

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

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

Briefing on the findings from the 1st
Quarterly Survey (January to March 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

The last five years have been a time of profound uncertainty for these islands, due in large part to the unsteady unfolding of Brexit. That uncertainty has been felt by all sectors of our societies, with not only businesses having to grapple with changes as to how they trade across borders, but also different communities and individuals perceiving at different times that their sense of identity and belonging and how they relate to one another are coming under threat. In many ways we are still waiting to see whether the outworkings of Brexit will be compatible with the totality of relations encompassed by the [1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement](#). **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 begin this quarterly survey of North-South and East-West cooperation. 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.

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 is, therefore, 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.**

However, the survey is aimed specifically at civic society organisations and local authorities. This is 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 Quarterly Survey also seeks to underline core elements that make up the necessary conditions for North-South cooperation which, undoubtedly important as they are, cannot be reduced to legal or policy frameworks. Therefore, while the survey captured respondents’

views on the nature of the regulatory context supporting their North-South and East-West cooperation, it also sought their opinions on the extent to which the political, social and material contexts facilitating cooperation had evolved following the end of the transition period and the beginning of the implementation of the Protocol.

In terms of the importance of the political temperature, for example, a [Position Paper](#) by the Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation noted in August 2020:

The ability of actors at all levels to engage in effective North-South cooperation is always dependent on the political context prevailing at any given time. Those conditions may deteriorate if the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland exacerbates existing political divisions or gives rise to new ones, particularly in Northern Ireland. Such divisions may be exacerbated if North-South cooperation and relations are perceived to be given priority over East-West relations, above all in terms of Northern Ireland's trading relations with Great Britain. Political tensions are almost inevitably going to arise on a regular basis as the provisions of Article 18 of the Protocol (Democratic consent in Northern Ireland) are enacted, which could result in political obstacles to the effective operation of North-South cooperation (pp.2-3).

The information this survey will provide will, therefore, be used by the Centre for Cross Border Studies as it works with other organisations to protect North-South and East-West relations and cooperation.

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.

2. Understanding the data

The data has been collected via a survey of self-selected respondents between the 9th and 26th March 2021, gathering 80 responses in total.

Due to the self-selected nature of the survey, the responses and perceptions presented here speak only for the respondents who completed the survey and cannot and should not be generalised beyond them.

However, the respondents each have a wealth of insight, experience, and expertise of cross-border cooperation and collaboration. As such, the contributions made through this survey should be given due consideration and credibility coming, as they do, from organisations that

can speak with knowledge of the on-the-ground conditions for cross-border, North-South and East-West cooperation.

As well as analysing the overall response data we present an analysis in each section of data broken down by whether the respondent organisation is based in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland in order to more fully understand the different experiences in the two jurisdictions on the island. Due to the size (n=80) and composition of the sample (44 respondent organisations based in the Republic of Ireland, and 30 in Northern Ireland) caution must be exercised in making proportional comparisons between the two in order to avoid misrepresenting any apparent differences. Therefore, absolute values will be presented alongside proportional comparisons for the sake of clarity and transparency.

3. Respondents

Of the 80 responses to the survey, 79 provided information as to where they were based. 56% were based in the Republic of Ireland and 38% based in Northern Ireland, with 6% having a presence on both sides of the border (figure 1).

The respondents were asked what the main activity of their organisation was (respondents were allowed to select more than one option). The top 3 areas of activity were community development (42%), education (38%), and cross-border cooperation (33%).

