

# **Eighth progress report to supporting States**

1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025

Public





# 8th PROGRESS REPORT

## 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025

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## A. Executive summary

Throughout the reporting period, human rights violations in Belarus persisted at an alarming rate. Actions possibly amounting to crimes against humanity, as documented by numerous human rights organisations, are likely to endure, as individuals continued to be targeted systematically for their real or perceived dissent with the Belarusian regime. The period from October 2024 to March 2025 witnessed an intensification of repression and fraudulent elections, while the 26 January 2025 presidential elections in Belarus resulted in Aleksandr Lukashenko securing his seventh term in office amid widespread allegations of electoral fraud.

Despite ongoing political challenges and a difficult global funding situation for human rights projects, the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB) remains committed to supporting justice for victims and ensuring that those responsible for human rights violations and international crimes in Belarus are held accountable. Continued international attention and pressure are essential to address impunity for violations of international law in Belarus.

Between October 2024 and March 2025, Belarusian authorities intensified their crackdown on dissent:

- 2,958 politically motivated arrests and trials were recorded by the Human Rights Center Viasna.
- 1,205 political prisoners remained detained, including prominent human rights defenders Ales Bialiatski, Valiantsin Stefanovic, Uladzimir Labkovich, Maria Rabkova, Andrei Chapiuk, and Nasta Loika.
- Security forces targeted past protesters to instill fear ahead of the elections.
- 511 individuals were added to the 'extremist' list, and 19 organisations were designated extremist.
- Inhumane detention conditions led to two reported deaths in custody.
- Women detainees faced threats of sexual violence and separation from their children.
- Press freedom and legal defense were severely curtailed, with 41 journalists imprisoned and at least five lawyers disbarred.

Moreover, the Belarusian regime further extended its crackdown beyond its borders through trials *in absentia*, with 24 cases recorded between October 2024 and March 2025. A February 2025 amendment to the Criminal Code expanded the scope of such trials, raising human rights concerns. Authorities also increased surveillance of Belarusian expatriates engaged in opposition activities.

### **Evidence-gathering:**

The IAPB collected critical evidence during the reporting period:

- 76 survivors and witnesses provided testimonies, contributing to a total of 2,775 interviews in the IAPB's closed source database.
- 30,019 witness-related documents were compiled, detailing arrests, mistreatment, and repression.
- The open-source database was expanded to over 1.5 million open-source items,

including videos, images, and text records, to support judicial investigations.

- Linkage evidence analysis continues to establish chains of command linking high-ranking officials to crimes committed by subordinates.

### **Types of violations documented by the IAPB:**

- Physical ill-treatment during protests, arrests, detention and house searches, including excessive and indiscriminate use of force and less-lethal weapons.
- Psychological ill-treatment, including forced confessions and threats of detainees of being shot, burnt, beaten or raped, and threats against family members (e.g. of raping the detainee's wife).
- Sexual and gender-based violence (e.g. rape, threat of rape).
- Potentially unlawful killings during protests and in the context of deaths in detention.
- Inhumane detention conditions (e.g. severe overcrowding, inadequate food/water, extreme temperature, hard labour etc), with harsher conditions on political dissidents (e.g. overcrowded punishment cells without mattresses or bedding, being woken up throughout the night, frequent cell inspections with physical violence and forced nudity)
- Violations of due process rights (e.g. lack of information about charges, trials conducted without defence counsel, closed to the public, relying on fake witnesses and/or forced confessions)
- Violations of other fundamental rights (restrictions on freedom of movement, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, and private and family life)

### **Support of accountability bodies:**

The IAPB played a crucial role in advancing accountability at national and international levels during the reporting period. Following Lithuania's ICC referral of the situation in Belarus, in January 2025, the IAPB filed a submission relating to potential crimes against humanity in Belarus, including deportation and persecution.

The IAPB further:

- Provided assistance to national prosecution authorities in two jurisdictions, including evidence and factual analyses in relation to specific incidents in support of ongoing investigative efforts, bringing the total number of submissions to nine in response to requests from five countries.
- Strengthened cooperation with the UN Group of Independent Experts on Human Rights in Belarus (GIEB), providing 1,502 files of interview transcripts and supporting materials.
- Engaged with independent lawyers in two countries and facilitated access to legal evidence for domestic proceedings.
- Offered mental health and psychosocial support to all witnesses of State-perpetrated violence. Since 1 October 2024, 88 survivors (54 women and 34 men) have benefitted from the MHPSS services of the IAPB, bringing the total number to 652 since the establishment of the Platform.



## Networking, capacity-building and communication:

Furthermore, the IAPB continues to enhance its efforts despite financial and security challenges:

- Conducted a capacity-building workshop for Belarusian partners.
- Developed a new social media communication strategy.
- Expanded engagement with international organisations and advocacy bodies, including the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the EU Commission, and Eurojust.
- Supported other civil society organisations seeking accountability for crimes against humanity by sharing lessons learned from the IAPB.

## B. Brief overview of the IAPB

The IAPB is a consortium of independent non-government organisations that have joined forces to collect, verify, preserve, and analyse evidence of gross human rights violations constituting crimes under international law allegedly committed by Belarusian authorities and others in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and during the following years. The objective of the IAPB is to achieve accountability of perpetrators for serious violations of human rights and international criminal law in Belarus and redress for the victims. To this end, the IAPB directly assists criminal justice authorities and international accountability bodies in their investigation and prosecution of alleged perpetrators of these crimes.

The IAPB was created in March 2021 in response to the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Moscow Mechanism report on alleged human rights violations related to the presidential elections in Belarus, published on 5 November 2020. The report made a series of recommendations calling for accountability for the serious violations of international law in Belarus, and for the documentation and preservation of evidence to this end. The IAPB was created as a response to this call.

The consortium is composed of two Belarusian and one international co-lead organisations, Human Rights Center Viasna, International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, and REDRESS, and its lead organisation DIGNITY – Danish Institute against Torture.

Since its establishment, the IAPB is or has been supported by a wide range of States, notably (*countries in alphabetical order*) Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as the European Union.

## C. Project objectives

- **Strategic Outcome 1:** Consolidate the IAPB's evidence hub by continuing to expand evidentiary sources, centralise the preservation of information and evidence, and analyse crimes under international law committed in Belarus in the context of the August 2020 election and its aftermath.
- **Strategic Outcome 2:** Expand the range of evidentiary and analytical products, accountability processes and other actors the IAPB's work outputs will effectively serve (including the OHCHR examination, other human rights mechanisms and bodies and criminal justice authorities).

- **Strategic Outcome 3:** Mainstream a survivor-centred, trauma informed approach to all aspects of the IAPB's work.
- **Strategic Outcome 4:** Ensure creation of standing infrastructure and the sustainability of the IAPB's operations.

## D. Overview of key achievements so far

- As models or founding documents for this type of initiative were not available, the IAPB was **established from the ground up** as a unique civil society platform to document violations of international law and promote accountability for international crimes. A closed-source database for interview-based information was created and programmed along with a secure database for open-source investigation files, tools for secure communication and encryption were identified, and various Standard Operating Procedures were developed, thereby regulating the modus operandi for informed consent and GDPR-compliant procedures as well as for personal and data security, the development of interview guidelines, and the delivery of capacity-building activities.
- **Comprehensive training** was provided to enable all partners to implement their role professionally, safely, and in a survivor-centered manner. Belarusian partners were trained on general investigation and interview skills and the Istanbul Protocol, coupled with survivor-centered and trauma-informed approaches in interviews. Further trainings were provided relating to the elements of crimes against humanity, including deportation and sexual and gender-based crimes, and on linkage evidence for structural investigations.
- IAPB partners have gained the **trust of victims and witnesses**, who have provided their testimony in the pursuit of accountability. As of 24 March 2025, more than 2,775 **interviews** have been conducted with victims and witnesses, for which transcripts have been produced, translated, tagged according to pre-determined criteria, and securely stored and organised in the IAPB database.
- By 31 March 2025, the IAPB has catalogued more than 30,019 **closed-source documents/ files**, comprising medical documents, court and other official documents, and photos and videos linked to testimonies, which have also been tagged and organised in the database alongside the testimonies.
- Further enhancing its evidence-base, by 31 March 2025, the IAPB had collected over 1,540,550 **open-source materials** from 895 sources, verifying information, proactively researching relevant issues, and securing evidence from official Belarusian websites to avoid situations wherein content was subsequently removed. The collection includes over 266,000 videos, 752,000 images, and 521,000 text items. Videos containing speech have been processed using automated speech recognition software, resulting in 173,060 transcripts, which facilitates comprehensive textual searches. Open-source information and materials inform IAPB's analytical work, providing valuable insights into individual incidents as well as the broader context of the situation.
- The IAPB has **provided evidence and analytical documents** to prosecutorial services from five States, receiving complimentary feedback from such services. These disclosures were in response to nine requests, while a further five requests for information were received from UN mechanisms (OHCHR Examination of the Human rights situation in Belarus and the UN Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights Situation in Belarus), one request from the OSCE Moscow

Mechanism Rapporteur, and several requests from civil society organisations and lawyers working on Belarus.

- To further enhance its response to requests from prosecution services and other bodies, the IAPB has produced multiple **analytical products** supporting case-building under international criminal law, with a focus on crimes against humanity.
- The IAPB continues to provide survivors with **evidence-based mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS)** in a survivor-centered and trauma-informed manner. Since the establishment of the Platform, 652 survivors have benefitted from the MHPSS services of the IAPB, including further referral pathways for MHPSS and a comprehensive clinical monitoring and evaluation system. Since its establishment, the IAPB expanded the geographical area and increased the pool of specialists and medical centres in more than four countries to improve access to these services.

