



Department for Transport

International Road Freight Statistics, United Kingdom 2016

About this release

This statistical release summarises the latest statistics on the **international** activity of UK registered HGVs. The information is derived from two continuous surveys run by the Department for Transport: the International Road Haulage Survey (IRHS) and the Continuing Survey of Road Goods Transport Northern Ireland (CSRGT NI).

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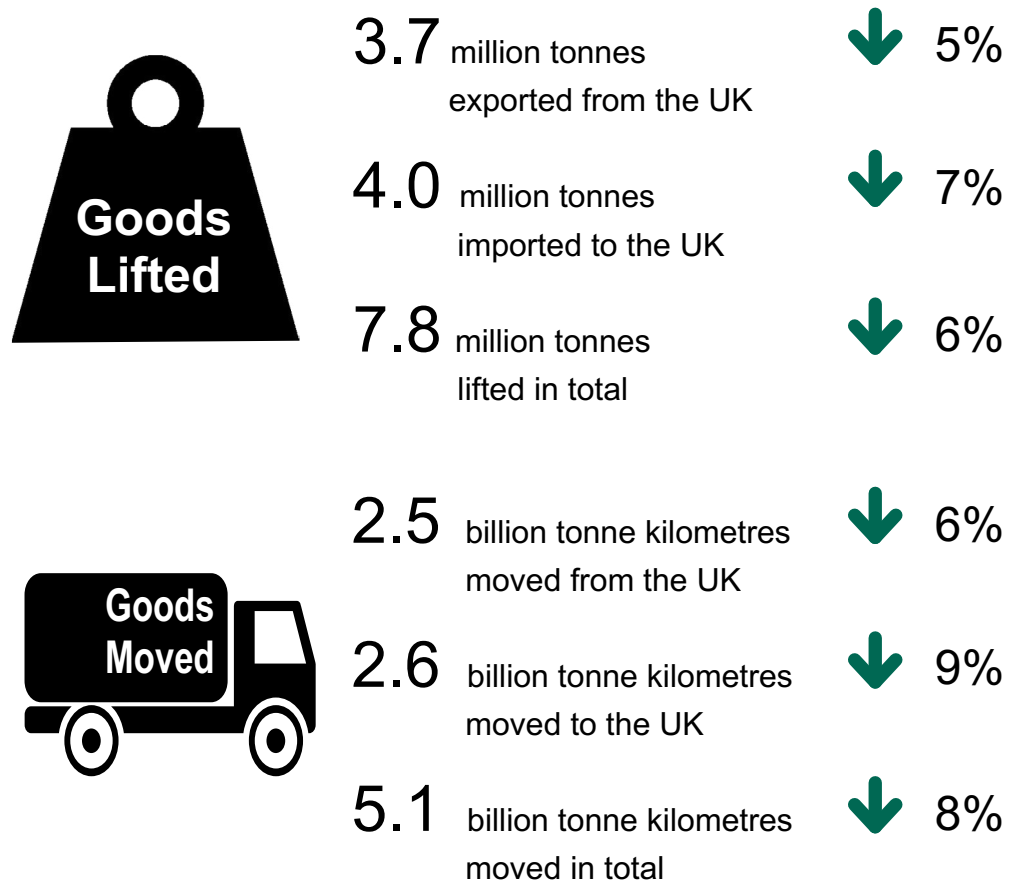
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International road freight activity falls in 2016

In 2016, for UK registered HGVs transporting freight internationally there were...



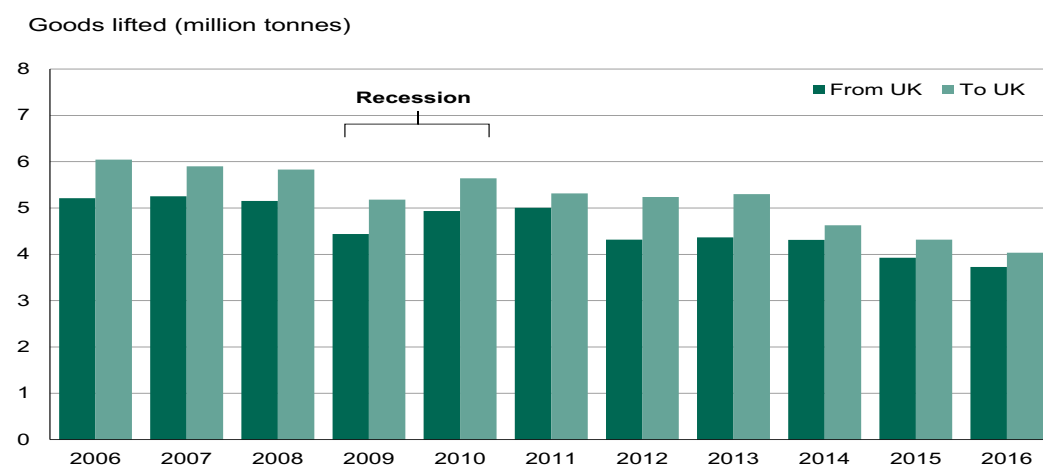
- ▶ In 2016, more goods were imported by road to the UK than exported
- ▶ 98% of goods lifted by UK HGVs were to or from the EU15
- ▶ 28% of goods lifted by UK HGVs were between the UK and France
- ▶ Foreign HGV cabotage accounted for just 1% of road freight activity within the UK

