

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

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

Briefing on the findings from the 7th
Quarterly Survey (July - September 2022)

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November 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).

1. Introduction

At the time of writing this report, the uncertainty around Northern Ireland's political institutions remains unresolved and it appears likely that the electorate will be heading to the polls on 15 December for the second Assembly election of the year. Stormont has not been sitting since February 2022 following the DUP's decision to pull out of the Executive and to not to nominate a Deputy First Minister or allow for the nomination of a speaker after the May Assembly elections in protest at the Protocol. After several personnel changes in Westminster that saw three Prime Ministers in the space of 7 weeks, Rishi Sunak has moved into number 10 and claims that, while a negotiated settlement to issues around the Protocol remain his preferred outcome, he will proceed with 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.

While responses to this 7th Quarterly Survey do not point to the same level of deterioration of the political context for North-South and East-West cooperation as was the case in the previous quarter, the overriding sentiment that comes through is one of uncertainty. That uncertainty is largely as a result of the political turmoil seen in Westminster over this period, as well as the continued failure to form an Executive in Northern Ireland and to allow for the Assembly to function.

With little to no real contact between the UK Government and the European Commission for much of this period, added to the instability within London and the absence of a functioning Northern Ireland Executive, it has proved difficult for those seeking to ensure the maintenance of the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation to find stable channels of engagement with relevant decision-makers. Meanwhile, actors on the ground continue to seek to collaborate on a cross-border basis, even as challenges emerge for North-South cooperation given that the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland does not give Northern Ireland access to the EU's Single Market for services.

The next quarter (October to December) will see whether the new UK Prime Minister's arrival will see a new approach to his government's engagement with the EU over the Protocol. It will also be a period where, following the failure to restore a functioning Executive by the deadline of 28 October, fresh Assembly elections are due to take place (barring any move by the UK Government to introduce legislation to delay the calling of elections). In this context, it is unclear whether the political context for North-South and East-West cooperation will become any more stable than it is at present.

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 seventh round of this survey, 43 of 45 respondents have completed at least one previous round of the survey. As 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 and their suggestions for improving conditions on the ground. 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 30th September 2022, gathering 45 responses in total. 96% (43) reported that they completed the survey in the last quarter while 4% (2) are new respondents.

Of the 45 responses to the survey, 36% were based in the Republic of Ireland and 49% based in Northern Ireland, with 16% having a presence on both sides of the border (figure 1).

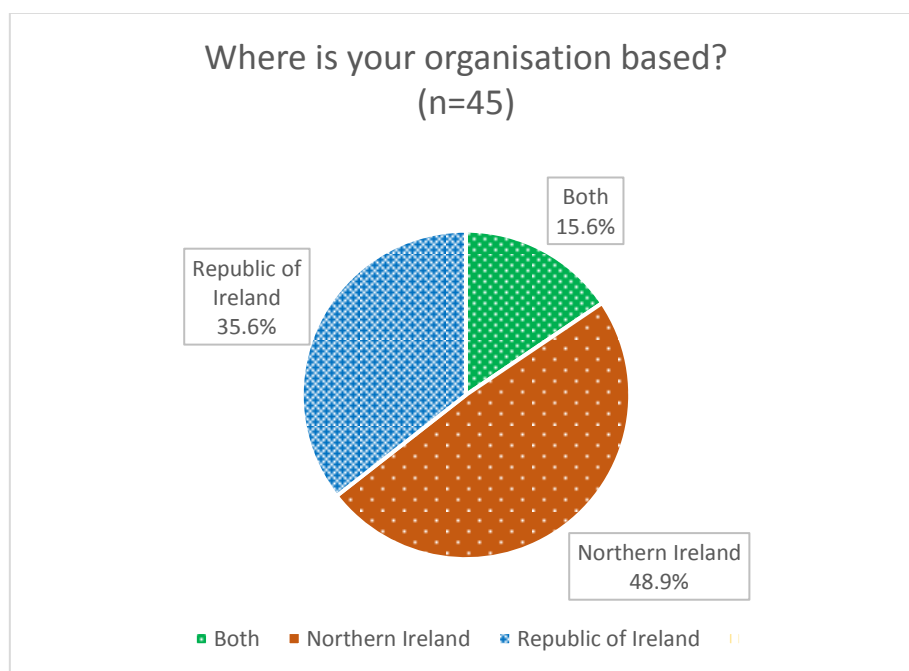


Figure 1

3. The North-South dimension

3.1. Contact and collaboration

In this quarter (July-September 2022) 90% of respondents have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 2). For 49% of respondents their level of contact this quarter has been at the same level as the last and has increased for 31% of respondents.

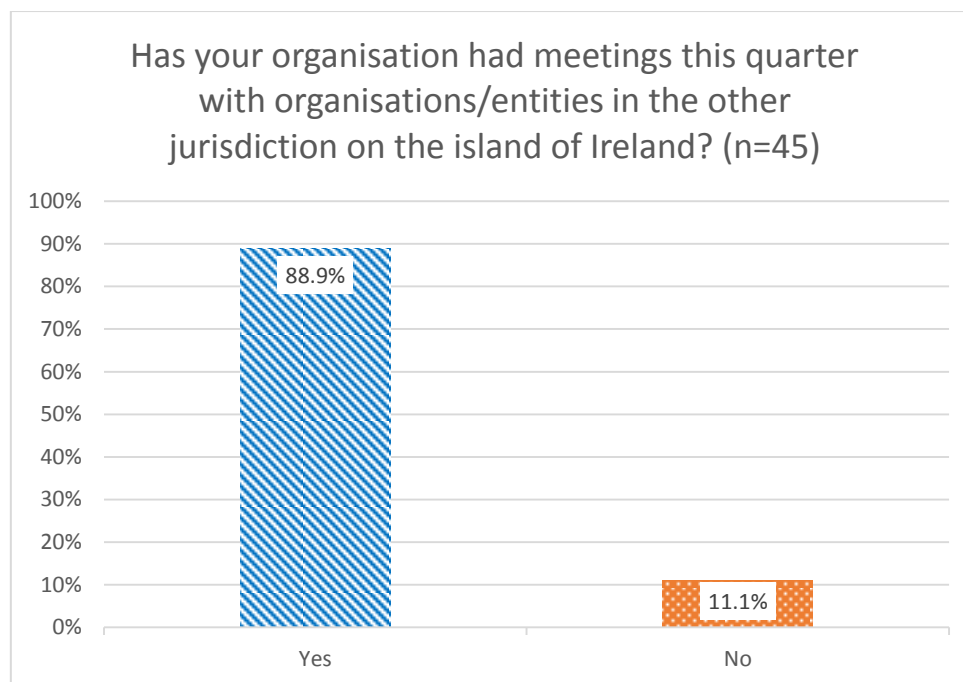


Figure 2

68% of respondents reported that meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction discussed challenges to cross-border cooperation either on occasion (43%) or to a significant extent (25%). It is worth noting that this is a fall from a combined 82% in the previous quarter. The nature of these challenges focussed heavily on a lack of funding, as well as concerns around the pending introduction of Electronic Travel Authorisation for cross border travel for non-visa nationals.