## 1. Situation in Belarus

### Presidential elections 26 January 2025

The reporting period was marked by presidential elections, which took place on 26 January 2025 and resulted in a seventh presidential term for Aleksandr Lukashenko.<sup>1</sup> As in 2020, Belarusian and international experts concluded that the elections were neither “genuinely democratic” nor free.<sup>2</sup> Only presidential candidates approved by the current regime were allowed to run, which led to campaigning that rendered all candidates except for Lukashenko invisible, and forced voters to participate in early voting in a “climate of intimidation” with law enforcement present at the polling stations.<sup>3</sup> The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) deplored “[t]he decision of the Belarusian authorities not to invite OSCE participating States to observe the country’s presidential election on 26 January”, noting that, “ODIHR has been unable to monitor key stages of the process”.<sup>4</sup> On 26 January 2025, the Vice President of the European Commission and High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, and the Commissioner for Enlargement, Marta Kos, noted that “[t]he relentless and unprecedented repression of human rights, restrictions to political participation and access to independent media in Belarus, have deprived the electoral process of any legitimacy.”<sup>5</sup>

Reacting to the outcome of the elections and another term for Lukashenko, the GIEB expressed “well-founded fears that patterns of repression and human rights violations will continue”.<sup>6</sup>

### Human rights situation

From October 2024 to March 2025, arbitrary arrests, home searches, unfair trials, and inhuman detention conditions remained pervasive. Individuals continued to face systematic targeting for their real or perceived dissent against the Lukashenko regime, with a significant increase in the use of administrative detention during September to mid-November 2024.<sup>7</sup>

Between October 2024 and February 2025, Human Rights Center Viasna recorded 2,958 cases of politically motivated incidents of repression, including arrests, home searches, administrative trials,<sup>8</sup> and arrests of individuals crossing the border to Belarus. These actions appeared to be

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<sup>1</sup> [“Forgetting 2020. How Lukashenko was elected the President in Belarus again”, BBC, 26-Jan-2025](#); [“86.82% of voters voted for Lukashenko at the elections in Belarus”, Belta, 27-Jan-2025](#).

<sup>2</sup> [“Elections\\*2025. Preliminary analytical report on the results of observation of the election of the President of the Republic of Belarus”, Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections, 04-Feb-2025](#); UN HRC, [“Belarus: Outcome of presidential elections likely to result in continuing human rights violations, Experts say”, 29-Jan-2025](#).

<sup>3</sup> [“Elections\\*2025. Preliminary analytical report on the results of observation of the election of the President of the Republic of Belarus”, Human Rights Defenders for Free Elections, 04-Feb-2025](#).

<sup>4</sup> [“No election observation mission in Belarus due to lack of invitation, in breach of OSCE commitments”, OSCE ODIHR, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, 09-Jan-2025](#).

<sup>5</sup> [“Statement by the High Representative / Vice President Kaja Kallas and Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos on the sham presidential election in Belarus”, European Commission, 26-Jan-2025](#). See also “European Parliament resolution of 22 January 2025 on the need for actions to address the continued oppression and fake elections in Belarus (2024/3014(RSP))”, [European Parliament, 22-Jan-2025](#); [“So-called presidential elections in Belarus ‘set to be a sham’, says PACE General Rapporteur”, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, 21-Jan-2025](#).

<sup>6</sup> UN HRC, [“Belarus: Outcome of presidential elections likely to result in continuing human rights violations. Experts say”, 29-Jan-2025](#).

<sup>7</sup> [“At least 1,213 sentenced in administrative cases: repression intensifies in Belarus ahead of presidential elections”, Viasna, 15-Nov-2024](#).

<sup>8</sup> 656 cases of repressions in February 2025, 506 cases – in January 2025, 759 cases – in December 2024, 671 cases – in November 2024, 366 cases – in October 2024. See [“Human rights situation in Belarus. October 2024”, Viasna, 11-](#)



targeting individuals who: made comments about the Minister of Internal Affairs, Ivan Kubrakov;<sup>9</sup> had subscribed to independent media; had photos on their phones of protests or protest symbols; or had passport stamps of visits to Ukraine.<sup>10</sup> The logged incidents included a wave of arrests on 31 October 2024 across Belarus, some accompanied by unnecessary or disproportionate use of force.<sup>11</sup>

According to witness reports, authorities mainly targeted persons who had previously been charged for protest-related activity, presumably as a tool of intimidation in advance of the presidential elections.<sup>12</sup> According to Viasna, from September to mid-November 2024 alone, 1,213 administrative trials were held under Article 19.11 (Dissemination of extremist materials) and Article 24.23 (Unauthorised mass gathering) of the Code of Administrative Offences.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, between June and August 2024, 975 administrative trials were concluded.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, there are credible reports that two men died in relation to their detention. Dmitrii Shletgauer, a political prisoner, was reported to have died from “mechanical asphyxia” in the Mahilioŭ Correctional Facility No. 15 in October 2024,<sup>15</sup> while another unidentified adult man died, also in October 2024, as a consequence of torture and ill-treatment he was allegedly subject to in a temporary facility in Vitebsk in March 2025.<sup>16</sup>

From October 2024 until the eve of the so-called presidential elections, Aleksandr Lukashenko pardoned 143 prisoners who had been convicted of extremism-related crimes.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, persecution continued against those who expressed political opposition, risking legal consequences based on legislation designed to counter extremism and terrorism. Between October 2024 and February 2025,<sup>18</sup> at least 511 persons, including media workers and human rights activists, were added to the ‘*List of Citizens of the Republic of Belarus, Foreign Citizens or*

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Nov-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. November 2024”](#), Viasna, 09-Dec-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. December 2024”](#), Viasna, 09-Jan-2025; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2025”](#), Viasna, 07-Feb-2025; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2025”](#), Viasna, 05-Mar-2025.

<sup>9</sup> [“Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2025”](#), Viasna, 07-Feb-2025; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2025”](#), Viasna, 05-Mar-2025; [“Human rights defenders: prior to return to Belarus, it is worth to thoroughly assess the risks of arrest”](#), Viasna, 15-Jan-2025.

<sup>10</sup> [“Human rights defenders: prior to return to Belarus, it is worth to thoroughly assess the risks of arrest”](#), Viasna, 15-Jan-2025.

<sup>11</sup> [“Human rights situation in Belarus. October 2024”](#), Viasna, 11-Nov-2024; [“Mass searches and arrests across Belarus: chronicle of persecution from 31 October to 1 November”](#), Viasna, 01-Nov-2024.

<sup>12</sup> [“Human rights situation in Belarus. October 2024”](#), Viasna, 11-Nov-2024; [“Mass searches and arrests across Belarus: chronicle of persecution from 31 October to 1 November”](#), Viasna, 01-Nov-2024.

<sup>13</sup> [“At least 1,213 sentenced in administrative cases: repression intensifies in Belarus ahead of presidential elections”](#), Viasna, 15-Nov-2024.

<sup>14</sup> [“At least 1,213 sentenced in administrative cases: repression intensifies in Belarus ahead of presidential elections”](#), Viasna, 15-Nov-2024. Note that outcomes of the trials are (to date) not available.

<sup>15</sup> [“Human rights situation in Belarus. October 2024”](#), Viasna, 11-Nov-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. November 2024”](#), Viasna, 09-Dec-2024.

<sup>16</sup> UN HRC, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, [A/HRC/58/68](#), 07-Feb-2025, para. 51.

<sup>17</sup> [“The President of Belarus pardoned 31 convicts of extremism-related crimes”](#), Belta, 07-Nov-2024; [“The President pardoned 32 more persons convicted of extremism crimes”](#), The website of the President of Belarus, 20-Nov-2024; [“Lukashenko pardoned 29 more political prisoners”](#), DW, 09-Dec-2024; [“Aleksandr Lukashenko signed a Decree pardoning 20 persons, committed extremism-related crimes”](#), The website of the President of Belarus, 28-Dec-2024; [“Aleksandr Lukashenko pardoned 23 persons, who committed extremism-related crimes”](#), The website of the President of Belarus, 18-Jan-2025; [“Lukashenko pardoned 15 convicts”](#), Belta, 24-Jan-2025 (eight persons were convicted for extremism-related crimes and seven persons – for drug-related crimes).

<sup>18</sup> As of 24 March 2025, the list includes 5,073 individuals. See [“The Investigative Committee threatens Belarusians abroad, MVD stated it did not beat the stand-up comedian: chronicle of persecution 21-24 March”](#), Viasna, 24-Mar-2025.

*Stateless Persons Involved in Extremist Activities*’ for their participation in street protests or other forms of perceived dissent,<sup>19</sup> while at least 19 entities were denounced as extremist organisations by the State Security Committee and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>20</sup> In December 2024, Andrei Tolchyn, a journalist who had been pardoned months prior, was again convicted by the Sovetskii District Court of Homel for dissemination of extremist materials.

