

**Centre for  
Cross Border Cooperation**

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

Briefing on the findings from the 20<sup>th</sup>  
Quarterly Survey (October – December  
2025)

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## 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](http://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 North/South Ministerial Council met in Institutional and Plenary format in Dublin in October 2025. The meeting was chaired by the First and deputy First Ministers, the Government of Ireland was represented by the Tánaiste. Ministers welcomed the ongoing mutually beneficial cooperation being delivered through the PEACEPLUS programme as well as work to develop a successor programme, and through the Shared Island Initiative. In October, the UK Government reported to Parliament on a joint framework agreed with the Irish Government to address the legacy of the Troubles. The framework outlined the UK Government's revised approach to legacy issues including historical investigations, information recovery, and reconciliation. Crucially, the controversial proposals to provide immunity from prosecution in the 2023 Act will be dropped.

The House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee published its report, ['Northern Ireland after Brexit: Strengthening Northern Ireland's voice in the context of the Windsor Framework'](#) in October<sup>1</sup>. Key findings included asking the UK Government to urgently consider how the structures of the Windsor Framework can be simplified and made more accessible to Northern Ireland stakeholders. The report called on Government to address

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<sup>1</sup> To read the Centre's submission to the House of Lords Northern Ireland Scrutiny Committee's Call for evidence click: <https://crossborder.ie/reports/submission-to-the-house-of-lords-northern-ireland-scrutiny-committee/>

the difficulties businesses are facing due to the absence of a centralised register of applicable EU laws in Northern Ireland. It also recommended an increase in transparency about the function of the Stormont Brake to promote greater dialogue between the Assembly and the UK Government and recorded concerns over the capacity of Windsor Framework Democratic Scrutiny Committee (DSC) to conduct effective scrutiny new or replacement EU acts to Northern Ireland due to tight timescales.

The House of Lords European Affairs Committee's report on the UK-EU reset was published in November. The report: *'Unfinished Business: Resetting the UK-EU relationship'* assessed the progress on the Government's reset objectives in two parts: assessing the reset up to and including the May 2025 UK-EU summit; and, looking ahead, identifying issues for consideration as the Government takes forward the summit agenda such as foreign policy, defence and security issues, including law enforcement cooperation; trade and mobility issues; and overarching implications for Government and Parliament. The Committee noted in its overall findings that: "The Government's reset of relations with the EU is a process not a single event or a summit, and there is no clarity about the endpoint."

The Specialised Committee on the Implementation of the Windsor Framework issued a press release following its meeting in December outlining further progress in the sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) area and welcoming the reduction in frequency of SPS identity checks from 10 to 8%, which, it stated, would ease the flow for agri-foods in the context of the Northern Ireland Retail Movement Scheme. The Specialised Committee also reaffirmed the importance of continuing to work to implement the Windsor Framework. The meeting also discussed the implications of the EU's Artificial Intelligence and Cyber Resilience Acts on the functioning of the Windsor Framework.

The EU Entry Exit System (EES), the new digital border system for registering non-EU nationals travelling for a short stay to the Schengen area, came into force in October. Digital data collection will be gradually introduced by European countries using the EES at border crossing points with full implementation by April 2026. Non-EU travellers will be asked to provide fingerprints and facial scans when entering (or exiting) the Schengen/Schengen-associated area. The Republic of Ireland and Cyprus are outside the Schengen area and EES is not applicable.

The seventh meeting of the European Political Community (EPC) took place in October in Copenhagen. Founded in 2022, the EPC brings together leaders from across the continent on a biannual basis and this meeting was attended by An Taoiseach, Micheál Martin, and Prime Minister Keir Starmer. The summit focused on the Ukraine war, the general security situation in Europe and the wider geopolitical situation. The EU Commission unveiled its work programme for 2026 in October. Some of the headline priorities include, sustainable

prosperity and competitiveness, defence and security, quality of life - food, water, nature and global engagement.

