

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

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

Briefing on the findings from the 12th
Quarterly Survey (October – December
2023)

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2 February 2024

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

During the period covered by this Quarterly Survey (October to December 2023), the UK Government and the European Commission oversaw the implementation of elements of the trading arrangements initially established by the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland and revised by the March 2023 Windsor Framework. Among them was the introduction of the red and green lanes for the movement of goods between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the use of “Not for EU” labelling of UK goods not for sale in the EU, both of which came into operation on the 1st of October 2023. These new arrangements appeared to be functioning without any significant difficulties. However, both the UK and European Commission were also preparing for the forthcoming implementation of other aspects of the new trading arrangements, including the introduction on 31 January 2024 of new customs processes for a range of EU goods entering the UK.

In the run-up to Christmas hopes were briefly raised that a Northern Ireland Executive would be formed and that MLAs would return to work in the Assembly. With the UK Government making a £3.3bn financial package available to Northern Ireland, the UK Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Chris Heaton-Harris, stated on 19 December that the Government’s negotiations with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) to resolve the latter’s concerns regarding the Windsor Framework had concluded. However, as 2023 came to an end, the DUP continued to express its dissatisfaction with the post-Brexit trading arrangements between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which it sees as undermining Northern Ireland’s position as an integral part of the United Kingdom. That continued dissatisfaction meant the continued absence of an Executive and functioning Assembly, and Northern Ireland’s inability to avail of the £3.3bn financial package, which the UK Government had made conditional on the formation of an Executive. As a result, Northern Ireland’s government departments, public sector, the community and voluntary sector and the wider population continued to suffer the consequences of public services under colossal strain due to severe budgetary pressures.

As has been the case since our 5th Quarterly Survey (January to March 2022), the political stalemate in Northern Ireland has once again been a concern for respondents to our 12th

survey, although the majority saw the overall political context (which includes UK-EU relations) to have been largely stable. However, the budgetary disparities between the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland should be seen as a challenge to North-South cooperation. If Northern Ireland's financial situation is not remedied, the ability of organisations and local authorities there to engage in cooperation with counterparts in the Republic of Ireland will become increasingly difficult. Lack of funding means that they are primarily concerned with keeping their doors open and retaining staff, with little time to look beyond the border. This situation is compounded by the political impasse in Northern Ireland and the often heated and divisive arguments regarding the Windsor Framework and whether the DUP should return to Stormont or not. Without a resolution to this deadlock, organisations in the Republic of Ireland may be increasingly reluctant to seek to engage in collaborative initiatives with those in Northern Ireland, seeing the political context there as inhospitable.

At the time of writing (2 February 2024), however, a breakthrough on the political stalemate in Northern Ireland has been achieved, with the DUP indicating that it is now in a position to join an Executive and for the Assembly to return following its negotiations with the UK Government. It is hoped that with functioning institutions, Northern Ireland will once again have Executive ministers at the North South Ministerial Council and the British Irish Council. However, in order for all the potential of cooperation on both a North-South and East-West basis to be properly exploited, it is essential that the Northern Ireland Executive's approach to these institutions under Strands 2 and 3 of the 1998 Agreement is a positive one.

It is vital, then, that close attention is paid to the underlying context for North-South and East-West cooperation, and that those engaged in such cooperation are consulted by those responsible for shaping that context. This includes the UK Government and the European Commission as the parties responsible for the ongoing implementation of the Protocol/Windsor Framework and the Trade and Cooperation Agreement. This remains a 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](#).

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 twelfth round of this survey, 93% of the 27 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 during the period 17 November to 31 December 2023, gathering 27 responses in total with 93% of respondents reporting that they have completed the survey in at least one previous quarter.

44% of respondents were based in the Republic of Ireland and 41% based in Northern Ireland, with 15% having a presence on both sides of the border, providing a broad representation of organisations from across the island of Ireland (figure 1).

Where is your organisation based?

27 responses

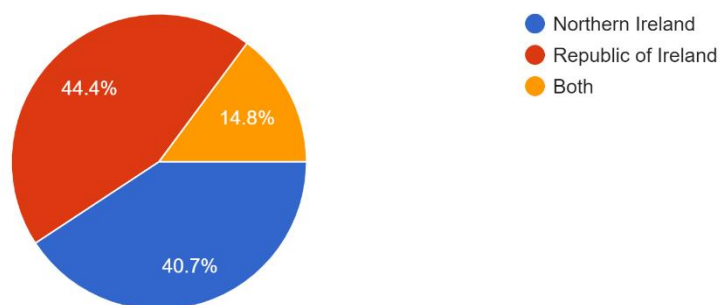


Figure 1

3. The North-South dimension

3.1. Contact and collaboration

In this quarter (Oct-Dec 2023) 82% of respondents have had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 2). For 56% of respondents their level of contact this quarter has been at the same level as the last and has increased for 41% of respondents.

