

**Centre for
Cross Border Cooperation**

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

Briefing on the findings from the 19th
Quarterly Survey (July – September 2025)

Ben Rosher
Aidan Campbell

November 2025

About the Centre for Cross Border Cooperation

The Centre for Cross Border Cooperation, 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

Given what is at stake, 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 Cooperation 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](#).

The period from July-September saw ongoing anti-immigration protests and racist intimidation across the UK and Ireland which has been, regrettably, an increasing trend across these islands and across many other European countries in the past 12 months. This has been reflected in responses to our quarterly survey. In the midst of ongoing geopolitical tensions related to wars in Ukraine, Gaza and Sudan President Trump met with President Putin in Alaska in August. Despite the US describing the summit as being constructive and respectful, no progress was made on achieving an end to the war in Ukraine. Many commentators viewed the summit as a strategic and diplomatic success for the Russian President who made no commitments to ending the conflict yet was welcomed back onto the world stage by Mr Trump.

An article by The Detail investigative website, published in September, based on data obtained by a freedom of information request reported that NI Assembly officials were concerned that Northern Ireland could face a "perma-crisis" in relation to racism and the threat of further violence and intimidation towards migrants and asylum seekers. This comes in the aftermath of large-scale rioting and intimidation of migrant families from their homes which occurred in parts of Northern Ireland in June and ongoing intimidation and harassment of black and minority ethnic people in public places in Belfast by vigilantes over the summer. Whilst violence and intimidation were condemned across all mainstream political parties

some politicians did express their “understanding” of the grievances which motivate individuals who are attributing immigration as the underlying cause of housing shortages and the general deterioration in public services. This scapegoating of migrants and asylum seekers is normalising racism and shifts responsibility from duty holders in government who are charged with addressing these issues. Meanwhile, migrants and asylum seekers continue to bear the brunt of increasing levels of violence, intimidation and racism in their daily lives.

In August, an article by Danny McCoy, IBEC Chief Executive, called for a joint response from the UK and EU to deal with the fallout from recent US trade agreements, the differential tariff rates in effect North and South and their potential impact on the operation of the Windsor Framework. The article asked that the joint EU/UK Specialised Committee engage with the North South Ministerial Council and the North South Implementation Bodies. Following those discussions a proposal should then be presented to the Specialised Committee to begin jointly considering possible risks identified for the Windsor Framework’s implementation and application.

The UK Government announced its new arrangements on Addressing the Legacy of the Troubles in September. Inquests into Troubles killings that had started but were frozen by the Legacy Act will resume. The current Independent Commission for Reconciliation and Information Recovery (ICRIR) is to be replaced by two new bodies, one dealing with investigations (the Legacy Commission) and the other focused on information recovery. The immunity scheme for soldiers or state agents will be ended and the ban on civil proceedings taken by victims’ families will be lifted. A legacy unit is also to be established by the Gardaí which will act as a central point of contact for cross-border cooperation on Troubles related cases and investigations being undertaken by An Garda Síochána.

In September, Irish Justice Minister Jim O’Callaghan, responding to questions at an Oireachtas committee, confirmed that over 80% of International Protection applicants were arriving in the UK and travelling through Northern Ireland and across the Border to claim asylum in Dublin unlawfully taking advantage of the Common Travel Area.

In early July Prime Minister Starmer met with the German Chancellor Merz in London where they signed a treaty on friendship and bilateral cooperation. The Treaty focuses on foreign policy cooperation, security and defence, and economic growth. It also aims to increase connections at citizen level between both countries by enabling visa free travel for school groups and promoting cultural and academic exchange.

A UK France summit took place in July where Prime Minister Starmer and President Macron discussed issues related to foreign policy and defence. They also agreed a way forward in trying to tackle illegal channel crossings by asylum seekers which has seen much media and political interest in Britain for years now.

