

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

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

Briefing on the findings from the 4th
Quarterly Survey (October to December
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

Negotiations between the UK Government and the European Union continued in the final quarter of 2021 to seek resolution of outstanding issues related to the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. Within Northern Ireland's main political parties, we saw the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) continue to voice its strong opposition to the Protocol. It repeatedly pressured the UK Government to either reach a resolution with the EU that would, in the DUP's view, abide by the Government's commitment in [New Decade, New Approach](#) to 'ensuring that Northern Ireland remains an integral part of the UK internal market' (p.47), or that it trigger Article 16 of the Protocol if a resolution were not found soon. The DUP's leader, Sir Jeffrey Donaldson MP, also reiterated his warning previously set out in his [speech](#) of 9 September 2021 regarding his party's participation in the political institutions, including the North South Ministerial Council (see, for example, his [statement of 16 December](#) ahead of his meeting with the EU's chief negotiator, Maroš Šefčovič).

While the tensions surrounding the Protocol continued to affect Northern Ireland's political stability, which may to some extent have informed the responses to the Centre for Cross Border Studies' 4th Quarterly Survey on the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation, the nature of the UK's approach to its engagement with the EU came under question following the resignation of its chief negotiator, Lord Frost, on 18 December 2021 (who set out his reasons for taking this course of action in his [resignation letter](#) to the UK's Prime Minister). The UK's Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, replaced him to lead negotiations with the EU, with her first meeting with her EU counterpart having taken place on 13 to 14 January 2022 (therefore outside the period covered by the 4th Quarterly Survey). Although the first month of 2022 has seemed to show some signs of a more positive atmosphere surrounding the negotiations than had hitherto been the case (noted in the [joint statement](#) released by the two sides following the first meeting), the UK Government's position appears to continue to be that set out in its Command Paper – [“Northern Ireland Protocol: The way forward”](#) – of July 2021 (even, perhaps, with some indications of a differing emphasis being placed between the priorities within the Command Paper).

The underlying context for cooperation and relations within the island of Ireland, and between the island of Ireland and Great Britain, will be shaped by the extent to which the UK and EU are able to resolve the current issues related to the Protocol's implementation, and by the state of health of relations between the two parties subsequent to any resolution. Finding a path through the present obstacles will need mutual goodwill, which must be maintained in order to reach agreement on solutions or mitigations for any issues that might arise as the Protocol continues to be implemented. Crucially, in this regard, structures for engagement with civic society organisations must be put in place in order for them to be involved in the identification of any arising issues and in the feasibility of any proposed solutions or mitigations.

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 safeguarding of the necessary conditions for those relations and cooperation, which are reflective of the totality of relations encompassed by the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement is of paramount importance. It remains 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 need for structures for civic society engagement with the mechanisms of the Protocol that include a dedicated space for the monitoring of the conditions for North-South cooperation is a priority area of concern. Importantly, such a space must allow for the involvement of civic society organisations from both jurisdictions. Whereas the European Commission put forward proposals on structures for engagement with civic society in October 2021 (in its [Non-Paper: Engagement with Northern Ireland Stakeholders and Authorities](#)), these did not include any reference to the possibility of including representation from civic society organisations in the Republic of Ireland within those structures, even though Article 11 of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland is specifically dedicated to ensuring the implementation of the Protocol must 'maintain the necessary conditions for continued North-South cooperation'. The proposed structures only envisage engagement with civic society in Northern Ireland.

This is why in [written evidence](#) to the UK House of Lords European Affairs Sub-Committee on the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland (and following [earlier evidence](#) submitted by the Centre for Cross Border Studies), the Ad-Hoc Group stated: 'No proper consideration or monitoring of North-South cooperation and the extent to which the Protocol on

Ireland/Northern Ireland is safeguarding the necessary conditions for such cooperation can take place by engagement with only one pole of that cooperation’ (p.4). In its evidence, the Ad-Hoc Group also raised its concerns regarding East-West cooperation and the need for structures supportive of engagement with civic society to ensure the protection of collaboration between the island of Ireland and Great Britain. It recommended that ‘the UK Government fully supports and facilitates East-West channels of civic society cooperation and engagement through the mechanisms established (or being established) under the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA), particularly the UK Domestic Advisory Group and the EU-UK Civic Society Forum’ (p.3).

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](#)

In this, the fourth round of this survey, 44 of 51 respondents have completed at least one previous round of the survey. This means that, while differences in the composition of the panel mean that it is not possible to make direct comparisons between this and previous rounds of the survey (because some people completed the 1st and 3rd survey, some 2nd and 4th etc.), we can start to infer the shape of some trends over the course of the year in a

practical sense. These insights are further developed through the inclusion of qualitative responses to the central contextual questions which allow for more nuanced insights into *how* respondents are experiencing the changing political, social, regulatory, and material conditions for North-South and East-West collaboration as this information has proved invaluable in painting a more detailed picture of the current contexts for cross border collaboration. It also bears emphasising that the respondents to all rounds of the 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.

2. Respondents

The data has been collected via a survey of self-selected respondents between the 1st and 20th December 2021, gathering 51 responses in total. 86% (44) reported that they completed the survey in the last quarter while 14% (7) are new respondents.

Of the 51 responses to the survey, 31% were based in the Republic of Ireland and 53% based in Northern Ireland, with 10% having a presence on both sides of the border and 6% being based outside the Island of Ireland, but still reporting a stake in cross border cooperation and collaboration (figure 1).

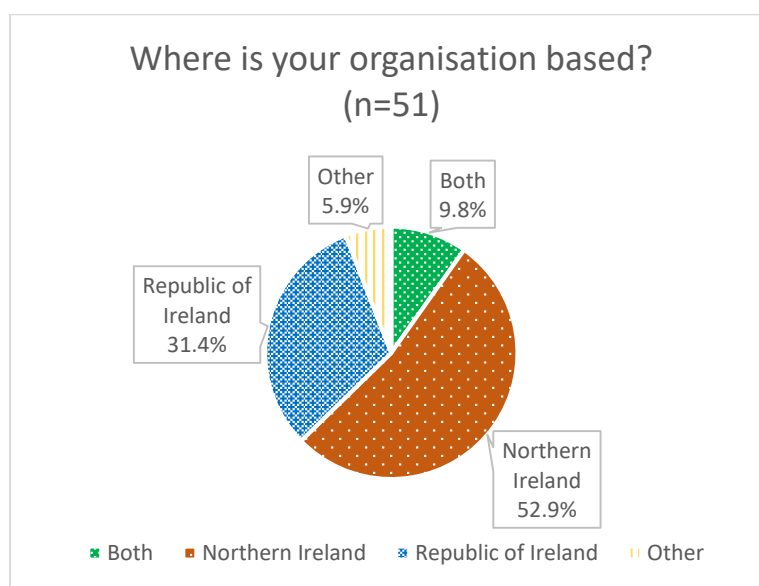


Figure 1

3. The North-South dimension

3.1. contact and collaboration

In this quarter (Oct-Dec 2021) 77% of respondents have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 2). For 55% of respondents their level of contact this quarter has been at the same level as the last and has increased for 31% of respondents.

