



Department for Transport

Road goods vehicles travelling to Europe: 2018

About this release

This statistical release summarises the number of road goods vehicles travelling to Europe. It collects information from roll-on roll-off (also called 'RoRo') ferry operators and Eurotunnel, on the number of powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers, carried on all the ferry routes from Great Britain and Europe, plus the Channel Tunnel.

Domestic routes within the UK are excluded from the main findings, however information on routes to Northern Ireland is contained in a separate section, on [page 5](#) of this release.

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3.47 million road goods vehicles travelled from Great Britain to Europe in 2018, a 1% decrease compared to the previous year. This comprised of:

2.4 million powered vehicles



Compared to 2017

↓ 2%

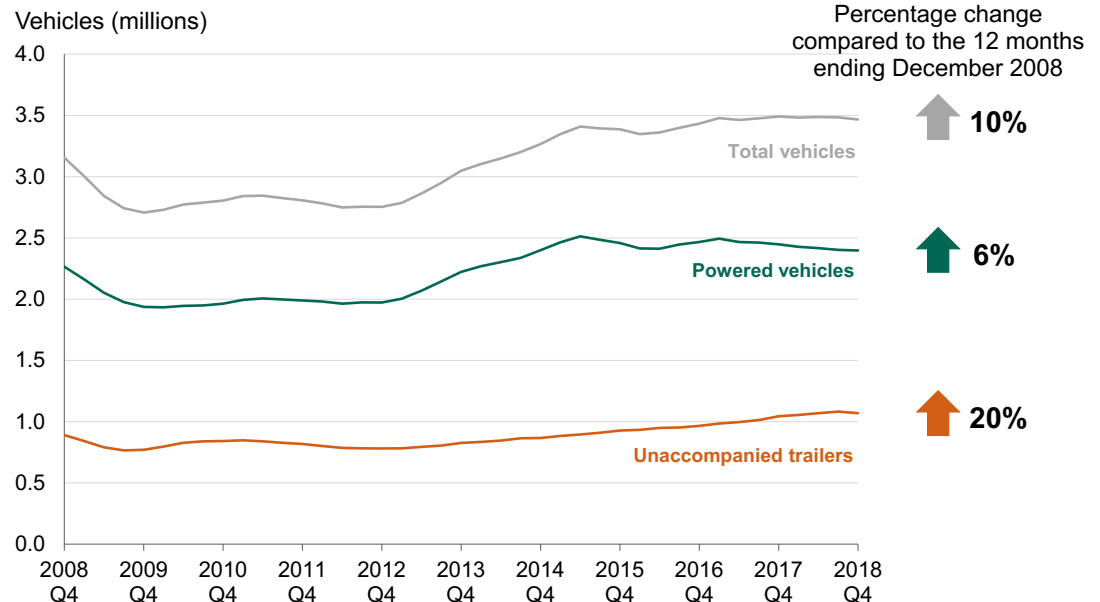
1.1 million unaccompanied trailers



↑ 2%

Over the last 3 years, the number of road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has been broadly stable at around 3.5 million. The number of road goods vehicles that travelled from Great Britain to Europe in 2018 is 10% higher than the pre-recession levels, 10 years earlier.

Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, rolling 12 month totals, 2008 Q4 to 2018 Q4 (Table [RORO0101](#))



Definitions



Powered vehicles (over 3.5 tonnes) includes: Rigid lorries, tractors & trailers (counted as one unit) and tractive units only.

