



Submission to Press Recognition Panel

January 2026

Executive summary:

This submission from Amnesty International UK explains how current news reporting practices, particularly around immigration, asylum, race, and human rights, are causing serious harm to individuals and communities, contributing to social hostility and violence, and undermining public understanding of the law and human rights. It identifies systemic weaknesses in complaints and redress mechanisms and highlights the growing role of platform amplification and AI in intensifying these harms. We propose areas for practical improvement to press standards and redress mechanisms, while reaffirming the crucial importance of press freedom and independent journalism.

Introduction:

1. On 17 November 2025, the Panel invited a submission from Amnesty International UK in response to its Call for Information, drawing particular attention to press reporting of matters relating to human rights, refugees, and migration. In this submission we primarily address the first of the Panel's questions concerning harm caused by news publishers. We provide more limited responses to questions concerning redress and social media.
2. Although we do not address it in this submission, we note the close relation or even interdependence of political rhetoric and news reporting. This raises at least two issues (which we do not address). First, it raises questions of political motivation (by which we mean commitment to a particular political view, not necessarily to a particular political actor or party). Second, it raises questions of irresponsibility (by which we mean failure to consider the accuracy, motivation, or harm of political rhetoric before reporting or adopting it). These questions are profound concerns given their connection to important values such as those concerning independence and the public interest in news reporting – values that Amnesty recognises in our strong defence of journalism and journalists.
3. These harms are occurring at a moment of heightened social tension around migration and identity, in which misinformation and inflammatory narratives have already contributed to real-world violence and intimidation. In this context, the effectiveness of press standards and redress mechanisms is not a theoretical concern but a pressing public-interest issue.

Misreporting, unjustified intrusion, coverage that unfairly targets or stereotypes diverse groups, and other harm caused by news publishers:

4. An overarching concern in news reporting is a failure to adequately distinguish between reporting news, offering opinion, and providing entertainment. This has especially harmful implications for those individuals or groups of people in the public eye, whose characteristics cause them to be more vulnerable to prejudice or hostility. In short, the reasons for this include that a concern to entertain will favour reporting and opinion that is popular (in the sense that it is attractive or in some way engaging to a significant audience). Reporting and opinion that is controversial (in the sense of stirring emotions and reaction) is more likely to be preferred; and opinion more favoured over news (in that strict reporting of news is primarily concerned with facts or evidence, whereas opinion is not so constrained). The effect is cyclical. If, for example, there is widespread prejudice about a defined group of people, it will stir emotion and engage a readership to report on that group and matters concerning them. That in turn will further entrench prejudice.
5. None of this is to deny excellent news reporting (including investigation and analysis). However, the preponderance and impact of such reporting is outweighed by the volume and impact of opinion, too much of which is not grounded in fact or evidence and which frequently presents matters, for which there is no evidence or which the evidence contradicts, as if these are fact. This may be by accident, carelessness, or design. The impact is harmful whichever is the case.
6. We draw attention to several discrete examples of harmful reporting. These are far from exhaustive. They are mostly but not solely focused on matters relating to immigration and asylum. They are all relatively recent or continuing examples. We select these as providing some of the most egregious examples of different types of harm and concerns relating to harm.

Reporting of nationality, ethnicity, and immigration status

7. It is now relatively common that reporting identifies the nationality, ethnicity, colour, and/or immigration status of people who are, or are suspected to be, responsible for serious crimes and other antisocial and harmful acts.
8. There is often no purpose to identifying these characteristics other than to stir emotion or prejudice that associates crime or other antisocial behaviour with persons sharing particular characteristics. In 2025, there has been much political and media attention to the matter of identifying these characteristics. Some of this has been prompted by reflection on the immediate aftermath of the horrific knife attack in which three children were killed in Southport in 2024. However, it has also been led by concerted political campaigning to intensify fears and anxiety concerning management of the immigration system by making false claims about the responsibility of migrant people for crime in the UK. This attention has led to revised police guidance, which now more stridently favours

the early release of information to identify these characteristics.¹ That had been demanded by ministers and others – including some news publishers, the political actors or commentators to whom they provide editorial space, and/or professional associations of editors and reporters.