As of 20 March 2025, 1,1205 political prisoners reportedly remained in detention,<sup>21</sup> including prominent Belarusian human rights defenders Ales Bialiatski, Valiantsin Stefanovic, Uladzimir Labkovich, Maria Rabkova,<sup>22</sup> Andrei Chapiuk, and Nasta Loika,<sup>23</sup> as well as 36 foreign citizens (as of 27 January 2025).<sup>24</sup> After 600 days of *incommunicado* detention, Maria Kolesnikova<sup>25</sup> was finally able to meet her father in November 2024,<sup>26</sup> and in January 2025, Viktor Babaryka and Ihar Losik were allowed to address their relatives via video recording.<sup>27</sup>

The trend of holding political prisoners in punishment cells with no contact to the outside world continued in the reporting period and was often linked to additional charges under Article 411 of the *Criminal Code* for ‘malicious disobedience to the requirements of administration of the correctional facility’.<sup>28</sup>

Human Rights Center Viasna established that at least 1,562 women were subject to politically motivated criminal prosecution between 2020 and 2024. Of these, at least 348 women were sentenced to imprisonment in a penal colony, and 73 were referred to an open correctional facility.<sup>29</sup> Women reported being subjected to bullying, insults, psychological ill-treatment in the form of threats (including threats of gang rape), numerous arbitrary and disproportionate strip searches in the presence of male officers, and other inhuman conditions of detention.<sup>30</sup> Political

<sup>19</sup> 118 individuals were listed in October 2024, 120 – in November 2024, 93 – in December 2024, 90 – in January 2025, 90 – in February 2025. See [“Human rights situation in Belarus. October 2024”](#), Viasna, 11-Nov-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. November 2024”](#), Viasna, 09-Dec-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. December 2024”](#), Viasna, 09-Jan-2025; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2025”](#), Viasna, 07-Feb-2025; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2025”](#), Viasna, 05-Mar-2025.

<sup>20</sup> Four entities were listed in October 2024, four in November 2024, six in December 2024, three in January 2025, two in February 2025. See [“Human rights situation in Belarus. October 2024”](#), Viasna, 11-Nov-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. November 2024”](#), Viasna, 09-Dec-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. December 2024”](#), Viasna, 09-Jan-2025; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2025”](#), Viasna, 07-Feb-2025; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2025”](#), Viasna, 05-Mar-2025.

<sup>21</sup> [“Political prisoners in Belarus”](#), Viasna, undated.

<sup>22</sup> In March 2025, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention recognised Maria Rabkova’s deprivation of liberty to be arbitrary and considered that the appropriate remedies would be release and enforceable right to compensation and other reparations. See UN WGAD, Opinion No. 54/2024 concerning Maria Rabkova (Belarus), [A/HRC/WGAD/2024/54](#), 18-Mar-2025, paras 103, 105.

<sup>23</sup> [“Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2025”](#), Viasna, 05-March-2025.

<sup>24</sup> [“Repressions with no borders: 36 foreigners are among political prisoners in Belarus”](#), Viasna, 27-Jan-2025.

<sup>25</sup> See [“Maryia Kalesnikava”](#), Viasna, undated.

<sup>26</sup> [“Political prisoner Maria Kolesnikova met with her father”](#), DW, 12-Nov-2024.

<sup>27</sup> [“Human rights situation in Belarus. January 2025”](#), Viasna, 07-Feb-2025; Telegram Channel @viasna96, last edited 22:18, 14-Jan-2025, <https://t.me/viasna96/29276>; Telegram Channel @viasna96, posted 11:03, 08-Jan-2025, <https://t.me/viasna96/29187>.

<sup>28</sup> [“Human rights situation in Belarus. October 2024”](#), Viasna, 11-Nov-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. November 2024”](#), Viasna, 09-Dec-2024; [“Human rights situation in Belarus. December 2024”](#), Viasna, 09-Jan-2025; [“They decided to wipe us off the face of the earth. Women’s testimonies on gender discrimination in Belarusian prisons”](#), Viasna, undated, p. 52.

<sup>29</sup> [“They decided to wipe us off the face of the earth. Women’s testimonies on gender discrimination in Belarusian prisons”](#), Viasna, undated, p. 13.

<sup>30</sup> [“They decided to wipe us off the face of the earth. Women’s testimonies on gender discrimination in Belarusian prisons”](#), Viasna, undated, pp 19, 26, 28, 29, 37, 40, 64,

prisoners are further reportedly deprived of maintaining regular contact with their children.<sup>31</sup> In penal colonies, political prisoners are allegedly listed in a registry of persons 'prone to extremism and other destructive activities'.<sup>32</sup>

As of February 2025, 41 media representatives are reported to be imprisoned in Belarus,<sup>33</sup> and from September 2024 to January 2025, the Ministry of Justice's Qualification Commission terminated the licenses of at least five lawyers.<sup>34</sup>

Transnational repression against Belarusians in exile also continued during the reporting period. Between October 2024 and 23 March 2025, at least 24 people were tried *in absentia* under politically motivated charges, which largely resulted in lengthy prison sentences.<sup>35</sup> In February 2025, the Criminal Code was amended to increase the range of offences for which trials *in absentia* are permissible.<sup>36</sup> The list consists of 16 offences, mainly used for politically motivated prosecution,<sup>37</sup> prompting a group of UN special procedure mandate holders<sup>38</sup> to issue a public statement expressing "concern about the growing practice in Belarus of conducting trials *in absentia* and without basic fair trial guarantees, which can result in lengthy prison sentences, deprivation of property and housing, or even the death penalty."<sup>39</sup> The mandate-holders noted that those prosecuted *in absentia* "are not notified of the proceedings, are not allowed to choose their defence lawyers or to participate in the trials remotely, and are not allowed to receive copies of their case files, relevant procedural documents or judgments", that "[t]hese materials are shared only with state-appointed defence lawyers, who are not required by law to communicate with their clients and routinely refuse to do so", that judgments are not made public, and that only incomplete information about the verdict is published on government websites and is inaccessible from abroad, resulting in further violations of human rights.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> ["They decided to wipe us off the face of the earth. Women's testimonies on gender discrimination in Belarusian prisons"](#), *Viasna*, undated, p. 68.

<sup>32</sup> ["They decided to wipe us off the face of the earth. Women's testimonies on gender discrimination in Belarusian prisons"](#), *Viasna*, undated, p. 50.

<sup>33</sup> See the table at ["Repressions against journalists in Belarus 2025. list of colleagues in prison"](#), BAJ, 27-Jan-2025.

<sup>34</sup> ["The Qualification Commission held a session on 16 January"](#), *The Right to Defence*, 17-Jan-2025; ["Human rights situation in Belarus. November 2024"](#), *Viasna*, 09-Dec-2024.

<sup>35</sup> ["List of political prisoners and persons convicted in political criminal cases"](#), *Viasna*, undated.

<sup>36</sup> See ["Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2025"](#), *Viasna*, 05-Mar-2025.

<sup>37</sup> "Incitement of racial, national, religious, or other social enmity or discord", "Rehabilitation of Nazism", "Denial of the genocide of the Belarusian people", "Discrediting the Republic of Belarus", "Insulting a governmental official", "Slander against the President of the Republic of Belarus", "Insulting the President of the Republic of Belarus", "Desecration of state symbols", "Act of terrorism", "Propaganda of terrorism", "Threatening to commit a terrorist act", "Financing of terrorist activities", "Facilitating terrorist activities", "Receiving training or other preparation for participation in terrorist activities", "Establishing or participating in an organisation for terrorist activities", and "Organizing the activities of a terrorist organization and participating in the activities of such an organisation." See ["Human rights situation in Belarus. February 2025"](#), *Viasna*, 05-Mar-2025.

<sup>38</sup> The experts: Nils Muižnieks, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Belarus](#); Mr. Matthew Gillett (Chairperson), Ms. Priya Gopalan (Vice- Chair on Follow-up), Ms. Miriam Estrada Castillo and Mr. Mumba Malila, [Working Group on Arbitrary Detention](#); Ms. Irene Khan, [Special Rapporteur on the right to freedom of opinion and expression](#); Ms. Mary Lawlor, [Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders](#); Mr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, [Special Rapporteur on adequate housing as a component of the right to an adequate standard of living, and on the right to non-discrimination in this context](#); Ms. Margaret Satterthwaite, [Special Rapporteur on the independence of judges and lawyers](#); Mr. Ben Saul, [Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms while countering terrorism](#); Mr. Morris Tidball-Binz, [Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions](#).

<sup>39</sup> UN OHCHR, ["Belarus: UN experts alarmed about widespread in absentia trials"](#), 22-Jan-2025.

<sup>40</sup> UN OHCHR, ["Belarus: UN experts alarmed about widespread in absentia trials"](#), 22-Jan-2025.

Moreover, official statements of the Investigative Committee issued in January and March 2025 suggest an expansion of surveillance and threats towards Belarusians abroad, particularly those involved in protests or commemorative events, such as the Day of Freedom on 25 March.<sup>41</sup>

### International organisations and Belarus

The preliminary examination of the Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (OTP/ICC) continued after Lithuania referred the situation in Belarus to the ICC on 30 September 2024.

In addition to the IAPB's Communication to the OTP on 31 January 2025 relating to potential crimes against humanity, including persecution and deportation (see section 3.1. below), two other non-governmental organisations are known to have submitted communications to the Court.

In January 2025, Reporters Without Borders (RSF) provided evidence and statistics that illustrate the persecution of Belarusian journalists as a crime against humanity, demonstrating the systematic and state-driven nature of the attack against them.<sup>42</sup> According to RSF, since August 2020, 589 arbitrary arrests have taken place, targeting 397 media professionals, and between 500 and 600 Belarusian journalists were forced to flee as a result of the authorities' persecutory campaign.<sup>43</sup>

On 20 March 2025, six Belarusian human rights organisations<sup>44</sup> submitted evidence of potential crimes against humanity of deportation and persecution committed by the Belarusian authorities to the OTP/ICC.<sup>45</sup> According to the Communication, the Belarusian authorities created an atmosphere of fear, terror and persecution, forcing 'disloyal' Belarusian population to flee the country, and continuously persecuting Belarusians in exile via, among others, *in absentia* trials, intimidation and threats, including against their relatives in Belarus, and the seizure of their property.<sup>46</sup>

On 7 February 2025, the GIEB published its first report, covering the period of 1 May 2020 to 31 December 2024. It concluded that there are reasonable grounds to believe that some human rights violations committed by the Government of Belarus amount to crimes against humanity, in

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<sup>41</sup> In January 2025, the Committee warned, "we are monitoring citizens' participation in actions taking place abroad and are giving a legal assessment to these activities", while in March 2025 it warned that "any attempts to organise unauthorised mass events will be regarded as unlawful", in connection with domestic commemorations of the Day of Freedom on 25 March. See "[Comment by the Investigative Committee regarding protests abroad](#)", *Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus*, 27-Jan-2025; "[Comment by the Investigative Committee on the Day of Freedom](#)", *Investigative Committee of the Republic of Belarus*, 21-Mar-2025.

