

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

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

Briefing on the findings from the 10<sup>th</sup>  
Quarterly Survey (April – June 2023)

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

### 1. Introduction

Responses from civic society organisations and local authorities on the island of Ireland to this 10<sup>th</sup> quarterly survey on North-South and East-West cooperation point to a dual legacy of events from the previous quarter (January to March 2023). There was an overall sense of stability in April to June, resulting from the agreement by the UK Government and European Union on the Windsor Framework, which had led to the most positive outlook from respondents to our previous quarterly survey since these surveys began in the first quarter of 2021. Indeed, the vast majority of respondents to the present survey judged the Windsor Framework to have improved the underlying conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation. This is a positive legacy.

However, whereas the agreement reached by the UK and the EU in regards the Windsor Framework has been widely welcomed by respondents to the survey, it has still not been seen as acceptable to the Democratic Unionist Party, which has prevented the formation of a Northern Ireland Executive and the functioning of the Northern Ireland Assembly. This political deadlock is specifically singled out by respondents, but it also informs more or less explicitly other issues raised.

A difficult funding environment is a cause of concern for a number of respondents from Northern Ireland. This lack of funding is, at least in part, a consequence of the dire budgetary situation faced by Northern Ireland government departments and the continued absence of a Northern Ireland Executive. In these circumstances, and having to deal with the immediate challenges of keeping the doors open, there is a growing risk that civic society organisations in Northern Ireland may regard North-South and/or East-West collaboration as an area of activity that has to be paused (indeed, there are some indications in this quarter's responses that the intensity of North-South and East-West contacts has reduced).

It could be argued that the availability of funding from sources such as the Shared Island initiative or the Department of Foreign Affairs' Reconciliation Fund should be able to mitigate for the budgetary situation in Northern Ireland, allowing civic society organisations to continue to engage in cross-border cooperation. However, the fact that Northern Ireland

respondents are nevertheless raising funding concerns could suggest that they are dependent on core-funding from Northern Ireland government departments, which is likely to have been reduced. This may in turn have affected their capacity to engage in cross-border cooperation activities.

Responses to this survey may also indicate an emerging isolation of Northern Ireland in terms of East-West relations. In this case, the comments offered by some respondents suggest that local authorities and civic society organisations from Northern Ireland are no longer being seen as equal partners in collaborations with counterparts from England, Scotland or Wales.

Nevertheless, despite these concerns, responses to this 10<sup>th</sup> quarterly survey – as has been the case since these surveys began – demonstrate a real desire to continue to cooperate on a North-South and East-West basis. There is genuine enthusiasm to exploit opportunities and to collaborate on common challenges, which would be all the more impactful with the return of a functioning Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly, underlining Northern Ireland as a valuable partner to collaborate with.

This Research Briefing, then, 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 tenth round of this survey, 93% of the 30 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 a consistently 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 12th June and 24<sup>th</sup> July 2023, gathering 30 responses in total with 93% of respondents reporting that they have completed the survey in at least one previous quarter.

43% of respondents were based in the Republic of Ireland and 37% based in Northern Ireland, with 20% having a presence on both sides of the border, providing a broad representation of organisations from across the island of Ireland (figure 1).

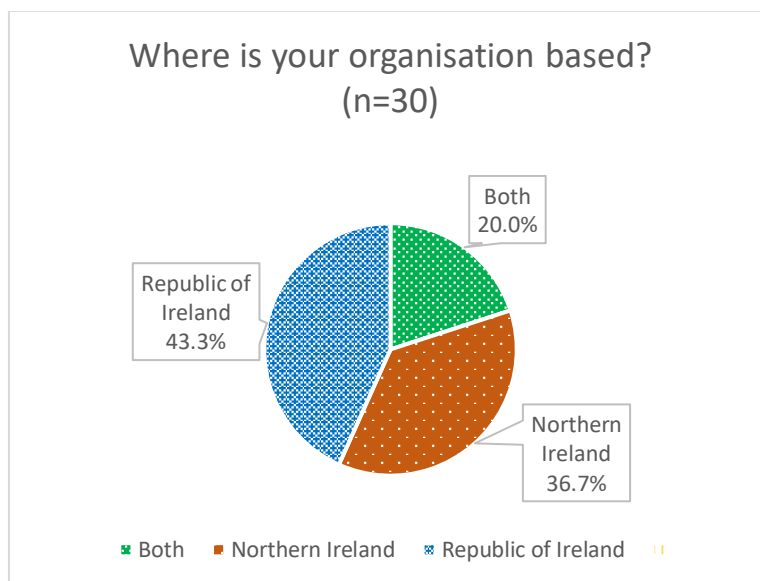


Figure 1

## 3. The North-South dimension

### 3.1. Contact and collaboration

In this quarter (Apr-Jun 2023) 77% of respondents have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 2). For 43% of respondents their level of contact this quarter has been at the same level as the last and has increased for 40% of respondents.

