

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

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

Briefing on the findings from the 5th
Quarterly Survey (January to March 2022)

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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

2022 had barely got underway before, on 4 February, DUP MLA Paul Givan resigned as First Minister, primarily in protest over the continuing implementation of the Protocol. This meant that Michelle O'Neill also had to stand down as deputy First Minister, bringing an abrupt end to the Northern Ireland Executive. However, under arrangements agreed as part of the [New Decade, New Approach](#) agreement the Northern Ireland Assembly was able to continue with some matters of business already agreed at Executive level. As we head into the Assembly Elections scheduled for 5 May, the Protocol remains firmly centre stage with the DUP and TUV campaigning on explicitly anti-Protocol platforms.

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 (for the period October to December 2021), 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. 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 their 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 explicit 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. Therefore, the Centre and the Ad-Hoc Group will continue to engage with the UK Government and the European Commission in order to ensure civic society organisations from both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland are provided with the necessary space within any structures to provide feedback on whether the conditions for cooperation are being maintained. We will also continue to seek channels to safeguard cooperation between the island of Ireland and Great Britain, with particular attention to the mechanisms for civic society engagement established under the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

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. 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 fifth round of this survey (and the first in 2022), 47 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 all previous rounds of the survey (because some people completed the 1st and 3rd survey, some 2nd and 5th etc.), the increasing level of repeat respondents means we are in a position to infer the shape of some trends regarding views and experiences of the Protocol 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. 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 31st March 2022, gathering 51 responses in total. 92% (47) reported that they completed the survey in the last quarter while 8% (4) are new respondents.

Of the 51 responses to the survey, 35% were based in the Republic of Ireland and 47% based in Northern Ireland, with 14% having a presence on both sides of the border and 4% being based outside the Island of Ireland, but still reporting a stake in cross border cooperation and collaboration (figure 1).

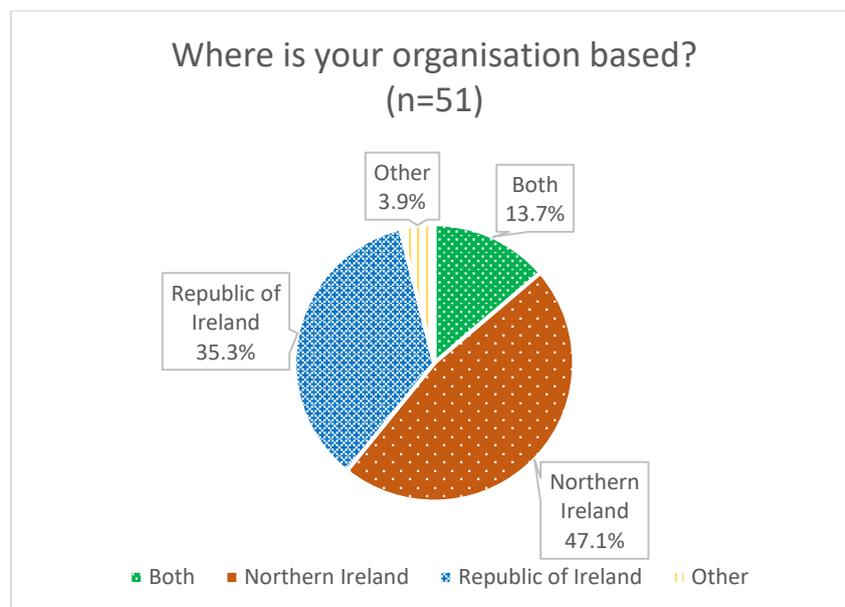


Figure 1

3. The North-South dimension

3.1. contact and collaboration

In this quarter (Jan-Mar 2022) 90% of respondents have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 2). For 61% of respondents their level of contact this quarter has been at the same level as the last and has increased for a third of respondents.

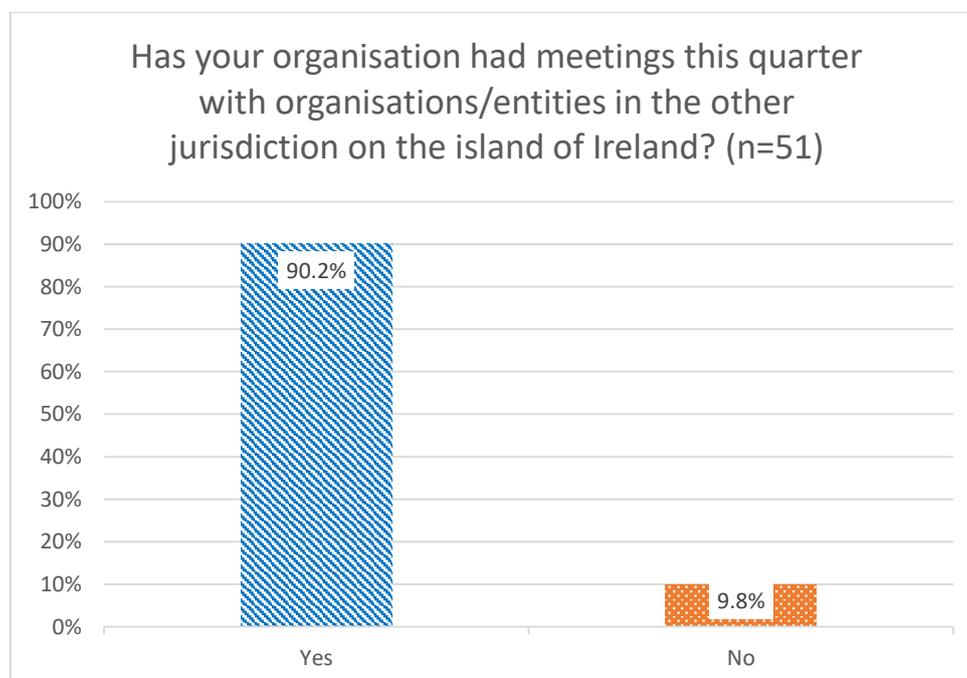


Figure 2

78% 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 (33%). 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 tax implications for frontier workers now working from home:

- “Discussions about racially discriminatory checks on the common travel area, and legal barriers for non-EU residents to cross the border”
- “need for papers to cross the border, health requirements, cost”
- “Cross-border insurance, recognition of qualifications, cross-border mobility of non-UK/Irish citizens”
- “Tax, Working from Home, Healthcare”
- “Access to all-island services and cross-border travel for migrants, given lack of protection under Common Travel Area”
- “Digital Inclusion, Cross border working, travel disruption due to visas etc. Funding from Irish Government to NI groups in absence of funding from UK government”

At present 86% 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, and education. 57% of respondents presently engaged in cross border collaboration (n=44) reported that they were in receipt of funding for cross-border collaborative projects, with the predominant funding sources being the Irish government or a Northern Ireland Government Department.

