



international  
broadcasting  
trust



# SMALL WORLD

International factual programming on  
public service channels (2023-24)

Martin Scott

# Foreword

Our democracy and civil society are stronger when we have access to high-quality, factual programming about the wider world. As citizens, it's essential that we understand what is happening beyond our borders and hear from people and communities in other countries. This enables us to respond effectively to the rapidly evolving global landscape and comprehend the local impact of international events.

Whilst audiences are increasingly accessing public service media online – through services such as BBC iPlayer and ITV X – traditional television channels continue to attract large audiences. For many, these 'linear' channels remain a vital window onto the world, offering insights into life, cultures, people, and events from abroad. It is therefore essential to continue monitoring the television channels, whilst developing new methods for tracking the Public Service Broadcasters as they transition to becoming 'digital first' providers. This is a crucial part of IBT's work, which we will be reporting on in the coming months.

We are grateful to Professor Martin Scott for his detailed analysis of data collected by IBT throughout 2023 and 2024. His findings highlight troubling trends in international coverage, such as an over-reliance on travelogues, at the expense of current affairs and documentaries, as well as significant gaps in the issues and countries represented, particularly in relation to humanitarian crises and conflict zones.

I hope this report will help to inform broadcasters, policy-makers, regulators, and civil society as we strive to reimagine public service media for an online world, whilst maintaining the societal value of channels that continue to serve huge audiences across the UK.

**Gareth Benest**  
**Advocacy Director, IBT**

## About the author

Martin Scott is a Professor of Media and Global Development at the University of East Anglia. He has published research on international journalism, media freedom, media influence on aid, journalism funding models, and news audiences. His books include *Capturing News*, *Capturing Democracy* (2024), *Humanitarian Journalists* (2022), *Media and Development* (2014) and *From Entertainment to Citizenship* (2014).

## About IBT

The International Broadcasting Trust is a UK charity working to protect and expand spaces for international stories within the media. We provide support and guidance to our members – NGOs from across the humanitarian, international development, and environmental sectors – and help them to understand the rapidly changing media landscape. We campaign to safeguard and increase the few remaining spaces for international stories to be heard, across public service broadcasting and the wider media landscape. [ibt.org.uk](https://ibt.org.uk)



# Executive Summary

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the UK's Public Service Broadcasters (PSBs) in covering global events through current affairs and other factual programmes on television channels. To achieve this, we analysed the volume, originality, scheduling, genre, and geographic focus of international (non-news) factual programmes broadcast on the main seven UK public service channels – BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, ITV 1, Channel 4 and Channel 5 – in 2023 and 2024.

Our most striking finding is that well over half of all international factual programmes were travelogues. This genre was especially common on ITV 1, Channel 5, BBC Four and BBC Two. However, we also identified a distinct lack of diversity amongst the presenters of these programmes. Nine of the ten most frequently appearing presenters of international travelogues were men. The only woman to feature on this top ten list was the singer and television presenter, Jane McDonald, who presented programmes such as *Jane McDonald: Lost in Japan* on Channel 5. The journalist and broadcaster, Clive Myrie was the only non-white presenter in the top ten.

We also find that international factual programmes were very heavily concentrated on a small number of countries. Two thirds of international factual programming in our sample focussed on just 15 countries – with the USA, Italy and Spain receiving the most coverage – primarily in the form of travelogues.

Although the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza both received a significant amount of coverage in documentaries and current affairs programmes, 35 countries experiencing humanitarian crises collectively received just 6.5% of all international factual programming across both years. Chad, the Central African Republic and Burundi received no coverage at all. In 2024, approximately six million people in Chad needed humanitarian assistance due to a protracted and multidimensional humanitarian crisis.

There was just one factual programme set in Central Asia within our two-year study, across all seven public service channels – and this was a repeat of an episode of *Around the World in 80 Treasures*, originally broadcast in 2005. Indeed, we found that half of all international factual programmes on UK public service channels were repeats.

Looking across the different channels, there are reasons for both concern and optimism. The BBC's dedicated youth channel BBC Three is an alarming outlier in this report. Once a showcase for innovative current affairs and high-impact documentaries for young audiences, it is the only channel in our study to have reduced its international coverage, and what remains is often from the true-crime or reality genres.

BBC One broadcast the second lowest volume of international factual programming, ahead of only BBC Three. Although the channel did carry several documentaries about issues and countries not covered by other outlets, they were often scheduled between midnight and 5am once it is running content from the BBC News channel.

Conversely, the international coverage of Channel 5 – a commercial PSB known more for its national and regional focus – increased by a massive 76% between 2023 and 2024. Whilst the channel does not currently broadcast international current affairs programmes – relying instead almost exclusively on celebrity-fronted travelogues – it's encouraging to see the channel working hard to bring the world to the UK.

**Our most striking finding was that well over half of all international factual programmes were travelogues**

# Key characteristics of international factual programming by channel

**BBC Two** had the greatest volume of international factual programming in our sample, nearly two thirds of which was in the form of travelogues, often focussed on gardening or cooking.

**BBC Four** had the second highest volume of international factual programming and the second highest proportion of programmes broadcast at peak-time. However, it also had by far the highest proportion of repeats. Its international coverage was characterised by a relatively strong focus on Asia and more documentaries than most other channels.

**BBC One** had the second least volume of international factual programming and nearly half of this was broadcast between midnight and 5am – far more than any other channel. However, it also had the lowest proportion of repeats and by far the highest proportion of international current affairs content. Its international factual programmes tended to focus more on Asia.

**Channel 4** had the third highest volume of international factual programming – and second lowest proportion of repeats. Its content tended to focus more on the Americas and Africa.

**ITV 1** had the highest proportion of international factual programming in the form of travelogues, most of which focussed on cooking. It also had a relatively high proportion of programming set in Europe and the highest percentage of programmes broadcast off-peak.

**Channel 5** had the second highest proportion of international factual programming in the form of travelogues and the fewest documentaries. It had no international current affairs programming. Notably, its international factual programming increased significantly between 2023 and 2024. Almost half of its content was set in Europe.

**BBC Three** stood out because it had the least amount of international factual programming overall and was the only channel where coverage declined between 2023 and 2024. Within that coverage, it had the highest proportion of documentaries – typically in the true crime genre – and reality-TV style shows. It also had a significantly higher proportion of factual programming set in the Americas and Oceania, and relatively little set in Europe and Africa.

