

# BORDERING ON BREXIT:

Views from Local Communities in the Central  
Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland



**BORDERING ON BREXIT**  
Views from Local Communities  
in the Central Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland

A report prepared for the Irish Central Border Area Network.

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Although the scope of a report of this nature prevents us from doing justice to all the views gathered in this research exercise, we trust that we have shown respect to them in our presentation of this material. We hope that this is but the beginning of ongoing conversations and information-sharing on this important subject.

# Executive Summary





# Overview

## The Central Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland

The eight Member Councils areas of the Central Border Region include Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; Fermanagh and Omagh; Mid Ulster and the counties of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo. The Region had a population of approximately 850,000 in 2011. This is a predominantly rural area, characterised by a dispersed population and distance from major urban centres. Approximately one third of the population live in settlements over 1,500 population; and two thirds in smaller settlements and open countryside. The Region accounts for 20% of the land area of the island of Ireland, with a high quality landscapes of coastline, lakes, inland waterways and hills.

After generations of severe social, political, and economic challenges in the Central Border Region, not to mention the experience of violent conflict, the 21st century has begun to prove the viability and value of cross-border cooperation. Unremarkably and uncontroversially, cross-border connections have become a means of overcoming the dual challenges of underdevelopment and geographical peripherality. Economies of scale, small-step exports, social enterprise, cross-community projects, tourism initiatives, even bargain hunting — in the past fifteen years, habits of cross-border movement have been developing that have brought evident and practical gain. The European Union helped to create an environment that made such contacts easier; indeed, it did a great deal to encourage it, as per the logic of the Single Market, legislative harmonisation and the European Regional Development Fund. Political parties of all hues have come to encourage local communities and businesses in the Border Region to make the most of such opportunities.

The UK's withdrawal from the EU will constitute a major change to the context for such relationships across the border. As such, the Central Border Region is the area most exposed to the risks of Brexit, for the impact of any divergence between the UK and Ireland will be felt most acutely at the Irish border. Although the nature and extent of any changes are as yet unknown, the very prospect of them is already having an impact in the Central Border Region. The purpose of this small-scale research project was to give a voice to members of local communities on both sides of the border in this Region, to better understand the potential and actual impact of Brexit even at this early stage.

## Responding to Brexit

The research for this report was conducted in the summer of 2017, some four months after the triggering of Article 50 by Prime Minister May and after just one round of the Brexit negotiations. Although the Irish border had already been identified by the EU and UK as one of the top three issues for negotiation (along with citizens' rights and financial liabilities), the position papers from the UK government and the European Commission on Ireland/Northern Ireland had not yet been published at the time of this research. Whilst the political parties in Ireland and Northern Ireland had set out their positions on Brexit (with strong policy differences evident between Unionism and Nationalism on the issue), there was as yet no development of a common approach to Brexit in Northern Ireland beyond the OFMDFM letter to Theresa May in August 2016.

This report thus constitutes a snapshot of the perception and anticipation of Brexit from the Border Region one year on from the June 2016 referendum but before much progress had been made in the negotiations. The focus on the movement of people and goods in the survey responses reflects the main issues raised in media coverage of Brexit. The possible fallout from Brexit for the peace process was also frequently mentioned. Other practical concerns were raised by individual participants, including diverging environmental standards, specialised healthcare provision, shrinking recruitment pools, the loss

of EU funding (including CAP), tourism decline and tariff barriers. Just as our research reflects the complex links across the border that make up everyday life and practice in the Region, we found that anticipation of the possible impact of Brexit on any aspect of cross-border movement has ramifications for several others. These local-level concerns contrast with the high-level picture of trade opportunities and Treasury savings presented by Leave supporters. We give space to both in this report.

## The study

The online survey and focus groups were used in this research to better understand the nature of cross-border movement in the Central Border Region now alongside the anticipated effects of Brexit from the perspective of local communities. It is not intended to be a comprehensive report on the potential impact of Brexit across a range of sectors but rather an opportunity to record the views of local communities who are ‘bordering on Brexit’ in a very literal way, from both sides of the border.

The survey received over 300 responses [n=305] from across the eight local authority regions of the Irish Central Border Area Network (Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon; Cavan; Donegal; Fermanagh and Omagh; Leitrim; Mid Ulster; Monaghan; and Sligo). Most of our respondents are in full-time work and aged 31-64. They come from both sides of the border and constitute balanced representation from the 8 local authority areas of ICBAN. There was an under-representation in our sample of those with British citizenship and those who voted Leave in the 2016 Referendum. Approximately 60% of our respondents had a vote in the June 2016 referendum. Of those who exercised this right, 1 in 6 voted for the UK to Leave the EU, which is not representative of the actual result of the referendum in the relevant Northern Ireland constituencies. This disparity may be because those most motivated to respond to a survey on Brexit were likely to be Remain voters and concerned to express their views. That said, from our focus groups it was clear that pro-European and Remain voters are just as keen as Leave voters to find ways of ensuring the best possible outcome, and avoiding unnecessary disruption or risk, in the process of Brexit for their local communities and the Border Region.

## Key Findings

This project contains eight core findings regarding the views of local communities in the Central Border Region towards Brexit that should be highlighted at this critical time:

### 1. The Central Border Region is most exposed to the impact of Brexit

- 1.a. The Border Region has experienced the most long-lasting economic and social consequences of partition and violent conflict, exacerbated by the 'back-to-back' development of Northern Ireland and Ireland. Respondents describe the Region as 'marginalised', 'deprived', 'isolated' and 'on the periphery'.
- 1.b. Through the creation of economies of scale, productive networks, resource-sharing and joint initiatives, cross-border cooperation has been one means of addressing the particular needs of the Central Border Region. Respondents identify cross-border cooperation as a sign of the changing fortunes of the Region.
- 1.c. Any change to the status of the border or ability to easily cross the border will have the most direct impact on residents in the Border Region, on both sides of the border. This in a Region where development and cooperation is greatly needed.
- 1.d. One respondent noted: *'Cooperation is based partly on goodwill and ease of access to one another's jurisdiction and both these qualities could be seriously diminished by a hard Brexit.'* (#251, M, Fermanagh and Omagh)

### 2. The legacy of conflict

- 2.a. The legacy of violent conflict is apparent in the fears that people have about the impact of Brexit on the border. For many respondents, the very term 'border control' is one that conjures images of a securitised border and recalls deeply negative experiences and community tensions.

- 2.b. The emotional and psychological (as well as social and political) significance of the border should not be underestimated. As one respondent put it, 'hardening the border is like opening a wound'.
- 2.c. Physical or material manifestations of border control would not only be targets for paramilitary activity but would stand as a symbol of regression in cross-border and British-Irish relations.
- 2.d. Above EU membership, most respondents credit the 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement with fundamentally changing their experience of crossing the border and facilitating cross-border cooperation.

### **3. The effects of Brexit are already being felt in the Central Border Region**

- 3.a. Brexit is already having an effect in respondents' comfort in living on one side of the border and working on the other, in their confidence in doing business on the other side of the border, and in their view of the UK as a welcoming place for residence/work/study for Irish citizens.
- 3.b. Respondents suggest that the different high-level political responses to Brexit – Unionist and Nationalist, British and Irish – are beginning to have a 'polarising' effect at a community level in the Border Region.
- 3.c. Frontier workers and some businesses are already feeling the effects of Brexit, particularly in the exchange rate. Some respondents have already decided to move to the other side of the border in anticipation of future difficulties in cross-border work.
- 3.d. Remain voters and those in the southern border counties view Brexit as risking the 'reimposition' of a hard border as a consequence of British government policy. In contrast, Leave voters are more likely to see imposition in the form of EU 'red tape'; they see Brexit as an expression of democratic freedom and Parliamentary sovereignty.

#### 4. **Leave and Remain voters differ in their anticipation of a hard border**

- 4.a. The vast majority of respondents (94%) expect to be personally affected to a considerable degree by Brexit. 73% of respondents believe that Brexit will affect their local community ‘to a great extent’.
- 4.b. The predominant hope (whether they be Leave or Remain voters) among respondents regarding the post-Brexit border is that there would be minimal disruption and change to the border as it is currently experienced.
- 4.c. There is no significant difference between respondents in different jurisdictions (Northern Ireland or Republic of Ireland) as to the emphasis they place on the border in the anticipated impact of Brexit.
- 4.d. There are sharp differences in views about the significance of Brexit for the border. Leave voters are less likely to fear a hard border – not because they don’t cross it or see the economic value of an open border – because they are less likely to believe that negotiations will result in such an outcome (largely due to the position of the Irish government).

#### 5. **There seems to be a paradox in the contemporary Irish border: crossing the border is both unremarkable and extraordinary. In some ways it is non-existent, completely irrelevant; however, in other ways it is ever-present and at the centre of politics, economics and peace**

- 5.a. The most significant aspects of EU membership for our respondents are, by far, EU citizenship rights and EU funding. Beyond this, the majority of respondents credit EU membership with direct, tangible benefits; many of these could be compromised through Brexit (e.g. workers’ rights, environmental protection).
- 5.b. Cross-border workers are especially conscious of the importance of EU membership for them and feel particularly anxious about the potential impact of Brexit on them.

- 5.c. Cross-border connections have been carefully fostered; they are still far from secure and concrete. The informal, relational links formed as an indirect consequence of EU projects or joint initiatives are those most easily broken but most vital to 'normalisation' and trust-building.
- 5.d. Many respondents expressed the view that they would avoid crossing the border, or do so less, should there be any difficulty or obstacles in the future. This relates in part to the evocation of the 'border of the past' when it comes to anticipating any border controls or restrictions.

**6. The overwhelming sense is one of uncertainty; this is not a good thing in a Border Region with a legacy of conflict and under-development**

- 6.a. Accurate information on Brexit is particularly vital for residents of the Border Region – not just because they will be so directly affected by any significant change and will need to prepare for it, but also because these residents are so particularly aware of the negative effects of a 'hard' border.
- 6.b. There is a conundrum faced by local representatives, in wanting residents to prepare for Brexit but in not wanting to risk (a) growing north/south polarisation or (b) unnecessary anxiety or disruption.
- 6.c. Brexit has evoked strong emotions among people who would otherwise describe themselves as having little interest in politics. Respondents describe feelings of anger, annoyance, resentment, fear, anxiety, confusion, helplessness, and devastation.

**7. Brexit is exacerbating the sense of marginalisation and invisibility felt by residents in the Central Border Region, in both jurisdictions**

- 7.a. Respondents who anticipated negative impacts from Brexit tended to show much less confidence in the current democratic system and in the capacity for the representation of the views of the Border Region.

- 7.b. This is also true of voters in Northern Ireland (both Unionist and Nationalist) who expressed concerns about the lack of representation in the absence of a sitting Assembly/Executive and concerns about the representation of Northern Ireland in Westminster (especially if Direct Rule was reintroduced).
- 7.c. The survey reveals acute anxiety among some respondents in the southern border counties, especially those who work or trade on the other side of the border. The fact that they did not have a vote in the referendum and yet are deeply affected by its outcome exacerbates their concerns.
- 7.d. The sense of having no voice further deepens concerns and has a destabilising effect. Communities in the Border Region are wary of future arrangements being ‘imposed’ on them with no local input nor accommodation of local needs.

## **8. There is a risk of return to back-to-back development**

- 8.a. Opportunities expressed for the Border Region/ Northern Ireland from Brexit tend to be framed as being at a cost to the other, i.e. NI/UK benefiting at the expense of the Republic or the southern border counties seeing opportunities arising from difficulties in NI/UK.
- 8.b. There is a profound risk of a re-emergence of ‘back-to-back development’ even in anticipation of Brexit. This may come at a micro-level in the form of people deciding to avoid crossing the border. It may also come in the private sector, as economic opportunities come in competition with those on the other side of the border. Or it may come as a result of reduced funding for cross-border initiatives (e.g. in the absence of Interreg funding from the European Regional Development Fund).
- 8.c. It is critical that cross-border bodies and forums receive investment rather than divestment at this time, not least to help prepare for a smooth transition to post-Brexit cross-border relationships and to minimise the risk of a sharp decline in market integration.



- 8.d. Without careful protection of its common interests, the Border Region is at risk of being simultaneously the Region most deeply affected by Brexit and least closely protected by measures put in place by London, Dublin or Brussels to mitigate its effects.

## Looking Ahead

As the border looks set to take on even more material, legal and economic significance come March 2019, it is important that the views and needs of the Central Border Region are taken into account. We would hope that these views might yet inform decision-making on the nature of the UK's Withdrawal Agreement and future UK-EU relationship, as well as policy-making for the future of the Region. We also hope that it will inform the representation of peoples in this Region beyond party political, local or sectoral priorities and enable better preparation for Brexit among communities in the Region as a whole.

Just as political leadership in both governments have emphasised that they wish to avoid any return to a hard border on the island of Ireland, so too is it imperative that the benefits of cross-border cooperation in the Central Border Region are preserved and protected during and after the UK's withdrawal from the EU. Amid current uncertainties and political differences, there remains a widely-held commitment across local communities and groups around the Region to continue working together to preserve the gains already achieved and to realise potential benefits for future generations.



# Section 1:

## The Central Border Region





## 1.1. Particular history, particular needs

When the UK leaves the European Union, the 500km border that runs across the island of Ireland will become an external boundary of the European Union. What this will mean in practice is subject to both the British withdrawal 'Brexit' negotiations under Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union and the contents of any agreement on the future UK-EU relationship. A so-called 'hard Brexit' would mean that the Irish border would be a frontier to the free movement of people, goods, services and capital that is a feature and condition of EU membership. This would mean deepening difference in experience on either side of the Irish border. This is a particular concern in the Irish Border Region, on both sides, which is where the benefits of carefully-fostered, mutually beneficial cooperation have been most valued.

The Irish border divides the historic province of Ulster, several parishes, and even some individual homesteads between the states of Ireland and the United Kingdom. The failure of governments on both sides to address the unintended socioeconomic consequences of the 1921 drawing of the border was worsened by decades of neglect – the effects of which were most acutely felt by the communities living most proximate to the border. Yet the socio-economic impact of the border pales in comparison to the human cost of the violent conflict associated with its contestation. The legacy of conflict has forced a lop-sided process of borderlands integration. When combined with the centralised nature of governance and administration in Ireland and Northern Ireland, it is clear that local cross-border cooperation has continually had to work against the flow.