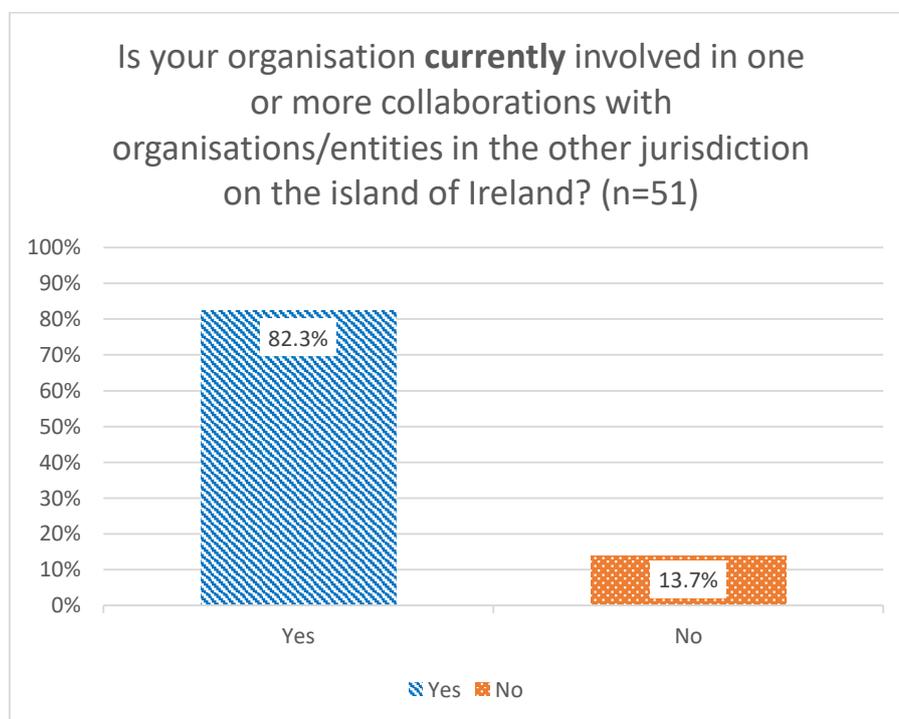


Figure 3

3.2. North-South context

When asked whether (and how) the political, social, regulatory, and material contexts for cross-border collaboration have changed over the last quarter (all n=51), 69% of respondents

believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has stayed more or less the same since the previous quarter, with 28% saying it has deteriorated. Notably no respondent has reported an improvement in the political context over the last quarter (figure 4).

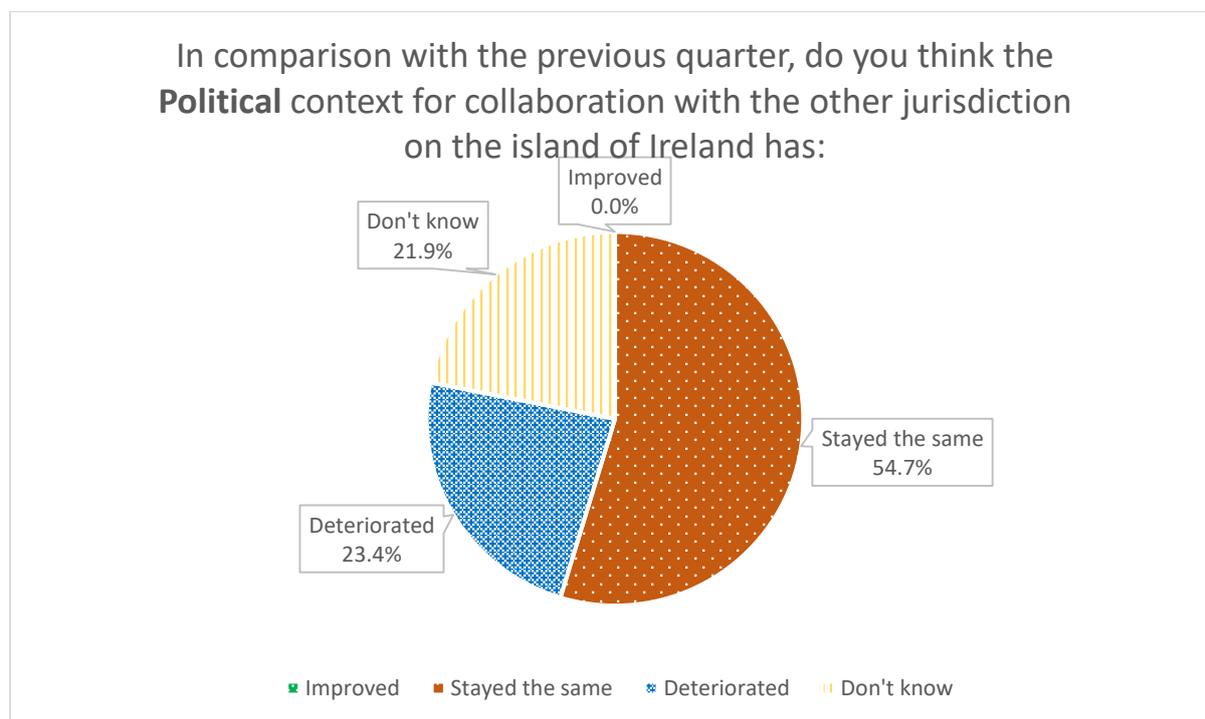


Figure 4

When asked to expand on their experiences of the **political** context for collaboration, respondents primarily pointed to issues around collapse of the Northern Ireland Executive and forthcoming Assembly elections as having a disruptive impact on conditions for collaboration and cooperation:

- “Protocol still being treated by some politically as an identity rather than a technical issue”
- “Some political uncertainty following resignation of First Minister and upcoming elections”
- “Our political advocacy with the Irish government has increased, but the context for political advocacy in NI has decreased due to the collapse of the institutions”
- “Collapse of Stormont and lack of cross border momentum”
- “The very real threat of a lengthy period in NI without an Executive ahead of and following the Assembly elections in May can only heighten tension not just in NI but across the border”
- “The increased social unrest associated with the NI protocol, in this lead-in period to NI Assembly elections”
- “Same as before Protocol protests are impacting on PUL community comfort levels of engaging”

Turning to the **social** context (figure 5): 24% of respondents say that the social context has deteriorated since the previous quarter with only 8% reporting it has improved. The predominant response is that it has remained the same (65%).

