

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

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

Briefing on the findings from the 8th
Quarterly Survey (October- December
2022)

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February 2023

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

Once more, at the time of writing this report, the uncertainty around Northern Ireland's political institutions remains unresolved. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Chris Heaton-Harris, avoided calling an election in December to try and restore power-sharing, instead choosing to give the UK and EU negotiators more time to resolve contentious issues around the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland so that the DUP could find cause to re-enter the Executive. The Northern Ireland Assembly has not been sitting since February 2022, while the 6-month interim period introduced in the New Decade, New Approach agreement that allowed incumbent Executive ministers to act lapsed, meaning that Northern Ireland is currently governed through a combination of expanded civil service authority, and occasional intervention from Westminster. This resulted in delays to heating payments designed to combat the cost of living crisis, and increasing crisis in the healthcare service. The Northern Ireland Protocol Bill is currently on hold in order to give negotiators more space to agree to solutions to Protocol issues without increasing tensions. From the UK Government side, those negotiations have been taking place under the Prime Ministership of Rishi Sunak, and that change of leadership may have led to a difference in tone and approach to the outstanding issues.

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that responses to this 8th Quarterly Survey indicated that the political context for North-South and East-West cooperation had remained more or less the same in the final quarter of 2022 as compared to the previous quarter. There is perhaps a sense that the majority of respondents are adopting a "wait and see" approach to what the current state of health of relations between the UK Government and the EU may be, and whether the changes in UK Government personnel may alter the prospects of finding resolution to the issues related to the Protocol's implementation. This state of affairs did not provide the stability required for civic society organisations and local authorities on the island of Ireland to collaborate with counterparts within and across these islands with confidence, even if it did not undermine the political context further through any major breakdown in relations between the UK and EU.

Given the current focus on resolving issues relating to trade and movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, no real progress has been made by the UK Government and the EU in the establishment of structures for engagement with civic society organisations. These will be essential 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, and on the totality of relations encompassed by the 1998 Good Friday/Belfast Agreement.

This remains the core objective steering the Centre for Cross Border Studies in all its work in relation to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union, which includes its convening of the [Ad-Hoc Group for North-South and East-West Cooperation](#). As part of those efforts in the last quarter of 2022, the Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, Steve Baker (a former chair of the European Research Group), [met with members of the Ad-Hoc Group](#) to discuss issues related to North-South and East-West cooperation and mobility, while earlier meetings with the European Economic and Social Committee's EU-UK Follow-up Committee and its President, Jack O'Connor informed the [report](#) published by that Committee in January 2023, which stated:

In order for the Protocol to be implemented in a way that does not undermine the necessary conditions for north-south cooperation, as per Article 11 of the Protocol, it is absolutely vital that CSOs involved in such cooperation are included within a formal and effective structure for engagement with the mechanisms established by the Protocol, namely the Specialised Committee and the Joint Consultative Working Group (p.48).

Following the end of the transition period and the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland from the 1st of January 2021, **these Quarterly Surveys by the Centre for Cross Border Studies have, 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 eighth round of this survey, 39 of 41 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 31st December 2022, gathering 41 responses in total. 95% (39) reported that they completed the survey in the last quarter while 5% (2) are new respondents.

Of the 41 responses to the survey, 37% were based in the Republic of Ireland and 49% based in Northern Ireland, with 15% having a presence on both sides of the border (figure 1).

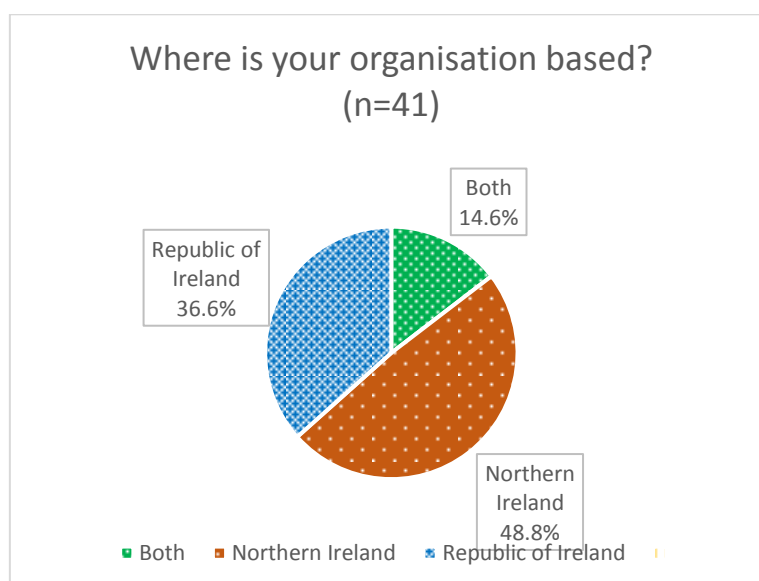


Figure 1

3. The North-South dimension

3.1. Contact and collaboration

In this quarter (Oct-Dec 2022) 81% of respondents have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 2). For 54% of respondents their level of contact this quarter has been at the same level as the last and has increased for 39% of respondents.