- “Funding for international and EU research issues caused by Brexit”
- “Lack of clarity regarding protocol / mobility / restrictions”
- “Uncertainty in relation to the current political situation is unfortunately underpinning much of our discussions”
- “Citizens issues; mostly cross border taxation, social security and healthcare”
- “how to build trust and confidence for those who fear constitutional change”
- “Cross border working; travel and access to all-Island |Services”
- “Cross-border insurance, cross-border data”
- “general discussion re ongoing situation and lack of funding”
- “Discussed potential issues arising from introduction of Electronic Travel Authorisations for those moving across the land-border if they are non-British, non-Irish people without recognised UK immigration status. Risks/challenges include risk of increased racial profiling associated with checks resulting from new requirements and disruption for cross-border life, particularly for border communities, as a result of additional bureaucracy and related checks - risk to enjoyment of private and family life”

At present 87% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaborations with a partner in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 3), and 78% of respondents are actively considering new collaborative projects. The main areas of current collaboration focus on the environment, cross-border cooperation, and community development. Over half (62%) 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.

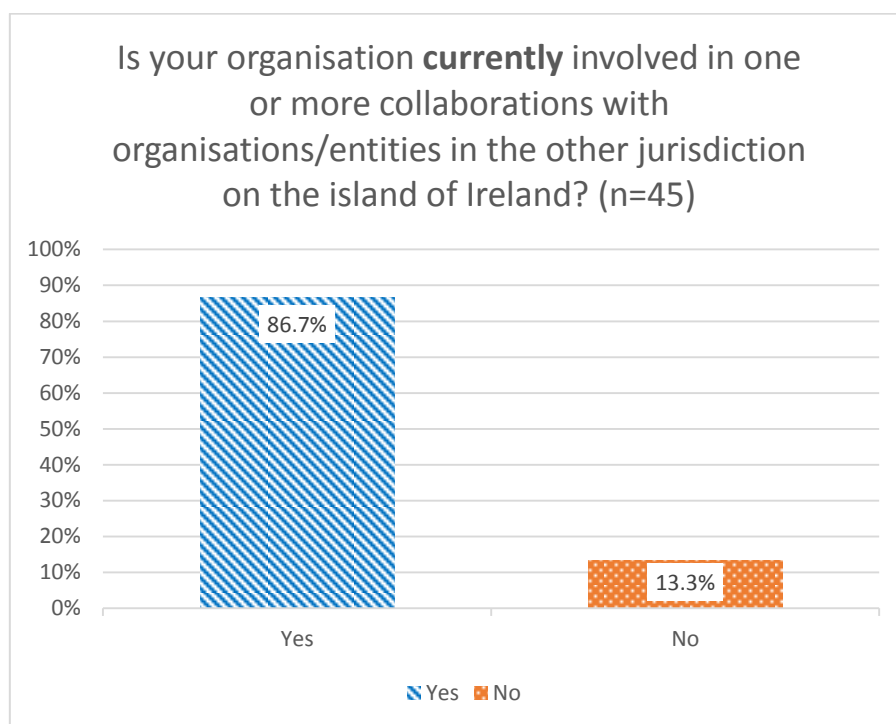


Figure 3

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=45), 53% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has stayed more or less the same since the previous quarter, with a third saying it has deteriorated (figure 4).

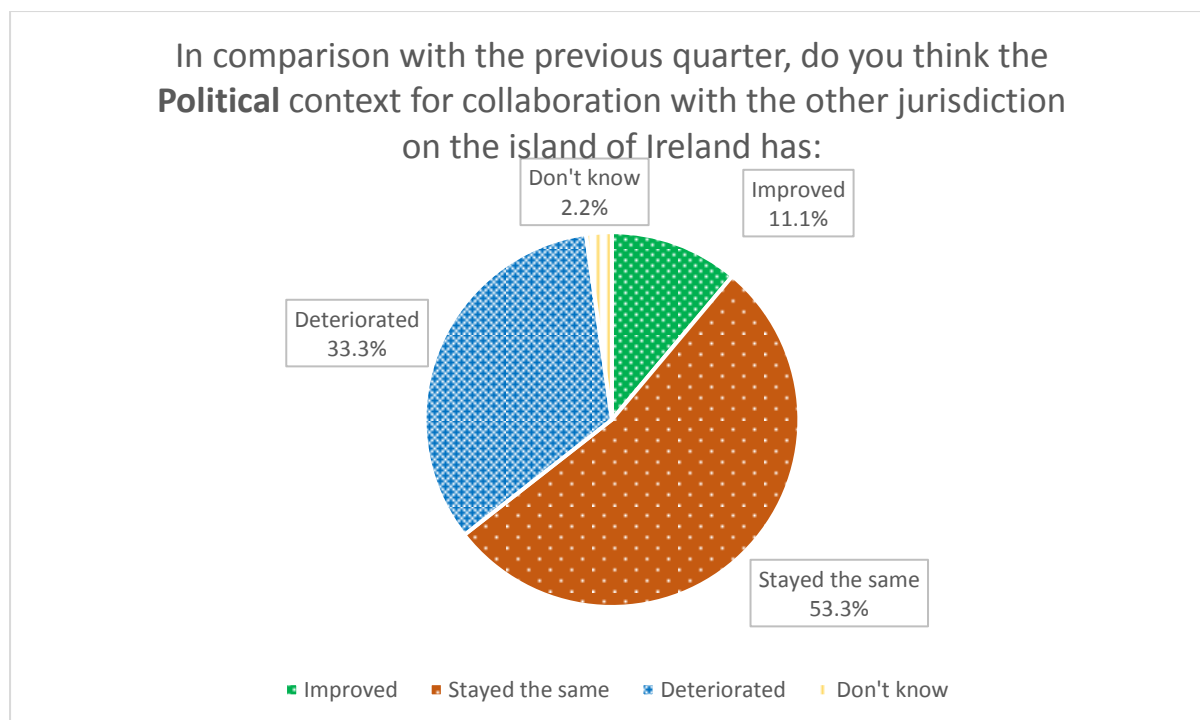


Figure 4

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 and uncertainty and disruption in Westminster politics:

- “No Government in NI or UK to address issues”
- “Lack of an NI Executive and Protocol Impasse”
- “Political rhetoric is becoming more divisive - particularly within PUL communities in North. Upsurge in sectarianism is a problem with people trying to put pressure on those engaging in cross border work”
- “linked to the Assembly not functioning and lack of clarity regarding funding, etc. going forward”
- “Given the elections in Northern Ireland and no Assembly formed, difficult to engage. Also, with PM election in the UK and now change of cabinet, little engagement seems to have been able to take place”
- “It's all still in quite a state of flux and with regard to the bigger picture, the disagreements on Brexit / the Protocol which are preventing Stormont from effectively operating, run to the heart of this”
- “With DUP boycotting the NI assembly the NSMC cannot function, which in turn stalls cross border cooperation”
- “For much of this period, political uncertainty in London has not allowed for the improvement of the context for cooperation, although more positive signs began to emerge more recently. However, it is still too soon to tell whether this positivity will endure”

Turning to the **social** context (figure 5): 18% of respondents say that the social context has deteriorated since the previous quarter with only 9% reporting it has improved. The predominant response is that it has remained the same (64%).

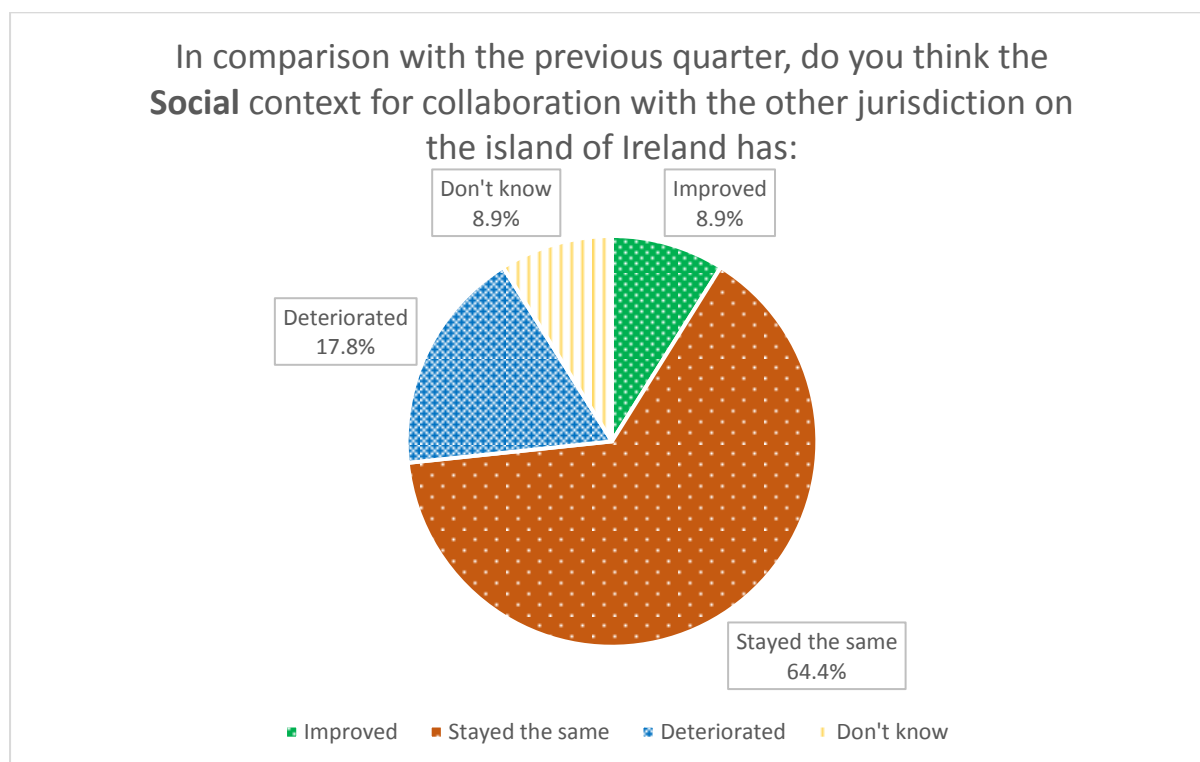


Figure 5

When asked to elaborate, responses have focussed heavily on the cost-of-living crisis as having an impact on the conditions for social cooperation and the implications of political stasis on the social dimension:

- “Cost of living crisis potentially limiting capacity to become involved in wider collaboration (though could also be a spur for some)”
- “Lack of local gov’t and increased social priorities around the Income Crisis driven by Westminster is having an impact on the ground”
- “The social context has always been supportive of collaboration, but the uncertainty regarding the political context impacts on social and civil society organisations in terms of cross border and all island collaboration”
- “The social context has become more quietly determined to keep going despite the political context. Within the social context people are interested in conversations ensuring social justice and equality and meeting the challenges of the current economic crisis and in recognising that we need to talk about the constitutional future of the island in a supportive and non-combative way”
- “The social context is being influenced by the lack of progression in the Political context”
- “Possibly the political context had made it more difficult for collaboration or new collaborations to take place”

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 60% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 20% 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 for the previous two quarters.