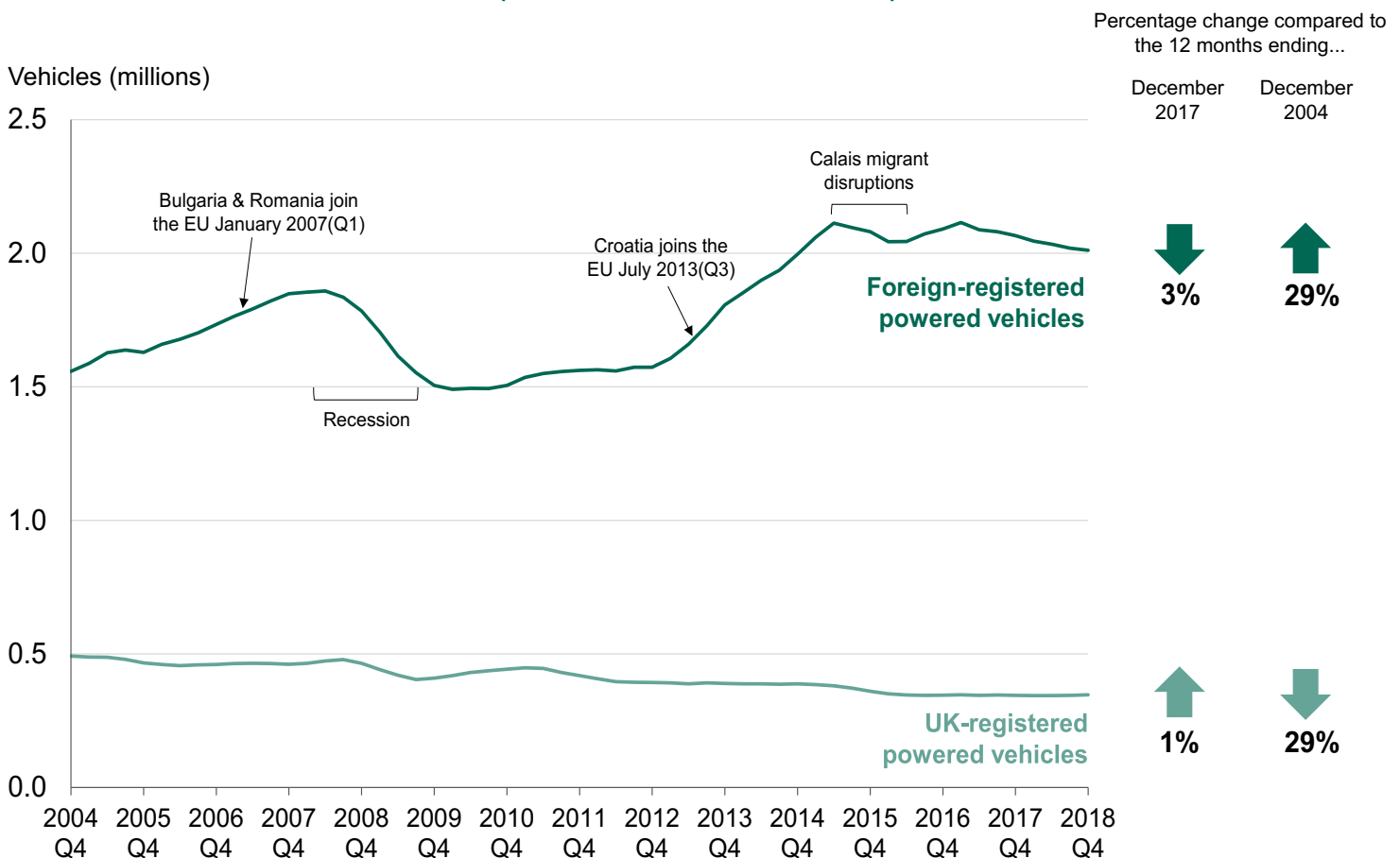


Unaccompanied trailers includes: tow-bar trailers and articulated semi trailers, not accompanied on the ferry by a powered unit.

Overall trend in powered vehicles travelling to Europe

There have been more powered **foreign-registered** vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe than **UK-registered** vehicles since 1997. In 2018, the number of foreign-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe (2.0 million¹) decreased by 3% compared to the previous year. While the number of UK-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe (0.3 million¹) increased by 1%.

Chart 1: UK and foreign-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, rolling 12 month totals, 2004² Q4 to 2018 Q4 (Table [RORO0601](#), [RORO0701](#))



Generally, the number of UK-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has been in gradual decline since 2005, while the number of foreign-registered powered vehicles has been steadily increasing with the exception of the recession related fall between 2008 and 2013. However, since 2015, the number of foreign-registered vehicles travelling to Europe has remained between 2.0 and 2.1 million.

Note:

¹ These figures will not sum to the total number of powered vehicles (2.4 million) given in previous page due to a combination of rounding and the omission of unknown vehicles.