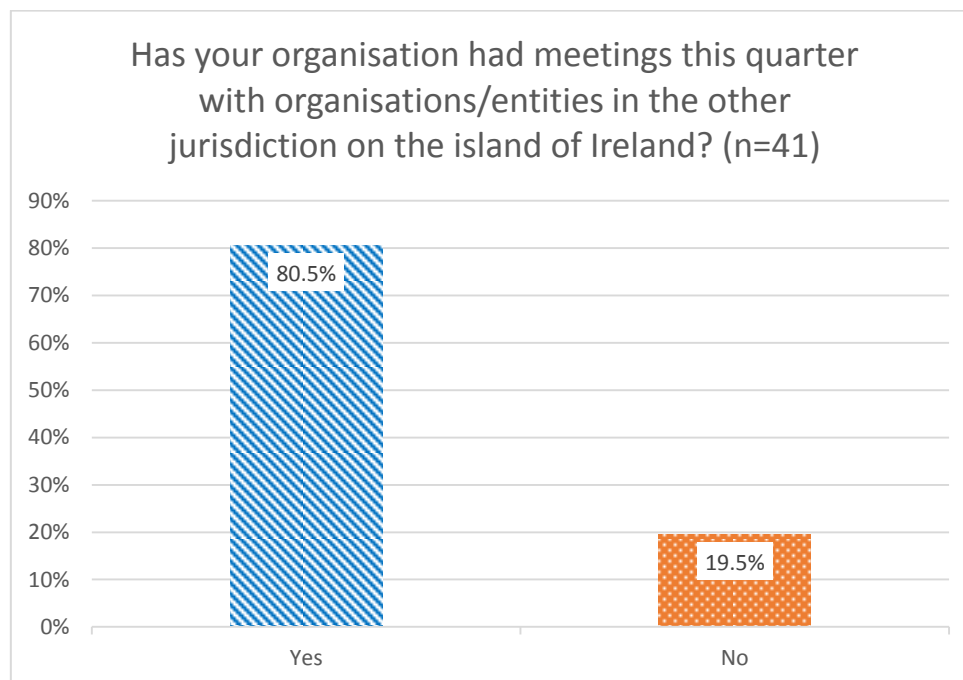


Figure 2

72% of respondents reported that meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction discussed challenges to cross-border cooperation either on occasion (55%) or to a significant extent (27%). The nature of these challenges were varied, touching on concerns around funding, cross-border cooperation, the pending introduction of Electronic Travel Authorisation for cross border travel for non-visa nationals, and the absence of an executive at Stormont.

- “The conversations have primarily revolved around issues facing cross-border communities post-Brexit, but we have discussed some difficulty in obtaining funding for projects”
- “Increasing number of European researchers/scientists are relocating out of UK? Northern Ireland as a result of Brexit and visa and residency issues. This is impacting on shared research projects”
- “Cross border co-operation for peace projects and the specific challenges around differentials in employment law when employing someone from the south under a northern Contract. Key issues around rights of asylum seekers who are recognized in UK as having right to remain, but when looking to register with university courses run in the north but accredited by southern universities, they were

treated as international students. It was a difficult issue and remains unresolved - they paid full fees”

- “Electronic Travel Authorisations referenced at meeting of NIHRC, ECNI and IHREC”
- “Extra requirements facing Haulage Licence holders. Difficulties for Frontier Workers who do not have Irish or British Passports.”
- “The main obstacles discussed were cross-border insurance, cross-border data, and the introduction of the ETA system”

At present 81% 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 economic development, education, and community development. Over half (67%) 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.

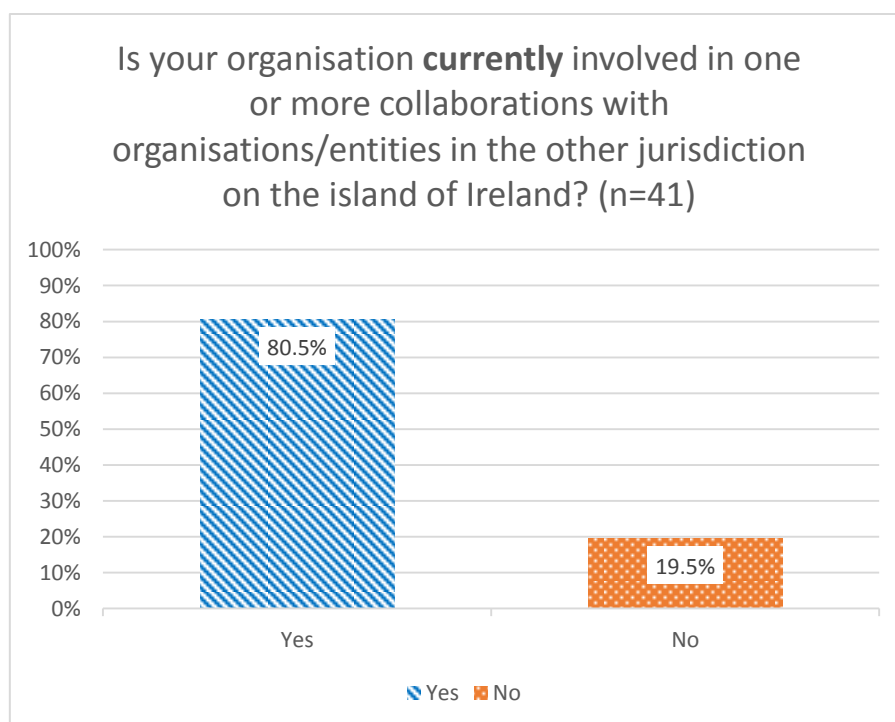


Figure 3

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=41), 76% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has stayed more or less the same since the previous quarter, with 15% saying it has deteriorated (figure 4).