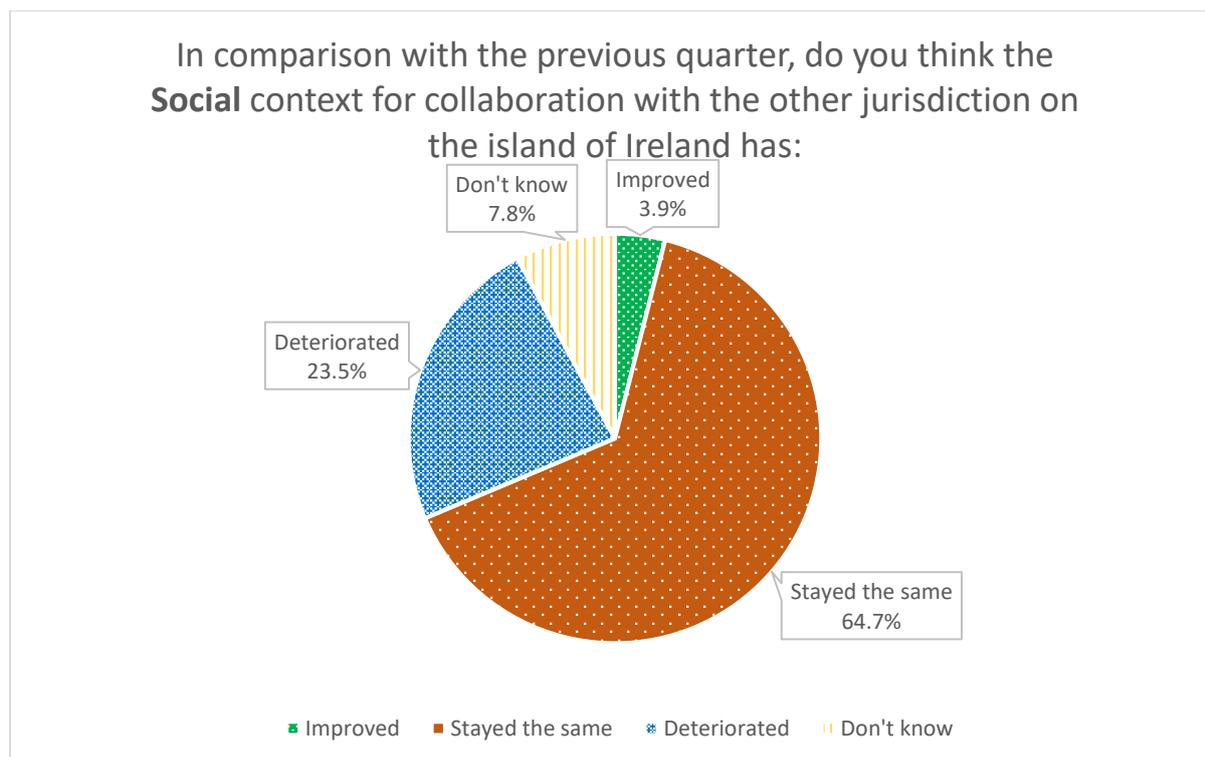


Figure 5

Respondents indicated that the social context is still uncertain after Brexit and concerns among PUL communities in response to the Protocol:

- “Organisations with longstanding cross-border collaborations continue their hard work, however the perception that obstacles are mounting may be hindering new collaborations and stifling potential new partnerships”
- “There are small elements of the Loyalist community in Northern Ireland trying to impede north south co-operation and inter action as a protest against the Protocol”
- “some groups have hardened over the Brexit agreement”
- “Given the political context has not substantially changed community attitudes which can be influenced by politicians' stances are likely to have also remained similar”

As we saw in the previous quarter, easing Covid restrictions have had a notably positive impact on social relations and this has continued into this quarter:

- “The lifting of COVID restrictions and an increased understanding on common social and economic challenges in the context of the recovery”

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 65% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 24% saying it has deteriorated. Again, what is noteworthy here is that no respondent has reported an improvement in the North-South regulatory context.

