

Final report:

External Evaluation of the International Accountability Platform for Belarus (IAPB)

Prepared for: DIGNITY – Danish Institute against Torture
Reference: Project code 3042, contract of 5 May 2025
Date: 28 October 2025

Executive summary

This summary briefly presents the evaluation's main **findings, conclusions** and **recommendations**.

Findings

Relevance

The IAPB clearly speaks to the need of addressing human rights violations in Belarus. This can be illustrated with data on the scale of the violations. As of May 2024, at least 1,275 Belarusians were imprisoned on politically motivated charges; over 224 political prisoners faced health risks due to poor and often inhumane conditions in Belarusian detention; and since 2020, more than half a million people have fled Belarus. IAPB support is clearly aligned with the needs of victims / witnesses, having provided evidence-based mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) to 687 victims (by July 2025). A positive feature of IAPB support for victims is that the platform's support is continuously adjusted to meet the needs of victims. The IAPB also clearly meets the needs of accountability bodies. As of August 2025, and in the framework of ten submissions, six national prosecution authorities, four international accountability bodies, three CSOs and two lawyers have benefited from the IAPB's data collection and analysis.

Coherence

Interview data confirms a strong level of coherence within the consortium that implements the IAPB. This is indicated by none of the partners identifying overlaps with other partner initiatives and the absence of any contestation of the respective roles of the different partners. Instead, the four partners and other stakeholders noted the complementing strengths of the different partners. Dignity has access to international organisations and experts and ensures funding via well-established relations with donors; REDRESS provides access to relevant networks and counselling; the two Belarusian partners conduct interviews with victims, diaspora, and witnesses, secure informed consent, coordinate medical documentation via forensic experts and provide support services on the ground.

The evaluation also found the IAPB to operate in coordination with various international mechanisms that address the situation in Belarus and related human rights violations (United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Examination of the Human Rights situation in Belarus, United Nations Group of Independent Experts on the Human Rights situation in Belarus and Moscow Mechanism Rapporteur of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe). Although these mechanisms are complementary, they differ in focus. Moreover, accountability initiatives focusing on other countries are benefiting from the experience of the IAPB. In general terms, the IAPB is considered a good practice model that should lend itself well for replication in similar contexts, and stakeholders welcome the fact that the platform documents its processes.

Effectiveness

Data on the different IAPB outputs indicates a strong level of consolidation of the evidence hub. Since the launch of the platform there has been a substantial increase in the range of evidentiary sources and analytical products. As of July 2025, the IAPB has collected a total of 34,306 closed source documents and 1,603,032 open-source materials. Moreover, since 2021 the IAPB has collected 3,140 witness statements. Interview data validates the high quality of IAPB outputs. Indeed, the quality of outputs is indicated by accountability mechanisms / national prosecution authorities approaching the IAPB for support. Moreover, stakeholders noted significant improvements in quality over time, with enhanced categorisation of data and translation of relevant documents greatly facilitating the production of analytical documents.

Interview data confirms that IAPB outputs strongly benefited from capacity development activities. Since the establishment of the platform, the IAPB has continuously organised and / or participated in various forms of capacity development activities to consolidate the evidence hub, enhance its capacity to collect and analyse data and to strengthen and expand the range of its analytical outputs. Illustrating enhanced capacities, interviews credited the Belarusian partners, and specifically the documenters with increased professionalism in terms of documentation tasks. In general terms, the quality of IAPB outputs is considered to compare well with similar outputs by United Nations mechanisms.

Turning to the effectiveness of support for national prosecution authorities and international accountability bodies, interview data is consistent in confirming the IAPB's significant support to prosecution authorities and international accountability mechanisms. Again, the quality of the IAPB's work in supporting prosecution authorities / international accountability mechanisms is substantiated by the fact that these stakeholders sought IAPB support on repeated occasions, use IAPB outputs in their own work, and refer to the work of the IAPB. Two recent expert assessments (September 2025) validate the evaluation findings: *'IAPB's analytical work is consistently excellent and is already supporting investigations into violations of human rights and international criminal law by Belarus conducted by international and national law enforcement bodies. Their work – both evidence collection and legal analysis - is equipping courts, prosecutors, and governments with the evidence they need to pursue accountability for crimes committed in Belarus'* and *'I was in each case impressed with the effort and detail that have gone into the preparation of each and every one of the reports and documents which in essence formed the template for future investigations and prosecutions of the relevant subject matter'* (see expert assessments in annex 2).

The IAPB has also performed well in terms of ensuring the mainstreaming of a survivor-centred / trauma-informed approach. As noted above, the IAPB has provided evidence-based MHPSS to 687 victims, and the IAPB has strengthened referral pathways to ensure survivors have access to specialised support. Interview feedback suggests strong attention to changing needs, e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder can be more pronounced for prisoners released after long prison sentences. The emphasis on the survivor-centred approach is further illustrated by the arrangements put in place to protect data on survivors. The IAPB renewed informed consent from survivors by signing consent forms

aligned with international standards to share information with specific bodies who may require access (renewed consent from 1,103 interviewees as of September 2025).