Public discourse on migration and asylum seekers remained high on the political agenda in Britain during this quarter as anti-immigration protests continued in various communities. This included a proposal made by the Reform party for the UK to leave the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Refugee Convention as a way of stopping small boats crossing the channel and controlling immigration. This is despite the fact that UK membership of the ECHR underpins the Good Friday Agreement. Reform has said that the Good Friday Agreement would need to be renegotiated as part of the ECHR withdrawal process. The UK EU Trade and Cooperation Agreement (TCA) is also dependent on the UK's continued membership of the ECHR and any proposal to leave would likely be considered a breach of the TCA's terms.

UK Minister for EU Relations, Nick Thomas Symonds, indicated that the UK was open to re-engaging with the EU Erasmus student exchange scheme in August but that this would be subject to agreement on the financial terms of participation on which discussions were ongoing. Chancellor Rachel Reeves, speaking at the Labour Party conference in September said that the government was working with the EU to secure agreement on an ambitious youth mobility scheme.

The Independent Review of the operation of the Windsor Framework undertaken by Lord Murphy was published in early September. The report acknowledged that the detrimental impact of complex trading arrangements is being felt most keenly by small and medium sized businesses (the bulk of businesses in Northern Ireland) who are less well equipped to respond. The review also pointed out that "little had been made" of the dual market access afforded to businesses locating in Northern Ireland to both the UK and EU markets.

Prime Minister Starmer also announced in September that the government intended to proceed with plans to introduce a mandatory digital ID card which would come into force by 2029 at the latest. The government argues that this will speed up citizen's access to services and support employers to determine whether someone has the right to work in the UK. All Northern Ireland's political parties have rejected the concept of compulsory digital ID for a range of reasons. There are obvious complications in Northern Ireland with the Good Friday Agreement protecting people's right to identify as British, Irish or both. Responding to criticisms at the Labour Party conference NI Secretary of State Hilary Benn said that the government would not do anything in implementing the scheme that would undermine the rights and protections set out in the Good Friday Agreement.

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 Cooperation 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 nineteenth round of our quarterly surveys, 97% of the 29 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, Windsor Framework, and broader post-Brexit landscape 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 22 September and 10 October 2025 gathering 29 responses in total with 97% of respondents reporting that they have completed the survey in at least one previous quarter.

55% of respondents were based in the Republic of Ireland and 41% based in Northern Ireland, with 3% having a presence on both sides of the border, meaning that there was a reasonably equal balance between the two jurisdictions (figure 1).

Where is your organisation based?

29 responses

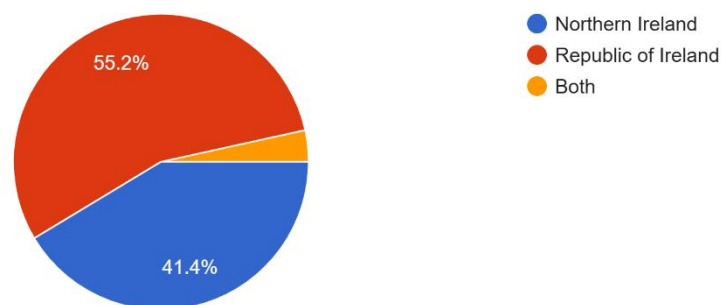


Figure 1

3. The North-South dimension

3.1. Contact and collaboration

In this quarter (July-September 2025) 76% of respondents had had meetings with organisations in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 2).

Has your organisation had meetings THIS QUARTER (between July and September) with organisations/entities in the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND?

29 responses

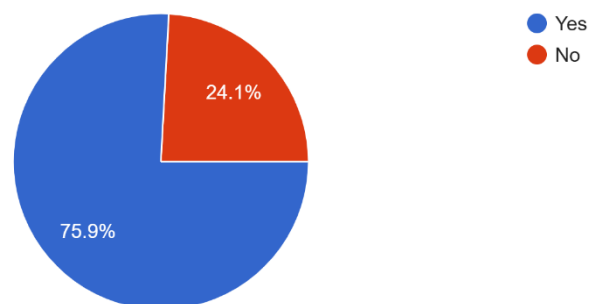


Figure 2

100% 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 (46%). This high level has developed into something of a trend over recent surveys but this is the first time that every respondent has reported discussing disruption caused by Brexit in their meetings with counterparts in the other jurisdiction. 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, touching on issues including tax, tourism, and challenges confronting cross-border workers.