Has your organisation had meetings THIS QUARTER with organisations/entities in the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND?

27 responses

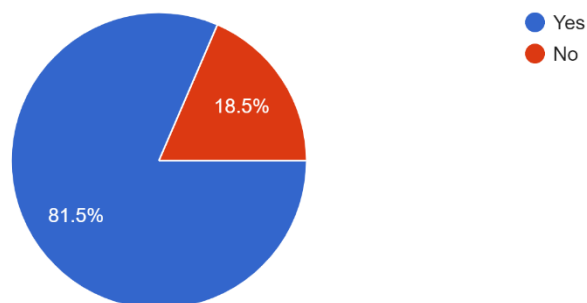


Figure 2

For the first time since this survey was launched, every respondent has reported that meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction discussed challenges to cross-border cooperation, either on occasion (46%) or to a significant extent (55%). While it is to be welcome that dialogue is open and issues are being discussed, it is concerning that so much time is still being spent attempting to resolve issues primarily arising from Brexit. The nature the challenges discussed were varied but focussed particularly on concerns around a lack of funding and issues arising in cross border work and travel.

- “Nature of meetings relates to free movement over the border and immigration requirements which naturally raises questions of collaboration and communication between organisations North and South. Difficulties in raising awareness in the South due to perception of being a 'UK issue' and Brexit fatigue arise. Movement away from online meetings has impacted groups who aren't Dublin/Belfast based. On one occasion a group travelled from Derry to Dublin for a government meeting which was very short. They expressed frustration that they had to travel, expend resources, with little gained and that wasn't considered. UK government anti-ECHR rhetoric post Rwanda judgement has also raised concerns about lack of consideration of GFA and situation in NI.”
- “The implications for workers or tourists needing a travel visa”
- “project planning and currency exchange rates - co hosting events and insurance, different and common professional working standards to include in documentation”
- “NIHRC published research in October highlighting that the rights of frontier workers, i.e. those living on one side of the border and working on the other, are complex to understand and have been impacted by Brexit”
- “Data sharing agreements, funding and payment issues related to conducting collaborative cross-border research projects”
- “Issues or challenges of people working across the border as well as working from home for a company in the other jurisdiction and the implications of this for people”
- “Failure by the relevant authorities in both jurisdictions to establish cross-border agencies, as required by the Good Friday Agreement; for example, no unified agency responsible for river basin management in both jurisdictions, no Environmental Protection Agency for the island as a whole (there is no EPA in the North, but the EPA in the Republic has on several occasions funded research projects undertaken jointly by third-level institutions in both jurisdictions). A further obstacle is the uncertainty surrounding the legal status of certain institutions and individuals in the North, especially in the absence of a Legislative Assembly which would provide a forum for such discussions. For example, we are not sure of the level of human rights available to Irish citizens in the North, even though they are living in the EU Customs Union, though not in the EU itself”
- “Different responsibilities between organisations in both jurisdictions make it challenging to develop Cross border projects for submission to PEACE PLUS”
- “Movement of people with migrant status, issues of working cross border, childcare issues cross border, co-operation and collaboration between groups cross border”

At present 82% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaborations with a partner in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 3), and 70% of respondents are actively considering new collaborative projects. 64% of respondents presently engaged in North-South cross border collaboration reported that they were in receipt of funding for cross-border collaborative projects, with 50% of respondents reporting that one of their funding sources was the Irish government.

Is your organisation CURRENTLY involved in one or more collaborations with organisations/entities in the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND?

27 responses

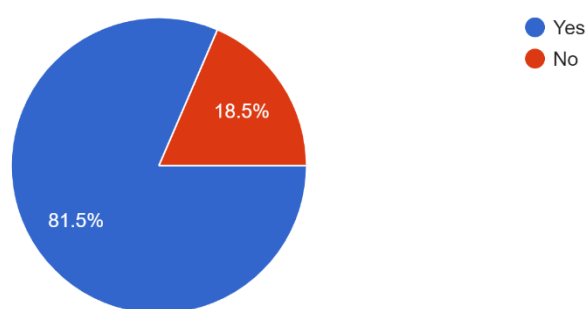


Figure 3

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=27), 70% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has stayed more or less the same since the previous quarter (figure 4), while 11% say it has deteriorated and only 19% report an improvement.