***A so-called 'hard Brexit' would mean that the Irish border would be a frontier to the free movement of people, goods, services and capital that is a feature and condition of EU membership.***

***Cross-border cooperation has been used as one means of addressing the particular needs of the Central Border Region***

## 1.1.1. Effects of division and peripherality

Cross-border cooperation has been used as one means of addressing the particular needs of the Central Border Region – needs which can be summarised in terms of its demographic deficit, rurality, geopolitical peripherality and structural deprivation. Detailed analysis at the turn of the millennium showed the concentration of material deprivation in the District Electoral Divisions closest to the borderline.<sup>1</sup> As a number of our survey respondents eloquently expressed, even in the present day the material effects of being a Border Region are tangible:

*‘This is a deprived area: socially, in terms of infrastructure, and of course because of the Troubles.’ (#276, M, Derry)*

*‘We have a Region with an older population, weaker infrastructure, very few large and strong multinationals, [and] a dependence on agriculture and local services – and these are the sectors that are very vulnerable.’ (#67, M, Mid Ulster)*

The demographic deficit can be observed in both the low levels of population density and the relatively low levels of population growth in the Central Border Region. Given the ageing population of the border counties, the demographic deficit represents a threat to the long-term sustainability of the Region’s communities. Unfortunately, the resultant lack of agglomerated economies in small border towns and villages further spurs the outmigration of skilled labour towards those more developed urban centres with concentrations of higher value-added industries. There are low rates of urbanization in the Central Border Region relative to the rest of the country. This not only limits the number of towns available to facilitate economic development but also contributes to low levels of employment in

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<sup>1</sup> Price Waterhouse Coopers (2003) Mid-Term Evaluation of Interreg IIIA - Final Report. Belfast: Special EU Programmes Body.

technical and professional occupations.<sup>2</sup> This dispersion of the borderlands populace also contributes to the demographic basis for its geopolitical peripherality. This works at two levels. First, the physical and cognitive distances between borderland communities and their metropolitan centres of governance and commerce; secondly, the challenges they have faced in attracting investment away from the Dublin-Belfast and, to a lesser extent, Derry-Letterkenny development corridors.<sup>3</sup>

The legacy of peripherality is also reflected in the constraints faced by local communities in the Central Border Region in accessing essential features of structural development for economic prosperity, such as public transportation networks, wide tertiary education options, and advanced communications infrastructure. From a public administration perspective this can be easily understood in terms of public service providers' difficulties in achieving economies of scale in small and physically dispersed communities. This public policy challenge is openly recognized in the Northern Ireland Department for Infrastructure Regional Development Strategy 2035.<sup>4</sup> On the southern side, the scale of the challenge is revealed in the fact that the area formerly known as the Border, Midland and Western region suffered the 8th worst performance among 284 NUTS II regions in Europe (2007-2015), in a 21% drop in GDP.<sup>5</sup>

***public service providers' difficulties in achieving economies of scale in small and physically dispersed communities.***

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- 2 Roper, S. (2006) 'Cross-border and local cooperation on the island of Ireland: an economic perspective'. Mapping frontiers, plotting pathways, Working Paper 7. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.  
Roper, S. (2001) 'Innovation, networks and plant location: evidence for Ireland', *Regional Studies* 35(3), 215-28
  - 3 Wilson, T. (2000) 'The obstacles to EU regional policy in the Northern Ireland borderlands', *Human Organisation* 59(1), 1-10.
  - 4 Department for Infrastructure, Northern Ireland. (2012) *Regional Development Strategy 2035: Building a Better Future*. Belfast: Crown Copyright.
  - 5 [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Eurostat\\_regional\\_yearbook](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Eurostat_regional_yearbook)

## 1.1.2. Market integration

This resource deprivation underscores a fiscal/economic deficit exhibited across the borderlands. Although violent conflict had a depressing effect on economic development until the 1990s, market integration was actively pursued by Irish and UK governments by the 1970s – particularly during the pre-1973 EEC accession period.<sup>6</sup> The removal of duties and protectionist policies finally eliminated the price distortions seen in many common consumer goods, reducing the profitability of smuggling operations that had continued across the physical border since its inception.<sup>7</sup> The introduction of EEC regulations on customs declarations in 1987 had immediate effect on the ease with which goods could be transported across the border.

A few years later, the creation of the Single Market erased many obstacles to cross-border trade and economic development, and customs posts on the border were immediately made redundant. This led to a brief export boom as Northern Ireland's exports to both Ireland and to Europe expanded dramatically.<sup>8</sup> Yet the Border Region still suffered 'growth lag' during the Celtic Tiger boom period of the 1990s/early 2000s.<sup>9</sup> This is in part because there remained, despite the central role businesses played in pushing for market integration, a significant integrative deficit within the private sector in the Border Region.<sup>10</sup>

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6 Bielenberg, A., and Ryan, R. (2012) *An Economic History of Ireland since Independence*. New York: Routledge.

7 Harvey, B. (2005) *The Emerald Curtain: The social impact of the Irish border*. Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan: Triskele Community Training and Development.

8 Murphy, M. C. (2014) *Northern Ireland and the European Union: The dynamics of a changing relationship*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

9 Harvey, B. (2005) *The Emerald Curtain: The social impact of the Irish border*. Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan: Triskele Community Training and Development.

10 Hayward, K. and Magennis, E. (2016) 'Peace and the private sector: Northern Ireland's regional experience of globalised trends', in T. J. White (Ed.) *International Relations Theory and Northern Ireland*. Manchester University Press.  
Hayward, K. and Magennis, E. (2014) 'The Business of Building Peace: Private Sector Cooperation across the Irish Border', *Irish Political Studies*, 29(1), 154-175.

The influx of external capital through inward investment after the 1998 Agreement brought an impressive spurt of economic development to the island – though the lion’s share of this ‘peace dividend’ was enjoyed largely within the Dublin-Belfast development corridor.<sup>11</sup> For the borderlands Region as a whole, the most direct ‘peace dividend’ was felt with the completion of the de-securitization process in the early 2000s. Added to this, the EU helped create, support and fund networks and programmes across and through the Border Region, helping to ameliorate some of the negative legacy of the border whilst facilitating closer integration of economies on either side. Yet levels of local inter-firm co-operation across the border remain much lower than levels of inter-firm co-operation on the same side of the border.<sup>12</sup>

## 1.2. Cross-border cooperation

### 1.2.1. The origins of cooperation

Cross-border cooperation has thus had to work against the background of a stark integrative deficit in the Border Region, with differences in policy and administration across the border hindering

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11 Poole, W. (2004) ‘Where Now for the Belfast - Dublin Economic Corridor?’ Centre for Cross Border Studies: Year 5. Armagh: CCBS.

12 Roper, S. (2006) ‘Cross-border and local cooperation on the island of Ireland: an economic perspective.’ Mapping frontiers, plotting pathways, Working Paper 7. Belfast: Queen’s University Belfast.

co-operation in both public and private sectors.<sup>13</sup> In the public sector, local cross-border co-operation was not even considered in the public sector until the mid-1970s and the Irish borderlands were not seen as a distinct region by either national governments until the 1980s. Indeed, there has been a gap in regional-level policy-making, and even those local authorities proximate to the border were not incentivised to consider policies beyond the remit of their local constituencies. When they have done so, however, the achievements have been considerable. The work of ICBAN (Irish Central Border Area Network) as well as that of EBR (East Border Region) and the North West Strategic Growth Partnership exemplifies the benefits that can come through Region-wide cooperation.

ICBAN was formed in 1995 as a local authority-led cross-border development organisation. Initially set up to provide a forum for networking amongst Councillors and Council Officials from across the border region, the organisation's role has developed in the intervening period and changed, responding to the cross-border challenges and opportunities of the time. The organisation is now working with local authorities and other stakeholders in an innovation development role with a focus on strategic priorities across infrastructure connectivity, creative industries and rural development. This includes a leading role in creating cross-border synergies on broadband telecommunications, having been empowered by local authorities of the area to identify solutions in progressing connectivity investments in the Region. The organisation has directly levered over €50 million in funding to the area and has been a catalyst in helping lever major investments in a number of connectivity projects on roads and telecommunications.

By joining up the Regional stakeholders and playing to the strengths of the Central Border Region, cross-border groups such as ICBAN have been able to attract significant EU-funded investment into the Region towards the development of strategic cross-border initiatives.

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13 Arthurs, P. (2015). 'The Local Authority-Led Cross-Border Groups: an early example of cross-border best practice along the Ireland/Northern Ireland Border area?', *The Journal of Cross Border Studies in Ireland*. Vol. 10. Armagh: Centre for Cross Border Studies.



Some of the most effective examples of this investment in the Central Border Region occurred under the EU Interreg IVA Programme 2007 – 2013 (from the European Regional Development Fund). These included the Innovation Enterprise Programme (IEP), a £3.8m project built on the relationship between Omagh Enterprise Company and the Leitrim Local Enterprise Office in working together to successfully deliver cross-border business support programmes. The £1m Higher Attainment Through Cross-Border Hubs (HATCH) project supported and developed entrepreneurship in the Central Border Region and delivered targeted accredited training to key groups. Finally, the Border Uplands Project (£3.1m project value) deployed cross-border co-operation approaches to develop the Central Border Region as a world class geo-tourism and recreational destination.

In order to be delivered successfully, such projects necessarily entail joint structures, such as in marketing, education and management. Participants in this research study explained how funding for projects such as these have a greater impact than merely the specific programme output:

*‘I’ve been on the Interreg Monitoring Committee and that’s another example of the relationships and opportunity to build relationships and see the other person’s point of view, to see the wider angle in the two jurisdictions’. (3.29.46)*

*‘I also do a lot of community work and have been involved with European projects. Such projects are an excellent way of networking and sharing skills and information. Much of the funding also comes from Europe and [Brexit] will be a great blow to those who currently benefit from these programmes.’ (#110, F, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

## 1.2.2. Added value of cooperation

Another aspect of cross-border cooperation is in the Memorandums of Understanding between local authorities on each side of the border. As one Councillor said, this means that *‘they don’t do*

*anything in isolation – they run it past their other partners in the wider Region. All those things help considerably.’ (3.30.25).*

Another recalled a vivid example from a cross-border regional project showing the ways in which joint initiatives at Council level can filter down to make a valuable, albeit informal, contribution to peace-building and trust-building:

*‘The Marble Arch Caves Geopark in Fermanagh and Omagh is the first transnational geopark in the world. It was the legacy of Fermanagh Council and Cavan Council [working together]. The relationships around the table are one thing, but then there’s the events that happen in conjunction with them, so you’re going to social events and you’re bringing your husband/wife/partner – barriers break down and relationships build.’(3.30.48)*

The International Centre for Local and Regional Development (ICLRD) and the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) offer several studies of how ‘softer,’ practical cross-border cooperation have benefited groups across all sectors (businesses, regional health authorities, local councils) and promoted better relations between communities. ICBAN’s Regional Strategic Framework 2013-2027 recognises the added-value that cross-border cooperation activity can continue to bring by:

- ▶ Gaining critical mass, working together and sharing resources on a cross-border basis (for example in providing innovation support for trade between businesses in the Region);
- ▶ Tackling issues arising from the presence of the Border (such as the weaknesses in the roads, telecoms and energy infrastructure in the vicinity);
- ▶ Making the case to the two Governments and the EU for investment in the area on a consistent and evidence-informed basis.

Yet the sustainability of the work of cross-border groups such as ICBAN is threatened by a financial crisis. Not only are many of these cross-border groups heavily dependent on EU Interreg funding for

operations, but the constraints of the post-2008 austerity programme in both the UK and Ireland have also left local authorities with shrinking resources from which to commit to these collaborative forums. Even aside from Brexit, the levels of local cross-border public sector co-operation achieved face challenges if they are to avoid slipping back into a state of baseline disintegration. In sum, despite significant efforts and advances, the border continues to exercise a disintegrative influence over local public and private sector actors within the Central Border Region. Unless active efforts are made to protect and sustain cross-border cooperation, there is a risk that the practical gains achieved through it for all communities over the past 20 years could rapidly retreat.

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### 1.3. Facing Brexit

The Central Border Region is already conceived by a number of respondents as a ‘marginalized’ or ‘neglected’ area. Despite the successes and achievements of recent cross-border cooperation detailed in this report, this enduring sense of isolation exacerbates many of the concerns that residents have around the potential impact of Brexit; it also dampens some of the perceived opportunities that may be more apparent in urbanized, better-connected locales. As a focus group participant commented:

*‘These things are going to be driven from the capital cities and if they are driven from these places, the supports may not be relevant for us in this Region and supports could be somewhat diluted by the time they get as far up the country.’ (1.33.06)*

It is notable that the majority of benefits or opportunities from Brexit that were identified by respondents (even Leave voting respondents) tended to be framed as benefits for the UK (or Republic of Ireland) as a whole, or to be quite general Leave arguments, rather than specifically relevant to the Border Region.

The unique position of the border counties are that they are in a ‘liminal’ zone between the UK and Ireland. In the past, this has meant that they are on the periphery of policy making and political

***The unique position of the border counties are that they are in a ‘liminal’ zone between the UK and Ireland.***

***The Border Region is thus at risk of being the Region most deeply affected by Brexit and least closely protected by measures that may be put in place by London or Brussels to mitigate its effects. However, this particular position also puts it at the cutting edge of the new relationship between the UK and European Union. This could mean acting as a bridge between the two.***

interest in both Westminster and Dublin. With that border becoming an EU/UK border, the concern of the border area is that it becomes even further from the centre of decision-making (especially in the absence of a functioning devolved Assembly and Executive in Stormont). The Border Region is thus at risk of being the Region most deeply affected by Brexit and least closely protected by measures that may be put in place by London or Brussels to mitigate its effects. However, this particular position also puts it at the cutting edge of the new relationship between the UK and European Union. This could mean acting as a bridge between the two. It is clear that a pull to either Dublin or to London merely stretches and exacerbates divisions within Northern Ireland. Instead, cross-border cooperation takes on a new symbolic and practical significance in this environment of uncertainty.

It is possible that the Central Border Region could get the best of both worlds after Brexit; this would require a commitment of policy-makers to thinking in terms of mutual benefit and collaboration rather than competition and divergence. The challenge now, then, is to find a social and economic strategy for the Border Region as a whole – one that stands as a sustainable alternative to impeded dialogue, back-to-back development, competition and market disintegration, and one that is Brexit-ready.



# Section 2:

## The Study



## 2.1. Purpose

ICBAN developed a Policy Paper on Brexit in March 2017, noting the differing political positions on the Board. The agreed position was that the organisation would work to highlight any opportunities or concerns and to help withstand any negative consequences arising from the process. Whilst the Board recognised that there was a programme of civic dialogue led by the Irish government, they identified an absence of local community consultation on both sides of the border. As a result this initiative was conceived between ICBAN and Queen's University Belfast. We see this study as complementing the excellent recent research conducted on Brexit along the border and border corridors, by presenting the view of local communities and concentrating on the Central Border Region.<sup>14</sup>

It is in keeping with the policy of ICBAN to help withstand any negative consequences on the social and economic life of the Central Border Region. This study's main aim was to identify problems, issues and possibilities from the process of Brexit for people living in rural communities on both sides of the Central Border Region – particularly from the perspective of 'ordinary citizens' whose lives will be most affected by any change in the nature of the border. This study has a particular emphasis on the experience of rural communities in Armagh City, Banbridge and

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14 For example, Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (October 2017) Brexit and the Border Corridor on the Island of Ireland: Risks, Opportunities and Issues to be Considered (<http://www.fermanaghmagh.com/app/uploads/2017/10/171012-Brexit-report-FINAL-version.pdf>); Ulster University Economic Policy Centre (2017) Initial Analysis of the Challenges and Opportunities of Brexit for the Derry City & Strabane and Donegal County Council areas – The North West City Region (<https://www.derrystrabane.com/getmedia/f1f1bbb6-e336-4acf-9fd9-5e1e171fe43f/Initial-Analysis-of-the-Challenges-and-Opportunities-of-Brexit-for-the-North-West-City-Region-150217.pdf>); Centre for Cross Border Studies (August 2017) Brexit and Economic Development, EU Referendum Briefing Paper 5 Update ([http://crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/UpdatedEUReferendumBriefingPaper5\\_Final.pdf](http://crossborder.ie/site2015/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/UpdatedEUReferendumBriefingPaper5_Final.pdf)); InterTrade Ireland (May 2017) British Exit from the European Union: Case Studies (<http://www.intertradeireland.com/researchandpublications/publications/publications/name-42572-en.php>) [all accessed 20.10.2017].

Craigavon (ABC); Cavan; Donegal; Fermanagh and Omagh; Leitrim; Mid Ulster; Monaghan; and Sligo.