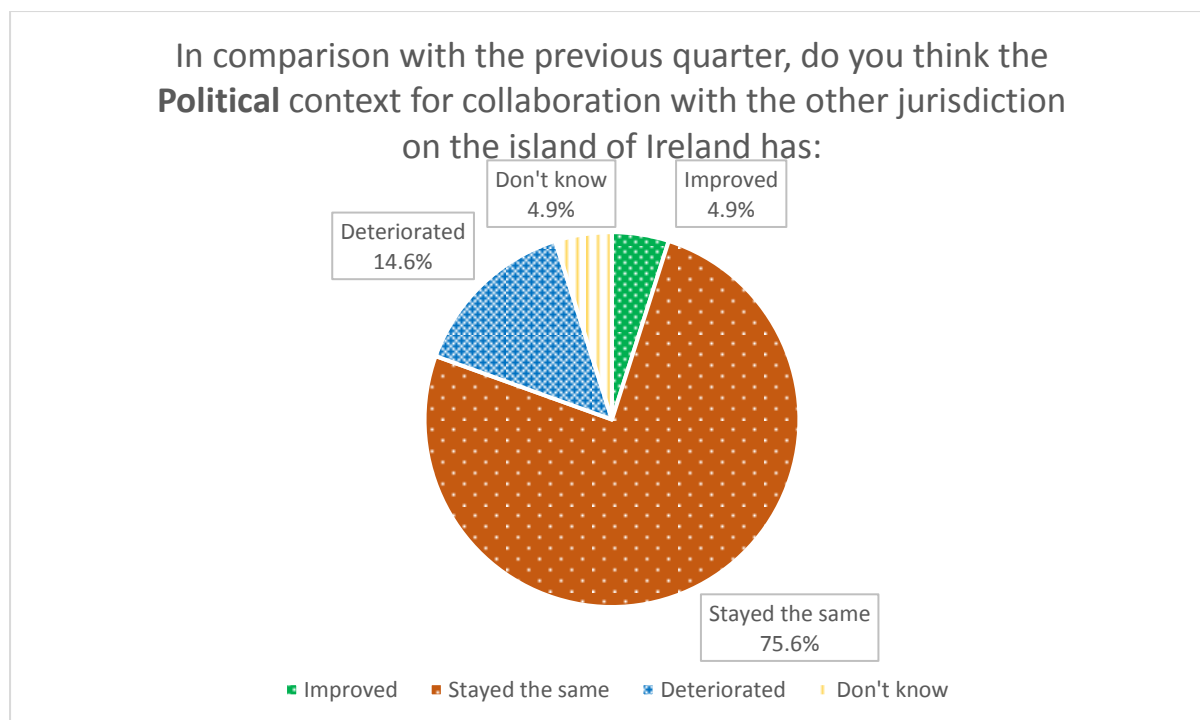


Figure 4

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

- “The continuing political uncertainty owing to the protocol and lack of an Executive does overshadow things”
- “We work well with other Local Councils but they are at a standstill because of the lack of an Executive”
- “The lack of a devolve administration in NI means there is a continuing hiatus in cooperation at highest levels, which impacts at regional and local levels as a consequence. The funding opportunities through Peace Plus, Shared Island and Reconciliation Fund mitigate the consequences of this political hiatus to some context by providing opportunities for dialogue, interaction and development”
- “Protocol / Brexit and fall of Stormont all issues on negative side, Shared Island approach is a positive political development”
- “Recent series of surveys North /South border poll speculates on voter positions in advance of political proposals .Shows that the political process vacuum means space is taken by speculation which can be divisive”

Turning to the **social** context (figure 5): 7% of respondents say that the social context has deteriorated since the previous quarter while 12% report it has improved. However, the predominant response is that it has remained the same (78%).

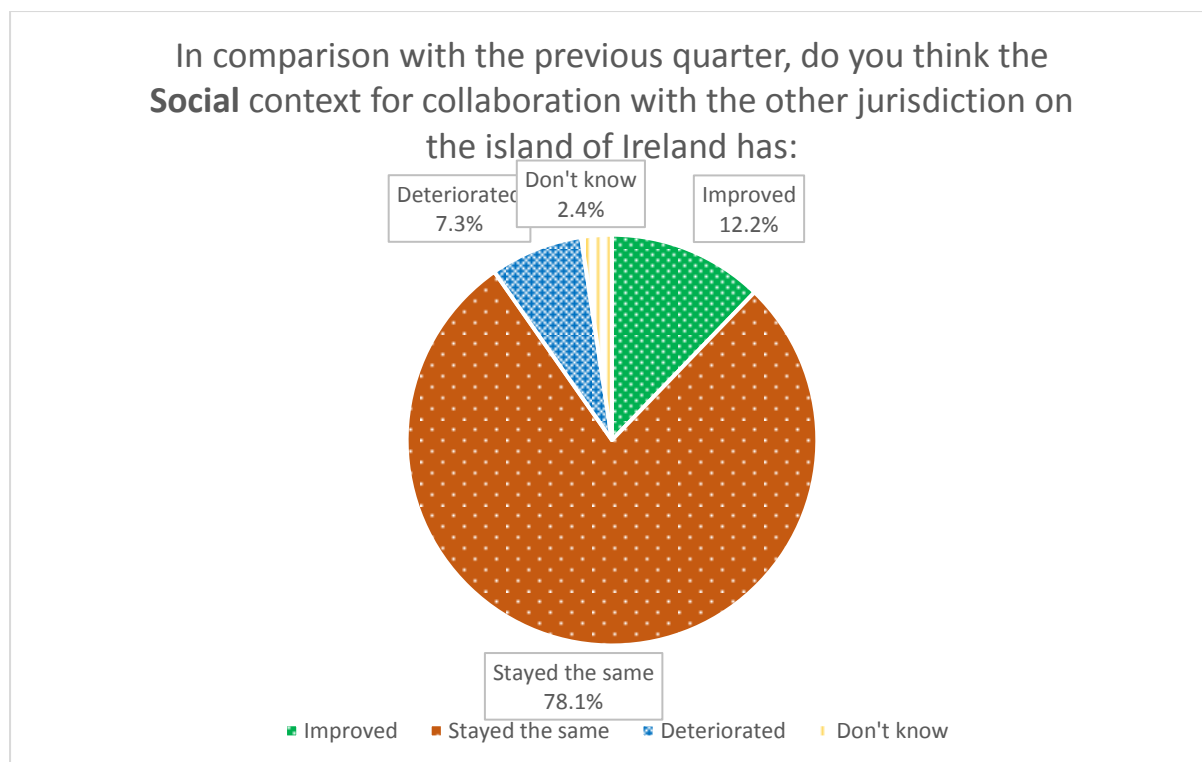


Figure 5

When asked to elaborate, respondents mention “There does seem to be more negativity among Loyalist communities owing to the NI Protocol” and that “Ireland residents reluctant to travel to Northern Ireland”.

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 56% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 27% saying it has deteriorated. This is the third consecutive quarter in which no respondent has reported an improvement in the North-South regulatory context.