Following the end of the transition period and the implementation of the Protocol on Ireland/Northern Ireland from the 1<sup>st</sup> 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 edition of the quarterly survey is the last time it will run in this format. As regular readers of these briefings will be aware, the cohort of respondents had declined following the agreement of the Windsor Framework. Although there are still issues emerging from the implementation of the Windsor Framework the relationships between the Irish and UK governments and the UK and EU have improved. The potential for further disruption which would impact negatively on cooperation still exists as the UK and EU diverge but the CCBC is now considering developing alternative methods of tracking 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 are being safeguarded. We would like to take this opportunity to record our sincere appreciation to all those civic society organisations and local authorities who have completed the survey over the past five years and shared their invaluable insights into how the wider political, social, regulatory and material context was impacting on their vital cooperation work.

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 twentieth round of our quarterly surveys, 100% 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 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 during gathering 27 responses in total with 100% of respondents reporting that they have completed the survey in at least one previous quarter. The survey was conducted between 28<sup>th</sup> November and 17<sup>th</sup> December.

48% of respondents were based in the Republic of Ireland and 48% based in Northern Ireland, with 4% having a presence on both sides of the border, meaning that there was an equal balance between the two jurisdictions (figure 1).

Where is your organisation based?

27 responses

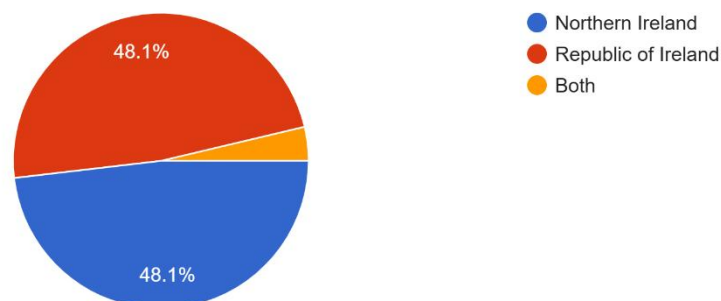


Figure 1

## 3. The North-South dimension

### 3.1. Contact and collaboration

In this quarter (October - December 2025) 78% 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 October and December) with organisations/entities in the other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND?

27 responses

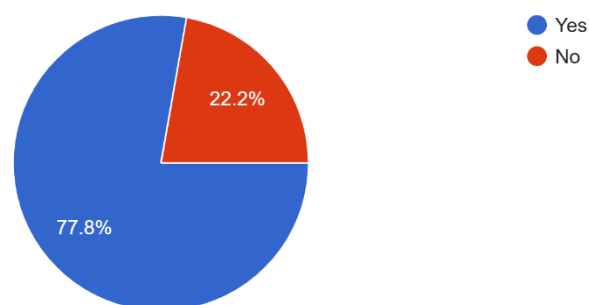


Figure 2

86% 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 (24%). While the level of discussions around Brexit related challenges has been consistently high, this is a welcome decrease from the 100% we recorded in the previous quarter. The nature of the challenges discussed were varied, touching on issues including concerns around racial profiling, visa issues, and obstacles to healthcare.

- “Discussed risk of racial profiling in relation to movement of people on the island.”
- “Ongoing issues of far right impacts on 'othering' in addition to EU Exit impacts impinging on good relations and cooperation.”
- “Focus on threat of rollback of CTA and impact on North-South work.”
- “We are planning a border conference next year involving 120 delegates from across Europe. We are taking delegates across the border from Monaghan to Armagh. The tourist visa is an issue. We are still not clear on the requirements.”
- “Lack of access to EU Erasmus mobility opportunities; possible alternate funding.”
- “Policy differences and difficulties in resourcing cross-border co-operation on common social and economic policy challenges - and the disconnect with policy makers despite alignment on language and terminology.”
- “Extra requirements and cost for hauliers due to Brexit. Challenges to cooperation between the two Health Care systems to deliver better outcomes to the border community. Anomalies in home care support where a carer on one side of the border does not get support to care for a family member on the other side.”
- “Working with people across the Border (s) who are from ethnic minority groups who are unable to cross the border due to their settlement status.”