<sup>42</sup> "[Belarus: ahead of sham election, RSF files ICC complaint for Lukashenko's crimes against humanity targeting journalists](#)", *RSF*, 24-Jan-2025.

<sup>43</sup> "[Belarus: ahead of sham election, RSF files ICC complaint for Lukashenko's crimes against humanity targeting journalists](#)", *RSF*, 24-Jan-2025.

<sup>44</sup> The Communication was submitted by the Center for Global Justice and Human Rights "M.A.R.A.", the International Federation for Human Rights, Human Rights Center Viasna, the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, and Human Constanta.

<sup>45</sup> "[Belarus: six human rights organisations submit evidence of crimes against humanity to the International Criminal Court](#)", *International Federation for Human Rights*, 27-Mar-2025.

<sup>46</sup> "[Belarus: six human rights organisations submit evidence of crimes against humanity to the International Criminal Court](#)", *International Federation for Human Rights*, 27-Mar-2025.

particular imprisonment and persecution.<sup>47</sup> The GIEB concluded that the attack against Belarusians perceived as being critical of the Belarusian government was both widespread, due to the number of victims and patterns of human rights violations, and systematic, due to the organised nature of the crimes.<sup>48</sup> The GIEB concluded that “[t]he crimes were committed as part of a pattern of organised conduct, following instructions, encouragement and endorsement by high-level officials, and implemented by individual perpetrators,”<sup>49</sup> and “involved a wide range of institutional actors who acted as part of a concerted plan to silence, discourage and quash any opposition, perceived or real, to the Government of President Lukashenko.”<sup>50</sup>

Concluding observations on Belarus were issued on 27 February 2025 by the UN Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), relating to the ninth periodic report of Belarus. The Committee expressed continuing concern about the “shrinking civic space” caused by “unlawful and arbitrary detention, harassment, censorship, heightened surveillance, forced exile, gender-based violence, and threats, such as the deprivation of parental rights, amounting to crimes against humanity”, and deplored the lack of accountability for these acts.<sup>51</sup>

During the reporting period, CEDAW and various UN Special Procedure mandate holders highlighted the inhumane conditions for women in detention, including overcrowding, poor hygiene, difficulties in obtaining medical care, lack of clean and/or warm clothing, strip searches by both male and female prison staff, and a lack of privacy when using the toilet.<sup>52</sup> Other concerns related to reports of sexual and gender-based violence, absence of an effective complaint mechanism, arbitrary punishment (e.g., solitary confinement, deprivation of contact with children, having to stand in an outdoor “shame cage”<sup>53</sup> in all weather conditions), forced labour as a criminal punishment, and continued imprisonment of women arrested in the context of exercising their rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> UN HRC, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, [A/HRC/58/68](#), 07-Feb-2025, Summary, paras 69-82.

<sup>48</sup> UN HRC, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, [A/HRC/58/68](#), 07-Feb-2025, paras 71, 74.

<sup>49</sup> UN HRC, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, [A/HRC/58/68](#), 07-Feb-2025, para. 71.

<sup>50</sup> UN HRC, Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, [A/HRC/58/68](#), 07-Feb-2025, para. 72.

<sup>51</sup> UN CEDAW, Concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of Belarus, [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), 27-Feb-2025, para. 25(a)-(b).

<sup>52</sup> UN CEDAW, Concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of Belarus, [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), 27-Feb-2025, para. 53; UN OHCHR, “[Belarus: Experts deplore blatant lack of accountability for ill-treatment of women in detention](#)”, 29-Jan-2025.

<sup>53</sup> The “cage of shame” is a rectangle of metal bars, about one and a half meters long and two meters wide. See “[They decided to wipe us off the face of the earth. Women’s testimonies on gender discrimination in Belarusian prisons](#)”, *Viasna*, undated p. 50.

<sup>54</sup> UN CEDAW, Concluding observations on the ninth periodic report of Belarus, [CEDAW/C/BLR/CO/9](#), 27-Feb-2025, para. 53; UN OHCHR, “[Belarus: Experts deplore blatant lack of accountability for ill-treatment of women in detention](#)”, 29-Jan-2025.



## 2. Evidence-gathering and analysis

### 2.1. Victim/witness interviews

During the reporting period, the IAPB collected information and evidence from 76 survivors/witnesses (27 women, 49 men) regarding alleged crimes under international law, bringing the total number of interviews to 2,775 and increasing the IAPB's closed-source collection to 30,019 witness-related documents. The newly collected interviews provide information on arrests, the mistreatment of detainees, including extremely poor conditions of detention and various forms of physical and psychological ill-treatment, as well as acts of persecution by State authorities, including acts taken against Belarusian individuals who fled abroad.

The information from interviews is complemented by witness-related materials, which some interviewees provide in the context of their interviews. These include audio/video material, relevant documentary evidence such as medical and court records, photographs of injuries, and other relevant items. These records continue to be translated into English with an automated translation software and are catalogued for preservation and analysis in the IAPB's closed-source database. Additionally, materials are being coded according to a detailed framework, which facilitates evidentiary retrieval from the database. This enables searches based on criteria such as the time and location of an incident or arrest, detention facility, officials referenced in interviews or documentary evidence, specific acts of mistreatment, and other relevant categories. Coding enhances the analysis of the materials and streamlines the preparation of analytical briefs, supporting criminal investigations and other accountability mechanisms at both domestic and international levels.



The IAPB continues to seek renewed informed consent from survivors/victims and other witnesses to ensure it remains current for disclosure to third parties. By 31 March 2025, over 800 witnesses had signed a consent form. Consent forms are renewed to ensure that the forms align with international standards and comply

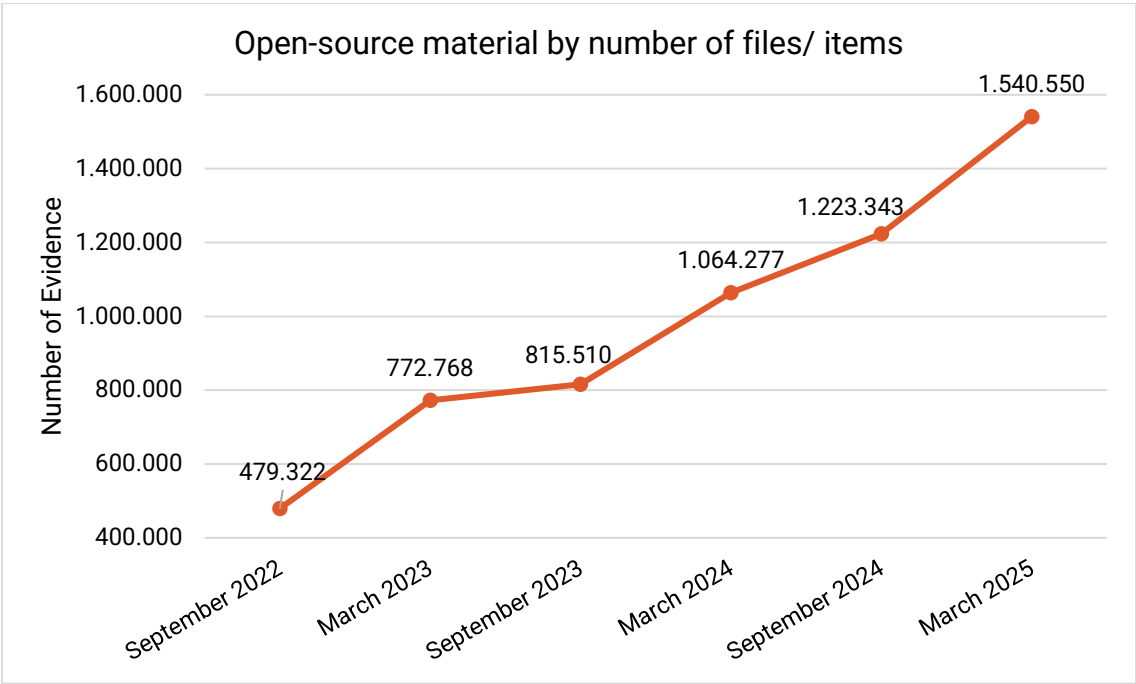
with GDPR requirements, while also including consent to share information with all third parties who may require access to the materials now and in the future. It further allows witnesses to review and reaffirm their consent since their personal circumstances may have changed over time.

One of the key focus-areas for the IAPB has been the generation of ‘witness summaries’, summarising interview transcripts and relevant materials for those witnesses who confirmed their consent to share evidence with accountability mechanisms. Witness summaries are a common tool in international criminal law, enable clearer delineation of the IAPB’s present evidence-base and are the preferred format of domestic and international authorities as part of other analyses or as a stand-alone product. In early 2025, the IAPB reviewed and updated the existing internal guidelines for preparation of witness summaries based on the IAPB’s lessons learned to date. A new template and workflow were introduced for witness summaries to ensure quality, consistency, and facilitate quality control at all stages of the process. This work will facilitate future IAPB submissions to investigative and judicial authorities.