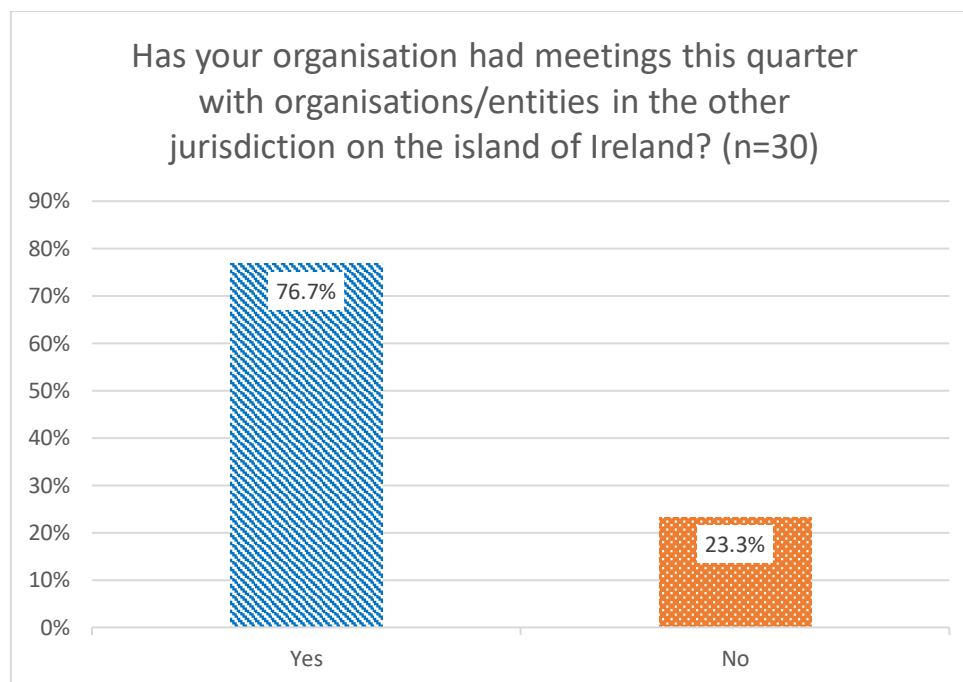


Figure 2

96% of respondents reported that meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction discussed challenges to cross-border cooperation either on occasion (61%) or to a significant extent (35%). The nature of these challenges were varied, but focussed particularly on concerns around funding and cross-border travel.

- “Funding Environment in the north, the limitations of Peace plus for all island and strategic policy work on community development, anti- poverty and health from the grass roots up. Different policy and legislative context and not enough time our resources to get down to the shared concerns and common agendas”
- “We discussed how people on either side of the border may first travel further in their own jurisdiction for a service before thinking of travelling across the border - not just a physical barrier, but perhaps a mental barrier too”
- “Access to all-island funding streams to support CB cooperation for smaller non-profits”
- “Electronic Travel Authorisation, funding and budgetary disparities between Northern Ireland and Rol”
- “Meetings centred on socio-economic impact on local economies within N. Ireland of UK decision on arrangements for people ( non- Rol / UK citizens/ residents ) entering UK form Rol: and on the potential for expansion of CTA to include all immigrants lawfully resident in either jurisdiction”
- “Obstacles in relation to environmental targets and sustainable agricultural practises and how these can impact on innovation and cross border work between civil society and environmental organisations in trying to deliver programmes to initiate changes within agricultural practices”

At present 77% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaborations with a partner in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 3), and 77% of respondents are actively considering new collaborative projects. Over half (65%) 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.

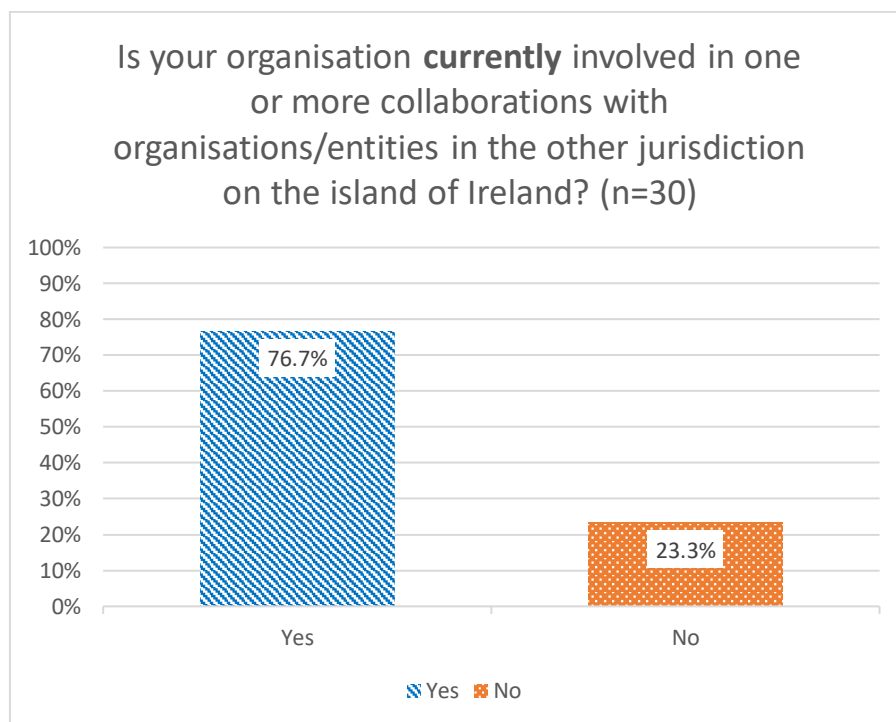


Figure 3

### 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=30), 83% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has stayed more or less the same since the previous quarter (figure 4). Given that 27% reported that it had improved on the previous quarter in the 9<sup>th</sup> survey, this stability is a promising sign.