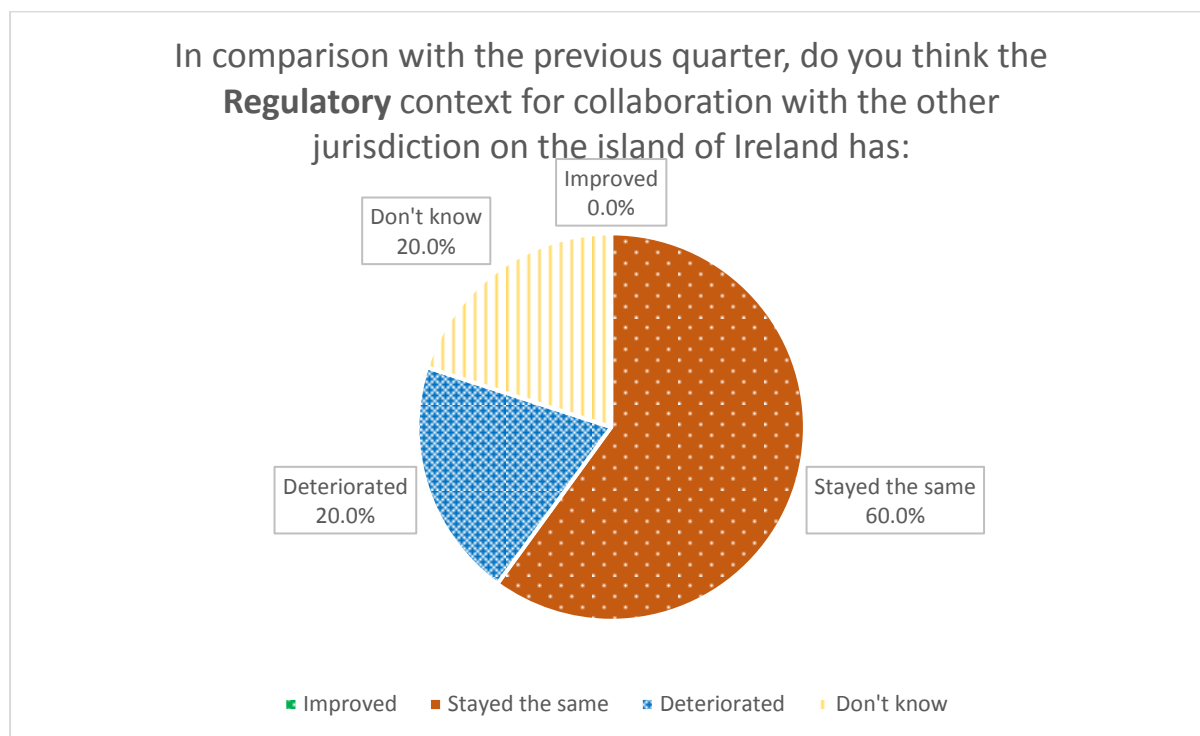


Figure 5

When asked to expand on their experiences of the **regulatory** context for collaboration, as with the previous quarter, respondents primarily pointed to ongoing uncertainty around the protocol and the outworkings of the current political impasse:

- “Uncertainty has become the norm and makes forward planning difficult”
- “Protocol Impasse & Lack of political will with Unionism”
- “I am not sure where we are anymore over regulatory issues”
- “Continued uncertainty around the NI/Ireland protocol and no prospect of negotiated solution”
- “Nothing is really changing in regulation/legislation because we still have no functioning regional government and UK are not significantly moving to regulate for the North. At the end of October, we will know what comes next”

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 62% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter, with 20% reporting that it has deteriorated since the last quarter, and 13% saying they don't know.

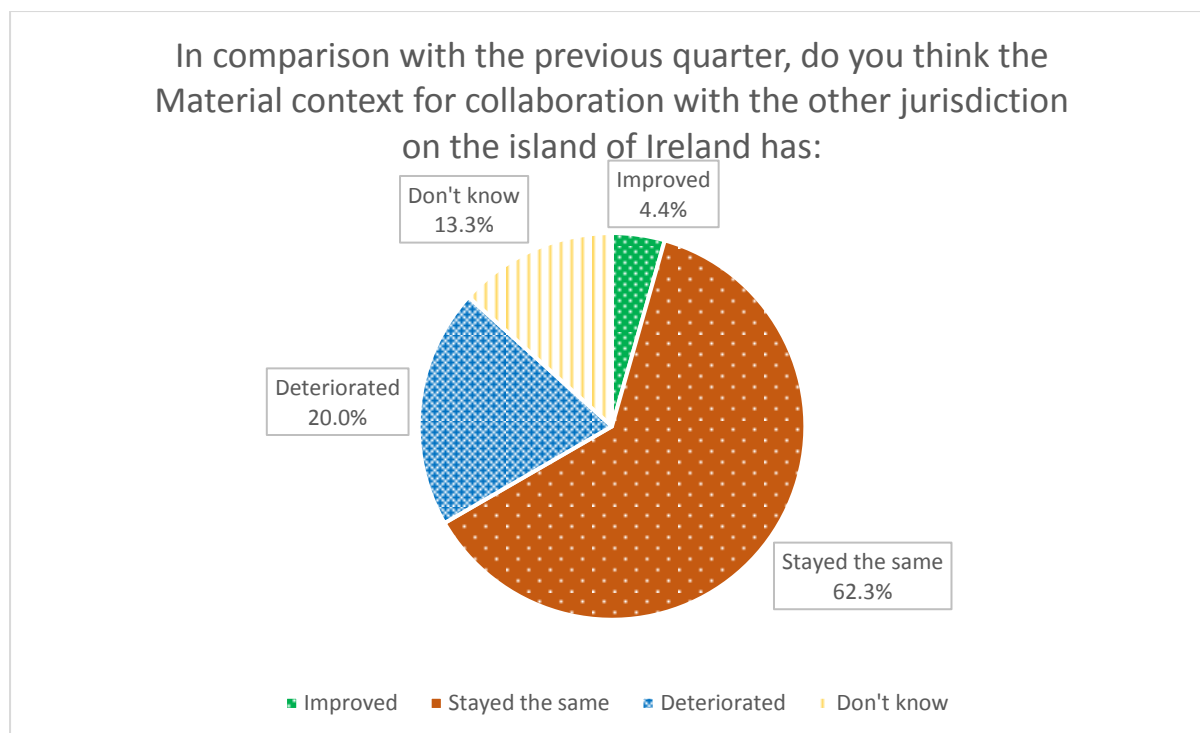


Figure 7

When asked to elaborate on their experiences of the **material** context for collaboration, responses point toward increased costs, both in terms of time and money:

- “what would have taken ten day now takes 10 weeks”
- “There is still the uncertainty of what impact any changes to Northern Ireland Protocol will have on goods and services will have and as it is at a standstill given the elections both in Northern Ireland and in the UK and new cabinet in UK formed, difficult to say”
- “access to software / materials / rising costs”
- “With the passage of time, we hear more and more feedback that companies in these islands are slowly but surely getting to grips with the administrative and logistical impacts of Brexit and the Protocol on trade. So when I state 'improved' I say that with this qualified note, as an observer”
- “The impact of the currency crisis in sterling and rising energy and inflation costs is having a negative impact on many organisations, particularly those in civil society”
- “As for regulatory context much remains the same but increasingly the practical option for those us in the North is to source from the South in terms of Goods. Access to Services North -South is improving as people become more aware of the practical realities re. Common Travel Area (for non-citizens) if people need to access all-island services - travel to work. Still needs to get the point of certainty with regulation - but improving”

3.3. North-South suggestions for improvement

This quarter we have also asked respondents for any suggestions they have for improving the conditions for cooperation and collaboration. In the North-South dimension there were

concrete suggestions for improvements to infrastructure, travel, healthcare, and communications.