9. Reflection on the horrific attack in Southport, to which we return in relation to social media in a later section of this submission, has included concern at the role of misinformation (about the perpetrator's religion and immigration status) in stirring anger and hate to ignite, sustain and/or exacerbate serious violence and threats against people seeking asylum, migrant people, Muslims, and other people minoritised by their ethnicity (also against people providing support or services, including legal services, to or relating to refugees and migrants).² There are two distinct features of the misinformation that was circulated. First, it was inflammatory (and intentionally so). Second, it was false. Regrettably, reflection has overwhelmingly focused on the second of these features and treated the inflammatory nature of what was done as an aggravating feature of the falsity without considering it as a harmful wrong in its own right.
10. This is a grave concern and one that is exacerbated by the revised police guidance to which it has led. Inflammatory reporting is harmful, whether what is reported is true or false. That reporting is false is clearly a factor that raises a question of culpability for any harmful consequence. It may imply recklessness or even suggest malice. It does not follow, however, that accuracy absolves any culpability for harms that are caused, still less that accuracy removes any question of recklessness or ill motivation.
11. In this instance, Amnesty is gravely concerned that the revised guidance and the discourse that led to it (and which continues) has legitimised harm. It has confirmed a dangerous notion that the nationality, ethnicity, colour, and/or immigration status of people who are, or are suspected of being, responsible for crime and other harmful acts, is generally or ordinarily relevant. It has confirmed not only that the public should expect to have this information but should treat it as relevant to crime and other antisocial activity. It has done so in a wider context (see below) of persistent, forceful, and false association of crime, illegality, and social harm with people who migrate to the UK and people identified by characteristics of race and religion (which is also aggravated by tacit linkage of matters of immigration, race, and religion).³ In this context, reporting that a suspect is British and white does not have the same impact as reporting that another is, for example, an Albanian, a Muslim, Black, seeking asylum or a migrant to the UK. This would be the case even if reporting of crime

¹ The National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing published interim guidance in August 2025 in response to heightened media and political attention to the question of disclosing suspects' ethnicity and nationality

² The Home Affairs Committee's *Police response to the 2024 summer disorder*, Second Report of Session 2024-25, HC 381, provides useful background though its focus does not include detailed inquiry into the scale and spread of violence, including the threat of violence, and who was targeted by this

³ See e.g., Runnymede Trust reports, [A hostile environment: Language, race, surveillance and the media \(Phase I\)](#), 2025 and [A hostile environment: Language, race, surveillance and the media \(Phase II\)](#), 2025

and other antisocial behaviour otherwise avoided disproportionate reporting of the actions of people with certain characteristics and/or disproportionate reporting of the harmfulness of their actions.

12. The prejudice, which underpinned why the identification of a person's religion and immigration status was considered useful to those who maliciously spread that information following an horrific attack that included the killing of three children (information which in the particular instance was also false), has been further entrenched. Accordingly, that malice has been rewarded and the purposes to which it is put advanced. This is because the capacity to spread inflammatory information – true or false – is not addressed, save for official endorsement of the notion that such information is relevant, which can only affirm prejudice and enable serious and harmful social agitation.

Use of the word 'illegal' in relation to asylum and related reporting

13. There is a close connection between much of the wider reporting of immigration and asylum and the previous concern. This is because much of that reporting presents immigration as if it is inherently harmful or threatening to the UK and/or the wider public; and makes a strong association with crime by the ubiquitous use of the word 'illegal' in conjunction with stories that link crime and immigration. This link is made by various means including running separate issues together (such as stories concerning people seeking asylum and people designated as 'foreign criminals'),⁴ frequent direct association of certain people (people seeking asylum, migrant people, or minoritised people who may be perceived to be migrants) with particular types of crime (especially related to drugs, sexual or other violence), and/or decontextualised reporting that emphasises such association (suggesting it to be disproportionate or overwhelming).⁵

14. Use of the word 'illegal' merits consideration in its own right. Its widespread use encompasses a host of different circumstances of people who either enter the UK without the permission required by the rules or who overstay the permission they are granted to enter or stay in the UK. There are four errors at the heart of this. First, some of the people have not committed any illegal act under UK law.⁶ This first error constitutes straightforwardly inaccurate reporting. Second, some have in strict terms breached immigration law, but good policy and the UK's international legal duties require they should not be treated as having committed any crime.⁷ Third, some people are clearly not culpable for

⁴ This designation is itself controversial, yet routinely repeated without acknowledgement of that controversy, since it refers to people who are without British citizenship, which include people who are born in the UK, people who have never lived or even visited anywhere but the UK, and people who are entitled under British nationality law to that citizenship; it also includes people who have grown up in the UK having been brought or sent to this country in their early childhood.

