



Department for Transport

International Road Freight Statistics, United Kingdom 2018

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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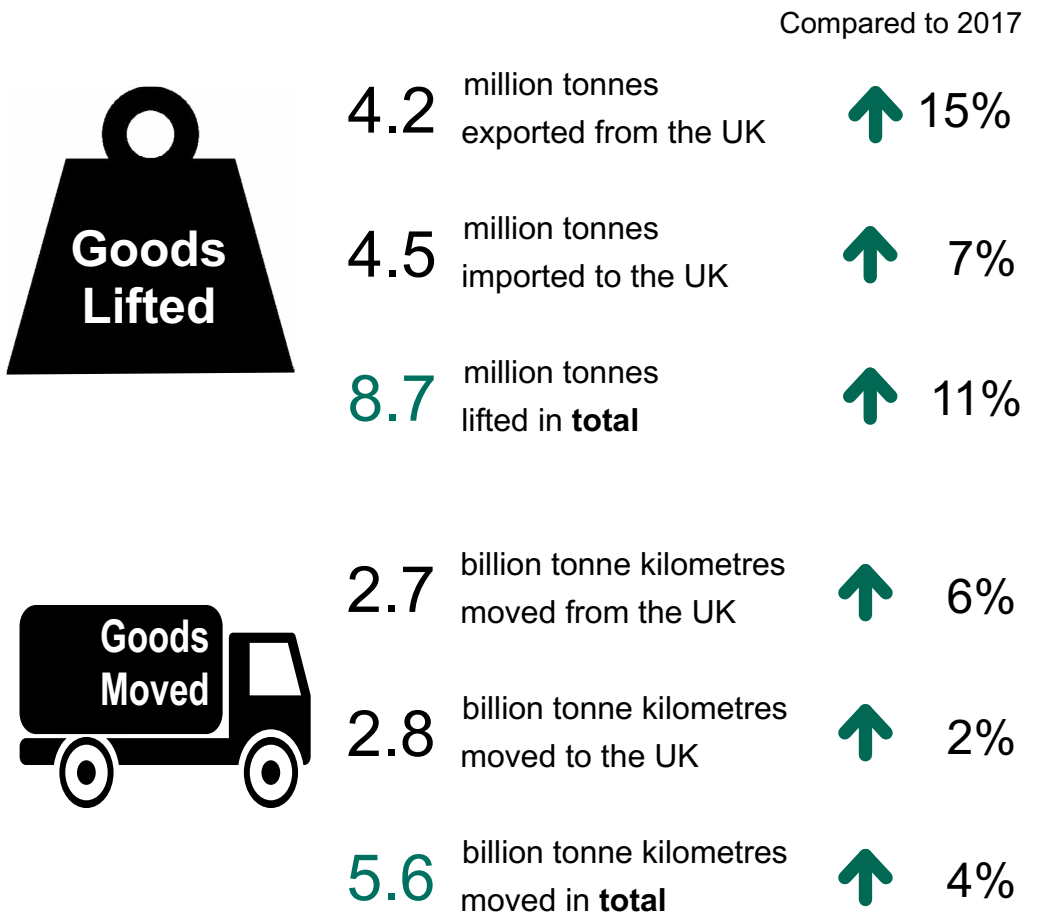
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Total UK international road freight activity increased in 2018

In 2018, for UK registered HGVs transporting freight internationally there were...



- ▶ In 2018, more goods were imported by road to the UK than exported.
- ▶ Of the goods lifted by UK HGVs, 96% were to or from the EU15.
- ▶ Of the goods lifted by UK HGVs, 26% were between the UK and France.

International activity of UK-registered HGVs

Goods lifted:

In 2018, the amount of **goods lifted** by UK-registered HGVs travelling to or from the UK was 8.7 million tonnes, up 11% on 2017, but 45% lower than the 1999 peak of 15.9 million tonnes.