# Introduction

Over the past two years, rising geopolitical tensions, rapid technological innovations, and the accelerating effects of climate change have made the world an increasingly complex, unpredictable, and precarious place. 2023 saw the onset of the ongoing civil war in Sudan and the Israel–Hamas conflict, as well as the escalating effects of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. That same year witnessed a record 339 million people across 69 countries needing humanitarian assistance.<sup>1</sup> In 2024, 1.7 billion people voted in elections in over 60 countries – making it the largest ever global test for democracy.<sup>2</sup>

Factual television programmes about our world help to provide an enabling environment for effective foreign policy, particularly humanitarian support, by raising awareness of key global issues amongst domestic audiences. Building public support for UK aid requires at least some public awareness of the challenges that people are facing around the world.

How well did the UK’s public service television channels cover global events for UK audiences in its factual programmes during this period? One of the key distinguishing features of public service media is a commitment to informing audiences about the wider world, because purely commercial broadcasters are often less inclined to invest in international programming due to the relatively higher costs and the smaller audiences it attracts. According to the Public Media Alliance ‘providing international context in today’s globalised world’ is one of the key pillars of public media.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of the BBC, one of its five public purposes is to ‘provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them.’<sup>4</sup> In particular, the BBC’s Charter mandates that it should:

... provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs and factual programming to build people’s understanding of all parts of the United Kingdom and of the wider world... It should offer a range and depth of analysis and content... so that all audiences can engage fully with major local, regional, national, United Kingdom and global issues and participate in the democratic process, at all levels, as active and informed citizens.<sup>5</sup>

Unfortunately, Ofcom does not currently monitor levels of international factual programming provided by the PSBs – making it difficult to assess how well they are fulfilling their internationally oriented public service principles. The International Broadcasting Trust (IBT) is working to address this shortfall by monitoring the linear schedules and, beginning in 2025, the online services of the nation’s principal Public Service Broadcasters.

In this report, we present the results of an analysis of all international factual programming broadcast on the UK’s seven principal public service channels – BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, ITV 1, Channel 4 and Channel 5 – during 2023 and 2024. Specifically, we report on the volume, originality, scheduling, genre, and geographic focus of the programmes. While news coverage is another vital dimension of international content, our focus here is exclusively on non-news factual programming, including current affairs, documentaries, factual entertainment (reality shows) and travelogues.

IBT has been commissioning analyses of the changing nature of international factual programming on UK television for 35 years. This report is the latest contribution to that body of research.

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1 [Global Humanitarian Overview 2023](#). OCHA, 2023

2 [How the world voted in 2024](#). *Al Jazeera* Chughtai, A., 2024

3 [What is PSM?](#) Public Media Alliance, 2025

4 [Mission, values and public purposes](#). BBC, 2025

5 [Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation](#). Crown copyright, 2016

# Analysis

## Volume of international factual programming

The channels with the most international factual programming were **BBC Two** and **BBC Four**, followed by **Channel 4**, **ITV 1**, **Channel 5** and **BBC One**. The youth-focussed **BBC Three** had by far the least. While half of all international factual programmes were repeats, a clear majority were scheduled at peak-time, or between the hours of 6pm and 10.30pm. The total volume of international factual programming increased by 15 percent, between 2023 and 2024.

Figure 1 shows that the two UK public service channels with the most international factual programming were **BBC Two** (472 hours in total) and **BBC Four** (363 hours). Between them, they had 43% of all international factual programming in our sample.

**Channel 4** (289 hours), **ITV 1** (267 hours) and **Channel 5** (253 hours) each had broadly similar volumes of international factual programming, during 2023-24. **BBC Three** (108 hours) had by far the least volume of international factual programming, followed by **BBC One** (185 hours).

Table 1 shows that half (50%) of all international factual programming in our sample was broadcast for the first time, whilst the remaining 50% were repeats of programmes originally broadcast in previous years. However, the proportion of repeats varied significantly between channels.

**BBC One** (14%) and **Channel 4** (25%) had by far the lowest proportion of international factual programming in the form of repeats. Interestingly, despite having a relatively large volume of international factual programming, **BBC Four** had by far the highest proportion of repeats, at 85%. Approximately half of all international factual programming on **Channel 5** (44%), **ITV 1** (49%), **BBC Two** (55%) and **BBC Three** (59%) was broadcast for the first time.

**BBC Three broadcast the fewest hours of international factual programming**

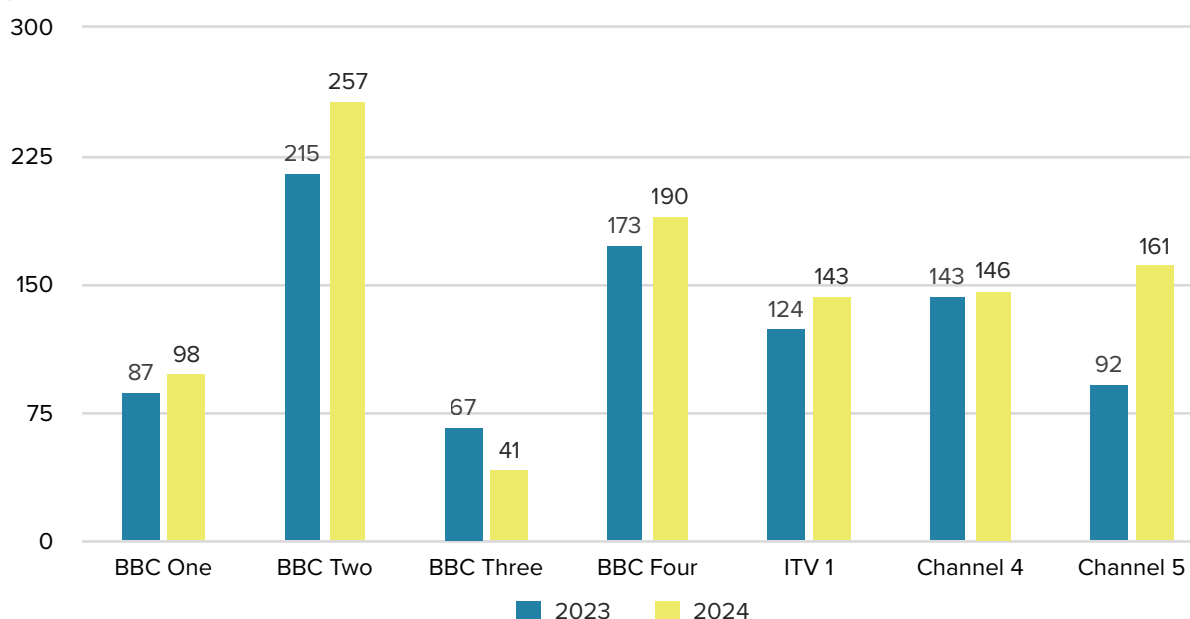


Figure 1: Total hours of international factual programming on UK public service channels in 2023 and 2024.