Data collection did not point to major unforeseen short-term outcomes; rather, outcomes were achieved at a level beyond what was initially expected. As such, there have been significant, positive unforeseen long-term outcomes, e.g., other organisations approaching IAPB to replicate the approach to contribute to accountability in other country contexts.

Turning to the question as to how relevant developments would be different in the scenario of 'no IAPB', this evaluation finds that the scenario of 'no IAPB' implies a reduced likelihood of prosecution because of the absence of systematic data. Additionally, the legally admissible and reliable evidence provided by IAPB facilitate their use in prosecution, which has been a limitation in previous human rights violation cases. Interview data suggested a strong consensus on the view that a scenario of no IAPB would mean impunity for the Belarus regime. Moreover, the absence of a centralised and systematic database means that victims are more likely to be approached by multiple organisations, implying the risk of re-traumatisation.

Turning now to the factors that have facilitated / constrained the achievement of outcomes, the facilitating factors included the high quality of IAPB outputs and outstanding capacity of IAPB staff and experts; the responsiveness of the IAPB in terms of responding to requests for support by prosecution authorities, international accountability mechanisms and other stakeholders; the IAPB's strong credibility / trust vis-à-vis state actors, international organisations, and CSOs; the 'personal' commitment of IAPB staff to implement platform tasks and to engage in capacity development. Constraints included challenges in engaging with national prosecution authorities (prosecution authorities lacking experience with universal jurisdiction / resource limitations; challenges in terms of maintaining the Belarus situation on the agenda of donors / political actors; and staff turnover at the Secretariat.

Finally, looking at IAPB efforts in terms of ensuring the creation of standing infrastructure and sustainability of operations, the evaluation finds the IAPB to have performed well. The large majority of stakeholders reflected positively on the IAPB's governance arrangements (Advisory Council and Steering Committee, Secretariat). Whilst there is strong attention to establishing policies / procedures, at the same time the approach of Dignity is valued in terms of allowing for adequate levels of flexibility for the Belarusian partners to adjust procedures to their needs. Secretariat staff and documenters value the strong team spirit. Team building benefits from attention to health of staff and team building exercises via retreats. Moreover, capacity development events contribute to team building / networking. This is important as many IAPB experts / documenters / MHPSS experts work remotely.

Impact

Impact in terms of perpetrators brought to justice can only be assessed in the long term. Indeed, experiences with other regimes having committed similar crimes show that many years can pass before perpetrators can be brought to justice. Conditions for the IAPB to achieve long-term outcomes are considered, to a large extent, to be in place. These conditions include:

- Evidence: The IAPB has collected a substantial amount of evidence (as of July 2025, 34,306 closed source documents, 1,603,032 open-source materials, and 3,140 witness statements).
- Evidence is stored in a secure database that can be accessed at any point in the future.
- Potential willingness / capacity of prosecution authorities / international accountability mechanisms: Willingness and capacity is indicated by the fact that to date, 15 accountability bodies have already engaged with the IAPB.

Sustainability

Finally, Conditions indicating the sustainability of the IAPB are largely in place: Evidence has been collected and is stored in a secure database that can be accessed in the future; The IAPB has benefited from donor support and feedback collected from some donors suggest an interest in the continuation of the IAPB; The IAPB has developed the capacities of the Belarusian partners and of individuals involved in the operation of the IAPB (most notably, documenters and analysts).

Conclusions and recommendations

This evaluation finds the IAPB to have demonstrated very strong performance across all evaluation criteria. This is explained by attention to meeting evolving needs of victims and national prosecution authorities / international accountability bodies, and strong alignment with other relevant initiatives. Moreover, there has been good progress with regard to achieving all four Strategic Outcomes, and there are good prospects for contributing to the overall objective of accountability for severe violations of human rights and international crimes in Belarus. The IAPB's performance is explained by its adequate design and governance arrangements, most notably the work in close partnership with Belarusian organisations, and the outstanding commitment of Secretariat and partner staff, documenters and MHPSS experts.

Recommendations include the following:

- The IAPB lacks an **explicit ToC**, and it is recommended that the partners review the ToC proposed by this evaluation with a view to establishing a ToC that can guide future assessments of performance.
- A series of interviewee recommendations focused on **capacity development**. Regarding the content of capacity development, interviewees suggested capacity development on the themes of victims with long prison sentences; crime of deportation; safeguarding open-source data; security of documenters and of data; assessing the quality of evidence, identification of perpetrators, working with witnesses who are minors, dealing with insider witnesses. Looking at the format of capacity development, interviewees noted their appreciation of the practical nature of most capacity development. Moreover, interviewees valued offline events to facilitate team building and networking.