International activity of UK-registered HGVs

Goods lifted: In 2016, the amount of **goods lifted** by UK-registered heavy goods vehicles travelling to or from the UK was 7.8 million tonnes, down 6% on 2015, and 51% lower than the 1999 peak of 15.9 million tonnes. There was a 12% decrease in **goods lifted** in the year following the 2008 recession and decreases seen in 2014 and 2015 may be due in part to the intermittent disruptions seen at key freight interchanges e.g. disruption at Dover-Calais. [[Table RFS0201](#)].

Historically, UK registered vehicles have consistently imported more goods to the UK than they exported. In 2016, of the 7.8 million tonnes of **goods lifted**, 4.0 million tonnes were imported, and 3.7 million tonnes were exported (Chart 1)

Chart 1: Goods lifted by UK-registered vehicles, 2006-2016 [[Table RFS0201](#)]



Goods moved: There was a 8% decrease in the amount of **goods moved** from 5.5 billion tonne kilometres in 2015 to 5.1 billion tonne kilometres in 2016. This is a fall of 67% from the 1997 peak of 16.5 billion tonne kilometres. Of the 5.5 billion tonne kilometres of **goods moved**, 2.52 billion tonne kilometres were exported from the UK and 2.56 billion tonne kilometres were imported.

In 2014 for the first time since 2000, more goods were exported than imported to the UK. Neighbouring European countries reported similar patterns in the amount of goods moved to and from the UK. However in 2015 and 2016, the flow of goods reverted to trend. It is unclear what caused the change in freight flows in 2014, but the intermittent disruptions seen at Calais may have been a contributing factor.

In 2016, around 90% of the tonnage exported from the UK in UK-registered vehicles was unloaded in one of five countries: France (24%), Irish Republic (22%), Belgium (20%), the Netherlands (13%) and Germany (12%). The same five countries also represented the origin of 90% of imported goods (Chart 2 and Tables [RFS0202](#) and [RFS0203](#)).

Definitions

Goods lifted: the weight of goods carried, measured in tonnes

Goods moved: the weight of goods carried, multiplied by the distance hauled, measured in tonne kilometres

Cabotage: road haulage solely within one country by a vehicle registered in another country.