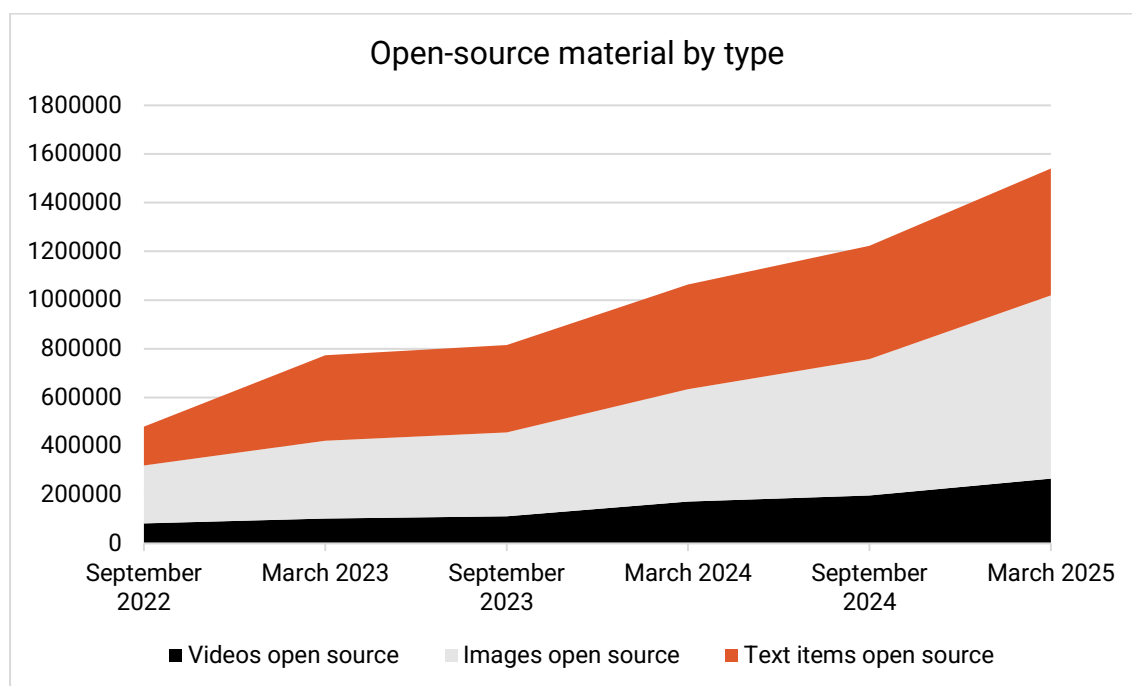
2.2. Open-source information

In parallel to evidence from interviewees, the IAPB continues to collect open-source information, namely publicly available and legally accessible information, including social media posts and audio/video material, news articles and reports, publications by public or private entities, satellite imagery, material from court records and archives, and other information from blogs, forums and websites.

Open-source information complements the evidence obtained from victim-survivors and witnesses. This ensures that the analytical products prepared by the IAPB are grounded on a solid factual and evidentiary basis and that domestic and international judicial and accountability bodies, which receive such information from the IAPB, can conduct effective investigations and prosecutions accordingly.



To date, the IAPB has collected over 1,540,550 items from open-source research from 895 sources, verifying information, proactively researching relevant issues, and securing evidence from official Belarusian websites to prevent the loss of evidence due to subsequent content removal. The collection includes over 266,000 videos, 752,000 images, and 521,000 text items. Videos containing speech have been processed using automated speech recognition software, resulting in 173,060 transcripts, which facilitates comprehensive textual searches. Open-source information and materials further inform the IAPB's analytical work, providing valuable insights into individual incidents as well as the broader context.



### 2.3. Linkage evidence analysis

In its current phase of operations, the IAPB is carrying out an analysis of linkage evidence within the framework of criminal case building. Linkage evidence refers to evidence and information that connects higher level perpetrators with crimes committed on the ground, such as in a detention facility, a police station, in a private home, or during a demonstration in a public square, in particular, high-ranking military or civilian officials, who are often not present at the time and place of commission of a crime.

Linkage evidence analysis is helpful to establish chains of command from the direct perpetrators (those who physically commit a crime) to those in position of command and authority, with a view to proving that the latter planned, ordered, instigated, contributed, and/or knew about the crimes committed by their subordinates or people under their control, and/or that they failed to prevent, stop or punish those responsible for such crimes. This type of evidence and the resulting analysis further assists in establishing links between different State structures, agencies, and law enforcement bodies, which may have been implicated in the commission of international crimes during the 2020 presidential election and in the following years.

## 2.4. Types of violations documented by the IAPB

- Physical ill-treatment during protests, arrests, detention, and house searches (e.g. punches, kicks, baton blows), including excessive and indiscriminate use of force and less-lethal weapons (e. g. unnecessary and/or disproportionate use of stun guns, stun grenades, rubber bullets and tear gas, use of stun guns against sensitive parts of the body)
- Psychological ill-treatment, including threats against the person (e.g. threat of being shot, burnt, beaten or raped), threats against family members (e.g. threats of raping one's wife, of taking children into care, threats to 'visit' family members), forced video-taped confessions, verbal abuse
- Sexual and gender-based violence (e.g. rape, threat of rape, use of derogatory/discriminatory language)
- Potentially unlawful killings during protests and in the context of deaths in detention
- Inhumane detention conditions (severe overcrowding, inadequate food/water, extreme temperature, hard labour etc), with harsher conditions on individuals detained in the context of expressing political dissent (e. g. being held in overcrowded punishment cells without mattresses or bedding, being woken up throughout the night, frequent cell inspections with physical violence and forced nudity)
- Violations of due process rights (e.g. lack of information about charges, trials conducted without defence counsel, closed to the public, often lasting only several minutes, relying on fake witnesses and/or forced confessions)
- Violations of other fundamental rights (restrictions on freedom of movement, the right to freedom of peaceful assembly, freedom of expression, private and family life including denial of parental rights)

## 3. Assistance to accountability mechanisms

### 3.1. International Criminal Court

During the reporting period, the IAPB submitted a Communication to the OTP of the ICC in support of Lithuania's 30 September 2024 referral of the situation in Belarus. The Communication presents witness statements and other evidence as well as legal analyses to inform the ongoing preliminary examination relating to alleged crimes against humanity, including deportation, persecution, and other inhumane acts allegedly committed by Belarusian senior officials since 1 May 2020.

The IAPB's Communication, based on Article 15(2) of the Rome Statute, comprises factual findings, including in relation to civilian protests and the subsequent State response, ill-treatment during protests, arrests, house searches, and treatment during in detention, other fundamental rights violations, forced civilian departures from Belarus, and human rights violations of Belarusians after their departure from Belarus. Legal analyses on jurisdictional issues, the underlying acts of alleged crimes against humanity and the admissibility of the case were also submitted alongside relevant annexes on detention facilities and State structures in Belarus. The Communication, *inter alia*, describes various acts of mistreatment and persecution that led to the forced departures of numerous Interviewees:

*"Interviewees presented in this Communication fled fearing further targeting through criminal prosecution and imprisonment after they fell victim to arbitrary arrest and detention, house searches, physical and psychological mistreatment in custody, expulsions from university, loss of employment, and threats to have their children removed into state care. Fleeing individuals described feeling persecuted and unsafe, with some leaving without a plan, their families or possessions."*

The Communication addressed the Belarusian authorities' acts further targeting those who fled the country:

*"Numerous Interviewees described how after their departure, State bodies continued to try to locate and contact them. Some of these efforts manifested as threatening communications from state officials, while others involved questioning and interrogating friends, family members and neighbours in Belarus, and in some cases, threatening them. The authorities continued pending and initiated new criminal proceedings against those who fled from Belarus, tried them in absentia, searched their homes and seized their property."*

Finally, the Communication suggests further steps and offers the ICC continued support from the IAPB:

*"In light of the prevailing impunity for these crimes and the absence of other effective accountability mechanisms, the IAPB respectfully requests the Prosecutor to submit a request for authorisation of an investigation to the Pre-Trial Chamber under Article 15(3) of the Rome Statute, to initiate a full investigation with all duties and powers provided by Article 54 of the Rome Statute. The IAPB submits that the requirements to open such an investigation are manifestly met in full."*

### 3.2. Support of national prosecution authorities

During the reporting period, the IAPB responded to two requests for assistance received from prosecution authorities of two different States. The IAPB presented its evidence and factual analyses in report-form, responding to specific incidents to support the ongoing investigative efforts in relation to acts of mistreatment committed by Belarusian authorities, which were purportedly inflicted in those States.

Currently, the IAPB is in the process of preparing responses to newly received enquiries requesting contact details of relevant witnesses, additional contextual information, and linkage evidence relevant to specific incidents and events.

### 3.3. UN Group of Independent Experts on the situation of human rights in Belarus (GIEB)

During the reporting period, the IAPB continued its cooperation with the UN investigative mechanisms, particularly the GIEB, established by resolution A/HRC/RES/55/27 on 4 April 2024.

In light of the establishment of the GIEB as a new, independent body, a Memorandum of Understanding was agreed upon between IAPB and GIEB in December 2024 through exchange of letters, covering provisions regarding access to closed-source data, minimization of re-



traumatisation of witnesses, confidentiality and security, and transitional arrangements to ensure that the same principles will be adhered to by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in the case of termination of the GIEB's mandate.

