

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

Quarterly Survey on the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation:

Briefing on the findings from the 2nd
Quarterly Survey (April to June 2021)

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About the Centre for Cross Border Studies

The Centre for Cross Border Studies, based in Armagh, Northern Ireland, has a strong reputation as an authoritative advocate for cross-border cooperation and as a valued source of research, information and support for collaboration across borders on the island of Ireland, Europe and beyond.

The Centre empowers citizens and builds capacity and capability for cooperation across sectors and jurisdictional boundaries on the island of Ireland and further afield. This mission is achieved through research, expertise, partnership and experience in a wide range of cross-border practices and concerns (for more details visit www.crossborder.ie).

1. Introduction

Though we are now six months on from the end of the transition period, the definitive shape of the post-Brexit context is far from a settled matter. The tensions surrounding the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland have kept Northern Ireland at the centre of the generally fractious relationship between the UK Government and EU. The ongoing disputes and negotiations over the content and implementation of the Protocol (which could be interpreted as resulting from conflicting interpretations of the Protocol as either the agreed solution to the problems arising from Brexit, or as “the problem” itself) have potential implications for cross-border cooperation and collaboration both North-South and East-West.

Uncertainty continues, with not only businesses having to await what will ultimately await them after the (extended) grace periods on areas of the post-Brexit operation of GB-NI trade come to an end, but also different communities and individuals perceiving at different times that their sense of identity and belonging and how they relate to one another remain under threat. The core question that has yet to be definitively answered is: **will the UK Government and EU ultimately live up to their commitment that the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement would be protected “in all its parts”?**

For civic society organisations on the island of Ireland who work and regularly engage with counterparts in the other jurisdiction, as well as those who do the same with those in Great Britain, and who are concerned with relations within and across these islands, the protection of all strands of the 1998 Agreement is of paramount importance. It is the core objective that has steered the Centre for Cross Border Studies in all its work in relation to the United Kingdom’s departure from the European Union, and it informs the reasons for the Centre to have initiated this quarterly survey of North-South and East-West cooperation, with the [findings from the first quarter](#) published in April 2021. It also inspired the Centre to establish the [Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation](#) with a number of other organisations from both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland. While the overall and continuing interest of the Ad-Hoc Group is to promote and improve North-South

and East-West cooperation and relations, the Protocol and Brexit have inevitably become priority areas of concern.

The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland, which forms part of the [Withdrawal Agreement](#) that became the legal framework for the UK's departure from the EU, sets out how both the UK Government and European Union recognise "that **cooperation between Northern Ireland and Ireland is a central part of the 1998 Agreement**". It also confirms "that **the United Kingdom remains committed to protecting and supporting continued North-South and East-West cooperation**", but with both parties noting that "**the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Union gives rise to substantial challenges to the maintenance and development of North-South cooperation**". Within the body of the Protocol, Article 11 legally binds the parties to the following:

Article 11

Other areas of North-South cooperation

1. Consistent with the arrangements set out in Articles 5 to 10, and in full respect of Union law, **this Protocol shall be implemented and applied so as to maintain the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation**, including in the areas of environment, health, agriculture, transport, education and tourism, as well as in the areas of energy, telecommunications, broadcasting, inland fisheries, justice and security, higher education and sport.

In full respect of Union law, **the United Kingdom and Ireland may continue to make new arrangements that build on the provisions of the 1998 Agreement in other areas of North-South cooperation on the island of Ireland.**

2. **The Joint Committee shall keep under constant review the extent to which the implementation and application of this Protocol maintains the necessary conditions for North-South cooperation.** The Joint Committee may make appropriate recommendations to the Union and the United Kingdom in this respect, including on a recommendation from the Specialised Committee.

Following the end of the transition period and the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland from the 1st of January 2021, **this Quarterly Survey by the Centre for Cross Border Studies has, therefore, become a vital means to give us an understanding of the extent to which the necessary conditions for North-South cooperation are being maintained, and how relations between civic society organisations and local authorities on the island of Ireland and Great Britain are being safeguarded.**

The survey is aimed specifically at civic society organisations and local authorities, due to the fact that the mapping exercise of North-South cooperation undertaken in 2017 by the

UK and EU to inform the negotiations may have overlooked them or some of the activities they undertake: “areas of informal, local and community-level cooperation may not have been captured by this exercise” (para 16 of Department for Exiting the European Union’s December 2018 [“Technical Explanatory Note: North-South Cooperation Mapping Exercise”](#); see also [“Negotiations on Ireland/Northern Ireland, Mapping of North-South Cooperation”](#), p.4). That is why **it is crucial that cross-border cooperation taking place at informal, local and community levels – which have for decades been the life-blood of cross-border cooperation and reconciliation – is made visible and taken into account when considering whether the conditions for North-South cooperation are indeed being maintained.**

This Research Briefing proceeds in 4 sections. The first provides information regarding the data collection and analysis. The second section provides an overview of the respondents. Due to the anonymous nature of the survey this is necessarily brief. The third examines in detail the respondents’ experiences and perceptions of the North-South dimensions of cooperation and relations, and the fourth section analyses the respondents’ insights into the East-West dimension.

1.1. Understanding the data

There is a point of clarity which needs to be made before progressing to the analysis – we had originally anticipated a higher level of returning respondents so that we could begin to draw trends across time periods. This has not been the case and so, given the proportion of new respondents, we cannot say that the differences in results between the first and second surveys are not a function of the difference in panel, rather than a genuine change in perceptions of conditions. As such, the results presented here need to be considered in their own right and not directly compared to the results of the previous quarter (although this should be increasingly possible in subsequent quarters as we consolidate a core group of repeat respondents). All of that said, the respondents to both rounds of survey conducted thus far each have a wealth of insight, experience, and expertise of cross-border cooperation and collaboration and the results presented should be considered with that in mind.

Following on from feedback from our first survey, we have added questions to gauge perceptions and understandings of the protocol. We have also included open text questions to understand more precisely *how* respondents are experiencing the changing political, social, regulatory, and material conditions for North-South and East-West collaboration. This information allows us to paint a more nuanced and detailed picture of the current contexts for cross border collaboration.

2. Respondents

The data has been collected via a survey of self-selected respondents between the 4th and 30th June 2021, gathering 72 responses in total. 68% (48) reported that they completed the survey in the last quarter while 32% are new respondents.

Of the 72 responses to the survey, 38% were based in the Republic of Ireland and 49% based in Northern Ireland, with 11% having a presence on both sides of the border, and 3% being based outwith the island of Ireland but reporting a stake in cross border cooperation, either North-South or East-West (figure 1).