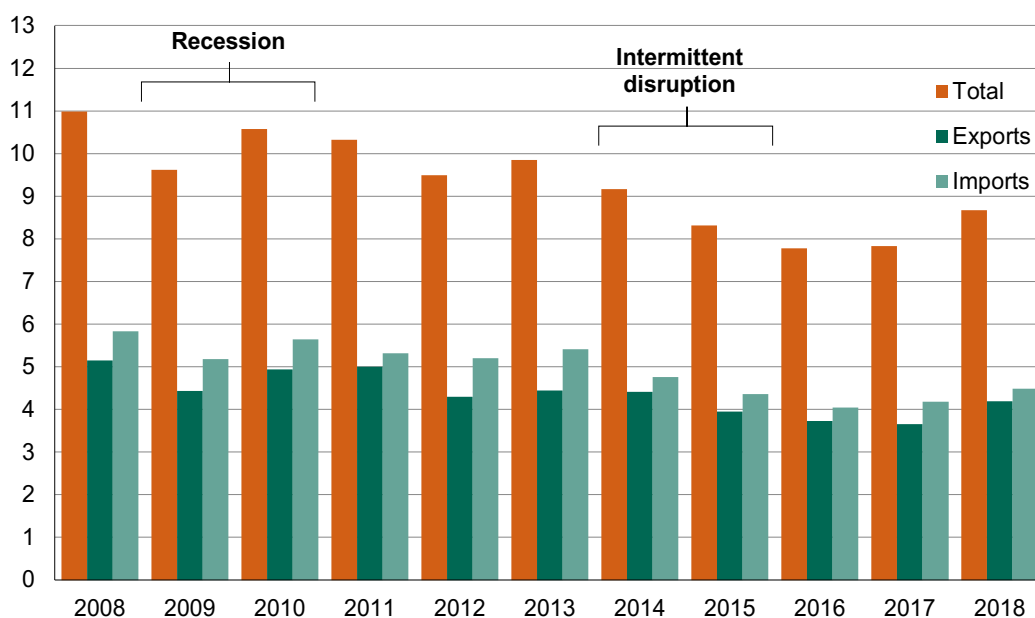
The rise in total **goods lifted** was driven by an increase in both goods imported and exported, which rose by 7% and 15% respectively. These rises were mainly driven by increases in the last two quarters of 2018 which possibly reflects businesses looking to transport goods internationally before the UK's original planned departure from the EU on March 29 2019.

In recent years, there was a 12% decrease in **goods lifted** in the year following the 2008 recession. The decreases seen in 2014 and 2015 may be due in part to the intermittent disruptions seen at key freight interchanges e.g. industrial action on the Dover-Calais route. [\[Table RFS0201\]](#).

Historically, UK registered vehicles have consistently imported more goods to the UK than they exported. In 2018, of the 8.7 million tonnes of **goods lifted**, 4.5 million tonnes were imported, and 4.2 million tonnes were exported (Chart 1)

Chart 1: Goods lifted by UK-registered HGVs, 2008-2018 [\[Table RFS0201\]](#)

Goods lifted (million tonnes)



Goods moved:

There was a 4% increase in the amount of **goods moved** from 5.4 billion tonne kilometres in 2017 to 5.6 billion tonne kilometres in 2018. This is a fall of 66% from the 1997 peak of 16.5 billion tonne kilometres. Of the 5.6 billion tonne kilometres of **goods moved**, 2.7 billion tonne kilometres were exports from the UK and 2.8 billion tonne kilometres were imports.

Definitions

HGV: A lorry with a plated weight of 3.5 tonnes or more.

