

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

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

Briefing on the findings from the 6<sup>th</sup>  
Quarterly Survey (April - June 2022)

Ben Rosher  
Anthony Soares

July 2022

## 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](http://www.crossborder.ie)).

### 1. Introduction

As we reached the end of second quarter of 2022, Stormont was still not sitting following the DUP's decision not to nominate a Deputy First Minister and to allow for the nomination a speaker after the May Assembly elections in protest at the Protocol. Meanwhile in Westminster the UK Government introduced the [Northern Ireland Protocol Bill](#), which intends to nullify or amend several aspects of the agreement between the UK and EU, specifically regarding checks on trade between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the role of the ECJ in legislation in Northern Ireland. This has, predictably, added further friction and mistrust to the already strained UK-EU relationship and uncertainty to business and society across Northern Ireland.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that responses to this 6<sup>th</sup> Quarterly Survey indicate a deterioration of the political context for North-South and East-West cooperation. The current state of health of relations between the UK Government and the EU does not inspire confidence in their ability to resolve issues related to the Protocol's implementation, which in turn further undermines the stability required for civic society organisations and local authorities on the island of Ireland to collaborate with counterparts within and across these islands.

Moreover, given the current political tensions, it is increasingly difficult to progress the establishment of structures for engagement with civic society organisations in order for them to be involved in the identification of any arising issues regarding the implementation of the Protocol and in considering the feasibility of any proposed solutions or mitigations, and how these may impact on North-South and East-West cooperation and relations.

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 remains 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 seek to 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. However, these efforts can only really come to fruition if relations between the UK and EU improve.

Following the end of the transition period and the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland from the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 sixth round of this survey, 42 of 46 respondents have completed at least one previous round of the survey. That the survey has been repeated every quarter since the beginning of 2021 and that there are now an incredibly high number of repeat respondents, we are in a position to infer the shape of some trends regarding views and experiences of the Protocol in a practical sense with a good degree of clarity. 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 1<sup>st</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2022, gathering 46 responses in total. 91% (42) reported that they completed the survey in the last quarter while 9% (4) are new respondents.

Of the 46 responses to the survey, 44% were based in the Republic of Ireland and 50% based in Northern Ireland, with 7% having a presence on both sides of the border (figure 1).

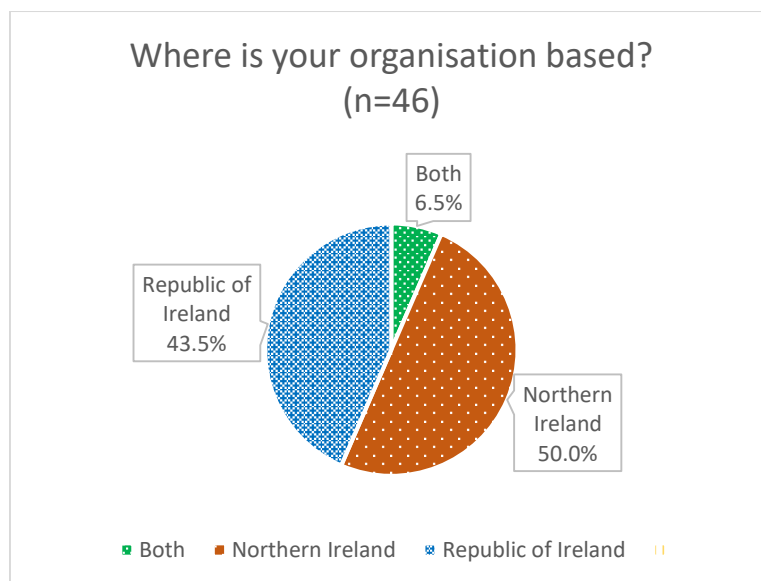


Figure 1

### 3. The North-South dimension

#### 3.1. contact and collaboration

In this quarter (Apr-Jul 2022) 85% of respondents have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 2). For 52% of respondents their level of contact this quarter has been at the same level as the last and has increased for 35% of respondents.

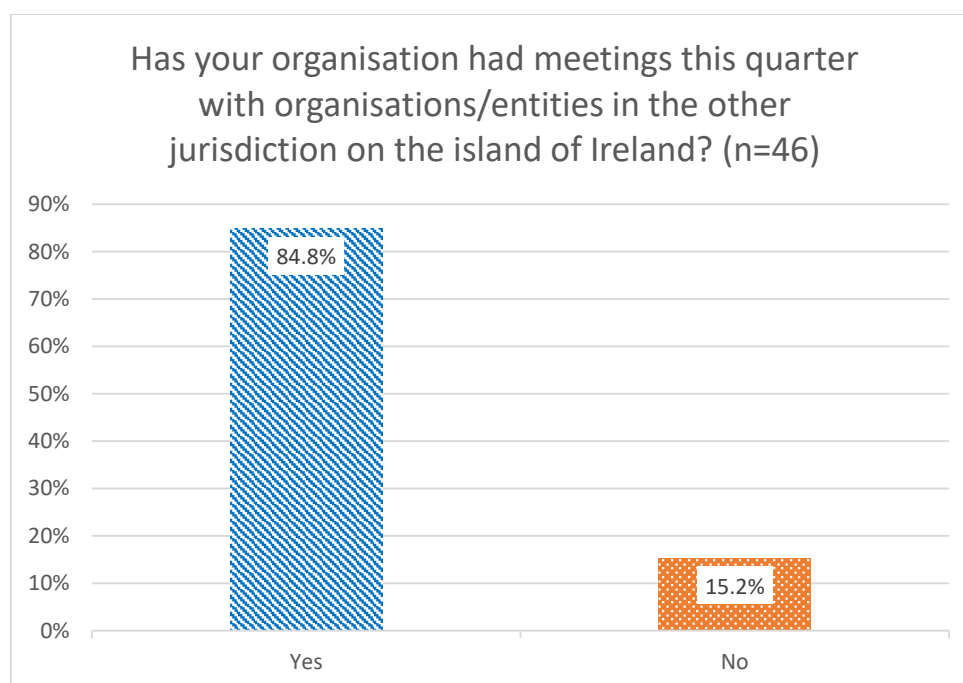


Figure 2

82% of respondents reported that meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction discussed challenges to cross-border cooperation either on occasion (62%) or to a significant

extent (21%). The nature of these challenges were wide ranging and included concerns around funding, education, regulatory differences, and citizens' rights.