² 2004 Q4 is the earliest comparable rolling 12 month total, due to the addition of data on road goods vehicles using Irish Sea ports from 2004 (the first point from which it was collected).

Country of vehicle registration

The proportion of powered vehicles registered to Western European countries such as the **UK**, **Netherlands**, **Germany** and **France** that travelled from Great Britain to Europe has fallen as Eastern European countries such as **Poland** and **Romania** having greatly increased their share since joining the European Union (EU).

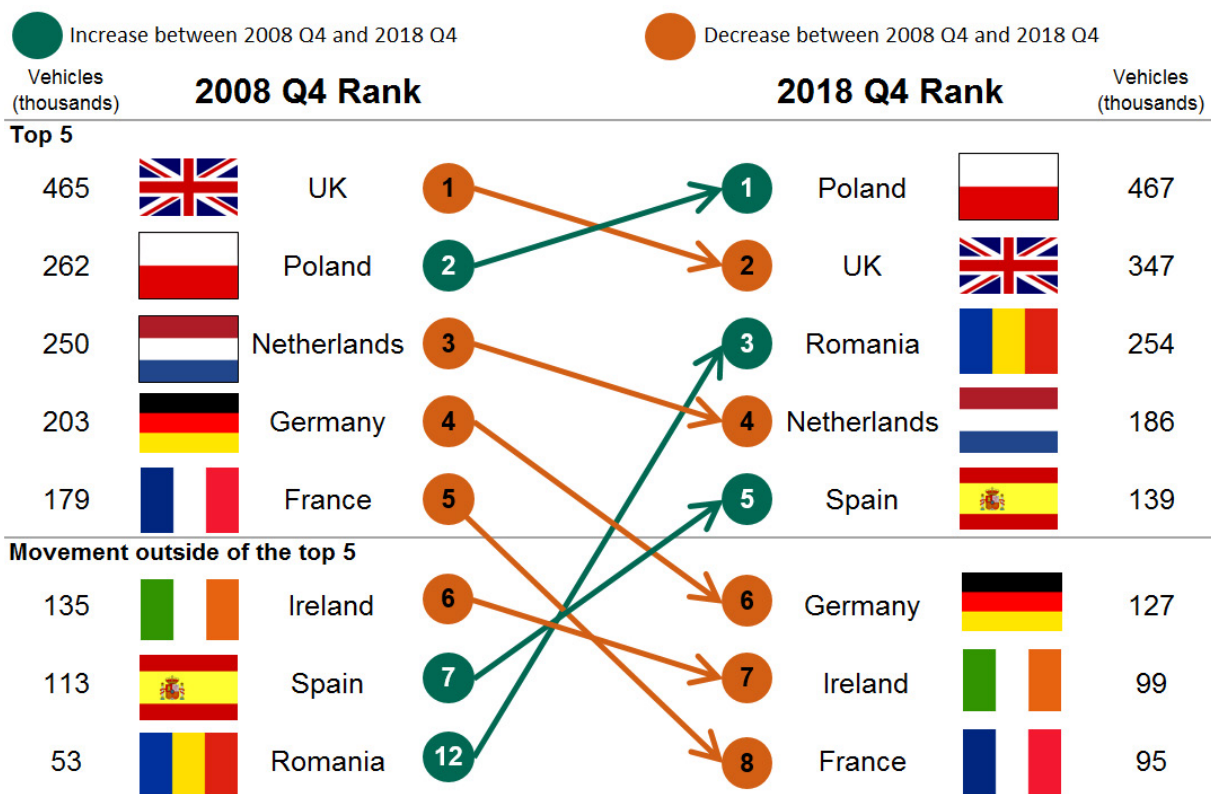
The volume of powered goods vehicles that travelled from Great Britain to Europe registered to **Poland** has increased from 3% when it first joined the EU in 2004 to 19% in the twelve months ending December 2018 - **the largest share of any country**.

The **UK** was the most prevalent country of vehicle registration ten years ago. However, it is now second with a 14% share (0.3 million) of all powered goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe.

Since **Romania** joined the EU in 2007, its share of powered goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has risen from 1% to 11% in the twelve months ending December 2018, making it the third largest country of vehicle registration.