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 2017 and 2018

Goods lifted

↑ 15% increase in the amount of **goods lifted** from the UK

↑ 7% increase in the amount of **goods lifted** to the UK

↑ 11% increase in total amount of **goods lifted**

Goods moved

↑ 6% increase in the amount of **goods moved** from the UK

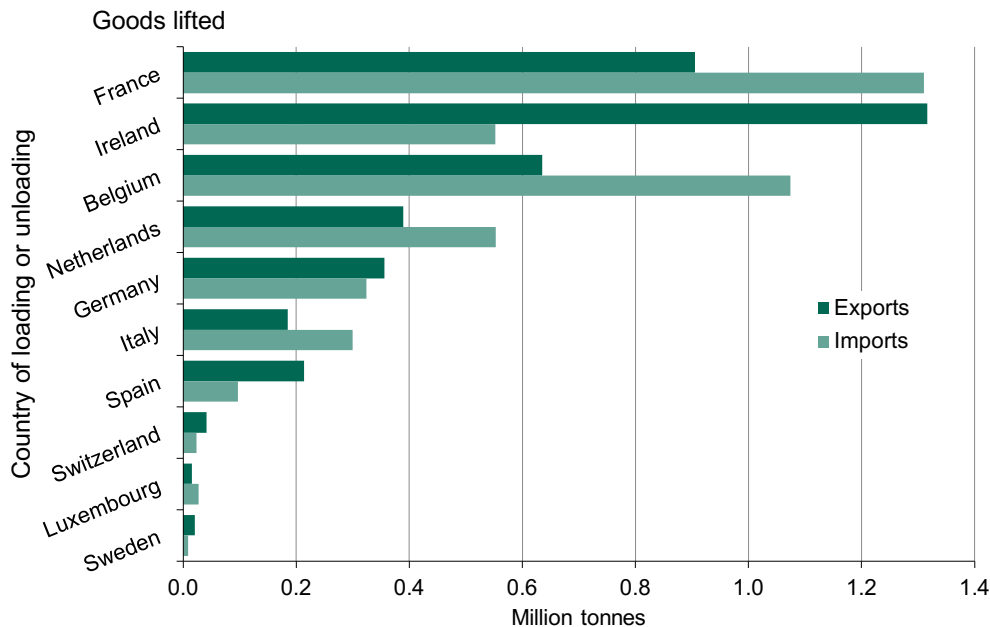
↑ 2% increase in the amount of **goods moved** to the UK

↑ 4% increase in the total amount of **goods moved**

Country of trade:

In 2018, around 86% of the tonnage exported from the UK in UK-registered vehicles was unloaded in one of five countries: Irish Republic (31%), France (22%), Belgium (15%), the Netherlands (9%) and Germany (9%). The same five countries also represented the origin of 85% of imported goods (Chart 2 and Tables [RFS0202](#) and [RFS0203](#)).

Chart 2: Goods lifted by UK-registered HGVs by country of loading or unloading, 2018 [Table RFS0202]

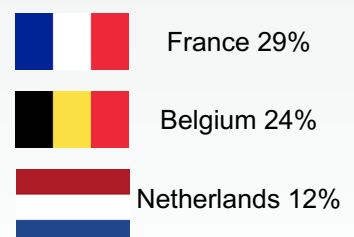


Goods lifted in 2018, origin and destination:

Exports from the UK to



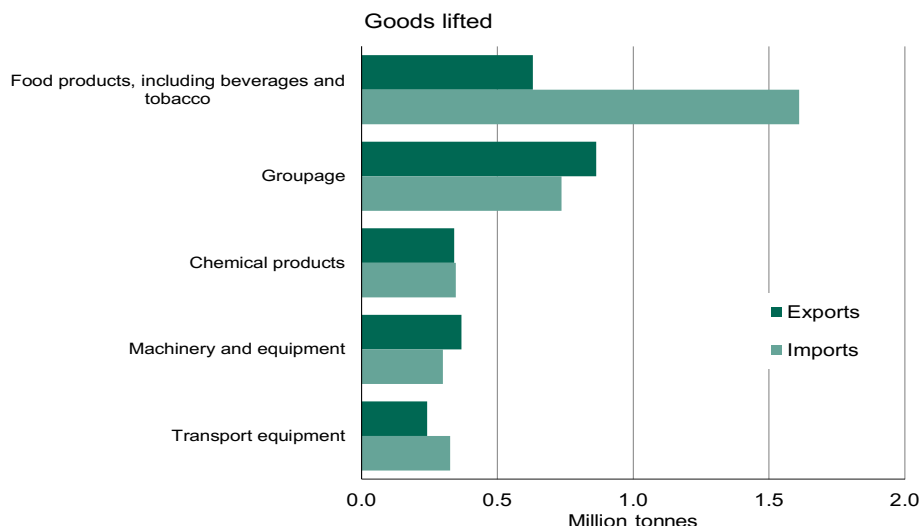
Imports to the UK from



Commodities carried by UK-registered HGVs

The most common single category of commodity exported by UK vehicles in 2018 was "Groupage" (ie mixed goods) (21%). This was followed by "Food products" (15%) and "Machinery and equipment" (9%). The main commodities imported were "Food products" (36%), "Groupage" (16%) and "Chemical products" (8%). Unidentified and unclassified goods accounted for around 1% of both exports and imports. (Chart 3 and Table [RFS0206](#))

Chart 3: Goods lifted by UK-registered HGVs by commodity type, 2018 [Table RFS0206]



Definitions

Origin/destination:

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.

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.

Goods vehicles travelling to Europe

The total number of goods vehicles (powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers) travelling to Europe from Great Britain in 2018 was 3.47 million, down slightly from the 3.49 million in 2017 ([Table RORO0101](#)).

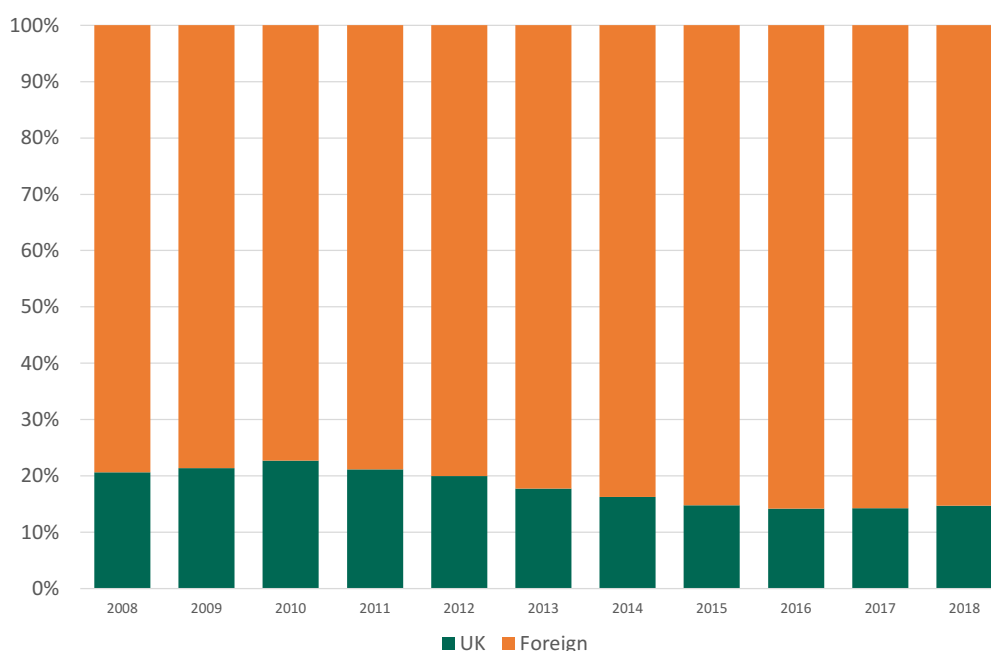
Powered vehicles: The number of UK-registered vehicles travelling to Europe was 347 thousand (slightly higher than the 345 thousand vehicles in 2017), whilst the number of foreign-registered vehicles was 2,011 thousand (a fall of 3% on the 2017 figure of 2,065 thousand) (Chart 4).

Over the last 10 years, the total number of powered goods vehicles travelling to Europe from GB has increased by 6%; within which foreign-registered vehicles have increased by 13% while the number of UK-registered vehicles has decreased by 25%.