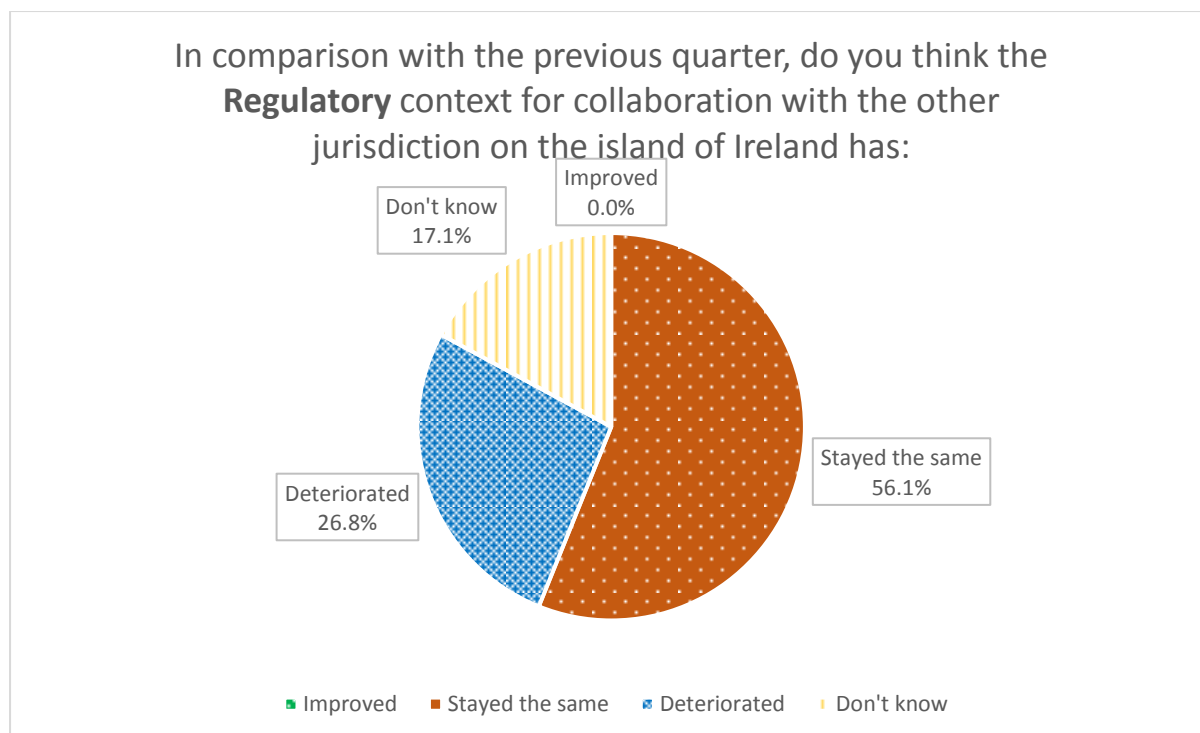


Figure 5

When asked to expand on their experiences of the **regulatory** context for collaboration, respondents pointed to concerns around potential regulatory divergence between the UK and Ireland and its impact on cross-border projects:

- “The Retained EU Law Bill currently in passage at Westminster is giving rise to concerns about increasing divergence of legislation in that it is proposed that much EU-derived domestic legislation would be automatically repealed at the end of 2023 unless preserved by Ministers”
- “DUP reluctance on Protocol discussions remains key issue”
- “I think we are only now discovering more and more anomalies in the regulations between NI and RoI which impede collaboration”
- “Unsure because this depends to an extent on the outworkings of Brexit, of which others may have better knowledge of the practical changes being experienced. As a case in point there is the fact that Peace Plus is being delayed and that may be a consequence of difficulties between EU and UK on future arrangements (which could impact on a joint funding and delivery programme such as Peace Plus)”

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 66% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter, with 17% reporting that it has deteriorated since the last quarter, and 10% saying they don't know.

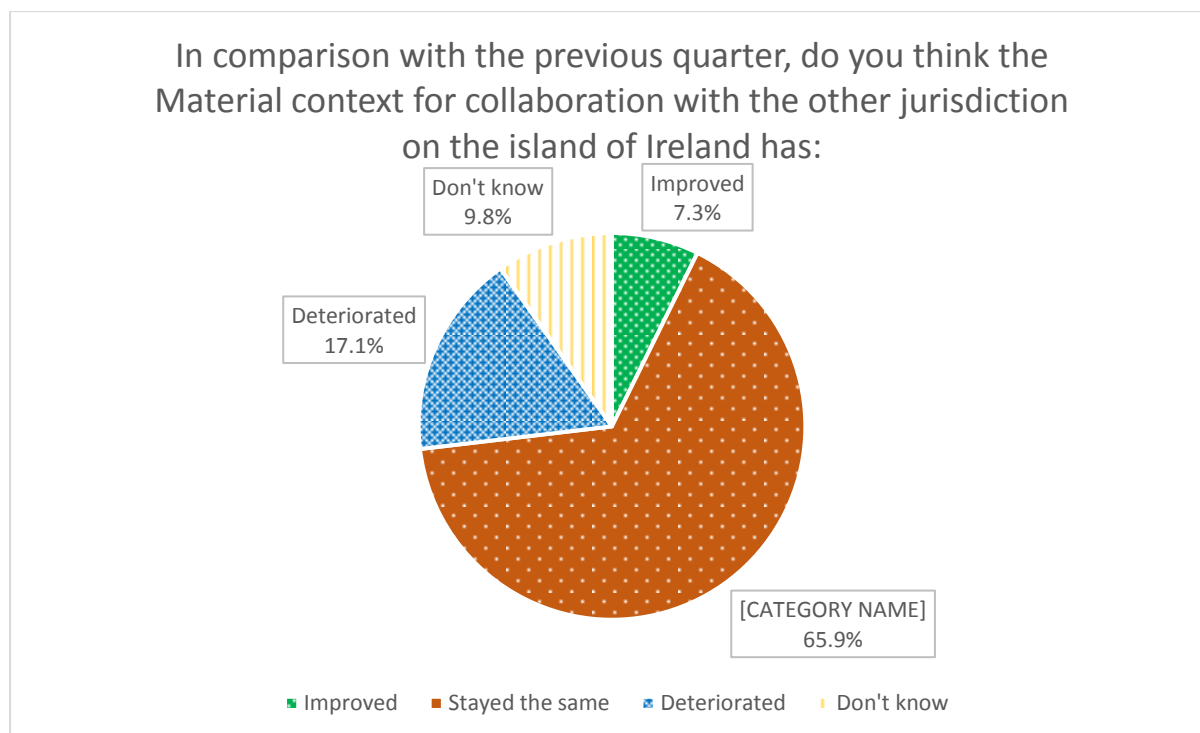


Figure 7

When asked to elaborate on their experiences of the **material** context for collaboration, respondents state that “Brexit realities beginning to hit home”. However, one also notes that “Businesses working their way through protocol admin to better effect”.

3.3. North-South suggestions for improvement

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 transport infrastructure, relations with the Irish Government, and student mobility.