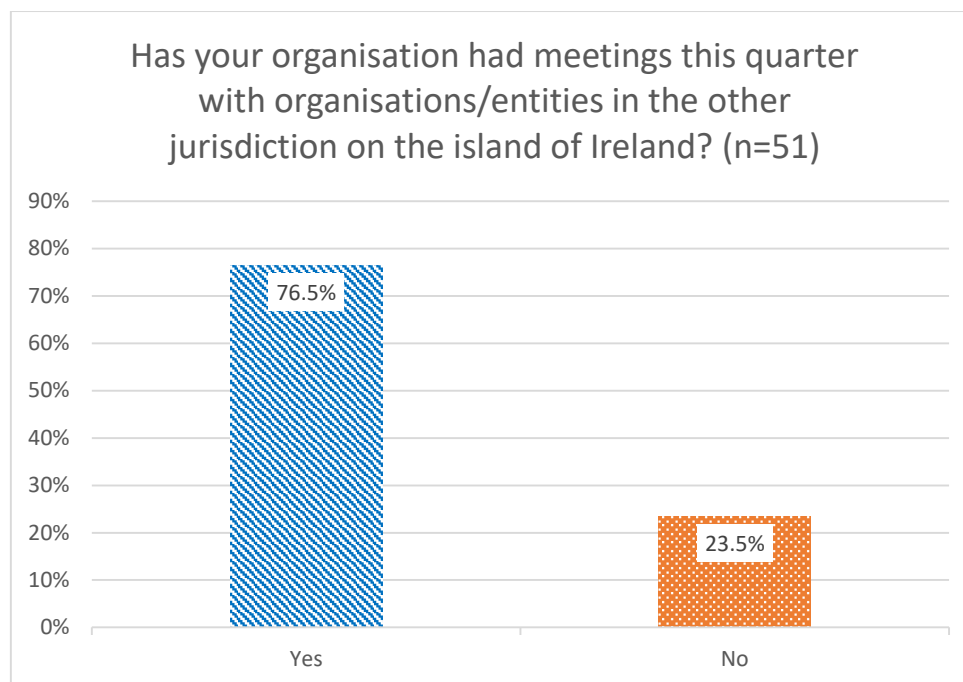


Figure 2

85% of respondents reported that meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction discussed challenges to cross-border cooperation either on occasion (46%) or to a significant extent (39%). The nature of these challenges were wide ranging, though there is a clear cluster of concerns arising regarding the Common Travel Area (CTA) and the cross-border movement of students and EEA frontier workers:

- “Joined up spatial planning, data and evidence, cross border departmental alignment to address regional needs and priorities”.
- “Uncertainty in regard to adverse results from ongoing dispute between UK and EU”.
- “Cross-border data, uncertainties around student mobility”.
- “CTA”.
- “Frontier workers”.
- “Northern Ireland Protocol and need for more Civil society engagement”.
- “Impact of new immigration legislation in UK on cross-border movement of non-UK/ ROI citizens”.
- “Divergent policies in relation to people and nationality/citizenship status. Poverty alleviation and covid recovery - divergence in strategies and policies that may lead to hardship for those who work on cross border basis - not yet clear how this may impact”.
- “Free movement of EU employees who are not covered by the Withdrawal Agreement or the Common Travel Area rules”.

At present 80% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaborations with a partner in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 3), and 75% of respondents are actively considering new collaborative projects. The main areas of current collaboration are cross-border cooperation, community development, education, and peace and reconciliation. 56%

of respondents presently engaged in cross border collaboration (n=41) 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.

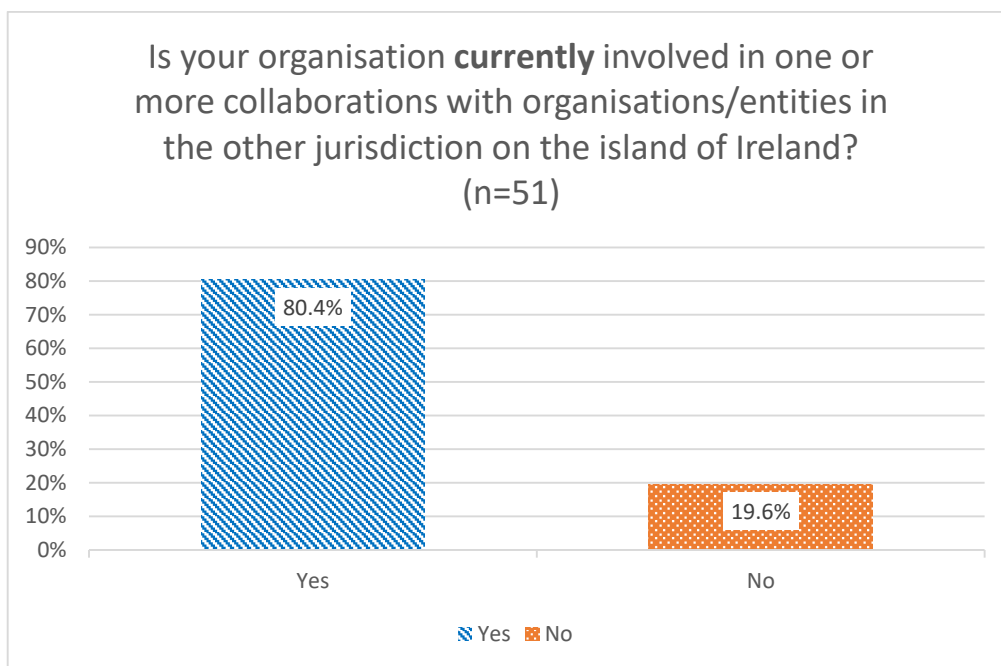


Figure 3

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=51), 53% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has stayed more or less the same since the previous quarter, with 29% saying it has deteriorated, but 14% saying it has improved (figure 4).