In comparison with the previous quarter (July to September), do you think the POLITICAL CONTEXT for collaboration with the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has

27 responses

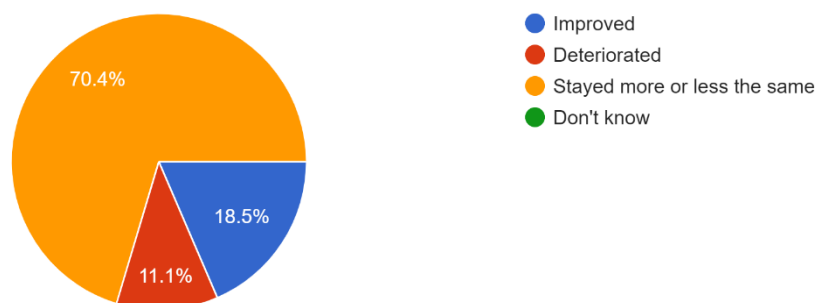


Figure 4

When asked to expand on their experiences of the **political** context for collaboration, respondents noted improved collaboration between NGOs but lamented the ongoing absence of an Executive at Stormont:

- “The political paralysis resulting from the DUP’s refusal to go into the Executive with a Nationalist First Minister is encouraging many to consider the constitutional change acknowledged in the Good Friday Agreement”
- “The budget cuts and continued lack of Government in Stormont makes it very challenging to plan projects, and raises significant concerns for the future of service delivery”
- “The political context remains unchanged, but there are signs of improved collaboration between non-government organisations (NGOs)”

Turning to the **social** context (figure 5): 74% of respondents say that the social context has remained the same as the previous quarter, with 19% saying it has improved and only 7% reporting a deterioration over the period.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the SOCIAL CONTEXT (i.e. attitudes within communities) for collaboration with the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has

27 responses

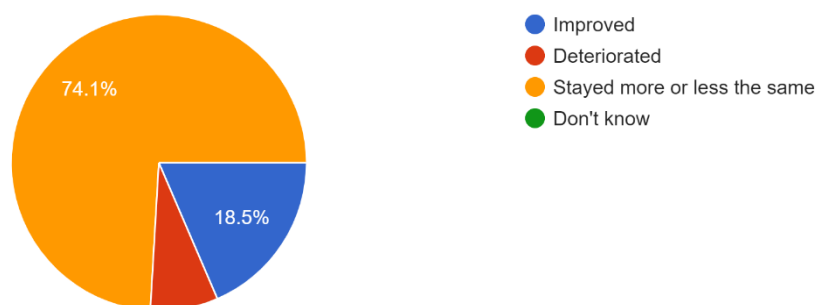


Figure 5

When asked to elaborate on the social context people are concerned by the ongoing political stasis though observe some improvements at the local level.

- “Following large public events in the other jurisdiction on our campaigns we have noted an upswing in interest in working together and collaborating. We will be returning to the South to meet with groups to follow up on this”
- “visibility of Ulster Scotch increasing”
- “The common challenges are becoming apparent - and democratic crises don't help to foster people's confidence that Governments can improve people's living and economic conditions”
- “The social context has improved, especially among professionals who are interacting with each other, exchanging information, and working together to dismantle the types of barrier described in the previous answer. However, at the same time, there are smaller communities which have set out to create barriers (in some cases new barriers) to collaboration”
- “Instability here has led to partners/ potential partners holding off because of funding and budget uncertainty”

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 70% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 11% saying it has improved and 11% who report a decline. . Respondents have pointed to UK's renewed membership of Horizon as bringing benefits to North-South collaboration, though other point to a lack of “information on changed or changing regulations” and one laments that things are “Still as problematical as ever ! And in one particular area, environmental protection, the British Government is moving away from the level of protection afforded by EU Directives, and is replacing them by weaker regulations. This move is not unexpected, it was predicted during the Brexit debate in and around 2016, but now it is actually happening”.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the REGULATORY CONTEXT (i.e. legislation and regulations) for collaboration with the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has

