

# A SURVEY OF BAME-LED INDIES IN UK TELEVISION AND THE IMPACT OF COVID-19



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COVID-19**

**SIR LENNY HENRY CENTRE FOR MEDIA DIVERSITY**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Across 6 weeks in May and June 2020 the Sir Lenny Henry Centre for Media Diversity carried out a survey into the impact of Covid-19 on 20 independent production companies led by Black, Asian and people from Minority Ethnic backgrounds (more commonly referred to as BAME-led indies) in the UK television industry.

**Overall our survey revealed:**

1. A sector which is facing severe difficulties. With two thirds losing money and/or programme commissions and nearly a third of companies in financial distress or worse due to Covid-19.
2. The vast majority of BAME-led indies have been unable to access much needed development funds.
3. The vast majority of BAME-led indies have not received government financial support.
4. The vast majority of BAME-led indies have not applied for industry relief funds.
5. This is clearly a sector that wants and needs targeted financial support for BAME-led indies, specifically from the industry and more generally from the government.

## **CONTEXT FOR THE SURVEY**

The impact of Covid19 on the UK's cultural sector is well documented with Bectu's Head, Philippa Childs, referring to a 'timebomb' with the lack of financial support expected to lead many freelancers to exit the industry (1).

The disproportionate impact of Covid19 on BAME communities (2) in terms of health as well as finance leaves this community particularly vulnerable in the post-lockdown return to work. The experience of recovery from the 2008 recession suggests that ethnic minority groups will fare worse than the white majority (3).

Against this backdrop, when the lack of BAME media professionals is part of an ongoing national debate (4)(5), identifying and understanding the needs of the existing BAME-led independent TV sector is vital.

Particularly when that sector is so small. Precise figures are hard to establish but the industry's trade association PACT has 900 members (production companies of various sizes). For this survey we identified 31 which are BAME-led, although this figure is not definitive.

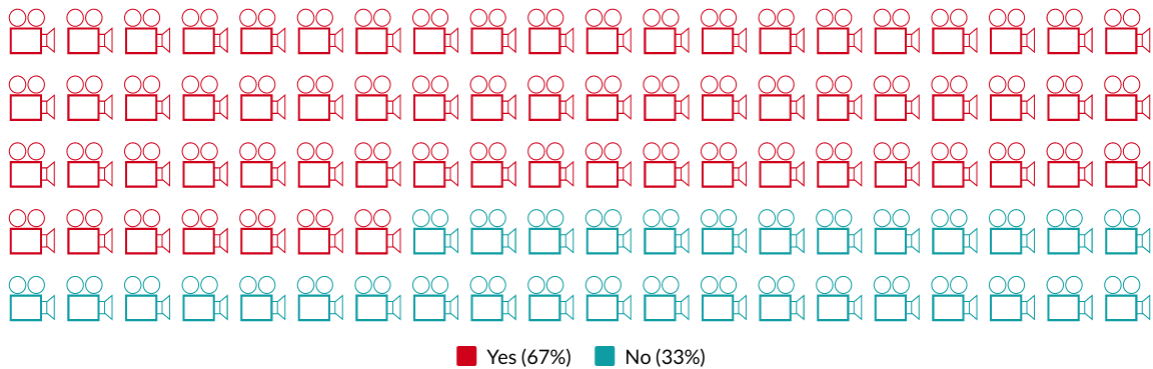
As seems likely given the current situation and future uncertainty, targeted support will be needed to ensure this sector doesn't diminish but, instead, flourishes to help inform the public conversation.

## SURVEY FINDINGS

### How are BAME-led indies managing financially?

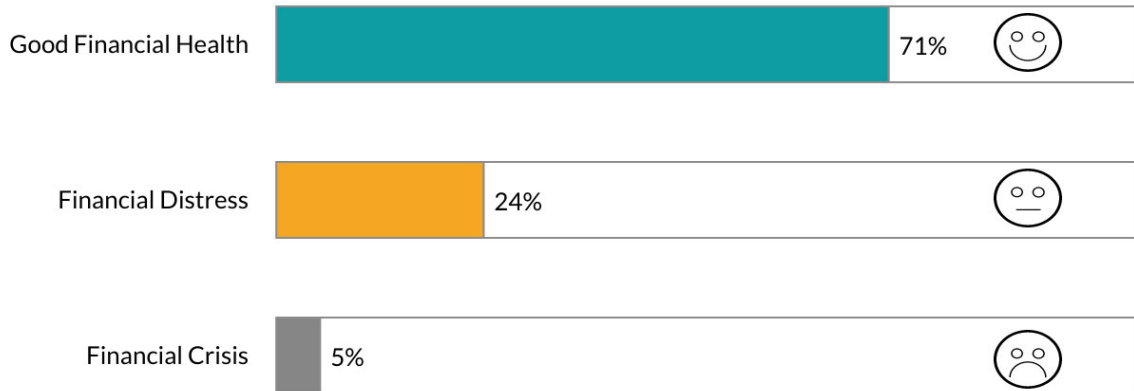
Our survey found that two-thirds (67%) of BAME-led companies had directly lost money and/or programme commissions due to Covid-19. And approximately half (48%) are now financially worse off due to the pandemic, although 20% said that they had actually gained specific commissions due to Covid-19.