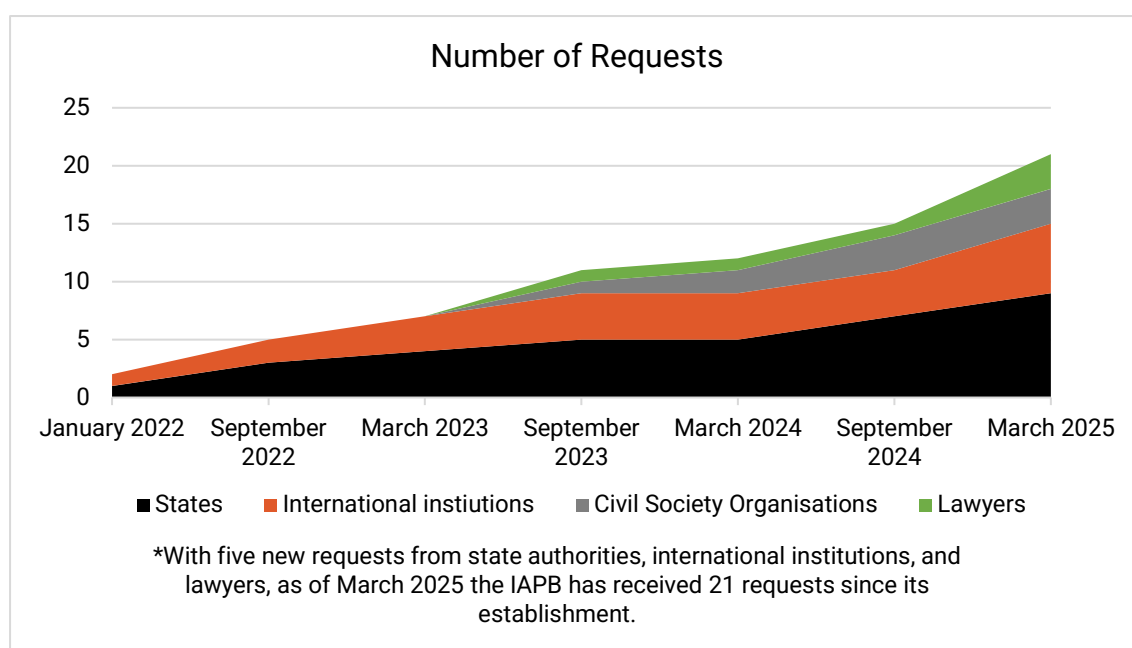
In response to the GIEB's request to the IAPB and in accordance with the above-mentioned Memorandum of Understanding, the IAPB provided information and evidence relevant to the period 2022-2024, including interview transcripts and supporting materials comprising 1,502 files in total. The materials provided by the IAPB were used in preparation of the GIEB's report to the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/58/68) published on 14 February 2025 as reflected in the respective report's methodology section.

### 3.4. Cooperation with lawyers

During the reporting period, the IAPB has provided support to independent lawyers in two different States, who sought the IAPB's assistance in the context of domestic proceedings regarding human rights violations and crimes committed in Belarus since May 2020. The lawyers requested data, evidence, information, and analyses that might be relevant for their case, such as information and evidence concerning specific locations, State officials, and alleged crimes.

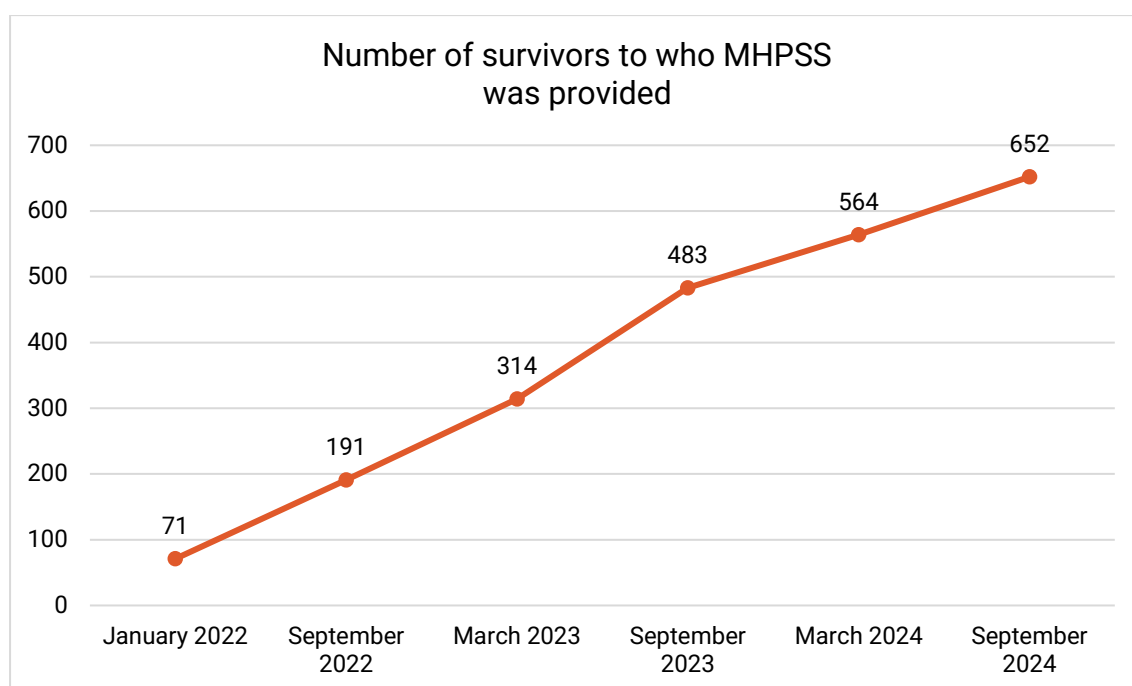
The IAPB employs a rigorous policy when releasing evidence and information pertaining to its interviewees, in line with GDPR requirements, notably GDPR-compliant informed consent from the interviewees, and therefore cannot provide victim statements or other documentary evidence to independent lawyers, unless consent is expanded for this use by the respective victim(s)/ witness(es). The IAPB, however, can provide other relevant information, and has produced an overview of potentially relevant evidence and analysis it could provide directly to domestic authorities upon request.

The IAPB encourages criminal justice authorities and independent lawyers representing victims, to contact the IAPB directly to request access to the underlying data concerning interviewees.



## E. Survivor-centered approach

The IAPB continues to provide survivors with evidence-based mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) in a survivor-centred and trauma-informed manner. Since 1 October 2024, 88 survivors (54 women and 34 men) have benefitted from the MHPSS services of the IAPB, bringing the total number to 652 since the establishment of the IAPB. The IAPB has continued to refine the referral pathways for MHPSS and a comprehensive clinical monitoring and evaluation system, which includes monitoring stress, depression, sleep, and overall well-being. Strong referral pathways better ensure access to specialized support systems. Strong referral systems also enhance organisations' capacity to engage with broader communities of survivors who may already be in touch with specific healthcare or other providers. A referral pathway linking survivors to services that provide healthcare, social, psychosocial, and legal support, and shelter is an integral part of the survivor-centred approach employed by the IAPB.



In order to be able to share the IAPB's experiences with other organisations, co-lead organisation REDRESS is preparing a public updated version of a previously developed internal guide on a survivor-centred approach to documentation. The briefing "A Survivor-Centred Approach to Documentation for the Purpose of Criminal Accountability" will cover key principles in adopting a survivor-centred approach to documentation of torture and other serious international crimes. It demonstrates how these principles can be implemented at various stages of the documentation process for the purpose of criminal accountability.

Finally, the briefing presents both lessons learned and best practices, including with respect to the survivor-centred approach to the documentation of torture and other serious human rights violations, based on the work of the IAPB and other documentation bodies.

The IAPB also pays attention to self-care for staff and partner organisations. Initiatives such as retreats and sessions on self-care are conducted on a regular basis to promote well-being and

resilience among team members. These activities aim to ensure that everyone involved maintains their mental and emotional health while engaging in this challenging and impactful work.

## F. Networking and advocacy

The IAPB engaged in a range of outreach and networking activities, geared to increase awareness and accessibility of its work to supportive States and civil society organisations with similar goals, and to share lessons learned in the course of the work of the Platform.

Seeking to generate support for the Lithuanian referral to the ICC, the IAPB liaised with like-minded organisations, resulting in an **open letter by 13 leading human rights organisations** calling on State Parties of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to support and join Lithuania's referral to the ICC to investigate alleged crimes against humanity in Belarus.<sup>1</sup> The IAPB followed up at bilateral level with 13 States by correspondence.



4 November 2024

### OPEN LETTER

Calling on ICC State Parties to join Lithuania's referral to the ICC requesting an investigation into alleged crimes against humanity committed by Belarusian authorities

The undersigned civil society organisations call on State Parties of the International Criminal Court (ICC) to support and join Lithuania's referral, on 30 September 2024, to the Prosecutor of the ICC to investigate alleged crimes against humanity in Belarus.<sup>1</sup>

The undersigned organisations, as applicable within their respective mandates, in particular the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB),<sup>2</sup> will make available relevant evidence and information collected in support of preliminary examinations to the Office of the Prosecutor of the ICC, and to States willing to pursue a referral.

As a communication tool on the referral for States, co-leading organisation REDRESS produced the briefing '[The International Criminal Court and Belarus: Understanding Lithuania's Referral and Why ICC Member States Must Act to Bring Justice to Belarusian Victims](#)', published in February 2025.

On 6 November 2024, the IAPB Head, its Lead Analyst, and a representative of the International Committee for the Investigation of Torture in Belarus delivered a briefing to a well-attended meeting of the '**Group of Friends of Belarus**' amongst delegations to the OSCE in Vienna upon the invitation of the Permanent Delegation of Sweden to the OSCE. Delegates were provided with an overview of the human rights violations committed in Belarus and an update on the work of the IAPB, followed by an overview of the accountability mechanisms that are available in the context of Belarus. The IAPB Head also held some bilateral meetings with delegates of Permanent Delegations to the OSCE in Vienna during the reporting period.