- "Brexit impact on research funding. Horizon EU projects"
- "A Southern Council must be the lead partner in applications to E.U. and Shared Island funding. Cross-border partnerships must be registered in the south to make application"
- "Differences in health service organisation, patient treatment and travel post Brexit"
- "The challenges of providing education in border regions"
- "barriers /certainty of entitlement re: access to cross-border and island of Ireland healthcare initiatives, particularly for migrant communities"
- "Citizens' rights, free movement, social security, banking, the practical impacts of Brexit"
- "Cross border workers and work from home issues"
- "Protocol, political instability in the North and lack of functioning Assembly in NI, proposed changes to legislation at Westminster level"
- "Political instability in NI. lack of government to make decisions. Withdrawal of DUP from all all-island work and the signal it is giving to others to withdraw. Challenges of remote working if you are employed in the south and live in the north, health care , access to further education, refugee status"

At present 85% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaborations with a partner in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 3), and 76% of respondents are actively considering new collaborative projects. The main areas of current collaboration are cross-border cooperation, community development, and education. Just under half (49%) of respondents presently engaged in cross border collaboration reported that they were in receipt of funding for cross-border collaborative projects, with the predominant funding source being the Irish government.

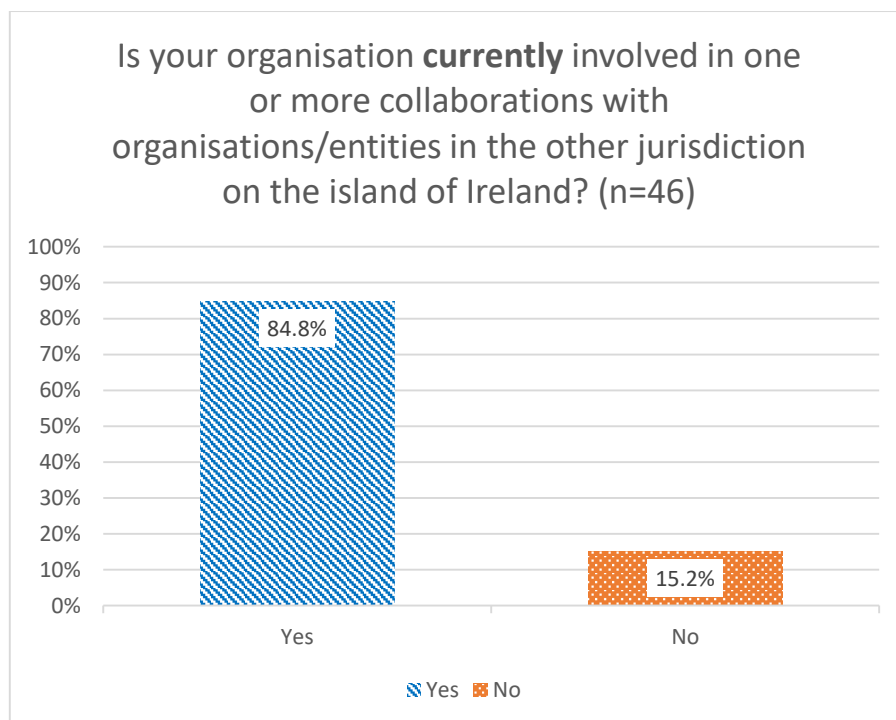


Figure 3

### 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=46), 46% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has stayed more or less the same since the previous quarter, with 48% saying it has deteriorated (figure 4).

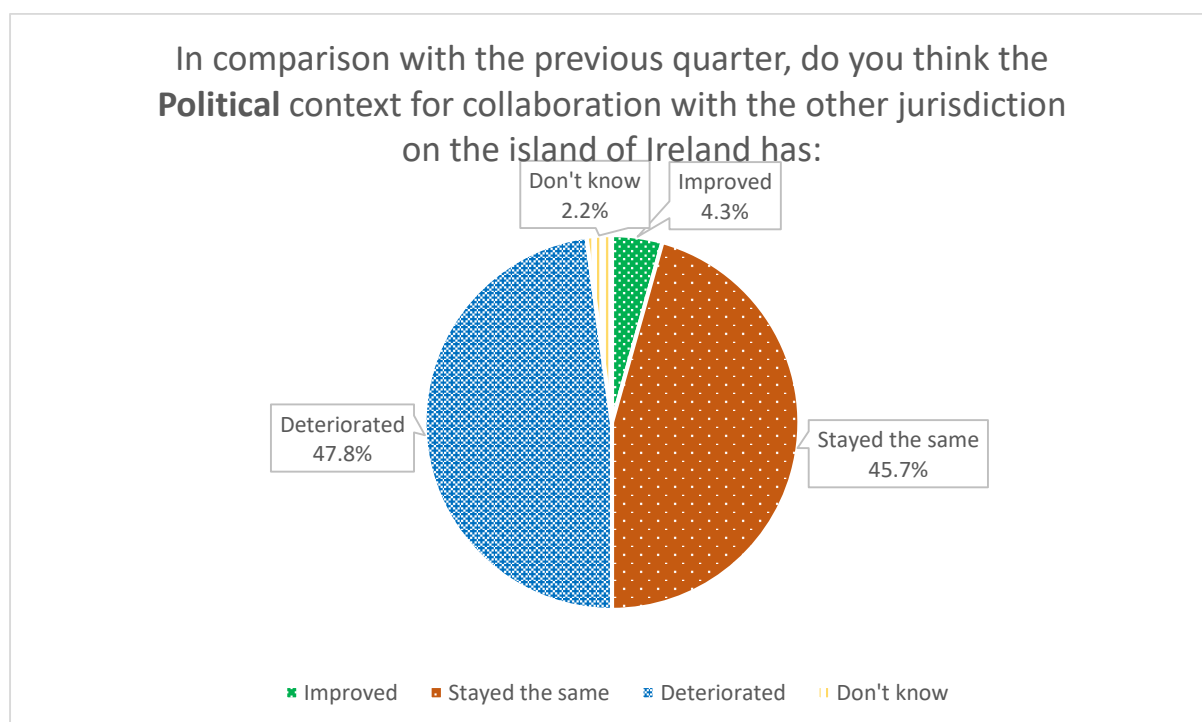


Figure 4

When asked to expand on their experiences of the **political** context for collaboration, respondents primarily pointed to issues arising from the absence of a functioning Assembly:

- “Government by civil service means that interactions with cross-border partners are almost inevitably more drawn out than they should be”
- “The election and formation of new Stormont. Also continued debate on the Northern Ireland Protocol”
- “Stormont elections have changed the cross-border as well as ongoing uncertainty of Brexit”
- “Continued rhetoric, and threats of unilateral action around the Ireland/NI Protocol as well as demonstrations create a more difficult context as well as instability and inability to plan ahead and tackle major shared social, economic and environmental challenges. These are direct consequences of the failure of political leadership”
- “No political leadership in Northern Ireland outlining a vision for the island of Ireland in practical terms”
- “The political context for stability and continuity has deteriorated across the board and it is increasingly challenging to encourage women from non Nationalist communities to engage in new cross border work”
- “The results of the Stormont elections and stalemate on assembly has impacted on the political context”
- “Relations between the UK Government and the EU and Irish Government have deteriorated to a significant extent in light of the UK Government's introduction of domestic legislation to disapply most of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland”

Some interesting observations were made in that, while the political climate had deteriorated, it had spurred motivation among local communities:

- “The political context has if anything emphasised the imperative of more and better cross border working. So the political context may have deteriorated but the actuality of collaboration may have improved. So more or less the same”
- “we're just ignoring Johnson, DUP and the UK gov and just getting on with things”

Turning to the **social** context (figure 5): 20% of respondents say that the social context has deteriorated since the previous quarter with only 13% reporting it has improved. The predominant response is that it has remained the same (61%).



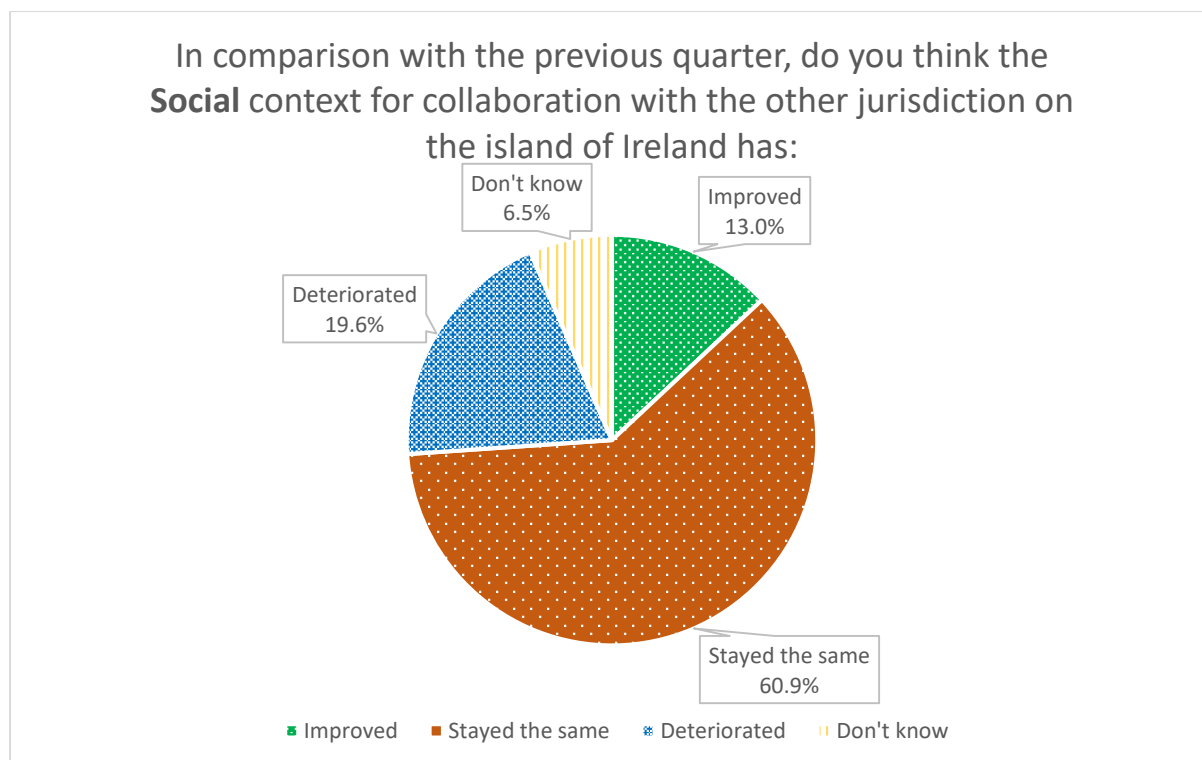


Figure 5

When asked to elaborate, responses have been mixed between positive and negative experiences of social cooperation:

- “Fear of travelling to Northern Ireland during political marching season”
- “Purely anecdotal but there seems to be a turning away from collaboration and remaining within one’s own ‘jurisdiction’”
- “Relationships between communities north and south are very fragile, they need protection from the fallout of extreme politics”
- “Local community groups are more willing to collaborate on environment, climate, and tourism issues”
- “Social Context for the majority of stakeholders in our area of work is for the main part now embedded in all-Ireland and an all UK - basis within which we sit as belonging within both jurisdictions. That wider shift in thinking is well-established now”
- “The social context has improved in some communities or the desire has increased in some communities but quite possibly this is balanced by a retraction on collaboration for those working on social development/justice”
- “The social context seems to have improved, as I found when attending two meetings earlier this month. One was an All-Ireland professional association, held on-line; and the other was a three-day conference in Belfast, at the Belfast campus of Ulster University. Attendees appeared to be split 50/50 between the two jurisdictions, and the extent of good friendly personal encounters was excellent”

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 59% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 28% saying it has deteriorated. What is noteworthy here is that no respondent has reported an improvement in the North-South regulatory context, the same as the last quarter.