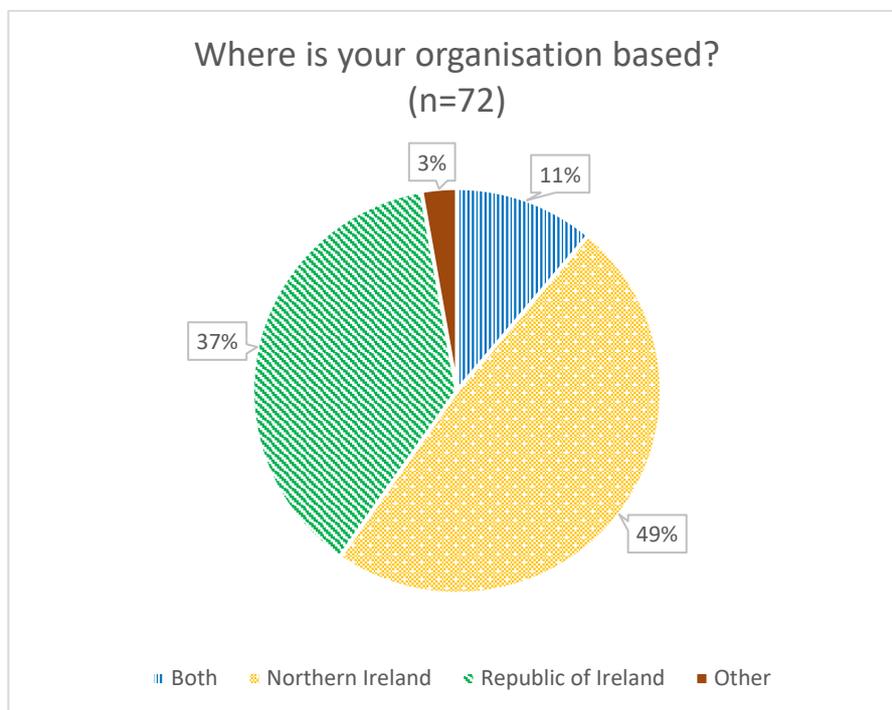


Figure 1

3. The North-South dimension

3.1. contact and collaboration

In this quarter (Apr-Jun 2021) 72% of respondents have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland. For the majority of respondents (56%) their level of contact this quarter has been at the same level as the last and has increased for a third of respondents (figure 2).

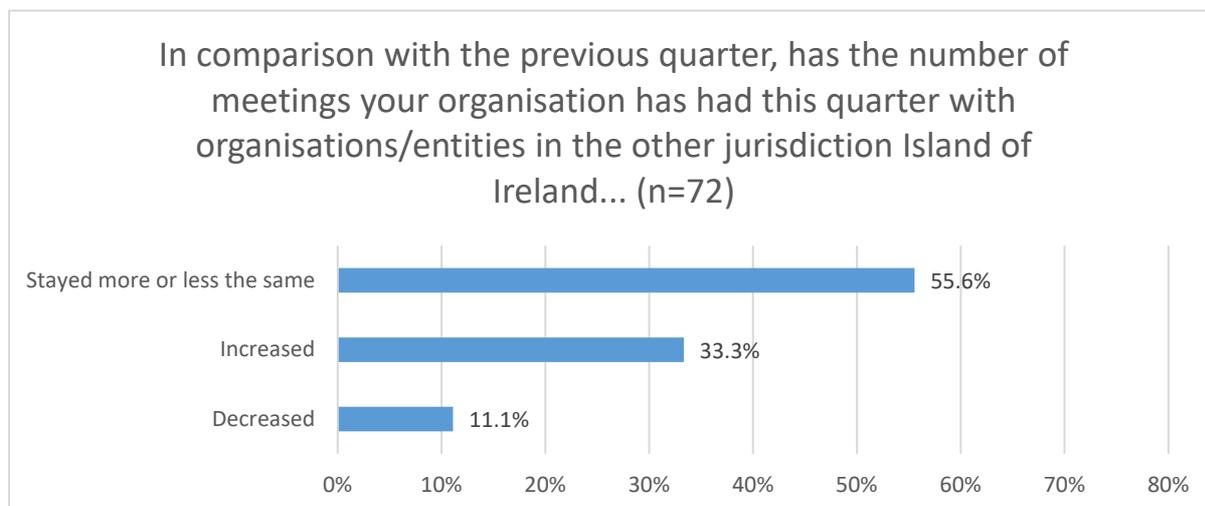


Figure 2

89% of respondents reported that meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction discussed challenges to cross-border cooperation to some degree. The nature of these challenges were varied and manifold, including:

The North West Development Fund - allocated to the cross border North West City Region is closing this financial year. Partnership is keen to extend the level of support offered to date to ensure the innovative model for strategic regional co-operation continues.

COVID-19 Vaccination programme and COVID 19 rates in the region. The delivery of public health restrictions, and other cross border health and social care challenges in two jurisdictional regions with a similar, high COVID 19 rates.

Differences in agricultural and environmental policies with respect to environment, agri-environmental schemes & uplands landscape management have arisen. The potential impacts of Brexit in creating further divergence between UK and EU policies is concerning.

Current political situation in Northern Ireland and lack of accurate information available to citizens as they move between the jurisdictions, to live, work, study etc.

Administrative and other barriers to cross-border communities including frontier workers and those not protected by CTA; future cross-border cooperation including in justice e.g. EU Protection Orders and enforcing maintenance agreements.

At present 79% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaborations with a partner in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 3), and 28 respondents are actively considering new collaborative projects. The primary areas of current collaboration are cross-border cooperation, education, and community development, and 54% of respondents presently engaged in cross border collaboration (n=57) reported that they were in receipt of funding for cross-border collaborative projects, with the predominant funding sources being the Irish government and the EU.

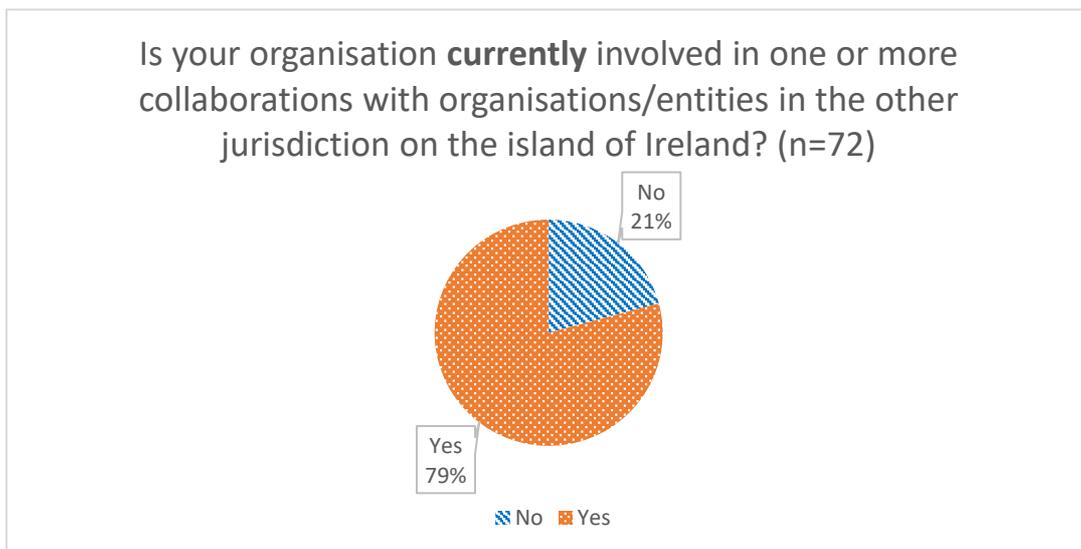


Figure 3

3.2. North-South context

When asked whether they believe that the political, social, regulatory, and material contexts for cross-border collaboration have changed over the last quarter (all n=72), 51% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has deteriorated since the previous quarter, with only 12.5% saying it has improved (figure 4).