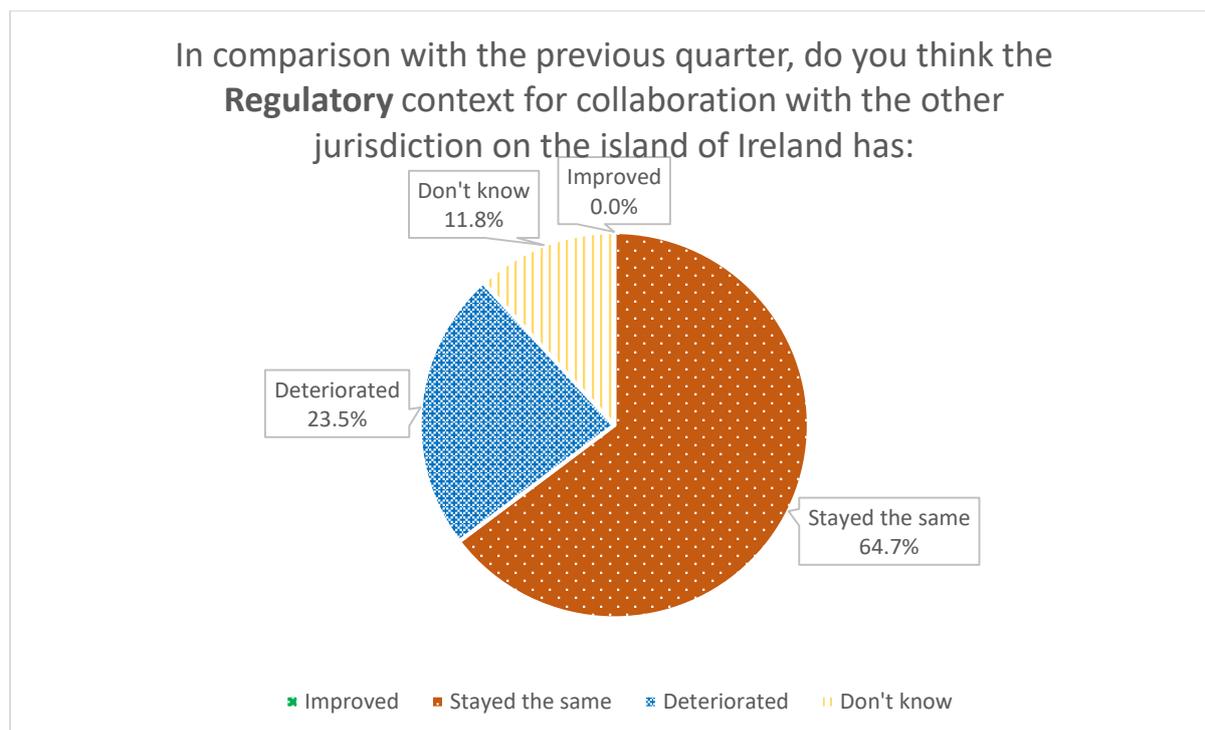


Figure 5

When asked to expand on their experiences of the **regulatory** context for collaboration, respondents primarily pointed to increased uncertainty regarding the CTA and the impending introduction of Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) for non-Irish EU nationals, though many noted that Protocol arrangements are now stabilising:

- “Brexit and Protocol arrangements may be becoming stable”.
- “There is concern about the pending visa waiver scheme being introduced by UK over Brexit for non-Irish EU national to travel across the Irish Border into Northern Ireland UK (CTA)”
- “Change in access for non-national Irish to NI”
- “The regulatory context has not changed, despite a need for unifying regulations on both sides of the border, so that they are essentially the same”
- “Introduction of the border by UK Government on the common travel area”

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 57% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter, with 20% reporting that it has deteriorated since the last quarter, and the same proportion saying they don’t know.

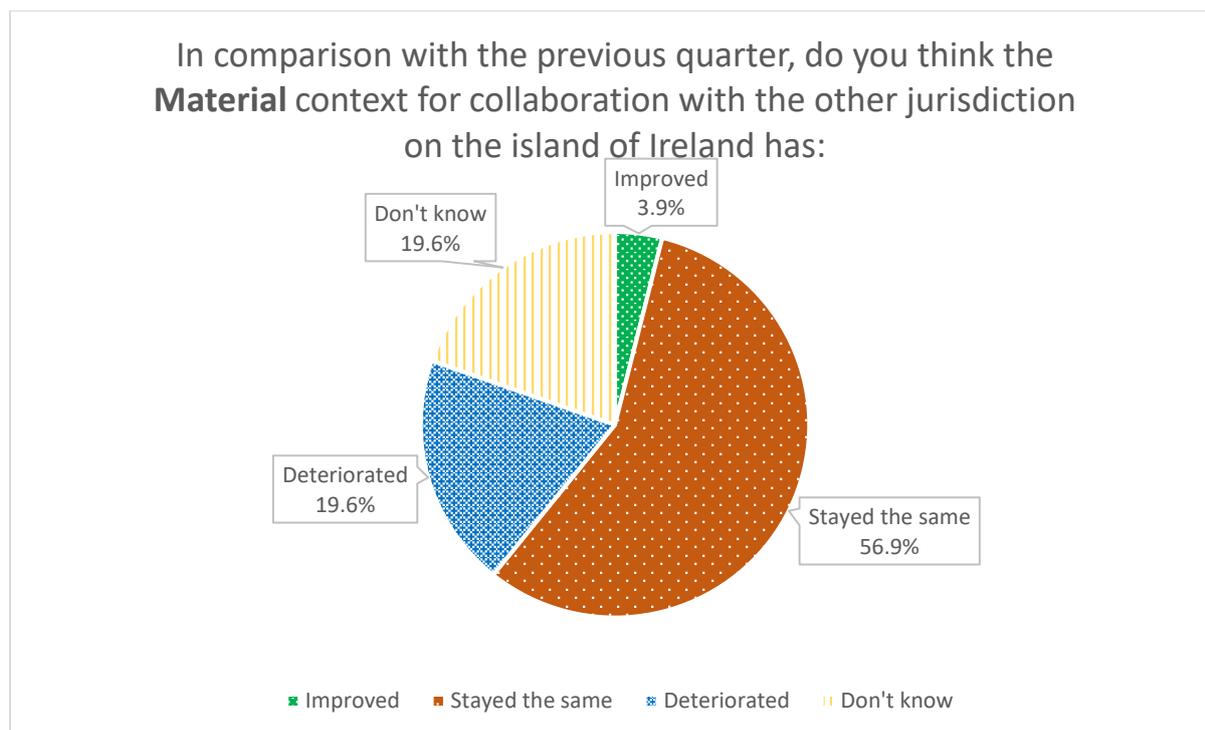


Figure 7

When asked to elaborate on their experiences of the **material** context for collaboration, responses recognised that a complex interplay between several factors were having an impact on access to materials including the increased cost of materials broadly, and the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on energy prices:

- “Rising cost of living index. Energy price shock resulting from war in Ukraine”
- “Anecdotal evidence of difficulty accessing some goods”
- “All elements of collaboration are being impacted by issues that continue to relate to the Protocol”

4. The East-West Dimension

4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter just under half of respondents (49%) reported having meetings with organisations in Great Britain (figure 8). 69% of respondents say that this is the same level of contact as the last quarter, and 18% reported that their level of contact had increased on the previous quarter.