Have you lost money/programme commissions due to Covid-19?



Overall this has resulted in roughly a third (29%) of all BAME-led indies facing either “financial distress” or severe “financial” crisis.

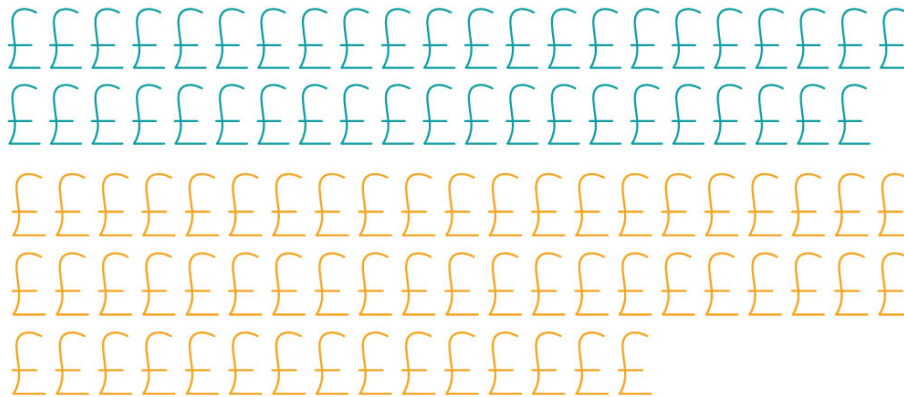
Since the outbreak of Covid-19 would you describe the financial position of your company as:



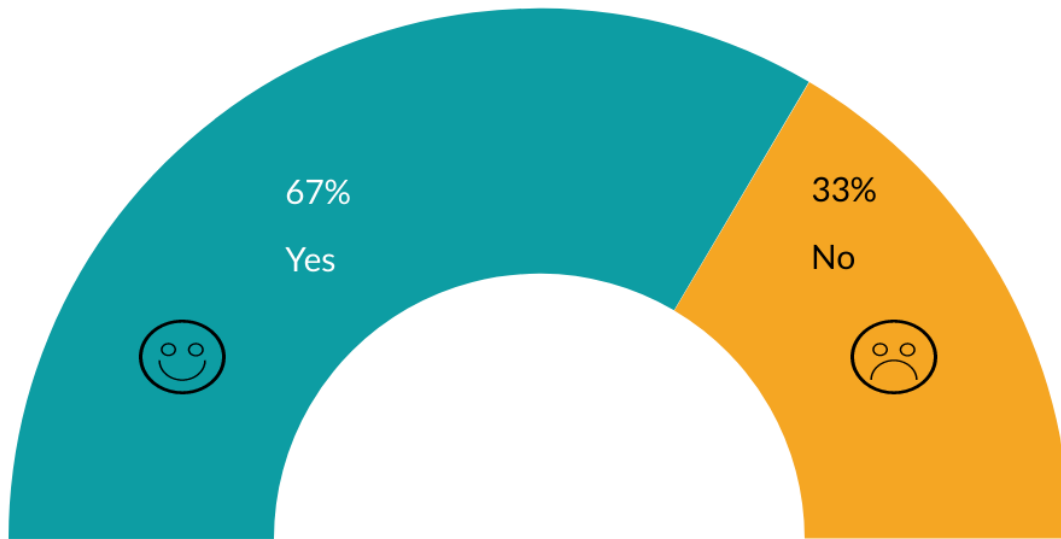
**Are government and industry policies of support working?**

Only a minority (43%) of companies had applied for general government support or tax relief, of the minority that applied two thirds (67%) were successful.

Have you applied for general government relief funds inc. tax relief?



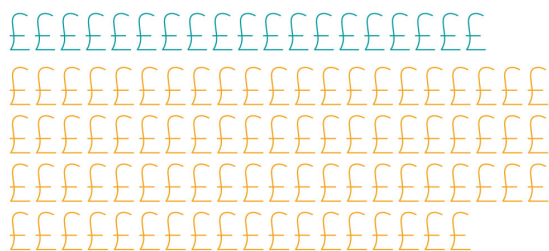
Have any of your applications to specific government funds/tax relief been successful?