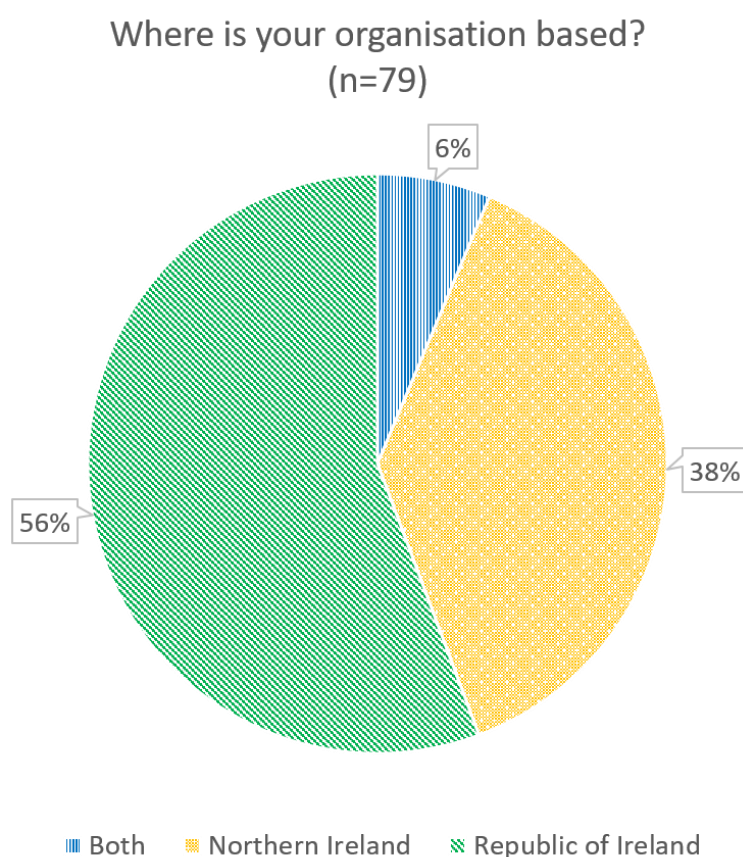


Figure 1

4. The North-South dimension

4.1. North-South contact

Since 2016 43% of respondents reported that their organisation had increased contact with partners in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland, while only 14% reported that their level of contact has reduced. More specifically, in this quarter (Jan-Mar 2021) 70% of respondents have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction. For the majority of respondents (61%) their level of contact this quarter has been at the same level as the last, though it had reduced for 25% of respondents (figure 2).

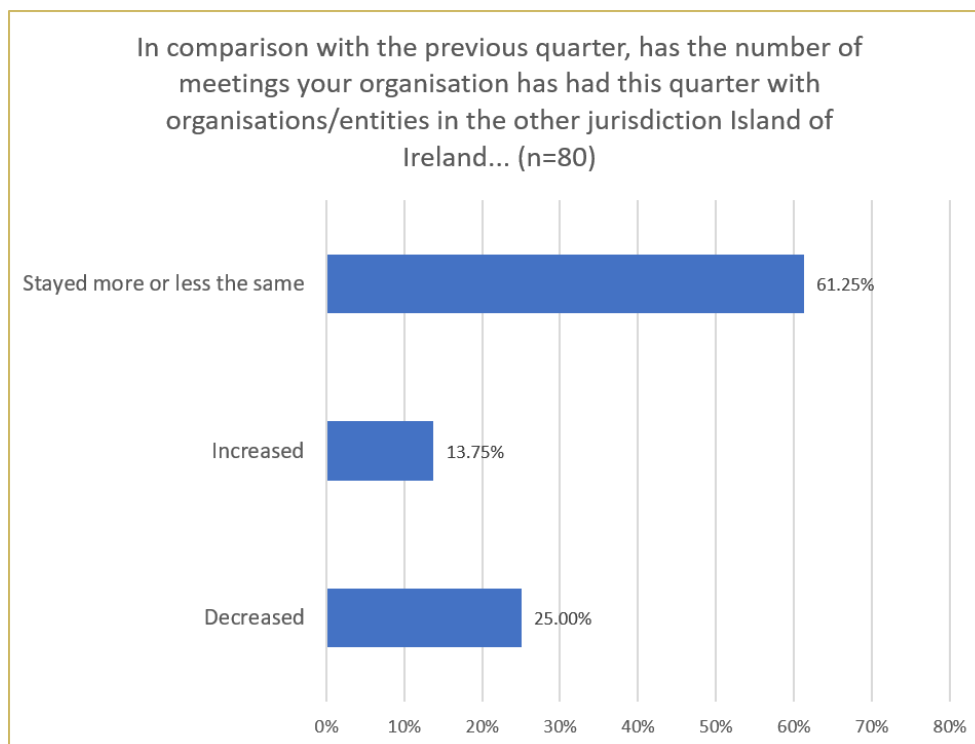


Figure 2

73% 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 had focussed primarily on the impacts of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Since 2016 ~41% of respondents based on either side of the border have increased contact with partners in the other jurisdiction. More recently in this quarter ~69% of respondents based on either side of the border have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction. These meetings discussed challenges to cross-border cooperation to some degree for ~70% of respondents based on either side of the border. The only difference we see regarding the location of the respondent is that for 20% of respondents based in Northern Ireland their level of contact with partners in the Republic of Ireland has reduced over the previous quarter, compared to 32% respondents based in the Republic of Ireland who reported a reduction in contact with the organisations in Northern Ireland. Substantively, this translates as 6 respondents based in NI and 14 respondents based in ROI reporting a reduction in their level of cross-border contact compared to the previous quarter.