- “Tax and issues for cross border workers. Differences in funding and supports.
- “The Irish Government seem disinterested in matters impacting the North. Common Travel Area rights are being shredded by the Irish Government in border enforcement operations”
- “Common policy challenges for community activists and practitioners working in disadvantaged communities, who are trying to improve access and quality of prevention measures across mental health and whole of government systems. On the face of it there is good policy alignment and both service and fiscal landscape in both jurisdictions differ. On public and community engagement and participation measures there are differences. However, discussing policy differences as a step on a way forward to work collaboratively can seem irrelevant and a waste of time for people who have had bad experiences of their respective systems and feel that they are not being listened too. They want to see practical measures and improvements urgently in the communities. We have not yet broached underserved communicates in Border areas”
- “Jurisdictional differences in taxation, apprenticeship requirements, immigration policies, recognition of professional qualifications that undermine the fulfilment of the opportunities presented by an all-island approach to the labour market, and means certain individuals are unable to cross the border in order to participate in cross-border projects”

At present 79% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaborations with a partner in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 3). However, this quarter only 35% 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?

29 responses

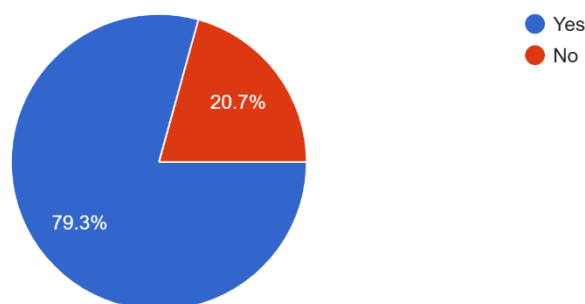


Figure 3

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=29), 10% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has improved since the previous quarter (figure 4), while 79% say it has stayed more or less the same.

In comparison with the previous quarter (April to June 2025), do you think the POLITICAL CONTEXT for collaboration with the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has

29 responses

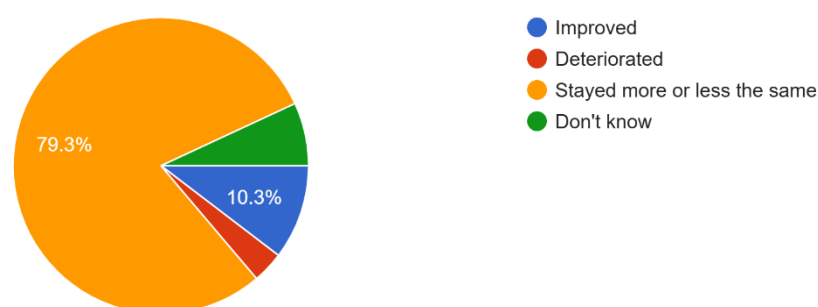


Figure 4

When we asked respondents to develop on these answers many pointed to concerns that the Irish government are neglecting their responsibilities under the Belfast-Good Friday Agreement.

- “The implementation of the Good Friday Agreement is regressing. There is zero focus by the ROI Government on both spirit and letter of the GFA.”
- “Our involvement has been training on attitudes, prejudice and human rights in contexts of explorations of historical developments and the impact of conflict. Developing this in an environment of suspicion and deep bigotry has been challenging but in many cases very rewarding”
- “There seems to be a growing gap in the reconciliation element of society.”

Turning to the **social** context (figure 5): 66% of respondents say that the social context has remained the same as the previous quarter, with 21% saying it has deteriorated. Several respondents have noted the racism and violence directed toward migrants in recent months as having dire implications for social life across these islands.

