

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER STUDIES

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

Briefing on the findings from the 14th
Quarterly Survey (April – June 2024)

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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).

1. Introduction

The first North South Ministerial Council plenary meeting in almost three years was chaired by the First and deputy First Ministers and attended by all NI Executive Ministers along with the then Taoiseach Leo Varadkar and a full complement of Irish Government Ministers on 8 April in Armagh. As well as the plenary meeting, a range of North South Ministerial Sectoral meetings have taken place in the period covered by this quarterly survey attended by Ministers from both sides of the border. Sectoral meetings have been held on Health and Food Safety, Transport, Tourism and Inland Waterways, Aquaculture and Marine Environment, Language, Agriculture, Education and Trade and Business. The British-Irish Council also met in June in the Isle of Man.

When asked about the political context for North-South and East-West co-operation in this quarter survey respondents spoke about the sense of a political “standstill” period with local and EU elections in the Republic of Ireland and the UK General Election. The UK general election took place on 4 July the day after our survey closed and it will be interesting to see initial reactions to the new UK government’s approach and their stated intention to reset relations between the UK and EU in the next quarterly survey. The EU elections resulted in significant gains for the far right in the European Parliament which may lead to a further move to the right in policy. However, the positive attitude of respondents to the political context for North South co-operation noted in the last quarter has been maintained. This was in contrast to the political context for East-West co-operation which respondents believed had deteriorated.

In April, the Assembly debated an applicability motion on an EU Regulation on the labelling of organic pet food. Before the UK can agree with the EU in the Joint Committee that a new EU law should apply in NI, the Assembly must indicate cross-community support for the new law to be added to the Windsor Framework by passing an applicability motion. This is one of the additional measures introduced by the UK government to the Windsor Framework to improve democratic accountability. An explainer on Applicability motions can be accessed here. Under the EU Regulation pet food will need to be produced with at least 95% organic

agricultural ingredients, rather than 100%, to be labelled organic. In this instance after discussion at the Assembly's Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee and debate in plenary it was agreed that the Regulation be added to the Windsor Framework with cross community support to ensure no barriers in trade are created between Northern Ireland and Britain.

In April, Irish Justice Minister Helen McEntee told the Justice Committee that more than eighty percent of people applying for asylum in Ireland were coming from the UK and crossing the border to seek asylum. The evidence for the Minister's claim was disputed in some quarters but was based on the increase in the numbers of people seeking asylum at the International Protection Office in Dublin rather than at a port of entry. Some commentators linked the increase in applicants coming from the UK to the Conservative government's attempted plan to deport asylum seekers to Rwanda. The issue of migration and the movement of asylum seekers across the border was identified as an issue that should lead to more cross-border co-operation between civil society organisations but also as one that could negatively influence the political context.

In May, a legal challenge against the Illegal Migration Act was heard by the High Court in Belfast. The case was taken by the NI Human Rights Commission and a child currently seeking asylum who is residing in Northern Ireland. The High Court ruled that parts of the Illegal Migration Act breached the UK's obligations under Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework and the European Convention on Human Rights. Article 2(1) of the Windsor Framework commits the UK government to ensure that there will be no diminution of rights for people in Northern Ireland that had been introduced by the Good Friday Agreement. The ruling, in effect, disapplied parts of the Illegal Migration Act and demonstrated the practical effect of the non-diminution of rights protection afforded by Article 2 of the Windsor Framework.

It is vital 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 fourteenth round of our quarterly surveys, 89% of the 28 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 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 1st June to 3rd July 2024,¹ gathering 28 responses in total with 89% of respondents reporting that they have completed the survey in at least one previous quarter.

50% of respondents were based in the Republic of Ireland and 39% based in Northern Ireland, with 11% having a presence on both sides of the border, meaning that while responses from the Republic of Ireland outweigh those from the North, there remains a good balance between the jurisdictions (figure 1).

1

Where is your organisation based?