4.2. North-South collaboration

Over the previous five years 82% of respondents reported having been involved in collaborative work with an organisation based in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland.

At present 71% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaboration (figure 3), and 65% of respondents are actively considering new collaborative projects. The primary areas of current collaboration are education, cross-border cooperation, and peace and reconciliation.

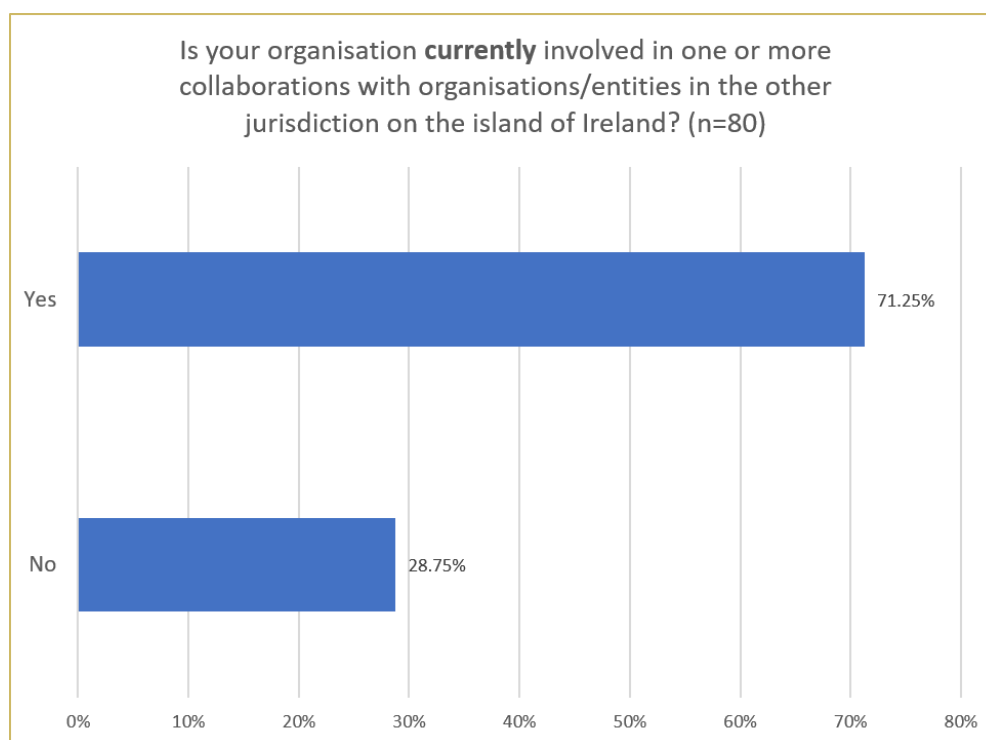


Figure 3

~80% of respondents from either side of the border report having been involved in collaborative work with an organisation in the other jurisdiction over the previous 5 years. A higher proportion of respondents based in the Republic of Ireland (77%) are currently involved in cross-border collaboration, compared to 60% in Northern Ireland. In substantive terms, 18 respondents based in NI and 34 respondents based in ROI are currently involved in cross-border collaboration. Responses also show that 2/3 of respondents based on either side of the border are actively considering new cross-border collaborative projects.

4.3. North-South context

Only 36% of respondents reported that they were in receipt of funding for cross-border collaborative projects, with the predominant funding sources being the Irish government, the EU, or the organisation's own core funding. No respondent reported receiving funding for cross-border projects from the UK government.