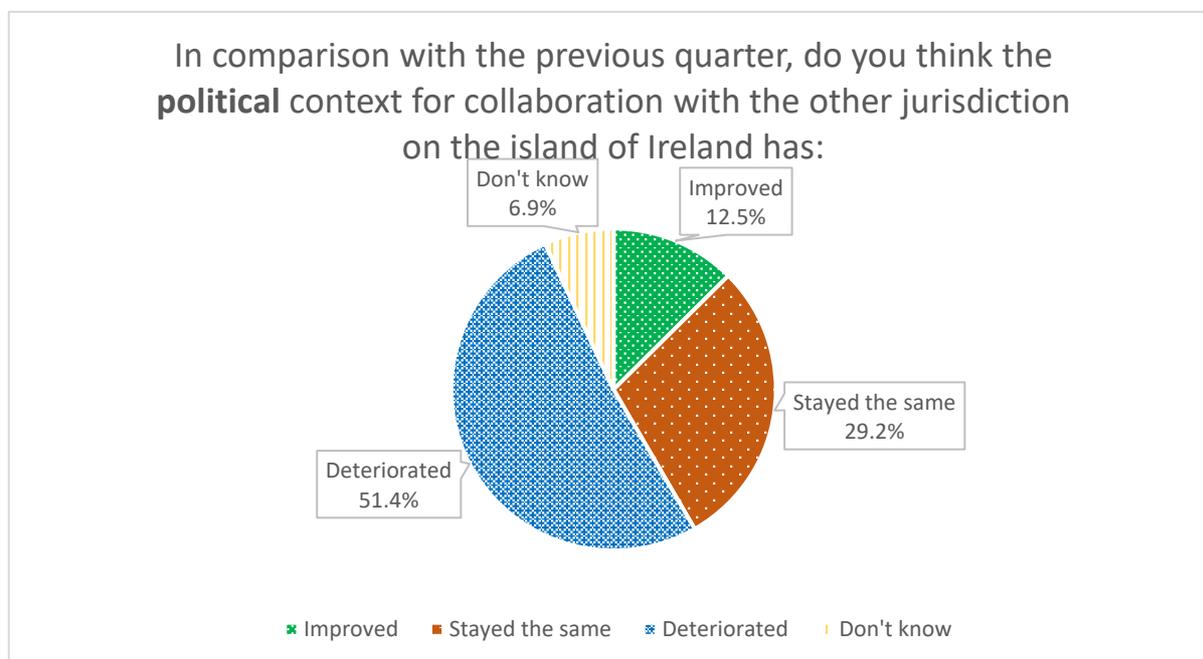


Figure 4

When asked to expand on their experiences of the impact of Brexit and the protocol on the **political** context for collaboration, respondents primarily pointed to the approach of the DUP toward the protocol to be having a negative impact on conditions for collaboration, responses included:

- Cross-party attendance at the North South Ministerial Council has been a concern
- Failure to engage in meaningful discussion with civil society orgs runs the risk of the conditions for all-island collaboration deteriorating further. The Shared Island Initiative has run a series of events but the opportunity to engage in debate/put forward recommendations is limited
- Apart from hard-line unionist stance, all other parties in NI and ROI seem open to continued opportunities for collaboration
- DUP stance on the protocol being the fault of the Irish Government and their withdrawal and threats to the Irish Government have created an anxiety in some groups about collaboration.
- Growing political instability in Northern Ireland and obstructionist attitudes to North-South institutions is undermining confidence. There is also wider uncertainty caused by the ongoing disagreements between the UK and EU over implementation of the Protocol.

Turning to the **Social** context (figure 5): 33% of respondents say that the social context has deteriorated since the previous quarter, though 49% say it has remained the same.

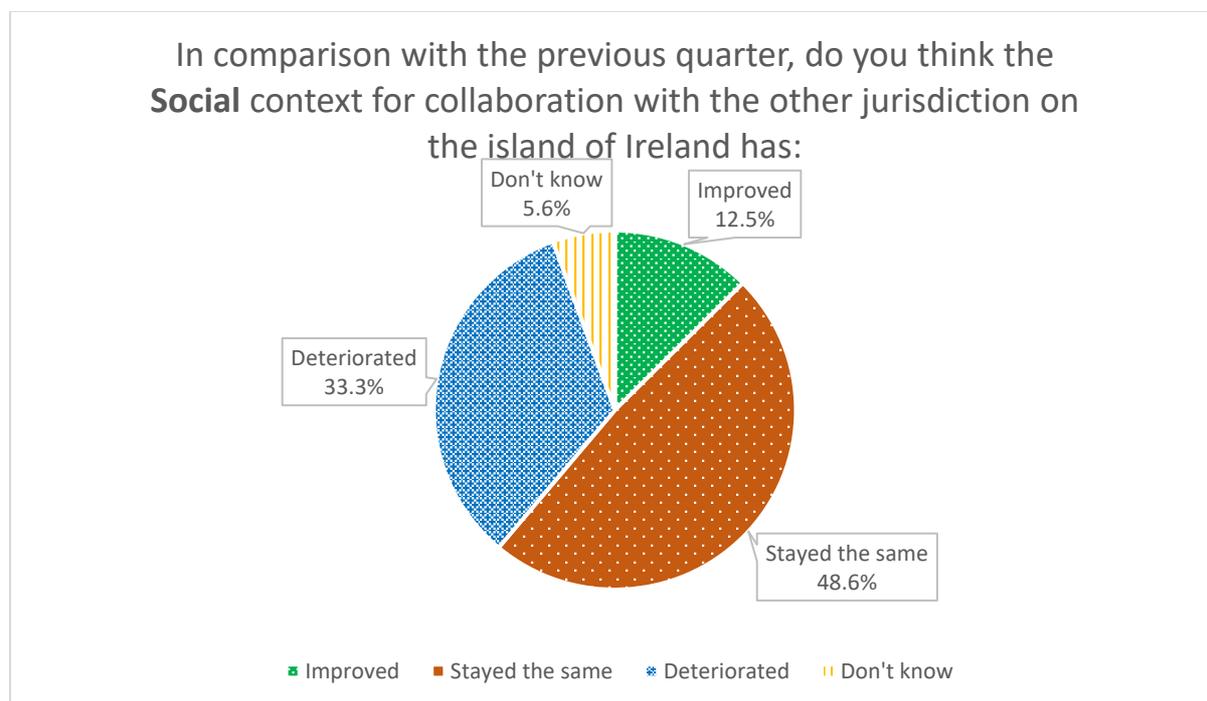


Figure 5

Respondents indicated that the manifestation of anxiety and insecurity among PUL communities has been having a negative impact on conditions for collaboration in terms of the **social** context:

- Controversy within loyalist communities and street violence in relation to the Brexit Protocol arrangements
- The type and intensity of Unionist protests will trigger Nationalist reactions
- The Unionist community are moving away from wanting any engagement with communities from the Republic of Ireland

Though there were some positive comments regarding social cohesion, particularly:

- We have a very strong collaboration & cohesion among our organisation's members, north and south. This has not been impacted by the political failures.