While the rise of non-linear viewing means the scheduling of programmes is now less significant, it does still give some indication of the prominence given to international factual programming by different broadcasters. Overall, a clear majority (59%) of international factual programming across all seven channels was shown at peak-time, or between the hours of 6pm and 10.30pm. However, Figure 2 shows that most international factual programming on BBC One (60%) and especially ITV 1 (81%) was broadcast off-peak.

There was also a strong tendency for BBC One to broadcast international factual programmes in the early hours of the morning. Overall, 45% of international factual programmes on BBC One were broadcast between midnight and 5am (once it has handed over to the BBC News channel), compared to an average of 9% of programmes on the six other channels. Despite having by far the least volume of international factual programming, BBC Three had the highest proportion of international factual programmes broadcast at peak-time (88%), followed by BBC Four (77%).

The data in Figure 1 also shows that, across all seven public service channels, the volume of international factual programming increased by 15 percent – from 900 hours in 2023 to 1,035 hours in 2024.

There was a particularly significant increase on Channel 5 (+76%) and, to a lesser extent, BBC Two (+20%). BBC Three was the only channel in our study to have less international factual coverage in 2024 (41 hours) than in 2023 (67 hours). Its coverage declined by 39%.

**Channel 5 increased its international coverage by 76% whilst BBC Three’s output declined by 39%**

	2023	2024	Overall
BBC One	16%	12%	14%
BBC Two	55%	54%	55%
BBC Three	53%	69%	59%
BBC Four	95%	76%	85%
ITV 1	48%	49%	49%
Channel 4	14%	37%	25%
Channel 5	39%	46%	44%
Overall	50%	50%	50%

Table 1: The percentage of international factual programming in the form of repeats on public service channels in 2023 and 2024.

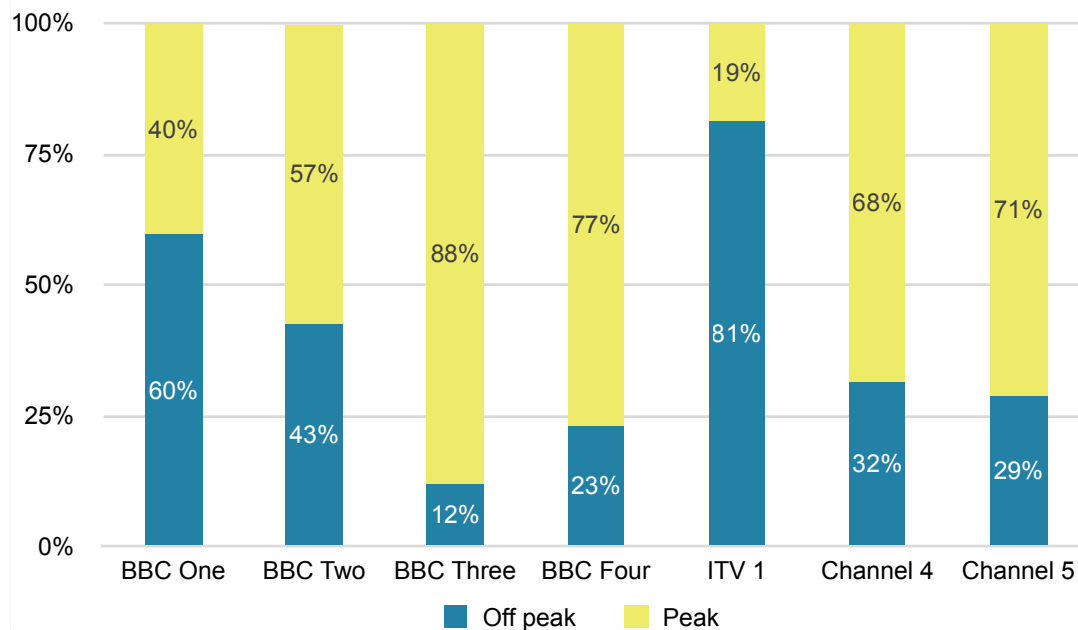


Figure 2: The percentage of international factual programming scheduled at peak-time (6pm to 10.30pm) on public service channels in 2023 and 2024

## Genres of international factual programming

Over half of all international factual programmes on UK public service channels were travelogues. This genre was especially common on ITV 1, Channel 5, BBC Four, and BBC Two. However, amongst the 10 most frequently appearing presenters of international travelogues, Jane McDonald was the only woman, and Clive Myrie was the only non-white presenter. Nearly one in four international travelogues focussed on the topic of cooking. Documentaries were the second most common genre, followed by current affairs, factual (other) and factual entertainment.

### Travelogues

Travelogues were by far the most common genre, making up over half (58%) of all international factual programming on public service channels throughout 2023 and 2024, as shown in Table 2. In fact, Figure 3 shows that they were the most common genre on five out of the seven channels in our sample.

ITV 1 (84%) and Channel 5 (81%) had the highest proportions of international factual programming in the form of travelogues. On Channel 5, examples included *Sue Perkins: Lost in Thailand* and *Michael Palin in Nigeria*.

**The ten most frequently appearing presenters of travelogues include just one female and one non-white broadcaster**



On ITV 1, the vast majority (83%) of its international travelogues focussed on cooking, according to the data in Table 3. Examples include *Judi Love's Culinary Cruise*, *Jason Atherton's Dubai Dishes*, *James Martin's Spanish Adventure* and *Jimmy's Taste of Florida*. In fact, Table 3 shows that cookery was a common sub-genre across most channels, making up 24% of all international travelogues.