The project has been determinedly non-political and non-partisan. The aim of ICBAN was simply to gather the views of local people who will be directly affected by any change that Brexit evokes (especially on the border). In order to do so, we used two means of gathering data: an online survey and focus group interviews. The research was conducted in accordance with guidelines and procedures for research ethics of Queen's University, including gaining approval from the relevant committee on research ethics in advance of the research. As part of this, all participants in the focus groups received an information sheet and signed a consent form.

## 2.2. Methods

### 2.2.1. The survey

The online survey was promoted and distributed through social media and online forums (such as via a blogpost on [brexitborder.com](http://brexitborder.com)) and through notices given by ICBAN and its member authorities (see the flyer in Appendix One). The initial aim was to get 150-200 responses for this survey; in the end, 305 people completed the survey, which was distributed via a link to an online platform. The survey distribution was not managed in such a way as to ensure random distribution and representative results, but the use of several targeted rounds of promotion ensured that we have a fairly balanced representation of respondents from across the different local authority areas that constitute the Central Border Region.

It is important that the survey is not taken as a representative sample from the Region, as this was not the primary purpose of the exercise.



Instead, through the use of several open questions, we sought to give residents in the Region an opportunity to express their views on the potential impact of Brexit, particularly in relation to cross-border movement and relations. The qualitative data illuminates our understanding of some of the interests, issues and valid concerns of residents on both sides of the border.

The survey contained a series of 26 questions, most of which used a single tick-box option or a Likert scale to register responses. It also allowed respondents to comment further on the topic of the section and we encouraged respondents to do so. A list of the survey questions is available at the end of this report (Appendix 2). Most of the open-ended questions received brief responses; some participants were very generous with their time and took the opportunity to write several hundred words of text. The first sections of the survey established general characteristics of the participant (gender, age, district of residency etc.), how frequently and why they cross the border, the ways in which EU membership currently affects them, and their views and expectations regarding Brexit. The survey was completely anonymous unless people decided to leave their email address and/or phone number to either receive a copy of the findings, or to take part in one of the focus groups. Before analysis began, the data from the survey was separated from any email addresses divulged. The quotations used in this report are referenced using the number allocated to the anonymous completed survey return, the gender, and the local authority area of the respondent (e.g. #247, F, Cavan). We have made minimal adjustments to spelling and grammar in the quotations where absolutely necessary for the sake of clarity.

## 2.2.2. The focus groups

The focus groups were composed of respondents to the survey who volunteered to participate in this further exercise, along with representatives of tenant businesses and organisations at Monaghan M:Tek and Enniskillen Business Centre where the focus groups were held. There was also a focus group of local Councillors,



who between them represented each one of the participating authorities and each of the following parties: DUP, Fine Gael, Sinn Féin, and the Ulster Unionist Party. The focus groups were conducted in ‘neutral’ spaces in Monaghan town and Enniskillen. Due to time constraints, we were not able to arrange to interview all the people who had offered to participate in a focus group. We are hoping to amend this in future research that builds on this project. The focus groups were centred upon a schedule of questions (see Appendix 3), but the discussion was managed in such a way so as to enable follow-up and elaboration of new areas for conversation as they naturally arose. The focus groups are referenced here in terms of the number and the time-marker for that quotation in the transcript, e.g. [Group]1.15 [mins].21[seconds].

## 2.3. The survey respondents

### 2.3.1. Area of residence

We were pleased to get a fairly even balance of respondents across the eight local districts that make up the ICBAN region. 12 per cent of respondents came from outside these districts; of these, most were from Derry City and some from Newry/Mourne/South Down region. The most sizeable group of respondents came from Fermanagh and Omagh, a large local district. Five respondents were not resident in the Border Region (e.g. Limerick, Galway, Dublin, Causeway and Glens) and these responses, although read closely, have been excluded from analysis included in this report in order to hold true to the primary focus of this report, i.e. the Central Border Region.

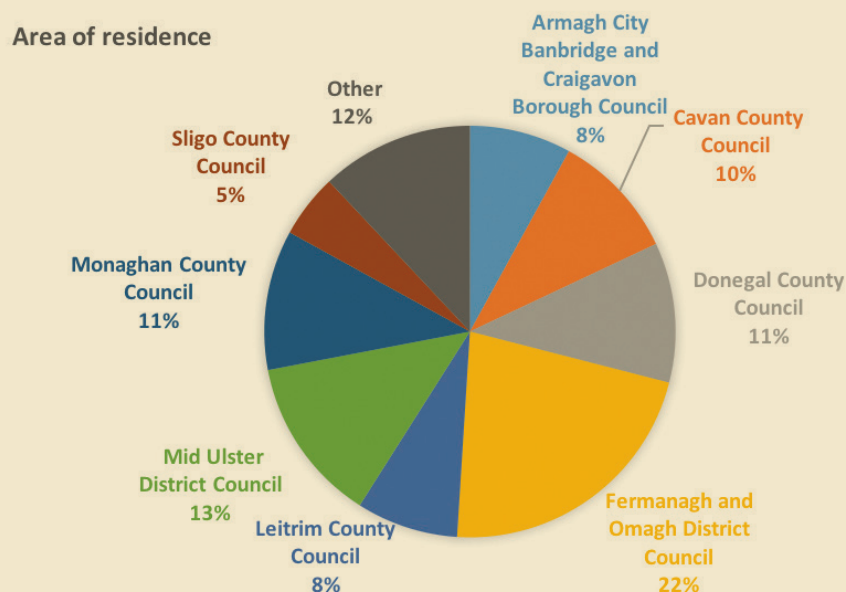


Fig. II.i. Responses to Q.4. Area of residence of respondents.

## 2.3.2. Profile of respondents

The majority of the respondents were in the age range of 46-55 years old, with 31-45 years as a close second. Together they make up over 83% of the responses. The third biggest group consisted of the age range 18-30 years old, followed by those over 66 years old; only a handful of the responses were under 18 years old. There was an almost equal distribution of male and female respondents.

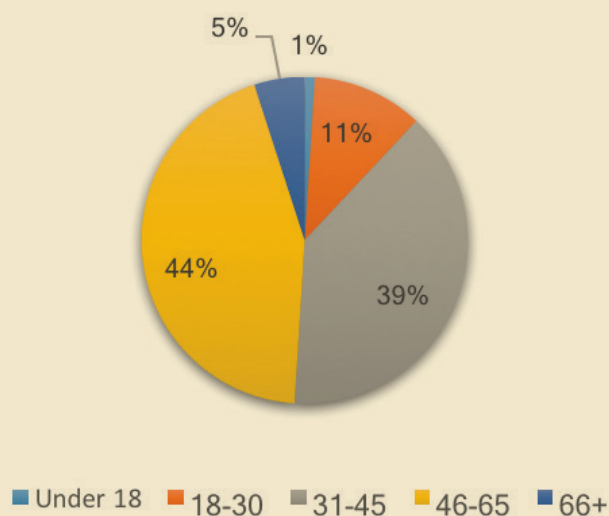
**Age**

Fig. II.ii. Responses to Q. 1. Age.

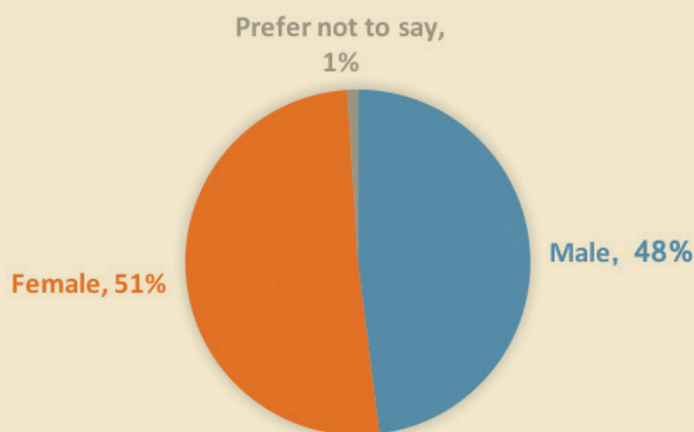
**Gender**

Fig.II.iii. Responses to Q. 2. Gender.

Over 80% of our survey respondents are in paid employment, and most of them on a full-time basis. The remaining 20% are constituted from a nearly equal mix of students, retirees, and those who are not currently in paid employment. Although the topics of agriculture and the agrifood sector are often mentioned in the responses to later survey questions, only 1 in 5 of our respondents actually work in industries directly related to agriculture or rural affairs.

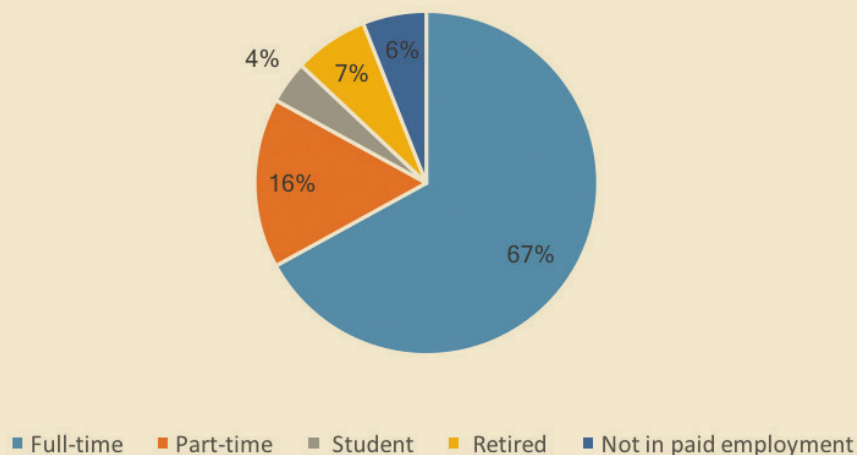
**Occupational status**

Fig. II.iv. Responses to Q. 5. Occupational Status.

## 2.3.3. Citizenship

Given the complexities of nationality and national identity on this island, the question we asked kept it as simple as possible, asking for respondents' 'Citizenship' and giving them a choice from a set selection: British, Irish, British and Irish, other dual citizenship, other citizenship. We know that this would not have been only interpreted as being about the passports or birth certificates people hold. This is possibly why the results from this diverge somewhat significantly from those in the 2011 Northern Ireland and 2016 Ireland censuses when it comes to the proportion saying they are both 'British and Irish' citizens (which, at 12%, is almost more than six times the figure from the 2011 Census in Northern Ireland). Most participants either hold Irish citizenship or consider themselves to be Irish (including those from Northern Ireland). It is striking that a substantial proportion of those saying they are both British and Irish are resident in the border counties in the Republic of Ireland. We do not have enough data to extrapolate any firm insights from this, although it is notable that those living in the Republic of Ireland who claimed both 'British and Irish' citizenship were more likely to have pro-Brexit (or even 'Irexit') views.

The proportion of respondents who hold either British citizenship only or both British and Irish citizenship are approximately the same. Of those with British citizenship only, approximately 1/5 lived on the southern side of the border. There is almost an equal breakdown in the number of British respondents who voted Leave and those who voted Remain in the Brexit referendum. Around a quarter of our survey participants holding British citizenship claimed to cross the border at least once a week or more; this compared to around 60% of participants holding Irish citizenship.

There were only a few respondents who held non-British and non-Irish citizenship. In sum, the survey contains a disproportionate representation of Irish citizens. We cannot assume that Leave respondents in this survey hold British citizenship, nor, indeed, that respondents from the Republic of Ireland hold only Irish citizenship.

#### Citizenship

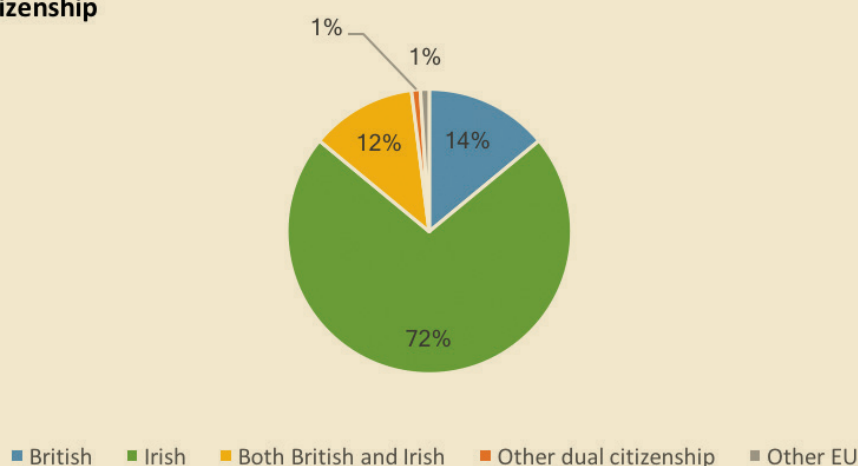


Fig. II. v. Responses to Q. 3. Citizenship

The 2011 Census results returned the following from areas covered by the ICBAN/QUB survey in terms of those predominant national identity (note that this is not the same as citizenship):

District	Irish	British	District	Irish	British
Armagh	44.4	32.4	Fermanagh	36.1	37.2
Banbridge	16.2	61.1	Magherafelt	42.7	31.4
Craigavon	48.3	25.6	Newry and Mourne	53.0	20.2
Cookstown	33.5	37.3	Omagh	40.9	28.6
Derry	55.0	23.7	Strabane	39.2	33.0
Dungannon	38.8	30.9			

Fig. II.vi. Predominant national identity (2011 Census returns, Northern Ireland)

## 2.3.4. Brexit vote

42% of the respondents did not have a vote in the Brexit referendum; most of these reside south of the border (but there were more than a dozen residents in the Republic of Ireland who had a vote, a few of whom voted Leave). Of those who did vote, the majority of respondents in this survey voted to remain. This is not an accurate reflection of the entire vote in Northern Ireland; we therefore make no claims that this research can give a comprehensively detailed representation of the spectrum of opinions towards Brexit held by those in the Border Region. Because such a small portion of our respondents are Leave voters (8% compared to 47% Remain) then their views have been given a somewhat disproportionate amount of attention in our analysis compared to the response rate. As an aside, it is worth noting that approximately 1/6 of the Leave voting respondents in this survey hold Irish citizenship.

### Brexit referendum vote

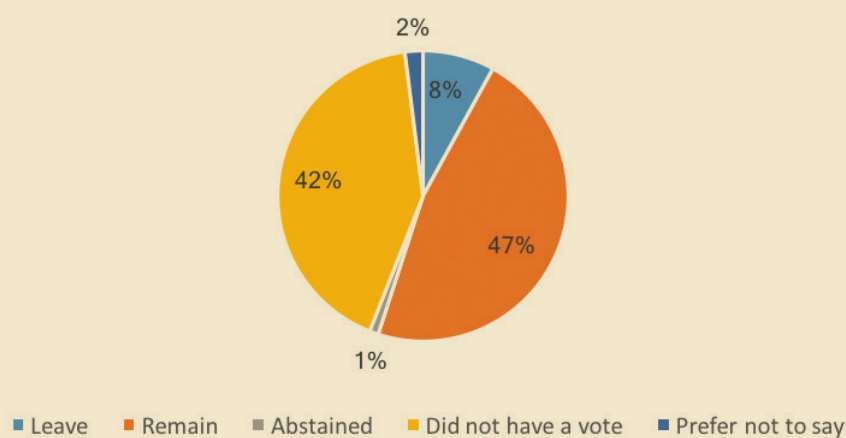


Fig. II. vii. Responses to Q. 7. How did you vote in the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU in June 2016?