⁵ Our assessment is largely the same as that set out in the Runnymede Trust reports, *op cit*

⁶ i.e., those with a statutory defence under section 31, Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

⁷ i.e., refugees generally

any offence they may have committed.⁸ These two errors do not constitute strictly inaccurate reporting in the sense of stating something that is untrue. Nonetheless, they are each highly prejudicial for reporting something in a significantly partial and harmful way (leaving out any reference to considerations that are plainly and highly relevant to any reflection on the matter of lawfulness). The fourth error concerns the overall impact of this reporting. Ubiquitous use of the word ‘illegal’ creates a false impression of homogeneity of the people or activity described. The impact of this goes far wider than the people reported on for it both tends to create a general impression of immigration and catches anyone who is perceived, wrongly or rightly, to be a migrant to the UK.

15. Use of the word ‘illegal’ compounds (or is compounded by) other prevalent language used in reporting on immigration and asylum, much of which is dehumanising (e.g., flows and influxes);⁹ and reporting that falsely asserts culpability whether expressly or by implication. People seeking asylum are, for example, regularly accused of ‘jumping a queue’ or ‘gaming the system.’

15.1. The first of these is simply false. Asylum cannot be sought in the UK without first getting here, there is no visa available for that purpose, and countries from which any significant number of refugees come to the UK are all on the visa list (meaning the rules permit no travel to the UK without first obtaining a visa). There is, therefore, no queue to jump – even assuming that the establishment of a visa route would provide a safe and accessible option for a refugee.

15.2. The second of these is inaccurate for making a generalised accusation that is entirely false in many or even most of the circumstances to which it applies and, at least, unreasonably prejudicial in many others. ‘Gaming the system’ is, for example, frequently used in relation to claims made after someone has entered the UK including after their being arrested by immigration officers, in relation to people who appeal against being refused asylum, or in relation to people who make fresh claims for asylum after they have exhausted any appeal rights. Each of these consists of a person exercising their rights under UK law and policy (and in some cases under international law too). Although the ‘system’ tightly constrains these rights, it allows for them precisely to secure against injustice to those who may exercise them. That includes people who may have no opportunity to make an earlier claim because they have been under the influence or control of others (including human traffickers/modern slavers) or for whom the system has not worked well (e.g., failing to provide sufficient time or opportunity to secure competent legal assistance and obtain and present relevant evidence) or whose circumstances have changed. However, this term (like other prejudicial reporting) is widely used so its implications are strongly attached to

⁸ e.g., victims of human trafficking generally; also, children sent or brought to the UK

⁹ Dehumanising language is also a concern expressed in the Runnymede Trust reports, *op cit*

seeking asylum *per se*, including people who have done none of the things that are suggested to be ‘gaming.’

16. Reporting pervasively asserts other negative associations – both with ‘illegality’ and with seeking asylum. Some associations may be accurate but are prejudicial for not being explained or being presented without human or other vital context. Others are falsely presented as applying generally even if there may be real examples of them. Others are simply false, including repetition of assertions by political commentators and actors without analysis of their accuracy or foundation. Examples include:

- 16.1. The reporting of people arriving by ‘small boat,’ which has consistently been alarmist and dehumanising. The reporting focuses on numbers (of people and/or of boats), but even this dehumanised approach is not contextualised. The circumstances of people who attempt these journeys (and others) to seek asylum is rarely addressed; and their number is rarely compared to the number of people seeking or receiving asylum elsewhere. Nor is it generally reported alongside reporting of the proportion of the people arriving by these means who claim asylum immediately and/or who receive asylum here.¹⁰
- 16.2. It is frequently asserted that there is a principle that refugees must claim asylum in the first safe country they enter. The assertion is rarely ever interrogated. No source for it is provided, which reflects the absence of any such principle in asylum law notwithstanding its repeated assertion by many politicians in justification of policies that are harmful to refugees (particularly policies to deter and prevent people seeking asylum).
- 16.3. The cost of asylum accommodation is frequently reported. This is done with little if any analysis of the asylum policies that have caused these costs to rise dramatically over recent years; and often with no acknowledgement of the policy to refuse permission to work to people who seek asylum (meaning that most such people have no means to support themselves or contribute to that).¹¹
- 16.4. Migrant people are frequently reported as causing public services (such as the NHS, social housing, social services, and social security) to be overstretched or made more costly. This is presented as both a drain on the taxpayer and a reason members of the public cannot access services. This is e.g. done with no analysis of the extra revenue collected from migrants via above-cost immigration fees and a high immigration surcharge (in addition to migrant people paying the same general taxes