28 responses

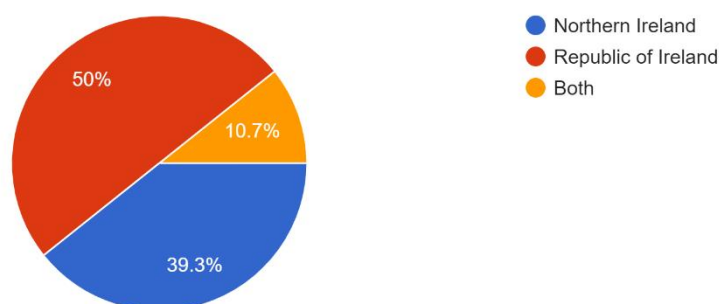


Figure 1

3. The North-South dimension

3.1. Contact and collaboration

In this quarter (Apr-Jun 2024) 75% 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 46% of respondents.

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

28 responses

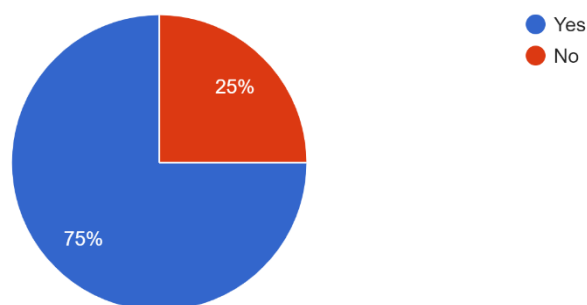


Figure 2

For the first time since we started conducting these surveys, 100% of respondents reported that meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction discussed challenges to cross-border cooperation, either on occasion (62%) or to a significant extent (38%). 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 and potential divergence between North and South. The nature of the challenges discussed were varied but focussed particularly on concerns around a lack of funding for cross-border projects.

- “How the EU's Defence of Democracy package has the potential to place significant obstacles to North-South cooperation. Also discussed the potentially significant barriers to North-South and East-West cooperation in relation to the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill, although with the elections called in the UK, it is uncertain what the future of this Bill might be. The political discussions around immigration on the island of Ireland were also a prominent issues during meetings this quarter”
- “Lack of sustainable funding; lack of recognition of the role civil society orgs play in cooperation”
- “Cross-community buy-in to cross-border working in the context of inter-governmental relationships”
- “Exploring policy regarding programme support and investment for civic organisations with a focus on community ownership and the social and economic development functions of voluntary, community & social enterprise sector (VCSE) organisations”
- “Insurance when working cross border, sharing of data cross border, engaging migrants in projects who can't cross the border”
- “Financial difficulties in administrating cross border research projects”
- “challenges around funding - for existing co-funded agencies the NI core funding element is under pressure”

At present 93% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaborations with a partner in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 3), and 82% of respondents are actively considering new collaborative projects. 58% of respondents presently engaged in North-South cross border collaboration reported that they were in receipt of funding for cross-border collaborative projects, with most 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?

28 responses

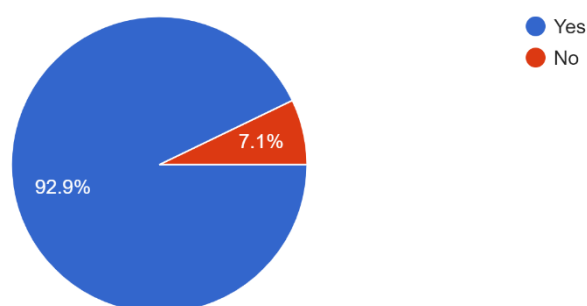


Figure 3

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=28), 29% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has improved since the previous quarter (figure 4), while 68% say it has stayed more or less the same. This needs to be considered in the context that, in the 13th quarterly survey, 90% of respondents reported an improvement in the political context. That this has predominantly either stayed the same or improved is to be welcomed.