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
29 responses

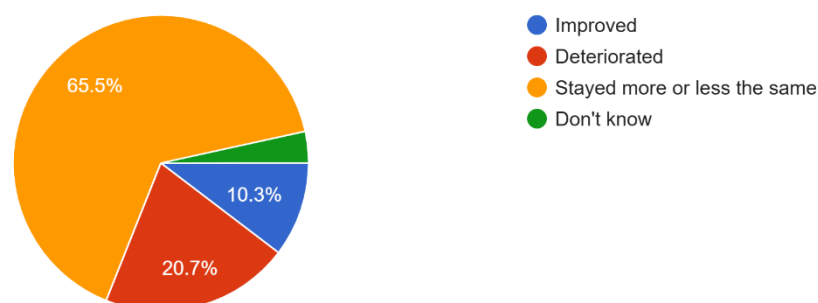


Figure 5

- “There is no engagement with the Irish Government with groups in the North on decisions impacting them, especially regarding the Common Travel Area”
- “Overall improving - Members involved tell us that the north south collaborative work is important but not very important. As a civil society organisation there are more opportunities emerging to engage on social and economic rights-based issues, such as affordable housing and anti racism and the running down of public services. Unfortunately social media has made it easier for right wing activists organising cross-border to take rights and dignity away from others is increasing - which isn't the same as improving from my perspective”
- “The tensions on immigration in communities on the Island of Ireland came to the fore again during this period, making it difficult for new communities to integrate.”
- “The rise of racist sentiment in both jurisdictions is providing a worse social context for North-South cooperation, especially when seeking to address differences in immigration policies that would support greater cross-border mobility.”
- “As we begin the political preparations for next years elections we have seen out political leaders work less together and more personal attacks have undermined our work to date.”
- “While contact and engagement between the two traditional communities has improved somewhat (especially among youth) suspicion, distrust and wariness remain notable. A recent factor has been the rise of anti-migrant hostility and racist xenophobia. The lack of education and fragmented training interventions are factors in failure to address these issues”

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 69% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 24% saying they are unsure how or if it has changed. This is largely due to the “increasingly complex” regulatory landscape, which another respondent says is resulting in, “more disjointed regulation”. While

another says that, “in terms of Visa's and sharing of data between jurisdictions is still very much up in the air”.

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

29 responses

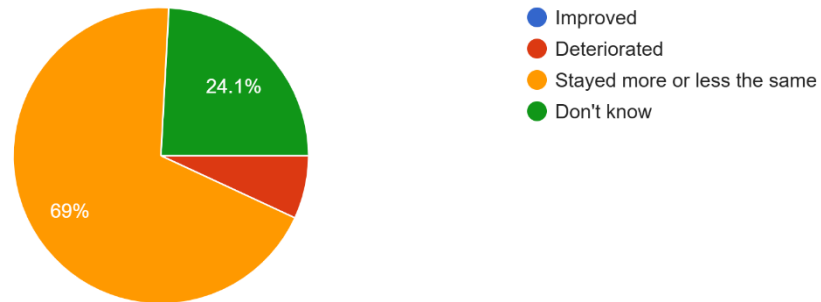


Figure 6

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 72% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter and 21% say they are unclear if or how it has changed. One respondent replied that, “NI would seem tethered to a more antiquated system of transport, narrower product range, poor internationalisation and substandard public transport and technology services. The gap in comparison with the Republic is very noticeable”. While another reported that “SEUPB (PeacePlus) funding becoming ‘live’ again is facilitating more civic society intentional work”.

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

29 responses

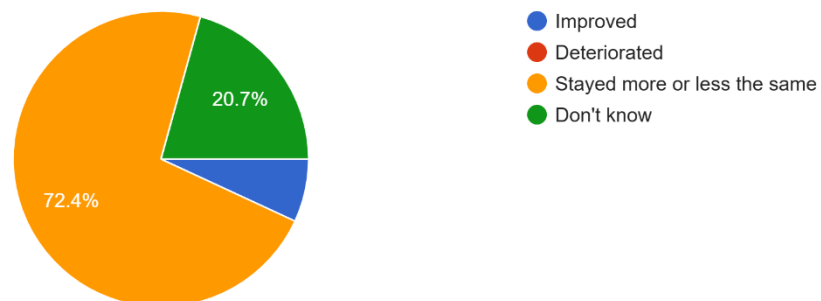


Figure 7

4. The East-West Dimension

4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter 62% of respondents reported having meetings with organisations in Great Britain (figure 8).