- “Transport communication by rail between north and south needs development and is a barrier to cooperation and interaction including by rail freight”
- “More support from the local Councils for the Voluntary Community sector who will do the work for free”
- “My community takes offence with the Government of the Republic of Ireland. And we believe they have no understanding or compassion for the Unionist community. I would like them to answer that statement”
- “The debate on Constitutional change on the island should be encouraged and supported by both the Irish Government and the British Government, by establishing a Citizens Assembly on the future of the island of Ireland”
- “Explore student exchanges at all levels (tertiary, secondary esp) using Erasmus etc models”
- “The context should improve when devolved institutions and bodies such as NSMC are operating again. It would greatly help to improve the context of N-S Cooperation were the NI and UK Govts to introduce an initiative similar to the Reconciliation Fund. Having a more defined, promoted and open connection on

the possibilities of linking Shared Island and UK Shared Prosperity and other UK regional funds, would help many contexts, including enabling joint initiatives and high level infrastructure programmes, and to promote better working and understanding on common challenges. Peace Plus will help this to an extent, however this programme is time limited and UK and Irish Govts need in time to consider how they will operate more closely in future on joint issues, including cross-border development etc. where there are no political sensitivities”

4. The East-West Dimension

4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter 66% of respondents reported having meetings with organisations in Great Britain (figure 8). 63% of respondents say that this is the same level of contact as the last quarter, and 20% reported that their level of contact had increased on the previous quarter.

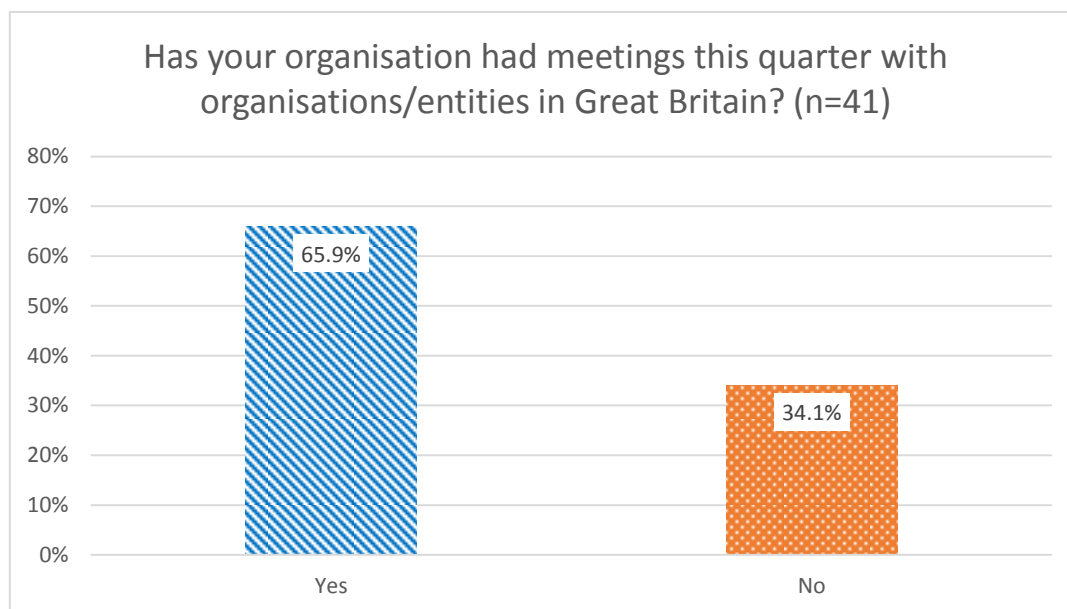


Figure 8

63% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (44%) or to a significant extent (19%). Such challenges were predominantly focussed on issues with regard to various funding schemes and potential implications of regulatory divergence:

- “Access of UK entities to EU funds
- “The introduction of a Visa for travellers into NI”
- “Although part of the UK, Public administration in N. Ireland is very different to that in England & Wales . A key example is the role of local authorities and their relationship & linkage to Government; the impact of front-line work being within ' non-devolved' matters. e.g. immigration including asylum seeking and refugee

community integration. The continuing 'fake news' on protocol holding centre stage in N. Ireland Political Party debate”

- “Difficulties relating to finding networking arrangements within a Europe-wide consortium of universities”
- “Managing environmental projects where there are different operating contexts and policies between England, NI and ROI”
- “Divergence of legal frameworks has been discussed”

This quarter 51% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), with the predominant areas of collaboration being economic development, human rights, and peace and reconciliation. At present only 37% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain and just under half (43%) 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.

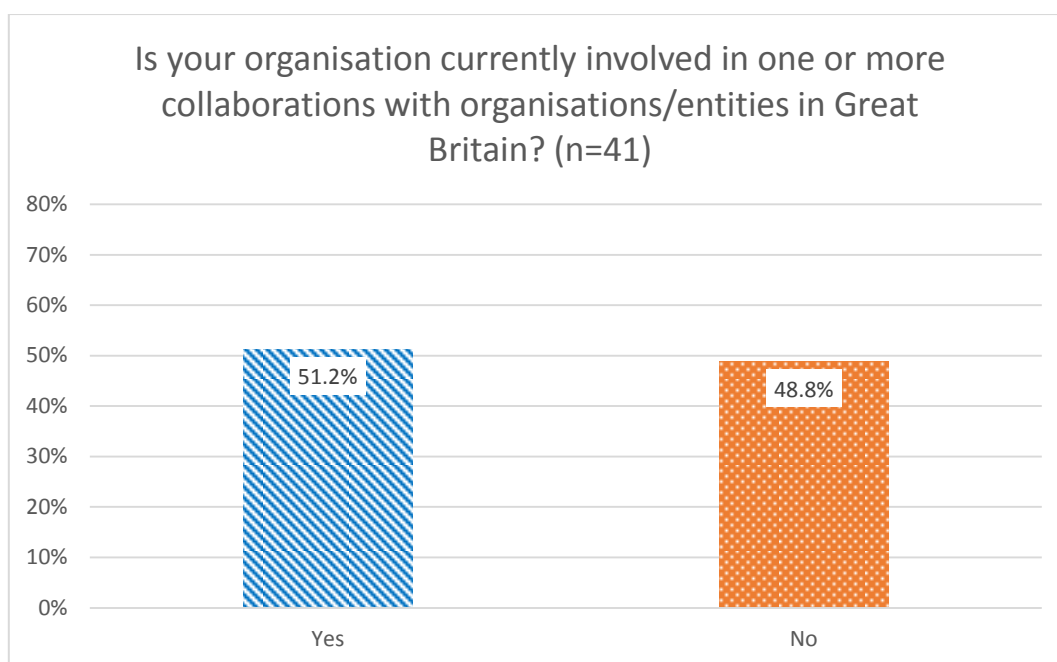


Figure 9

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=41), 71% of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 12% saying it has deteriorated and the same proportion saying it has improved (figure 10).