In comparison with the previous quarter (January to March 2024), do you think the POLITICAL CONTEXT for collaboration with the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has

28 responses

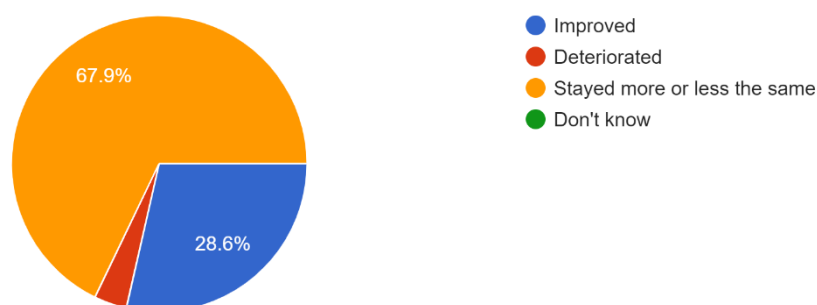


Figure 4

When we asked respondents to develop on these answers they pointed almost unanimously to the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly as the reason behind these improved conditions, though noted the UK General Election as a possible source of uncertainty.

- “In NI they will have a gen election in coming weeks so that might have an impact”
- “There is little appetite for cross boarder work other than through Peace Plus. There is a need to reinstate programmes such as the Causeway Exchange Programme”
- “The political context is currently healthy for cross border linkages”
- “No support or encouragement from the north to engage in North- South collaborations. All encouragement comes from the south”
- “Restoration of Stormont”

This trend continues when turning to the **social** context (figure 5): 71% of respondents say that the social context has remained the same as the previous quarter, with 21% saying it has improved. Again, this needs to be considered in the context of the huge sense of improvement we found in the previous quarterly survey.

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
28 responses

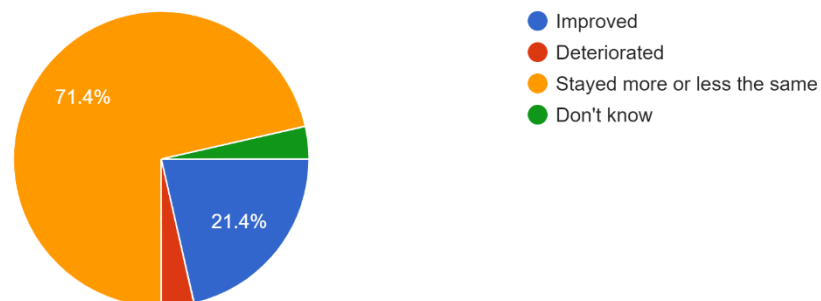


Figure 5

- “We have groups who are keen to undertake collaborative work but the resources aren’t present to enable the logistics”
- “There is increasing appreciation of the impact of collaborative N/S work within the sector (in our view)”
- “Reasons (social factors) for increased collaboration have risen (particularly with regards to immigration). Political factors (elections - local, European and UK National) have also had a significant bearing on social context.”

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 68% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 7% saying it has improved. Respondents reported that, “Less cooperation on workforce issues” and that, “The Rwanda decision has highlighted that migration cross border north to south is a relatively new factor that might have an impact on relations”.

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
28 responses

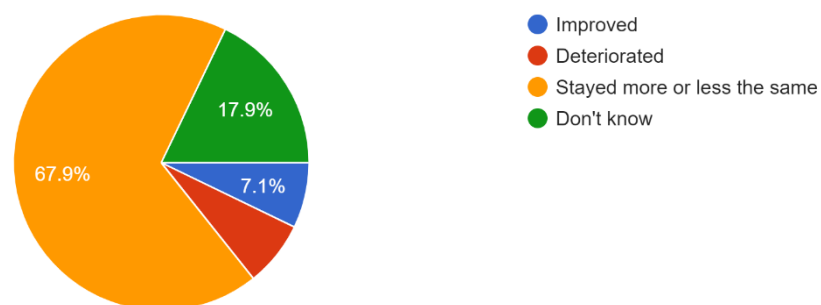


Figure 5

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 75% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter and 7% saying the context has improved. One respondent added that, “Insurance may become a bigger problem” while another said that, “Banking is an issue needing addressed”.