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 42% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter with only 38% saying it has deteriorated.

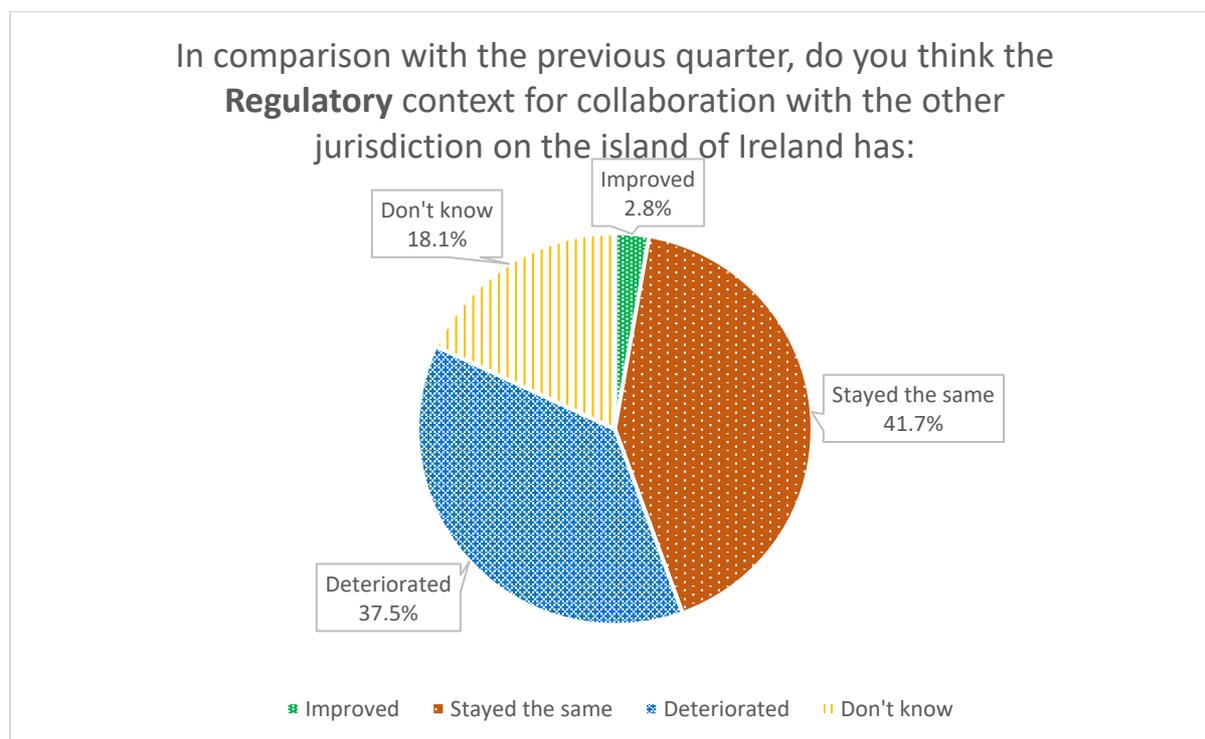


Figure 6

When asked to expand on their experiences of the impact of Brexit and the protocol on the **regulatory** context for collaboration, respondents primarily pointed to increased bureaucracy and lack of coordination between different parties:

- As Brexit unfolds and the protocol evolves it's hard to know where people stand on these issue.
- we are still working within transition for regulations - we expect to see differences in the next quarter as these come to different end dates.
- as NI is no longer part of the EU - more red tape in research submissions to EU
- GB/NI paperwork Increased....But most members are coming to terms with it.

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), half of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter, with 31% report that it has deteriorated since the last quarter, and only 8% of respondents say it has improved.

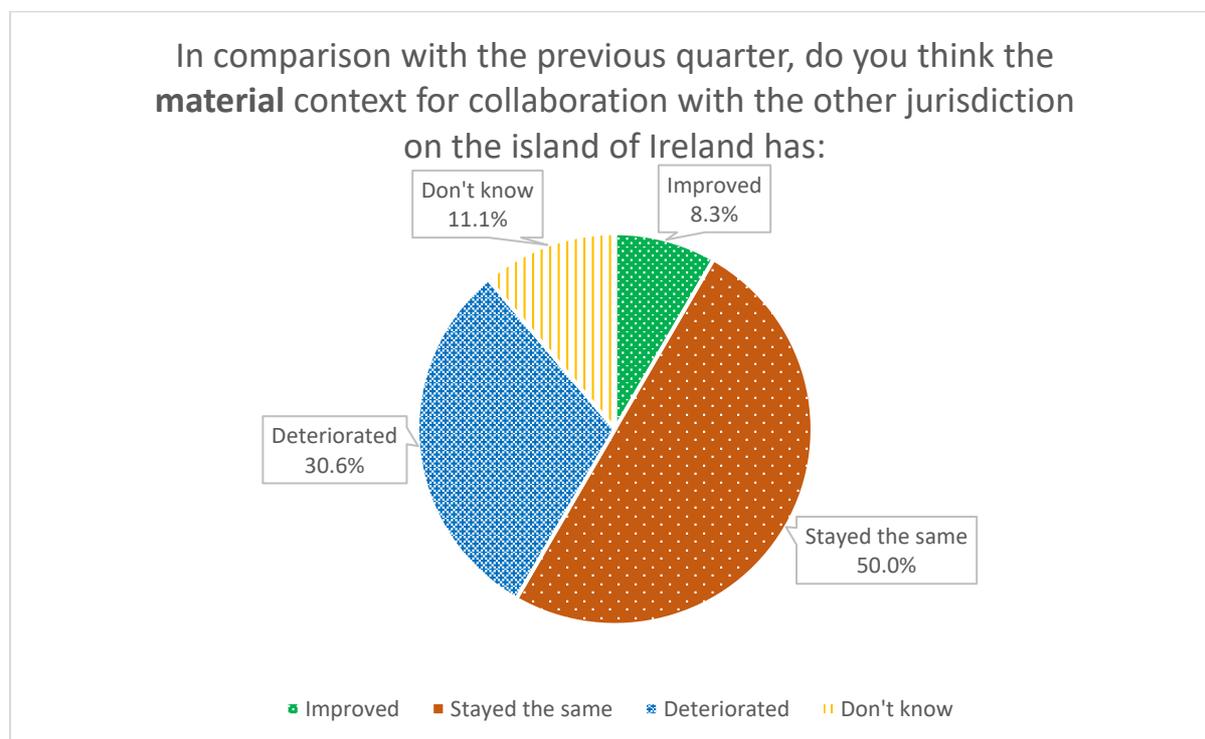


Figure 7

When asked to elaborate on their experiences of the impact of Brexit and the protocol on the **material** context for collaboration, respondents mentioned issues around licensing and the unavailability of some products:

- Problems around driving licences and insurance have surfaced.
- I see a lot more shops in the north now stocking produce from the south, which makes infinitely more sense to me, practically, environmentally and fiscally, than getting it from Britain
- prices are starting to rise, certain goods are becoming harder to obtain
- First indications of shortfalls in availability of some products. Changing bank services.
- Our public and employer liability insurance does not allow us to work and trade services in ROI without additional insurance cover

4. The East-West Dimension

4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter almost half of respondents reported having meetings with organisations in GB (49%). 75% of respondents say that this is the

same level of contact as the last quarter, and 14% reported that their level of contact had decreased on the previous quarter (figure 8).