Percentage change between 2015 and 2016

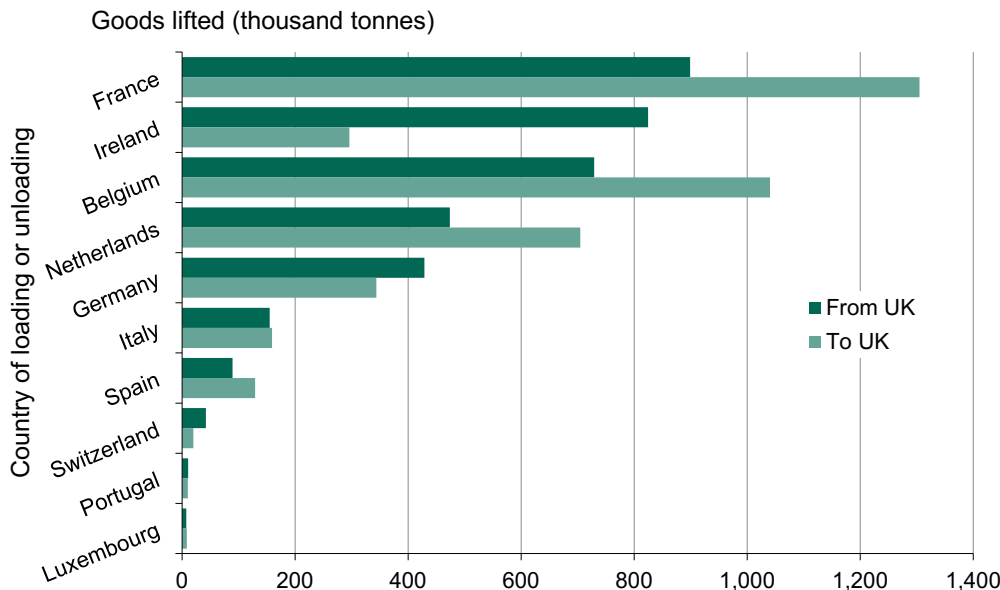
Goods lifted

- ↓ 5% decrease in the amount of **goods lifted** from the UK
- ↓ 7% decrease in the amount of **goods lifted** to the UK
- ↓ 6% decrease in total amount of **goods lifted**

Goods moved

- ↓ 6% decrease in the amount of **goods moved** from the UK
- ↓ 9% decrease in the amount of **goods moved** to the UK
- ↓ 8% decrease in the total amount of **goods moved**

Chart 2: Goods lifted by UK-registered vehicles by country of loading or unloading, 2016 [Table RFS0202]



Goods lifted in 2016, origin and destination:

From the UK to ...



To the UK from ...



NB Some HGV trips may be part of a multi-modal or multi-stage journey. The final origin/destination of the HGV road element may therefore not be the ultimate origin/destination of the goods.

Definitions

Commodity: goods are classified into commodity types and sub-categories by the 'standard goods classification for transport statistics 2007' NST2007.

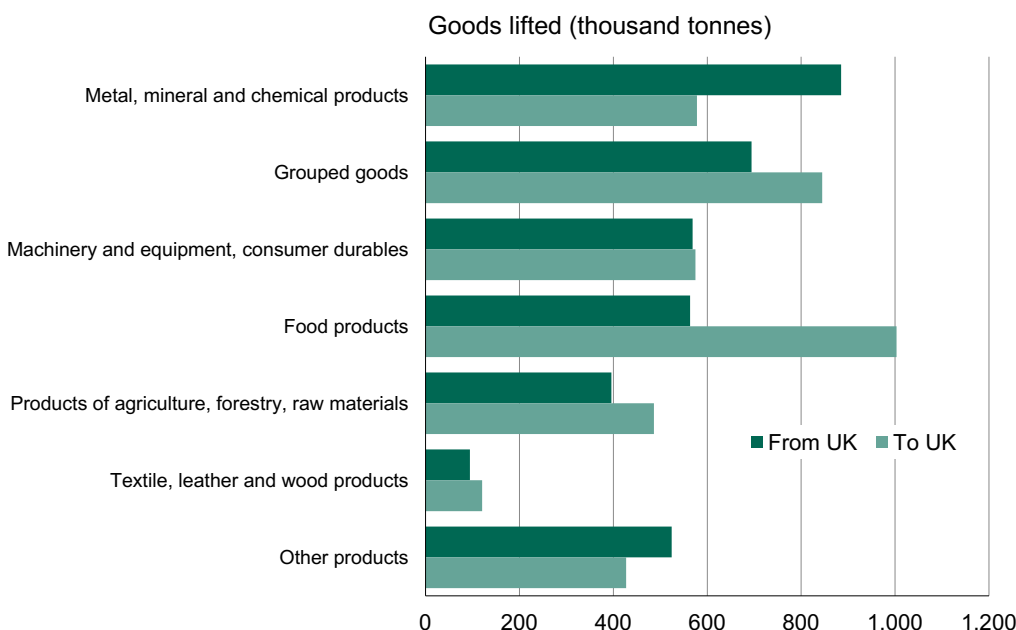
Grouped goods: when, for mixed consignments, no single commodity makes up 75% or more of the consignment weight.

Commodities carried by UK-registered vehicles

The most common single category of commodity exported by UK vehicles in 2016 was "Metal, mineral and chemical products" (24%). This was followed by "Grouped goods" (19%) and "Machinery and equipment, consumer durables" (15%). The main commodities imported were 'Food products' (25%), "Grouped goods" (21%) and "Metal, mineral and chemical products" (14%). Non-categorised "Other products" accounted for around 14% and 11% of exports and imports respectively (Chart 3 and Table RFS0206).