Only 19% had applied for specific industry support, of which only half were successful.

Have you applied to specific industry relief funds?

Have any been successful?



Yes (19%)

No (91%)

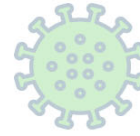
Yes (50%) Awaiting Answer (50%)

The low rate of application for general and industry specific financial support, coupled by the success rate, would indicate to us that companies did not think they were eligible for support and it was not worth trying.

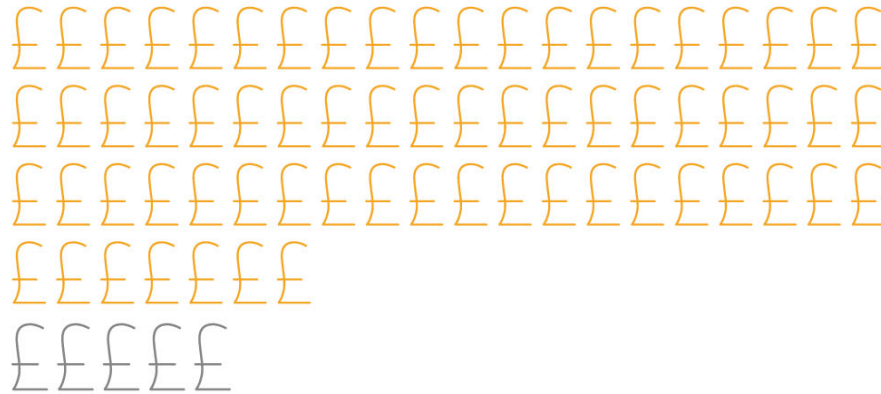
Despite obvious financial difficulties we are concerned that current government and industry policies to address the situation are inadequate and not being taken up by the companies.

We also noted that less than a third of BAME-led indies (29%) said they had been able to access any development funds since the outbreak.

Have you been able to access development funds since the outbreak of Covid-19?



Yes (29%)



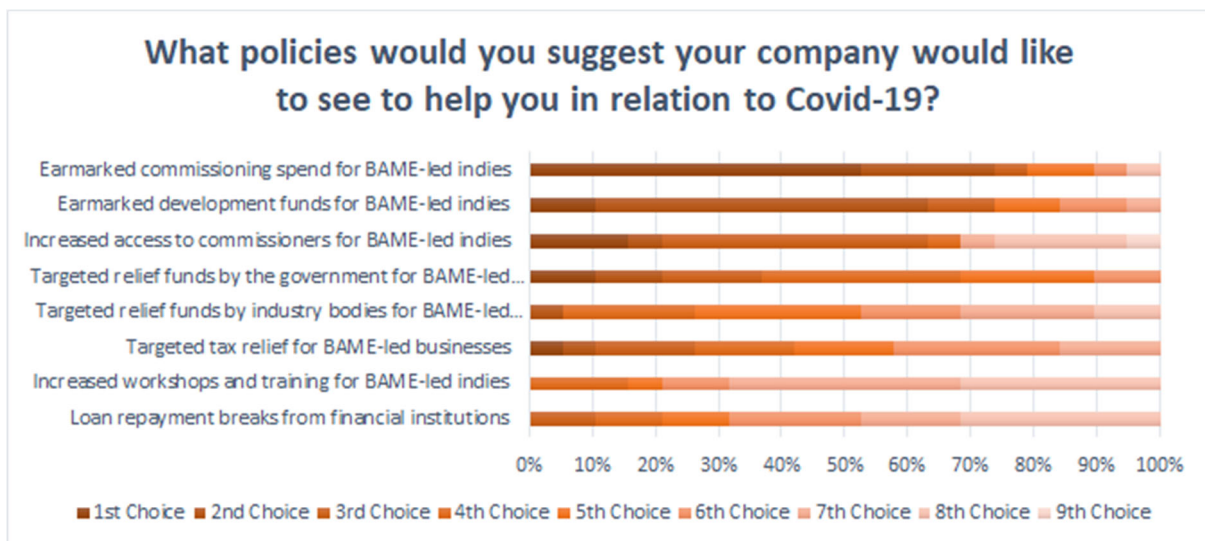
No (67%)

No response (5%)

### What do BAME-led indies want?

The survey gave a range of policy options which they might want to see implemented to support the sector.