The Leave vote in the constituencies covered by the ICBAN/QUB Brexit survey was as follows:

Constituency	% Leave vote	Constituency	% Leave vote
Foyle	21.7	Mid Ulster	39.6
South Down	32.8	Fermanagh and South Tyrone	41.4
West Tyrone	33.2	Upper Bann	52.6
Newry and Armagh	37.1		

Fig. II.viii. The percentage Leave vote in the 2016 Referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union in Northern Ireland constituencies in the Central Border Region

We should reiterate before concluding this Section that this study is merely an exploratory one, intended to offer illustrative rather than quantifiably representative results. We have analysed the data to present the most predominant themes, together with additional indications of points raised by several respondents. Given the modest scale of this project, we neither claim – nor seek – to give voice to every survey respondent or focus group participant.

We do hope, though, that in encouraging discussion of the views from the Central Border Region that this project helps create the conditions in which a wide range of perspectives will be considered in preparing for the effects of Brexit for the Border Region.



# Section 3:

## The Border



## 3.1. The Border conundrum

*‘I think of barriers when I think of Brexit’ (2.0.37)*

When it comes to anticipating the impact of Brexit, the border is front, left and centre of most responses in this study. The point that comes out clearly from this research is that this Region has been most severely affected by the border (*‘having witnessed first-hand its impact’* [#242]). That said, evidence from our study indicates that our respondents do not necessarily consider themselves as living beside or close to a border (notwithstanding the half dozen responses who specify how many metres they live from the border); rather, they consider themselves as living in a Border Region. For some this, in their mind, incorporates areas on both sides of the border, for others it is very much on one side. Overall, it felt odd for many to discuss the border as an object because it is simply not a consideration in people’s everyday geographies.

Respondents explained that, as things currently stand, the decision as to which side of the border to shop on, for example, depends on what one wants to buy or whom one wants to meet; whether it is the northern side or the southern side only comes into consideration in terms of the currency and price difference. Nevertheless, the profile given to the border in the Brexit debate means that they are increasingly likely to make associations of this with their worst experience of the pre-Single Market, pre-Agreement border. This mix of the mundane and the extraordinary significance of the border is encapsulated in the comments of one young survey respondent:

*‘[A hard border] would be a Nightmare, politically, socially. It would seriously affect my daily routine, and my faith in the peace process.’* (#155, M, Leitrim)

To raise the spectre of disruption to cross-border cooperation and movement – making it a politically significant or practically demanding

task, rather than an ordinary, simple task – does further disrupt the ground on which the peace is founded. This was expressed very powerfully by a participant in a focus group in Monaghan:

*‘Even the psychological impact - the re-awareness and the re-awakening of the border. Everyday I’m now thinking ‘what’s going to happen?’ (1.22.22)*

***‘...the re-awareness and the re-awakening of the border.’***

The fragility of the peace process is an immediate concern for many, especially when combined with acknowledgement of the lack of progressive politics in Northern Ireland:

*‘People have entrenched positions, heightened emotions on something that hasn’t been dealt with, even from a legacy point of view. We’re still on the path to reconciliation and this is like opening a wound.’ (1.25.25)*

***‘We’re still on the path to reconciliation and this is like opening a wound.’***

Concerns about the peace process were wrought together with concerns about Brexit-induced change for the Border Region. As one respondent holding both British and Irish citizenship put it:

*‘I would prefer that Brexit didn’t go ahead because the North is a powder keg already without dragging the nationalist community out of the EU to be a part of the UK and nothing else’ (#261, F, Monaghan)*

***‘...the North is a powder keg already...’***

Leave voters were much more likely to see EU membership as an imposition and Brexit as an expression of democratic freedom. This is a fundamental difference between the two positions and one that can only be resolved through clear information, transparency in decision-making and accountability as principles of governance in the Border Region after Brexit.

## 3.2. Legacy of conflict, fragility of peace

### 3.2.1. Psychological and emotional dimensions of the border

Despite Prime Minister May's reassurances that 'no one wants to see a return to the border of the past', responses to this survey repeatedly express the fear that a hard border will take the border area back to the situation as it was during The Troubles, i.e. a militarised border. This is a theme that naturally came to the fore in the focus groups, on both sides of the border.

*'Mentally, [the border conflict] has had a huge bearing on the identity of the people. Cavan, Louth, Donegal – 500 yards to your right could be danger, but to your left, you're ok. That constant warfare mentality wears you down. As well as the physical danger.'*  
(1.19.12)

It is against this background that such negative associations with border controls are rooted in both communities, on both sides of the border.

*'There was a fear when you got to the checkpoint – you didn't know if you were going to get hauled out of the car. When people think of the border, that's often where they go in their minds.'*  
(1.4.32)

It is clear that for residents in the Border Region, the very concept of a 'hard border' is one that conjures up memories and fears of a militarised, securitised border. One respondent explained this vividly:

*'I grew up a stone's throw from the border. I remember 22 mile detours to go 4 miles up the road. I remember the militarisation of border crossings and the closure of roads. I remember how few services we had and how difficult it was for people to survive. We were completely terrorised by the British military. I never ever want to see that again and we should never go back to that.'* (#284, F, Fermanagh and Omagh)

It should be noted that physical or material manifestations of border controls are undesirable not only because they could be targets for paramilitary activity but because they would stand as a stark reminder of painful, traumatic experiences and also as a symbol of regression in cross-border relations. As noted above, the lifting of border controls and free movement across the island has been an integral part of the peace process.

Beyond this, and more difficult to explain but equally important are the psychological dimensions to the configuration of the border. Such psychological aspects are entirely understandable in a post-conflict context and they need to be handled with sensitivity. It is for these reasons that Brexit may be seen to have ramifications for the peace process itself; peaceful, unremarkable border crossing has been a hugely important part of conflict transformation. One focus group participant explains this well:

*Particularly [after] 10 years working together, people [in the Border Region] have seen what life is like for normal people and they don't want to lose that. People are annoyed, concerned, confused and getting angry. The impact on border communities has not been taken into account. (1.25.25)*

This quotation reiterates the point that cross-border contact has a rare quality in the Border Region – something quite different to contact across the Channel. Contact is part of a process of 'normalisation' – one that has been facilitated by EU membership. This is not to say that this cannot be continued after Brexit, but the importance of those social, personal contacts – the ones that don't have an economic value or material presence – for the peace process is clear.

***the lifting of border controls and free movement across the island has been an integral part of the peace process***

***peaceful, unremarkable border crossing has been a hugely important part of conflict transformation.***

***'...have seen what life is like for normal people and they don't want to lose that.'***

***the importance of those social, personal contacts – the ones that don't have an economic value or material presence – for the peace process is clear.***

## 3.2.2. Importance of the 1998 Agreement

Most respondents credit – not the Single Market or EU membership – the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement with fundamentally changing people's experience of crossing the border.

***'I wouldn't be living here if it wasn't for the GFA.'***

*'I travel more now. It's much easier to cross now than when I was growing up. The GFA changed all that immensely.'* (2.6.52)

One focus group participant elaborated on the importance of the peace process for border crossing:

***'...the idea of a border in the north is just terrifying.'***

*'I wouldn't be living here if it wasn't for the GFA. I moved in 2000 to the border area. I am back and forth [across the border] every day and the idea of a border in the north is just terrifying. If I'm queuing and don't know how long for, it's going to be almost impossible to run my business from Enniskillen. I would close my business if there was a hard border.'* (2.6.52)

***'I would close my business if there was a hard border.'***

A survey respondent concurs:

*'I have lived on the border for several years. Peace in the community and easy daily access are reliant on an almost non-existent border. The introduction of a hard border would create agitation, annoyance and dissent.'* (#295, F, Monaghan)

***the connections made between the 1998 Agreement and the ease of moving and working across the border now – and anxiety at potential disruption to this.***

We see in such extracts the connections made between the 1998 Agreement and the ease of moving and working across the border now – and anxiety at potential disruption to this. A number of respondents talk about the 'them and us' attitude that contributes to the conflict and that was worsened by the existence of a hard border. A focus group participant goes further:



*‘The ‘them and us’ complex could be very quickly re-established if there is difficulty and restrictions on movement. That movement starts with social and extends into business. This forum [ICBAN] and other cross-border forums have broken down barriers and personal relationships have established as a result of this.’ (3.27.12)*

A number of respondents connected the expectation of restrictions on cross-border movement with resonances of conflict. One described an impact of Brexit on them personally as being a *‘sense of fear and intimidation’* (#43, F, Leitrim).

## 3.3. Crossing the border today

### 3.3.1. Frequency of crossing

Over half of the survey respondents cross the border at least once a week (some daily or even several times a day). This figure is more or less the same for respondents on either side of the border. This has much to do with living in the Border Region itself. One participant in a focus group commented that road networks now meant that one can cross the border several times on a journey:

*‘For those of us that live near the border, it has to be crossed. They recently closed the roads near where I live for roadworks and I counted that, [following the alternative route] I crossed the border 12 times. So if there was a physical border that would be a nightmare.’ (2.7.37)*

There are only a handful who cross the border ‘rarely’ and it is notable that none of the respondents said that they never cross the border at all.

Frequency of border crossing

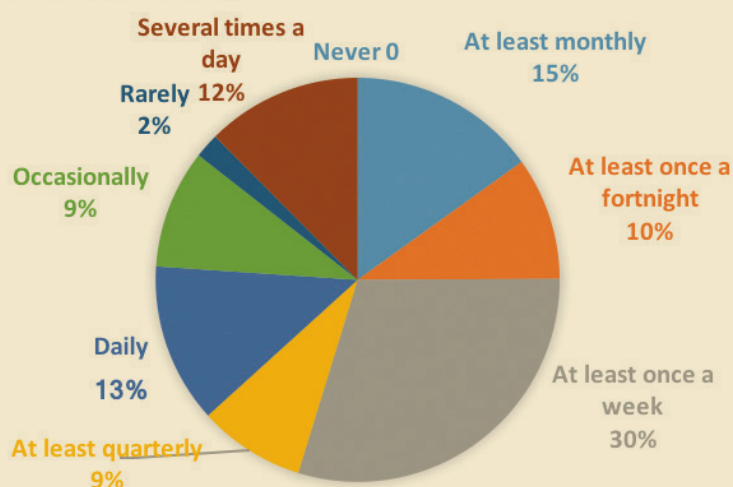


Fig. III. i. Responses to Q. 8. How often do you cross the border?

*the main reasons are social reasons (e.g. 52% of respondents do so [very] frequently to meet family and friends) and for shopping (45% [very] frequently).*

### 3.3.2. Purpose of crossing

As to why people cross the border frequently or very frequently, the main reasons are social reasons (e.g. 52% of respondents do so [very] frequently to meet family and friends) and for shopping (45% [very] frequently). This is followed by about 40% of our respondents doing so frequently for work/business and about 38% for sport/entertainment and holiday/travel. The least common reasons that people cross the border was for education (this is not surprising, given the age profile of the respondents) and healthcare. That said, 9.2% said they frequently or very frequently cross the border for Education/Studies, and 10.5% said they cross for healthcare (very) frequently.

**Purpose and frequency of border crossing**

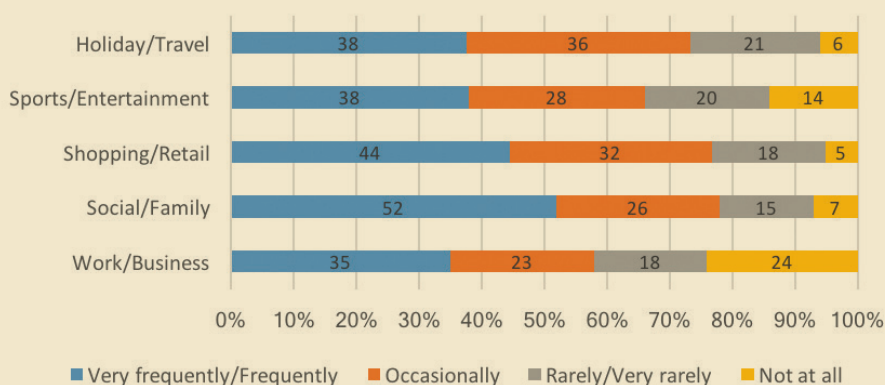


Fig. III. li. Responses to Q. 9. How frequently do you cross the border for...?

Many respondents, in their comments, mentioned the fact that they have family members on both sides of the border; a few shared that their partner lives on the other side of the border to them. One respondent in particular articulates the type of social and familial ties that exist across the border:

*'My family is split across both sides of the border. I have 50 first cousins with approximately half on each side of the border. I am a member of some literature groups and they regularly meet on both sides of the border. I use the libraries in both Derry and Letterkenny. My house is literally 250 metres from the border across the fields. Everything I do crosses the border. My bus to Letterkenny crosses the border to go to Derry first, then back across the border to complete its journey to Letterkenny. The border going back up, will affect every single aspect of my life in a negative manner.'* (#279, F, Donegal)

***'Everything I do crosses the border.'***

Another, also with family on both sides of the border, recalls how different border crossing used to be in the past compared to now:

*'My father is from Monaghan and my mother Armagh; I spent most of my childhood passing back and forth through the border several times a week visiting my grandparents and cousins. I'm from North Monaghan which the border surrounds in all directions so I have vivid memories of regularly passing through check*

***‘...if we returned to this type of system; I would feel like the country would go back 20 years.’***

*points and customs a many times a day - sometimes through a checkpoint to do a five minute message and back through again on the return journey. I would be devastated if we returned to this type of system; I would feel like the country would go back 20 years. I can’t begin to imagine not only the inconvenience of it but the thought that we are once again separated by a border run by army and customs officials... It is ridiculous to think we’re having to consider it.’ (#238, F, Monaghan)*

***the paradox of the contemporary border. In some ways it is non-existent, completely irrelevant and not a consideration in daily life:***

We were able to discuss the experience of crossing the border in more depth in the focus groups. These conversations revealed the paradox of the contemporary border. In some ways it is non-existent, completely irrelevant and not a consideration in daily life:

*‘Yes, the decision is to shop in Armagh or Dundalk, but the border doesn’t come into it.’ (1.7.53)*

*‘Not sure that people are even aware they are crossing the border for shopping or whatever – I don’t think about it.’ (1.7.53)*

***In other ways, however, the border is ever-present, particularly as linked to politics and the experience of the peace process.***

In other ways, however, the border is ever-present, particularly as linked to politics and the experience of the peace process.

## 3.4. Anticipating a ‘harder’ border

### 3.4.1. The impact south of the border

A border not only divides, it is a meeting point – what happens on one ‘side’ of the border invariably affects experience on the other.

This is powerfully illustrated in the case of a referendum with such significant implications for the economic, social, legal and political environment of a country. For a Border Region, the ramifications are particularly acute – the more integrated a Border Region, the weightier the implications. Responses to some of the questions in this project have brought this to the fore in several ways.

