

Reference: 01994613

Information Requests
information.requests@ofcom.org.uk

2 June 2025

Freedom of Information request: Right to know request

Thank you for your request for information about complaints regarding racial misrepresentation in UK media.

We received this request on 6 May 2025 and we have considered your request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 ("the FOI Act").

Your request

1. The number of complaints received by Ofcom over the past 10 years (or the most recent period available) concerning the disproportionate or unequal representation of different racial or ethnic groups in UK television, radio, or other regulated media, relative to their proportion in the general population.

2. A breakdown of these complaints, if available, by year and by broad category (e.g. under-representation, stereotyping, misrepresentation, or other).

3. The number of investigations initiated by Ofcom on the basis of such complaints, and the outcomes of those investigations.

4. Where investigations were concluded, I would also request:

- * A summary of the key findings or conclusions*
- * Any formal recommendations made to broadcasters or content providers*
- * Whether any sanctions, warnings, or guidance were issued as a result*

If the above information is not available in the exact format requested, I would appreciate any relevant data or documentation that addresses the core subject of racial or ethnic representation/misrepresentation in UK media.

Our response

Before responding to your request, we would like to provide some background information on Ofcom's complaints procedures and reporting.

Complaints about content standards are handled under [Ofcom's Procedures for investigating breaches of content standards for television and radio](#).

Ofcom's Broadcast and On Demand Bulletin (the 'Bulletin'), published every fortnight on our website, includes decisions about the complaints we have considered. [The Bulletin](#) covers a range of cases, including those which Ofcom has escalated for full investigation, and those which, after

careful assessment, Ofcom has decided not to pursue because they did not raise issues warranting investigation. The Bulletin can be accessed on our website.

We log complaints on our complaints database by category of the complaint issue, which relate to rules in [Ofcom's Broadcasting Code](#), which sets standards for programme content that broadcasters must follow. Although all Ofcom decisions are published in the Bulletins, we only hold searchable data for the past five years.

There is no specific category used exclusively to identify the individual subject of a complaint such as the disproportionate or unequal representation of different racial or ethnic groups. Complaints in this area could be logged under a range of categories depending on exactly how a complaint is presented, for example, due accuracy, material misleadingness, race discrimination / offence. These categories are not exhaustive and would be used for a wide range of complaint topics.

Given that we do not hold searchable information in the format of your request and would need to look at each complaint on a case-by-case basis, with volumes comprising tens of thousands of complaints a year, this would take us over the permitted timescales for FOI requests. Therefore, under Section 12 of the Freedom of Information Act ('the FOI Act'), Ofcom is not obliged to comply with this request for information as we estimate that the cost of complying with this request would exceed the 'appropriate limit'. The appropriate limit is set out in the Freedom of Information and Data Protection (Appropriate Limit and Fees) Regulations 2004 ('the Regulations'), and is, for Ofcom, £450. The Regulations provide that costs are to be estimate at a rate of £25 per person per hour, which equates to 18 hours of time. That sum is intended to cover the estimated costs involved in determining whether Ofcom holds the information requested, identifying, locating, retrieving and extracting the information from any document containing it. Ofcom estimates that it would take at least 18 hours to search for and retrieve the information,

Please note that cases which Ofcom has escalated for investigation form a much smaller base than all complaints we consider, and previous Ofcom investigation decisions can be viewed in the Bulletin for complaints from 2020 onwards in the section titled "look at past decisions" and also filtered by complaint category. However, we are unable to identify any Ofcom investigations related to "disproportionate or unequal representation of different racial or ethnic groups". In principle such issues would be an editorial matter for broadcasters in the first instance. Our role would be limited to whether disproportionate or unequal representation raised a Code issue, for example, in relation to our rules on due accuracy for news, material misleadingness in other programmes, or offence.

We hope this information is helpful. If you have any further queries, then please send them to information.requests@ofcom.org.uk – quoting the reference number above in any future communications.

Yours sincerely,

Information Requests

Request an internal review

If you are unhappy with the response you have received to your request for information, or think that your request was refused without a reason valid under the law, you may ask for an internal review. If you do, it will be subject to an independent review within Ofcom. We will either uphold the original decision, or reverse or modify it.

If you would like to ask us to carry out an internal review, you should get in touch within two months of the date of this letter. There is no statutory deadline for us to complete our internal review, and the time it takes will depend on the complexity of the request. But we will

try to complete the review within 20 working days (or no more than 40 working days in exceptional cases) and keep you informed of our progress. Please email the Information Requests team (information.requests@ofcom.org.uk) to request an internal review.

Taking it further

If you are unhappy with the outcome of our internal review, then you have the right to [complain to the Information Commissioner's Office](#).