- “People to people contact is a confidence builder in terms of neighborly relations. This may happen through business, sport, tourism and so on. The more contact and interaction the greater the opportunity for relationships building. The Ulster canal was a project that enhanced at the strategic level such contact and in a similar way cross border rail should be considered as a long term means of joining both communities similar to cross border movements in EU. The absence of rail in the west and in fact it’s active removal over decades had a negative impact in connectivity, this could be improved to the benefit of both parts of the island. The idea that Letterkenny or even Gweedore and Belfast could be connected by rail would send a good message. In business terms it’s extraordinary that the rail freight capacity in NI has disappeared which even through the Troubles was maintained despite being attacked many times. There may be economic factors for the decision but in terms of 2030 climate change targets this is a positive story that both parts of the island could collaborate and shift freight from road to rail for the benefit of all. A good story where both sides gain”
- “It is not just about trade but also people and civil society and they must be part of talks and agreements”
- “Emphasis on the positive benefits of collaboration on issues like energy, sustainability, transport, and even health care. These are areas where there has been regular ongoing collaboration, but the likes of people travelling for operations in either jurisdiction often goes under the radar”
- “Exemption of journeys from Ireland to NI from the new ETA requirements would facilitate movement and co-operation”
- “More local and small group initiatives, visits etc. to enable familiarisation. Also more factual information and comparisons on cost of living, health and education as many myths abound”
- “Clarity regarding funding, particularly ESF funding and others, and clarity regarding the political context is crucial to support cooperation among civil society and research organisations on those issues most impacting on people and households across the island, and also on preparatory work for the social, sectoral and economic changes to come to meet climate targets”
- “Protocol might be amended to included free movement for people in the North and South who are 'lawfully resident' in either jurisdiction. - as well as for goods”

4. The East-West Dimension

4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter 58% of respondents reported having meetings with organisations in Great Britain (figure 8). 64% 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.

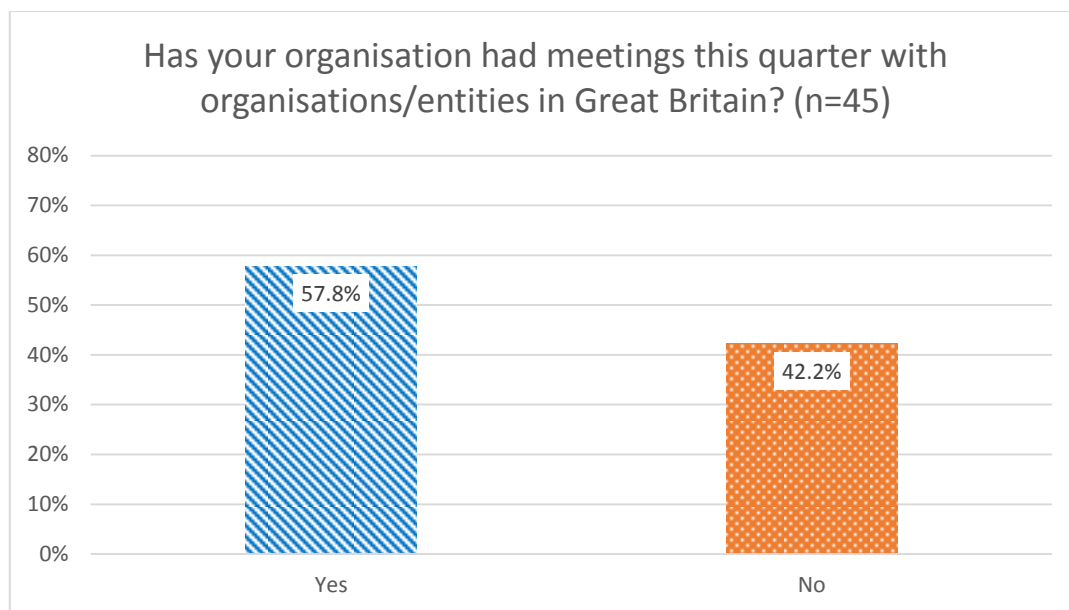


Figure 8

58% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (39%) or to a significant extent (19%). Such challenges were predominantly focussed on issues with regard to various funding schemes:

- “Loss of Interreg and Horizon opportunities”
- “Recent funding call for collaboration between Scotland and Ireland but only academia is eligible”
- “The peace fund is completely directed to north south relationship building. We have grave concerns with this”
- “Lack of investment”

This quarter 60% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), with the predominant areas of collaboration being education, human rights, community development, and arts and culture. At present 44% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain, however, 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 The EU or charitable foundations.