¹⁰ Further and wider concerns regarding reporting on immigration by numbers are e.g. addressed in the Runnymede Trust reports, *op cit*

¹¹ The particular attention given to accommodation is also discussed in the Runnymede Trust (Phase II) report, *op cit*

as other members of the public);¹² with no or little recognition of the various exclusion of migrant people from various services and recourse of public funds; and with little acknowledgment of the reliance of many services (and much else of real importance to society) on the labour of migrant people. Such acknowledgment as is given to the latter, rarely extends beyond recognition of the role of relatively skilled people (e.g., doctors and nurses), who are generally well or relatively well paid, as distinct from poorly paid people (e.g., hospital orderlies and cleaners).

- 16.5. Integration and social cohesion are frequently raised as points of concern related to immigration. This includes giving implicit or even explicit justification for plainly antisocial and divisive activities by some people against migrants. Little if any attention is given to any wider responsibility to enable migrant people to be and feel integrated, or to other social divisions from which many migrant people and others suffer (such as wide socio-economic inequality).

Misreporting of immigration decisions relating to ECHR

17. Some newspapers frequently report decisions of courts and tribunals in immigration cases in criticism of the judiciary, lawyers, or the European Convention on Human Rights. The decisions reported are all of the same type in that they concern someone who has succeeded (or is reported to have succeeded) with an appeal against a decision to refuse asylum or other permission to stay or a decision to remove or bar them from the UK on human rights grounds. Much of this reporting is inaccurate. Facts are reported from the court or tribunal's decision, which are either taken out of context or even irrelevant to the decision yet are presented as the sole or critical reason for the decision. Relevant facts are routinely ignored. No wider context is provided, such as the larger volume of decisions made by courts and tribunals to refuse similar appeals; or that the availability of appeals has been restricted to human rights grounds for several years. The effect is to falsely present human rights as obstructing legitimate immigration control in ways that are illegitimate or even absurd (and the implication is that this is deliberate).¹³

Muslim communities

18. There is a strong correlation with many concerns relating to immigration with concerns that arise in reporting of Muslim and other racialised communities. This is a concern in itself because of the tendency for reporting to compound a wider problem whereby racialised people are wrongly treated as migrant people (and vice versa).

¹² Fees charges to migrants is the subject of Amnesty's January 2025 briefing [*Immigration Fees: unfair and inefficient*](#)

¹³ This is further discussed in Amnesty's June 2025 briefing [*Article 8: private and family life*](#)

19. However, we highlight coverage of Muslim communities in the UK as it is both extensive and overwhelmingly negative. Of particular concern is the association of Muslims with 'extremism' and the use of negative and racist stereotypes.¹⁴ The connection between hostile reporting on Islam and Muslims and racist discrimination and violence is of especial concern. As racist hate crimes continue to rise, addressing these concerns should be a matter of urgency.¹⁵ We note that these or related concerns extend to employment within media institutions (including publishers).¹⁶

Weaponisation of gender-based violence

20. There has been a recent resurgence of discourse about the role of Muslim men and migrant men as perpetrators of gender-based violence. This includes discussion about grooming gangs, which in the media has focused on Muslim men as the originators of child sexual exploitation, and about discussion about people seeking asylum, including men who arrive by 'small boats' and men housed in 'asylum hotels.' There is a close link in the reporting of these distinct matters in that the racialisation of 'grooming gangs' enables or exacerbates narratives that cast racialised migrant men (who may or may not be Muslim) as threats to women. (This is one area in which the close relation between political rhetoric and news reporting to which we refer in the introduction to this submission is particularly acute – as e.g. evidenced by the rhetoric of senior representatives of traditional mainstream political parties and the recent Pink Ladies protest movement and groups such as the Women's Safety Institute.)

21. Reporting that links Muslim men and migrant men to gender-based violence continues and is widespread notwithstanding widely available and authoritative data confirming that neither ethnicity nor migration status are indicators of criminality or likelihood to perpetrate gender-based violence.¹⁷ Official data and reports repeatedly confirm the vast majority of offenders to be white; and that victims are failed by a narrative that focuses on race, religion and/or migration status rather than on protecting women and girls or securing justice.¹⁸ Reporting on gender-based violence therefore fuels prejudice and racism. It also exacerbates misunderstanding of this serious matter, attributing it to 'deviant' individuals with particular characteristics rather than as being a structural issue that is pervasive across society. Equally, it tends to make

