdown, leading to mass arrests, imprisonment, and abuse of protesters. As a result, between 200,000 and 600,000 Belarusians fled the country to escape persecution.

Many refugees face serious mental health challenges, such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety. However, most research on refugee mental health focuses on regions like Africa and Southeast Asia. This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on Belarusian political refugees and comparing their experiences with those of non-political migrants.

## Study Goals

1. Compare mental and physical health between political refugees and non-political migrants from Belarus.
2. Assess adaptation to new countries in terms of social life, work, and family.
3. Examine PTSD characteristics and struggles faced by political refugees through interviews.

**Main Hypothesis** People who have been imprisoned for political reasons are more likely to develop severe PTSD and other mental health issues.

## Study Design

- A case-control study with both surveys and interviews.
- Two groups:
  - **Group A:** Political refugees who fled due to persecution and have proof of imprisonment or repression.
  - **Group B:** migrants without experience of criminal political persecution from Belarus (e.g., jobs, better living conditions).

## Participant Criteria

- Must be 18 or older.
- Have lived outside Belarus for at least six months but no longer than five years.
- Must be able to understand Russian or Belarusian.
- Exclusions: Severe mental illness preventing participation or unclear migration reasons.

## Study Timeline

- **Nov-Dec 2024:** Develop research tools.
- **Dec 2024 - Feb 2025:** Conduct surveys.
- **March - April 2025:** Analyze data.
- **April - May 2025:** Present results.

## Sample Size

- At least 100 people per group to ensure reliable results.

## Data Collection

- **Surveys:** Conducted online via a secure platform with privacy protections.
- **Mental Health Measures:** Standard psychological tests will assess PTSD, depression, anxiety, stress, and quality of life.
- **Interviews:** 10-16 political refugees will be selected for in-depth discussions about their experiences.

## Ethics and Safety

- Participants' identities will remain confidential.
- Data storage will comply with international privacy laws.
- Support resources will be provided to participants in case of distress.
- Ethical approval will be obtained from a relevant institution.

## Data Analysis

- **Quantitative:** Statistical tests will compare mental health outcomes between groups.
- **Qualitative:** Interview data will be analyzed to identify common themes.

## Results and Sharing

- Findings will be published in academic journals and presented at conferences.
- A simplified summary will be shared with refugee support organizations.
- Anonymized data will be made available to researchers while ensuring participant confidentiality.

This study will help understand the unique challenges faced by Belarusian political refugees and guide future mental health support programs.