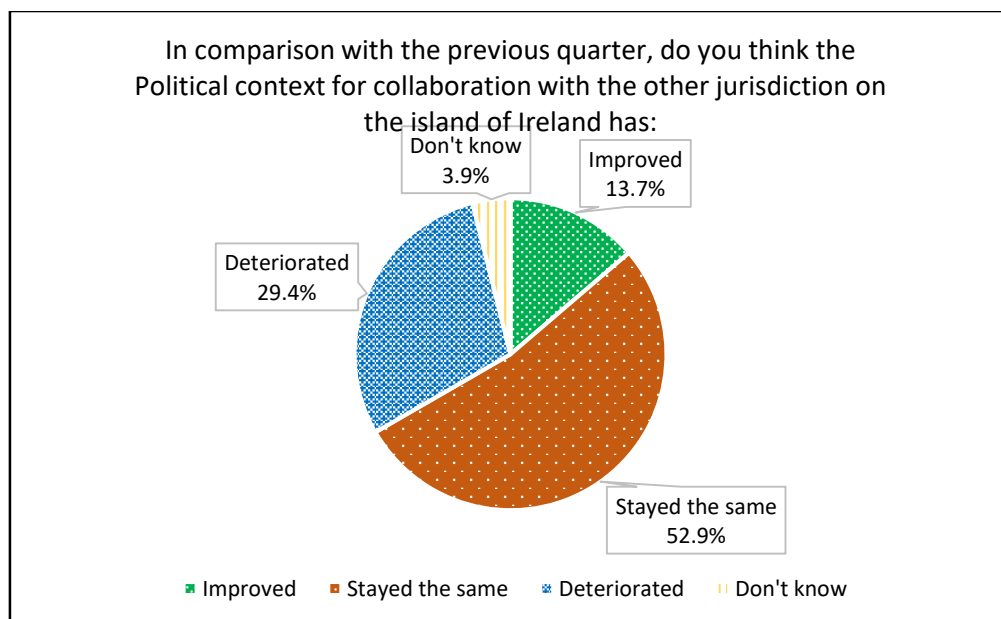


Figure 4

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 issues around the protocol and threats from the UK around potentially triggering Article 16 as having a negative impact on conditions for collaboration and inhibiting the ability for cooperation:

- “It is difficult to say whether or not the political context for collaboration has actually deteriorated, but we feel that it has. Our experience is that whenever the political situation begins to improve, the British Government steps in and causes problems. It seems to us, from a joint Northern and Southern perspective, and as EU citizens, that the Government in Westminster must be nearly impossible to deal with, and those people negotiating on behalf of all 27 Member States, must find the process immensely frustrating”.
- “NI Protocol has created political disruption and cast a shadow over areas of mutual collaboration”.
- “There is a continuation of uncertainty due to the repeated references to potential triggering of Article 16”.
- “New Common Travel Area rules and proposed Electronic Travel Authorisations are impacting the political context and tone of discussion”.

However, some respondents reported increased engagement from political parties and positive news around funding programmes as improving the political context:

- “Implementation of Peace Plus Programme is getting closer and Shared Island funding is becoming clearer, therefore encouraging preparation of projects”.
- “Greater willingness on the ground from within both jurisdictions to make things work despite political posturing from UK government and DUP at media level”.
- “Shared Island work has encouraged and supported greater engagement - we have actively looked for partnership as a result of what we are hearing from the South”.
- “Positive announcements regarding funding such as Peace Plus, Shared Island and UK Levelling up funds have increased opportunities”.

Turning to the **social** context (figure 5): 18% of respondents say that the social context has deteriorated since the previous quarter though as many say it has improved. The predominant response is that it has remained the same (61%).

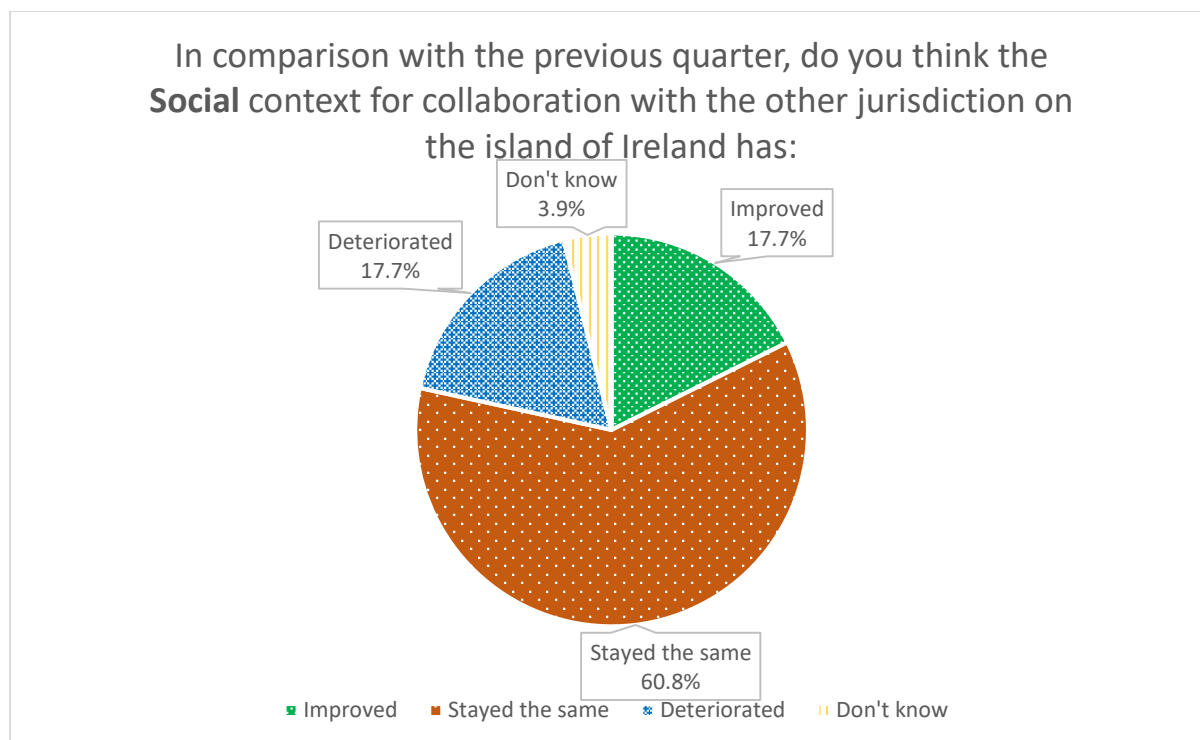


Figure 5

Respondents indicated that the social context is still uncertain after Brexit and concerns among PUL communities in response to increasingly public debates around the potential for a united Ireland:

- “Continuing negotiations on Brexit have impacted on community relations between communities and ensured that people are still concerned about where borders will be eventually sited and how these might be managed and responded to”.
- “People are uncertain how it will be in the future and people living along the border counties are continuing with their own routines”.
- “Fear and unwillingness with organisations due to the belief that nationalism is pursuing a United Ireland and their UK identity is being downgraded”.
- “In our experience civic society attitudes remain diverse and conflicted on this issue despite positive polling”.