The volume of powered vehicles registered to the **Republic of Ireland** decreased from 7% in 2008, to 4% in 2018.

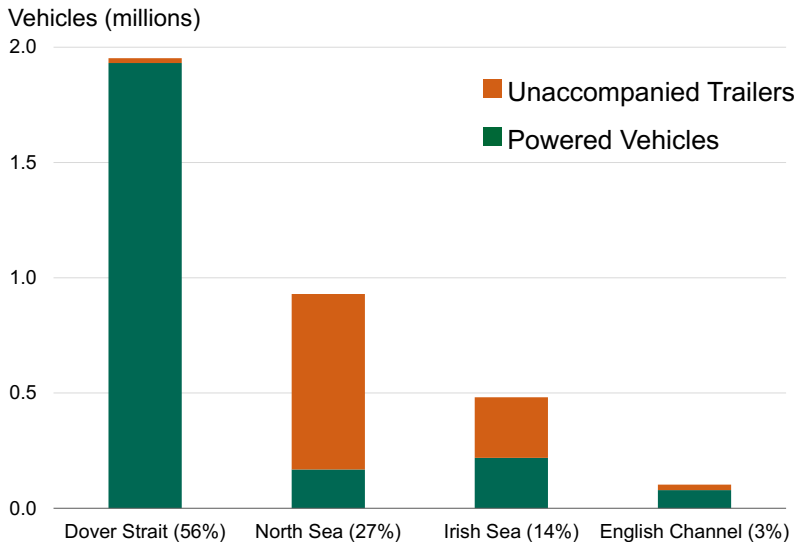
Chart 2: Powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, by country of registration, rolling 12 month totals, 2008 Q4 to 2018 Q4 (Table RORO0201)



Country of disembarkation

In 2018, more vehicles left Great Britain via the Dover Strait port group (56%) than all of the other port groups combined. The majority (81%) of **powered vehicles** travelling to Europe left via the shorter routes on the Dover Strait port group, whereas the majority (71%) of **unaccompanied trailers** travelled via the longer North Sea port group routes.

Chart 3: Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe by port group and type, 2018 (Tables [RORO0401](#), [RORO0501](#))