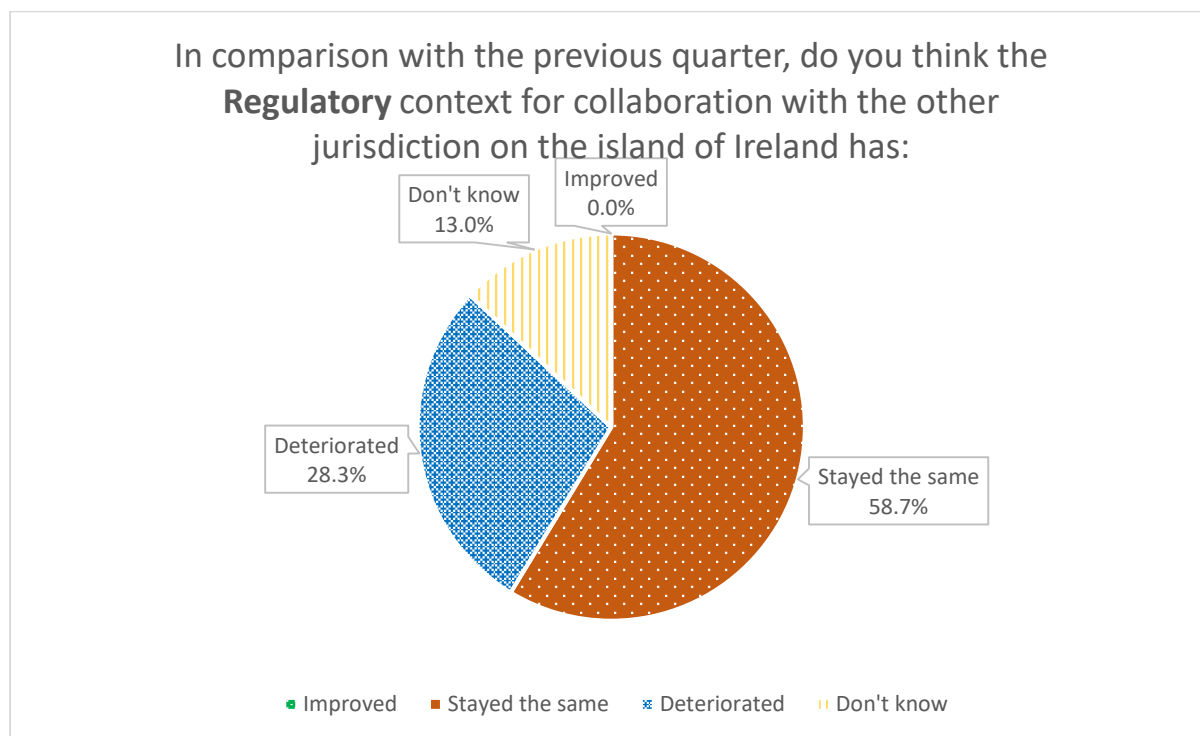


Figure 5

When asked to expand on their experiences of the **regulatory** context for collaboration, as with the previous quarter, respondents primarily pointed to increased uncertainty regarding immigration issues and the impending introduction of Electronic Travel Authorisation (ETA) for non-Irish EU nationals:

- “It has specifically deteriorated in relation to Immigration and rights of immigrants due to the new immigration regulations (some proposed/some already implemented) . While much heavy weather is being made of goods, people also matter and the 'invisible' border is very visible to residents in both jurisdictions who are not UK or RoI citizens- impact has increased significantly over past 6 months”
- “There remain major uncertainties around the regulatory framework governing cross-border trade, access to services, continued supply of medicines, environmental standards and governance, conflicts between the UK Internal Market legislation and the NI protocol as well as UK devolution more widely, exacerbated by the threat of trade sanctions, due to unilateral and illegal actions”
- “Recently passed UK legislation, the Nationality and Borders Act, provides for the introduction of 'Electronic Travel Authorisations' which look set to impact non-British, non-Irish people moving around the island”
- “The uncertainty regarding the British Government's attitude to the Northern Ireland protocol has made the regulatory context uncertain”

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 65% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter, with 11% reporting that it has deteriorated since the last quarter, and 13% saying they don't know.