*‘Both sides of the border... it’s a community. In Belfast/Dublin, certain sectors may be impacted and others might never be. Within the local border community, it’s everyone that will feel it.’(1.20.02)*

*‘For a border community, it impacts on every aspect of everyday life. When you get up in the morning, which road do you go out on? In Dublin or Belfast they won’t understand. That very close, tight way that it affects everything you think about and everything you do. For example, the man that fixes my car lives in Newtownbutler, County Fermanagh – to drive you’d go out the Cavan road into County Fermanagh, then into County Monaghan, then into County Fermanagh – then you get to his house. I could do that journey in 10 or 15 minutes; what would that be like if crossing an international European border?’ (1.20.20)*

Respondents from Donegal are particularly concerned, given its geographical position and reliance on routes of transport that traverse the border:

*‘The vote for Brexit was essentially a vote to turn my county [Donegal] into a peninsula. We are already cut off from our natural urban centre by partition. Any hardening of that line would be economically disastrous for my local area.’ (#73, M, Donegal)*

*‘From a Donegal perspective, the key word is isolation. Where we are...on the periphery of Europe. 95% of our land border is with the north. The logistics of any sort of restrictions on the border – whether that is form-filling, e-forms or queues at the border, it is going to have huge implications for industry and for people that cross the border for work, for education, for health.’ (3.18.33)*

***‘For a border community, it impacts on every aspect of everyday life. When you get up in the morning, which road do you go out on?’***

***the feelings of resentment, anxiety and voicelessness are particularly acute among respondents in the southern border counties.***

*'I have relatives in Scotland, England and Northern Ireland. The closest shopping town is across the border. Most employment locally is on the other side of the border in Derry.'* (#279, F, Donegal)

The fact that these respondents did not have a vote in the referendum and yet are deeply affected by its outcome means that the feelings of resentment, anxiety and voicelessness are particularly acute among respondents in the southern border counties.

*'We (in the Republic of Ireland) didn't have any say and we're going to be equally affected. People face the same issues on both sides of the border.'* (1.31.16)

*'We are being dragged out by the coat-tails by essentially England and Wales. It's galling that we're getting pulled out, given the amount of people who decided to stay. We're constrained by the GFA in one way and enhanced by it in others. We're caught.'* (1.34.50)

### 3.4.2. Ramifications of a 'harder' border

Personally affected by 'harder' border

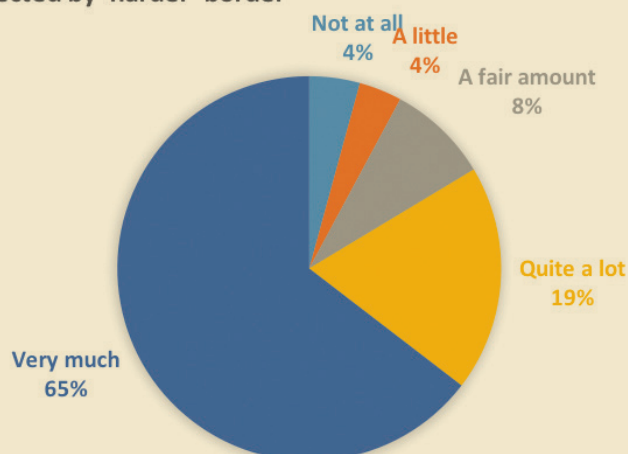


Fig. III. iii. Responses to Q. 11. How much do you think a 'harder' border between Ireland and Northern Ireland would affect you? (Likert scale)

Almost 85% of the respondents believe that a harder border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland will significantly affect them. When asked to anticipate what a hard border might mean, focus group participants recalled such border experiences and the impact it can have.

*'[A harder border] creates a number of problems and has massive ramifications, not just in terms of where roads are closed off, but emotionally. When you think about where you go shopping, where you trade. People here would've headed east rather than west; with Sligo just down the road, you would go to Craigavon. That emotional relationship with a border, in terms of where you think you're going to go has much longer impacts. It doesn't matter if they build [physical] barriers, the fact that they create some form of border...that's what divides families and communities.'* (2.9.16)

*'Paperwork barriers, people barriers, travel barriers, education barriers. [Brexit] Just makes everything more complicated and less seamless.'* (2.1.15)

***'...emotional relationship with a border.'***

***'It doesn't matter if they build [physical] barriers, the fact that they create some form of border...that's what divides families and communities.'***



Given the symbolic, political and emotional significance of the border, it is not surprising that many respondents draw direct links between the future nature of the border and relationships across the three 'strands': Unionist/Nationalist, north/south, and British/Irish. To illustrate this, we draw here on extensive comments from a British Unionist and Irish Nationalist who live in the Fermanagh and Omagh district. They have different experiences of the border and different viewpoints on the Union. It is worth quoting them at length as they reveal some of the concerns raised by the spectre of a harder border.

**'...any form of a hard border will have an adverse effect on relations here between Unionists and Nationalists.'**

*'Whilst a hard Border may not affect my life in terms of commuting I believe any form of a hard border will have an adverse effect on relations here between Unionists and Nationalists, particular in the border regions. As someone who lives in a border area I have witnessed how contentious simply erecting KM/H [kilometres per hour road speed signs, used in Republic of Ireland] and "Welcome to Northern Ireland" signage has been in particular rural areas. These are always quickly defaced or removed. I cannot for the life of me imagine what erecting physical signs of a border ... by establishing border infrastructure or border forces would have on community cohesion and the continued acceptance by Nationalists of the current constitutional position [given that they] believe their Irishness is underpinned by membership of the EU and an invisible border.'* (#211, M, Fermanagh and Omagh)

**'I am worried that our sporting clubs won't be able to field teams after everyone has to emigrate when there's no work here. I'm worried that our communities will be devastated by this.'**

*'I have the right as an Irish citizen to travel across my country unhindered and unrestricted by a border - of any description. I am concerned at the delays people will face crossing the border, whether all of the border crossings will remain open - which will cut off whole families, and that this reinforces partition on this small island. I am worried about businesses in the small border villages and the larger towns that will be starved of trade that any restriction may cause and the consequential effect this will have on our already struggling communities. I am worried that our sporting clubs won't be able to field teams after everyone has to emigrate when there's no work here. I'm worried that our communities will be devastated by this.'* (#284, F, Fermanagh and Omagh)

### 3.4.3. The optimistic view

Of course, the fact that an open border is a relatively recent phenomenon, with only the youngest generations having no recollection of a ‘hard border’, means that there is already considerable experience of having dealt with such difficulties. In light of this, the notion of the Border Region as being characterised by resilience and adaptability came to the fore in some of the discussions regarding how Brexit may be managed:

*‘The services/products that are here now will remain and that’s not going to change. We will adjust to what the new demands are.’ (2.28.03)*

*‘Whatever you have to do, you have to do. People will change and it will become the new norm. We are quite resilient and we’ll just get on with it.’ (1.11.30)*

It is also the case that 8% of our respondents said that a harder border would affect them only a little or not at all. Within this group, there was a mix of British and Irish citizens and residents on both sides of the border; all but one of these was a Leave voter. Indeed, as noted below, the trend among our small sample of Leave voters was to be rather more confident than Remain voters that there will not be a hard border. As one put it: *‘Why does everyone who is opposed to Brexit think there will be a hard border?’ (#8, M, Mid Ulster)*. This is partly because of the view that any harder border would be Ireland (rather than Britain’s) problem, so the EU would be pressurised to avoid it: *‘The border is more a problem for Southern Ireland than Northern Ireland’ (#18, M, Armagh)*. Others argued that concerns about Brexit overplayed the importance of EU membership: *‘There was life before the EU and there will be life afterwards’ (#21, M, Fermanagh and Omagh)*.

One Leitrim-based respondent argued that there could not be a hard border because to enforce one would push Ireland towards leaving the EU itself:

*'Business will demand that there is no hard border. People and communities will insist there is no hard border. We will not be bullied as we were with Lisbon. If Brussels does pay heed, I Brexit will follow. It will probably happen anyway.'* (#27, M, Leitrim)

The same respondent was very clear that reform of the EU was necessary and that Brexit reflected Britain's standing up to 'Brussels imperialism'. This is an interesting perspective from the southern Border Region:

*'We will not tolerate abuse of our community by Brussels. We had enough crap from British security - and it had an excuse due to IRA activity.'* (#27, M, Leitrim)

Aside from the sentiment of the respondent, this comment reveals a sense in the Border Region that it has suffered the most from the hard edge of forceful policies on all sides.

## **Section 4:**

### Anticipating Brexit



***by far the most significant areas in which respondents consider EU membership to affect them are in EU citizenship rights and in EU funding.***

## 4.1. Experience of EU membership

### 4.1.1. Effects of EU membership

The survey asked respondents the extent to which they considered themselves and their household affected by EU membership across a range of different policy/legislative areas. It is clear from this response that by far the most significant areas in which respondents consider EU membership to affect them are in EU citizenship rights and in EU funding.

After these, the main ways in which respondents believe themselves to be affected at least 'quite a lot' by EU membership are in relation to holiday/travel (78%), work/business (75%), shopping and retail (75%) and environmental protection (73%). The areas in which respondents are least likely to consider themselves affected by EU membership are Education and Fisheries policy; this reflects the fact that only a small portion of our respondents are students (7%) and the small size of the fisheries sector in Ireland/Northern Ireland, so its needs are not properly represented in this survey.



### Affected by EU membership

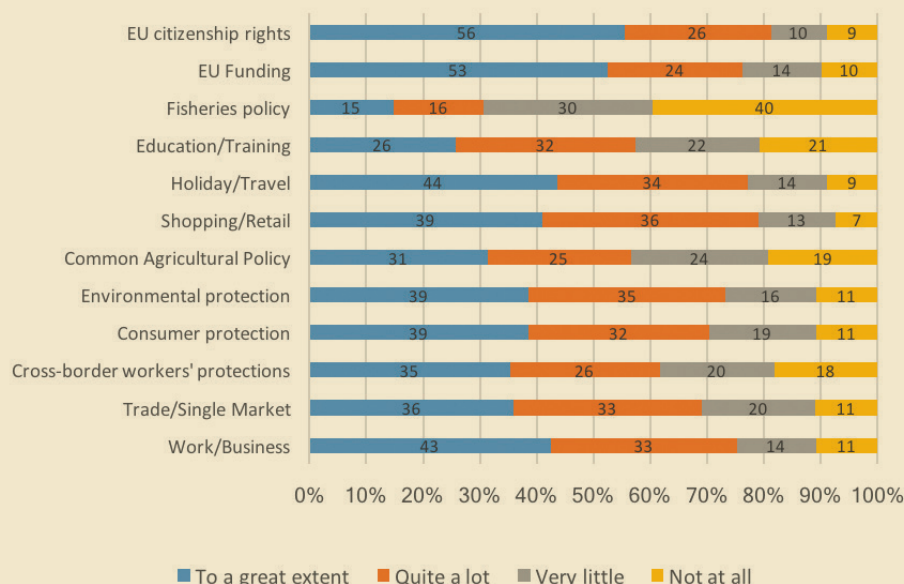


Fig. IV. i. Responses to Q. 15. In what ways does EU membership currently affect you and your household...? (Likert scale)

What this means is much of the experience of the European Union is not only related to travel abroad and to rights but also to very local experience, especially when it comes to direct funding and to matters that entail cross-border activity. In Section II, we noted the importance of shopping/retail as a motive for crossing the border, and  $\frac{3}{4}$  respondents also see EU membership as being important in this area. In this way, the lines between the experience of EU membership and the ease and experience of crossing the border can be blurred.

*‘EU membership is such an intrinsic aspect of life now that it, in one way or another impacts our daily life.’ (#177, M, Donegal)*

*‘EU Membership affects all aspects of my life, my family and my household from Energy Directive to food prices to worker protection’ (#181, M, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

*‘European Union is embedded in our law and culture’ (#183, M, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

***the lines between the experience of EU membership and the ease and experience of crossing the border can be blurred.***

## 4.2. Significance of Brexit

### 4.2.1. Impact on individuals

#### Personally affected by Brexit

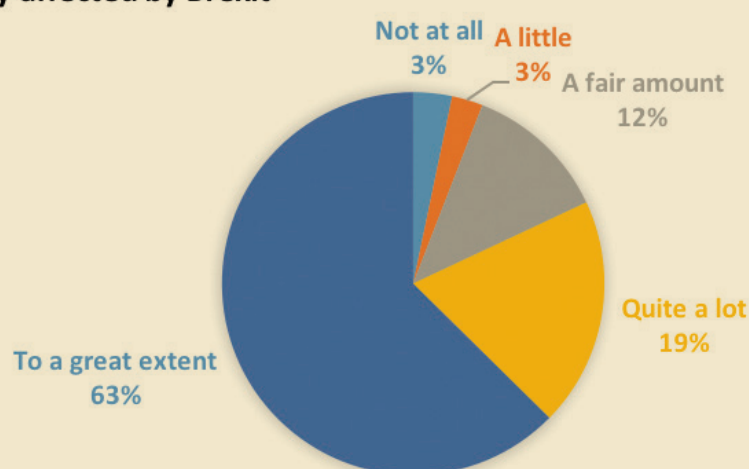


Fig. IV. ii. Responses to Q. 17. How much do you think the UK leaving the EU will affect you and your household? (Likert scale)

**82% said they would be significantly or majorly affected by Brexit.**

97% of our respondents (from both sides of the border) said that they would be personally affected by Brexit. 82% said they would be significantly or majorly affected by Brexit. Those who did not expect to be affected by Brexit tended to be older ('Won't affect me personally a lot, as I am retired') or they had a sceptical view of the media coverage of Brexit ('There will be an impact, some pros and cons but its impact is being hyped up'). Leave voters were disproportionately represented in the number of respondents saying that they would not be affected at all by Brexit. One such respondent said that he believed Brexit would not affect him because he believed the future of Northern Ireland was '*covered by GFA [Good Friday Agreement]*' (#7, M, Mid Ulster).





Fig. IV. iii. Wordcloud of answers to Q18 on effects of Brexit on personal life/household.

Of those who saw Brexit as having a significant personal effect on them, many mentioned the wider British-Irish context, such as anticipated changes to the position of British passport holders in Ireland and vice versa, and the importance of travel between Great Britain and Ireland. In light of this, it would seem that the preservation of the Common Travel Area is very important for people in the Central Border Region when it comes to managing the effects of Brexit. Travel across the border with ease and the anticipation of other forms of border control were very frequently mentioned as explanations for the anticipation of being personally affected by Brexit. The connection of cross-border movement to ‘everyday life’ was very apparent, with shopping, sports, holidays, entertainment, business and relationships mentioned frequently in this regard.

Beyond border-centric issues, there were a wide range of reasons offered as to the ways in which respondents anticipated being significantly personally affected by Brexit. A businessman commented: *'Will limit my business development opportunities, remove development grants and limit my free movement.'* (#58, M, Newry, Mourne, Down). Others mentioned the loss of EU funding: Farm support payments, Rural Development Programme monies, PEACE funding. A range of other points were raised including employee protections, trade, tourism and agriculture standards.

***the preservation of the Common Travel Area is very important for people in the Central Border Region when it comes to managing the effects of Brexit.***

**Not all those who anticipate Brexit affecting them to a great extent viewed this as a negative thing.**

Not all those who anticipate Brexit affecting them to a great extent viewed this as a negative thing. One commented by way of explanation: *‘Great to have rid of the EU, bureaucracy, we can make our own decisions’* (#8, M, Mid Ulster); this was echoed by another: *‘Life will be a lot better the EU has too much say in our affairs and not for the good’* (#16, M, ABC). It is important to recognise that these views were not exclusively those of Leave voters with only British citizenship or resident in Northern Ireland. A Leitrim resident (with joint citizenship) added: *‘[Brexit] will be a tremendously positive influence because we desperately need reform in the EU and only Britain has the ability to stand up to EU imperialism.’* (#27, M, Leitrim). And an Irish citizen in Cavan commented: *‘The UK will be a better place after it leaves EU’* (#9, M, Cavan).

## 4.2.2. Impact on local community

**a larger proportion of the respondents thought that their community would be greatly affected by Brexit than they themselves would be.**

Impact of Brexit on local community



Figure IV. iv. Responses to Q. 19. How much do you think the UK leaving the EU will affect your local community and Region? (Likert scale)

It is notable that a larger proportion of the respondents thought that their community would be greatly affected by Brexit than they themselves would be.