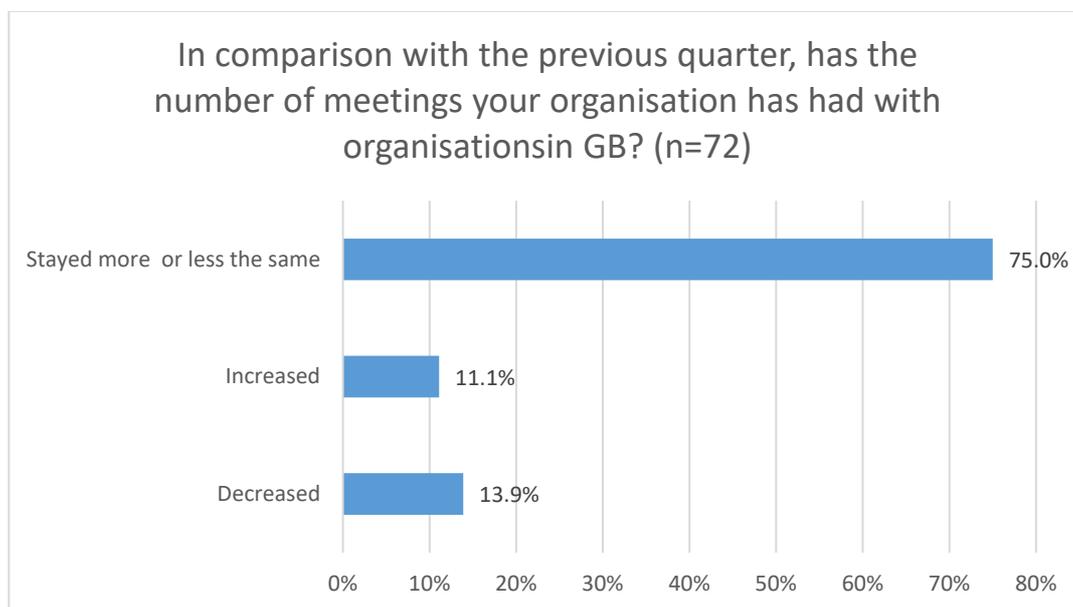


Figure 8

63% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (51.4%) or to a significant extent (11.4%). Such challenges included:

- Scope for cooperation limited especially on Inter-reg programmes due to Brexit
- Our E-W engagement has been with government entities largely with a primary focus on the challenges presented by the Protocol both real and perceived
- Lack of trust in government and elected reps

This quarter 47% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation, with the predominant areas of collaboration being education and human rights. However, at present only 35% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain (figure 5). Only 1/3 of respondents currently engaged in East-West collaborative projects reported that their organisation was in receipt of funding for those projects, with the predominant funding being drawn from the organisation's own core funding.

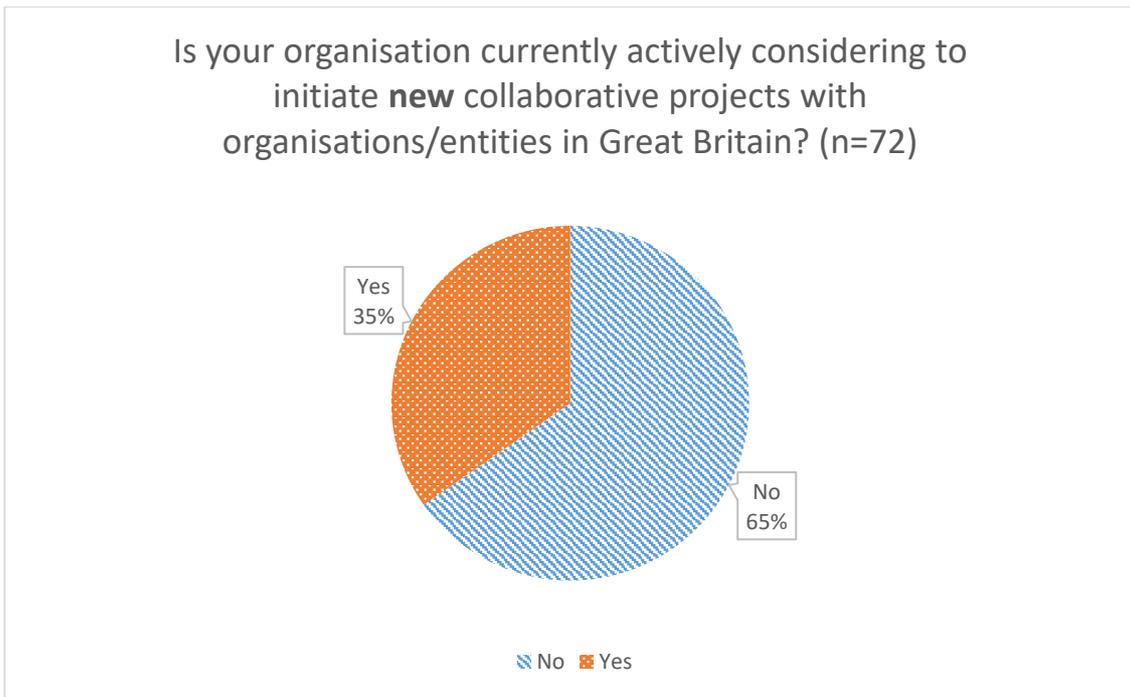


Figure 8

4.2. The East-West context

When asked whether they believe that the political, social, regulatory, and material contexts for East-West collaboration have changed over the last quarter (all n=72), the majority (57%) of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 28% saying it has deteriorated (figure 9).