Chart 3: Goods lifted by UK-registered vehicle by commodity type, 2016

[Table RFS0206]



Goods vehicles travelling to mainland Europe

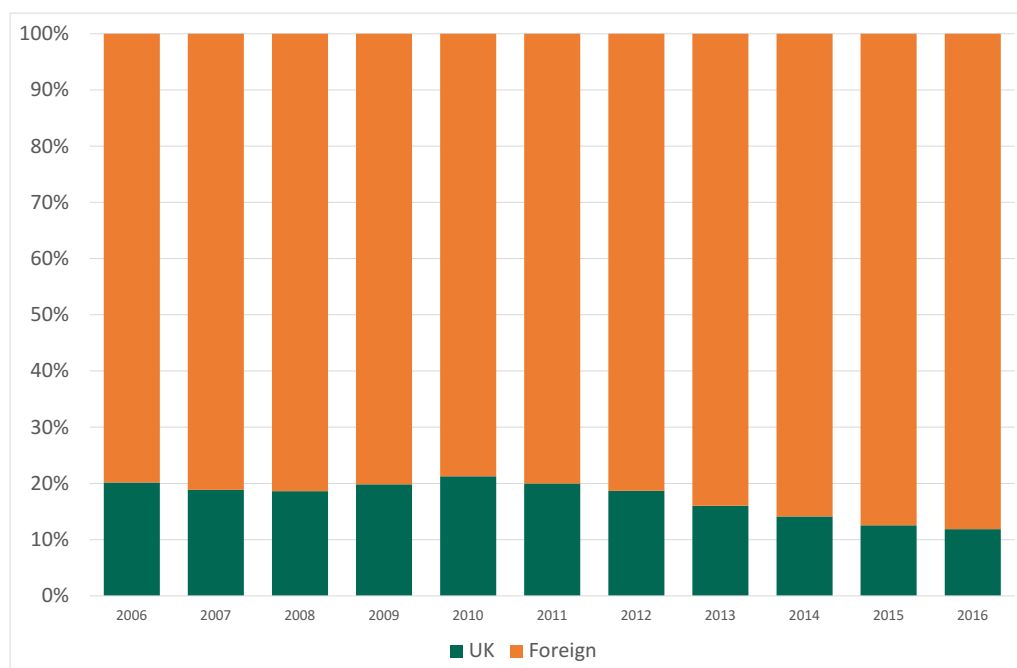
Chart 4 (Table [RORO0101](#)) shows that the number of goods vehicles (powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers) travelling to mainland Europe from GB in 2016 was 3.0 million, virtually unchanged from the number in 2015. The number of UK-registered vehicles travelling to mainland Europe fell by 6% (283,000 to 266,000), whilst the number of foreign-registered vehicles was unchanged at 2.0 million.

Since the turn of the century, the total number of goods vehicles travelling to mainland Europe from GB has increased by 29%; foreign-registered vehicles have increased by 90% while the number of UK-registered vehicles has decreased by 51%.

During the recession period of 2008 to 2009, there was a drop in the total number of goods vehicles travelling to GB, with the majority of this fall being accounted for by fewer foreign vehicles. It wasn't until 2013 that the total number of vehicles begin to increase again.

Of the foreign-registered powered vehicles travelling to mainland Europe from GB in 2016, the most common (455 thousand) were Polish-registered, followed by vehicles registered in the Romania (270 thousand), Netherlands (211 thousand), Spain (135 thousand) and Germany (128 thousand) (Table [RORO0201](#)).

Chart 4: UK and foreign registered powered goods vehicles travelling to mainland Europe from GB, 2006-2016 [[Table RORO0101](#)]



Definitions

Powered vehicles:

comprise rigid vehicles, lorries with semi-trailers (articulated units) and lorries with drawbar trailers (some vehicles under 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight are also included)



Unaccompanied trailers:

comprise trailers and semi-trailers not accompanied on the ferry by a powered unit.



Detailed statistics...