- With a view to maintaining Belarus on the agenda of international actors / donors, interviewees recommended attention to **identifying new 'trends'**, e.g., 'new' law enforcement units involved in violating rights; 'new' detainment centres etc.
- One interviewee suggested focused data collection on **'damages' suffered by victims** for possible future compensation cases, e.g. costs of medical and psychological treatment.
- Consider options for **supporting MHPSS experts / documenters with avoiding secondary traumatisation**; whilst there is good access to MHPSS, the high workload implies a risk of burnout.
- Ensure continuous attention to high standards in terms of **safety / security of data / documenters**; whilst standards are high, the Belarusian intelligence services are also 'improving' their competences in terms of breaching data protection / using survivors / witnesses to access documenters.
- Interviews with documenters pointed to the room for further enhancing **the 'stability' of contractual / working arrangements**. Some documenters noted concerns over long-term prospects (in exile) for themselves / their dependents.
- Consider the establishment of **terms of reference** for the Advisory Council, to outline the advisory role of this body, clearly establish the framework for Advisory Council activities and note the limitations to sharing information with members.
- Considering the importance of the IAPB's work with national prosecution authorities and the difficulties experienced by this evaluation in terms of interviewing national prosecution authorities, it is recommended for the IAPB to **systematically collect data on its engagement with national prosecution authorities**.

Annex 1 – Evaluation questions

Annex 1 presents the evaluation questions.

Table 1 – Evaluation questions

Evaluation criterion / question	Indicators	Data collection tools
Relevance		
(1) Does the IAPB approach and design align with the needs and priorities of the different beneficiaries (survivors, prosecutors, international organisations, lawyers and civil society organisations)? (focus on Strategic Outcomes (SO) 1, 2, 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which the IAPB aligns with the needs and priorities of the beneficiaries (qualitative indicator) • Number of accountability bodies that have benefited from data collection and analysis • Number of witnesses and victims of torture supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries
Effectiveness		
(2) To what extent has the evidence hub been consolidated? (focus on SO 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Diversity of evidentiary sources • Beneficiary assessment of the quality of evidentiary sources (qualitative indicator) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Interviews with IAPB (focus on documentors), partners, beneficiaries
(3) To what extent have the capacity development activities enhanced the consolidation of the evidence hub? (focus on SO 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficiary assessment of the quality of capacity development (qualitative indicator) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries
(4) To what extent has the IAPB (evidence and analytical products) supported prosecutors and international	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of accountability bodies that approached IAPB/request for assistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries

Evaluation criterion / question	Indicators	Data collection tools
organisations in their processes of investigation and prosecution? (focus on SO 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of cases that effectively used IAPB support (evidence and analytical products in prosecution) • Beneficiary assessment of the quality of evidence and analytical products (qualitative indicator) 	
(5) To what extent was a survivor-centred / trauma-informed approach mainstreamed to all aspects of the IAPB's work? (focus on SO 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of witnesses and victims of torture supported • Beneficiary assessment of the quality of support for witnesses and victims (qualitative indicator) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries
(6) Have there been any unforeseen outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficiary feedback on unforeseen outcomes (qualitative indicator) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries
(7) How would relevant developments be different in the scenario of 'no IAPB'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficiary feedback on scenario of 'no IAPB' (qualitative indicator) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries
(8) What have been the major factors facilitating / constraining the achievement or non-achievement of outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of factors that supported the effectiveness of the project (including IAPB governance) • Examples of factors that hindered the effectiveness of the project and how they have been addressed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries
(9) To what extent does the IAPB ensure the creation of standing infrastructure and sustainability of operations? (focus on SO 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beneficiary assessment of the quality of infrastructure (qualitative indicator) • Extent to which other stakeholders have engaged with the IAPB to 'replicated' IAPB approaches to evidence collection 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Desk review • Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries

Evaluation criterion / question	Indicators	Data collection tools
Impact		
(10) To what extent have IAPB outcomes contributed to increased accountability, redress for victims, other changes in the situation in Belarus / vis-à-vis Belarus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beneficiary assessment of the level of increased accountability, redress, situation in Belarus / vis-à-vis Belarus (qualitative indicator) and / or changes in attitudes and practices of key stakeholders Country-based working groups established to identify strategies for persuading criminal justice authorities to investigate / other similar initiatives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk research Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries
Sustainability		
(11) How does the project ensure the continuity of IAPB outputs / outcomes and serve for long-term prosecution?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Documents collecting / disseminating / communicating the experience of the IAPB Number of collaboration arrangements (e.g., working groups, surveys, other initiatives) with other organisations Beneficiary assessment of the level sustainability of IAPB outputs / outcomes (qualitative indicator) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries
Coherence		
(12) Internal coherence - To what extent does the IAPB align with other consortium partner initiatives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partner assessment of the level of internal coherence of IAPB outputs / outcomes (qualitative indicator) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries

Evaluation criterion / question	Indicators	Data collection tools
(13) External coherence - To what extent does the IAPB align / compare with other initiatives of relevance to accountability in Belarus or similar country contexts?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beneficiary assessment of the level of internal coherence of IAPB outputs / outcomes (qualitative indicator) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desk review Interviews with IAPB, partners, beneficiaries