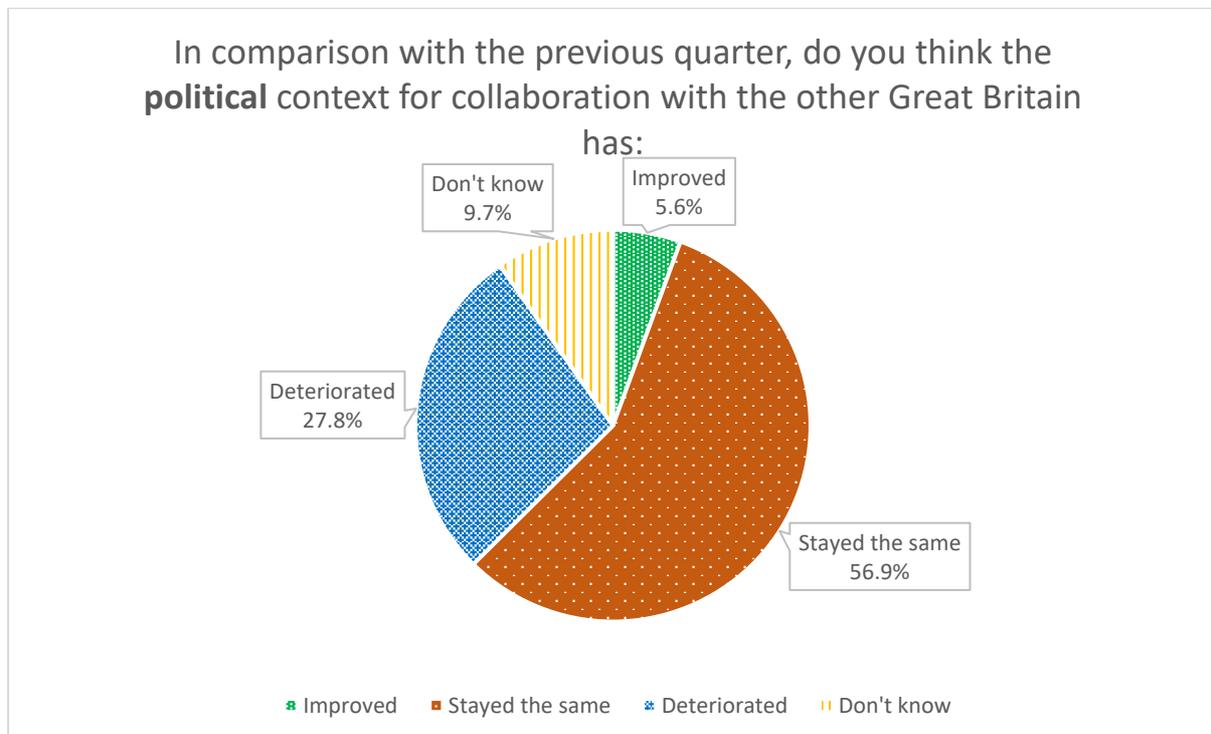


Figure 9

When asked to expand on their experiences of the impact of Brexit and the protocol on the political context for collaboration, respondents indicated a lack of trust in the British government to be having a negative impact on conditions for collaboration, responses included:

- Trust in British Government has deteriorated
- UK Government is creating a lot of uncertainty, here in NI and for EU.
- At the level we operate: central government relationships are very difficult

24% say that the **social** context (figure 10) has deteriorated since the previous quarter, though 60% say it has remained the same.

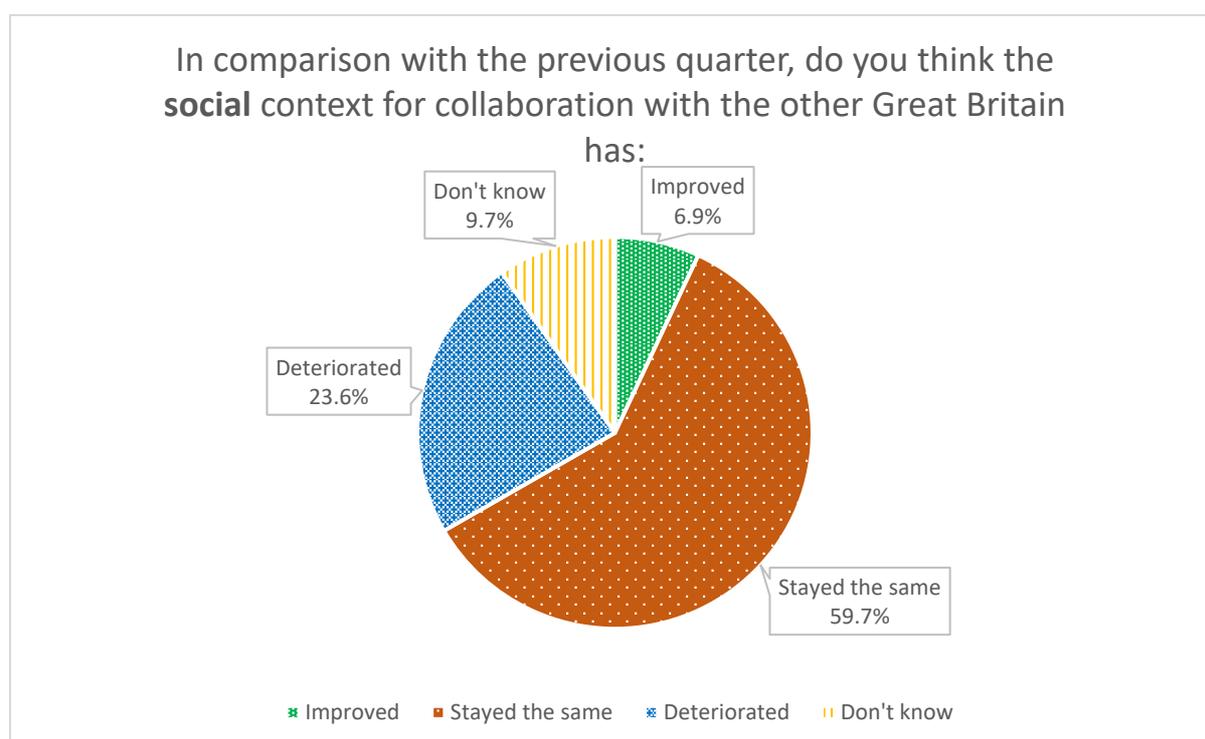


Figure 10

Respondents pointed to the anxieties among PUL communities are facing over the protocol, and the role of British media in exacerbating these issues, responses included:

- Hostility in the GB towards EU has increased; rhetoric in GB Newspapers is not helping
- Brexit protocol arrangements have been difficult for unionist communities
- It's just much more difficult to travel and the attitude and actions of the British government hasn't endeared anyone here

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 11), 30% of respondents say that the regulatory context has deteriorated over the last quarter with 50% saying it has remained the same as the previous quarter.