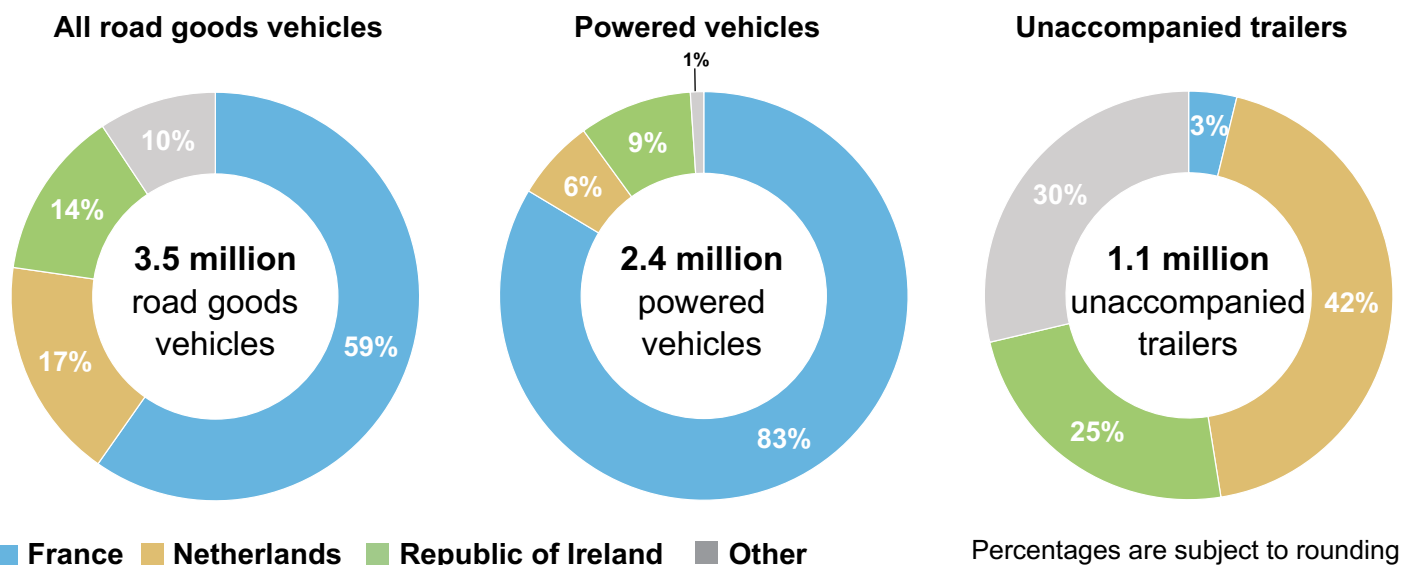


Port Groups

There are four port groups: **Dover Strait** (Ferry routes from Dover, Folkestone and Ramsgate; along with road goods vehicles using the Channel Tunnel), **North Sea** (All ports on the east coast of Great Britain, north of and including the Thames estuary), **Irish Sea** (All ports on the west coast of Great Britain), and **English Channel** (All ports on the south coast of Great Britain, west of Folkestone).

The prevalence of powered vehicles (those accompanied by drivers to allow a continuous, faster journey) on shorter routes is a result of these routes being used to transport more urgent freight such as machine parts or perishable goods. France is the most common country of disembarkation for powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, accounting for 83% of all powered vehicles. Freight which is less time critical is often shipped on the longer and slower routes, using unaccompanied trailers which are subject to stoppages in transition. Netherlands is the most common country of disembarkation for unaccompanied trailers travelling from Great Britain to Europe, accounting for 42% of all unaccompanied trailers. Detailed statistics on road goods vehicles travelling to Europe by country of disembarkation and port group can be found [here](#).

Chart 4: Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe by country of disembarkation, 2018 (Tables [RORO0301](#), [RORO0401](#), [RORO0501](#))



Percentages are subject to rounding

'Other' predominantly Belgium, along with Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Norway, Spain and Sweden.

Island of Ireland

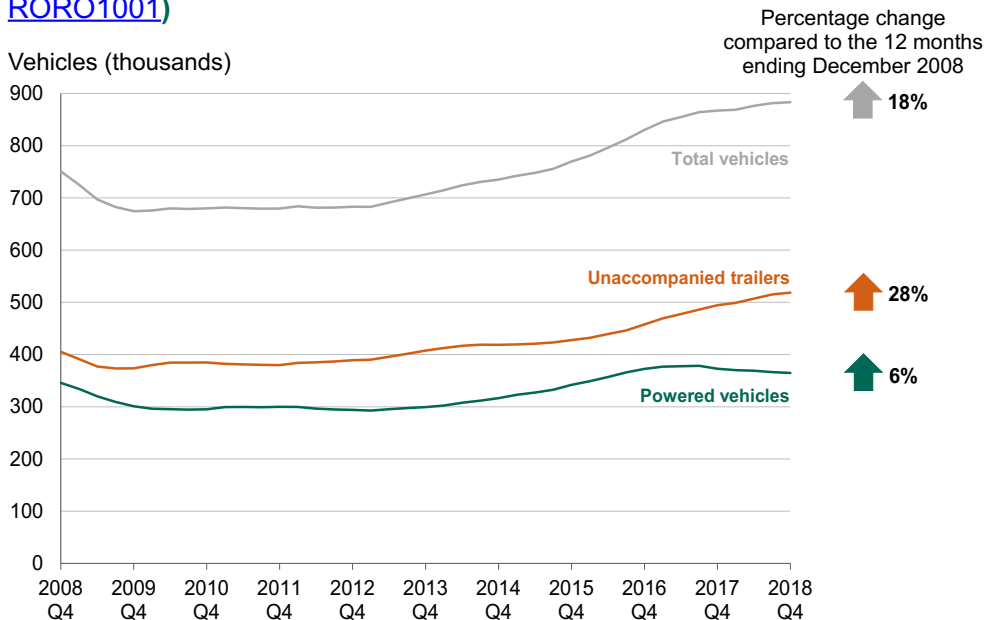
Vehicles travelling on domestic ferry routes from Great Britain to Northern Ireland are not included in the main part of this release; however this section includes statistics on those vehicles in order to give a complete picture of activity travelling from Great Britain to the **island of Ireland**, i.e. both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland combined. Detailed statistics can be found in Table [RORO1001](#).