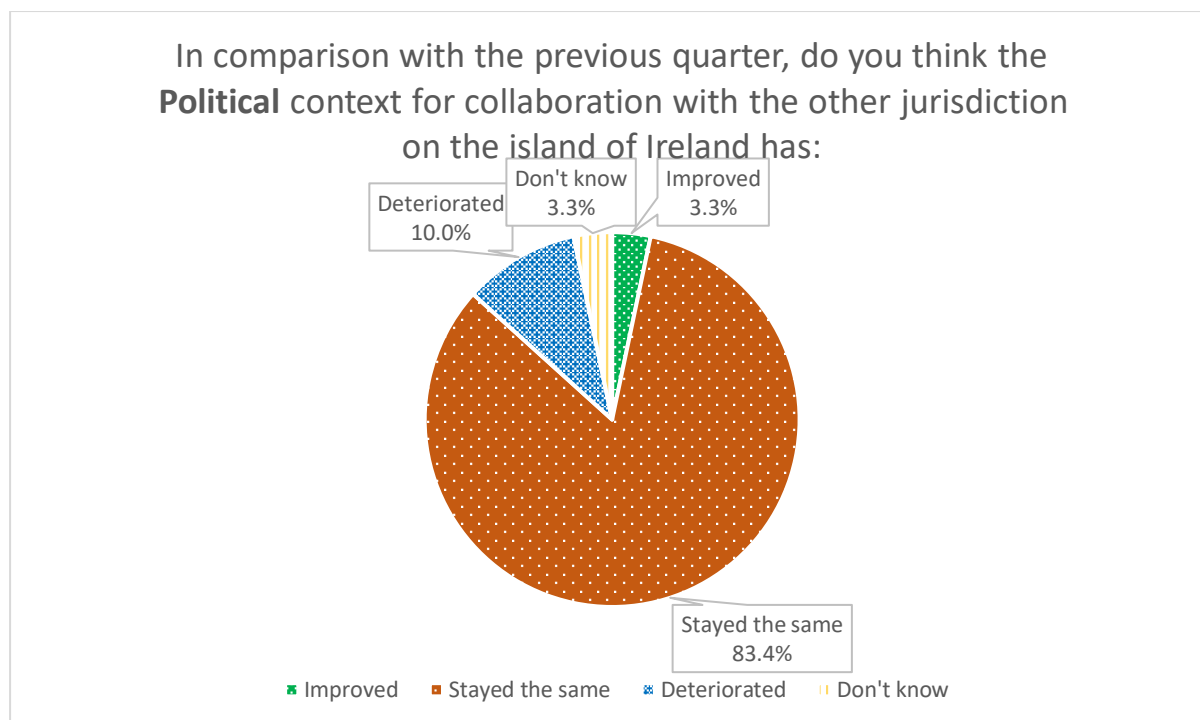


Figure 4

Despite this apparent progress, when asked to expand on their experiences of the **political** context for collaboration, respondents focussed on the lack of Assembly at Stormont as holding back the political context for collaboration:

- “Post NI election stagnation, hopefully after summer season the progression new political arrangements will commence depending on DUP position
- “The potential for collaboration across Ireland is clear, however ongoing resistance to parties in some areas of Northern Ireland are not opening up to opportunity across the island”
- “Great frustration with the lack of an Executive”
- “stagnation of politics in the North means nothing is moving here”
- “Without a resumption of the Assembly it is difficult to both plan or to make specific commitments on projects due to lack of clarity on funding and indeed Government policy”

Turning to the **social** context (figure 5): 70% of respondents say that the social context has remained the same as the previous quarter, with 13% saying it has either diminished or improved over the period.

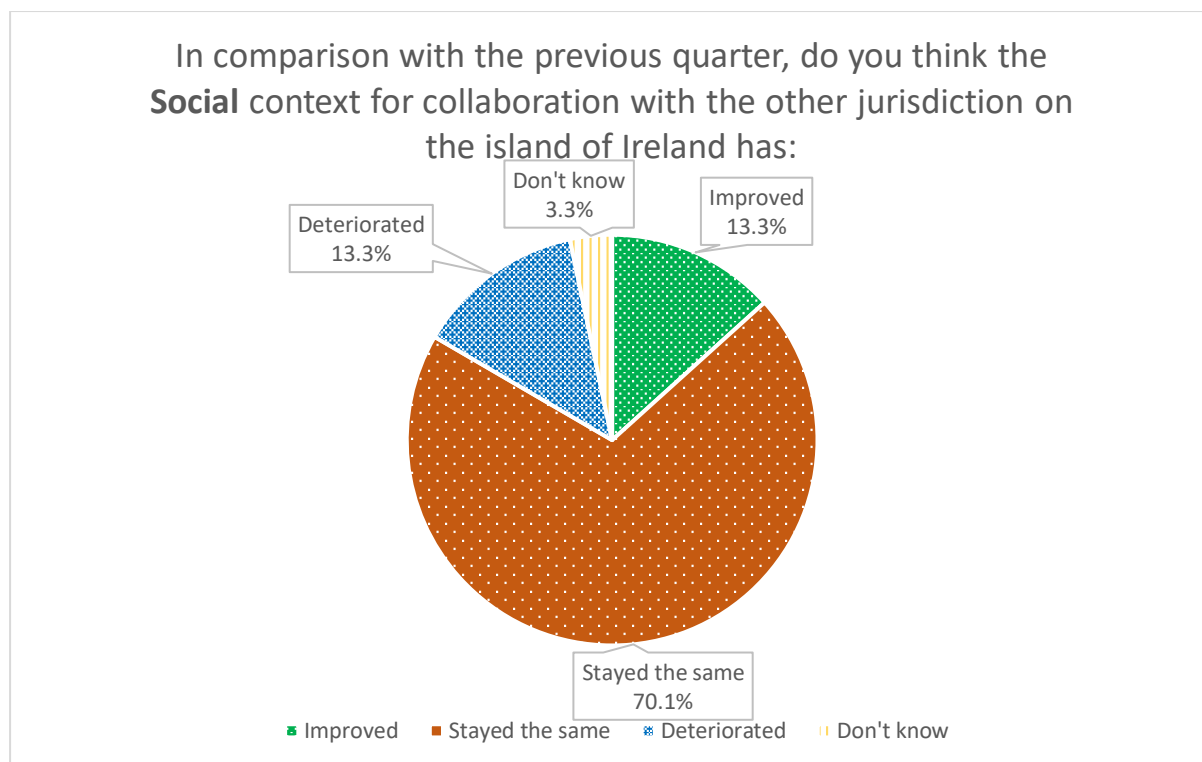


Figure 5

When asked to elaborate on the social context people are concerned by the lack of funding and point to increased interest in engaging with partners in the South given political stasis in the North.

- “We are collaborating on a voluntary basis no funding”
- “There is an increased wish to collaborate and work together”
- “stagnation in North has increased interest in how things are working in the South”

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 77% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 7% saying it has improved. While this is only a modest recognition of improvement, it is only the second time an improvement in the regulatory context has been reported since these surveys were first conducted (Jan-Mar 23 was the only other occasion an improvement was reported).