At present 78% of respondents are involved in cross-border collaborations with a partner in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland (figure 3). 62% 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?

27 responses

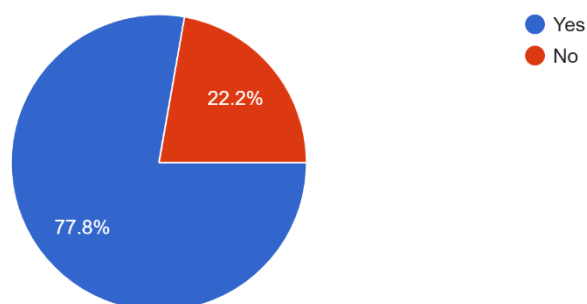


Figure 3

### 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), 7% of respondents believe that the **political** context for cross-border cooperation has improved and another 7% of respondents believe it has deteriorated since the previous quarter (figure 4), while 85% say it has stayed more or less the same.

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

27 responses

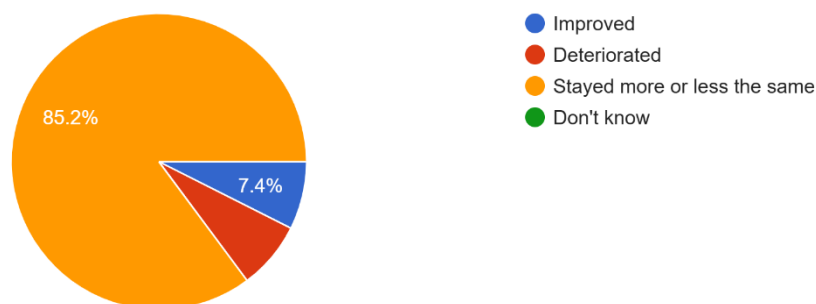


Figure 4

When we asked respondents to develop on these answers many observed that, while there were several positives, many of these were piecemeal and did not come together to contribute to an over-arching strategy.

- “New opportunities being opened by the enhanced availability of EU funding and resources.”
- “Increasingly hostile Irish government regarding our work on immigration and CTA. We are also finding it more difficult to engage with MEPs on NI related issues. Less interest post Brexit.”
- “Resourcing supports collaboration and without resources it is difficult to advance collaborative working. Governments investment in collaborative engagement is limited in scope and vision, is piecemeal and does not strategically challenge organisations to focus on difference in policy approaches to civic development and how this might be changed.”
- “There is a willingness to cooperate and improve co-operation on a level that we haven't experienced before - we are seeing it for environmental reasons and for issues around access to key services like health - especially in the western region of NI where there is a realisation that health needs the population head count for some viability of specialisms. While there are bigger voices shouting against it happening and objecting at a public level the pragmatism of cross border encounter and cooperation is winning over a lot of the rhetoric.”

Similarly, when we asked about the **social** context (figure 5): 85% of respondents say that the social context has remained the same as the previous quarter, with 7% saying it has either deteriorated or improved. Several respondents have noted that ongoing racism and bigotry is 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

27 responses

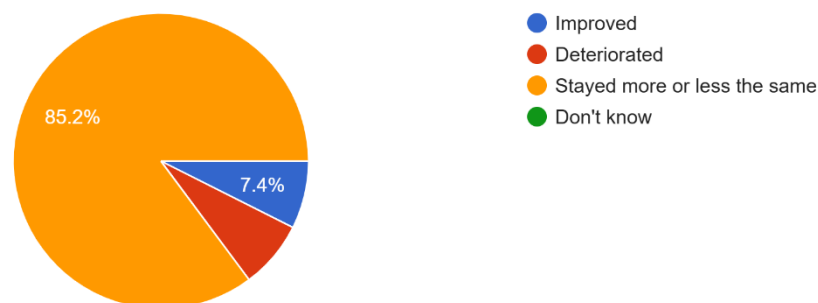


Figure 5

- “Identity, race and the far right agenda in addition to post conflict and post EU exit relations has been very damaging.”
- “There are signs of greater contact and openness. But some attitudinal barriers around prejudice and bigotry remain entrenched in some communities.”
- “Increased community collaboration on regional projects addressing concerns around environmental issues, job creation, etc.”
- “The interest for collaboration remains but its energy comes from those holding the investment resources, their political interest shapes the nature and focus of collaboration.”