But there have also been notable improvements in community relations as well. This should be considered in light of the easing of Covid restrictions which has perhaps impacted on the social interactions most directly:

- “Covid seemed to have retreated a little increasing social 'traffic' . At Community and community organisation level this has enabled re-engagement at more social level but incremental rather than significant change”.
- “I think organisations seem to have a renewed understanding of the value of partnerships. Also a link for NI into Europe”.

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 53% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 28% saying it has deteriorated.

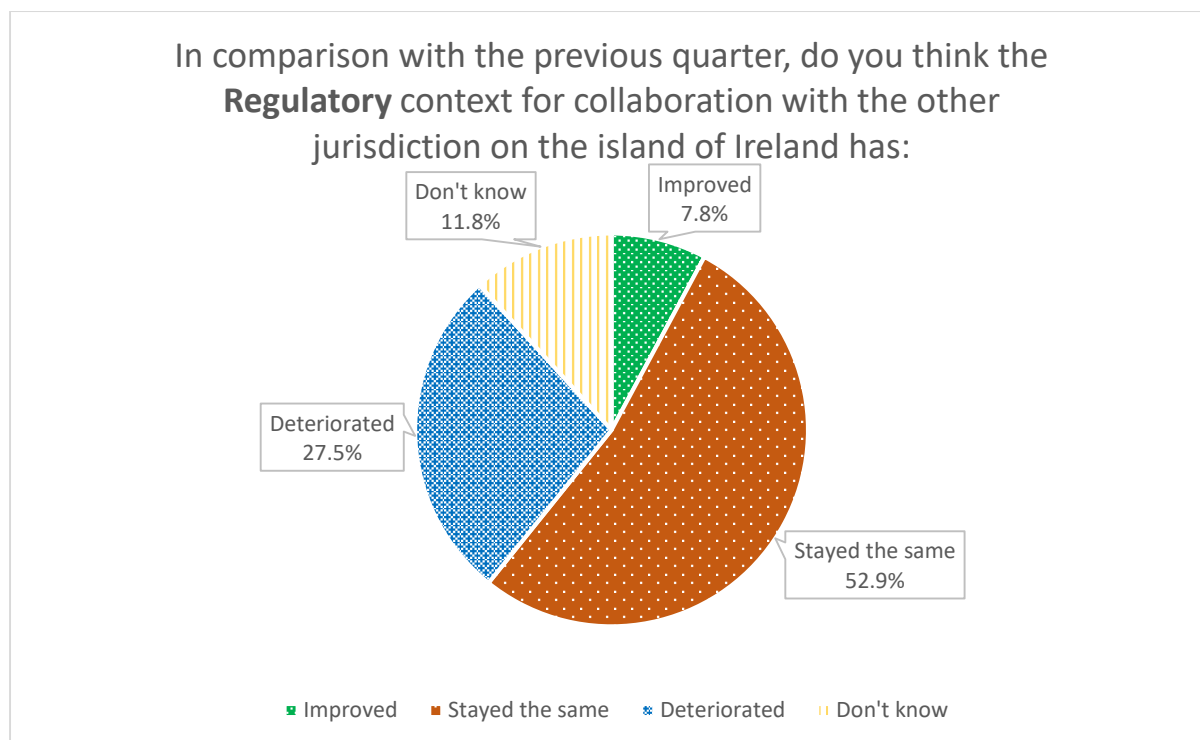


Figure 5

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 uncertainty regarding the CTA:

- “Business seems to be adapting to relatively new regulatory environment, but potential changes or talk of such changes creates uncertainty”.
- “The consideration of the UK Government on introducing the need for travel documents for other EU/EEA citizens resident in either Northern Ireland or Republic of Ireland to cross the border”.
- “I feel that it has deteriorated, not because the regulatory context has actually become worse, but because it should have improved, but it has not”.
- “New Common Travel Area rules increase bureaucracy re: crossing the border”.

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 61% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter, with 16% reporting that it has improved since the last quarter, and the same proportion saying it has deteriorated.