When asked whether they believe that the political, social, regulatory, and material contexts for cross-border collaboration have changed over the last quarter (figure 4), **the majority**

(60%) of respondents believe that the political context for cross-border cooperation has deteriorated since the previous quarter, with only 4% saying it has improved. 36% say that the social context has deteriorated since the previous quarter, though 48% say it has remained the same. **61% of respondents say that the regulatory context has deteriorated over the last quarter with only 3% saying it has improved, and 50% report that the material context has deteriorated since the last quarter, while only 1% of respondents say it has improved.**

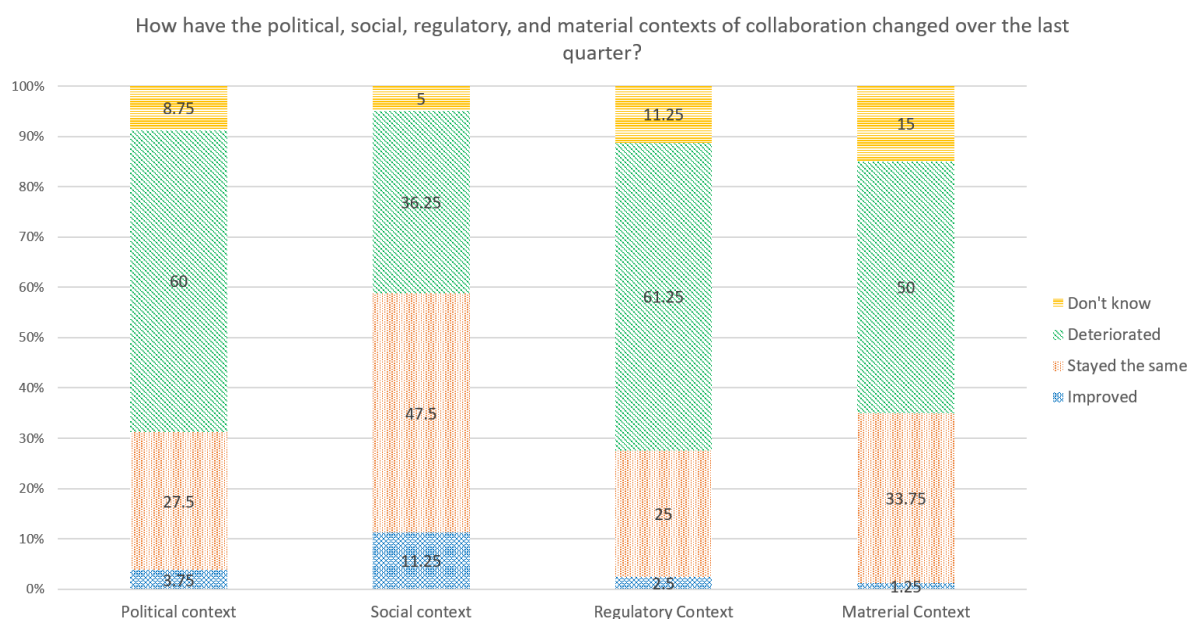


Figure 4

In summary, then, what the survey responses indicate is a broadly negative impression of the overall context of the conditions for cooperation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Breaking this down by location of respondents, the survey shows that 1/3 of respondents from either jurisdiction are in receipt of funding for cross-border collaborative projects.

57% (17) of respondents based in NI believe that the political context for cross-border cooperation has deteriorated since the previous quarter compared to 64% (28) in the Republic of Ireland. 40% (12) of NI respondents believed the social context has deteriorated since the previous quarter, compared to 34% (15) of respondents based in the Republic of Ireland. ~58% of respondents from either side of the border say that the regulatory context has deteriorated over the last quarter. Finally, 40% (12) of NI respondents say that the material context has deteriorated since the last quarter, compared to 55% (24) of respondents based in the other jurisdiction.

5. The East-West Dimension

5.1. East-West contact

62% of all respondents report that their organisation is in regular contact with organisations in Great Britain (more than once per year), and of those half have the most contact with England and just over a third are in contact with all nations equally. No respondent said they had most contact with Wales (figure 5).