In terms of the **regulatory** context (figure 6), 78% of respondents say that the regulatory context has remained the same compared to the last quarter, with 19% saying they are unsure how or if it has changed. One respondent noted that the “Impact of UK government Electronic Travel Authorisation-now impacting collaboration with visiting international groups who need to travel to NI via Dublin e.g. academics, international NGOs and school groups.”

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

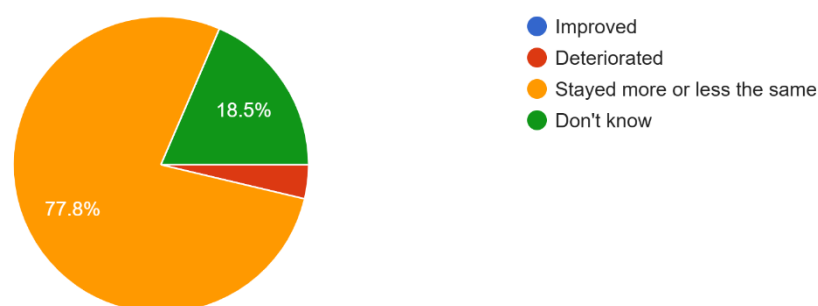


Figure 6

Finally, with regard to the **material** context for North-South collaboration (figure 7), 74% of respondents believe it is the same as the previous quarter and 11% say they are unclear if or how it has changed and 11% consider it to have deteriorated. One respondent replied that, “Funding is now harder to identify for N/S linkages”, while another said that, “Communities are being innovative and finding other ways to circumvent regulations.” A third observed that, “From a service perspective it is unclear to this organisation as to how this has changed. It may have for larger VCSEs that are embedded in public service supply chains but for smaller organisations, or those not partnering with other service providers, the material context has not 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 in other jurisdiction ON THE ISLAND OF IRELAND has

27 responses

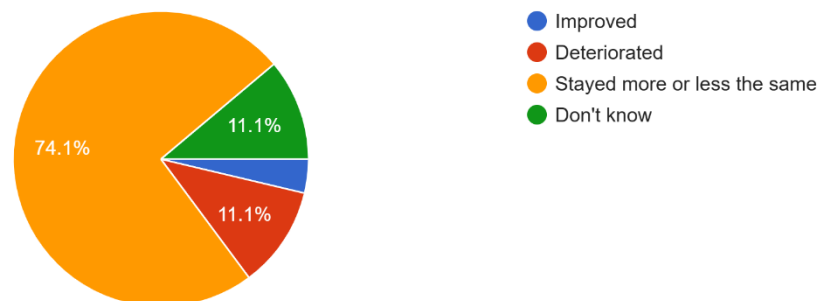


Figure 7

## 4. The East-West Dimension

### 4.1. East-West contact and collaboration

Turning now to the East-West Dimension, this quarter 44% of respondents reported having meetings with organisations in Great Britain (figure 8).

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

27 responses

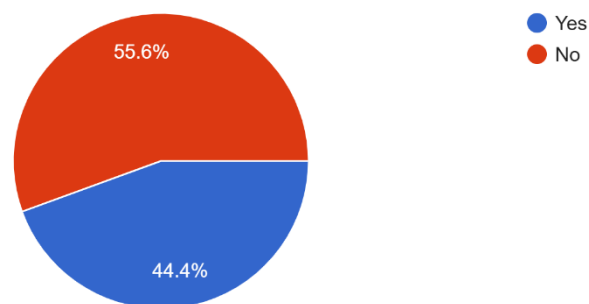


Figure 8

67% of respondents reported that meetings with partners in Great Britain discussed challenges to cooperation either on occasion (50%) or to a significant extent (17%). Such challenges were predominantly focussed on the issues arising from differences in legislation following Brexit:

- “Discussed distinct rights framework in NI, which derives important but limited benefit from Windsor Framework Article 2 yet lags behind GB in some areas and has done so since before Brexit.”
- “Differences in legislation and provision across jurisdictions.”