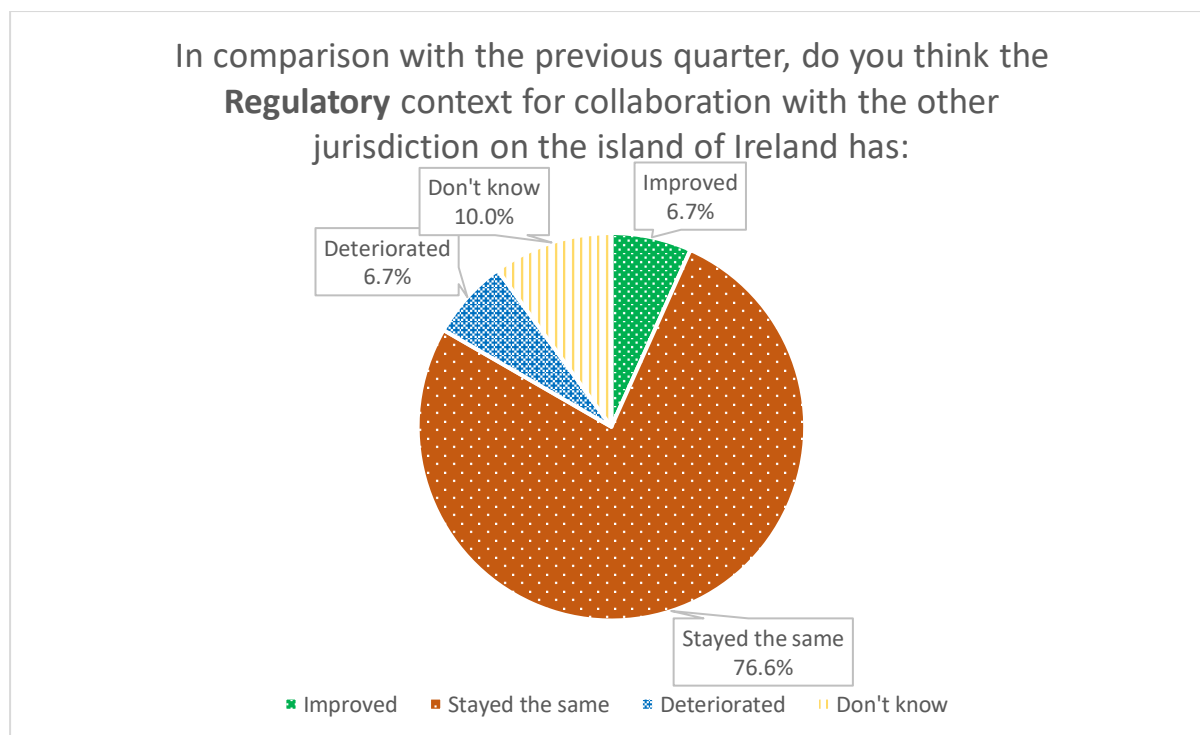


Figure 5

When asked to expand on their experiences of the **regulatory** context for collaboration, respondents pointed to the changes in trading conditions due to take place in October 2023 and concerns around travel arrangements:

- “Next phase of changes in trading arrangements in Autumn will be problematical”
- “Travel restrictions for people crossing border who are not UK or Irish citizens”

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 67% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter, with 10% reporting an improvement but 13% saying that it has deteriorated since the last quarter.

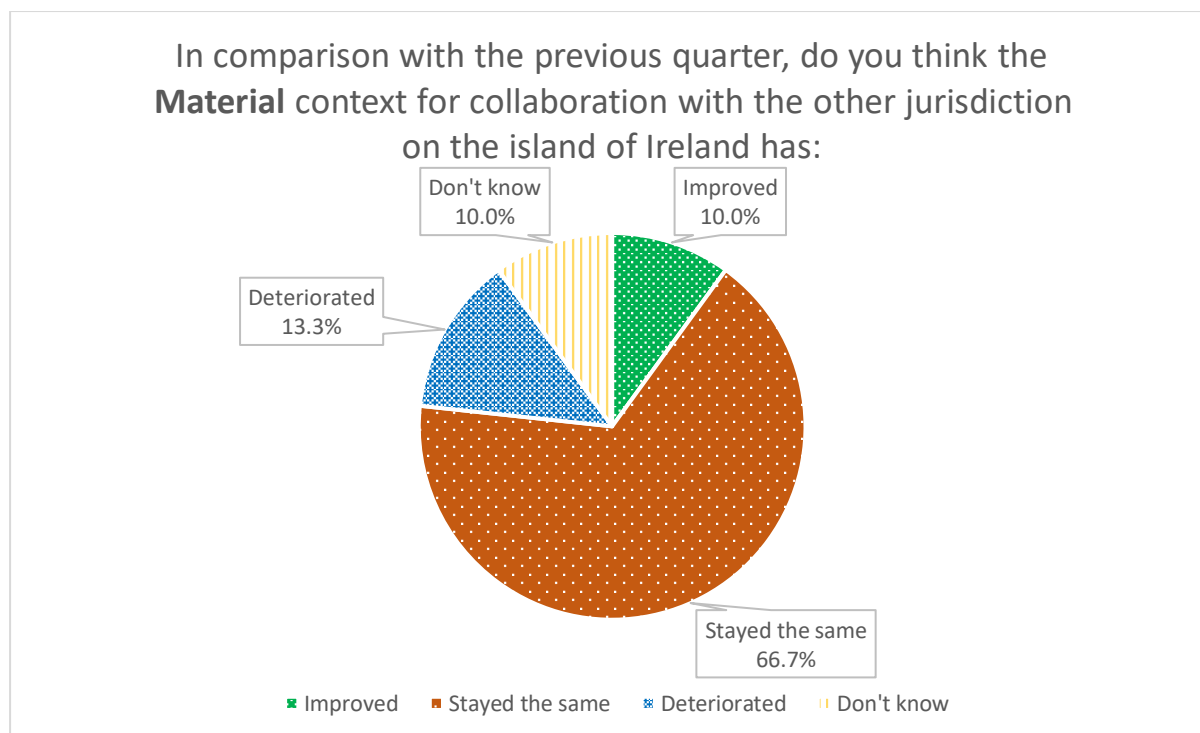


Figure 7

When asked to elaborate on their experiences of the **material** context for collaboration, respondents again point to uncertainty around the changes to trading conditions in the Autumn and funding concerns.

- “Need Must is always a good driver. The potential funding from South for A5; the contribution to retaining Nurses' training - the opening of the Peace funds - all help materially against a backdrop of no budget agreed and punitive financial action from Westminster”
- “Uncertainty about visas for workers and tourists”

### 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 suggestions for improving access to funding, cross-border travel infrastructure, and suggestions for all-island approaches to climate change.