This centres on the importance of the border for the Region. Issues raised include cross-border shopping, travel, trade, and social connections. Others mention particular risks for particular sectors, and the loss of EU funding is mentioned most frequently as a particular concern.

*‘Community and voluntary sector will be hit badly, especially with good relations/cross community work and programmes’ (#286, F, Fermanagh and Omagh).*

Some of the fears expressed by respondents were generally those regarding the UK’s exit from the EU, e.g. *‘we will all be poorer, less healthy, and dependent on the unstable/ dangerous US to come in and “help” us with trade deals that will make us even poorer’ (#285, F, Fermanagh and Omagh).* More common, though, were concerns about the exposure of Northern Ireland and the Border Region to new risks outside the ‘cushiness’ provided by the EU. *‘We have had it good for quite some time – no wonder they [England] are not worried about us’ (2.29.39).*

Some describe the anticipated effects of Brexit in emotive terms; in fact, as noted in the previous section, some of the most urgent expressions of anxiety about the effects of Brexit on the local community come from those on the southern side of the border. For example:

*‘I live in a border town. It will be devastating’ (#293, F, Monaghan)*

*‘I live in Carrigans in County Donegal. The border will sever our main transport links, access to shopping and access to employment.’ (#279, F, Donegal)*

*‘Devastation. Isolation’ (#296, M, Monaghan)*

*‘Currently barely surviving due to falling exchange rate and cannot sustain this. I am looking for alternative employment in Donegal (next to impossible) and also getting my house ready to put on market so [Brexit is] a life changing event that I was unable to voice an opinion on!’ (#281, F, Donegal).*

***some of the most urgent expressions of anxiety about the effects of Brexit on the local community come from those on the southern side of the border.***

***no significant difference between respondents in different jurisdictions as to the emphasis they place on the border in the anticipated impact of Brexit.***

*'We share most of our border with N Ireland so our trading will be affected by customs, charges, cross-border workers, immigrants, work opportunities.'* (#141, F, Donegal)

It is evident that those that see Brexit as having most consequence for their locality, tend to emphasise the border and to anticipate its 'return'. One person, when asked about the impact of Brexit, commented: *'border of the '70s' (#297, M, Newry)*. There appears to be no significant difference between respondents in different jurisdictions as to the emphasis they place on the border in the anticipated impact of Brexit.



Fig. IV. v. Wordcloud of answers to Q20 on effects of Brexit on your local community or region.

A little over 6% of the respondents believe that Brexit would hardly affect their local community and region. Looking at the reasons they gave for this view, it centres on the idea that things will either stay the same or improve. These respondents ridiculed what they saw as scaremongering from the ‘doomers and gloomers’ and welcomed the removal of ‘unelected bureaucrats’. Other improvements that they anticipated were to be the reduction of red tape, retention of monies currently paid to the EU, ‘the re-establishment of full Parliamentary democracy as a result of Brexit’.

Respondents who anticipated negative impacts from Brexit tended to show much less confidence in the current democratic system or the representation of Northern Ireland's views in the Executive or in Westminster.

As in the answers to the previous question on whether they would be personally affected by Brexit, Leave voters were disproportionately represented in those believing that Brexit would have no effect on their local community. One respondent argued that border roads could be closed as a result of Brexit but that *'Minor roads are open but very rarely used after 10 years except by locals'* (#7, M, Mid Ulster). A very different view was given by a different respondent:

*'I live in a location which was marginalized by its locations for years due to the border and increasing cross-border traffic is important to ensure my location will be given an opportunity to flourish'* (#88, M, Leitrim).

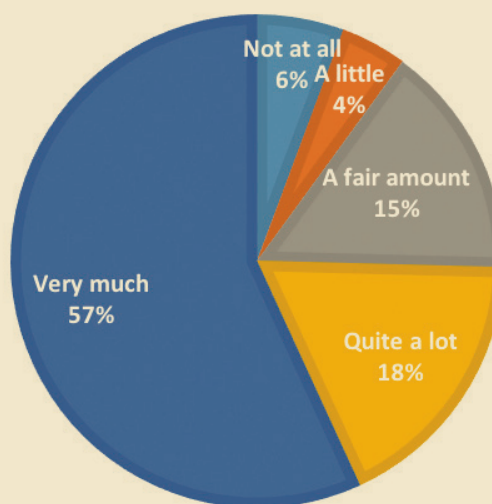
***Respondents who anticipated negative impacts from Brexit tended to show much less confidence in the current democratic system or the representation of Northern Ireland's views in the Executive or in Westminster.***

***Leave voters were disproportionately represented in those believing that Brexit would have no effect on their local community.***



## 4.2.3. Effect of change in UK/Ireland relations

Impact of Change in UK/Ireland Relations



*respondents were not so agitated by the prospect of a change in UK/Ireland relations as they were by Brexit*

Fig. IV. vi. Responses to Q.21. How much do you think a different relationship between Ireland and the UK would affect you?

Comparing answers to the question on the anticipated effect of changes in UK/Ireland relations to others, it is clear that respondents were not so agitated by the prospect of a change in UK/Ireland relations as they were by Brexit (although a few respondents saw no distinction between the two processes). Nor was the answer greatly affected by whether a respondent lived in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. UK/Ireland relations, for many, meant London-Dublin relations, and they considered the Border Region to be on the very margins of those circles.

*UK/Ireland relations, for many, meant London-Dublin relations, and they considered the Border Region to be on the very margins of those circles.*

The sense is that the whole of Northern Ireland is suffering from a lack of representation whilst the devolved institutions are not properly functioning. When combined with the particular needs of Northern Ireland that may not necessarily match the priorities of the UK (especially as regards the Border Region), this deepened the sense of voicelessness of some:

*'If I were talking to Michel Barnier I would say: make sure you give a voice to citizens here, especially EU nationals living in Northern Ireland. I don't think we're going to have a voice in Northern Ireland for a very long time. The British Government isn't going to do that... someone has to.'* (1.40.50)

***'...make sure you give a voice to citizens here...'***

A repeated concern rested on the vulnerability of Northern Ireland in wider geopolitics:

*'Living in Northern Ireland we are at the liberty of how these countries deal with one another, I fear we will become a bargaining chip.'* (#299, F, South Down)

*'Direct rule from Westminster would mean people who don't know much about Northern Ireland and who don't particularly seem to care about it would be ruling it from across the sea. I'm not a fan of this.'* (#47, M, Mid Ulster)

A lack of trust in Direct Rule from Westminster has been exacerbated by what has happened since the Brexit referendum vote. The vote in the House of Commons on the triggering of Article 50 contributed to such concerns:

*'I am also disturbed that Westminster voted against Amendment 86, which would have protected the Good Friday Agreement during Brexit – effectively, MPs voted to break the GFA.'* (#285, F, Fermanagh and Omagh)

***A repeated concern rested on the vulnerability of Northern Ireland in wider geopolitics:***

Beyond Northern Ireland, there is a sense in which there has been a decline in relationships between the UK and Ireland since the Brexit vote. Some respondents south of the Irish border expressed this in terms of a new discomfort in their personal impressions of the UK:

*'I have a lot of friends and family in UK and visit regularly. I feel less positive towards UK now and I feel don't have the option to move or work there'* (#38, F, Sligo)

*'Not going there anymore...'* (#60, F, Cavan)

This indicates that the conduct of politics at the highest levels clearly has an effect on personal decisions and views at the micro level.



## 4.3. The views of Leave voters

### 4.3.1. The Leave-voting respondents

Given that only a small portion of our respondents voted to Leave (8%), it is worthwhile giving a particular space to consider patterns and themes in responses from these participants. The small proportion of Leave voters in our sample reflects the fact that 42% of our respondents live in the Republic of Ireland and were not eligible to vote. We may speculate that the disproportionate representation of Remain voters in this cohort reflects a greater agitation about Brexit among that group than with Leave voters, but this is impossible to prove in this study.

***a small proportion who have changed their mind about voting for Brexit.***

Among the Leave voting respondents, there were a small proportion who have changed their mind about voting for Brexit. In most cases this is because of the feeling that they were misled during the referendum campaign: *'all the claims made before [the] referendum were unfounded'* (#39, Fermanagh, male) and *'[I] was not given full facts in [the] referendum'* (#225, Male, Monaghan). That said, among all our Leave voting respondents, there is an almost 50/50 divide between those who do not believe that they are very informed about the topic and those that state that they are very informed. Most information they gather on Brexit has come through the media, although they question the accuracy of the information that is given through the media. The overall impression of the views of Leave voters is the same as that of all our other respondents, i.e. that nobody can really know what the fallout of Brexit will be until the Brexit negotiations in Brussels are concluded.

## 4.3.2. Why respondents voted Leave

The reasons that most Leave respondents give for voting for Brexit was the reduction of ‘red tape’:

*reduction of  
‘red tape’.*

*‘The reduction of “red tape”, retention of monies currently paid to the EU and re-establishment of full Parliamentary democracy as a result of Brexit will have considerable positive advantages.’ (#18, M, Fermanagh)*

*‘Less red tape and interference in daily life and more trade with the wider world’ (#88, M, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

*‘For over 35 years I have been plagued by European legislation in the workplace. Our growth has been restricted. Entrepreneurial spirit and energies of the working man has been suffocated and blighted by faceless and uninformed and dis-interested political buffoons in Brussels. I have worked tirelessly to see the day that we could rid ourselves of such influences.’ (#76, M, Mourne)*

It is important to note that a few Remain voting respondents also give similar reasons as possible benefits arising from Brexit:

*Perhaps there could be positives, e.g. less red tape, more immigration controls etc., and I have no doubt that the UK will eventually flourish, however the real problem in this area [Border Region] is that ROI stays in Europe and the U.K. Is out. (#191, M, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

In terms of opportunities, one respondent was very explicit as to how Northern Ireland might benefit from the difficulties they believed Ireland would face as a consequence of Brexit.

**‘We will attract inward investment and we will export more.’**

**‘Yes a Hard Border [sic] will benefit us greatly. I look forward to it.’**

**having control over one’s own borders.**

**no respondent appears to link an open Irish border to any increase in immigration in either direction**

*‘Europe will not be able to subsidize these [farming and fishing] industries at its existing rate of grant in the Irish Republic and as a result we in Northern Ireland will be much more competitive within the market-place. We will attract inward investment and we will export more. And with the Irish Republic’s economy being so heavily dependent upon its exports into mainland GB this too will be a situation that we can exploit to our financial well-being... Yes a Hard Border [sic] will benefit us greatly. I look forward to it.’ (#76, M, Mourne)*

In the main, however, Leave voting respondents presented reasons that closely reflect the mainstream British pro-Brexit discourse:

*‘It is the right of all countries to secure their borders’ (#21, M, Fermanagh and Omagh).*

*‘Outstanding trading opportunities worldwide, reassertion of national sovereignty and control of immigration.’ (#18, M, Fermanagh)*

The same respondent argued that a specific challenge in the Brexit process was: *‘To minimise the economic impact’* of Brexit on the Border Region, and the *‘Prevention of the EU seeking to damage the UK economy and limit UK sovereignty’*.

Related to this is the theme of having control over one’s own borders, which appears to primarily mean keeping those out that they do not want entering.

*‘Immigration Control, Legal Control over Laws of the Land’ (#24, M, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

*‘A strong UK independent and forming its own laws for its own people. Strict immigration controls. Immigrants should be required to integrate into the community.’ (#34, M, ABC)*

*‘UK to govern our legislation, remove human rights and stop protecting the criminals, give greater protection to the victims, stop foreigners feeding off our benefits system and look after our people as a priority’ (#37, F, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

Despite the general anti-immigration tenor in the views of these respondents, it is notable that no respondent appears to link an open Irish border to any increase in immigration in either direction.

***no respondent appears to link an open Irish border to any increase in immigration in either direction.***

### 4.3.3. Leave-voters' views of the post-Brexit border

Our Leave-voting respondents were less likely to cross the border on a frequent basis than Remain respondents, and when they do so, it is for specific reasons, such as youth group outings, fuel or going to Dublin Airport: *'I very rarely cross the border so it wouldn't directly affect me.'* (#130, M, ABC). That said, it is the case that some Leave voting respondents were directly involved in activities that are likely to be directly affected by Brexit. One stated he had *'Work, family and business on both sides of the border'* (#88).

There were some exceptions to this, with two respondents in this category expressing concerns about future difficulty in crossing the border for work and sales, which they currently do at the moment. That said, they seem less concerned about the resonance of the past border than Remain voters in this survey:

*'Didn't affect me when there was a border in the past, can't see it making a lot of difference since that time'* (#37, F, Fermanagh and Omagh)

*'It will just go back to the old times'* (#6, M, Fermanagh and Omagh)

That said, one slightly younger respondent described her fear of *'intimate searches [and] intimidating presence'* (#46, F, ABC) if there was a return to a hard border.

Leave voters are less likely to fear a hard border, not because they don't cross it or see the economic value of an open border but because they do not believe that negotiations will result in it. Leave voting respondents, in response to questions about possible changes to cross-border or British-Irish relationships queried.

***Leave voters are less likely to fear a hard border, not because they don't cross it or see the economic value of an open border but because they do not believe that negotiations will result in it.***

**even the Leave voting respondents were neither voting for nor expecting a ‘hard’ Irish border, and a number state that they do not wish to see such a thing.**

*‘Will it be that different?’ (#37) and ‘Why should there be a different relationship?’ (#24). One reason given as to why they don’t anticipate a harder border is because of Ireland’s position:*

*‘I don’t think it will make a difference as Republic of Ireland is greatly dependent on UK and will be eager to strike a deal to protect their economy’ (#10, F, ABC)*

Another pointed to the vulnerable position of Ireland, seeing a hard border as a decision of the EU’s (at a cost to Ireland) alone:

*‘The border will only be hard if the EU ‘superstate’ want this to be the case. The people of the UK and people of NI do not want a ‘harder’ border ...nor do the people of the RoI. It will be the EU who need a hard border because of their policy on Free movement of people and customs controls... Surely the strict imposition of this EU law is not in the best interests of one of its member states?’ (#15, M, Mid Ulster)*

Their responses show that in the main, Leave voters view the impact of Brexit on the border controls as being primarily a matter of restricting immigration. Hence the response, when asked whether a harder border would affect him, *‘There might be a few delays at busy times of the year but worthwhile for the benefits of security and immigration.’ (#16, M, Fermanagh)*. That said, it is quite clear that even the Leave voting respondents were neither voting for nor expecting a ‘hard’ Irish border, and a number state that they do not wish to see such a thing. Indeed, one Leave voting respondent states that he wishes to see *‘an open border for the movement of people and business’ (#88)*.



# **Section 5:** Looking Ahead



## 5.1. Information on Brexit

### 5.1.1. Uncharted territory

In response to the question ‘How informed do you think you are about the possible impact of Brexit on your daily life?’ the average answer indicated that most people felt fairly informed (3.5 on Likert scale). Residence on one side of the border or another does not appear to be very significant here.