- “We deal with issues around policy and some of the issues that have been raised are concerned with different policy operating environments between areas - Rural Needs Act, Wealth Building Legislation, Social care and housing services being operated by Councils in UK and Scotland but that's different here etc.”

This quarter 44% of respondents say they are currently involved in collaboration with a GB-based organisation (figure 9), but only 25% of respondents currently engaged in East-West collaborative projects reported that their organisation was in receipt of funding for those projects, which is a worrying reversal on the increasing trend we had seen across recent surveys.

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

27 responses

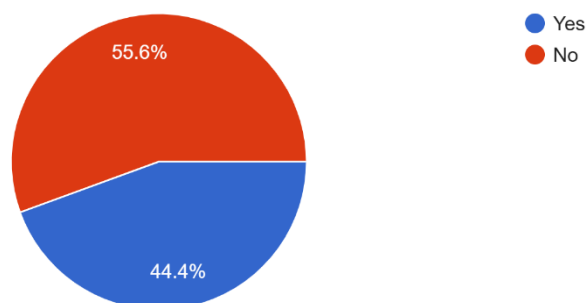


Figure 9

#### 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), 74% of respondents believe that the **political** context for East-West cooperation has remained the same since the previous quarter, and 15% say they are unsure if or how the context has changed (figure 10).

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

27 responses

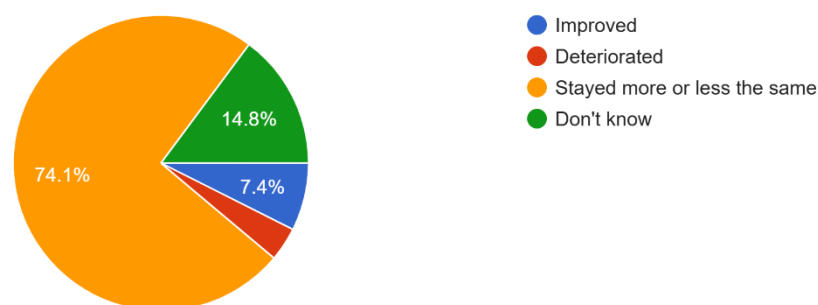


Figure 10

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

- "Slightly improved in tone and in expectations re fiscal, and legacy issues - more solution focused."
- "There is little interest in what happens on the island of Ireland."
- "The NIO has stepped into this space with the Connect Fund that has afforded new opportunities for east/west collaboration."

Similarly, 66% of respondents report that the **social** context (figure 11) has remained the same since the previous quarter, with 7% reporting a deterioration and 4% an improvement. When asked to develop on their experiences of the **social** dimension this quarter one respondent said that there need to be "opportunities to join in the social and economic policy discourse around affordability and child poverty, individualism, migration and asylum seeking and the rise of the far right and societies need for social solidarity and prevention measures".

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

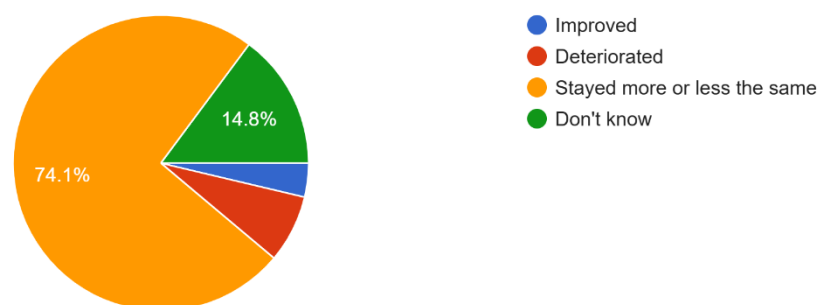


Figure 11

Turning to the **regulatory** context (figure 12), 67% of respondents say that the regulatory context has stayed the same over the last quarter, but none reported an improvement, while 15% say it has deteriorated. One respondent suggested that, “The UK is feeling the impact of Brexit more and more while Ireland (N&S) continues to benefit from the EU connection. The general disinterest in Ireland by the British government is unhelpful too”, while another lamented, “the UK Pride in Place fund announcement provided opportunity to align the development focus of civic infrastructure organisations across the UK. The decision to exclude NI from Pride in Place is a lost opportunity”.