Travelogues also made up a significant proportion of international factual programming on BBC Four (64%) and BBC Two (64%) and, to a lesser extent, Channel 4 (43%). There were several cookery-based travelogues on BBC Two (17%) and Channel 4 (13%), with programmes such as *Rick Stein's India* (BBC Two) and *Jamie Cooks the Mediterranean* (Channel 4). However, the most common sub-genre of international travelogues on Channel 4 (13%) and BBC Four (11%) was history, via programmes such as *Bettany Hughes' Treasures of the World* (Channel 4) and *Treasures of the Indus* (BBC Four). On BBC Two, several of its

international travelogues (9%) focussed on gardening, including *Around the World in 80 Gardens* and *Monty Don's Japanese Gardens*.

Interestingly, there were no travelogues whatsoever on BBC Three in 2023 and 2024.

Table 4 shows that the most common presenters of international programmes were Michael Portillo, James Martin, Michael Palin, Simon Reeve, Monty Don and Rick Stein – although most programmes featuring these presenters were repeats. The data in Table 4 also shows that only one of the top ten most frequently appearing presenters of international travelogues on UK public service channels was a woman. Jane McDonald is a singer and television presenter and presents programmes such as *Cape Verde with Jane McDonald* and *Jane McDonald: Lost in Japan* – all on Channel 5. The journalist and broadcaster, Clive Myrie is the only non-white presenter to feature in Table 4. He presented programmes such as *Clive Myrie's Caribbean Adventure* (BBC Two).

Genre	Total Hours	% of international factual
Travelogue	1127	58%
Documentary	339	18%
Current Affairs	185	10%
Factual (other)	164	8%
Factual Entertainment	120	6%

Table 2: The volume of different genres of international factual programming on UK public service channels in 2023 and 2024

## Genres of international factual programming

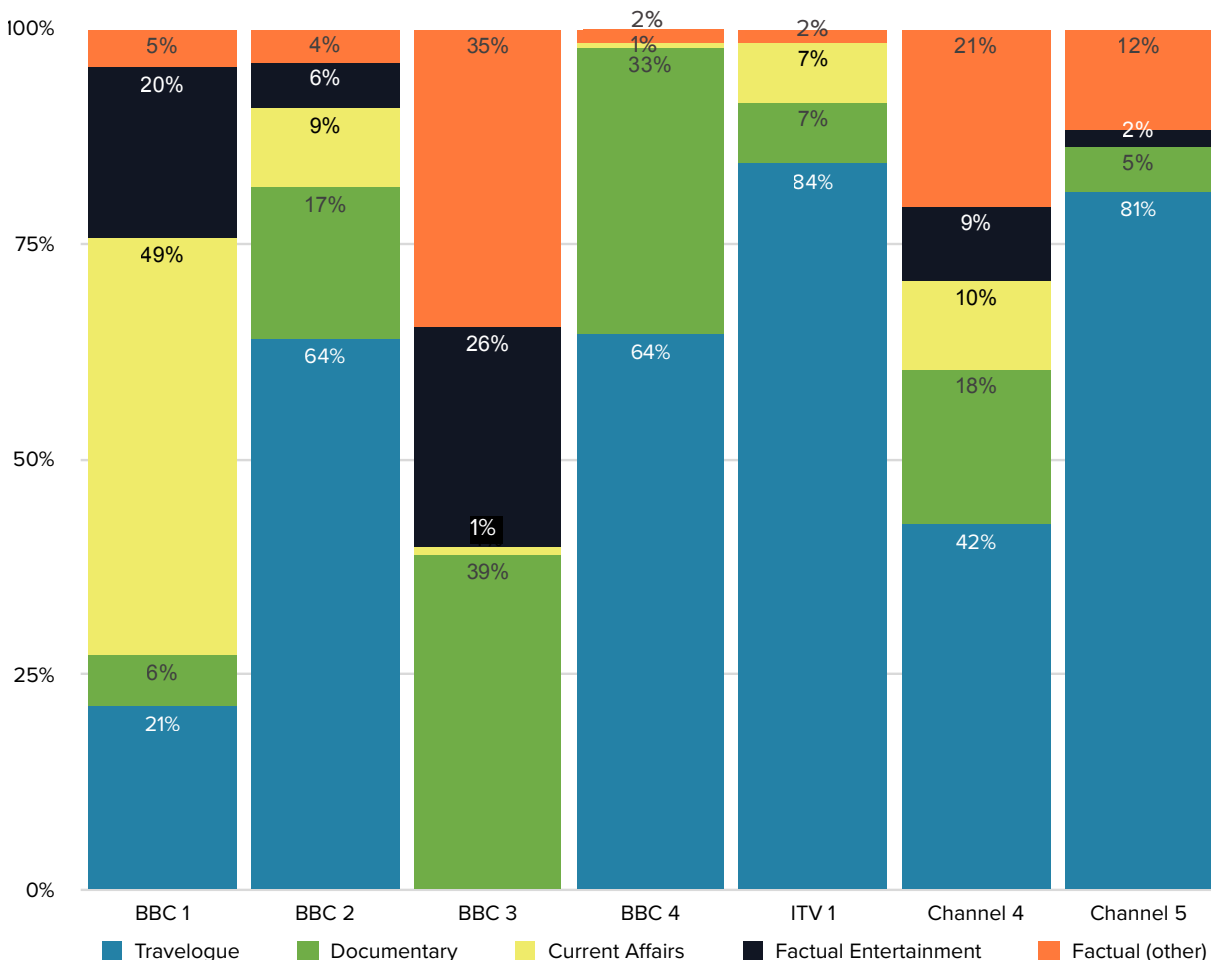


Figure 3: The proportion of different genres of international factual programming on public service channels in 2023 and 2024

	Cookery	History	Gardening	Lifestyle
BBC One	14%	1%		1%
BBC Two	17%	2%	9%	6%
BBC Four	5%	11%	3%	
ITV 1	83%			
Channel 4	13%	13%		5%
Channel 5	1%	3%		5%
Overall	24%	5%	3%	3%