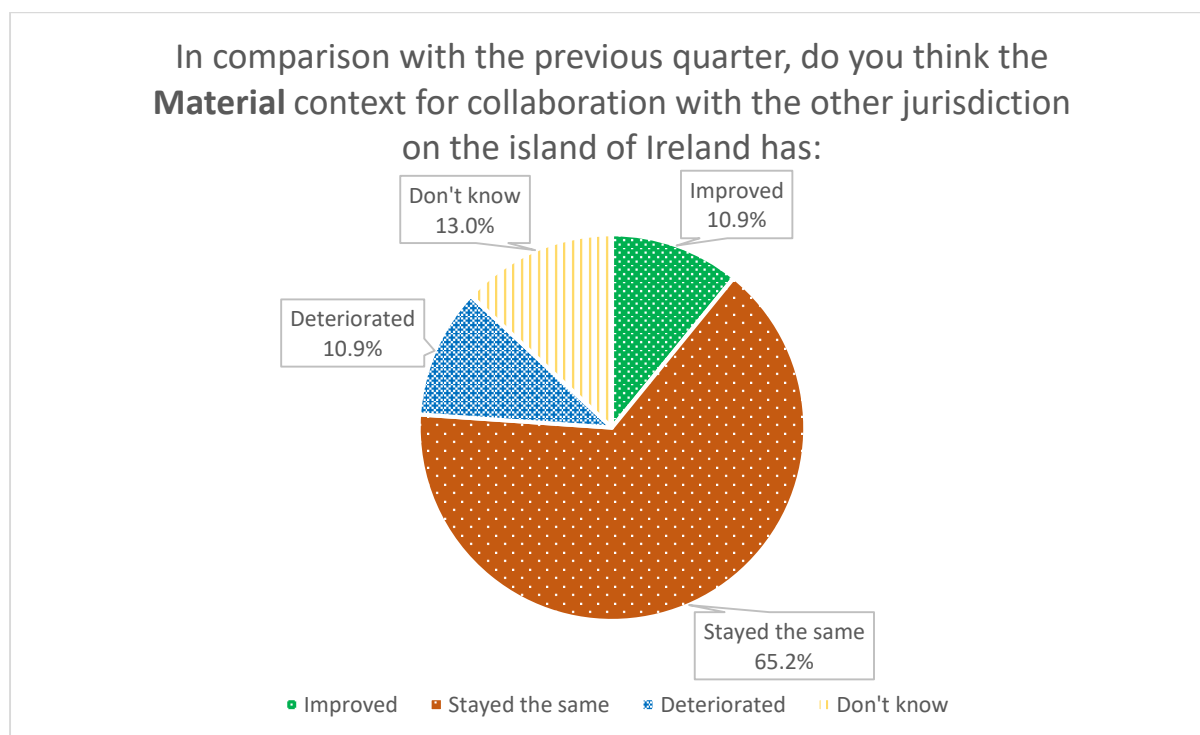


Figure 7

When asked to elaborate on their experiences of the **material** context for collaboration, responses are pointing toward the all-island opportunities that are arising post-Brexit, though these are being hindered by lack of transport infrastructure between the North and South:

- “On transport it is notable that rail freight which is starting to grow in the ROI is unavailable in NI. Traditionally rail freight was a connector btw both parts of the island and even during the Troubles the authorities strived to ensure that the rail link was maintained and operational. Gradually this link has disappeared and today might even be more important in terms of the Protocol and getting goods to EU as Waterford is the nearest rail freight port to EU mainland and is linked to Belfast/Derry by rail”
- “Apart from those who really do not want to, most people are learning to manage and benefit from increasing all-Island opportunities. Not without its challenges but the main challenges being faced people and organisations we work do not have cross-border work any where near the top of their 'serious challenges' list”
- “There is an emerging undercurrent of organisations circulating around whatever Peace Plus might present to support organisations to deliver services effectively”

## 4. The East-West Dimension

### 4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter 60% of respondents reported having meetings with organisations in Great Britain (figure 8). 67% of respondents say that this is the

same level of contact as the last quarter, and 15% reported that their level of contact had increased on the previous quarter.

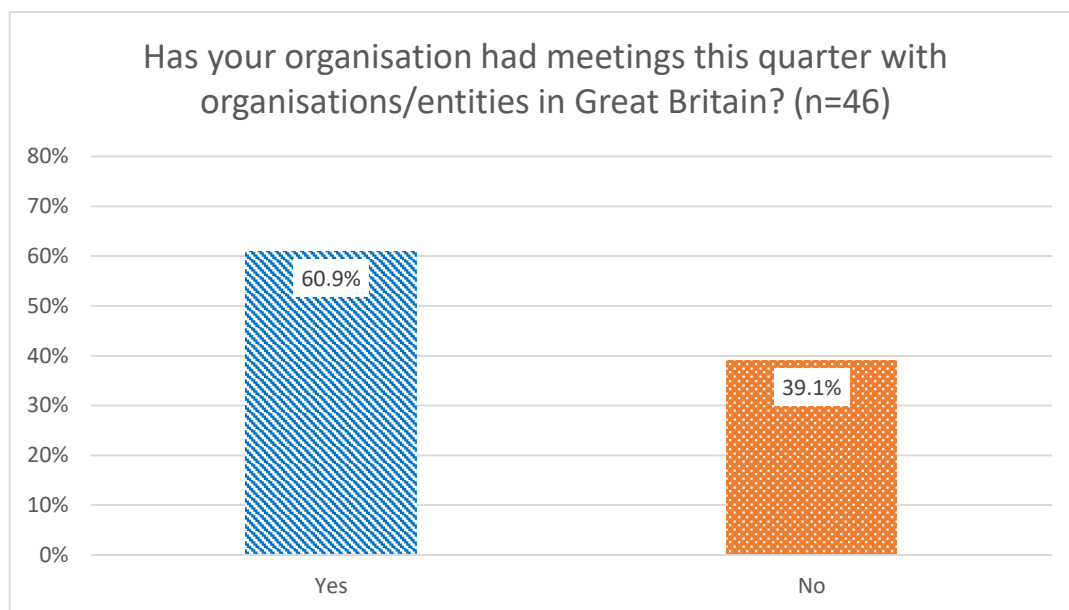


Figure 8

Just over half (51%) of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (36%) or to a significant extent (21%). Such challenges were predominantly focussed on issues with regard to various funding schemes:

- “EU Horizon funding of research activities”
- “Obstacles to funding with reference to peace 4 plus”
- “New but still unclear arrangements across the different jurisdictions of the UK for new UK programmes such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund are creating”
- “The impact of the Protocol discussions and Brexit on devolution and devolved nations. The proposed changes Human Rights. Role of Civil Society groups”
- “The deteriorating political context for cooperation, and lack of appropriate engagement with civic society”

This quarter 70% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), with the predominant areas of collaboration being equality, education, and community development. At present 41% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain, however, only 38% 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 organisation’s own core funding.