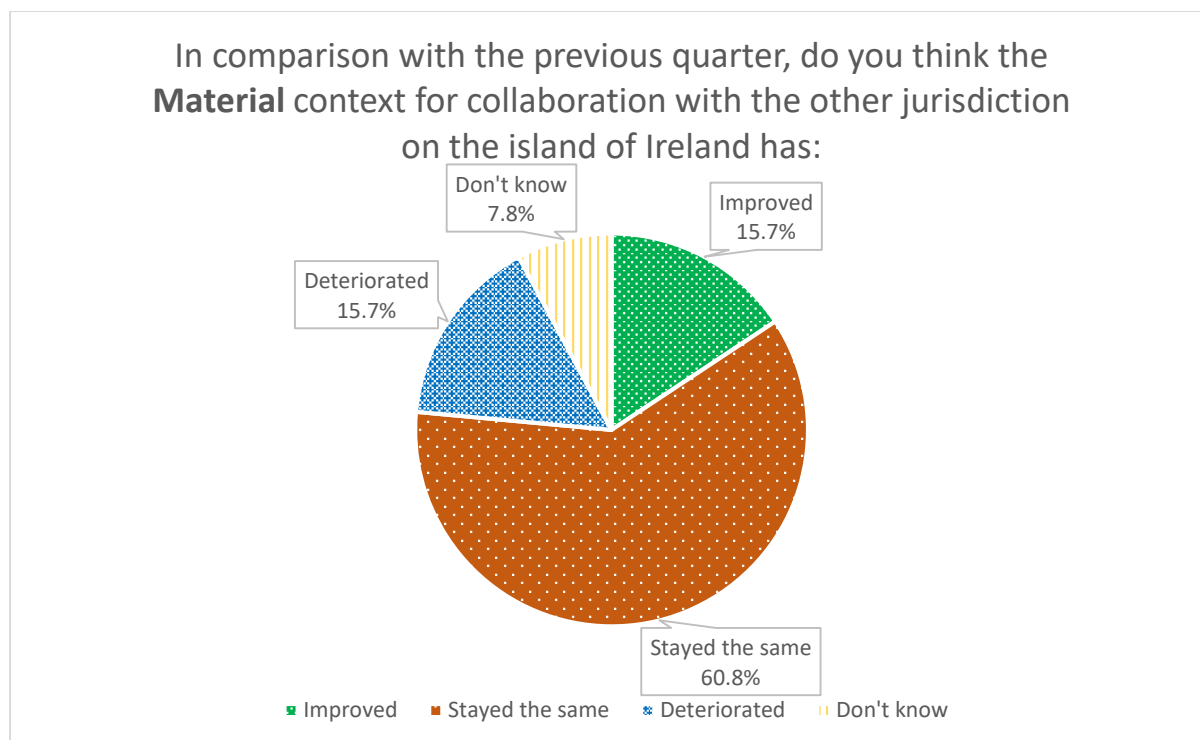


Figure 7

When asked to elaborate on their experiences of the impact of Brexit and the protocol on the **material** context for collaboration, respondents were almost unanimous in saying that they were finding it easier and cheaper to source goods and materials from within the island of Ireland rather than trading with Great Britain:

- “Price rises in shops, can't deliver to N. Ireland or will deliver but a big price rise in delivering here”.
- “We're probably buying more within Ireland than previously as shipping from GB is a nightmare, some suppliers have just opted out of supplying NI, although they could and orders have also been accepted and cancelled at short notice”.
- “The growth of trade in goods and services between North and South, as a direct result of Brexit, has highlighted the distinct opportunities and benefits that exist to expand trading relationships with both the UK and the EU”.

4. The East-West Dimension

4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter more than half of respondents (57%) reported having meetings with organisations in Great Britain (figure 8). 77% of respondents say that this is the same level of contact as the last quarter, and 14% reported that their level of contact had increased on the previous quarter.

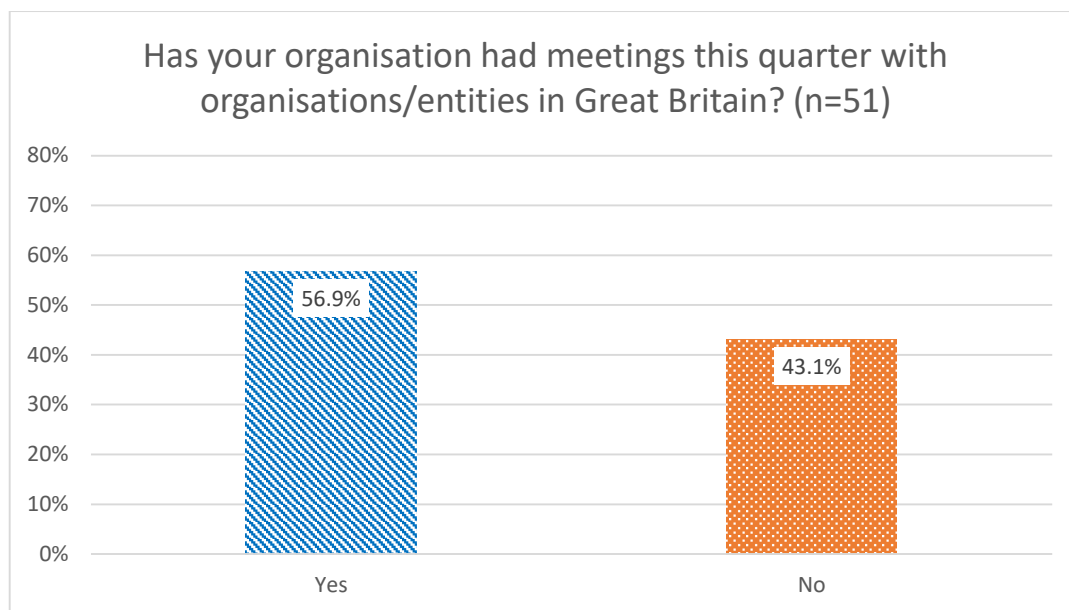


Figure 8

59% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (41%) or to a significant extent (17%). Such challenges included:

- “Discussions around the national policy context for the work of Community Development Trusts, particularly in the context of Levelling-up, Community Renewal and Community Ownership Fund”.
- “Again the fact that NI is 'special' has been a focus of the work we are doing. We are neither fully in nor out of EU and so partners in UK are unsure as to how that impacts on their working with us - we have had to assure them it has little to no bearing”.
- “Protocol, red tape, political instability, lack of political/government leadership or direction, failure of negotiations UK/EU”.

This quarter 49% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), with the predominant areas of collaboration being community development and education. At present only 26% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain and just under half (48%) of respondents currently engaged in East-West collaborative projects reported that their organisation was in receipt of funding for those projects, with the funding being drawn mainly from charitable foundations or the UK Government.