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

28 responses

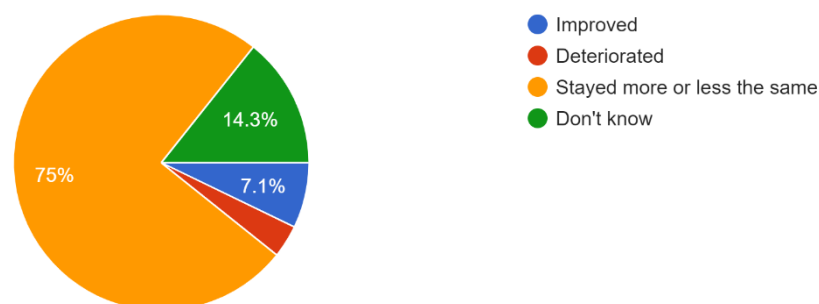


Figure 7

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 cross-border opportunities for young people, and improved information around funding and finance.

- “Organise Transition Year (ROI) and equivalent (NI) exchange visits with basic educational materials about both jurisdictions - it is striking how many people have not visited the other jurisdiction (beyond flying out through Dublin airport etc.)”
- “We would welcome public demonstrations of support from the leadership of the NI Executive for North-South cooperation, replicating the positive image they showed in the US in March this year.”
- “A bit more information on insurance, medical issues and what food can be taken over the border, about when you travel across the border”
- “The Good Friday Belfast agreement designated health an area for cross border cooperation. What happens at present is not cooperation it is cross border competition particularly for workforce”
- “It would be good to see some exploratory N-S work on the possible return of NI to EU Horizon project bids / applications in education and cultural activities - with an emphasis on trans-/inter-disciplinarity.”
- “Get banking systems unified”
- “Think we need to be raising the profile of north south co operation - a lot of people not aware of the extent to which north-south collaborations are happening. Let's celebrate this more and improve the profile, particularly in the north”

- “More emphasis both financial and non financial required to build capacity between individuals and organisations to build trust on a cross border basis. This is an essential prerequisite for successful cross border cooperation”
- “Would like to see things like the NSMC workplan refreshed and updated and the areas of co-operation move beyond the implementation bodies in terms of governance and statutory recognition”

4. The East-West Dimension

4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter only 39% of respondents reported having meetings with organisations in Great Britain (figure 8). What is worse is that 68% of respondents say that this is the same level of contact as the last quarter, and only 21% reported that their level of contact had increased on the previous quarter.

Has your organisation had meetings THIS QUARTER (April to June 2024) with organisations/entities IN GREAT BRITAIN?

28 responses

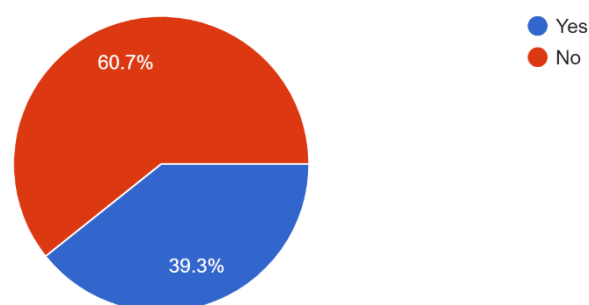


Figure 8

64% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (24%) or to a significant extent (36%). Such challenges were predominantly focussed on issues around post-Brexit data-sharing and regulation:

- “The central issue discussed with organisations in GB was the Data Protection and Digital Information Bill, and how that could impact on East-West and North-West cooperation.”
- “Workforce movement and regulation”
- “Discussed in relation to management of the Community Ownership Fund and the associated challenges faced by community organisations seeking access to its investment potential”

- “Brexit has resulted in the Wales Ireland INTERREG Programmes ceasing. There is thus no financial incentive to work across the two jurisdictions. The Welsh government wishes to maintain and build on existing links between organisations in Wales and Ireland both North and South. Discussions east west are ongoing to do this.”