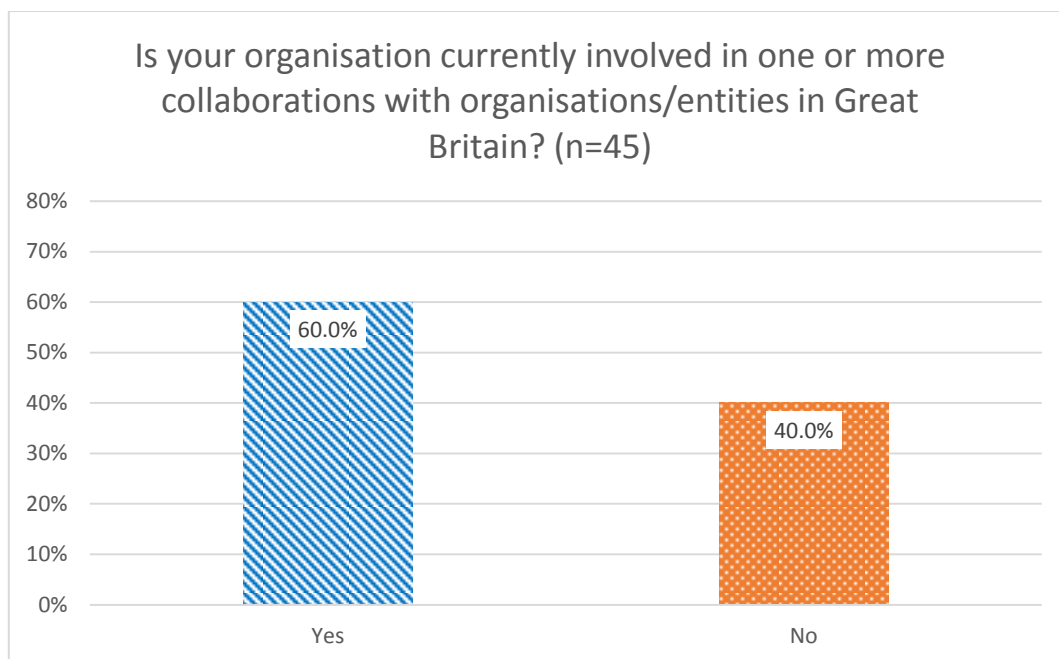


Figure 9

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=45), 51% of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 42% saying it has deteriorated (figure 10).

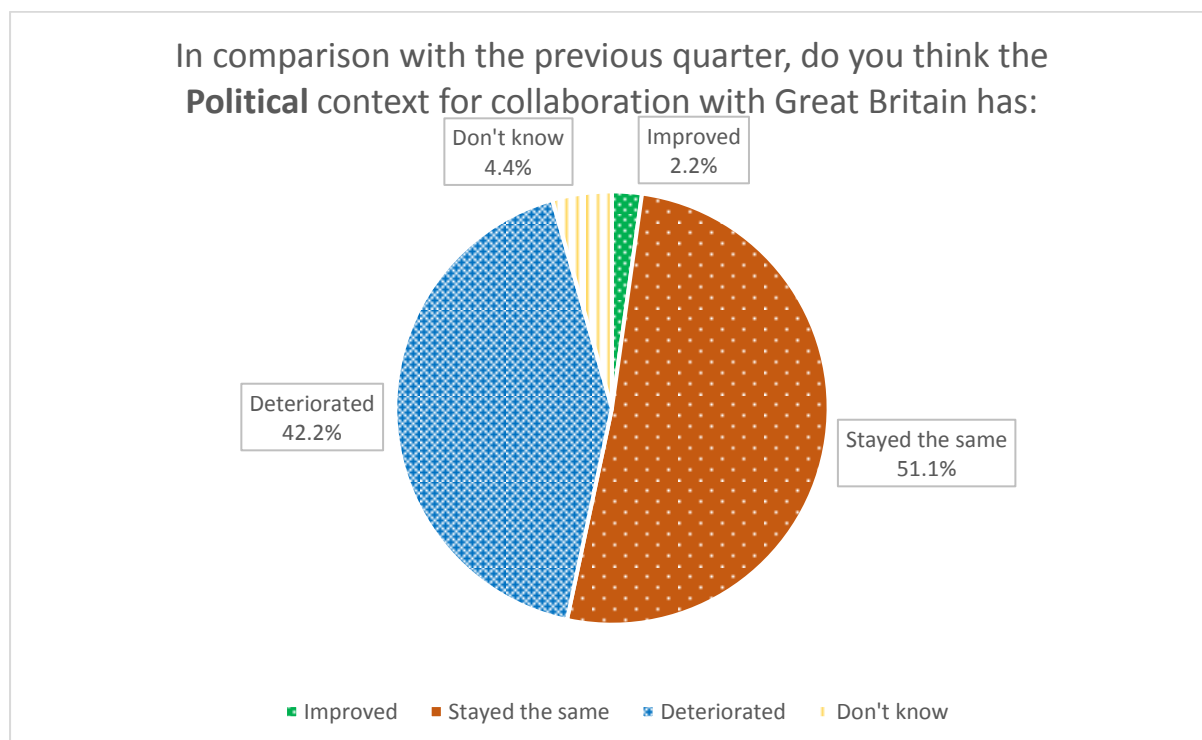


Figure 10

When asked to expand on their experiences of the political context for collaboration, respondents indicated that political instability and uncertainty at Westminster has been having a negative impact. Responses included:

- “Brexit and behaviour of British Government having very negative effect on East-West relationships”
- “Lack of political leadership over protocol - conservative leadership campaign and lame duck prime minister”
- “With the election of a new PM taking place for part of this quarter and a new cabinet now in place, little decisions could be made by organisations in Great Britain”
- “The continued lack of political movement towards resolving NI's ongoing challenges (e.g. NI protocol) is allowing these problems to persist and potentially become worse”
- “Uncertainty regarding fiscal policies, impact on trading and the uncertainty regarding the EU and the Northern Ireland protocol means a challenging political context”
- “UK immigration policy and position on Protocol is creating significant challenges for community organisations including our own”
- “Political instability at national and local levels has been stagnant”

62% of respondents report that the **social** context (figure 11) has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 16% saying it has deteriorated, and only 9% report that it has improved. Respondents have said that the “people working within rights and social justice work are working more closely together because of the political context becoming more negative. The hostile environment is a Political reality propelling social actors to more collaborative work” and that there is “narrow eligibility criteria for funding that is available for collaboration”.