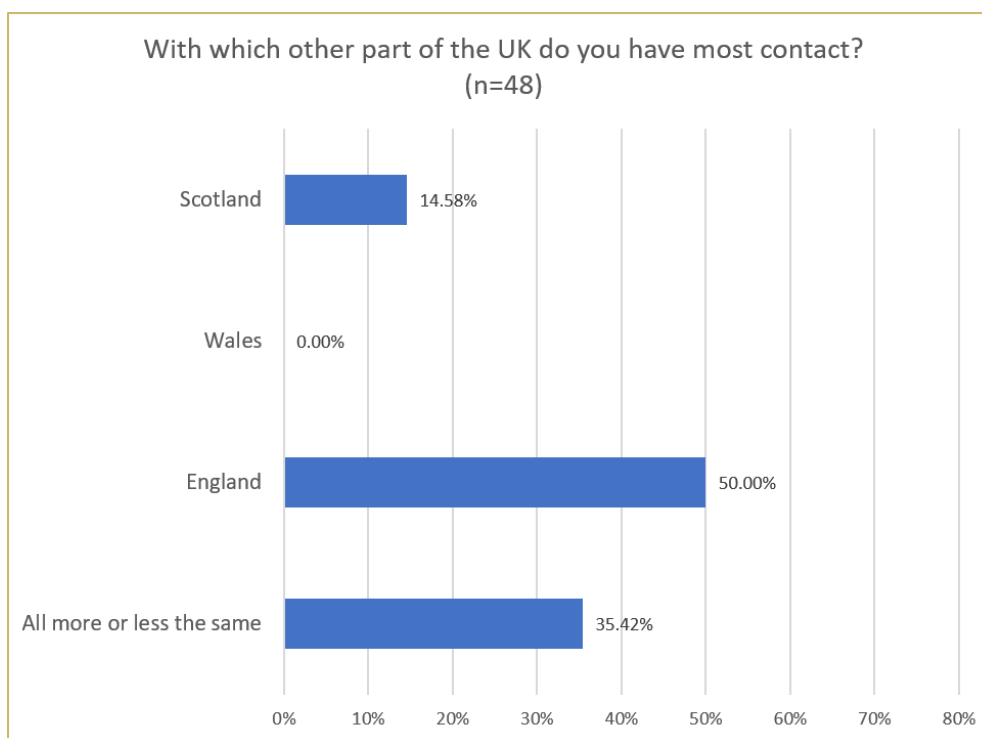


Figure 5

Since 2016 64% of respondents reported that their contact with organisations in Great Britain had remained the same, and 26% said it has increased. However, this quarter only 43% of respondents reported having meetings with organisations in GB. 71% of respondents say that this is the same level of contact as the last quarter, and 16% reported that their level of contact had decreased on the previous quarter.

The majority of respondents (59%) reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain did not discuss challenges to cooperation at all (figure 5), but those that did tended to focus on challenges posed by Brexit and Covid-19.

70% (21) of respondents based in NI have regular contact (more than once per year) with organisations in Great Britain compared to 52% (22) of respondents based in the Republic of Ireland. Since 2016 37% (11) of NI based respondents have reported an increase in contact. Over the same period 14% (6) of respondents based in the Republic of Ireland have reported an increase in the level of contact, though the same number of respondents based in the Republic of Ireland have reported a decline over the same period.

More recently, in this quarter **63% (19)** of respondents based in Northern Ireland reported **engaging in meetings with partners in Great Britain in contrast to the 30% (13) of respondents based in the Republic of Ireland**. This was an increase on the previous quarter for 23% (7) of NI-based respondents but only 5% (2) for ROI-based respondents.

68% (30) of respondents based in the Republic of Ireland reported that meetings with GB partners did not discuss cross-border challenges at all, compared to 47% (14) of NI-based respondents.

5.2. East-West collaboration

Over the previous five years 65% of respondents report their organisation being involved in collaborative work with an organisation based in Great Britain. 46% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation, with the predominant area of collaboration being education (46%). However, **at present only 30% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain** (figure 6).