This quarter 43% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), but only 39% of respondents are actively considering initiating new collaborative projects with organisations in Great Britain. However, only a third of respondents currently engaged in East-West collaborative projects reported that their organisation was in receipt of funding for those projects. This is a barrier to East-West cooperation that we have seen consistently throughout these surveys since 2021 and requires urgent political attention.

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

28 responses

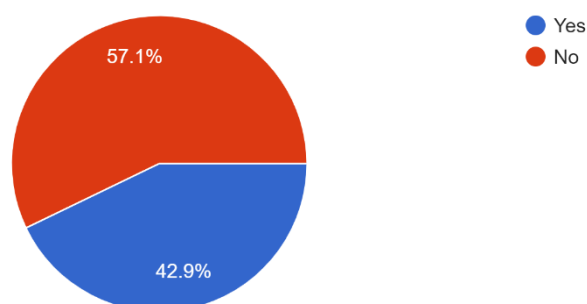


Figure 9

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=28), 61% of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, but 25% say it has deteriorated compared to only 4% who say it has improved (figure 10).

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

28 responses

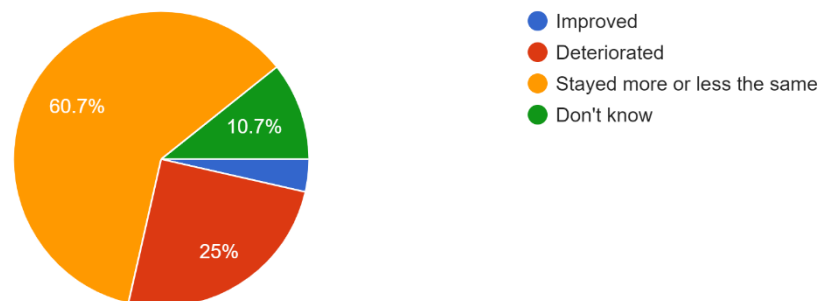


Figure 10

When asked to expand on their experiences of the political context for collaboration, respondents indicated uncertainty caused by the General Election and issues around migration and the Rwanda policy:

- “There is no additional opportunities made available and the loss of opportunity through the EU systems have dried up as a result of the Brexit”
- “Decision for Gen election in UK will have an impact on political relations. The Rwanda decision in UK had an impact in terms of driving migration from UK through NI to IE. This is a potential political issue”
- “Political change at Westminster and establishment of NI Executive/Assembly. Also the need for political lobbying regarding the Community Ownership Fund.”
- “Pre-election atmosphere is noticeable in all activities”

71% of respondents report that the **social** context (figure 11) has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 14% reporting that it has deteriorated.

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

28 responses

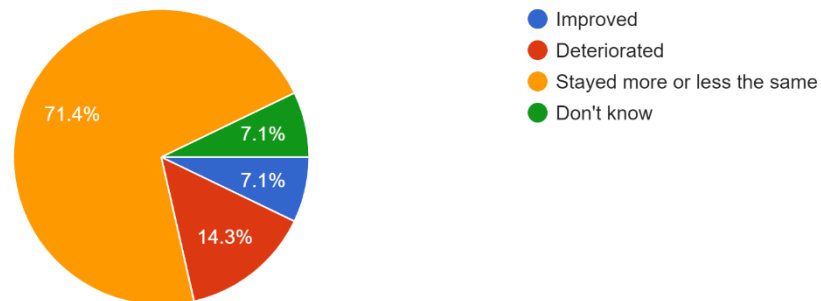


Figure 11

When asked to develop on their experiences of the **social** dimension this quarter one respondent said that, “There is willingness by civil society organisations but not full support from the Government”.

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 64% of respondents say that the regulatory context has stayed the same over the last quarter with 18% saying that it has deteriorated.