*most people get their information from media coverage.*

Information levels

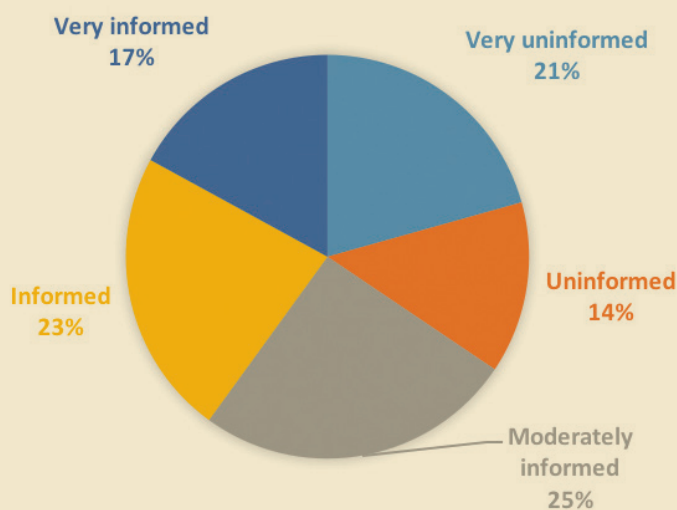


Fig. IV. vii. Responses to Q. 13. How informed do you think you are about the possible impact Brexit may have on your daily life? (Likert scale)

*news can exacerbate people's sense of uncertainty*

The comments given show that most people get their information from media coverage. There are some concerns that the information can be limited and inconsistent. This can mean that news can exacerbate people's sense of uncertainty about the topic: *'Sometimes there can be conflicting information which is hard to understand'* (#16, F, Monaghan). Respondents also raised



the issue of doubting any information put out until the process of the negotiations was clearer:

*‘Lots of speculation and guesswork with very few/no hard facts available!’ (#13, Derry, Female)*

*‘The NI border issue: we need facts, not speculation.’ (#223)*

In other circumstances, people may turn to political leaders for guidance but there is some cynicism in that regard, at least until there is some clarity from the direction of the negotiations.

*‘There is a lot of nonsense being spouted by politicians who don’t know what they are talking about. Until the deal is done no one knows.’ (#34, M, Armagh)*

Indeed, a general theme coming through is that the circumstances make it difficult to be anything other than uncertain: *‘No one’s fault that the information is limited, there is just so many unknowns. It’s uncharted territory.’ (#31, M, Donegal)*. One focus group participant explained this well:

*‘The problems could be zero or could be 100. Until the horse-trading starts, we don’t know what the outcome is going to be –’ (3.5.58)*

This means that there is a fear that the dangers will be worse than anticipated because they have not been adequately prepared for:

*‘While I have read some of the arguments presented from both sides there appears to be so much unknown that the risks will potentially be greater than even expected.’ (#104, M, Mid Ulster)*

A focus group in Monaghan picked up on the risks involved in this lack of preparation:

*‘Very few businesses, something like 98% are not even thinking about it, which is probably a message as well. It’s a message around the confusion and lack of certainty.’ (1.39.25)*

Indeed, some consider that information has limits to its usefulness anyway: *'It's going to happen; knowing about it will not change things'* (#18, M, Armagh) and another described himself as *'Intentionally uninformed. Too many variables to try and assess. The sun will still rise in the morning and set in the evening.'* (#35, M, Leitrim). Others question as to whether information can be trustworthy or whether it can only, at best, be *'opinions of journalists and others'* (#48, M, Fermanagh and Omagh). As one respondent stated:

*'Many relevant questions have been asked but only some of the relevant facts relating to the answer are provided, depending on which side of the argument the person is on.'* (#132, M, Mid Ulster)

A couple of other Leave voters commented on what they perceived to be a pro-European bias of journalists currently writing on the impact of Brexit.

Quite a number of respondents made a connection between the current uncertainty around the future of the Irish border and the *'political crises in the UK'* (#49, F, Fermanagh and Omagh), the lack of a NI Executive (#65, M, Cavan) and the lack of preparedness prior to the referendum (#56, F, Monaghan). One focus group participant commented on the referendum experience in Northern Ireland in that regard:

*'But there was a lot of publicity, a lot of involvement and Northern Ireland was very much involved in the talks before we voted. We got a lot of information from the BBC, UTV... there was too much! I think what the problem was that people buried their heads in the sand thinking it'll never go through.'* (1.13.45)

Some commended the levels of information available from various sources (though not official sources) but these respondents seemed to be particularly motivated to find out more, usually because of a particular business or personal interest in the subject (e.g. #29, #42, #52, #113). Others argued that these were insufficient.

*'I don't have much of an interest in politics but would like to know more about the potential impacts of Brexit.'* (#50, F, Fermanagh and Omagh)

*'Until such time as the average person receives very clear and proven facts through the letterbox or through approved media routes, the possible impact of Brexit will mean that most of the border population remain uninformed. Currently it is 'hearsay' with no proof behind it and therefore a degree of separation remains.'* (#80, F, Cavan)

This view was repeated in the focus groups. There was a discussion in one that exemplified the paradox of the situation: on the one hand *'everyone is talking about Brexit'* and yet on the other *'we're not getting information'* (3.1.34; 5.58).

*'Not knowing is the worst. Nobody knows what the impact of Brexit is going to be. It is not possible for them to judge what kind of problems there will be because of Brexit. There might be none and they might be immense.'* (3.1.34)

There was an expressed wish for information:

*'Any sort of clarity would be a starting point. If there was any sort of plan, as opposed to just limbo which it has been for a while.'* (2.26.33)

All of this comes back to the uncertainty about the future arrangements and implications for the Border Region. In the meantime, *'We do not know yet. Up 'til now politics is entirely in "guessing and assuming" mode. Not healthy.'* (#3, M, Donegal). When invited to describe their views on Brexit in one to three words, the word that came up most frequently of all among our focus group respondents was 'uncertainty'.

## 5.2. Priorities

### 5.2.1. Political uncertainty

In response to the survey question on what the priorities should be for the Border Region in the Brexit negotiations, a number of respondents gave answers that may be viewed as ‘political’. Yet few of these were what might be termed staunchly Unionist or Nationalist; instead, there were critical reflections on the future stability of the United Kingdom in light of the nationalisms unleashed by Brexit (English and Scottish as well as Irish) and on the future relationship of trust between Britain and Ireland.

These comments from someone describing himself as a British Unionist Remain voter express a particular sense of vulnerability, being concerned that Brexit will induce a rise of nationalism in Ireland and the UK that undermines the Union whilst at the same time having no representation of his views by a political party in Westminster:

***‘...I believe that leaving the EU will prove the biggest threat to Northern Ireland’s settled constitutional position and that of the UK as a whole...’***

*‘As someone who identifies as British I am beginning to question just how much a UK Conservative Government really cares for or understands the situation here in Northern Ireland ...I believe that leaving the EU will prove the biggest threat to Northern Ireland’s settled constitutional position and that of the UK as a whole. ... without any other mainstream British political parties standing for election here I feel that my vote is worthless at Westminster and I am beginning to imagine for the first time in my life just what a United Ireland would look like and how Unionist Remainers may have more of a voice and a lot more in common with our Southern Friends.’ (#211, M, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

Whilst it is not unusual for residents in the Border Region to protest that the UK and Irish governments pay it too little attention, this feeling appears to be exacerbated by Brexit.

This is in part because of the array of possible Brexit outcomes that may yet cause harm to the Region; even Leave voting respondents did not suggest many opportunities that would bring particular benefits to the Region through Brexit. The sense of Northern Ireland being ‘between’ the Republic and Great Britain is even more acute for the Border Region, which is literally at the edge of the two jurisdictions. As one respondent put it:

*‘People down the country talk about ‘The border areas’ and our business without really understanding how much our area is struggling as it is. There should be more effort made by the government and the media, as well as the UK citizens, to understand our plight and that of the North.’ (#261, F, Monaghan)*

## 5.2.2. Peace process

*‘The UK leaving the EU will plunge my life into uncertainty. ...I also worry about the threat of violence if a hard border is imposed as a result of Brexit.’ (#287, F, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

Respondents’ priorities for the Brexit negotiations (including Leave voters) centre on the need to keep a ‘frictionless’ border. This is connected to the over-riding concern to protect the peace process. A number of respondents used the analogy of a hardening border reopening old wounds:

*‘It places barriers between our County and the rest of the 6 counties. It raises old wounds and attitudes that were prevalent during the “Troubles”. It is not good for the Peace Process.’ (#237, M, Monaghan)*

***‘The UK leaving the EU will plunge my life into uncertainty. ...I also worry about the threat of violence if a hard border is imposed as a result of Brexit.’***



Fig. V. i. Responses to Q.23. What do you believe should be the priority outcomes from Brexit negotiations for you and the community you live in?

### 5.2.3. Agriculture

The practicalities of cross-border movement (and the mundane reasons for this) really come to the fore in people's responses to the anticipated effects of a harder border, especially with regard to farming and agriculture. This is important, given that free movement of agricultural products are not as a rule included in free trade agreements or customs unions with the EU for non-EU member-states.

*‘From Donegal to Dundalk there are farmers that have land on both sides of the border. During The Troubles, they had to travel maybe 30 miles to get back around to a field. There are probably 10k pigs a week going from my county [Cavan] to Cookstown for slaughter. The milk is usually going the other way – from north to south. No-one takes any notice of it and it’s only when something would happen, you’d think, “I never thought of that...”’ (3.32.50)*

A number of respondents commented on the fact that farming now is far more complicated – and the agricultural markets and supply chains far more integrated – than at the time there was a harder border. This makes the anticipation of a post-Brexit border all the more concerning:

*‘There are so many regulations around farming now. Previously, when the border roads would have been closed, there was less bureaucracy and red tape. Now it’s all traceability, far more bureaucracy with it. It’s going to be massively difficult with splitting up two farms in two jurisdictions.’ (3.33.50)*

The personal impact of such changes are expressed in the survey in quite poignant ways.

*‘It would completely destroy my farming enterprise in that as a suckler cow farmer and sheep farmer my outlet for product would be absolutely restricted... Brexit will end my farming enterprise [from] which I and preceding generations have lived relatively comfortably. [It is now] coming to an abrupt end’. (#258, M, Mid Ulster)*

That said, even though the Common Agricultural Policy provides for an important source of income for the vast majority of farmers on the island, it was one of the issues of concern that was given a lower ranking in the survey’s list of effects of EU membership. This may reflect the fact that the UK government has reassured farmers that it will subsidise farmers in place of CAP payments until 2020.

***‘It’s going to be massively difficult with splitting up two farms in two jurisdictions.’***

## 5.2.4. Business and work

More immediately, respondents raised concerns about the impact of Brexit on businesses on both sides of the border.

*‘I am more concerned about the market size of some of the companies that operate and cross borders. Currency fluctuations, tariffs... all impact on businesses. We are all jumping to conclusions that there is going to be a hard border.’ (1.11.30)*

Respondents comment frequently on the potential problems for cross-border trade and business, and the fact that some in the Region would have to make different choices about where they will live and work as a result of a harder border.



***‘...cross-border businesses need a plan of what happens if a hard border is reality.’***

***A more significant economic border will mean greater incentives for smuggling.***

*‘The UK’s decision has impacted Ireland in terms of business and highlighting the fact that NI is partitioned from the rest of the island. Many people living in border counties will perhaps have to make serious decision on their workplace/country of residence... Economically I think cross-border businesses need a plan of what happens if a hard border is reality.’ (#217, F, ABC)*

*‘[I] live on the border and own a business... rely on northern trade in business’ (#221, F, Cavan)*

Among business-related priorities, the themes of tourism and environmental protections are mentioned most frequently.

A particular Brexit-related concern for business relates to the issue of smuggling that comes up in several comments in response to the survey question about the impact of Brexit. Experience already shows that smuggling causes particular harm to the legal economy in the Border Region. A more significant economic border will mean greater incentives for smuggling. As well as causing a difficulty for policing, at one level this also places some legitimate businesses in the area at a competitive disadvantage.

*‘Black market economy and illegal behaviour is going to sky rocket again – back to the dark days again. People trying to make a genuine € or £ are subsumed by the illegal activity, illegally procured goods, people avoiding tariffs, avoiding controls whether it is digital or a hard border. People going through fields. People registering cattle on one side and registering on another. Back to the fuel laundering. All that stuff will come back.’ (1.18.17)*

*‘I know any change to current arrangements on the border will result in turning the clock back 20 years, return to smuggling, etc.’ (#291, M, Mid Ulster)*

*‘A lot of people will make money out of [a customs border]. Wee Sammy or Paddy will be sitting back saying: “There’s that product and if I move it from there to there, how much can I make by bringing it across fields?” That would be impossible to police. (3.13.01)*

A quite different dimension of Brexit-related changes that are already affecting business and life in the border region are felt at a personal level by cross-border or frontier workers. Brexit looks set to affect them not only in terms of changes to the economic conditions of work in the Border Region but also as the UK's withdrawal from the EU potentially affects workers' rights, transferability of social security payments and mutual recognition of qualifications. The future position of cross-border workers is one of the most frequently mentioned concerns in the survey responses and a number of our respondents are cross-border workers. Some explained that they are already feeling the effects of the Brexit decision:

*'I live in ROI work in N.I cross the border at least twice daily for work. [I] Socialise, shop and get health care each side of the border. A hard border would make all that difficult and more expensive in time and money. The currency drop of the £ already is a huge drop in my money in my pocket.'* (#151, F, Monaghan)

Similar views were expressed by another cross-border worker, but one in the opposite situation:

*'As an EU cross-border citizen I am entitled to claim my children's allowance in southern Ireland. If this is no longer the case I will lose out financially; this is already causing me worry and stress. As a working family, we cannot afford to lose this payment to receive a much lesser payment in the north of Ireland.'* (#192, F, Fermanagh and Omagh)

The greatest concern is that the process of Brexit (and the related disintegration of currently common frameworks) would mean that people would be forced to stay on one side of the border or the other, rather than to live cross-border lives.

*'I live in Donegal and work in Derry, very worried about hard border and implications to local economy in Inishowen. Already seeing impact with property prices and personally with falling exchange rate. I am considering having to sell house and move to Derry or change jobs.'* (#281, F, Donegal).

***The future position of cross-border workers is one of the most frequently mentioned concerns in the survey responses and a number of our respondents are cross-border workers. Some explained that they are already feeling the effects of the Brexit decision.***

## 5.2.5. Citizenship and migration

Most often mentioned in the responses concerning the prospect of a hard(er) border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is the expectation that this border would lead to delays and that crossing the border would generally become more difficult. More broadly, there is an anticipation that there will be change in the treatment of – and discrimination between – different types of citizens. There were many mentions of fears about diverging experiences of Irish citizens on either side of the border.

**anticipation that there will be change in the treatment of – and discrimination between – different types of citizens.**

*‘What will the position of Irish citizens in the North be? Will the guarantees of the Good Friday Agreement with respect to citizenship rights continue to be respected? How will Irish passport holders who live in the UK be treated in the South of Ireland and the rest of the EU post Brexit? Will we still be considered as full EU citizens with the same rights?’ (#96, M, Mid Ulster)*

**fears about diverging experiences of Irish citizens on either side of the border.**

*‘It is going to separate us further from our fellow Irish citizens on the other side of the border, through the proliferation of a multitude of daily obstacles, some visible, some invisible.’ (#202, M, Strabane-Derry)*

**concerns raised about the position of non-British and non-Irish citizens in the Border Region.**

There were also concerns raised about the position of non-British and non-Irish citizens in the Border Region. Some viewed controls on migration as causing problems for the sustainability of some businesses (particularly in the hospitality sector) in the Region. This is a concern to both sides of the border:

*‘I know back home [Cavan] if you hadn’t the foreigners [sic], a lot of places would close down. Even the hotels, it would be massive.’ (3.35.18)*

*‘Rights to travel, live and work between EU regions for residents here or for people from other regions wanting to work here - people and expertise we need such as medical and healthcare.’ (#250, F, British and Irish, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

Another broader concern relates to the question of potential effects on immigration and migrant communities in Northern Ireland. Some specifically named the risk of increased ‘race hatred’ and ‘racist profiling’ (1.30.05), noting it has particular connotations and difficulties in a place that has experienced ethnonational conflict of this type. One other pertinent point in relation to migration: a number of respondents comment that the Brexit vote has made them think differently about their plans for moving across the UK/Ireland border in future:

*‘I wanted to move to Armagh after university but I’m not doing that now.’ (#261, F, Monaghan)*

## 5.2.6. Future development

In terms of future concerns, many raised queries about the potential impact on employment and education opportunities. Some of the younger survey respondents commented thus:

*‘Considering I plan on doing some schooling in Belfast, it [Brexit] is extremely worrying’ (#155, M, Leitrim)*

*‘If I decided to study in the North that could be a massive problem.’ (#220, F, Cavan)*

*‘I will not be able to consider postgraduate study in Northern Ireland as I had previously thought I would’. (#108, F, Leitrim)*

Such concerns clearly not only have an immediate impact in terms of restricting choice but also a longer term impact on the Region, not only in terms of educational opportunities and the knowledge economy but also in terms of the personal networks and social connections that arise through third level education. Such changes have implications for future generations.