On 2 December 2024, the IAPB's Head attended a **side event during the 23rd Session of the ICC Assembly of States Parties** on "*The Belarus situation at the ICC: ICC Jurisdiction and the Need for State Party Support*" in The Hague, organised by REDRESS and the Centre for Global Justice & Human Rights M.A.R.A. and sponsored by The Republic of Lithuania, which allowed to take the floor to raise the profile of the Platform. Bilateral meetings were set up in the margins of this event.

Moreover, the IAPB Head attended the online **launch of the Eurojust project** 'National Authorities Against Impunity' on 12 February 2025, titled '*Bridging the gap between civil society organisations and judicial authorities in the fight against impunity for core international crimes*', and followed up in an online bilateral meeting with the Eurojust project team in order to communicate about the IAPB's process of evidence-gathering, analysis, and evidence provided to national prosecutors and the ICC. By establishing this connection, the IAPB will be able to communicate directly with project staff in the future and may create more direct communication channels with the EU Genocide Network (in addition to Redress attending its meetings). REDRESS had had an opportunity to meet the project team in December 2024, discussing regional and country priorities of their organisation, and including potential Belarus-focused activities.

On 12 February 2025, the IAPB Secretariat (attending in person) and REDRESS (participating remotely) took part in a **coordination meeting of the Barys Zvozhkau Belarusian Human Rights House**, which brought together Belarusian human rights defenders and civil society organisations for discussions on plans and priorities, common objectives and strategies. The meeting also addressed monitoring and investigation into the human rights in Belarus. REDRESS used this opportunity to share the work of the Platform related to the Belarus-focused ICC examination, and ongoing work in Poland.

Speaking at the **OSCE Human Dimension Committee meeting**, on 25 February 2025, DIGNITY's Senior Medical Doctor addressed the role of civil society in providing accountability for torture and other international crimes. He highlighted the unprecedented standing the IAPB enjoys as a consortium of national and international civil society organisations, which may play a crucial role in accountability for torture and other crimes. He noted that, through the collection, preservation and analysis of data, in accordance with international criminal standards, the IAPB has become an important counterpart to national prosecution authorities as well as to UN accountability bodies.

In early March 2025, the IAPB Head and Project Manager held **meetings with the EU Commission** in Brussels, participating in fruitful substantive and project-related discussions of the work of the Platform as well as in relation to the EU Commission's generous funding. The IAPB Head also had an opportunity to address a session of the **COEST Working Party** (Working Party on Eastern Europe and Central Asia) on 7 March 2025. The presentation about the IAPB attracted various expressions of support from State representatives. It also allowed for the promotion and explanation of the IAPB's work and served to inform State representatives about their options in terms of accountability mechanisms.

Moreover, the IAPB Head was invited to speak about the IAPB at a '**Human Rights Forum**' **organised by the German Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung** from 18 to 20 March 2025 in Cadenabbia/Italy, titled "*Human Rights and Democracy under Pressure*", including sessions on the impact of misinformation on human rights and on the relevance of the OSCE. The IAPB was also mentioned

in an intervention by the 2020 Rapporteur of the Moscow Mechanism on Belarus, Prof. Wolfgang Benedek.

To keep abreast of developments in Poland, the IAPB's Senior Legal Adviser attended the conference "**The Restoration of the Rule of Law in Polish Prosecution Service**", which took place in Warsaw, Poland, on 20-21 March 2025. Organised by the Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights, the Polish prosecution branch of the International Criminal Law Association and the Association of Polish Prosecutors '*Lex Super Omnia*', participants discussed reforms of the Polish prosecution services based on best practices abroad, and the amendments to the Criminal Code to facilitate the prosecution of crimes under international law pursuant to universal jurisdiction, including crimes committed in Belarus by Belarusian perpetrators and/or against Polish and foreign citizens.

On 26 March 2025, the IAPB shared information on recent developments upon a call for contributions by the **Brussels-based Human Rights and Democracy Network**, informing a forthcoming resolution of the European Parliament.

Moreover, during the reporting period, the IAPB connected with a range of civil society organisations beyond the Advisory Council to share information and exchange experiences. Catch-up meetings are conducted with the **Centre for Global Justice & Human Rights M.A.R.A.** in relation to advocacy activities. Online calls with the **International Bar Association's Human Rights Initiative** are held, in particular to exchange information relating to accountability for international crimes committed in Belarus and related discussions at the level of the Human Rights Council. Finally, IAPB set up meetings with **Trial International** and the **Nuhanovic Foundation**, active in universal jurisdiction cases and the documentation of core international crimes respectively.

## G. Communication

Over the reporting period, the IAPB had at least 41,720 impressions and nearly 2,500 post engagements on X (Twitter), LinkedIn, and Bluesky. Following a decision of the Steering Committee, the IAPB archived its X account, and, since 23 January 2025, is now focusing its social media presence on LinkedIn and a new Bluesky account.

Co-lead organisation REDRESS also developed a template for designing future IAPB reports to ensure consistent branding.

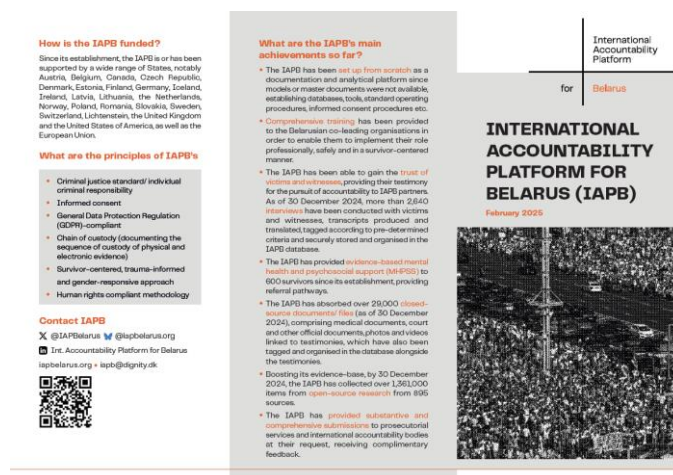
Four press releases were issued during the reporting period, with the assistance of co-lead REDRESS:

- [IAPB welcomes Lithuania's referral of crimes against humanity by Belarusian officials to ICC](#) (1 October 2024)
- [Belarusian and international organisations call on other ICC State Parties to support Lithuania's referral of the situation in Belarus to the ICC](#) (4 November 2024).
- [Widescale repression continues in Belarus, but opportunities towards advancing accountability emerge](#) (7 November 2024).
- [The IAPB submits evidence to the ICC prosecutor on the situation in Belarus](#) (5 February 2025).



The IAPB also intensified **initiatives to communicate** about its work by producing:

- A comprehensive briefing about the work of the Platform – in English
- A short brief about the IAPB (2-pager) – in English, Belarussian and Russian - <https://iapbelarus.org/resources/>
- A fact sheet for prosecutors and criminal justice actors
- A flyer for dissemination at conferences – in English, Belarussian and Russian



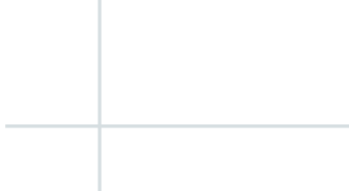
All resources were made available on the IAPB's website and promoted proactively on the IAPB's social media presence on **LinkedIn and BlueSky**.

## H. Infrastructure, staff and finances

Since its establishment, the IAPB is or has been supported by a wide range of States, notably Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Latvia, Lichtenstein, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States of America, as well as the European Union. Funding for the second year of Phase III (2025) has been secured thanks to generous contributions. However, for year 3 of Phase III (2026), the IAPB is still in the process of collecting pledges, finalizing agreements, and reaching out to potential donors.

The Secretariat maintains a close working relationship with the lead and co-leads' documentation teams, engaging in bi-weekly meetings and feedback sessions. This unique structure facilitates the exchange of knowledge on pertinent matters, including medical documentation, general interviewing techniques, and collecting interview evidence on unlawful detention, torture, gender-based violence, and deportations.

In February 2025, a **capacity-building workshop on the use of force and weapons** was conducted for Belarusian partners and the IAPB secretariat team. The workshop had two main objectives: to strengthen the participants' ability to identify different types of weapons used by law enforcement and to understand the effects and injuries these tools can cause. Additionally, it aimed to enhance skills in documenting the weapons and police equipment used on survivors. The workshop also focused on how to effectively document information based on witness descriptions and engage



with witnesses to help identify the types of weapons used. Furthermore, participants gained knowledge about relevant international human rights laws that can help assess whether the use of force is necessary and proportionate, and to determine if certain weapons are inherently illegitimate.

Due to the ongoing human rights violations in Belarus and the associated security risks for individuals providing testimony, the IAPB is continuously reviewing its information security measures to ensure compliance with GDPR regulations and to keep information and evidence safe. Both employees and consultants participate in regular online training sessions on IT security provided by DIGNITY.

## I. Lessons learned/ Sustainability/ Sharing of experience

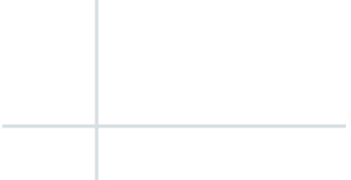
Securing the sustainability of the IAPB's work is a crucial priority to facilitate accountability in the longer term. Issues to be considered in this context have been collected at a meeting in early March 2025 and will form the basis for a one-day gathering of the IAPB Secretariat and staff of partner organisations in early June to discuss further measures to ensure sustainability of the work of the IAPB beyond its existence.

Issues to be discussed include access to both evidentiary databases, including responsibility for the retention of data and upholding the security of the information; capacity of partner organisations to respond to requests; continued survivor access to mental health and psychological support; accessibility of documents and analytical products to criminal justice actors without compromising their evidentiary value and the integrity of ongoing investigations; a standing report as a tool to preserve findings on crimes against humanity; clarification of the possible use of the Europol database (Analysis Project Core International Crimes – AP-CIC); need for cut-off dates for intake of new interviews and documents by the IAPB and/ or requests by prosecutors and other accountability bodies; cooperation and coordination of Belarusian partners without the current consortium structure.