27 responses

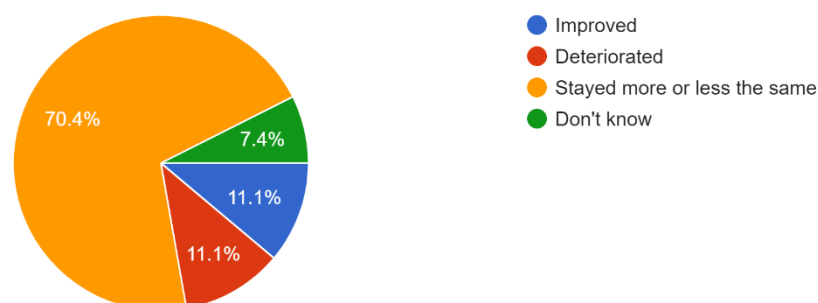


Figure 5

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 85% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter, with no respondent reporting a

deterioration. This result is consistent with recent polls which find the material context to be broadly stable.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the MATERIAL CONTEXT (i.e. access to goods or services necessary for organisations to operat...e other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has
27 responses

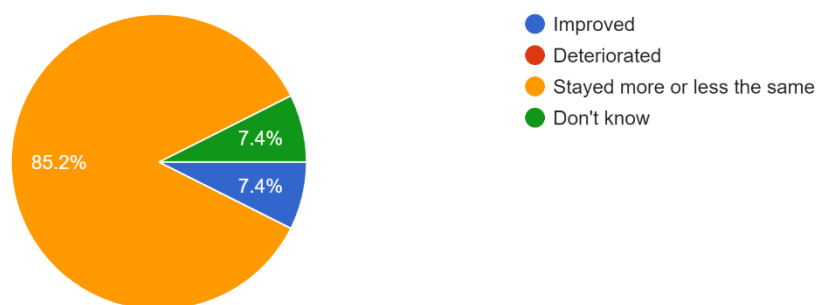


Figure 7

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 transport, clarity on the rights of frontier workers, and the need for a restored Executive to provide governance and leadership.

- “We have continued concerns that there is no formal mechanism or support for N/S cooperation particularly in relation to post-Brexit frameworks and monitoring. It is left to civic society to maintain without meaningful support”
- “There is a need for some form of advocacy to help cultivate North-South links”
- “Organise exchange/visits/on-line educational programme for second-level schools during Transition Year (ROI) and similar (NI)”
- “Two types of clear, comprehensive and accessible guidance from the UK and Irish governments on the rights and entitlements of frontier workers would be helpful: first, guidance for workers and, secondly, dedicated guidance for employers. Co-operation between the governments plus funding would also be required to promote understanding and awareness among workers and employers on the range of practical matters arising”
- “Reinstate the North-South Ministerial meetings, even in the absence of an Executive in the North; hold a joint "Citizens Assembly" type of policy proposal meeting to provide recommendations, and implement these recommendations. Suggestions include the establishment of a single authority responsible for river basin management (land and water) and a single EPA covering both jurisdictions. We have examples such as Waterways Ireland, the Loughs Agency and the Commissioners of Irish Lights to follow”

4. The East-West Dimension

4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter only 30% of respondents reported having meetings with organisations in Great Britain (figure 8); this is almost 15 points lower than the previous quarter and the lowest level of East-West engagement we have seen since starting these surveys, which is a pressing concern and something which politicians across these islands need to devote time and resource to remedying. What is worse is that 70% of respondents say that this is the same level of contact as the last quarter, and 15% reported that their level of contact had decreased on the previous quarter.

Has your organisation had meetings THIS QUARTER (October to December) with organisations/entities IN GREAT BRITAIN?

27 responses

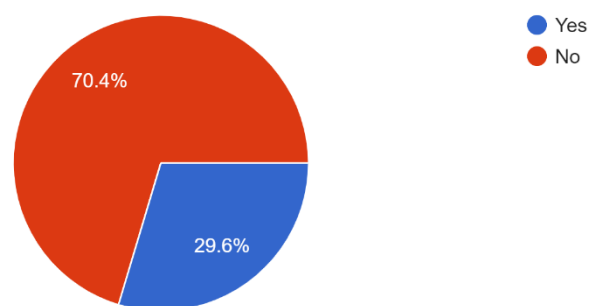


Figure 8

50% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (38%) or to a significant extent (13%). Such challenges were predominantly focussed on issues around post-Brexit trade arrangements.