*‘We’ll only start to understand what we’ve lost after we’ve lost it. When it’s too late.’ (1.47.27)*

## 5.2.7. Opportunities

Some opportunities were expressed in vivid form in terms of political preferences, among which ‘special status’ for Northern Ireland appears the most prevalent but (as one would expect) there are strongly expressed views for other outcomes too. For those seeing direct opportunities arising from Brexit, by far the majority centred on the idea of free trade outside the EU:

*‘We have to make the most of what we’ve got. We now will be an independent country that has traded for hundreds and hundreds of years and led the industrial revolution; we should be fit to make good deals with countries outside of Europe. It’s going to be difficult. We need strong negotiations with other countries ...there is a wider world out there. (2.2.55)*

*‘The world’s a big place, there is an opportunity...we can go and make our own trade deals. The money that we were putting into Europe will become available; we would want to get some of those funds.’ (3.51.10)*

It is notable that none of these talk in particular about Northern Ireland but about the UK as a whole as a beneficiary of such opportunities. Those who do see opportunities for Northern Ireland seemed to see these as coming at the expense of the Republic of Ireland.

*‘Citizens in the Irish Republic will be faced with considerable trading difficulties due to their close ties on the economic front with mainland GB and within 3 to 5 years they may well have to make their own decision as to whether or not they stay in Europe or choose to leave. In the immediate future, the opportunity for financial gains will be ours in Northern Ireland, provided we work and take advantage of such opportunities.’ (#76, M, Mourne)*

The same is true of respondents in the Republic of Ireland who see benefits for the Border Region from Brexit, i.e. it comes at the expense of the UK/Northern Ireland:

*‘Companies currently with HQs in UK/NI will look for a presence here to maintain EU access’ (#304 Sligo)*

*‘Opportunities for businesses to locate from North to South to take advantage of free EU market’ (#228, F, Fermanagh and Omagh)*

This is worrying, given that these opportunities are seen in terms of back-to-back development or competition between the two. But again, in the main, comments return to the uncertainty of the present climate.

*There are unforeseen things; this is all ‘cloud in the sky’ guessing but for our local area exporting outside of Northern Ireland is already complicated. If that becomes more complicated, then the opportunities out of it will be difficult to see. The opportunities will come, but will they come for everybody? I’m not so sure. (2.32.10)*

***‘The opportunities will come, but will they come for everybody? I’m not so sure.’***



## 5.3. Conclusion

### 5.3.1. The implications of Brexit for the Central Border Region

What effect has their common membership of the European Union had on the land border between the UK and Ireland? First and foremost, it has brought about the normalisation and de-politicisation of cross-border cooperation. A pragmatic approach to cross-border cooperation has steadily become more common in the Central Border Region, regardless of political or cultural affiliation. This is not to say EU membership has effected a process of de-nationalisation (British Unionist and Irish Nationalist views on the EU remain starkly different), but the practical benefits of cross-border cooperation have been recognised by politicians of all backgrounds, especially at the level of local authorities in border areas.

In economic terms, UK and Irish membership of the EU Single Market has removed customs tariffs, harmonised regulation and indirect taxation, and created a more level playing field for trade and competitiveness across the border. The Republic of Ireland is Northern Ireland's most important export partner outside the UK. Cross-border trade is of growing importance to the Northern Ireland economy, and has become a particularly important stepping stone for the SME-dominated private sector in Northern Ireland to explore export markets. Such growth has been aided by EU financial contributions towards major cross-border infrastructural projects (such as in the Belfast-Dublin rail and road corridor).

Input from European Cohesion policies and funding has been concentrated in particular in the Border Regions, helping to ensure that they do not fall further behind the central hubs of economic growth in the Single Market. In terms of daily experience, common EU citizenship for British and Irish citizens has provided benefits above and beyond pre-existing UK/Ireland arrangements, such as

supranational rights, harmonised protective employment legislation, the Treatment Abroad scheme, and protections for frontier workers. The changes to cross-border cooperation that may arise as a result of Brexit thus not only have symbolic resonance but also starkly concrete implications; these are most keenly felt in the Border Region.

For our respondents, their predominant hope (whether they be Leave or Remain voters) was that there would be minimal disruption and change to the border as it is currently experienced. Respondents picked up on the sensitivities in the language used in this matter. One spoke for a number when suggesting:

*‘Special status, or whatever term all sides can live with that delivers a bespoke deal for businesses allowing them to continue to trade freely with EU markets and to trade across the border.’*  
(#96, M Mid Ulster)

When considering what would be needed to help navigate the changes ahead, many mentions were made of ‘funding’ (including making it ‘easier to access’ than is currently the case for EU funding). Some specifically mentioned the importance of policies for rural development in the Central Border Region. Meeting these new policy challenges will be a task for politicians and officials at all levels of governance, including local representatives.

## 5.3.2. Representing the Central Border Region

*‘I think people are talking. Who is listening?’* (#154, Sligo)

Local representatives told us that they mainly get their information on Brexit from the media such as television, radio and newspaper articles. Some have also had the opportunity to attend conferences organised by independent organisations (e.g. the Centre for Cross Border Studies), but the overriding impression was that they feel hugely under-informed.

***predominant hope (whether they be Leave or Remain voters) was that there would be minimal disruption and change to the border as it is currently experienced.***

***don't want to exacerbate fears among their local constituents.***

This is a particular problem given that residents in the Border Region are likely to turn to their local representatives for more information and guidance on Brexit. There is thus a major information deficit that has a multiplier effect when it comes to local representatives when combined with the general sense of uncertainty and ill-preparedness for Brexit. Local representatives consequently find themselves in a Catch-22 situation in that they recognise the need for proper preparation for the impact of Brexit in their areas but they don't want to exacerbate fears among their local constituents, not least because this can be politically incendiary when it relates to the border.

***It is vitally important that facts and information are given directly to citizens so as to allay fears.***

One way of managing this is to ensure that local constituents become informed as to what is not likely to happen. The specific historical experiences of the Border Region, combined with the differing positions on Brexit taken by political parties in Northern Ireland, means that rumours and anxieties about cross-border relations can be used to further polarise communities. It is vitally important that facts and information are given directly to citizens so as to allay fears. For example, many of our respondents associated Brexit with the possibility of the introduction of passport controls along the border. We know from the UK Government Position paper on Northern Ireland/Ireland and the publications of the EU Commission that such controls are extremely unlikely to be required. It is important that this information is distributed to constituents. This is particularly vital for residents of the Border Region – not just because they will be so directly affected by any significant change and will need to prepare for it, but also because these residents are so particularly aware of the negative effects of a 'hard' border.

***'If something is imposed on people who don't want it – then you're talking big trouble.'* (1.22.22)**

The recent experience of a very hard Irish border has created a profound awareness in the Border Region of the damage that can be caused by circumstances that affect the symbolic and practical manifestation of the border. As such, representation was a theme or ideal that many respondents viewed as being appropriate for

the nature of these challenges, wishing to see a future situation in which ‘decisions are devolved down to a local level’. Meeting the particular needs of the Central Border Region, then, is seen as a challenge that requires proper representation. This would need to be acknowledged and steered from local political forums as well as at higher levels.

*‘If Brexit does go through, I think people locally would be a lot more accepting if their concerns and their fears were dealt with by politicians at a local, national and European level. If conditions were put in that come from Monaghan, come from Donegal – they would be a lot more accepting of the inevitable if they knew their concerns had helped to formulate policy.’ (1.34.11)*

Now is not a time to pull back from funding cross-border bodies and groups but a time to invest in them and draw upon their knowledge and experience.

This study set out to record the views of residents in the Irish Central Border Region as those most exposed to the changes that may come as a result of the UK’s withdrawal from the EU. It is clear that the anticipation of change, combined with uncertainty as to the future, means that Brexit is already having an impact on people on both sides of the border. Even more than EU membership, the way that the border is experienced today is seen primarily as an achievement of the peace process. It is thus extremely important that, throughout the Brexit process, the EU and UK government continue to maintain their shared principles of upholding the 1998 Agreement, protecting the peace process and avoiding a hard border. In seeking to realise these principles in their negotiations, they hold immense and direct responsibility for the future prospects of the Border Region as a place of stability, growth and peace.

***Meeting the particular needs of the Central Border Region, then, is seen as a challenge that requires proper representation.***

# | Appendices

# Appendix 1: Information flyer for online survey



## Brexit and the Central Border Region: Views from rural communities

**Amid the uncertainty about the future of the UK's relationship with the European Union, one thing is clear: the Irish border region will be most directly affected by Brexit:**

With this in mind, ICBAN - the cross border group for the area known as the Central Border Region - together with a small team from Queen's University Belfast are conducting a community engagement research project on the impact of Brexit, with a particular emphasis on the opinions of the rural communities in the Central Border Region of Ireland / Northern Ireland.

The project is non-political and non-partisan; we want to gather the views of local people whose voices otherwise tend not to be heard, therefore all the data from the survey and focus groups will be kept anonymous.

The results of this project will be compiled in a final project report, summarised in a blog and on [www.icban.com](http://www.icban.com). We will ensure your voices are carried forward and brought to the attention of the governments of the United Kingdom and Ireland, as well as the European Union.



## Appendix 2: Questionnaire for online survey

### 1. Age range

- a. Under 18
- b. 18-30
- c. 31-45
- d. 46-65
- e. 66+

### 2. Gender

- a. Male
- b. Female
- c. Prefer not to say

### 3. Citizenship

- a. British
- b. Irish
- c. Both British and Irish
- d. Other dual citizenship
- e. Other EU
- f. Other international
- g. Prefer not to say

### 4. Area of residence

- a. Armagh City Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council
- b. Cavan County Council
- c. Donegal County Council
- d. Fermanagh and Omagh District Council
- e. Leitrim County Council

- f. Mid Ulster District Council
- g. Monaghan County Council
- h. Sligo County Council
- i. Other

## 5. Occupational status

- a. Full-time
- b. Part-time
- c. Student
- d. Retired
- e. Not in paid employment

## 6. Is your primary occupation directly connected to agriculture or rural affairs?

- a. Yes
- b. No

## 7. How did you vote in the referendum on the UKs membership of the EU in June 2016?

- a. Leave
- b. Remain
- c. Abstained
- d. Did not have a vote
- e. Prefer not to say

## 8. How often do you cross the border

- a. Several times a day
- b. Daily
- c. At least once a week
- d. At least once a fortnight
- e. At least monthly
- f. At least quarterly
- g. Occasionally
- h. Rarely
- i. Not at all

**9. How frequently do you cross the border, and what for?**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Choose between Not at all; Very rarely; Rarely; Occasionally; Frequently; Very frequently**

- a. Work / Business
- b. Social / Family
- c. Education / Studies
- d. Shopping / Retail
- e. Holiday travel
- f. Healthcare
- g. Sports / Entertainment
- h. Other

**10. If you answered 'other' in the previous question, please elaborate here.**

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**11. How much do you think a 'harder' border between Ireland and Northern Ireland would affect you?**

Likert scale 1 to 5, 1 = Not at all; 5 = Very much

**12. Please elaborate on your answer to the previous question.**

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**13. How informed do you think you are about the possible impact Brexit may have on your daily life?**

Likert scale 1 to 5, 1 = Very uninformed; 5 = Very informed

**14. Please elaborate on your answer to the previous question.**

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**15. In what ways does EU membership currently affect you and your household?**

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**Choose between Not at all; Very little; A fair amount; Quite a lot; To a great extent**

- a. Work / Business
- b. Trade / Single Market
- c. Cross-border workers' protections and rights
- d. Consumer protection
- e. Environmental protection
- f. Common Agricultural Policy / Farming
- g. Fisheries Policy
- h. Education / Training
- i. Shopping / Retail
- j. Holiday travel
- k. EU funding
- l. EU citizenship rights
- m. Other

**16. If you answered 'other' in the previous question, please elaborate here.**

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**17. How much do you think the UK leaving the EU will affect you?**

Likert scale 1 to 5, 1 = Not at all; 5 = Very much

**18. Please elaborate on your answer to the previous question.**

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**19. How much do you think the UK leaving the EU will affect your local community and region?**

Likert scale 1 to 5, 1 = Not at all; 5 = Very much

**20. Please elaborate on your answer to the previous question.**

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**21. How much do you think a different relationship between Ireland and the UK would affect you?**

Likert scale 1 to 5, 1 = Not at all; 5 = Very much



**22. Please elaborate on your answer to the previous question.**

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**23. What do you believe should be the priority outcomes from Brexit negotiations for you and the community you live in?**

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**24. What opportunities do you believe will be forthcoming as a result of the UK leaving the EU?**

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**25. Are there any specific challenges or concerns you would wish to highlight for attention as a result of the UK leaving the EU?**

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**26. What impact might Brexit have on your future plans?**

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**27. Are there any particular questions relating to the impact of Brexit that you feel are not currently being addressed and which you would like to see more information on?**

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## Appendix 3: Interview schedule for focus groups

**Q1** Can you describe Brexit in one sentence / a few words?

**Q2** Do you cross the border more now than you used to in the past (e.g. post-Agreement)? What made the difference?

**Q3** What would be a deciding factor in making you less likely to cross the border?

Prompt: E.g. approved roads, stopping points, price divergence?

Probe: For you / your company (if applicable) / your community / or the sector you work in?

**Q4** Do you see Brexit as being relevant to the peace process/ Agreement?

Prompt: Cross-border bodies? Economy? Stability?

Probe: Examples? Reasons why it is not relevant?

**Q5 Is there anything positive to come from Brexit?**

Prompt: What are the opportunities for you / your community / (Northern) Ireland / your business (if applicable) when it comes to Brexit?

Probe: Will these benefits compensate the possible downsides? How could they be secured?

**Q6 We know a key priority in the negotiations is the Irish border/ unique circumstances of NI. What is the key message that you would like to get across from the Border Region to the negotiators?**

Prompt: What do you think are the unique issues in the Border Region that could get overlooked by a more general focus on the island of Ireland/UK?

**Q7 Is there anything else you would like to discuss that has not been touched upon in either the survey or this focus group?**

# BORDERING ON BREXIT:

Views from Local Communities  
in the Central Border Region  
of Ireland / Northern Ireland

The eight Member Councils areas of the Central Border Region include Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon; Fermanagh and Omagh; Mid Ulster and the counties of Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan and Sligo.

An initiative of the Irish Central Border Area  
Network, working with Queen's University Belfast

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