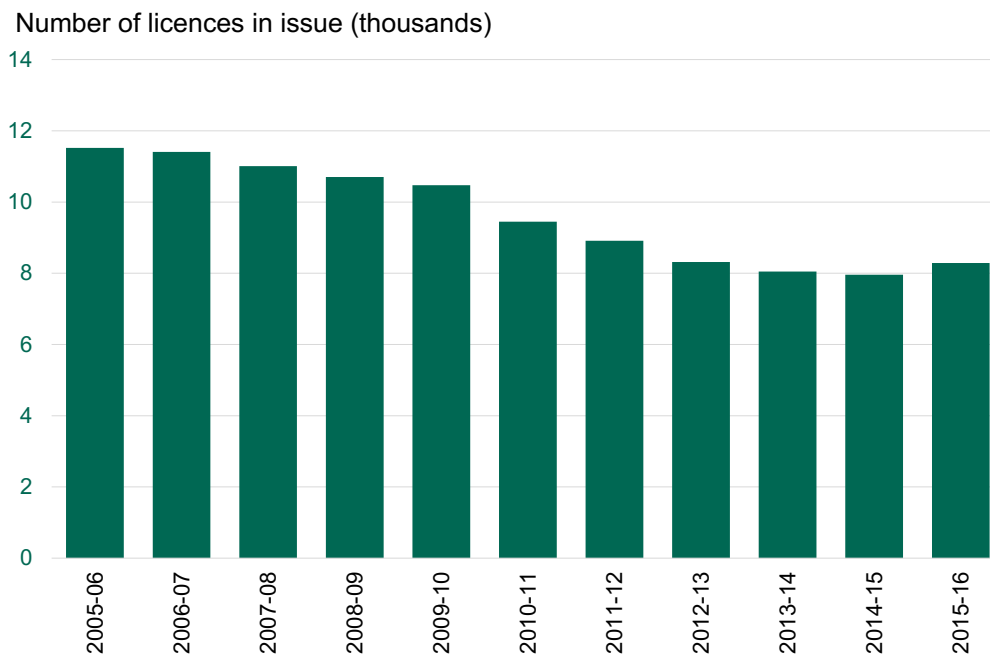
on goods vehicles travelling from GB to mainland Europe can be sourced from [roll-on, roll-off international freight statistics, Department for Transport](#).

The number of HGV Standard International (SI) Operator Licences in issue in Great Britain increased from 7,960 in 2014-15 to 8,289 in 2015-16, an increase of 4%. This reverses the decreasing trend that has been seen for over a decade, with increases seen across all regions. However, the number of licences in 2015-16 is 28% below that seen in 2005-06 when just under 12 thousand licences were in issue (Chart 5).

The highest number of licences were issued in the Eastern region of GB, 1,812 in 2015-16, an increase of 6% on the 1,716 in issue in 2014-15. The large number of licences issued in the Eastern region maybe due in part to the proximity to port links to European destinations and generally higher levels of freight activity in this area (Tables [RFS0137](#) and [RFS0139](#))

The total number of vehicles covered by SI licences increased by 8%, from 76,869 in 2014-15 to 82,694 in 2015-16. The average size of operators' international fleet has increased from 7.43 vehicles in 2005-06 to 10 vehicles in 2015-16. This means fewer licences are in issue than 10 years ago (2005-06) but more vehicles are being specified under these licences. The same trend can be seen for domestic licences.

Chart 5: Standard International Licences in issue, Great Britain, 2005-2006 to 2015-2016 [[Traffic Commissioner's Annual Report](#)]



Definitions

UK hauliers must obtain a Standard International Operator's Licence to carry goods for others, for hire or reward, within the UK and on international journeys. This applies to all vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating above 3.5 tonnes.

Change in Standard International licences in issue between 2015 and 2016

↑ 4% increase in number of SI licences in issue

↑ 8% increase in number of vehicles specified under SI licences

Detailed statistics...

on the number of operator licences, broken down by issuing office, can be found within the [Traffic Commissioner's Annual Reports](#).

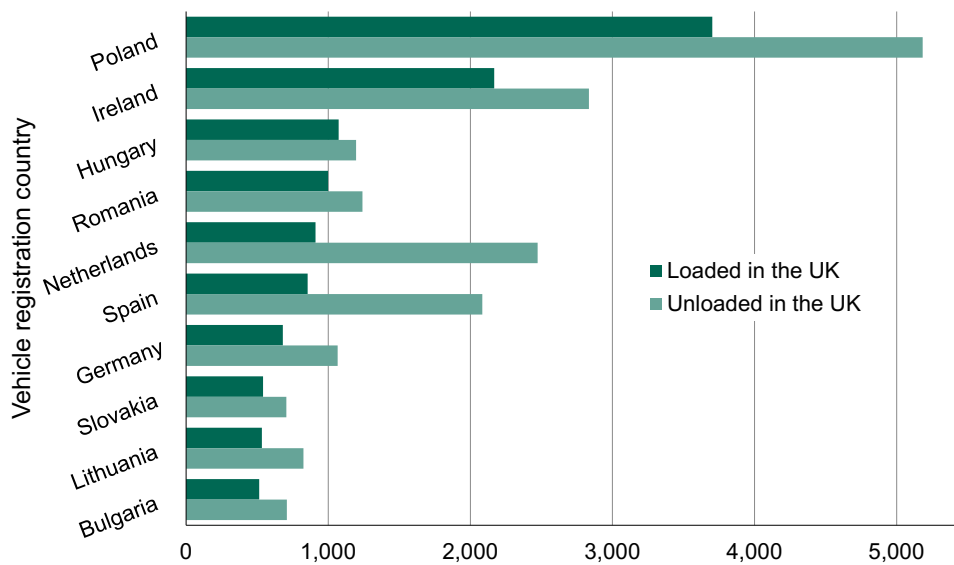
Data for 2016-2017 were not available at the time of producing this publication.