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

29 responses

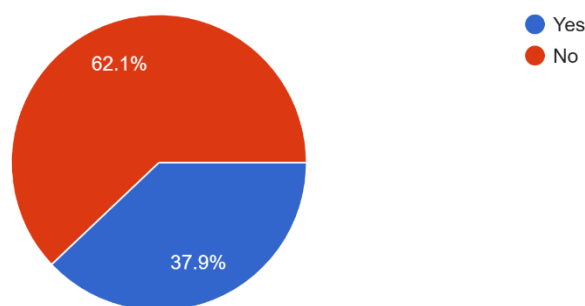


Figure 8

82% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (64%) or to a significant extent (18%). Such challenges were predominantly focussed on the UK's inability to access some EU programmes:

- "Great Britain not having access to significant EU Funding."
- "Unique legal framework requires distinct consideration of policy /legislation."
- "Lack of funding and the funding that is in place tends to go to larger organisations."

This quarter 69% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), and 44% of respondents currently engaged in East-West collaborative projects reported that their organisation was in receipt of funding for those projects. This is a welcome increase from the 25% reported last quarter and is hopefully indicative of an improved funding landscape moving forward.

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

29 responses

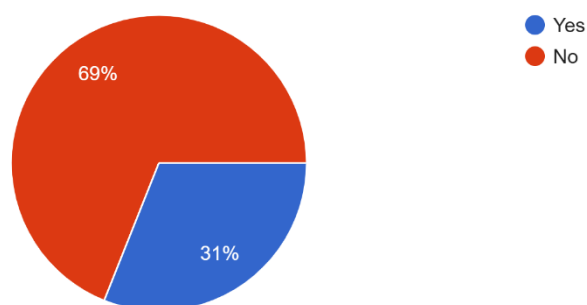


Figure 9

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=29), 66% of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, and 14% say it has improved (figure 10).

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

29 responses

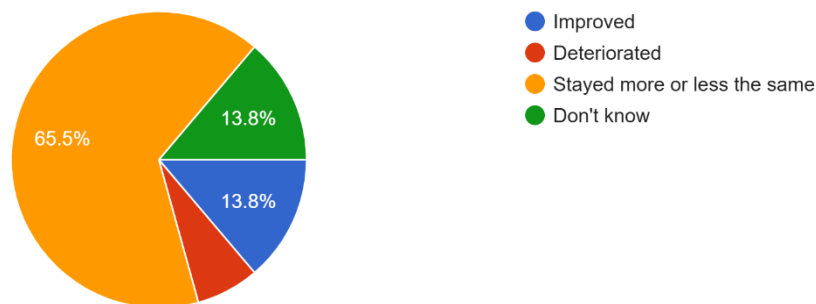


Figure 10

When asked to expand on their experiences of the political context for collaboration, there was a mixed response, with contrasting views on the UK government's engagement with Northern Ireland

- “Since Labour Party there seems to be a greater appetite for collaboration with Ireland among the UK Government.”
- “There doesn't seem to be much appetite for engagement. It lacks the urgency and drive it used to have as broader geopolitical events taken over.”
- “Politically our group has better access to GB institutions. However Westminster top down decision-making on borders, immigration checking, security and the lack of attempt to dismantle paramilitarism is a pattern. The appointment of a paramilitary interlocutor is a distraction from what UK Gov should be doing, ie upholding human rights and tackling terror.”
- “NIO funding released”

66% of respondents report that the **social** context (figure 11) has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 10% reporting a deterioration and 7% an improvement. When asked to develop on their experiences of the **social** dimension this quarter one respondent said that there “appears to be a greater level of cooperation btw both Executives east/west the optics look better politically which impacts society.” However, another reported that “the impact of Brexit is incremental and there is no sense of enthusiasm. Having no involvement in EU programs gives less reason to reach out.” While a third lamented the “protests and tensions on immigration”.