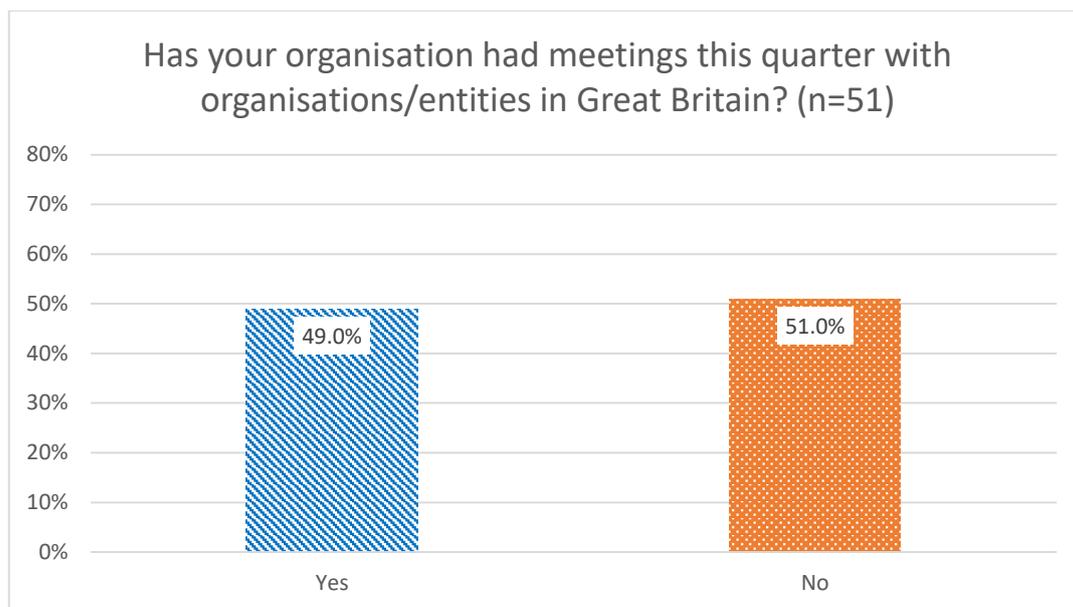


Figure 8

60% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (48%) or to a significant extent (12%). Such challenges included:

- “The emerging proposals for new UK-wide Government policies and proposed programmes (e.g. Levelling Up, UK Shared Prosperity Fund) have different implications across the UK making it more difficult to take a common view with partners in GB”
- “They have primarily revolved around NI orgs educating orgs in Great Britain on cross border issues, such as the potential ETA scheme”
- “Education and research funding Horizon and Espon EU projects”

This quarter 59% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), with the predominant areas of collaboration being education and community development. At present 41% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain and only a third of respondents currently engaged in East-West collaborative projects (n=30) reported that their organisation was in receipt of funding for those projects, with the funding being drawn mainly from charitable foundations, the EU, or the organisation’s own core funding.

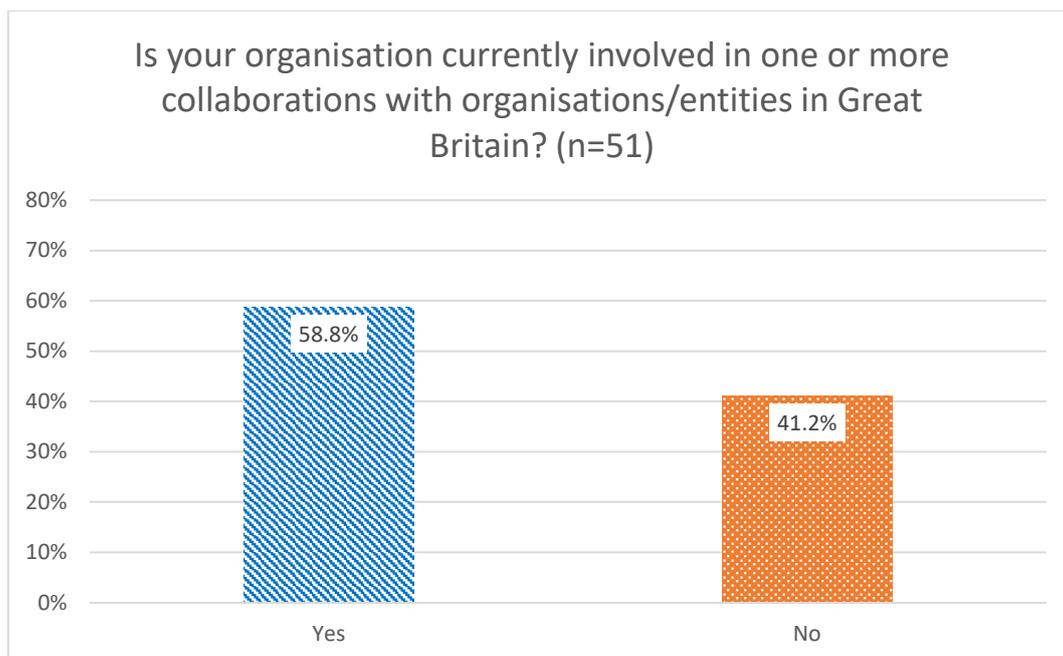


Figure 9

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), 61% 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 10).

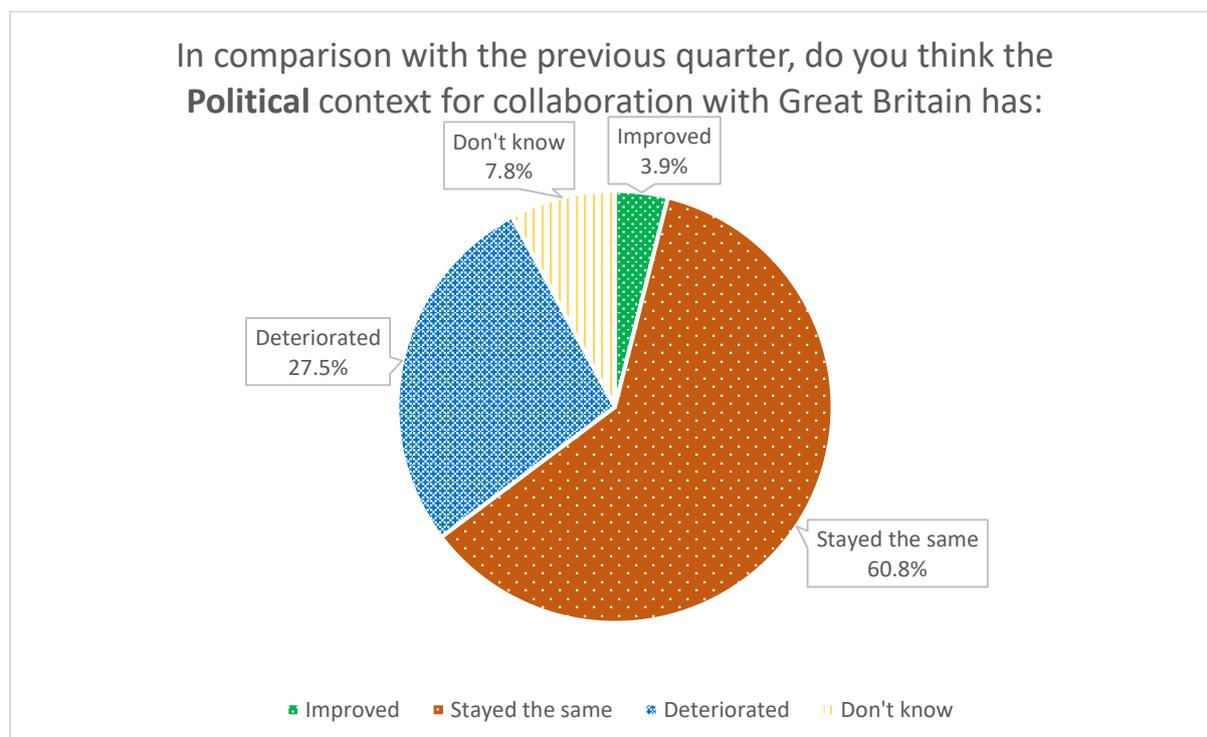


Figure 10

When asked to expand on their experiences of the political context for collaboration, respondents indicated a lack of certainty around the Protocol. Responses included:

- “It's difficult to gauge the UK Government's commitment to the Protocol. This uncertainty then has a detrimental knock-on effect on strategic planning for any potential new collaborations”
- “The reality of Brexit is hitting home”
- “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”

Though there have been some notes of optimism, albeit quite heavily caveated:

- “Opportunities for collaboration in times of crisis - a European war changes the context and hopefully allows leaders to co-operate on more pressing ecological issues (in the widest sense). The new Westminster legislation that allowed the Assembly to continue to wrap up its business, has been symbolically important and its impact will be a boost to the morale and maturity of politicians and wider civil society here”
- “Improving dialogue with main political parties, however, considerable distrust of conservatives”

73% 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.

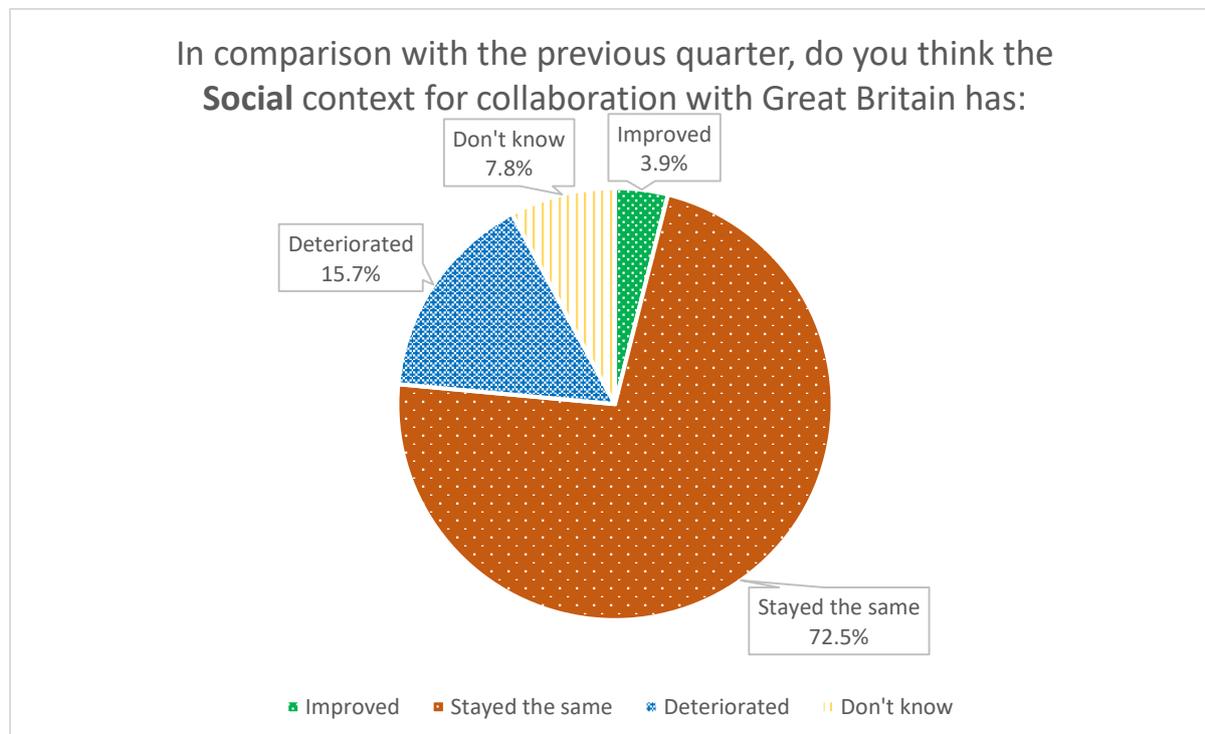


Figure 11

Respondents pointed to lack of contact, though this is perhaps improving with the removal of Covid restrictions:

- “No change; very little social contact”
- “End of CoVID restrictions”

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 22% of respondents say that the regulatory context has deteriorated over the last quarter with 59% saying it has remained the same as the previous quarter.