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

28 responses

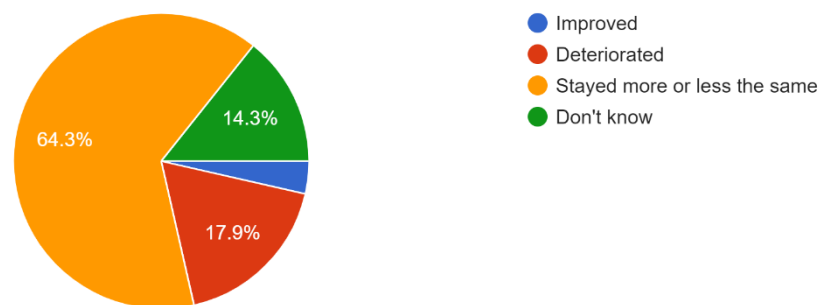


Figure 12

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 71% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 21% of respondents say that they do not know how it has changed.

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
28 responses

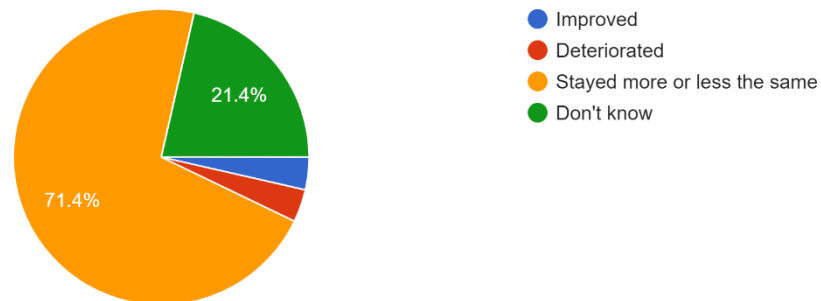


Figure 13

4.3. East-West suggestions for improvement

In the East-West dimension respondents emphasised the need for “Closer relationships between London and Dublin”, and to “Focus on advantages to foster relationships”. But another said that, “No point until there is a stable Government”.

5. Restoration of the Assembly

Following the return of the Northern Ireland Assembly on 3rd February 2024, in this round of the survey we have asked respondents what changes they have already started to notice and what they would like to see from the new Assembly and Executive.

- *“Although we would hope this might change, we have seen no substantive evidence of how the NI Assembly and Executive are actively and publicly supporting North-South and East-West cooperation. We would like to see greater evidence of this in terms of public demonstrations of their support.”*
- *“Overall there appears to be a better relationship in terms of Nth Sth cooperation between political leaders. Both in the south and north and in UK all areas are in election mode which means limited decisions making and a wait and see time. Once the political picture emerges then the change that is necessary is improved strategic cooperation between Nth and South and ultimately east-west”*
- *“More political engagement, pick-up on some of our policy interests, especially around community ownership and wealth building.”*
- *“restoration of political structures gives confidence that situation and cooperation can be improved”*
- *“A more positive atmosphere is now evident in certain sections of our work. Increased opportunities to work”*
- *“Havent noticed any changes. Would like to see a strategy for education that promotes north south relations. It seems to happen between Universities but not*

within post primary sector. Lots of good practice to share and opens up more cpd for teachers”

- *“I am conscience that the Restored assembly has to work within an inadequate Budget”*

Conclusion

Last quarter, the return of the Executive and Assembly to Stormont led to increased optimism both in terms of the North-South and East-West contexts for cooperation and collaboration. This quarter we have seen that enthusiasm largely sustained in terms of the North-South dimension, but less so in terms of East-West cooperation. This is in part because of the General Election that was scheduled to take part during much of the fieldwork for this survey and we must wait to see how the newly elected Labour Government responds to the needs of civic society across these islands.

There are early signs for optimism, as the Rwanda policy and its impact on the island featured heavily in responses to this round of the survey and Labour have already announced its end. However, a lack of funding for East-West cooperation has been a longstanding concern and this is something that the new government must be pressed to address.

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