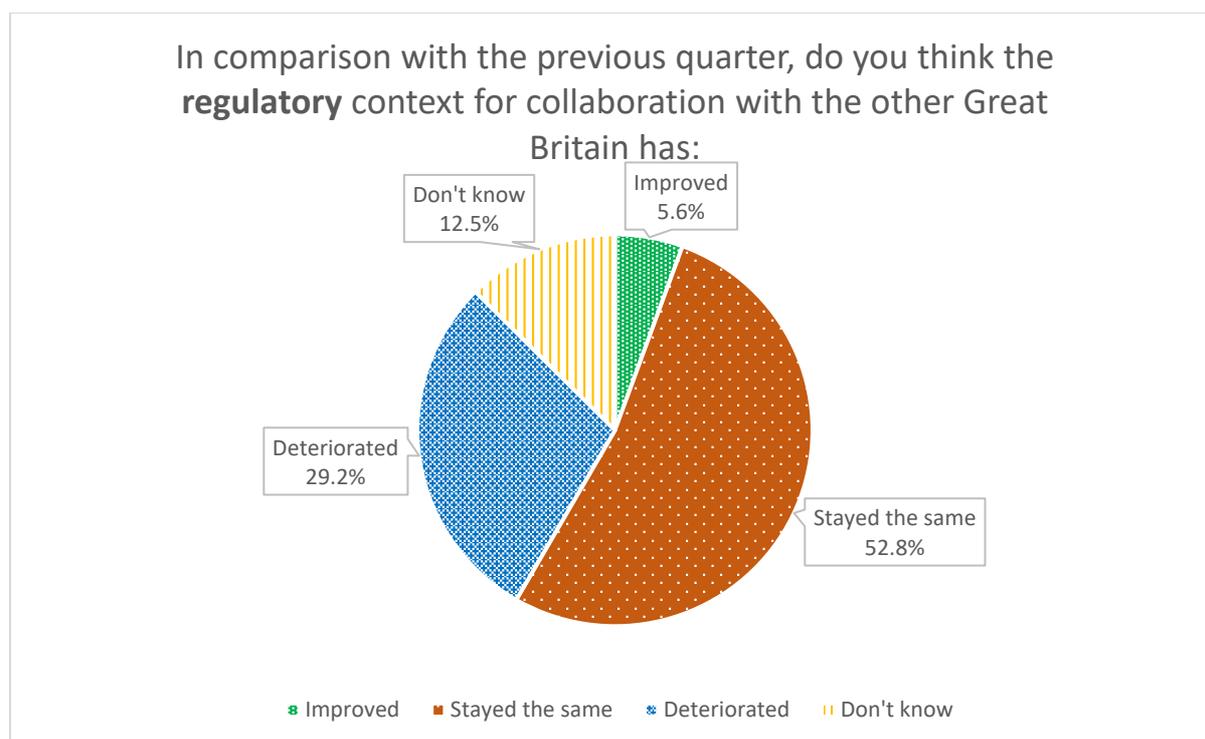


Figure 11

Respondents pointed toward the increased difficulty in moving goods between GB and NI as a result of the protocol as a manifestation of these **regulatory** challenges:

- Impact of Brexit in movement of goods and people is considerable
- It has been such a difficult quarter politically that all of the regulatory context has been compromised e.g. Westminster committing to deliver parts of NDNA instead of the Executive undoubtedly shifts the balance of the regulatory context
- Protocol has brought more regulation, that was to be expected...but should be kept to absolute min to support GB/NI trade.

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 12), 43% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 36% of respondents say it has deteriorated.

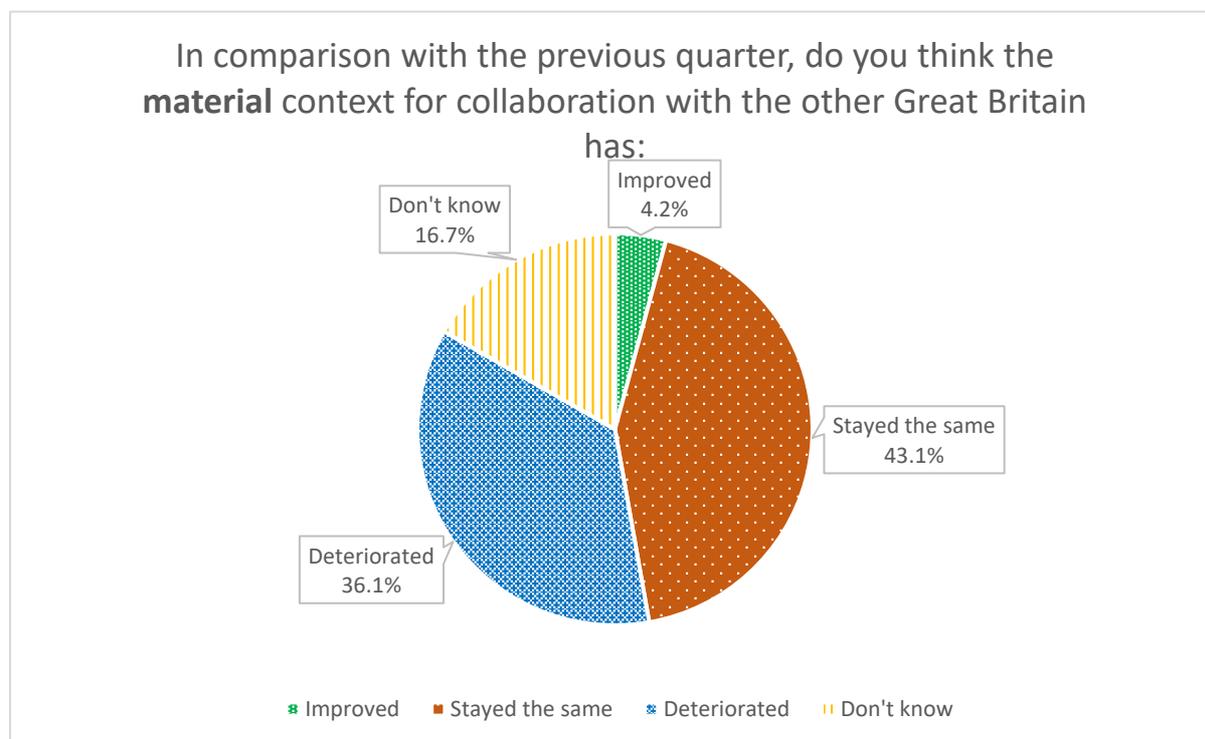


Figure 12

When asked to expand on their experiences of the impact of Brexit and the protocol on the material context for collaboration, respondents pointed toward the lack of preparation on the part of GB business to ready for the protocol, responses included:

- Full implementation of the Protocol will impact business further but UK Govt and EU looking at extending deadlines which will help
- GB Businesses not prepared for Brexit and this has had consequences on the supply chain. It is improving

5. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland

In this survey we asked respondents around their knowledge of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. 70% of respondents reported that they do not feel there is enough information on the protocol available to those involved in cross-border (North-South and/or East-West) cooperation activities compared to 19% who feel that there is (figure 13). However, 21% of respondents feel very informed about the protocol and 54% feel somewhat informed, with the press and social media being one of the primary sources of information (82% of respondents gathered information on the protocol from press and social media). The Irish government was a source of information on the protocol for 60% of respondents, and the EU for 58%, while the UK government was a source of information for 44% of respondents.