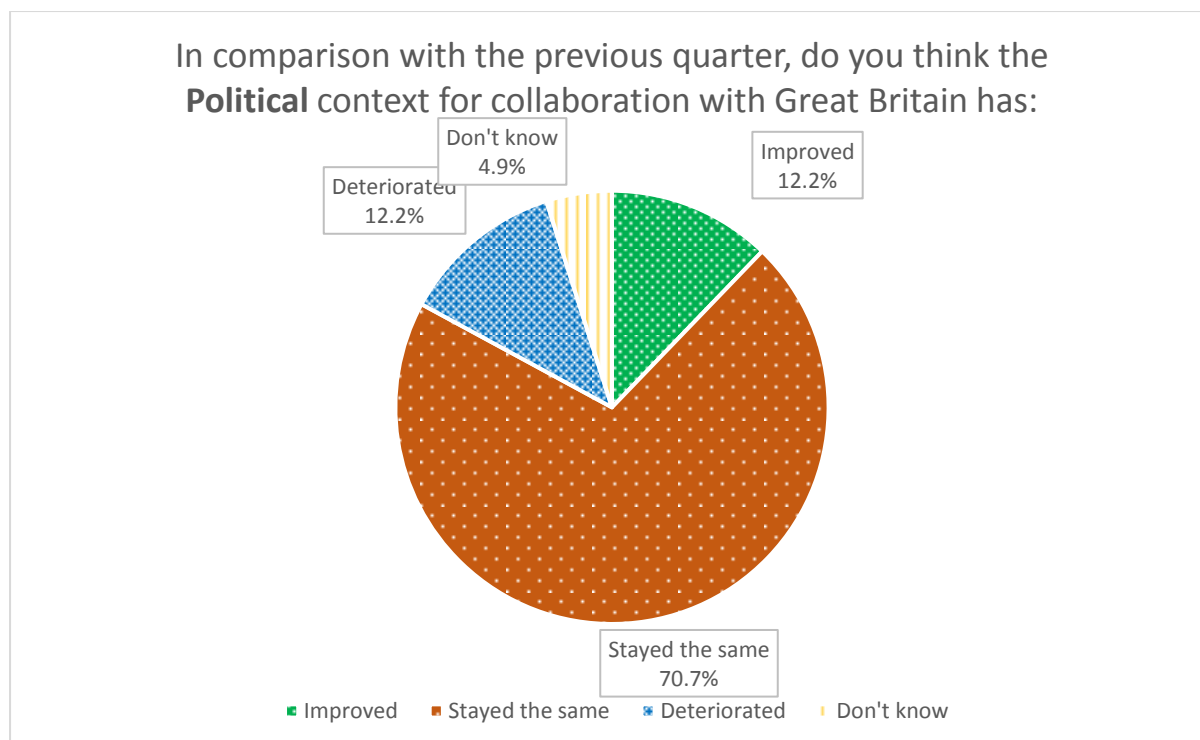


Figure 10

When asked to expand on their experiences of the political context for collaboration, respondents indicated that stability at Westminster has given cause for optimism but that continuing uncertainty around the protocol remains an issue:

- “We are all living and working in constantly shifting and increasing sinking sand with no sense that the government or political leaders have the capacity to agree a solution - we are drifting to an exit door with no idea if it will open or where it will take us. Still we rise .. every day and do what needs to be done. it cannot continue like this.”
- “Better relations between Ireland and UK since Sunak became PM”
- “New Prime Minister and Ministers should lead to some stability and clarity on policy”
- “Protocol / Brexit / lack of local government at Stormont, lack of will by UK government to engage constructively with EU until recently”
- “The continuing obstacles with regard to Brexit and the NI Protocol impact”

76% of respondents report that the **social** context (figure 11) has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 12% saying it has deteriorated, and only 5% report that it has improved. Respondents have said that the “Cost of living crisis” is having a societal impact in that “focus on cost of living and post covid has meant groups are inward looking and less likely to focus on looking up and out”.