This quarter 41% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), but only 37% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain. What is more, only 18% of respondents currently engaged in East-West collaborative projects reported that their organisation was in receipt of funding for those projects. Again, the lack of funding for East-West collaboration is something which requires urgent political attention.

Is your organisation currently involved in one or more collaborations with organisations/entities IN GREAT BRITAIN?

27 responses

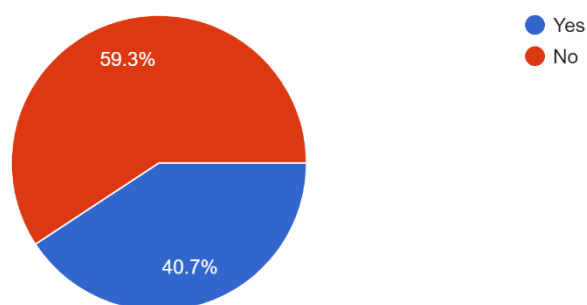


Figure 9

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=27), 59% of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 26% saying it has deteriorated (figure 10).

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the POLITICAL CONTEXT for collaboration WITH GREAT BRITAIN has

27 responses

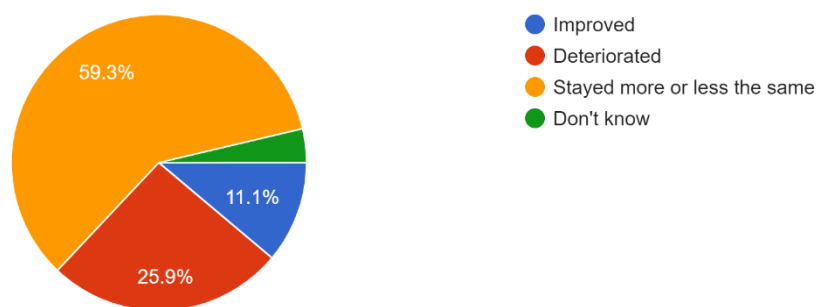


Figure 10

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 lack of Assembly at Stormont:

- “References by UK Gov ministers and MPs from Conservative Party to UK compliance with international law and treaties relating to refugees, and potential implications for HRA and GFA, have destabilised the political context recently”
- “There seems to be no interest in Irish issues”
- “Blockages here due to no Devolved Government in NI”

74% of respondents report that the **social** context (figure 11) has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 11% saying it has deteriorated and 7% reporting that it has improved.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the SOCIAL CONTEXT (i.e. attitudes within communities) for collaboration WITH GREAT BRITAIN has

27 responses

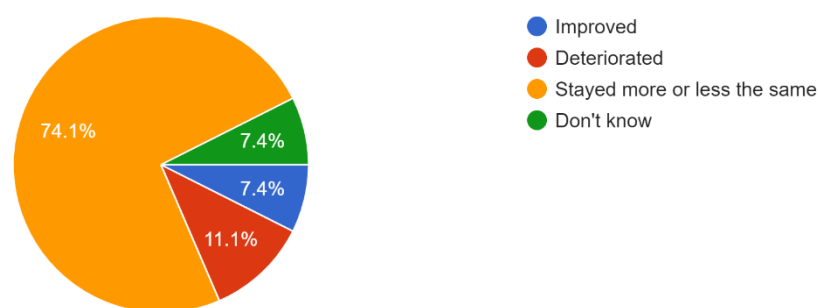


Figure 11

When asked to develop on their experiences of the **social** dimension this quarter one respondent said, “whilst the developments themselves are not an improvement-the UK government law and policy on areas such as legacy and immigration has led to strong collaboration within civic society across the UK and helped to build new relationships. The link between NI and the ECHR is also being increasingly recognised and utilised as a campaigning tool by GB groups which strengthens E-W cooperation”.