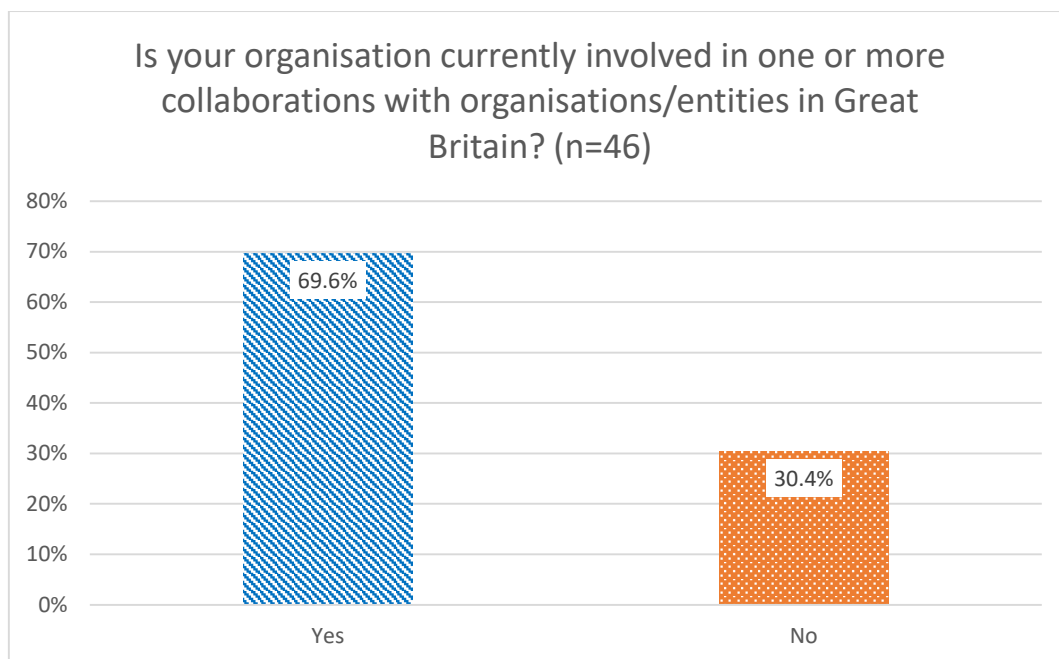


Figure 9

#### 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=46), 48% of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, with the same proportion saying it has deteriorated (figure 10).

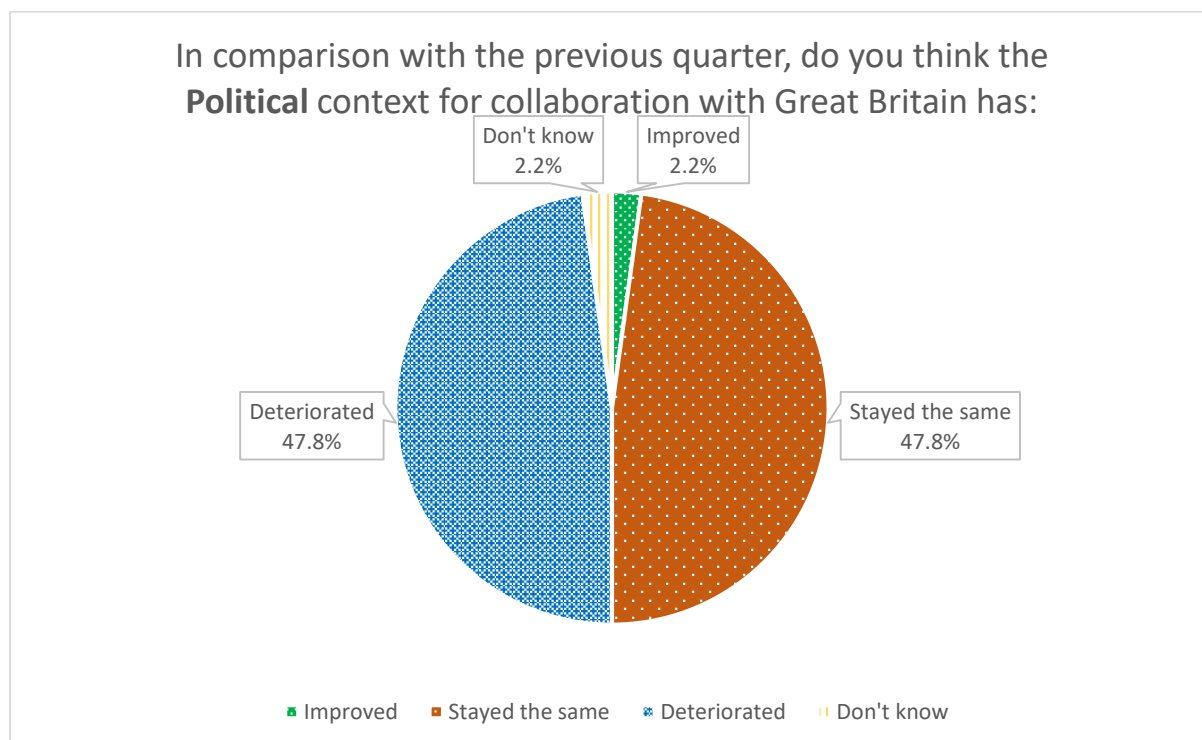


Figure 10

When asked to expand on their experiences of the political context for collaboration, respondents indicated being ignored by Westminster and a lack of certainty around the Protocol, which has been a common theme across these surveys. Responses included:

- “Political instability Protocol issues”
- “The issue over the Protocol and the introduction of new legislation to override the Protocol is souring East/West relationships”
- “The political environment as managed by the current government at Westminster is driving a wedge between majority communities in NI and impacting on community relations and space for collaboration”
- “The majority of political parties in NI are being ignored in Westminster. A very damaging situation to be in”
- “The uncertainty surrounding the Northern Ireland protocol has made the political context less favourable”
- “Unilateral actions by UK Government regarding the Protocol have had a significant negative effect on the political context for cooperation between the island of Ireland (particularly the Republic of Ireland) with GB”
- “Raft of new legislation from London on protocol, legacy issues etc ill thought out and not wanted”

85% of respondents report that the **social** context (figure 11) has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 9% say it has deteriorated, and only 2% report that it has improved. Respondents have said that the “UK focus has changed due to EU UK deterioration”