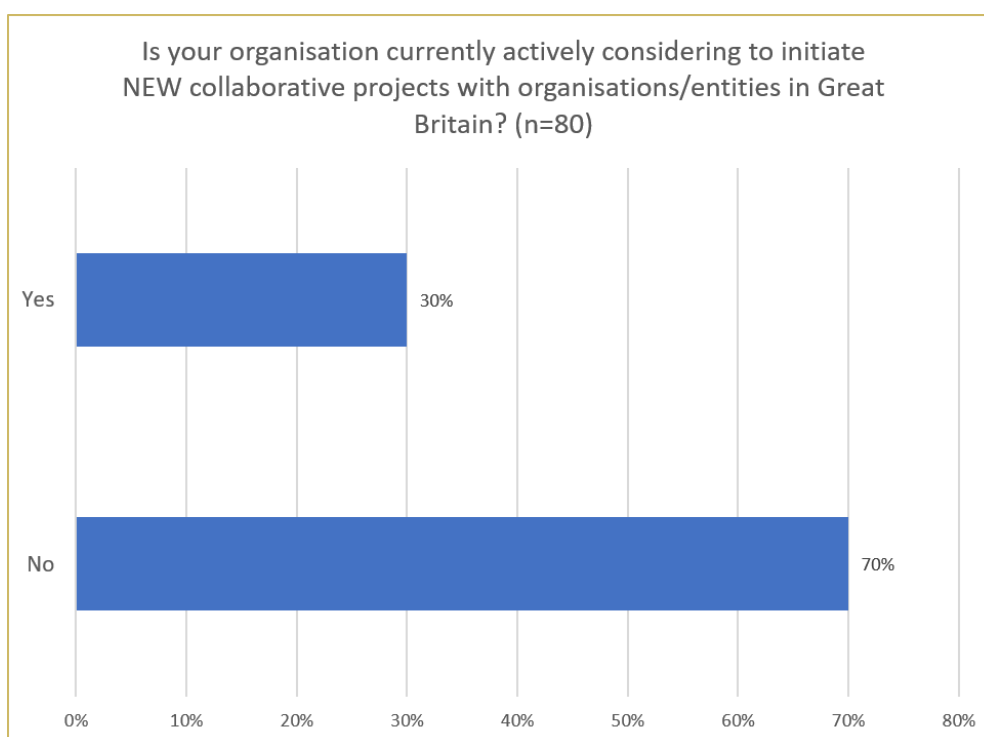


Figure 6

43% (13) of respondents based in Northern Ireland are actively considering new collaborative projects with partners in Great Britain, compared to 18% (8) based in the Republic of Ireland. The responses also show that a 60% (18) of respondents based in Northern Ireland are currently involved in collaboration with GB, compared to 34% (15) based in the Republic of Ireland.

5.3. The East-West context

Only 11% of all respondents reported that their organisation was in receipt of funding for collaborative projects, with the predominant funding sources being the EU. Again, no respondent reported receiving funding for collaborative projects from the UK government.

When asked whether they believe that the political, social, regulatory, and material contexts for East-West collaboration have changed over the last quarter (figure 7), the majority (60%) of respondents believe that the political context for East-West cooperation has deteriorated since the previous quarter, with only 3% saying it has improved. 36% say that the social context has deteriorated since the previous quarter, though 41% say it has remained the same. 64% of respondents say that the regulatory context has deteriorated over the last quarter with only 3% saying it has improved, and 53% report that the material context has deteriorated since the last quarter, while only 1% of respondents say it has improved.