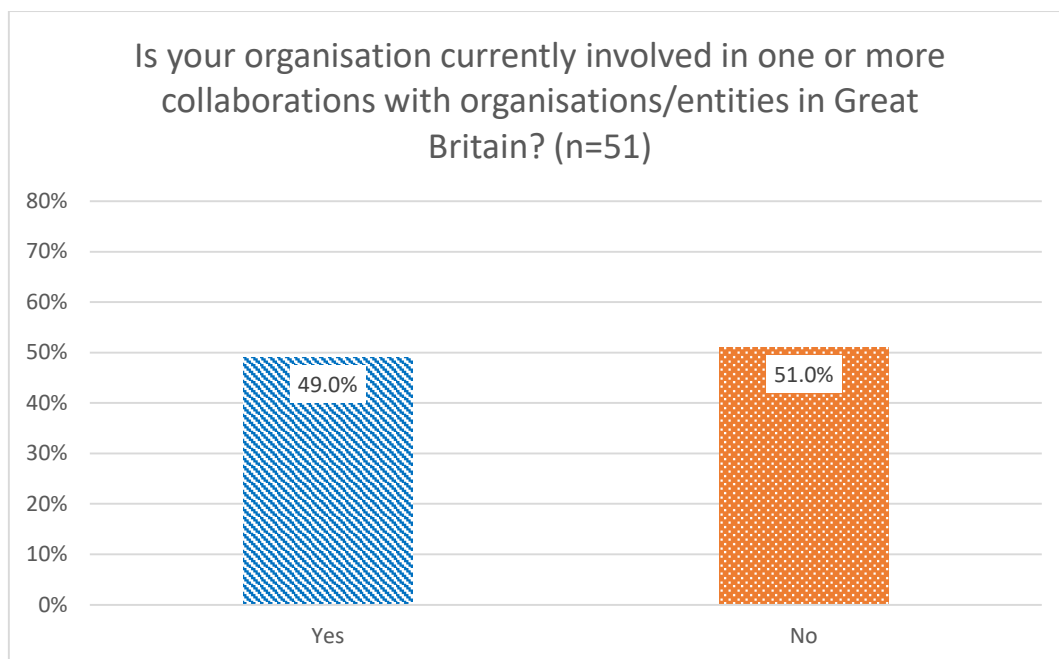


Figure 9

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=51), 67% of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 25% saying it has deteriorated (figure 10).

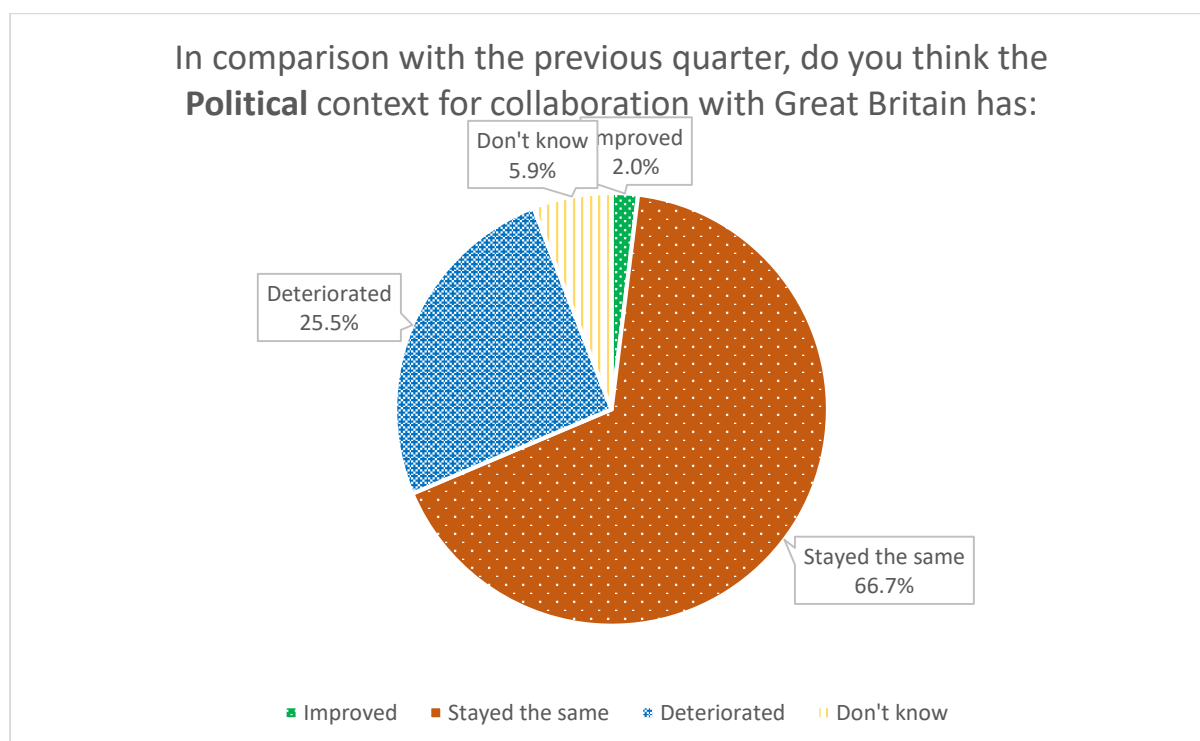


Figure 10

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 and a lack of progress in politicians being able to address issues. Responses included:

- “Failure to move on from the Brexit agreement and implementation of the protocol are facilitating the deterioration of relationships within NI Great Britain is increasingly 'distant' or isolated from our concerns”.
- “Similar challenges of NI being a place apart on the delivery of UK wide policies and the levelling up agenda, which is looking for a different delivery mechanism here”.
- “There appears to be a complete lack of trust between NI and GB. Neither side fully listening to the other”.
- “The continuing impacts of Brexit, creating uncertainty and frictions”.

71% of respondents report that the **social** context (figure 11) has remained the same since the previous quarter, though 16% say it has deteriorated, and only 4% report that it has improved.