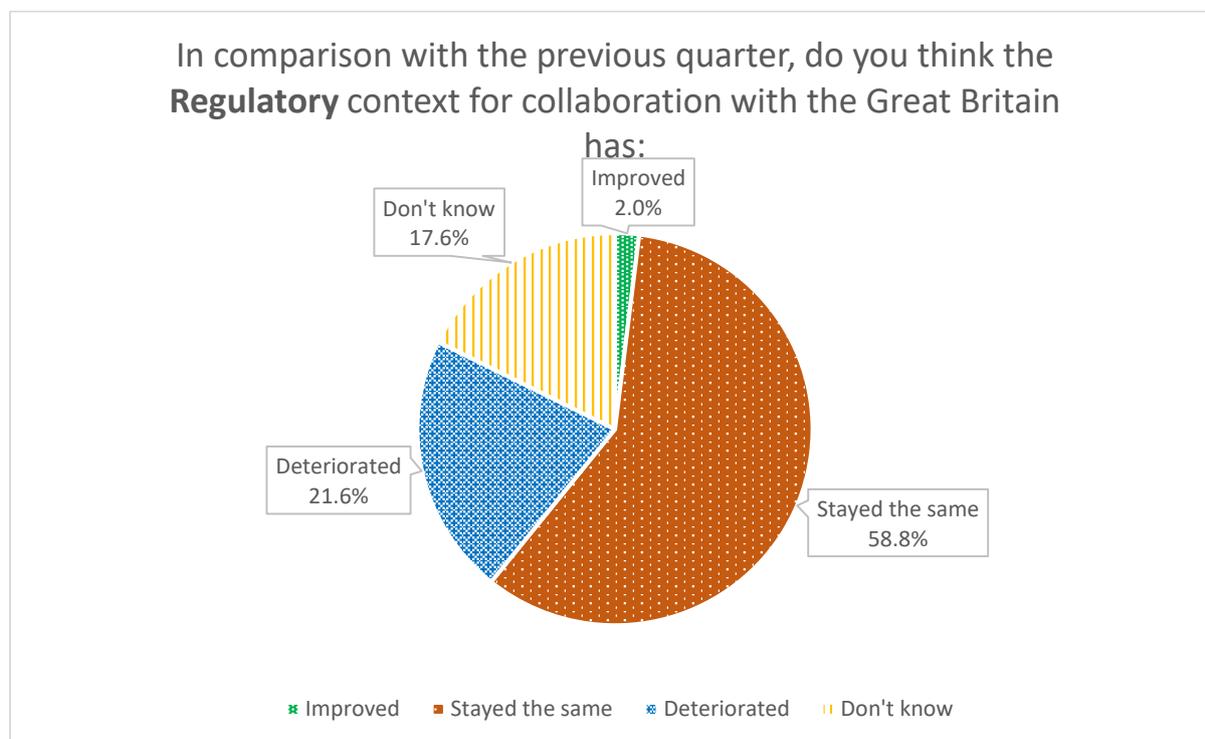


Figure 12

Respondents have had different experiences of the **regulatory** environment, with one pointing toward increased complexity and others not experiencing any changes:

- “Simple issues such as shipping of goods are more complicated with new customs and regulatory formalities”
- “I’m not aware of any regulatory changes between NI and Britain that would impact our project or potential new collaborations between the regions”
- “Changed access for non-Irish living in IE”

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 51% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 24% of respondents say it has deteriorated and 22% saying they don’t know how or if the situation has changed.

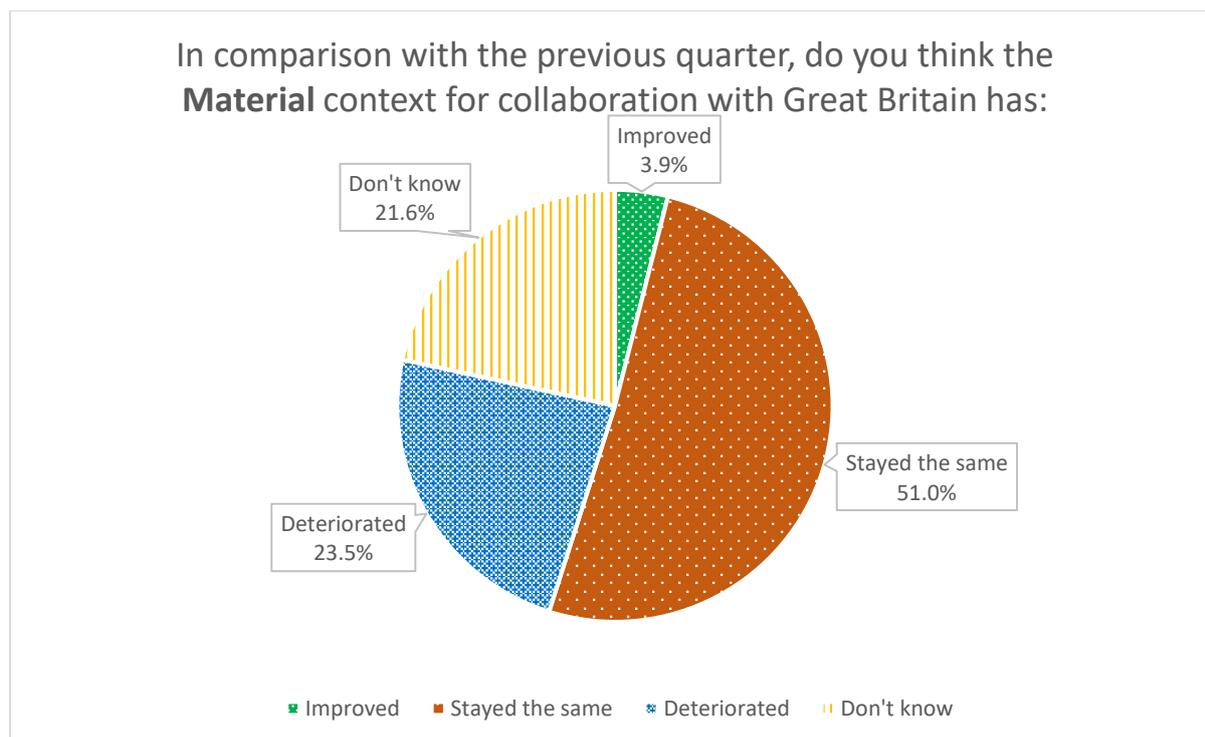


Figure 13

When asked to expand on their experiences of the material context for collaboration, respondents pointed toward the recent issues surrounding P&O ferries and the knock-on impacts for GB-NI movement:

- “P&O ferries dispute will impact of supply chain and the war in Ukraine will change the material context - NI on the periphery and lagging behind on sustainable energy initiatives”
- “I’m not aware of any material changes between NI and Britain that would impact our project or potential new collaborations between the regions”.

5. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland

As the Protocol has now been in effect (to some extent) for a year, we are also asking respondents whether they believe it is, on balance, broadly a good or bad thing for North-South and East-West cooperation (Figure 14). 73% of respondents reported that they believe the Protocol is, on balance, a good thing for North-South cooperation, compared to 22% who are unsure and only 6% who believe it is a bad thing. In terms of East-West relations, 53% believe the Protocol is, on balance, a good thing for East-West cooperation, with 28% unsure, and 20% reporting it is a bad thing.

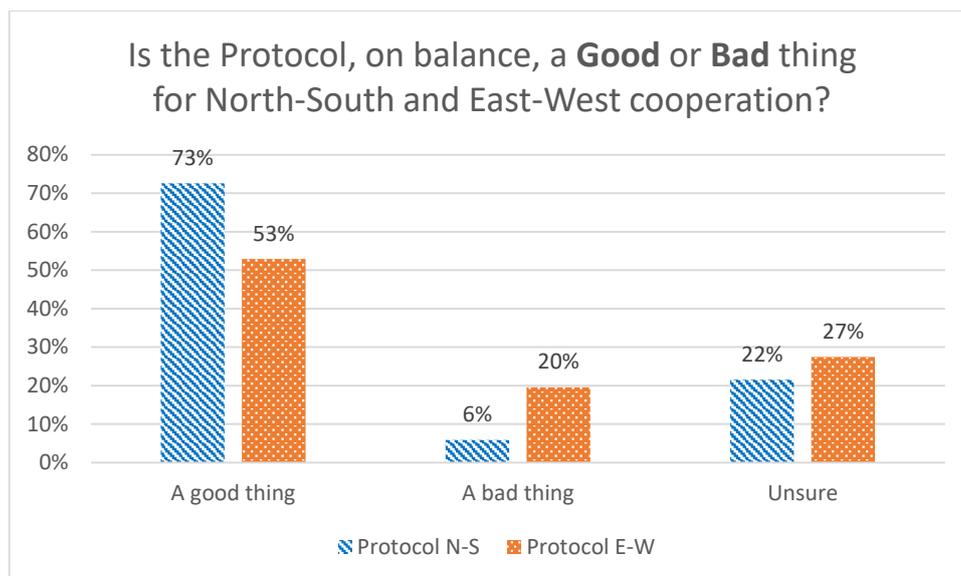


Figure 14

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.