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 67% of respondents say that the regulatory context has stayed the same over the last quarter with 4% saying that it has improved, 15% stating that it has deteriorated, and 15% that do not know. Respondents have said that “unilateral changes in legislation passed by the British Government have made collaboration more difficult”.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the REGULATORY CONTEXT (i.e. legislation and regulations) for collaboration WITH GREAT BRITAIN has

27 responses

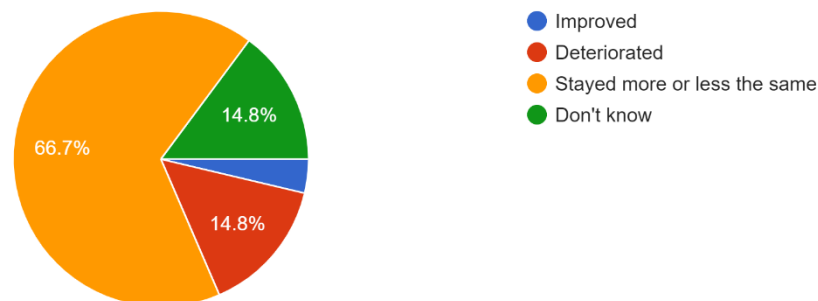


Figure 12

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 74% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 15% of respondents say that it has deteriorated with respondents commenting that, “in terms of food in supermarkets, feel it is harder to get some food products and also price of clothes in UK stores in Republic of Ireland seem to be higher”.

In comparison with the previous quarter, do you think the MATERIAL CONTEXT (i.e. access to goods or services necessary for organisations to operate...ctively) for collaboration WITH GREAT BRITAIN has

27 responses

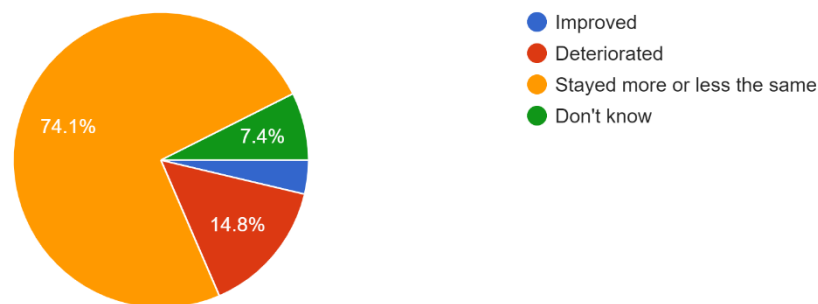


Figure 13

4.3. East-West suggestions for improvement

In the East-West dimension respondents suggest that there “needs to be dedicated funding to encourage East West cooperation”.

5. 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 community and voluntary sector is losing staff in its droves. Good people are seeking security and stability of tenure in jobs. No government here, no budget here and no decision makers here is leading to an loss of skilled people. This will impact on our ability to have cross border NSEW cooperation”*
- *“Connectivity in terms of rail transport on the island has been obstructed over previous decades through the gradual dismantling of railways between north and south. The all island rail review published in Jul is stalled in terms of action because of the political impasse in NI which means that any joined up action or collaboration in terms of rail travel or freight is impeded. Currently in the south there is a gradual recovery of rail as a transport option with slow progress in terms of reconnecting the ports to railways such as Foynes (reopening old railway) Waterford reconnecting to Ballina inland port for rail freight traffic to the south and potentially reconnecting the railway to ROSSLARE port in the future. In terms of the 2028 EURO soccer championships both north and south venues will be used yet little planning has gone into how visiting supporters will move through the island in the period. Rosslare is a likely entry point from France Spain and other parts of mainland Europe and onwards by rail to Dublin and Belfast. Is there good connectivity? What’s the plan? This is the type of thinking that needs to progress. Likewise in terms of freight there is no rail freight capacity in NI meaning that HGVs trundle across the border daily in an unsustainable transport system. Is there a climate change plan to alter the situation and shift to rail where both parts of the island gain an advantage? Is the absence of rail freight capacity in NI hampering progress in the south? How can the transport system’s collaboration successfully to the advantage of the both populations re climate change and sustainability?”*

Conclusion

The responses to this quarter’s survey suggest that we are ending the year with a tentative level of stability with respondents predominantly reporting that all conditions for cooperation, both North-South and East-West have remained the same on the previous quarter. In some respects this is to be welcomed as it represents a broad improvement in the context we have seen for much of the previous 2 years, but on the other there are clearly still many improvements people feel are needed in order to fully realise the potential for cooperation and collaboration across these Islands.

Specifically, while the level of North-South cooperation remains both high and robust, East-West cooperation consistently falls behind. This survey, and indeed several previous rounds of the survey make clear that increased funding is needed from all quarters, but particularly the UK Government in order to build capacity and incentive for East-West cooperation and collaboration. Furthermore, the absence of a functioning Assembly at Stormont is having ongoing negative impacts for cooperation and collaboration both North-South and East-West.

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