Road haulage by foreign-registered HGVs in the UK

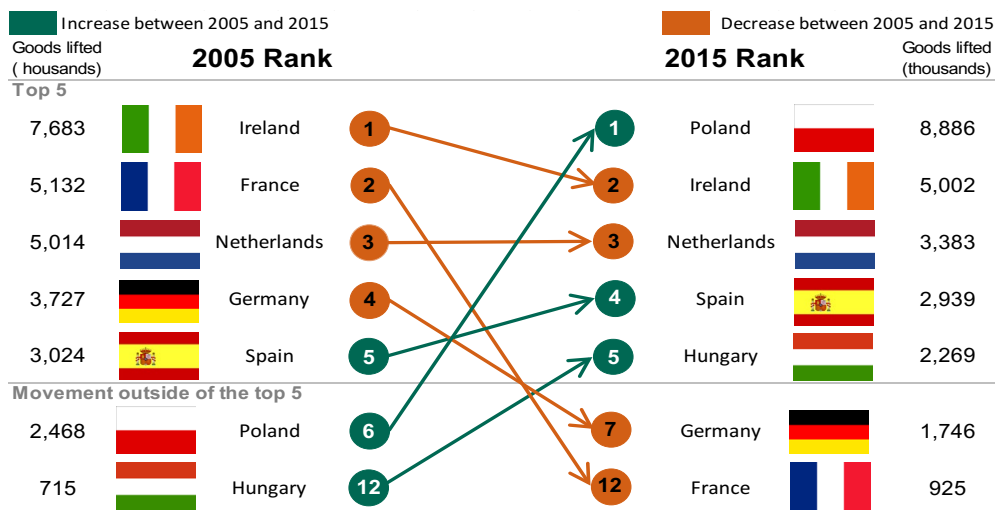
In 2015, 35.3 million tonnes of goods were lifted to and from the UK by foreign-registered HGVs, a increase of 4% on 2014. Since 2009, Polish HGVs have lifted the largest tonnage of goods in total of all the EU28 countries, lifting 8.9 million tonnes in 2015. Prior to this, between 2002 and 2008, Irish HGVs carried the largest total weight of goods into or out of the UK, mostly across the Irish land boundary between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Irish vehicles continued to carry significant quantities in 2015, as did Dutch, Hungarian, Spanish and German HGVs (Chart 6 and Tables [RFS0208](#) and [RFS0209](#)).

Chart 6: Goods lifted to and from the UK by foreign-registered vehicle: by vehicle registration country, 2015 [[Tables RFS0208](#) and [RFS0209](#)]

Goods lifted (thousand tonnes)



Total goods lifted to or from the UK by foreign-registered vehicles - Ten year comparison



Detailed statistics...

on the activity of foreign registered vehicles can be obtained from the [Eurostat Transport Database](#).

Data for 2016 were not available at the time of producing this publication.

Definitions

EU15: refers to the European Union member states as of January 1995.

These consist of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and United Kingdom.

EU28: refers to the European Union member states as of July 2013

These consist of the EU15 plus Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia.

Cabotage within the UK by foreign-registered vehicles

In 2015, the overall level of cabotage **goods moved** in the UK was 1.4 billion tonne kilometres, just under one per cent of all HGV activity within the UK. The level of cabotage has remained relatively stable for the last decade, however a drop was seen during the period following the 2008 recession. (Table [RFS0212](#)).