- “increase cross border transport links in particular at the strategic level the rail links which will encourage travel between both sides and reopen old connections that were useful in the past including re freight”
- “As well as collaboration at Community level needs to be at local authority level as well”
- “increase student /young people exchanges (Transition Year, Erasmus type programmes, Third level competitions and group events e.g. Hackathons)”
- “Concern that issues raised by grassroots organisations e.g. lack of interest in NS

Cooperation are not being heard. Conditions are not being adequately resourced in order to maintain cooperation”

- “I would like to see a more urgent approach to convening a meaningful north-south / east-west initiative on climate action and sustainability - involving policy makers, academy and the business community - including farming organisations and unions”
- “Allow free travel between north and south for all people”

## 4. The East-West Dimension

### 4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter 53% 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 20% reported that their level of contact had increased on the previous quarter.

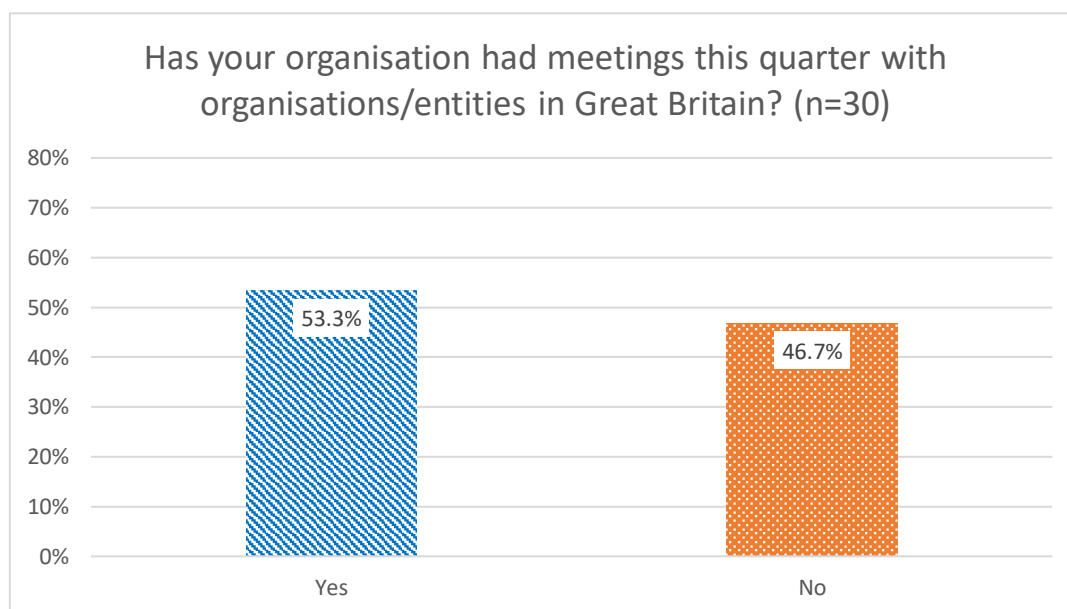


Figure 8

81% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (63%) or to a significant extent (19%). Such challenges were predominantly focussed on issues with regard to access to funding and potential implications of regulatory divergence:

- “In some UK/English funding and research bids, there is a willingness to include NI in delivery but not planning. Some parity of esteem issues for our region organisations not regarded as having the same country status as Scotland or Wales. Seen as delivery partners.”
- “Potential regulatory divergence between UK and EU, particularly in regard to the environment”

- “The increasingly hostile immigration legislation creates problems in N. Ireland. Immigration is not a devolved matter but protections within Section 75 of NI Act and the protection of children and women with children is significantly weakened in respect of asylum seekers resident in N. Ireland - the increased friction with Home Office and Private companies operating in N. Ireland to provide accommodation over rights and protections is increasingly challenging - and co-operation with UK charities working in this field becomes challenging beyond campaigning on the legislation”
- “Research funding for third level research projects following Brexit”

This quarter only 37% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), and only 33% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain. 55% 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, the Irish Government, or the organisations own core funding. Notably none reported receiving funding from the UK Government.

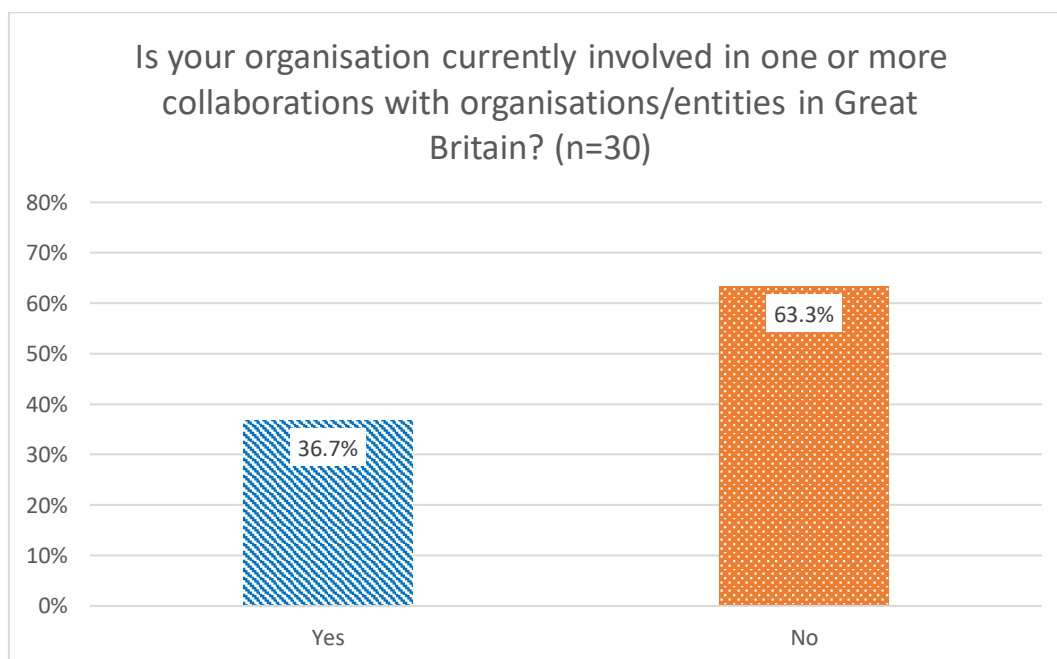


Figure 9

#### 4.2. The East-West context

When asked whether they believe that the political, social, regulatory, and material contexts for East-West collaboration have changed over the last quarter (all n=30), 67% of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 20% saying it has deteriorated (figure 10).