¹⁴ This links to concerns and findings discussed and referenced in Amnesty's '*This is the Thought Police: The Prevent duty and its chilling effect on human rights*', November 2023; and the Runnymede Trust's *Islamophobia: towards a working definition*, 2025

¹⁵ We note, however, it was nearly a decade ago that research from the University of Cambridge was discussed at a roundtable event in the House of Lords, attended by the then Home Office Minister for Countering Extremism identified mainstream media reporting as contributing to rising hostility towards Muslims in the UK: see <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/media-fuelling-rising-hostility-towards-muslims-in-britain>

¹⁶ See the Centre for Media Monitoring's *Muslim Women in Media: Breaking Barriers, Bearing the Burden*, July 2025

¹⁷ This is e.g. a matter highlighted by the Runnymede Trust's (Phase II) report, *op cit*

¹⁸ Official data includes that collated by the Hydrant Programme and published jointly with the Child Sexual Exploitation Taskforce and National Police Chiefs' Council

‘invisible’ gender-based violence that is directed against racialised or minoritised women and girls, including migrant women who face additional challenges in seeking justice, protection, or support.

Social security claimants and the system

22. Similar concerns to those relating to immigration arise in reporting of the social security system and claimants – including strong associations of ‘gaming’ the system, criminality, and unfair cost to the wider public (including consequential depletion of public services and/or higher taxation). This includes reporting that uses plainly prejudicial terminology and makes highly negative generalised assertions, with little reporting of the varied circumstances of people who make claims or receive benefits or of the system’s injustice and bureaucracy imposed on claimants.¹⁹

Redress for harm caused by news reporters:

23. Generally, complaints systems are particularly ill-suited to address the speed with which misinformation is disseminated and takes hold, harms that are done to communities or groups of people, and harmful and inaccurate narratives that are repeated across several outlets and platforms. The Panel may wish to consider means to increase the prominence and speed of corrections, routes for representative rather than individual complaints, improved standards in reporting judicial decisions, and consideration of how correction can be disseminated to match the spread of misinformation.

24. Our experience is that the right of reply is often ineffective. Replies are often refused on timing or editorial grounds. If published, this is often after the news cycle with a fraction of the reach of what is replied to, heavily edited and stripped of much context, and rarely provides any opportunity to address harmful narratives rather than discrete errors. Pursuing replies is resource intensive and risks prompting further hostile coverage. For these reasons, the right of reply is particularly inadequate to address systemic harms or harms to communities or groups.

Social media, AI, and news reporting:

25. Amnesty has over recent years drawn attention to how social media platforms are used, even designed (whether carelessly or intentionally), to quickly disseminate false and hateful information and opinion that encourages or generates racism, Islamophobia, misogyny, and xenophobia.²⁰ There are also strong links between mainstream media (including newspapers) and social

¹⁹ Amnesty’s [*Social Insecurity: The devastating human rights impact of social security system failures in the UK*](#), April 2025, includes concerns relating to stigma, government rhetoric and reporting

²⁰ Amnesty’s May 2025 [*submission to the Science, Innovation and Technology Committee*](#) inquiry into *Social Media, Misinformation, and Harmful Algorithms* provides further information and sourced references; and in August 2025, Amnesty published a [*Technical explainer on X’s recommender system and the 2024 racist riots*](#)

media – whether the use that mainstream media makes of social media to raise its profile and disseminate its opinion and reporting; or its reliance on social media for information and opinion.

26. The horrific attack in Southport, referred to earlier, provides example of how harmful information (whether false or accurate) is routinely amplified and accelerated through platform distribution, often outpacing capacity to mitigate harm by corrections or complaints processes.

Key Recommendations for the Panel's Consideration:

The Panel may wish to consider the following measures as part of its assessment of the effectiveness of press regulation and future development of the Recognition System:

- **Strengthening standards on contextual and accurate reporting of judicial decisions**, including clearer requirements to avoid misleading shorthand and to provide relevant legal context.
- **Improving the prominence and speed of corrections**, particularly where misinformation or harmful narratives have reached wide audiences.
- **Creating routes for representative or group complaints** to better address harms suffered by communities or groups rather than only identifiable individuals.
- **Enhancing mechanisms for dissemination of corrections and remedies** to ensure that corrective information travels across platforms and reaches those audiences reached by the original harm and at comparable scale.
- **Ensuring recognition frameworks account for modern media realities**, including platform amplification, online-only publishers, influencer-led content that functions as journalism, and the growing use of AI tools in news production and distribution.