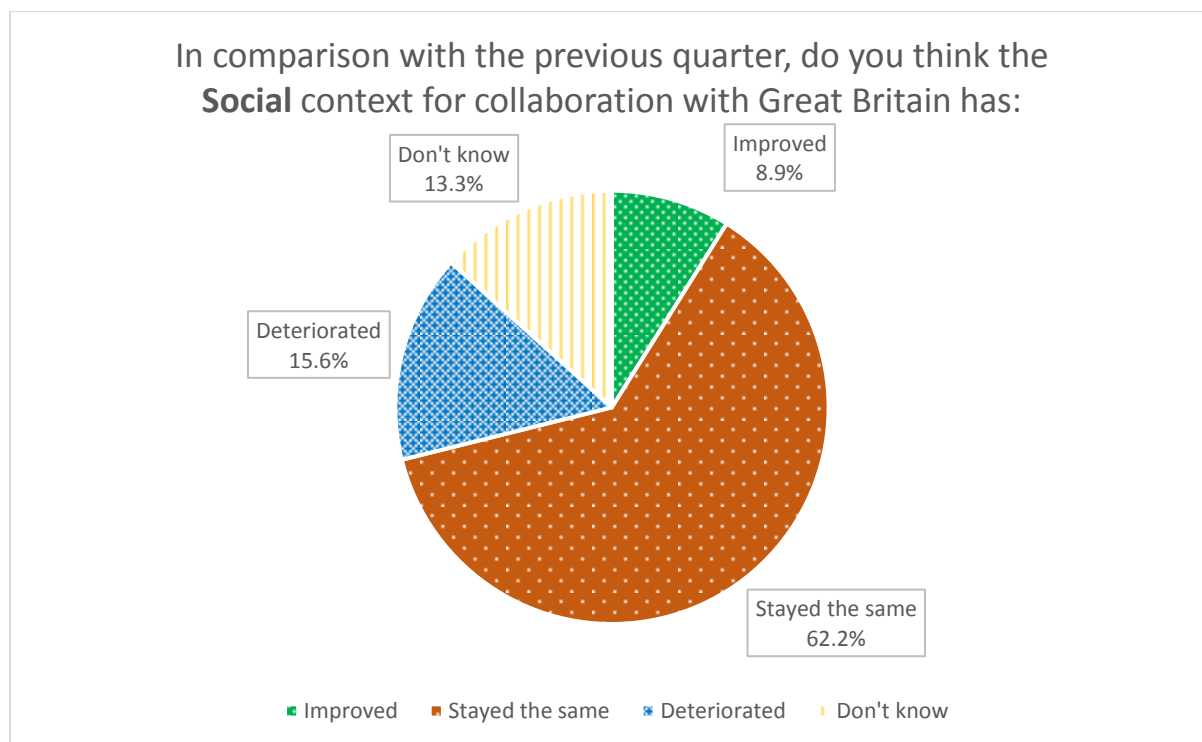


Figure 11

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 22% of respondents say that the regulatory context has deteriorated over the last quarter with 53% saying it has remained the same as the previous quarter. Notably, no respondent reported an improvement in the regulatory environment.

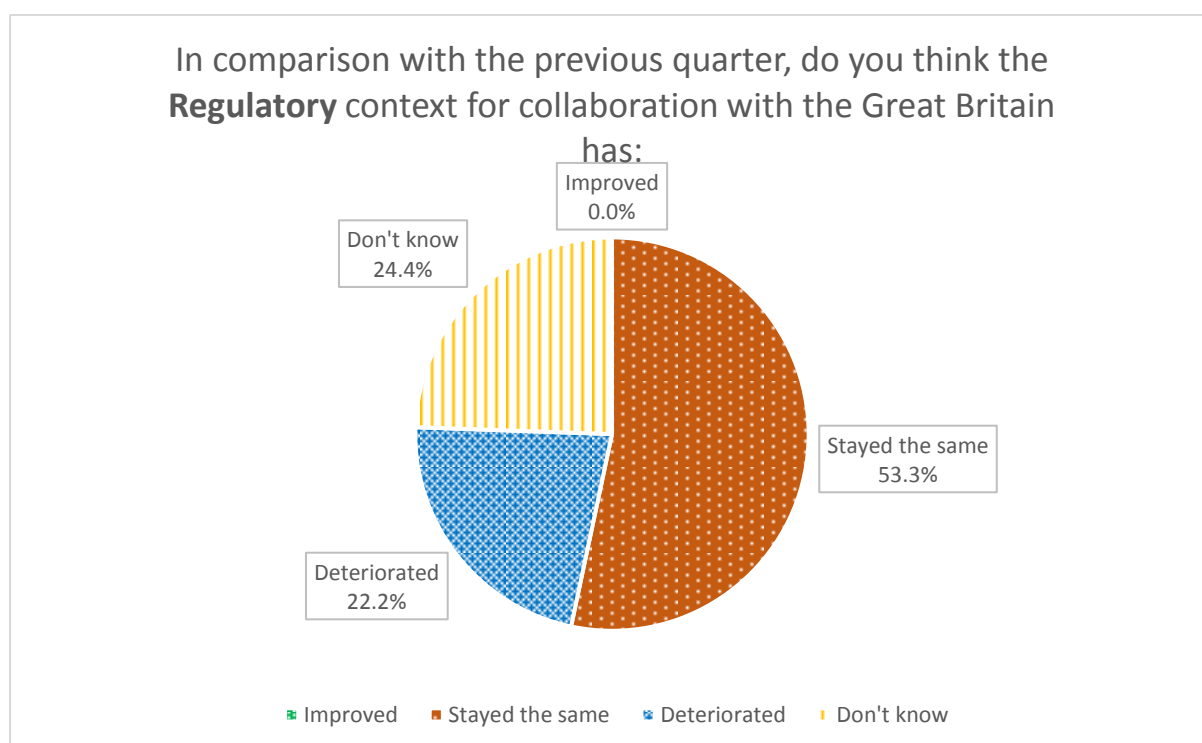


Figure 12

Respondents have said that the **regulatory** environment is primarily defined by its uncertainty which means that respondents are “not sure where we stand on regulations at the moment”.

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 62% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 24% of respondents say it has deteriorated and 13% saying they don’t know how or if the situation has changed. No responded has reported an improvement in the material context this quarter.