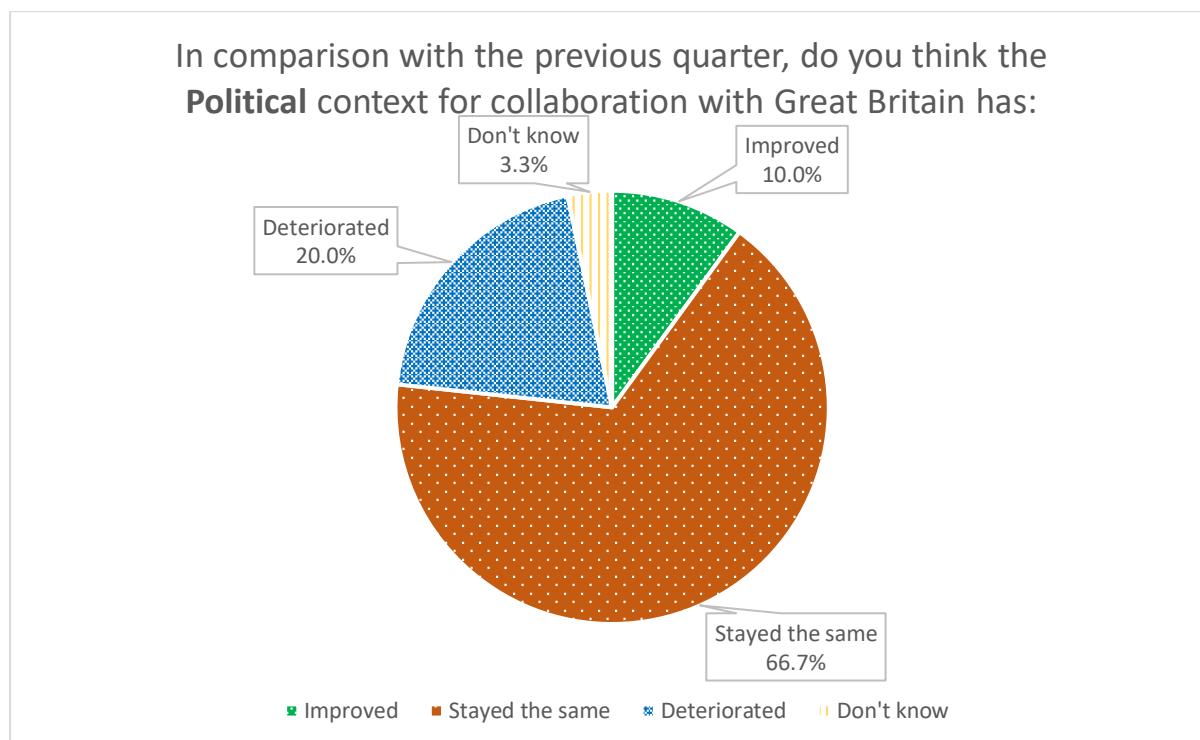


Figure 10

When asked to expand on their experiences of the political context for collaboration, respondents indicated that the UK Government is not focussing on the correct priorities, and a sense that Northern Ireland is being punished for the DUP's refusal to enter an Executive:

- "Political context in UK looks unsteady at the moment and cannot inspire confidence"
- "More pragmatic approach from incoming UK political leaders"
- "leadership crises in Westminster and NI assembly/executive"
- "There is a collective sense that society is being punitively under resourced in order to pressurise the DUP back into the Assembly. The chill factor around this is a distancing from anything that involves N. Ireland"
- "Difficult to hold faith in a system that is now fixated to such an extent on displacement activities (such as pursuing 'rip-off' degrees) that take from the real issues of these days & times"

77% of respondents report that the **social** context (figure 11) has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 10% saying it has deteriorated and 7% reporting that it has improved.