BAME-led companies were *most* in favour of earmarked commissioning spend from broadcasters (53% listed this as their first choice), followed by earmarked development funds (53% listed this as their second choice), and increased access to commissioners for BAME-led indies came third (42% listed this as the third choice).



“Increased workshops and training for BAME-led indies”, was the *least* favourite policy option with the respondents (37% and 32% listed this as their seventh and eighth choice respectively) , with loan repayment breaks and targeted tax relief also coming low down on the list of preferred options.

We believe that BAME-led indies themselves must be central in the development of any and all policies that are created by both the government and the industry to support them.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The survey questions were compiled and tested with a focus group from the sector before being launched. The survey took place between 17th May and 29th June 2020 and was conducted online with a mix of open, closed and multiple choice questions. A total of 31 BAME-led independent TV production companies were identified through industry contacts, BAME sector organisations and our own networks. They were contacted by email and phone and the survey was also publicised via social media. Respondents were sent a link to the consent form followed by the survey. All responses were anonymised.

21 companies completed the survey giving a response rate of 67.7%

We offered the definition of being a ‘BAME-led indie’ as having a CEO or MD of the company from a BAME background, or having other C-suite/senior management people in key positions in their company from a BAME background.

Currently there is no industry standard definition of what constitutes a ‘BAME-led indie’. We believe that this is urgently needed to ensure better understanding of what is being measured when broadcasters and industry stakeholders refer to the ‘BAME-led indies sector.’ We also believe further work needs to be done on the categorisation of companies that might fall under any definition so specific issues can be identified between different ethnic groups and issues of intersectionality.



## **Terminology**

We recognise the increasing dissatisfaction with the term “BAME” across large sections of society. We used it in the survey as it is still the industry standard term and how this sector is categorised. We did however ask respondents their ethnicity and, of those that specified, two thirds came under the broad category of Black or Mixed/Black (Black British - African, Black British - Caribbean, Mixed - White and Black African, Mixed - White and Black Caribbean). A third identified as Asian or Mixed/Asian (Asian British Pakistani, Mixed White & Asian, Asian British - unspecified).

We intend to use more appropriate and specific terminology in future research conducted by the Centre because we think it will more accurately reflect the detail of diversity in the media landscape.

## ***Report authors***

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***Technical support and graphics from Peter Crowther and Rosemary Flowers***

## **References**

- (1) <https://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/home/freelancers-fear-timebomb-as-furloughing-ticks-down/5150325.article>
- (2) <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusrelateddeathsbyethnicgroupenglandandwales/2march2020to10april2020>
- (3) <https://www.bitc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/bitc-race-factsheet-ethnicity-economic-impact-april20.pdf>
- (4) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/commentisfree/2020/jun/20/to-see-race-and-class-at-work-in-britain-just-try-a-film-set-steve-mcqueen>

- (5) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/22/black-journalists-denounce-lack-of-diversity-in-newsrooms>

## **SURVEY QUESTIONS AND RESULTS**

### **How do you fall under the definition of a BAME-led indie?**

CEO or MD of your company from a BAME background: 15

CEO or MD of your company from a BAME background and the majority of C-suite/senior management people in key positions in your company from a BAME background: 5

The majority of C-suite/senior management people in key positions in your company from a BAME background: 1

### **How many permanent staff (part and full time) does your company employ?**

0 permanent members of staff: 1

1 permanent member of staff: 1

2 permanent member of staff: 6

3 permanent member of staff: 3

4 permanent member of staff: 2

5 permanent member of staff: 4

6 permanent member of staff: 2

9 permanent member of staff: 1

10 permanent member of staff: 1

### **In 2019, did your company have revenue of**

Up to £250,000: 6

£250,000 - 500,000: 5

£500,000 - 1,000,000: 4

£1,000,000 - £2,000,000: 3

£2,000,000 - £5,000,000: 2

Did not answer: 1

### **In 2019 how many programme hours did you produce for one of the UK's Public Service Broadcasters (i.e. BBC, ITV, Channel 4, S4C or Channel 5)?**

0 hours: 7

20 Minutes: 1

1 hour: 2

2 hours: 2

3 hours: 2

4 hours: 3

6 hours: 1

6.5 hours: 1

9 hours: 1

11 hours: 1

### **In 2019 how many programme hours did you produce for a major Streaming-Video-On-Demand (SVOD) or Non-terrestrial/overseas broadcaster (Including, although not limited to, Netflix, Amazon, and Sky)?**

0 hours: 13

1 hour: 1

2 hours: 2

3 hours: 1

7 hours: 1  
Did not answer: 3

**In 2019 how many programme hours of content did you produce for online only?**

0 hours: 5  
1 hour: 1  
1.5 hours: 2  
2 hours: 2  
3 hours: 5  
35 short films for online: 1  
100 - 150 hours of online content: 1  
\$3m in value not measurable by hours: 1  
Multi-million dollar US website not measurable by hours: 1  
Did not answer: 2