- *“Protocol is a good thing IF implemented in the correct spirit”*
- *“Ground level upwards cooperation has best chance of succeeding people to people contact. At the higher level better cross border train network would encourage casual travel in both directions. The dismantling of the railway network over decades has had a negative impact on movement and travel especially in NW”*
- *“It seems that there are so many opportunities missed for integrating services and regulations, and for improving the political context between North and South, when these could have been used to improve the situation”*
- *“Fact checking is needed - loudest voices are those of the anti- protocol groups - fear mongering and lies are the norm - where are the counter arguments and counter voices and fact checking that needs to be done? Now more than ever the civic engagement process is needed to ensure the voice of those on the ground are heard”*

Conclusion

As we head into the second year of the Protocol, respondents are now used to the Protocol *as it is* but are aware that this is not the Protocol as fully implemented. As such, there is a sense that the still unsettled relationship between the UK and EU is likely to see further changes in the Protocol, and that the broader political landscape in Northern Ireland, already

disrupted by the resignation of the First Minister, is likely to face further uncertainty following the Stormont Elections in May.

What this means for North-South and East-West cooperation and collaboration in the present is a continuation of the trend we saw established toward the end of last year, namely that we are in a situation that can perhaps best be described as *precarious stability* – the predominant response 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 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, at the beginning of 2021 there were clear indications that conditions were deteriorating across all dimensions at the start of 2022 there is strong evidence that these now deteriorated conditions have become normalised. Worryingly, there is very little sign of improvement across any dimension.

Simply put, at the start of the second year of Brexit under the Protocol, civil society is learning to adapt to a *new normal* that has fewer opportunities, but still feel they are working on shifting ground.

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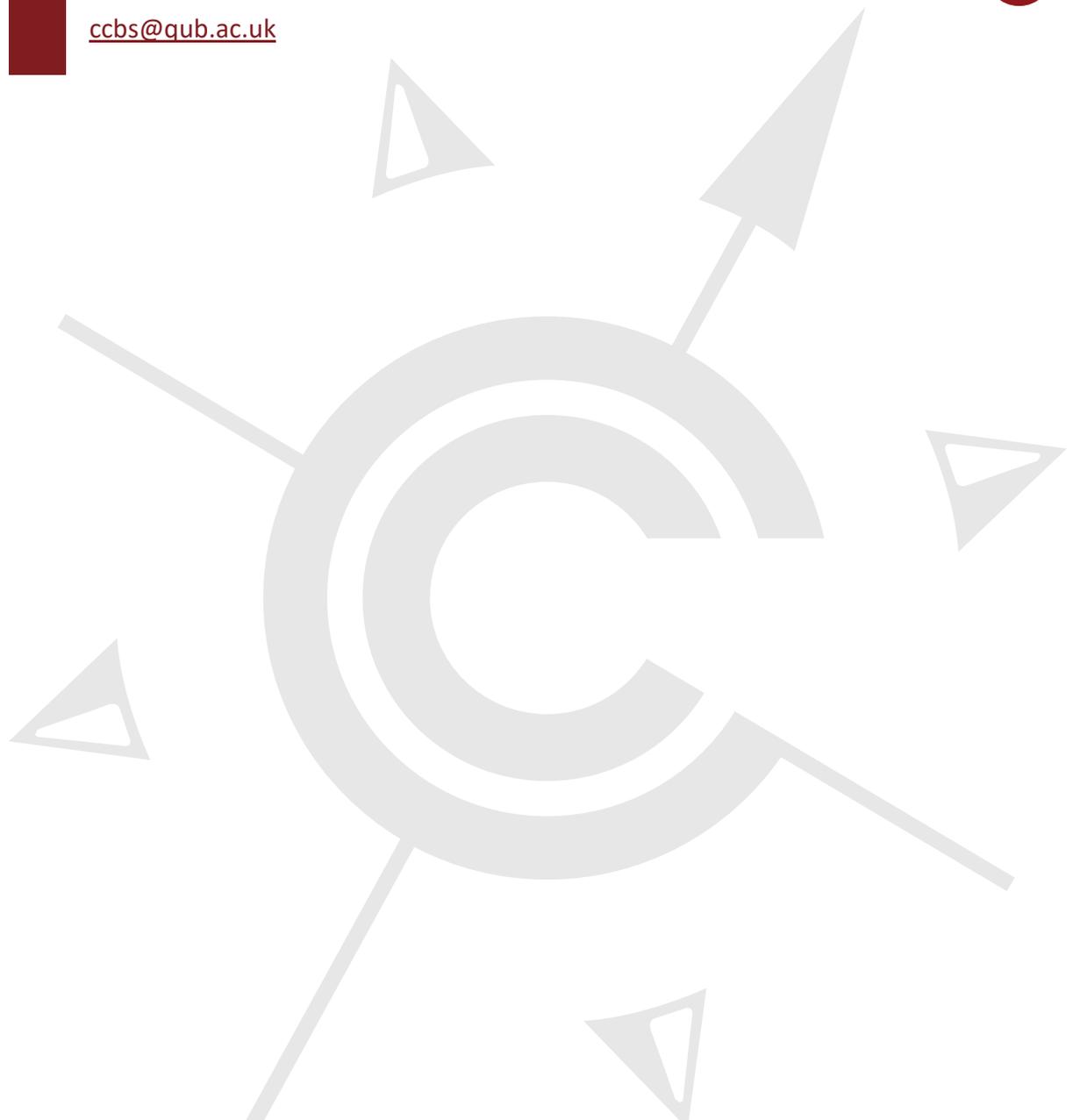
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