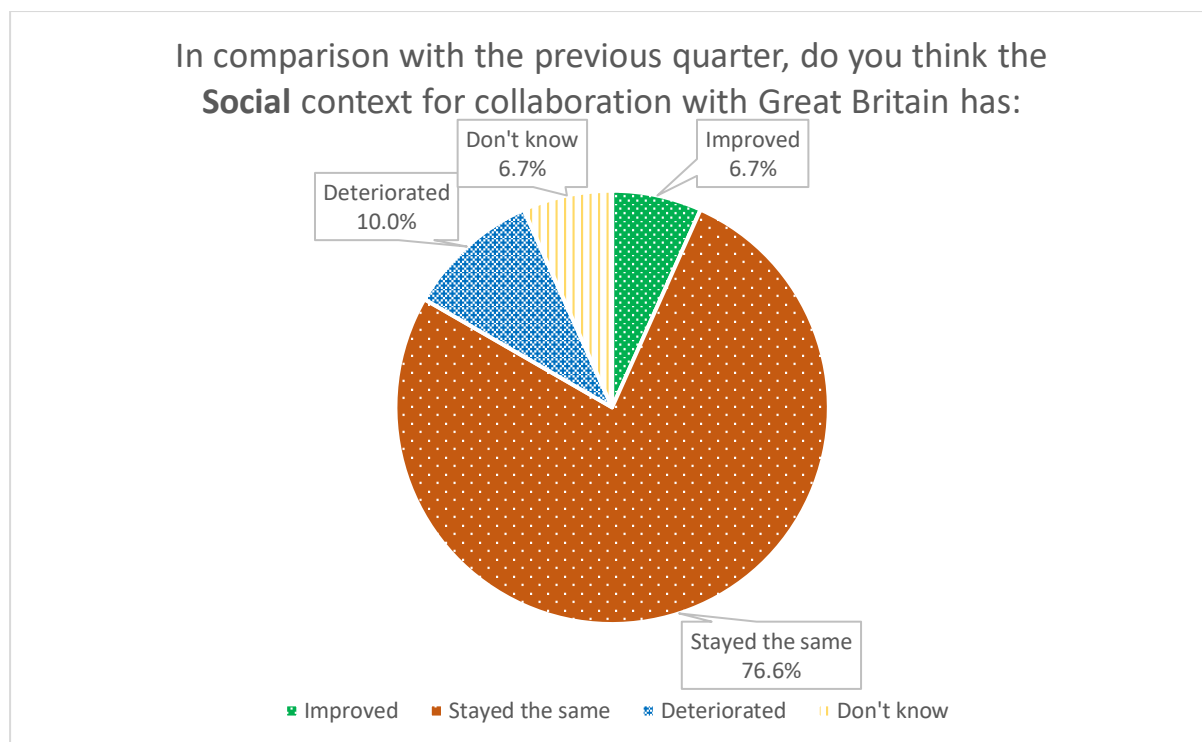


Figure 11

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 60% of respondents say that the regulatory context has stayed the same over the last quarter with 10% saying that it has improved, 13% stating that it has deteriorated, and 17% that do not know. Respondents have said that “the protocol issues have been resolved”.

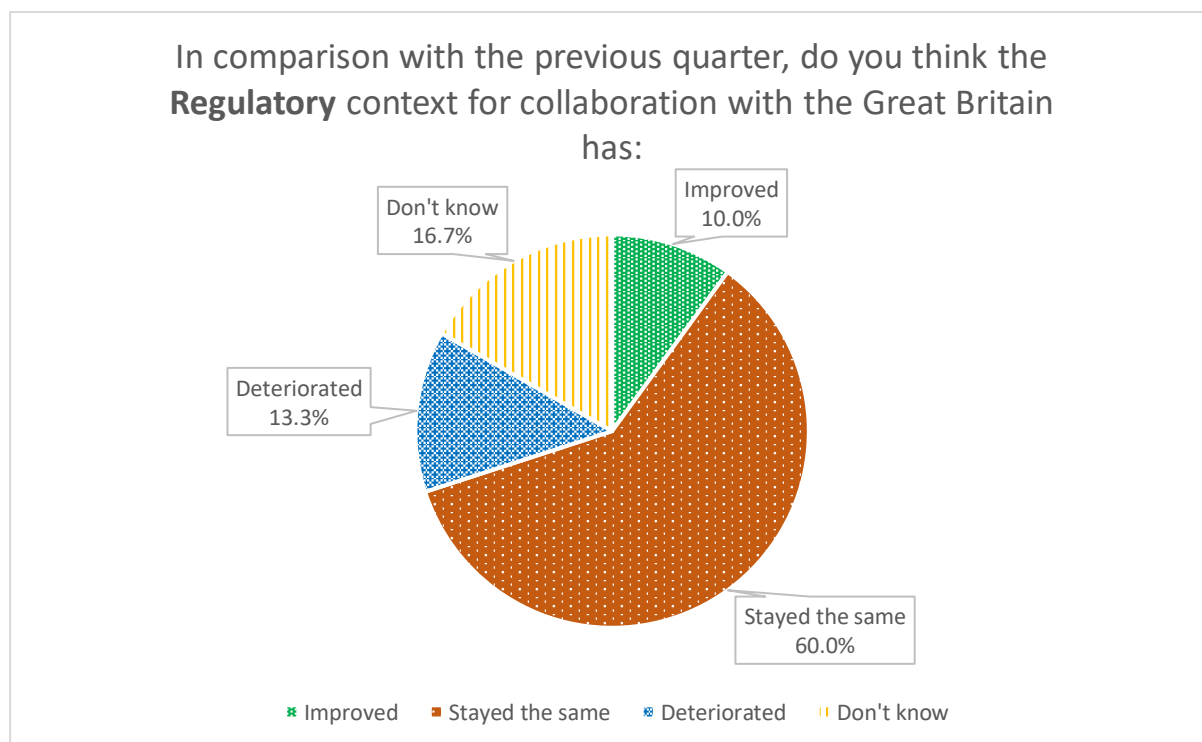


Figure 12

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 57% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 20% of respondents say it has deteriorated.