Table 3: The proportion of different sub-genres of international travelogues for different public service channels in 2023 and 2024

## Presenters of international travelogues

Presenter	Total hours	% of repeats	Channel(s)	Programme examples
Michael Portillo (former politician)	119	18%	BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Four, Channel 5	<i>Great Continental Railway Journeys, Madrid With Michael Portillo, Portillo's Andalusia</i>
James Martin (chef)	106	78%	ITV 1, BBC Two	<i>James Martin's French Adventure, James Martin's American Adventure, James Martin's Spanish Adventure</i>
Michael Palin (comedian, actor, writer)	57	90%	BBC Four, Channel 5	<i>Michael Palin In Nigeria, Brazil with Michael Palin, Michael Palin's New Europe</i>
Simon Reeve (travel writer)	44	86%	BBC Two, BBC Four	<i>The Americas with Simon Reeve, The Tea Trail With Simon Reeve, Wilderness with Simon Reeve</i>
Monty Don (horticulturist)	33	64%	BBC Two, BBC Four	<i>Around the World in 80 Gardens, Monty Don's Spanish Gardens, Monty Don's Japanese Gardens</i>
Rick Stein (chef)	31	100%	BBC Two, BBC Four	<i>Rick Stein Tastes the Blues, Rick Stein's India, Rick Stein's Long Weekends</i>
Jane McDonald (singer)	29	27%	Channel 5	<i>Cape Verde with Jane McDonald, Jane McDonald: Lost in Japan</i>
Clive Myrie (journalist)	29	16%	BBC Two, BBC One	<i>Clive Myrie's Italian Roadtrip, Clive Myrie's Caribbean Adventure</i>
Jason Atherton (chef)	28	33%	ITV 1	<i>Jason Atherton's Dubai Dishes</i>
Nick Knowles (broadcaster)	24	42%	Channel 5	<i>Into The Grand Canyon With Nick Knowles, Nick Knowles In South America, The Mighty Mississippi with Nick Knowles</i>

Table 4: The ten presenters featured most regularly on international travelogues on UK public service channels in 2023 and 2024

## Documentaries

Documentaries were the second most common genre of international factual programming, making up 18% of the content in our sample overall.

BBC Three (39%) and BBC Four (33%) had the highest proportions of international documentaries. On BBC Three this mostly involved programmes focussed on crime such as *The Idaho Murders: Trial by TikTok*, *Life and Death Row* and *High: Confessions of an Ibiza Drug Mule*. International documentaries on BBC Four focussed on a wider range of topics and included, *Handmade in Japan*, *Escape from Kabul Airport* and *My Family, Partition and Me: India 1947*.

On the other five public service channels, the proportion of international factual programming in the form of documentaries varied from 18% on Channel 4 and 17% on BBC Two to just 6% on BBC One and 5% on Channel 5.

## Current affairs

Current affairs programmes made up 10% of all international factual programming in our study. BBC One had by far the highest proportion of international current affairs content (49%) including various episodes of the *Our World* strand such as *Hong Kong's Exodus*, *Inside El Salvador's Gang Crackdown* and *Windsurf Escape: Cuba's Migration Crisis*. Table 5 shows that there were 26 episodes of *Our World* across 2023 and 2024, covering 30 different countries.

The other channels with a notable proportion of international current affairs programming were Channel 4 (10%), BBC Two (9%) and ITV 1 (7%), largely due to programming in their respective current affairs strands: *Unreported World* (Channel 4), *Unspun World with John Simpson* (BBC Two) and *On Assignment* (ITV 1). Channel 5 had no international current affairs programming. Table 5 also shows that there were 17 episodes of *Panorama* on BBC One with an international focus – such as *Challenging Putin: Moscow* and the *Mutiny and Hamas' Secret Financial Empire* – but only 5 episodes of *Dispatches*, on Channel 4, with an international focus. Overall, 21% of episodes of *Panorama* (BBC One) had an international focus and 20% of episodes of *Dispatches* (Channel 4).

## Factual entertainment and other factual

Factual entertainment programmes made up 6% of all international factual programming in our study. These reality-TV style shows were concentrated largely on BBC Three and BBC One where they made up 26% and 20% of international factual programming respectively. On BBC Three this included episodes of *The Apprentice Australia*. On BBC One this included programmes such as *Made in Korea: The K-Pop Experience*.

International factual programming which did not fit into one of our genre classifications made up 8% of our sample. BBC Three also had the highest proportion (35%) of factual (other) content. This included episodes of *Dubai Hustle* and *Ibiza: Secrets of the Party Island*.

**Just 21% of episodes of Panorama (BBC One) and 20% of Dispatches (Channel 4) focussed on international stories**



Current affairs strand	Channel	International episodes (2023)	International episodes (2024)	No. of countries covered	% of international episodes
<i>Our World</i>	BBC One	22	4	30	100%
<i>Panorama</i>	BBC One	9	8	24	21%
<i>Unspun World*</i>	BBC Two	19	27	151	100%
<i>On Assignment</i>	ITV 1	10	10	62	100%
<i>Dispatches</i>	Channel 4	3	2	7	20%
<i>Unreported World</i>	Channel 4	10	10	20	100%

Table 5: Number of international episodes for different current affairs strands in 2023 and 2024.

\*Note: *Unspun World with John Simpson* is a studio-based discussion programme

## Countries and regions of the world featured

Europe received the most international factual programming, followed by the Americas, Asia, Africa and finally Oceania. Notably, there was only one factual programme about Central Asia across all seven public service channels, within our two-year study. Two thirds of international factual programming focussed on just 15 countries, with the USA, Italy and Spain receiving the most – primarily via travelogues. While the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza both received a significant amount of coverage, 35 other countries experiencing humanitarian crises received less than seven percent of all international factual programming collectively.

In total, 161 countries were covered by international factual programming on UK public service channels in 2023 and 2024. However, this coverage was highly concentrated on a small number of countries. Table 6 shows that two thirds (66%) of international factual programming in our sample focused on just 15 countries.

The country which received by far the greatest amount of factual coverage was the USA (307 hours). It was the subject of approximately 16% of all international factual programming. Factual programming about the USA primarily took the form of travelogues (52%), documentaries (35%) and current affairs programmes (10%). Italy (7%) received the second highest amount of international factual coverage (141 hours), mostly in the form of travelogues (79%), such as *Clive Myrie's Italian Road Trip* (BBC Two) and *Gino's Italy: Secrets of the South* (ITV 1).