In terms of **goods moved**, the major participants to cabotage in the UK were vehicles from Poland, Netherlands and Ireland. These three countries accounted for 55% of cabotage in the UK. France, Germany and Portugal together accounted for most of the remaining cabotage in 2015.

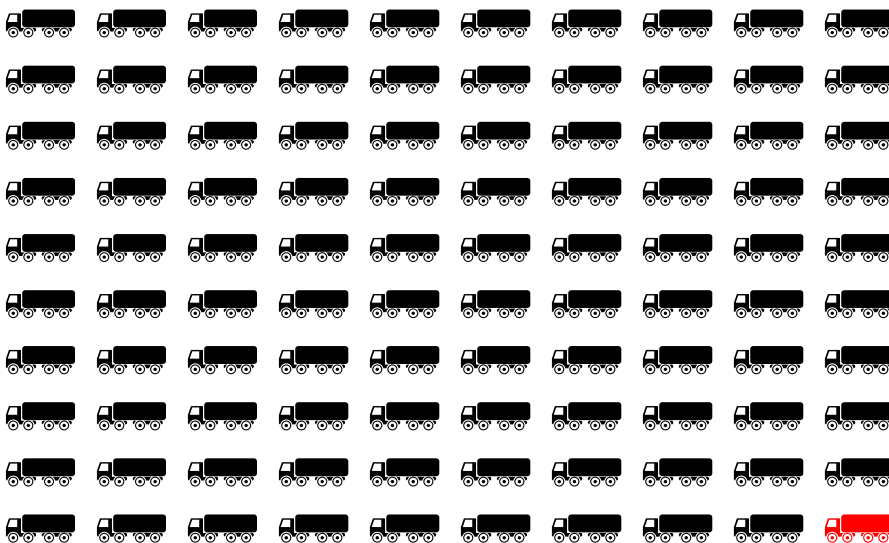
The amount of cabotage by Polish vehicles in the UK has increased ten fold between 2005 and 2015 from 36 million tonnes kilometres to 362 million tonne kilometres. Over the same period cabotage tonne kilometres from Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland dropped by 80%, 64% and 61% respectively.

The level of cabotage within the UK at 0.9% is below the EU28 average penetration rate of 2.7%. Levels of cabotage are highest in Belgium, France and Austria where rates are 7.4%, 5.6% and 4.9% respectively (Table [RFS0216](#)).

In 2015, cabotage accounted for less than 1% of UK HGV activity (Table [RFS0212](#))

 UK domestic activity

 Foreign cabotage



Definitions

Cabotage: refers to road haulage solely within one country by a vehicle registered in another country.

Penetration rate: defined as cabotage (in tonne kilometres) as a proportion of the sum of domestic and cabotage tonne kilometres

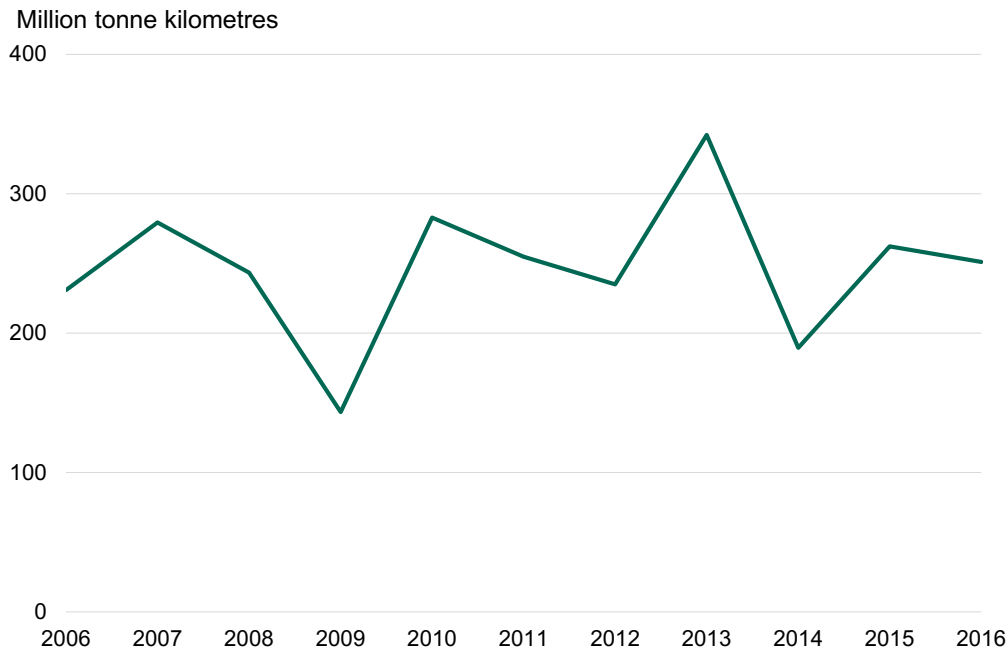
Detailed statistics...