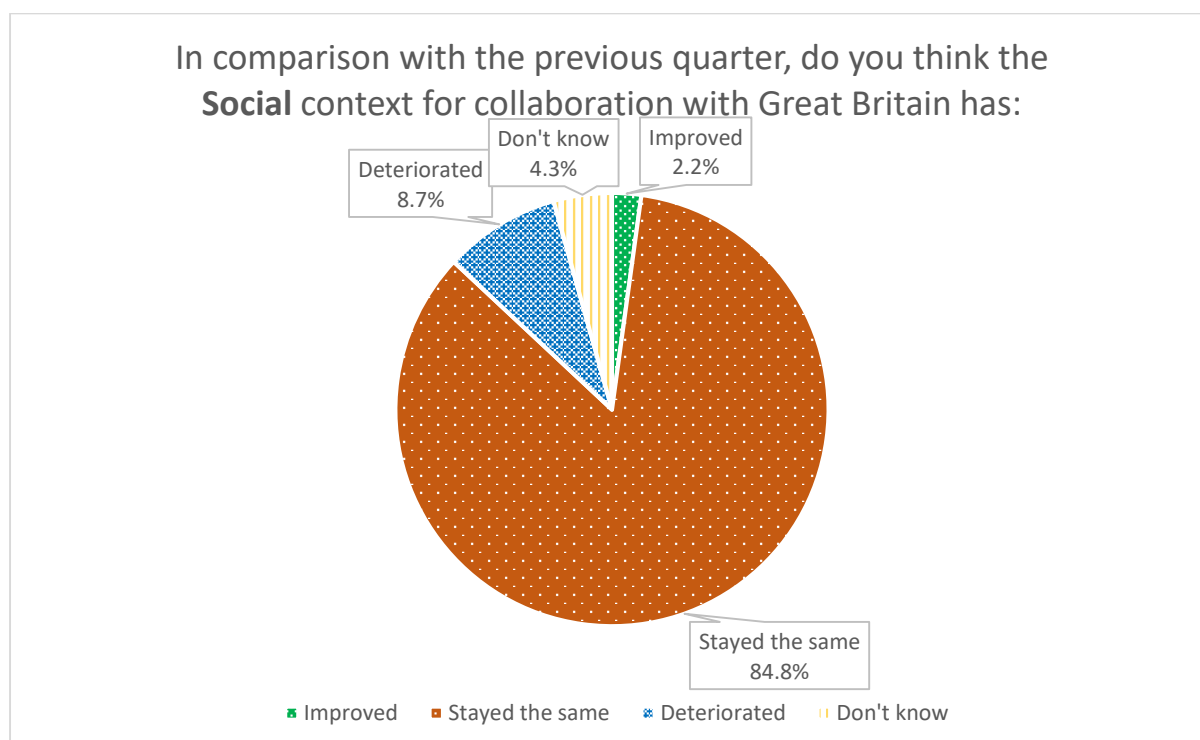


Figure 11

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 24% of respondents say that the regulatory context has deteriorated over the last quarter with 54% saying it has remained the same as the previous quarter.

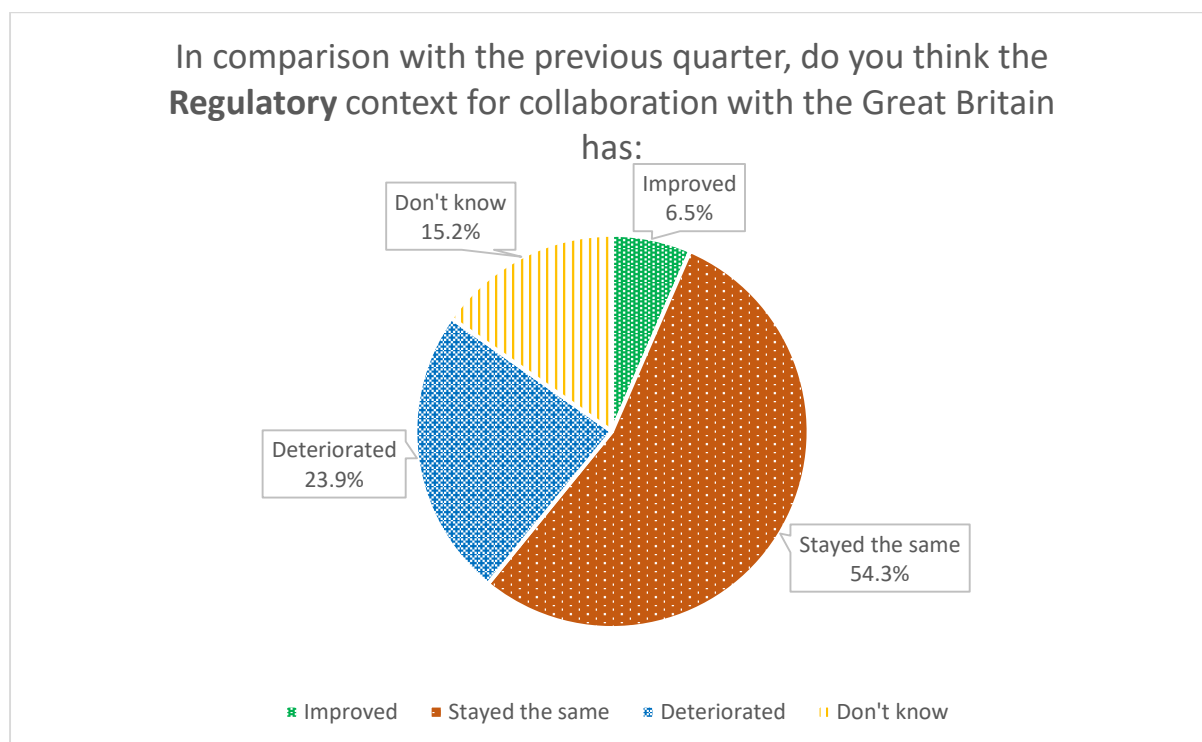


Figure 12

Respondents have said that the **regulatory** environment is being negatively impacted by concerns and confusion around the Protocol and the impact that these issues have on the broader UK-EU relationship:

- “Brexit complications regarding European funding applications”
- “The 'rules' around the impact of Brexit on free movement are beginning to change daily”
- “Protocol stalemate and potential impact on Horizon funding”

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 63% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 15% of respondents say it has deteriorated and 20% saying they don't know how or if the situation has changed. Again, issues arising regarding the material context are often being attributed to issues regarding the uncertainty around the Protocol.