Sustainability has also been built into the conceptualisation of the Working Group on universal jurisdiction in Poland, including by involving the Polish Helsinki Foundation and Warsaw University as local partners. Composed of civil society organisations and practitioners working on universal jurisdiction in Poland, the Working Group aims at strengthening ties and synergies among relevant actors with a view to pursuing accountability of international criminal law violations. Initially, the group focuses on building internal capacity within civil society before progressing to approaches for building constructive relationships with national authorities at a later stage.

Furthermore, the IAPB engaged in initiatives that feed the Platform's lessons learned into **ongoing studies, surveys and workshops**.

To this end, during the reporting period, the IAPB contributed to a **study on the collaboration between national prosecuting authorities** and civil society organisations in justice processes for international crimes, conducted by the Global Initiative Against Impunity consortium. In an interview conducted by TRIAL International, the IAPB shared insights, best practices and lessons learned from its work supporting prosecution authorities in their investigations since 2021.



In February 2025, the IAPB also contributed to the **ongoing efforts of Yemeni civil society organisations** to establish a Centralized Information Repository for evidence in relation to international crimes committed in Yemen. First in a remote interview and later during an in-person workshop, the IAPB shared its lessons learned on establishing and maintaining an evidence database, setting up a cooperative workflow when working within the framework of a consortium of several organisations, and addressing challenges in investigations and analysis.

The IAPB also took part in a survey to inform a research project on open-source investigations facilitated by the Centre for Information Resilience (CIR) and UC Berkeley's Human Rights Center, Swansea University, and lawyers specialising in international criminal law. Sponsored by the United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the project aims to foster engagement between justice and accountability institutions and digital open-source research organisations with the goal of increasing the utility of online open-source material that documents breaches of international criminal law and international human rights law. In the long term, the project aims to advance common standards and practices.

## J. Risks and challenges

Risks highlighted in previous progress reports persisted in this reporting period, particularly the pressure under which the Belarusian co-lead organisations are forced to conduct their work.

Survivors continue to have to balance considerations about their own security and the security of their family with their desire to contribute to accountability and justice, which results in some reluctance to share evidence and provide explicit consent for their testimonies to be shared with accountability bodies.

Some jurisdictions with access to witnesses and an established legal framework nevertheless remain hesitant to initiate investigations, and Belarus continues to 'compete' for attention amongst the human rights-minded international community with other crises situations.

The decline in donor funding has put increasing pressure on the entire sector that supports various NGO initiatives. Following the U.S. funding freeze in January 2025, several European ministries have also announced reductions in their Overseas Development Assistance. This situation could impact negatively on donor funding for Year 3 of Phase III of the Platform.

Sanctions imposed by the US administration against the International Criminal Court by executive order on 6 February 2025<sup>55</sup> may have a significant negative impact on the civil society organisations engaging with the Court and, in particular, with the Office of the Prosecutor. The risk of enforcement penalties for interacting with the OTP could cause some organisations to stop their engagement with the Court entirely.

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<sup>55</sup> The sanctions are in response to the Court's investigation of alleged Israeli and U.S. role in war crimes that fall under the ICC's jurisdiction. The executive order allows the U.S. government to impose sanctions, and visa bans on foreign persons involved in ICC investigations. Both U.S. and non-U.S. persons may potentially be exposed to enforcement penalties for violating the sanctions.

## K. Outlook

The IAPB is working to finalise three more **substantive submissions to prosecutorial services** in three countries and continues to work with a lawyer in another country providing relevant information and evidence to the criminal complaint of a Belarusian citizen. The IAPB is also producing a '**stand-alone document**', to be shared with national prosecutors, based on evidence compiled and analysed in the context of drafting the communication to the ICC supporting the argument that violations committed in Belarus constitute crimes against humanity.

Co-lead organisation REDRESS, in collaboration with the IAPB Secretariat, are facilitating the establishment of a **Working Group on universal jurisdiction (UJ) in Poland** (see also above under I), Sustainability) comprised of a limited number of civil society organisations and practitioners working to strengthen ties and synergies among relevant actors with a view to pursuing accountability of international criminal law violations in Belarus. The first meeting took place on 4 April 2025 in Warsaw, Poland, and focuses on the roles of civil society organisations throughout the lifecycle of UJ cases, including but not limited to evidence collection, victim support, and perpetrator tracking.

The briefing "**A Survivor-Centred Approach to Documentation for the Purpose of Criminal Accountability**" will be published in April/ May 2025 and be made available through the IAPB's website, social media feeds, and direct dissemination.

Benefiting from synergies created by the project "Combatting Impunity in Belarus", implemented by DIGNITY<sup>56</sup> in close coordination with the IAPB Secretariat, staff of the Belarusian co-lead organisations will benefit from a **capacity-building exercise** conducted in the form of a mock trial in Warsaw in June 2025. Orientated around an anonymised case study, the training aims to improve the interview and documentation skills of the Belarusian partners by showing how evidence comes to life throughout a trial.

A **one-day meeting** has been scheduled in early June 2025 to bring the IAPB Secretariat and partners together to discuss measures geared towards ensuring the sustainability of the work of the Platform, and in particular the continued accessibility of the evidence collected, beyond the lifetime of the IAPB.

**Linkage evidence analysis**, also supported by the project "Combatting Impunity in Belarus" will be made available to domestic and international judicial and accountability bodies upon request, to assist in their understanding of Belarusian key state structures and officials allegedly involved in the commission of crimes under international law during the relevant timeframe of the IAPB's mandate.

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<sup>56</sup> This project is separate from but complementary to the work of the IAPB and aims to strengthen the capacity of key actors, including local partner organisations and representatives of relevant national and international authorities, to ensure justice and accountability for crimes committed by Belarusian authorities.

## L. Selection of references to the IAPB

### **Report of the Group of Independent Experts on the Situation of Human Rights in Belarus, 7 February 2025 (UN-Doc. A/HRC/58/68)**

8. In assessing trends, the Group also consulted materials shared by the International Accountability Platform for Belarus.

### **OSCE Warsaw Human Dimension Meeting Side event on Political Prisoners in Belarus, 2 October 2024:**

In her intervention, Ms Sviatlana Tsihanouskaya acknowledged the IAPB as having “laid the ground” for the referral [of international crimes] to the International Criminal Court by Lithuania.



### **Council of Europe, Parliamentary Assembly, “A democratic future for Belarus”, 5 January 2024 (Doc. 15892)<sup>57</sup>**

11.1. welcomes efforts and initiatives by international organisations, human rights defenders, and civil society representatives on the ground for the collection, verification, and preservation of documentation and evidence of serious human rights violations perpetrated in Belarus during and after the August 2020 presidential elections and states its support for the International Accountability Platform for Belarus.

### **A sign of freedom and democracy: University of Graz awards human rights prize to IAPB, 22 March 2024<sup>58</sup>**

The International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB) was founded to document these crimes and bring the perpetrators to justice at a later date. Since its foundation in 2021, it has documented around 2,500 reports from victims and witnesses and identified numerous perpetrators.

For this outstanding achievement, the University of Graz is awarding the organization the Human Rights Prize on 22 March 2024, sending a strong signal for a free and democratic Europe.

### **Report on the serious threat to the OSCE human dimension in Belarus since 5 November 2020, 11 May 2023, by Professor Hervé Ascensio**

28. In this regard, the work of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB), established in 2021 in response to the last OSCE Moscow Mechanism report<sup>19</sup>, should be highlighted. The Rapporteur received precise information on their processes, and he has had personal access to a significant part of the data, corresponding to their work on open-source documents and to a sample of confidential sources on individual cases, including testimonies and decisions of Belarusian courts. He is convinced that the information gathered is highly reliable.

(...)

Recommendations to the International Community:

<sup>57</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/a-democratic-future-for-belarus/1680adee82>

<sup>58</sup> <https://www.uni-graz.at/en/news/a-sign-of-freedom-and-democracy-university-of-graz-awards-human-rights-prize-to-iapb/>



- Support initiatives aimed at reporting and documenting human rights violations in Belarus, and notably the work of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB).

**Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President on the EU's support to the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, 26 March 2021<sup>59</sup>**

Together with a group of EU Member States and other like-minded countries, the EU is supporting the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, an independent and impartial platform for the collection, verification and preservation of documentation and evidence of serious human rights violations perpetrated in Belarus during and after the August 2020 presidential election. The EU supports the Platform politically and, once preparations are finalised, also financially.

**Joint statement by 19 states in support of the establishment of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus, 24 March 2021<sup>60</sup>**

The International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB) has taken on the responsibility of the collection, consolidation, verification and preservation of information, documentation and evidence of serious violations of international human rights law committed in Belarus in the run-up to the 2020 presidential election and its aftermath. (...) We express our full support to the work of the IAPB as an important contribution to the efforts aimed at ensuring accountability in Belarus. We call upon other states, and encourage other international or local accountability initiatives, civil society and other relevant stakeholders, including Belarusian authorities, to cooperate fully with the IAPB for it to effectively carry out its work, to provide any form of assistance, including access to information and documentation, and invite states to help ensure the safety and security of the victims and witnesses of human rights violations in Belarus, members of the IAPB and the collected information, documentation and evidence.

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<sup>59</sup> [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belarus-statement-high-representativevice-president-eu%E2%80%99s-support-international-accountability\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/belarus-statement-high-representativevice-president-eu%E2%80%99s-support-international-accountability_en)

<sup>60</sup> <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/joint-statement-by-19-states-in-support-of-the-establishment-of-the-international-accountability-platform-for-belarus:34543>