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

29 responses

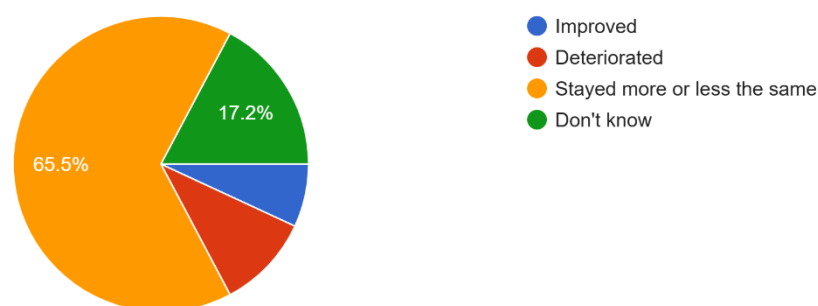


Figure 11

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 66% of respondents say that the regulatory context has stayed the same over the last quarter, but none reported an improvement, while 10% say 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

29 responses

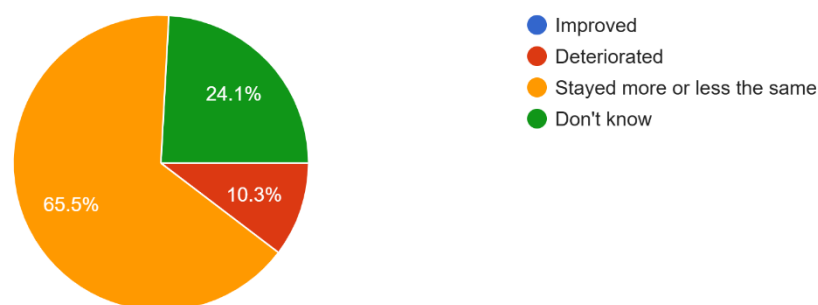


Figure 12

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 62% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 14% of respondents say that the environment has deteriorated with one respondent reporting that there are “more barriers to on line delivery of goods.”

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

29 responses

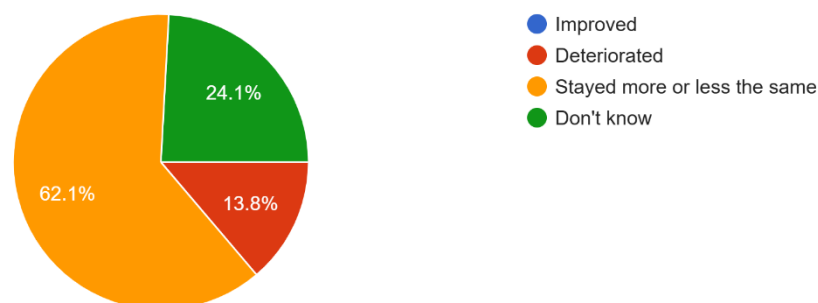


Figure 13

Conclusion

This quarter has seen some much welcome improvement with regard to the East-West dimension with increased levels of cooperation between NI and GB based partners. The increase in respondents reporting they are receiving funding for these projects is particularly welcome and something we will monitor moving forward. There are of course concerns that remain to be addressed, particularly around cross-border travel for non-UK/Irish frontier workers and around the engagement of the Irish Government with their role in the GFA.

Finally, there remains clear concern for the racism and violence which has been directed at migrant communities across the UK and Ireland and which all governments have a responsibility to address.

CONTACTS

CENTRE FOR CROSS BORDER COOPERATION

39 Abbey Street, Armagh BT61 7EB

028 (048 from Republic of Ireland) 3751 1550

info@crossborder.ie

[Centre for Cross Border Cooperation](#)

[@CCBSCrossBorder](#)

[@crossborderstudies](#)

A large, light grey graphic of a stylized letter 'C' with several arrows pointing outwards from its perimeter. The 'C' is composed of two concentric curved lines. The arrows are of varying lengths and directions, some pointing towards the top, some towards the bottom, and some towards the sides. The entire graphic is centered on the page.

www.crossborder.ie

A valued source of research, information and support for collaboration
across borders on the island of Ireland, Europe and beyond.