**35 countries experiencing humanitarian crises received less than 7% of all coverage**

Spain received the third highest amount of international factual coverage (117 hours), almost entirely in the form of travelogues (90%) such as *The Pyrenees with Michael Portillo* (Channel 5) and *Gordon, Gino and Fred: Viva Espana!* (ITV 1).

Although India (6%) received the fourth highest amount of international factual coverage (110 hours), nearly three quarters of this content (73%) were repeats of programmes aired in previous years, such as *Himalaya with Michael Palin* (BBC Four), first broadcast in 2004, and *The World's Busiest Railways* (BBC One) from 2015. Factual programmes about India that were broadcast for the first time in 2023 and 2024 included *Freddie Flintoff's Field of Dreams* (BBC One) and *Joanna Lumley's Spice Trail Adventure* (ITV 1).

Interestingly, Table 6 also reveals that there was significant coverage of four countries involved in two of the major, ongoing conflicts in the world during our sample period – Ukraine (53 hours), Russia (50 hours), Israel (40 hours) and the Palestinian Territories (37 hours). It is also worth noting that these countries were far more likely to be covered by documentaries and current affairs programming. For example, 74% of all factual programming about Ukraine was in the form of current affairs, and 46% of all coverage of Palestine was in the form of documentaries. Examples of documentaries and current affairs programmes covering these countries include, *The Zelensky Story* (BBC Two), *Dispatches: Hunting Russia's Lost Boys* (Channel 4), *Israel & Gaza: Into the Abyss* (ITV 1) and *Panorama: October 7th: One Year On* (BBC One).

However, many other countries experiencing major conflicts and humanitarian crises received far less coverage. Table 7 shows that only five of the 40 countries experiencing humanitarian crises in 2024 received more than 10 hours of coverage, during our sample period – Ukraine (53 hours), Palestine (37 hours), Afghanistan (18 hours), Vietnam (15 hours) and Colombia (10 hours). The remaining 35 countries received just 6.5% of all international factual programming (126 hours) combined. For example, there were only two programmes about Yemen across all seven channels: *American Mercenaries: Killing in Yemen* (BBC Two) and an episode of *Unspun World with John Simpson* (BBC Two).

There were just four original factual programmes about Sudan in 2023 and 2024 – totalling just 2.5 hours - all broadcast by the BBC. Notable examples were *Sudan Fighting: Caught in the Shrapnel* and *Inside Sudan's Forgotten War* (Eye Investigations), however, both were broadcast between 3-5am. Similarly, there were just 75 minutes of factual programming about South Sudan and only one first-run programme: *Life at 50 Degrees: Water Crisis in South Sudan* (BBC One). Chad, the Central African Republic and Burundi received no coverage.

**Yemen received just 78 minutes of coverage in two years, across seven channels**

In total, 34 countries were not the subject of any international factual programming on UK public service channels, as shown in Figure 4. These were Andorra, Angola, Armenia, Benin, Belarus, Brunei, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Djibouti, East Timor, Equatorial Guinea, Eritrea, Eswatini, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kazakhstan, Kiribati, Kyrgyzstan, Lesotho, Liberia, Liechtenstein, Nauru, Palau, Qatar, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Samoa, San Marino, Sao Tome and Principe, Tajikistan, Togo, Turkmenistan, and Tuvalu.

## Total hours of international factual programming

Country	Total hours	% of int. coverage	Travelogues	Documentaries	Current affairs	Factual entertainment	Factual (other)
USA	307	16%	52%	35%	10%	0%	3%
Italy	141	7%	79%	7%	2%	1%	11%
Spain	117	6%	90%	1%	3%	3%	3%
India	110	6%	48%	21%	7%	15%	10%
France	98	5%	67%	19%	6%	7%	1%
Australia	92	5%	57%	12%	2%	27%	2%
Canada	66	3%	41%	13%	2%	23%	21%
South Africa	57	3%	23%	18%	10%	9%	40%
Ukraine	53	3%	2%	24%	74%	0%	0%
Russia	50	3%	15%	43%	42%	0%	0%
United Arab Emirates	44	2%	70%	5%	0%	2%	23%
Israel	40	2%	6%	47%	47%	0%	0%
Palestinian Territories	37	2%	3%	46%	51%	0%	0%
Mexico	35	2%	59%	17%	16%	9%	0%
Norway	33	2%	58%	17%	6%	9%	9%

Table 6: The total hours of international factual programming received by the 15 most frequently covered countries, on UK public service channels in 2023 and 2024

## Total hours of international factual programming on countries receiving UN humanitarian support

	Total hours (2023)	Total hours (2024)	Total
Ukraine	28.8	23.8	52.6
Palestinian Territories	13.3	24.0	37.3
Afghanistan	7.8	10.1	17.9
Vietnam	7.0	7.7	14.7
Colombia	7.4	2.8	10.2
Nigeria	3.0	6.0	9.0
Democratic Republic of the Congo	3.0	4.5	7.5
Bangladesh	3.5	3.5	7.0
Myanmar	2.8	4.0	6.8
Mali	3.7	3.0	6.7
Ethiopia	4.0	2.5	6.5
Syria	4.8	1.5	6.3
Venezuela	4.0	2.0	6.0
Nepal	3.0	2.8	5.8
Mongolia	2.8	2.3	5.1
Zambia	1.0	3.7	4.7
Sudan	1.0	3.3	4.3
Lebanon	2.0	2.3	4.3
Libya	2.0	2.0	4.0
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	3.1	0.9	4.0
Zimbabwe	2.5	1.4	3.9
Honduras	3.8	0.0	3.8
El Salvador	2.8	1.0	3.8
Philippines	0.5	3.3	3.8
Madagascar	1.1	2.0	3.1
Republic of the Congo	0.0	3.0	3.0
Guatemala	1.9	1.0	2.9
Somalia	1.0	1.5	2.5
Haiti	1.5	1.0	2.5
Mozambique	1.0	1.0	2.0
Yemen	0.0	1.3	1.3
South Sudan	0.8	0.5	1.3
Burkina Faso	0.0	1.0	1.0
Cameroon	0.0	1.0	1.0
Grenada	0.9	0.0	0.9
Niger	0.5	0.0	0.5
Malawi	0.5	0.0	0.5
Chad	0.0	0.0	0.0
Central African Republic	0.0	0.0	0.0
Burundi	0.0	0.0	0.0