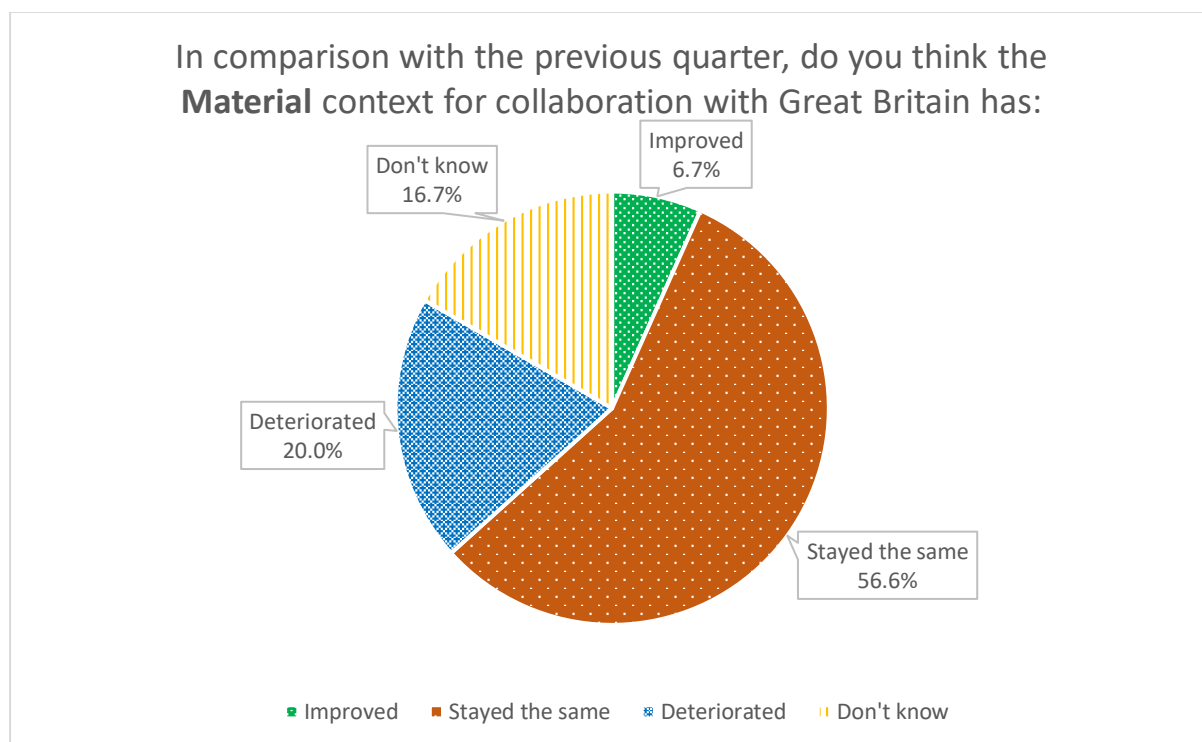


Figure 13

#### 4.3. East-West suggestions for improvement

In the East-West dimension there were suggestions for improved engagement with Northern Ireland in terms of energy and environment issues.

- “The are initiatives such as the Ireland Wales Joint Accord which are very welcome but we were disappointed that public health was not an area of co-operation - the business community have been very proactive but also v well supported - would like to see something similar for health matters”
- “Exploration of cooperation in areas of Energy and Environmental Protection”

## 5. The Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and the Windsor Framework

64% of respondents reported that they believe the Protocol is, on balance, a good thing for cooperation across the UK and Ireland, compared to 30% who say it has had no impact, and only 7% who believe it has had a negative impact on cooperation and collaboration. Furthermore, 74% of respondents believe that the Windsor Framework is an improvement on the Protocol, with 22% saying it has made no change, and only 4% saying that the Windsor Framework has made the situation worse.

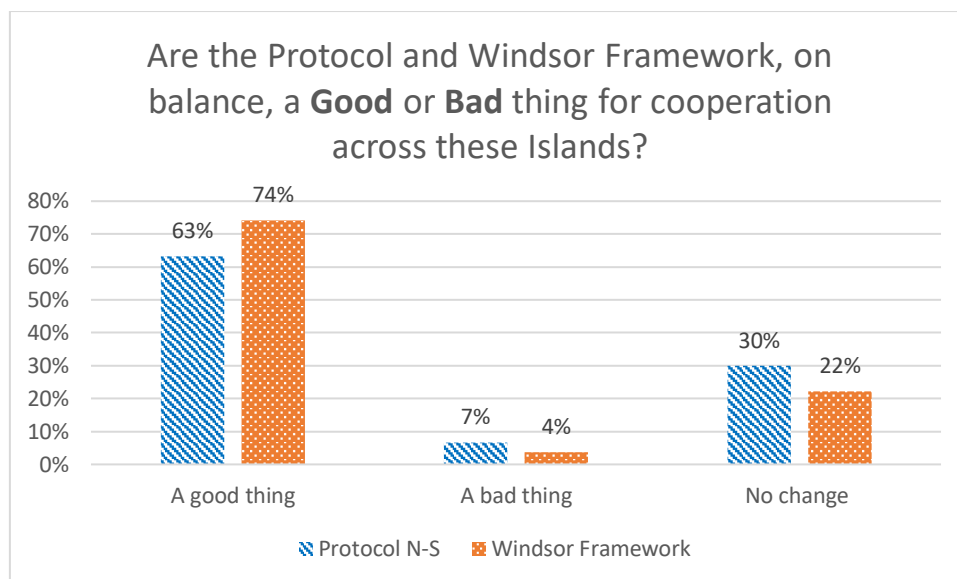


Figure 14

## 6. 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.

- “The work to develop links between Nth/Sth and east/west is a continuous effort more important probably north/south. Confidence building is a function that must be continuously grown so that communities get to know one another and build trust. This can be achieved through normal social contacts, business and political etc but can be strategically guided by long term decisions like tourism projects that are linked, energy, environmental collaboration including maritime projects and of course the transport links like rail. The All-Ireland rail review report is being impeded by the absence of Stormont this has a negative impact on efforts in the south to advance rail projects and drains confidence from groups working on such issues. The rail developments are positive, environmentally necessary and future proofed in terms of the SDGs for 2030 and beyond yet there is no urgency in the north political system to collaborate and progress. The absence of progress on issuing the AI rail review report is symptomatic of the unwillingness for both sides of the border to recognise win win situations for the betterment of the island populations. In this case politics is a hindrance to mutually beneficial decision making”*
- “Windsor framework on paper would seem to be a slight improvement in relation to civic engagement however clarification on terminology required and implementation will be key”*



- *“Would like to see a volunteer centre to match up cross border organisations”*

## Conclusion

The responses to this quarter’s survey in many ways build on the positive note we saw emerge at the start of 2023. While in many cases people believe there has been a deterioration across several contexts on the previous quarter, there remains a predominant response that the situation has remained the same. Considered in light of the general sense of improvement seen in the 9<sup>th</sup> survey, there is still a sense of optimism that has not been apparent since these survey were first conducted in the first quarter of 2021. This positivity can broadly be attributed to the Windsor Framework agreed between the UK and EU to mitigate against issues that have become apparent in the Protocol for Ireland/Northern Ireland, and recognising that people have now largely adapted to the post-Brexit landscape.

However, this progress is fragile. This quarter has reported lower levels of contact and collaboration both North-South and East-West than the previous quarter. In terms of high-politics, the UK Government is perceived to be increasingly distracted by “culture war” issues rather than focussing on what people see as the serious business of governing; this risks undermining the progress that has been made with regard to Northern Ireland so far. Furthermore, the absence of a functioning Assembly at Stormont is having ongoing negative impacts for cooperation and collaboration both North-South and East-West where people feel like they are increasingly being punished for the inaction of their politicians.

Ultimately, there is cause for cautious optimism here that the worst of the Brexit disruption is over. However, much work needs to be done in Westminster and Stormont to restore the conditions for cooperation and collaboration to their pre-Brexit levels and to encourage and support robust and enduring relations across these islands.

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