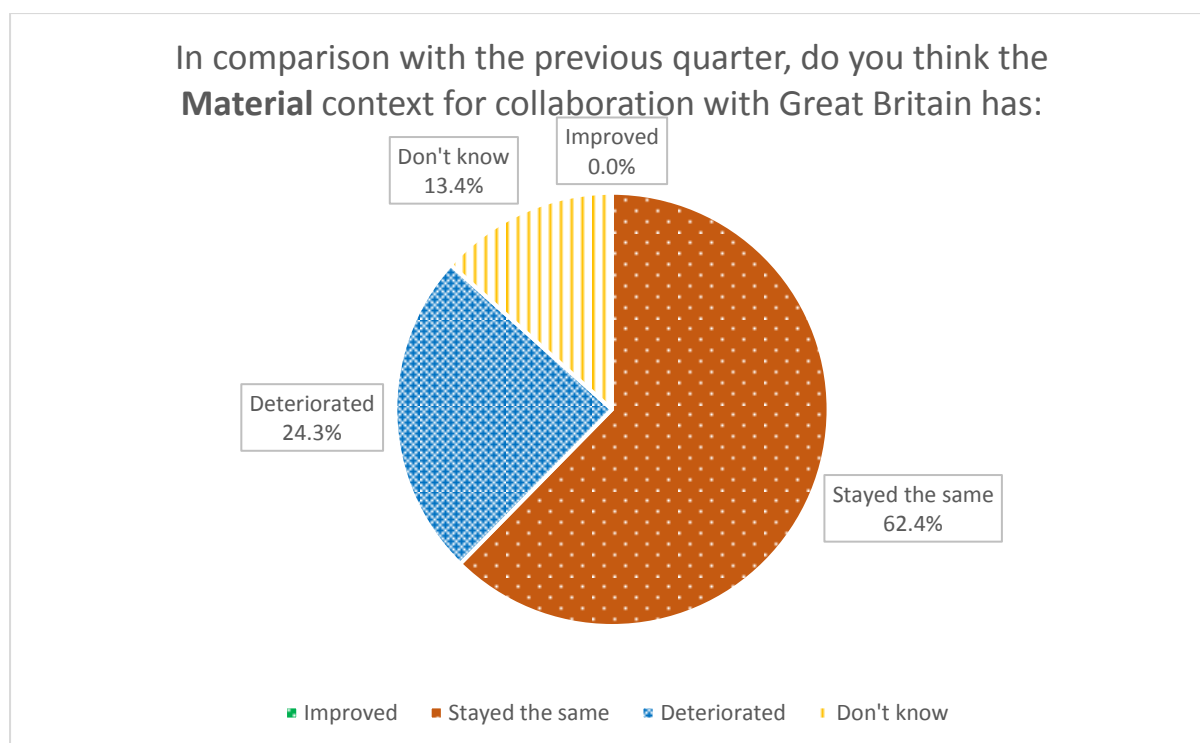


Figure 13

Respondents point toward inflation and regulatory uncertainty as having negative impacts.

- “Simple issues of reliability on deliveries reduced due to customs and regulatory confusion”
- “Still difficult to get some products from Great Britain to Ireland”
- “The impact of fiscal policies and rising inflation and rising energy prices will have a negative impact on the material context for collaboration”

4.3. East-West suggestions for improvement

In the East-West dimension there were concrete suggestions for improvements to agriculture, funding, and communications.

- “I think that the entire area of climate change is an area of common ground because of the Irish Sea and also the climate threats that are increasing. Both

islands share a similar climate and similar agricultural pattern so both can learn from each other and cooperate to ensure our future is protected from climate and other shocks.* The horse industry is an example of how both islands share a love of the sport and such collaboration should be enhanced”

- “Widen the eligibility criteria for funding for collaboration and also make non-profit orgs aware of funding opportunities available”
- “I think there needs to be a think tank/forum to challenge peace 4 on the lack of commitment or understanding of the importance to east west relationship building”
- “Tone down the rhetoric on media”

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). 64% of respondents reported that they believe the Protocol is, on balance, a good thing for North-South cooperation, compared to 29% who are unsure and only 7% who believe it is a bad thing. In terms of East-West relations, 44% believe the Protocol is, on balance, a good thing for East-West cooperation, with 40% unsure, and 16% reporting it is a bad thing. These figures show that there is a decrease in outright support for the protocol on the previous quarter. This change is not resulting in respondents being negative toward it, but rather expressing uncertainty as to whether it is good or bad for North-South cooperation.

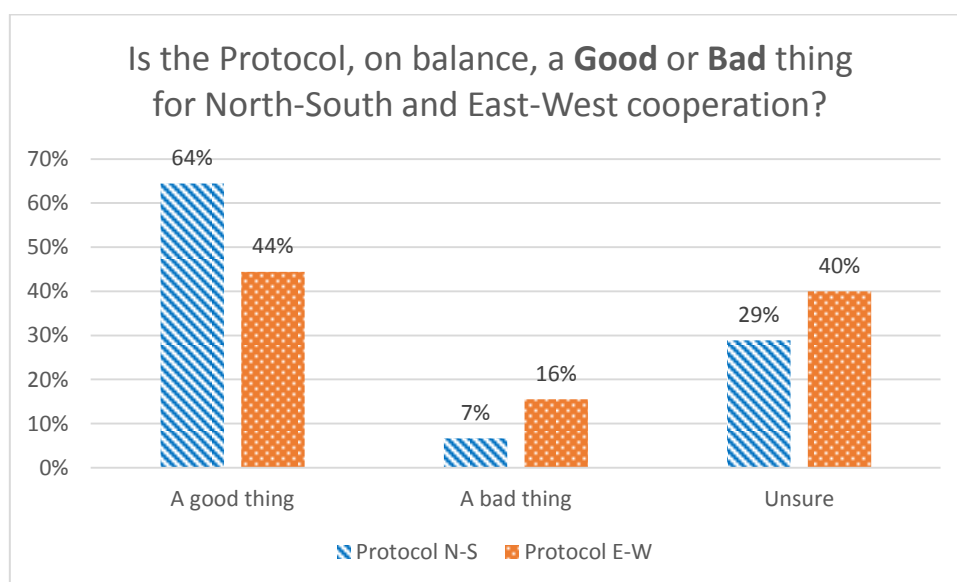


Figure 14

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.

- *“Relationships on the island are in perpetual motion similar to other parts of the world. Politics is changing quickly and we now see how international events in Ukraine have an impact even on this island. The work of conflict resolution must be continuous and improved to react to the changing context all the time”*
- *“An insufficient level of attention has been given to the NI situation in recent years which means that there may be slippage in the confidence building measures to ensure peace and non-violence”*
- *“The protocol (although flawed) is necessary due to the decision of the UK to leave the EU. The protocol is positive for North South Cooperation as it allows enterprise in the North to access EU markets and should promote economic growth in the region. In terms of East West cooperation, the protocol is the agreed mechanism to manage the relationship between to UK and EU, and has been ratified by the UK parliament. To this end it can be positive to manage and support that very damaged working relationship”*

Conclusion

The central theme emerging from this quarter’s survey are concern around political instability both in Northern Ireland as the executive remains absent, and in Westminster as a result of the turnover of Prime Ministers and Cabinet Personnel of recent months.

This is manifesting into prolonged uncertainty for cross-border organisations that fear new administrations may make changes to the Protocol with which they have only recently got to grips. This is having a particularly detrimental impact on the regulatory environment, both North-South and East-West with no respondents reporting an improvement in the last quarter (and indeed for the last 6 months in the North-South dimension).

Finally, respondents have been very emphatic in highlighting challenges in accessing funding both North-South and East-West, there is clearly a need for improved communication and training for how to access and apply for funding, an issue which all authorities must take responsibility for to ensure that cooperation and coordination across these islands can be maintained and developed.

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