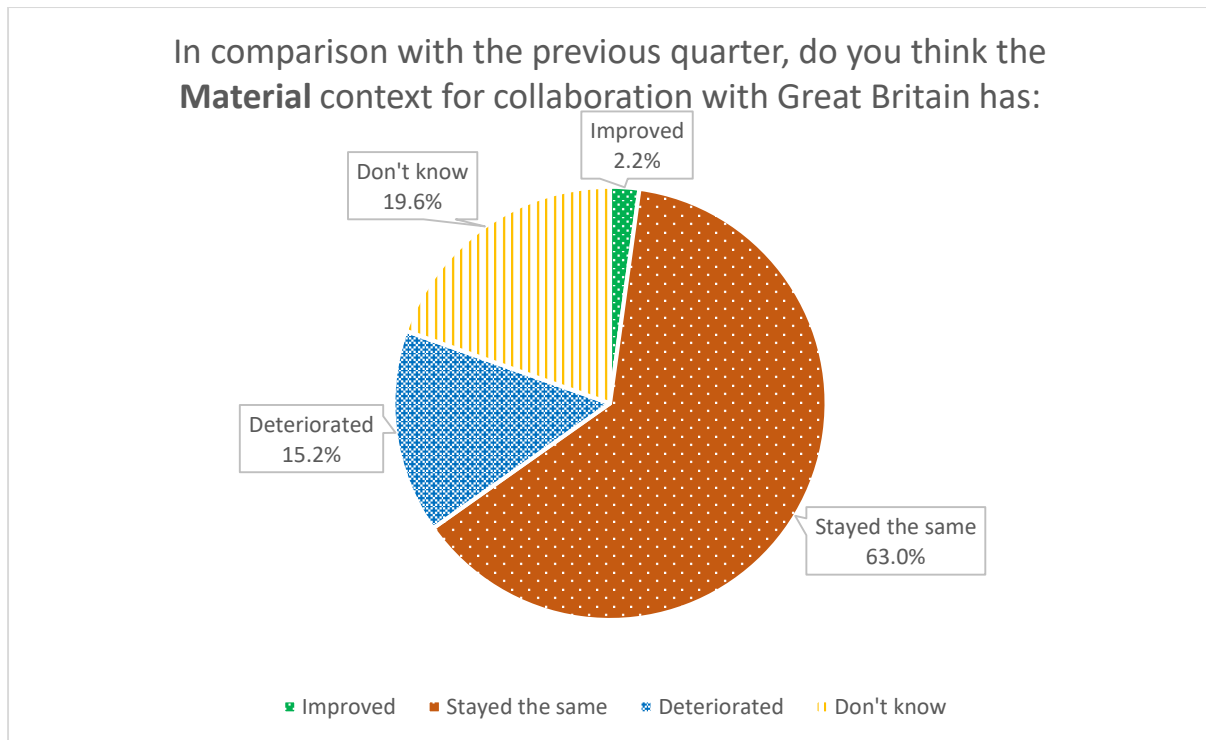


Figure 13

### 5. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland

As the Protocol has now been in effect (to some extent) for over 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). 85% of respondents reported that they believe the Protocol is, on balance, a good thing for North-South cooperation, compared to 11% who are unsure and only 4% who believe it is a bad thing. In terms of East-West relations, 59% believe the Protocol is, on balance, a good thing for East-West cooperation, with 26% unsure, and 15% reporting it is a bad thing.

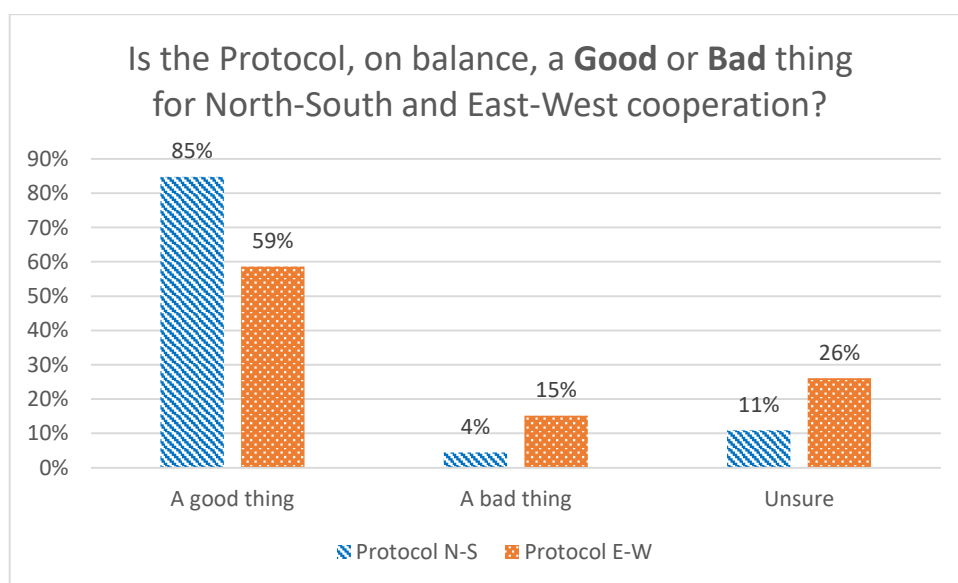


Figure 14



## 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.

- *“Traditional links btw north south in places like Donegal and Sligo remain strong though not helped by the absence of a rail link in both directions that had been there in the past”*
- *“Business connectivity can be nurtured in a mutually beneficial way by reconnecting the rail freight links north and south and connecting the ports in the SE (Waterford/Rosslare) with NI by rail”*
- *“New/forthcoming UK legislation impacting human rights and equality has prompted increased conversations on a north-south and east-west basis about potential implications and responses”*
- *“There is an urgent need for engagement between political reps and civil society organisations. This is not for lack of effort on the part of civil society. Grassroots organisations are best placed to ensure accurate and timely information is being distributed to communities - avoiding misinformation and vacuums”*
- *“Every quarter I fill this in it seems that the political context has deteriorated and that impacts on all our work and lives”*

## Conclusion

The central theme emerging from this quarter’s survey are concern around the protocol and the way the UK government is approaching the Northern Ireland Protocol Bill and the ECHR.

This is manifesting into greater uncertainty for cross-border organisations who, while now mostly to grips with the Protocol *as currently implemented* (and generally supportive of the Protocol as implemented) are unsure as to what changes the future will bring. This also appears to, despite the intentions of the UK government, be encouraging an all-island approach to managing issues and mitigating against uncertainty.

The clear message coming from organisations who operate either North-South and/or East-West, is that the Protocol needs to be resolved so that they can begin to engage and plan their activities and relationships with more certainty than they currently are able.

**CONTACTS**

**CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES**

39 Abbey Street, Armagh BT61 7EB

028 (048 from Republic of Ireland) 3751 1550

[ccbs@qub.ac.uk](mailto:ccbs@qub.ac.uk)

[Centre for Cross Border Studies](#)



[@CCBSCrossBorder](#)



[@crossborderstudies](#)



**www.crossborder.ie**

A valued source of research, information and support for collaboration  
across borders on the island of Ireland, Europe and beyond.