Table 7: The total hours of international factual programming received by every country receiving support via a UN Humanitarian response plan in 2024



## International factual programming by region

World region	Total hours	% of international coverage
Southern Europe	348	14.9%
Western Europe	186	8.0%
Eastern Europe	145	6.2%
Northern Europe	92	3.9%
<b>Europe total</b>	<b>771</b>	<b>32.9%</b>
North America	382	16.3%
South America	118	5.1%
Central America	72	3.1%
Caribbean	58	2.5%
<b>Americas total</b>	<b>631</b>	<b>27.0%</b>
Middle East	193	8.2%
Southern Asia	190	8.1%
South-Eastern Asia	107	4.6%
Eastern Asia	99	4.2%
Central Asia	1	0.0%
<b>Asia total</b>	<b>589</b>	<b>25.2%</b>
Southern Africa	70	3.0%
Northern Africa	55	2.3%
Eastern Africa	48	2.1%
Western Africa	35	1.5%
Central Africa	13	0.6%
<b>Africa total</b>	<b>221</b>	<b>9.4%</b>
Australia and New Zealand	108	4.6%
Melanesia	12	0.5%
Polynesia	8	0.3%
Micronesia	2	0.1%
<b>Oceania total</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>5.5%</b>

Table 8: The volume and distribution of international factual programming according to different world regions, on UK public service channels in 2023 and 2024

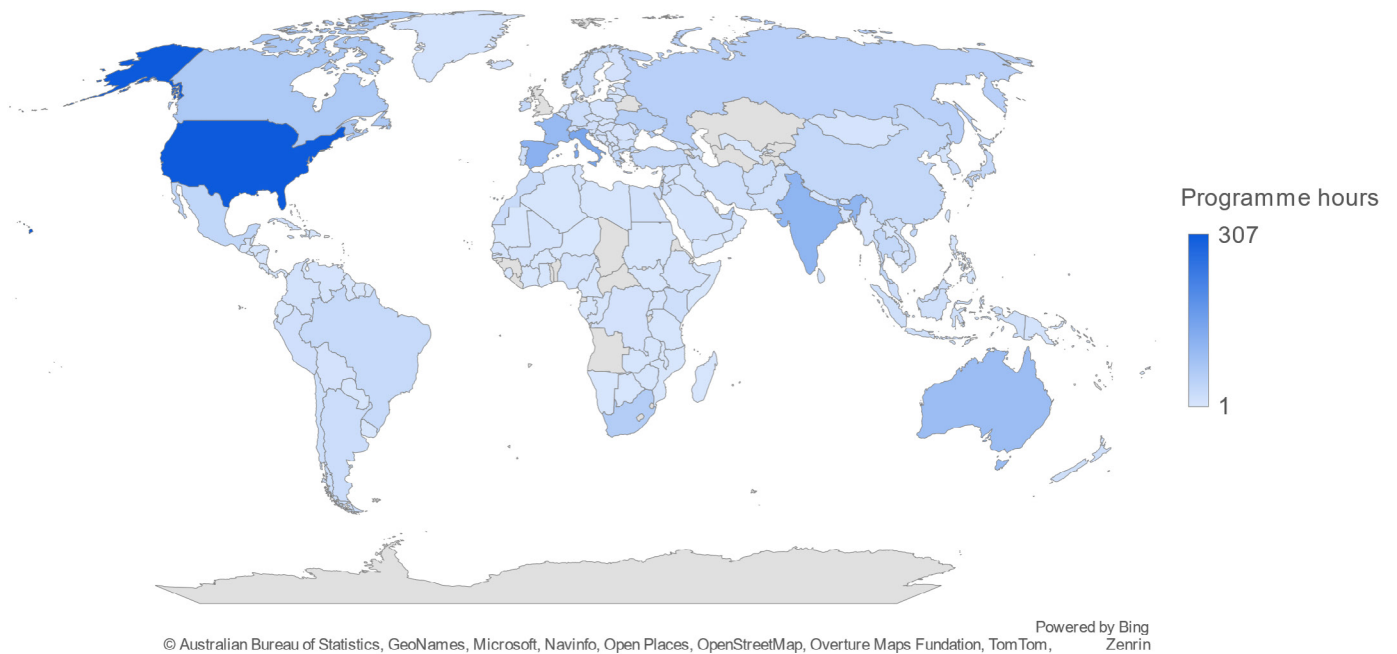


Figure 4: The total hours of international factual programming received by every country, on UK public service channels in 2023 and 2024

**North America received significantly more coverage than South America, Central America and the Caribbean combined**

Table 8 shows that Europe (32.9%) was the continent which received the most coverage, followed by the Americas (27.0%), Asia (25.2%), Africa (9.4%) and Oceania (5.5%). Coverage of Europe focused most heavily on Southern Europe (348 hours), rather than Western (186 hours), Eastern (145 hours) or Northern (92 hours) Europe. In the Americas, North America received significantly more coverage (382 hours) than South America, Central America and the Caribbean combined (248 hours).

In Asia, countries in the Middle East (193 hours) and Southern Asia (190 hours) received most coverage, followed by those in South-Eastern Asia (107 hours) and Eastern Asia (99 hours). Notably, there was only one factual programme about Central Asia within our two-year study, across all seven public service channels. This was a repeat of an episode of *Around the World in 80 Treasures*, on BBC Four, set in Uzbekistan and originally broadcast in 2005.

In Africa, factual programming was relatively evenly distributed around Southern Africa (70 hours), Northern Africa (55 hours), Eastern Africa (48 hours) and Western Africa (35 hours). Notably, however, countries in Central Africa were the subject of just 13 hours of factual programming, or just 0.6% of the entire sample. This included programmes such as *Into the Congo with Ben Fogle* (Channel 5) and *Wilderness with Simon Reeve* (BBC Two).