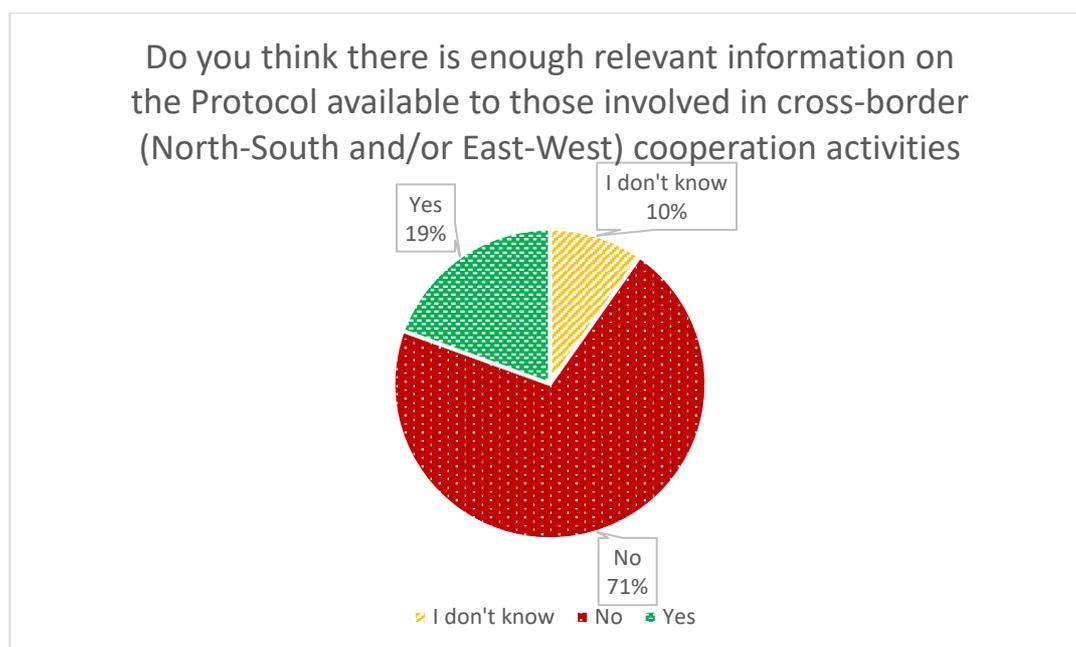


Figure 12

6. The respondents in their own words

In addition to the open text questions asked specifically around political, social, regulatory, and material conditions, the survey also asked respondents to provide, in their own words, any additional comments and insights they feel would be beneficial to understanding the impact of Brexit and the protocol on cross-border contact and collaboration, both North-South and East-West.

Greater Economic partnership and collaboration is needed ...Tourism Ireland is a great example of how partnerships can work.

This has been a hugely challenging quarter to work through; to support the sharing of accurate information, to seek and utilise opportunities to convey the real, 'on the ground' realities with all actors whilst the political tone has been often unhelpful and our own devolved government has lurched through weeks of instability and crisis.

Our work with ROI/NI colleagues will continue despite the political failures. People on the ground are getting on with their work and are exasperated by political wranglings.

The future of Leader and Interreg is the next concern.

Conclusion

In summary, then, what the survey responses indicate is that the overall context of the conditions for cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and between Northern Ireland and Great Britain in this quarter are, broadly, the same or worse

than the last quarter. Indeed, “stayed the same” was the predominant response for all contexts with “deteriorated” as the second most selected option, apart from the political context North-South, which was primarily perceived as having deteriorated on the last quarter. While, as mentioned, the composition of the panel means that no robust inferences as to trends can be made, the qualitative responses would indicate that in many instances, conditions being perceived as “more or less the same” as the previous quarter could reflect a normalisation of the conditions that were considered as deteriorating in the previous survey.

Despite the challenges presented by Brexit and further complicated by Covid, a majority of respondents report engaging in meetings and collaborations with partners in the North-South dimension, though these figures were slightly less than half in terms of the East-West dimension.

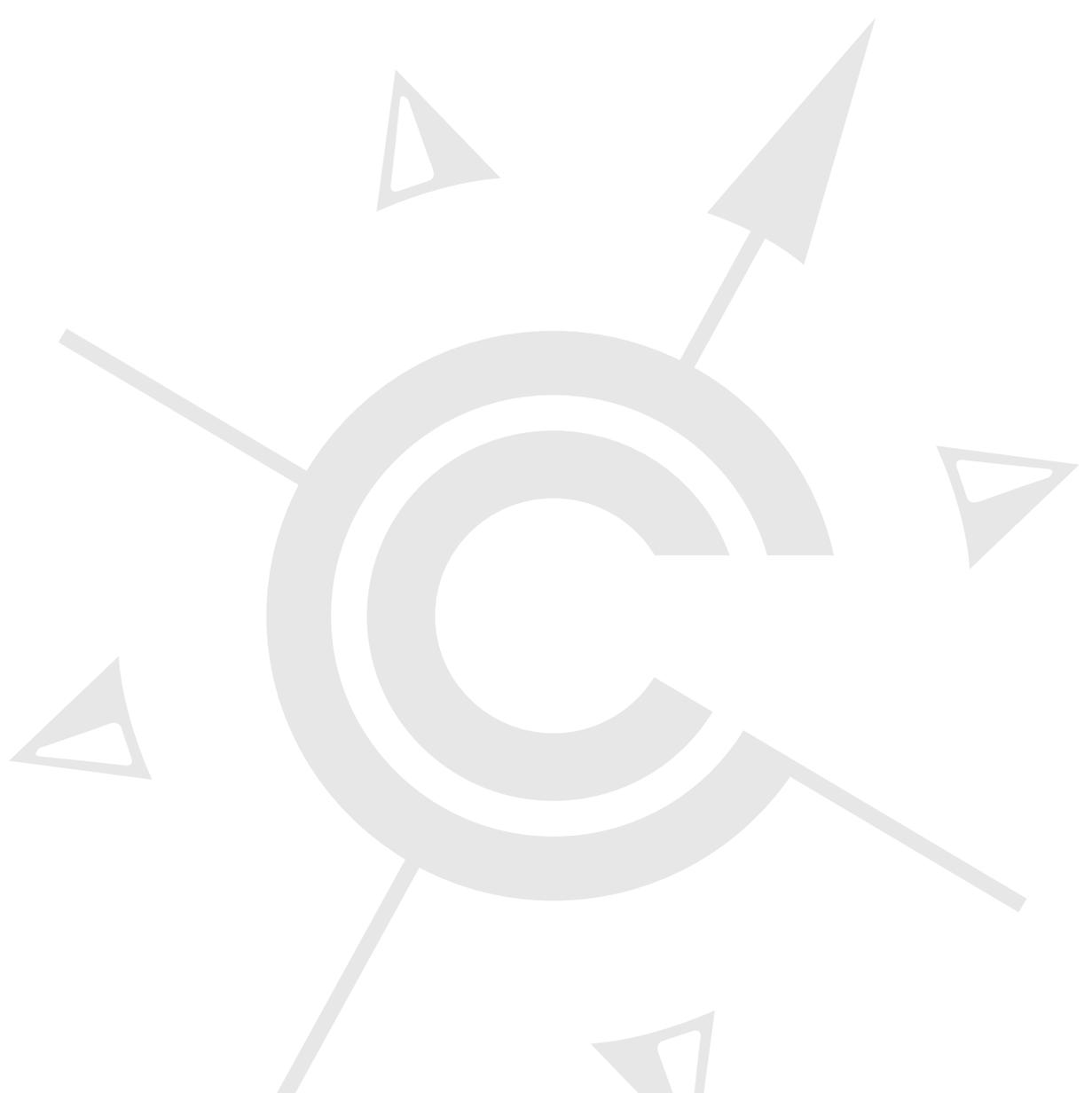
Through the qualitative contributions, there is evidence to suggest that the largest challenges to cooperation, both North-South and East-West, come from the UK government and their increasingly fractious relationship with the EU and Ireland, and as a result of the aversion of political unionism to the protocol and the outworkings of that aversion on North-South institutions.

A clear message from across the responses is that certainty is required, and this means the UK and EU need to come to an agreement regarding how the protocol is going to work in the long term so that organisations engaging in cooperation and collaboration, both North-South and East-West can proceed with confidence in their broader socio-political and regulatory contexts.

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