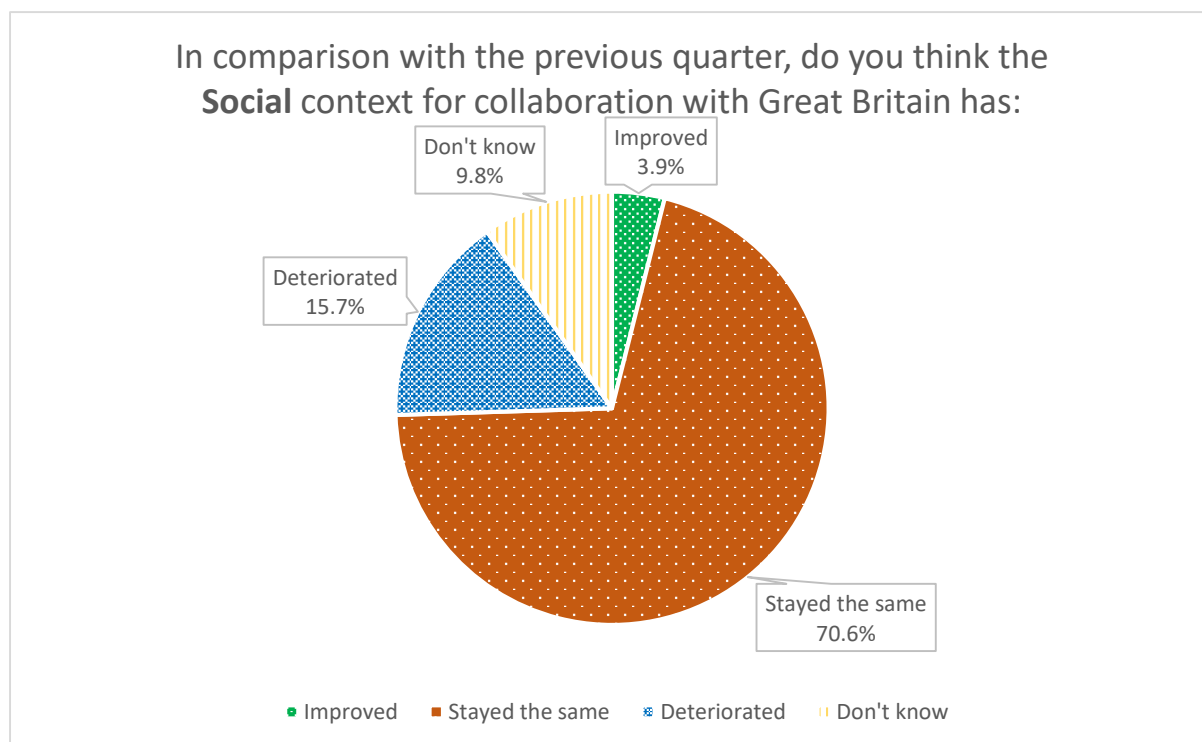


Figure 11

Respondents pointed to perceived imbalances between the ‘two communities’ in Northern Ireland, with responses including:

- “It's a matter of balance. One side will possibly feel that they have improved if the role of the British Government is seen to reflect its aspirations (removal of the protocol), whilst the other might consider it's deteriorating as the British Government is seen to have reneged on its legal responsibilities. This is further seen in the approach being taken to Legacy Legislation and an Irish Language Act at Westminster”.

- “Again, perhaps social achievements in NI e.g. Array studios winning Turner prize may bring a bit more positive east to west attention”.
- “Professional associations based in Britain still have many Irish members, and there seems to be no change in the degree or extent of collaboration”.

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 26% of respondents say that the regulatory context has deteriorated over the last quarter with 57% saying it has remained the same as the previous quarter and only 4% reporting an improvement.

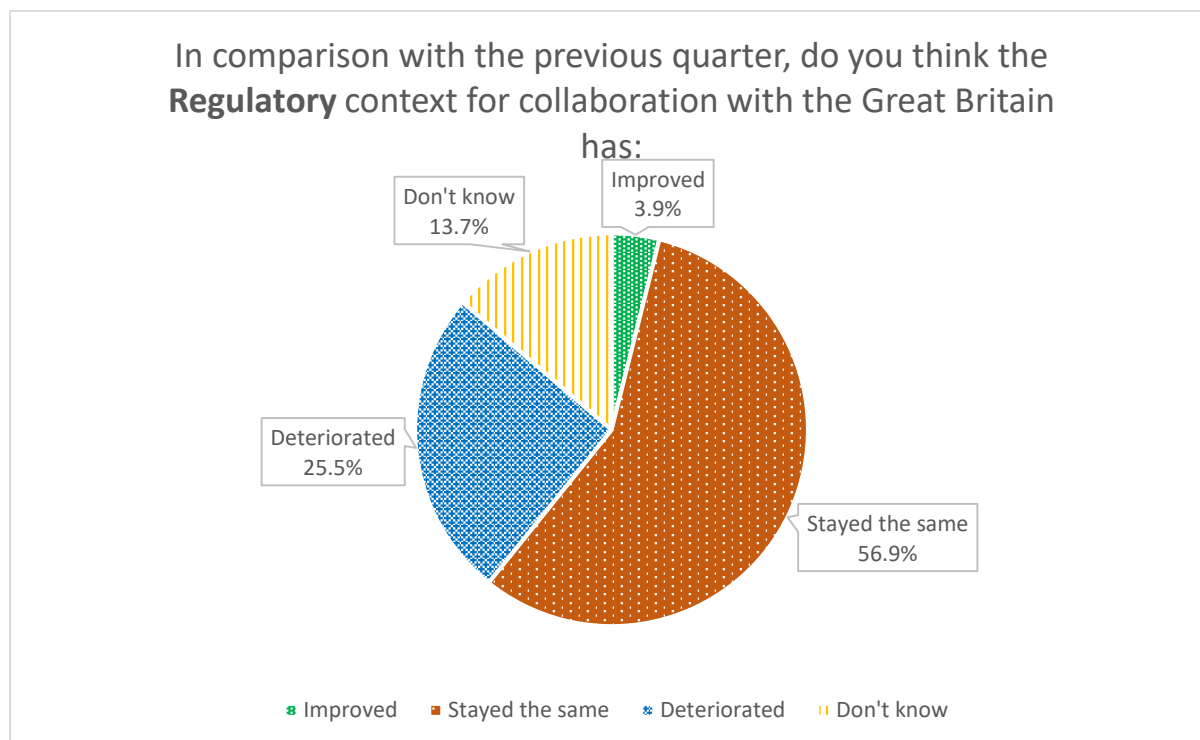


Figure 12

Respondents pointed toward the stance taken by the UK government with regard to the protocol as having a negative impact on the **regulatory** environment for East-West cooperation:

- “The government has taken a harder approach to the protocol Unilateral actions around the NI protocol on the part of the UK government are undermining confidence & trust”.
- “The stated policy has shifted from inception due to outcomes experienced and this has frustrated understandings and relationships”.
- “The government has taken a harder approach to the protocol”.

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 59% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 22% of respondents say it has deteriorated.