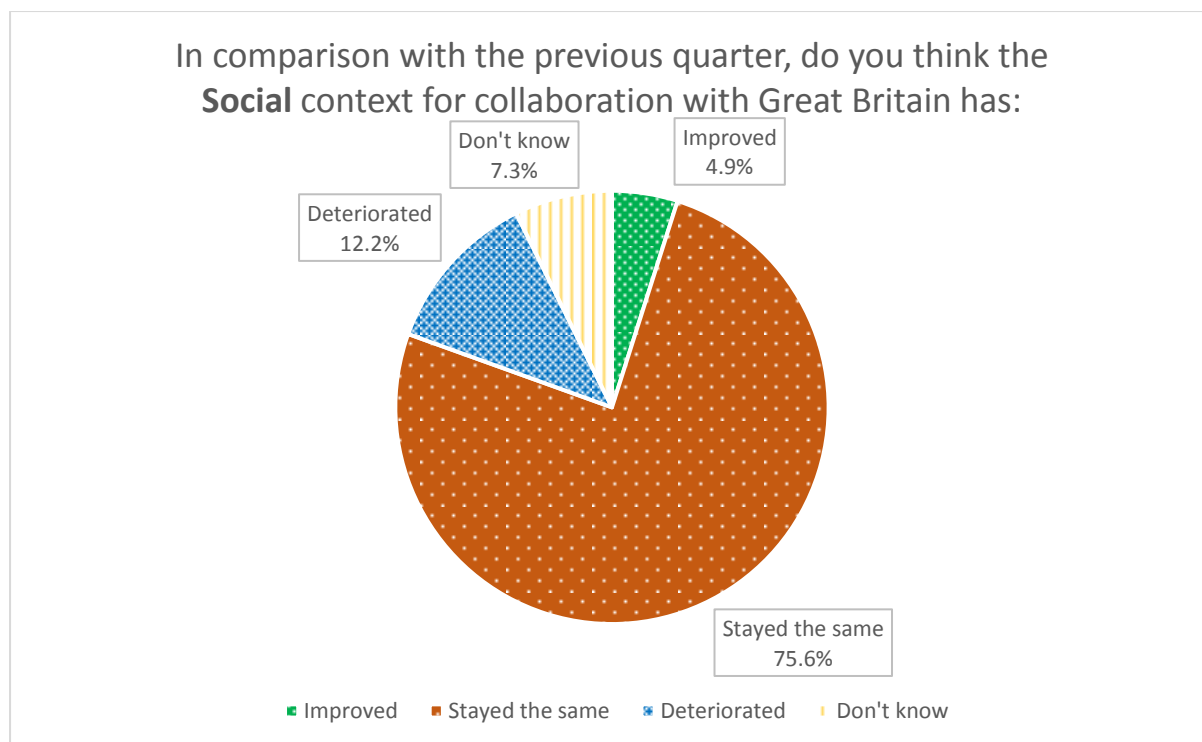


Figure 11

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 68% of respondents say that the regulatory context has deteriorated over the last quarter with 22% saying it has deteriorated.

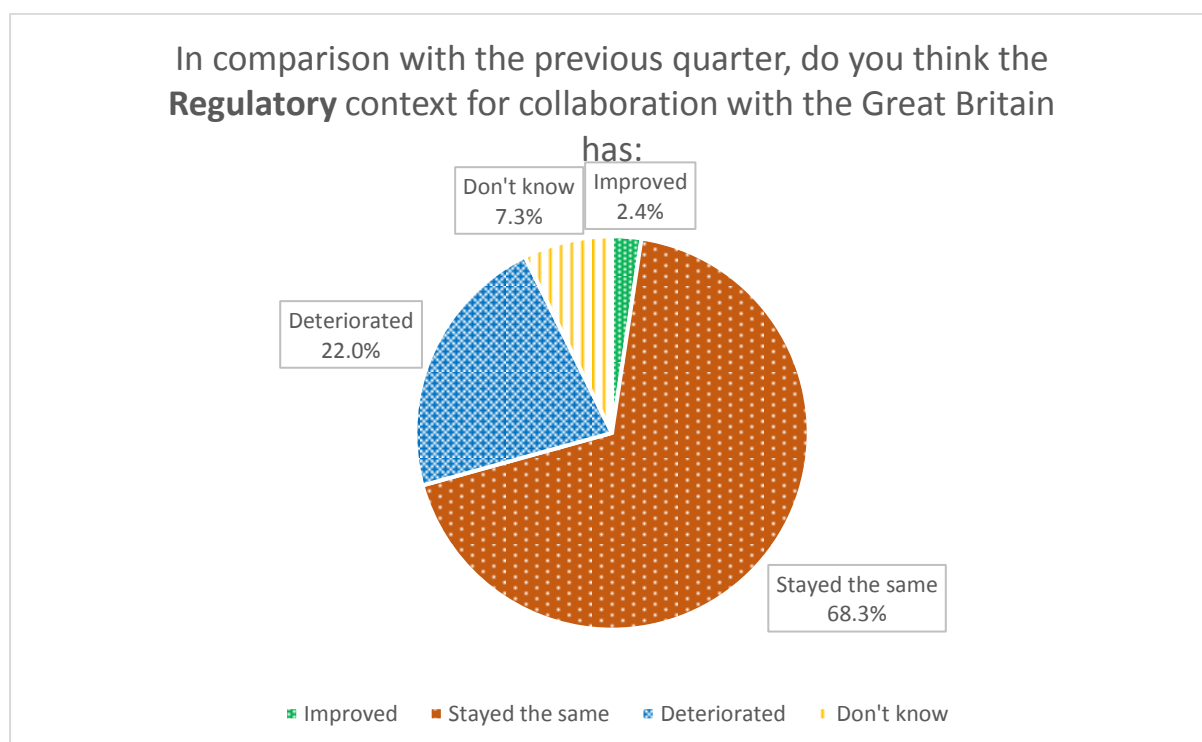


Figure 12

Respondents have said that there are concerns around the impact of **regulatory** divergence between the UK and Ireland/EU, saying “we are increasingly 'out of regulation' watching deregulation increase on the other island (less so in Scotland) ; out-of democratic-

governance which underpins the authority of local regulation; out of EU regulation” and that “Retained EU Law Bill may result in greater divergence between NI and GB due to requirements of Protocol, depending on progress on Protocol Bill & negotiations also”.

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 76% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 12% of respondents say it has deteriorated and 10% saying they don’t know how or if the situation has changed.