**Of the programme hours you produced for 2019 what percentage would you describe as being specifically about a BAME subject or issue?**

0%: 7  
10%: 1  
25%: 2  
30%: 1  
50%: 1  
75%: 2  
83%: 1  
90%: 1  
100%: 5

**Have you lost money/programme commissions due to Covid-19?**

Yes: 14  
No: 7

**Have you gained money/programme commissions due to Covid-19?**

Yes: 4  
No: 14  
Awaiting answer 3

**Have you applied for general government relief funds including tax relief?**

No: 12  
Yes: 9

**If yes, how many different government financial sources have you applied to?**

Applied to 1 source: 3  
Applied to 2 sources: 6

**Have any of your applications to specific government funds/tax relief been successful?**

Yes: 6  
No: 3

**Which specific government applications have been successful?**

Bounce Bank Loan Scheme: 2

Small Business Rates Relief: 2

Self Employed Grant: 1

Unspecified: 1

(We note that either respondents didn't apply for the furlough scheme or none consider it as included under this heading)

**Have you applied to specific industry relief funds?**

Yes: 4

No: 17

**How many different sources of industry specific relief have you applied to?**

Applied to 1 source: 3

Applied to 2 sources: 1

**Have any of your applications to specific industry relief funds been successful?**

Yes: 2

Awaiting answer: 2

**Have you been able to access development funds since the outbreak of Covid-19?**

Yes: 6

No: 14

No Answer: 1

**If yes, which development funds have you been able to access?\***

BBC Small Indie Fund: 2

BBC Arts: 1

Northern Ireland Small Screen: 1

Channel 4: 3

Sky: 1

Awaiting response from BBC Small Indie Fund: 1

\*(These numbers add up to more than the 6 companies who have accesses development funds as some of the successful companies were able to access multiple funds)

**How has your financial position changed since the outbreak of Covid-19?**

Stayed the same: 11

For the worse: 10

**Since the outbreak of Covid-19 would you describe the financial position of your company as:**

In a state of "Good financial health" a steady flow of income, ability to meet ongoing financial obligations: 15

In a state of "financial distress" a condition in which a company or individual cannot meet or cannot pay its financial obligations. 5

In a state of "financial distress" a condition in which a company or individual cannot meet or cannot pay its financial obligations: 1

**Have you accessed general non-financial industry Covid-19 services (e.g workshops)?**

Yes: 8

No: 13

**If you have accessed general non-financial industry Covid-19 services, please name those that were most helpful.\***

TV Collective Talks: 7

BFI Soul Sisters: 1

PACT: 1

ScreenSkills: 1

\*(The number of “helpful” courses exceeds the number of companies accessing courses as some companies listed multiple courses)

**What policies would you suggest your company would like to see to help you in relation to Covid-19? (Please rank in order of priority)\***

POLICY OPTIONS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th
Targeted relief funds by the government for BAME-led businesses	2	2	3	6	4	2	0	0	0
Targeted tax relief for BAME-led businesses	1	1	3	3	3	5	3	0	0
Loan repayment breaks from financial institutions	0	0	2	2	2	4	3	6	0
Targeted relief funds by industry bodies for BAME-led businesses	0	1	0	4	5	3	4	2	0
Earmarked commissioning spend for BAME-led indies	10	4	1	0	2	1	0	1	0
Earmarked development funds for BAME-led indies	2	10	2	0	2	2	1	0	0
Increased workshops and training for BAME-led indies	0	0	0	3	1	2	7	6	4
Increased access to commissioners for BAME-led indies	3	1	8	1	0	0	1	4	1
Other suggestions (please specify in next question)	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	18

\*(2 companies did not respond)

**What is the ethnic group of the person completing the survey?**

Asian/Asian British - Pakistani: 4  
Asian/Asian British - Any other background: 1  
Black/Black British - African: 1  
Black/Black British - Caribbean: 7  
Mixed - White and Asian: 1  
Mixed - White and Black African: 4  
Mixed - White and Black Caribbean: 2  
White - Any other background: 1

**What position does the person completing the survey hold in the company?**

CEO: 3  
Managing Director: 11  
Company Director: 1  
Creative Director: 1  
Co-Founder: 2  
Owner: 1  
Head of Production: 1  
Producer: 1

**Is your company owned or part-owned (over 50%) by a larger group/organisation**

No: 16  
Yes: 2  
Did not answer: 3