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

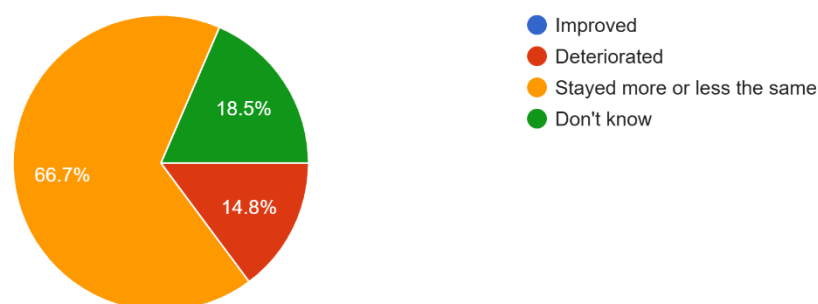


Figure 12

Finally, when considering the **material** context (figure 13), 70% report that the material context has remained the same since the last quarter, while 22% of respondents say that they are unsure how or if the context has changed, with one respondent reporting that the “Connect Fund is an excellent new support”.

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

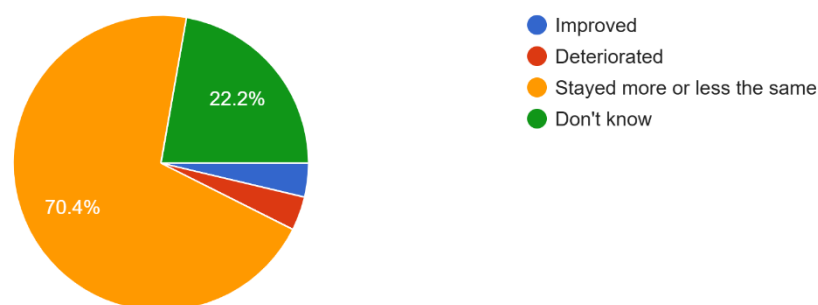


Figure 13

## Conclusion

This quarter has seen something of a return to the low-level stability seen through 2024 and the first half of 2025. The North-South dimension remains more robust than East-West. There is much work to be done in sustaining the Common Travel Area, particularly given the rollout of the UK's Electronic Travel Authorisation. But, civic society organisations have proved dedicated and adaptable to the challenges thrown up by Brexit.

As this was the final quarterly survey, we ended by inviting the respondents to offer their own final comments on the conditions for North-South and East-West cooperation and collaboration. Respondents have said that they “want to highlight the impact of the EU Pact on Immigration being implemented in Ireland. This does not seem to have considered the border or N/S impacts at all!”, while another stated that “There is an increasing need for the two Governments to refocus on implementing the G.F.A. and lead the debate on constitutional change. Brexit should be a lesson”.

Finally, a third has said that, “we have purposely looked East West much more because of the need to look up and out from this region to other areas to see what they are doing and how they are responding to the challenges facing rural communities in areas like Health, Housing, Poverty and access to Transport. We have also recently attended the European Rural Parliament in Scotland which led to us connecting with groups in rural Scotland who we thought would be useful for our membership. It was the engagement in the Ad Hoc group that largely encouraged/helped us to realise the potential of connection beyond this Island. The NIO Connect fund also helped us to think about exploiting East West connection for our work on Lough Neagh.”

Thank you to all who have given their time and insight to this survey over the last 5 years. Your input has been invaluable in shaping the work of the Centre and how we work to influence policy across these islands and we hope we have been able to provide some help and insight in return.

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