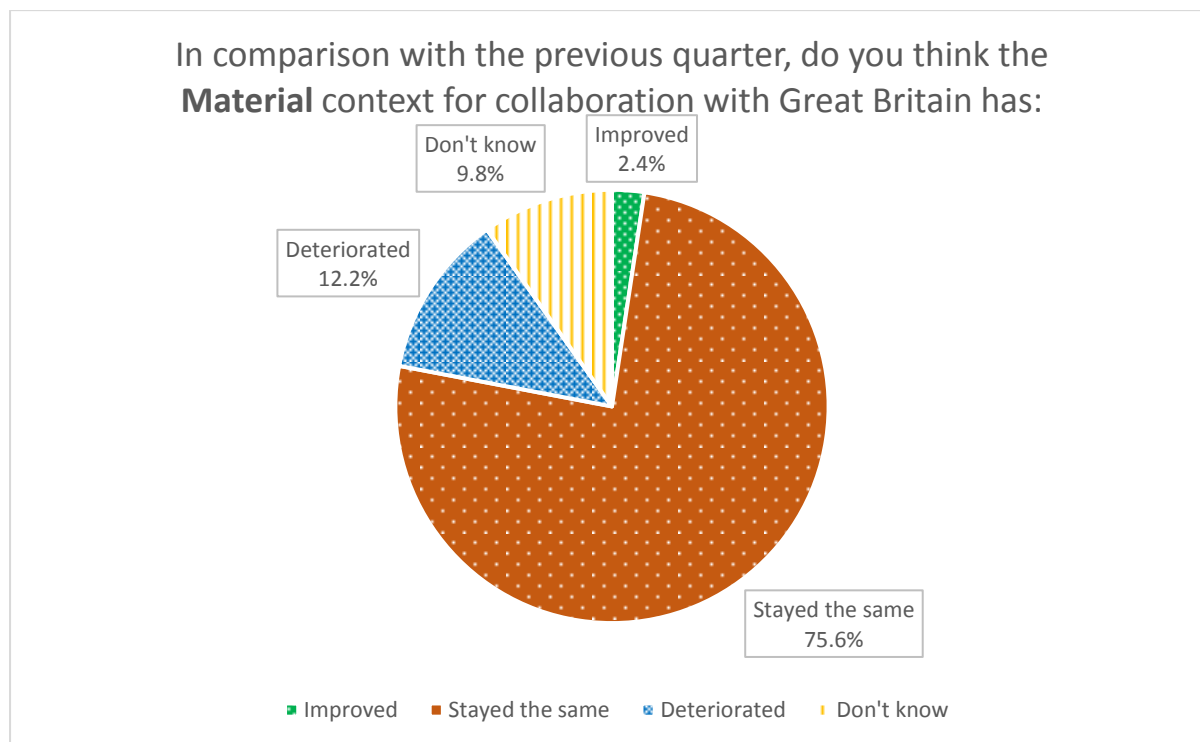


Figure 13

Respondents point toward inflation and the protocol as having negative impacts.

- “notice when ordering goods some are not delivering to NI or are charging larger rates”
- “Inflation is the key issue; we have to fly to conferences - increasingly it is easier to get to/ from GB (outside London) via Dublin”
- “The continuing obstacles with regard to Brexit and the NI Protocol impact”

4.3. East-West suggestions for improvement

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

- “Sport, tourism, culture, art, education are areas that work and can grow between east-west. An understanding of the history between both islands needs to be continuously developed so that each side has an appreciation of the other perspective. The centenary projects have been an important addition in this

regard as were the 1WW studies. This in depth analysis and history must be grown. the 1WW is an example of where the north and south can gradually come together in terms of understanding the 36th Division and how the commemoration in later years was based on sectarian rather than personal memory”

- “Demonstration of good practice projects, space to learn and explore from other 3rd sector organisations”
- “Increased funding for mobility projects involving teaching staff”

5. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland

The Protocol has now been in effect (to some extent) for almost 2 years and we have asked respondents whether they believe it is, on balance, broadly a good or bad thing for North-South and East-West cooperation (Figure 14). 68% of respondents reported that they believe the Protocol is, on balance, a good thing for North-South cooperation, compared to 20% who are unsure and only 12% who believe it is a bad thing. In terms of East-West relations, 56% believe the Protocol is, on balance, a good thing for East-West cooperation, with 32% unsure, and 12% reporting it is a bad thing.

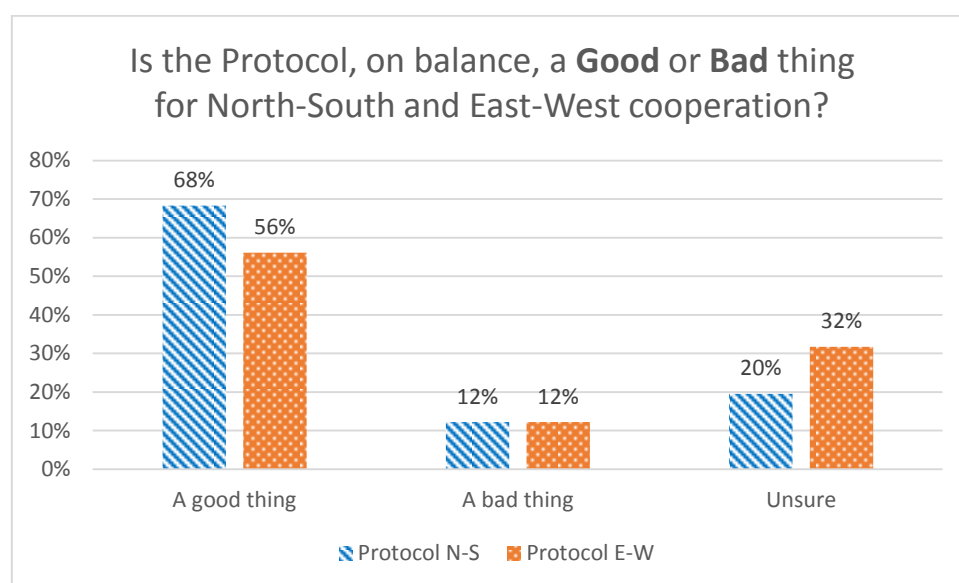


Figure 14

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.

- “Continue the confidence building between Nth and Sth through the soft power, art, culture, language, sport, religion, history and environment. Continue to

develop real links to eliminate old barriers on the island. Go for a strategic project like a rail connection north south and encourage tourism/business between the parts of the island (rail freight was a good link in the past that has been dismantled). Unblock the narrative around the Troubles by continuing to study and collate and build reconciliation by respecting the views on all sides though often appearing hard line and radical”

- *“We need proper engagement and negotiation between UK & EU and a resolution to Protocol issues, we need an end to the UK Bill that will replace elements of Protocol, We need Stormont up and running again effectively”*
- *“Arts must be prioritized”*
- *“More ‘systems thinking’ needed to bring some understanding to bring some order to the current chaos”*

Conclusion

The uncertainty that pervaded last quarter’s survey as a result of instability at Westminster is notably absent in this quarter, which is to be welcomed. However, we are seeing evidence of a more specific concern rather than the broad anxiety we have seen in previous quarters. Specifically, after the initial generalised disruptions arising from Brexit, it is becoming much clearer how intertwined the UK and Irish regulatory landscape was while both were in the EU, the Retained Law Bill has focussed attention among cross border organisations to the potentially profound implications of divergence in a much more specific sense.

Also a prominent feature this quarter is the increasing awareness of the pending introduction of Electronic Travel Authorisation is perhaps promising given how profoundly it will impact on South-North travel for non-visa nationals, However, there is still incredibly limited information coming from Westminster as to how and when this scheme will be rolled out and organisations in the border region and across the island of Ireland need time to prepare.

Finally, in terms of the broader contexts for cooperation and collaboration both North-South and East-West, we are seeing a continuation of the trend that a deteriorated environment is becoming normalised. This should not be allowed to continue. All stakeholders, and especially the governments in the UK and Ireland and the EU need to step up and take concrete steps to improve conditions for cooperation and collaboration across these islands. As respondents have stated, this requires increased access to funding, exemptions for mobility within the island, and for the Executive to return to Stormont.

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