on cabotage in the UK by vehicle registration country can be sourced in Table [RFS0212](#)

Cabotage by UK registered vehicles

UK vehicles did approximately 251 million tonne kilometres of cabotage in foreign countries in 2016, down from 262 million tonne kilometres in 2015 (Table [RFS0144](#) and Chart 7).

Chart 7: Cabotage by UK registered vehicles, 2006-2016 [[Table RFS0144](#)]



Users and uses of statistics

Road freight statistics are a key source of management information on the use of the country's infrastructure. Main use occurs across various types of public and private bodies: the statistical office of the European Union (Eurostat), local and central government, such as the Office for National Statistics and Highways England; local town and transport planning bodies; commercial organisations, such as haulage operators and transport consultants, and academics.

Users are mainly interested in information such as the length of haul, empty running, the pattern of freight from abroad on UK roads. The statistics also support policies on freight, road safety and reducing congestion and pollution.

Strengths and weaknesses of data

The figures in this release are derived from the International Road Haulage Survey (IRHS) which collects information on HGVs registered in Great Britain making international trips. Excluded from the survey are HGVs registered in Northern Ireland, foreign-registered vehicles and vehicles of 3.5 tonnes or less gross vehicle weight (Light Goods Vehicles).

The IRHS is a continuous survey which collects a range of information on freight movements from a sample of firms holding a standard international HGV licence. These licences are issued by the eight regional Traffic Commissioner Offices (TCO) and data are provided to the DfT by the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA).

Figures are weighted to be representative of the volume of HGV traffic travelling from GB to mainland Europe using ferry routes and the Channel Tunnel. This information is collected from returns provided by the roll-on / roll-off ferry operators (RORO), giving the number of powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers carried on each route from GB to mainland Europe, and from monthly information supplied by Eurotunnel.

The use of RORO data to weight the IRHS data may introduce a small bias due to the fact that this information is collected on outward traffic only. This will affect the weighting of vehicles which return to the UK using a route different than that for the outward journey. RORO data is also only able to disaggregate between UK and foreign vehicles. An assumption is therefore made on the proportion of UK vehicles which are registered in Northern Ireland to obtain an estimate of GB registered vehicles.

Between 2011 and 2012, a number of changes were made to how the three DfT road freight surveys were processed. Caution should therefore be used for statistics based on the three freight surveys when making comparisons over time. See the [Road Freight Statistics methodology note](#) for more information.

This release and its contents partly rely on the use of administrative data from DVLA and DVSA. DfT have assessed the impact of this on the quality of these statistics, a report on which can be found in the [Quality assurance of administrative data sources: Driver Vehicle Licensing Agency](#) and [Quality assurance of administrative data sources: Driver Vehicle Standards Agency](#).

Guidance on the methods used to compile these statistics and further information can be found in the [Road Freight Statistics notes and definitions](#).

The data tables give further detail on the key results presented in this statistical release and statistics on other road freight topics, including the domestic activity of UK-registered HGVs. These data tables are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-freight-domestic-and-international-statistics>

This release also collates statistics from a number of published sources that are revised and updated throughout the year. The data for this release were extracted in July 2017, and users can refer to the links overleaf for the most recent or revised data available for each of the sources used, and also caveats relating to the sources.

1. The web tables give further detail on the key results presented in this statistical release and statistics on other road freight topics, including domestic activity of GB-registered HGVs. They are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-freight-domestic-and-international-statistics>
2. The statistics on vehicles travelling to mainland Europe are available on the 'Roll on roll off International Freight' webpages via <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-freight-domestic-and-international-statistics>
3. The statistics on road freight undertaken by foreign-registered vehicles have been taken from the Eurostat Transport database at <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/transport/data/database>
4. Guidance on the methods used to compile these statistics and further background information can be found in the Road Freight Statistics [Notes and Definitions](#).
5. Details of ministers and officials who receive pre-release access to these statistics up to 24 hours before release can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-freight-statistics-pre-release-access-list>
6. The next annual Road Freight Statistics release will be published in the Summer of 2018. It will contain statistics for 2017.



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