Predictably, a significant majority of coverage of Oceania focused on Australia and New Zealand (108 hours), although there were several programmes set in both Melanesia (12 hours) and Polynesia (8 hours). However, there were only two programmes set in Micronesia (2 hours) – *Martin Clunes: Islands of the Pacific* (ITV 1) and *Murder in the Pacific* (BBC Two).

Figure 5 shows that the geographical distribution of international factual coverage was very similar for almost all the channels in our sample. In general, they tended to focus most heavily on Europe, the Americas and Asia, and less on Africa and Oceania. However, there were some subtle differences. ITV 1 (45%) and Channel 5 (48%) had a relatively high proportion of factual programming set in Europe, whereas coverage of Asia was

relatively more prevalent on BBC One (30%), BBC Two (29%), and BBC Four (32%). Channel 4 had a relatively high proportion of factual programming set in the Americas (29%) and in Africa (14%).

The geographical focus of factual programming on BBC Three was by far the most distinctive. It had a significantly higher proportion of factual programming set in the Americas (59%) and Oceania (15%), compared to the other channels, and a much smaller proportion set in Europe (7%). It also broadcast only two programmes set in Africa (1%) during the two years: *Hiplife Rewind*, set in Ghana, and a *Top Gear Special*, set in Botswana. Finally, though, it is worth noting that every channel had at least some factual programming about every continent during our two-year sample period.

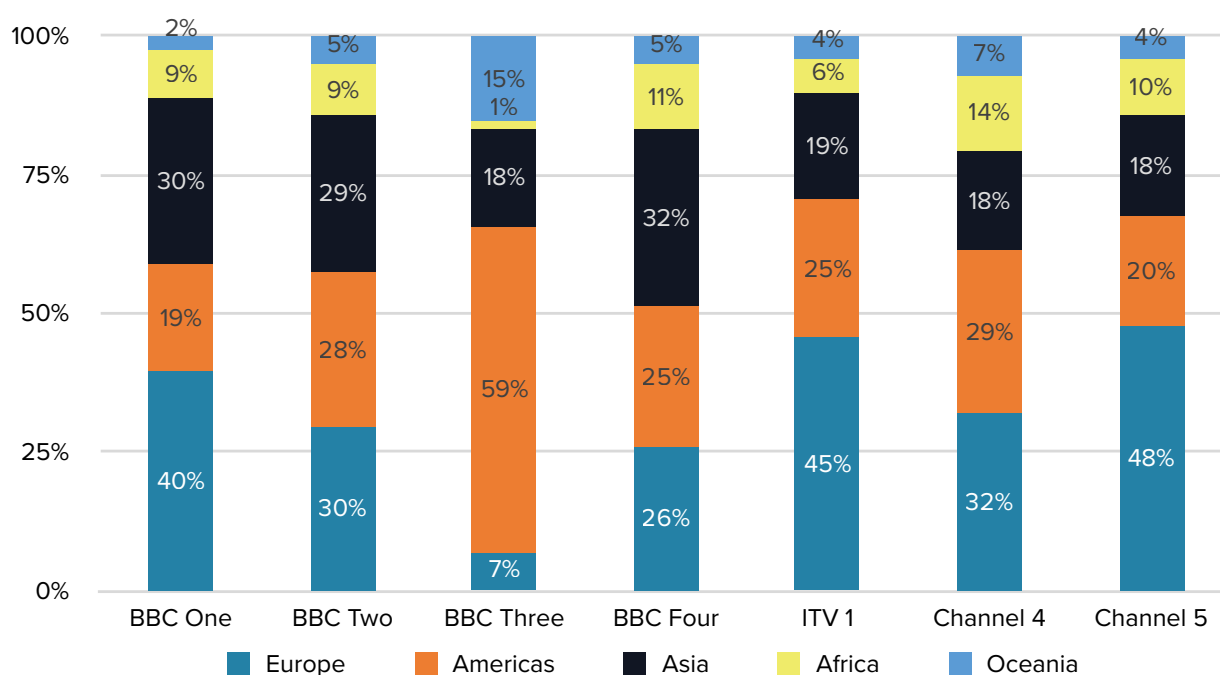


Figure 5: Percentage of international factual programming focused on different continents, on public service channels in 2023 and 2024

# Methodology

In this study, we analysed all international factual programming broadcast on the seven UK public service channels – BBC One, BBC Two, BBC Three, BBC Four, ITV 1, Channel 4 and Channel 5 – in 2023 and 2024.

Programmes were considered international if the principal themes addressed by the programme related explicitly and directly to a country or countries outside the UK. In general, this included all factual programmes filmed on location outside the UK, unless the focus was primarily on the experiences of UK citizens overseas (such as holiday, relocation and renovation programmes). Factual programmes filmed in the UK were generally excluded, with some exceptions such as discussion programmes specifically addressing global current affairs (e.g. Unspun World with John Simpson). Factual programmes about foreign influence in the UK were also generally excluded. For programmes where the distinction between international and domestic was unclear, the guiding question was: ‘does this programme provide significant opportunities for audiences to encounter people, issues, events, cultures outside the UK?’

Factual programming included all non-fictional programmes in the genres of current affairs, documentaries, factual entertainment (reality shows) and travelogues. Excluded from this study were all programming in the genres of news, arts and classical music, religious and ethics, drama, soaps, films, entertainment,

comedy, sports, and children’s – as defined by Ofcom. International factual programming which focussed exclusively on natural history were also excluded, as were lifestyle programmes including relocation and holiday shows. Purely historical programmes, using archive footage, were also excluded because our focus is on the programmes which inform audiences about the contemporary world. We were unable to include some current affairs programmes such as Newsnight, as the information about countries covered and time devoted to international issues was typically not available from the Electronic Programme Guides (EPGs).

Relevant programmes were identified via manual searches of publicly available listings (for London). Once identified, programmes were coded for their channel, approximate duration (in minutes), genre (see above), and all countries featured, using the information provided by the Electronic Programme Guides. International travelogue shows were also coded for the following sub-genres: cookery, gardening, history, and lifestyle. We also noted whether programmes were broadcast for the first time, or repeats, and whether they were scheduled at peak-time (between the hours of 6pm and 10.30pm). Any repeats of the same programme within a calendar year were excluded. The United Nations geoscheme was used to code countries according to their continent and geographical sub-region.

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