Overall trends

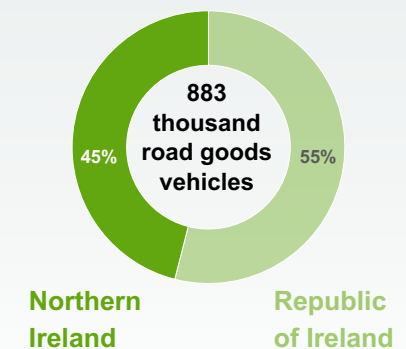
In 2018, a total of 883 thousand road goods vehicles travelled from Great Britain to the island of Ireland, a 2% increase compared to the previous year, of which there were:

- ▶ 365 thousand (41%) **powered vehicles**, a 2% decrease compared to 2017. Of these, 219 thousand (60%) disembarked in the Republic of Ireland and 146 thousand (40%) disembarked in Northern Ireland.
- ▶ 519 thousand (59%) **unaccompanied trailers**, a 5% increase compared to 2017. Of these, 263 thousand (51%) disembarked in the Republic of Ireland and 256 thousand (49%) disembarked in Northern Ireland.

Chart 5: Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland, rolling 12 month totals, 2008 Q4 to 2018 Q4 (Table [RORO1001](#))



Country of disembarkation for Irish Sea ports, 2018



Country of vehicle registration

In 2018, powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland were predominantly either UK or Irish-registered (79% in total). However, there are differences in the proportion of UK and Irish-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland:

- ▶ 146 thousand powered vehicles disembarked in Northern Ireland, of which 90% were UK-registered and 7% were Irish registered.
- ▶ 219 thousand powered vehicles disembarked in the Republic of Ireland, of which 38% were UK-registered and 29% were Irish registered.

Note: Remaining proportion of powered vehicles disembarking in Northern Ireland or in the Republic of Ireland were registered elsewhere or unknown

Strengths and weaknesses of the data

The figures in this release are derived from quarterly returns provided by the roll-on roll-off (also called 'RoRo') ferry operators, who are requested to provide the number of powered vehicles by country of vehicle registration and unaccompanied trailers carried on each ferry route from Great Britain to Europe. Equivalent information for the number of powered vehicles travelling through the Channel Tunnel are provided by Eurotunnel.

Figures for outward traffic only are presented here; up to 1978 inward traffic was also recorded, but as it was similar to outward traffic, the data requirement was discontinued to save respondent effort. Ferry routes to countries outside Europe, such as Morocco, are not included here. A list of active routes recorded since 2004 can be found in Table [RORO0901](#).

Since a data quality review in early 2008, survey returns have been supplied by all roll-on roll-off ferry operators, which has resulted in more complete reporting of the country of vehicle registration. However, while information on the country of registration for powered vehicles is derived by some operators from the vehicle registration mark, others estimate the nationality from the manifest or waybill, or in some cases, use the country of booking as a proxy for the country of registration. This means there may be discrepancies in the reported nationality of powered heavy goods vehicles and their actual nationality of registration. Users should exercise caution if using country of vehicle registration for analysis.

Further information about the statistics and methodology in this report can be found in the [Roll-on Roll-off International Freight Statistics notes and definitions](#).

Background notes

Accompanying data tables which give further detail on the key results presented in this statistical release are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-freight-domestic-and-international-statistics>.

Further information such as definitions and background on the statistics can be found in the [Roll-on Roll-off International Freight Statistics notes and definitions](#).

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/roll-on-roll-off-international-freight-statistics-pre-release-access-list>.

Going forward, the Department for Transport is proposing to change the format of the road goods vehicles travelling to Europe statistics releases. Currently, the series is comprised of four summary quarterly releases, including tables. We are proposing to change the format of the first three quarterly releases to being table only with the inclusion of an annual summary publication and tables. We would be keen to receive your views on this proposed change and you are invited to send these to us at roro.stats@dft.gov.uk



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