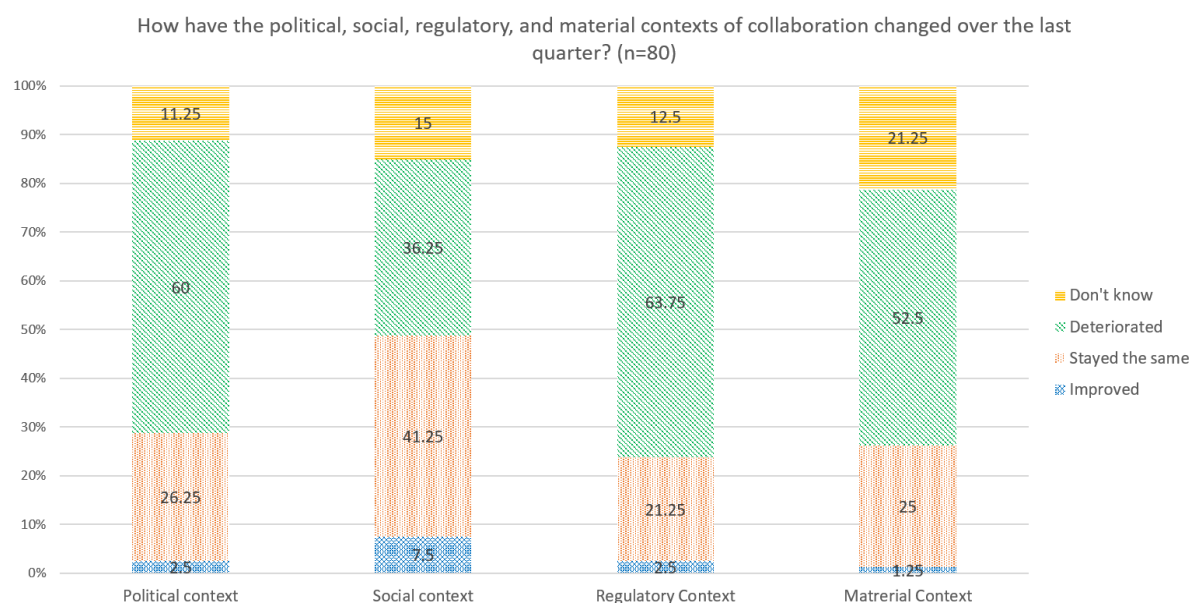


Figure 7

In an echo of the North-South dimension, what the survey indicates is a broadly negative impression of the overall context of the conditions for East-West cooperation and collaboration.

Breaking this down by location of respondents, the survey shows that **only ~11% of respondents based in either jurisdiction on the island of Ireland are in receipt of funding for collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain.**

43% (13) of respondents based in Northern Ireland believe that the political context for East-West cooperation has deteriorated since the previous quarter, compared to 71% (31) based in the Republic of Ireland. 30% (9) of NI respondents believed the social context has deteriorated since the previous quarter, compared to 46% (20) of respondents based in the

Republic of Ireland. 50% (15) of respondents from NI and 71% (31) of respondents based in the Republic of Ireland say that the regulatory context for GB collaboration has deteriorated over the last quarter. Finally, 40% (12) of NI respondents say that the material context has deteriorated since the last quarter, compared to 61% (27) of respondents based in the south.

6. The respondents in their own words

The survey also asked respondents to provide, in their own words, their perceptions and experiences of the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation post-Brexit. This develops on the quantitative analysis already presented and provides a more nuanced understanding of the impact of changes as they are felt on the ground and in practice:

“I am involved in trying to develop four different cross border initiatives all of which have struggled a combination of Brexit & Covid.”

“Uncertainty and political brinkmanship is the greatest difficulty. We find that business and organisations are willing to work towards finding solutions however, the political brinkmanship is making it more and more difficult.”

“The impact of the UK withdrawal from the EU has impacted significantly - while access to goods and services will probably be ironed out - the absence of formalised structures to support what were previously informal relationships and contacts has been overlooked - so dialogue, information sharing and problem sharing mechanisms are still stuck in the late 1990s.”

“Governments of Ireland and Scotland have recently signed a new framework for collaboration: perhaps bringing NI into this might present an interesting 3-way opportunity for collaboration in higher education and research.”

Conclusion

It is important to recognise that this is only the first Quarterly Survey of the Conditions for North-South and East-West Cooperation, and so the results and insights here offer only a snapshot of the very early post-Brexit landscape. As the survey continues over time it will be able to offer a more detailed insight into the trends that are prevailing in North-South and East-West contact and cooperation. At this juncture, what we can say is that:

- The level of North-South cross-border contact has increased among respondents over the last five years, and the majority of respondents are presently engaged in and actively seeking new cross-border collaborative projects. However, recently the context for this cooperation is perceived to be deteriorating.

- East-West cooperation appears to be struggling with less than half of respondents reporting that they had met with a GB organisation this quarter and less than a third reporting that they are actively seeking new collaborations with partners in GB.
- Brexit and Covid are presently considered to be the two biggest obstacles to cross-border collaboration.
- Political, social, regulatory, and material contexts are broadly perceived as deteriorating for North-South and East-West contact and collaboration.
- Respondents report that funding for collaboration both on a North-South and East-West basis is scarce, particularly from the UK government.

Finally, the responses to this survey indicate that there is a need to focus on maintaining and encouraging North-South contact and collaboration, and urgently developing the conditions for East-West contact and collaboration.

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