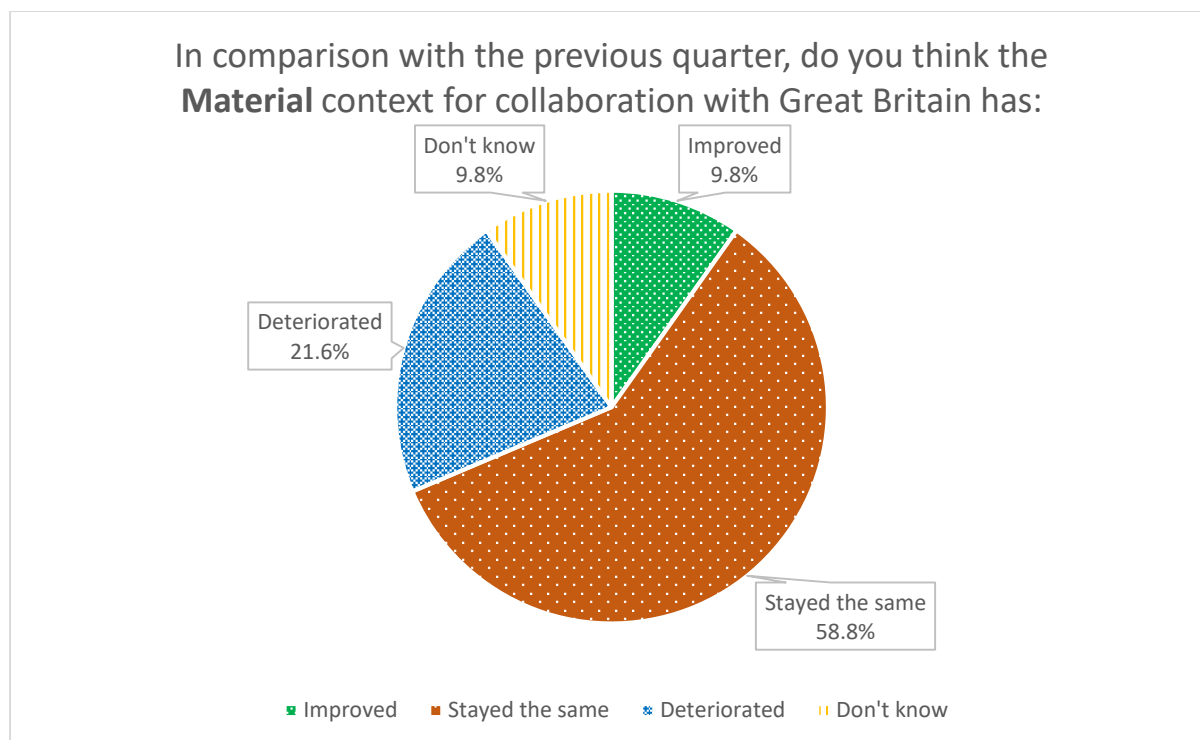


Figure 13

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 easing of covid restrictions allowing for greater access for work meetings but issues with increasing prices for goods and materials. Responses included:

- “Covid restrictions eased, more flights and face to face meetings in GB”.
- “An item ordered online costing €22, ended up costing €50 when delivered”.

5. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland

We also asked respondents about their knowledge of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland. 59% 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 28% who feel that there is (figure 14). However, 10% of respondents feel very informed about the protocol and 78% feel somewhat informed, with the press and social media being the primary sources of information (71% of respondents gathered information on the protocol from press and social media). The Irish government was a source of information on the protocol for 55% of respondents, and the EU for 47%, while the UK government was a source of information for 33% of respondents.

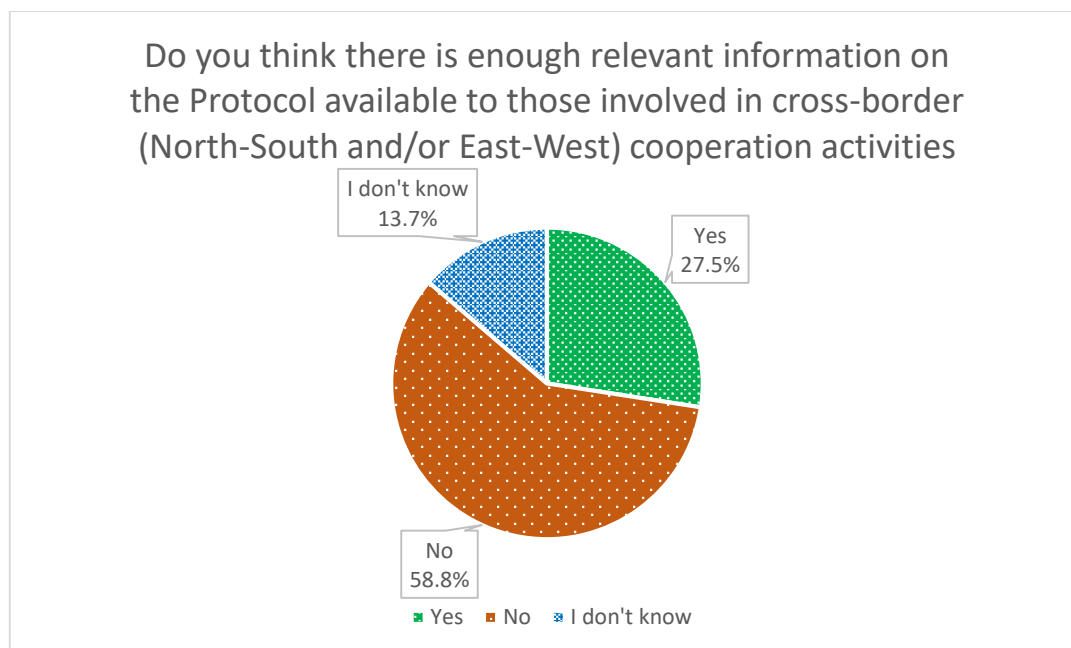


Figure 14

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.

- *“As a microbusiness importing mainly from GB and trading in an all-Ireland connection it would be helpful if a simpler way could be found to record the necessary data required”.*
- *“Extending the Common Travel Area to everyone lawfully resident in either jurisdiction would solve a lot of problems at a stroke”.*
- *“There are so many opportunities for exchanging information, working together, collaborating, and developing better integration that have been either lost or ignored -- and this has led to a feeling of frustration, though not to any reduction in the desire to work together, North and South”.*

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 predominantly the same as the previous quarter. Indeed, the majority of respondents said that the contexts for both North-South and East-West cooperation and collaboration had “stayed the same” as the previous quarter across all contexts. While the unique composition of each panel means that we cannot draw direct comparisons between this and previous rounds of the survey, by

drawing on the high number of respondents who have participated in at least one of the previous survey rounds, combined with the qualitative responses, there is a clear trend appearing over the course of the year. Namely, that at the beginning of 2021 there were clear indications that conditions were deteriorating across all dimensions and by the end of 2021 there is strong evidence that these now deteriorated conditions have become normalised and that there are very few signs of improvements. What can be put simply, then, at the end of the first year of Brexit following the end of the transition period (and even with many grace periods and mitigations in operation throughout that time) is that much work is still to be done in order to recover from the disruption caused (and in some cases still being caused) by Brexit.

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