During the recession period of 2008 to 2009, there was a drop in the total number of goods vehicles travelling from GB to Europe, 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 Europe from GB in 2018, the most common (467 thousand) were Polish-registered, followed by vehicles registered in Romania (254 thousand), the Netherlands (186 thousand), Spain (139 thousand) and Germany (127 thousand) ([Table RORO0201](#)).

Chart 4: UK and foreign registered powered goods vehicles travelling to Europe from GB, 2008-2018 [[Table RORO0101](#)]



Definitions

Powered vehicles:

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

Unaccompanied trailers



Detailed statistics...

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

Change of scope: The scope of the RoRo series has been expanded to cover vehicles travelling to all European destinations and now includes activity in the Irish Sea port group.

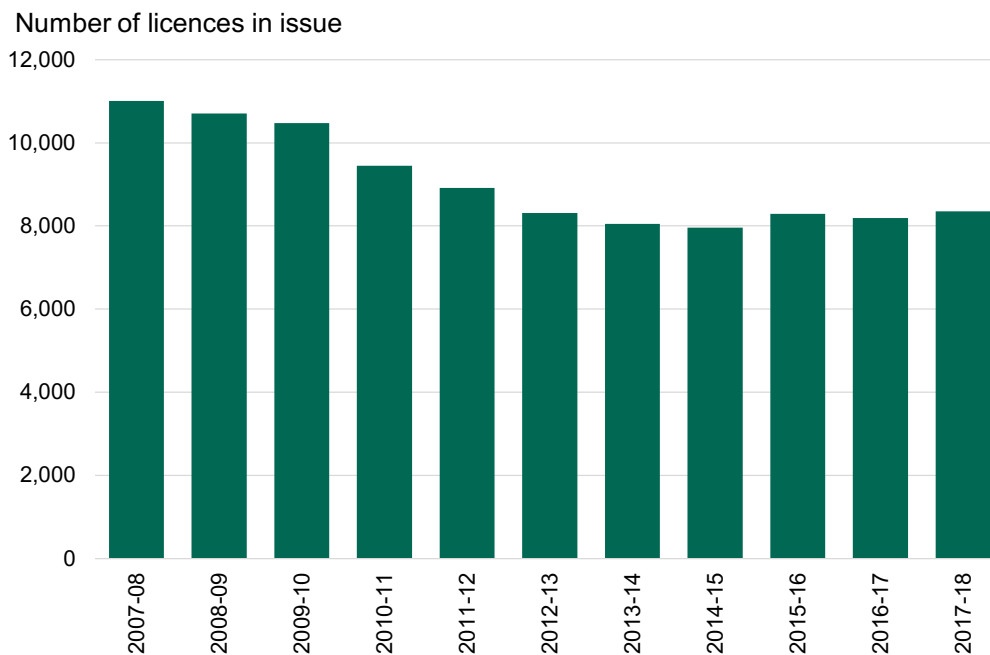
The number of firms using an HGV Standard International (SI) Operator Licence in Great Britain increased from 8,186 in 2016-17 to 8,351 in 2017-18, a rise of 2%. This rise follows a 1% decrease the previous year.

Increases in 2017-18 were seen across most regions. The number of licences in 2017-18 is 24% below that seen a decade ago in 2007-08 when just over 11 thousand licences were in issue (Chart 5).

The highest number of licences issued were in the Eastern region of GB, 1,949 in 2017-18, an increase of 5% on the 1,854 in issue in 2016-17. 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 [RFS0121](#))

The total number of vehicles covered by SI licences increased by 1% from 82,634 in 2016-17 to 83,619 in 2017-18. The average size of operators' vehicle fleet has increased from 8 vehicles in 2007-08 to 10 vehicles in 2017-18. This means fewer licences are in issue than 10 years ago (2007-08) 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, 2007-2008 to 2017-2018 [[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 2017 and 2018

↑ 2% increase in number of SI licences in issue

↑ 1% 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](#).

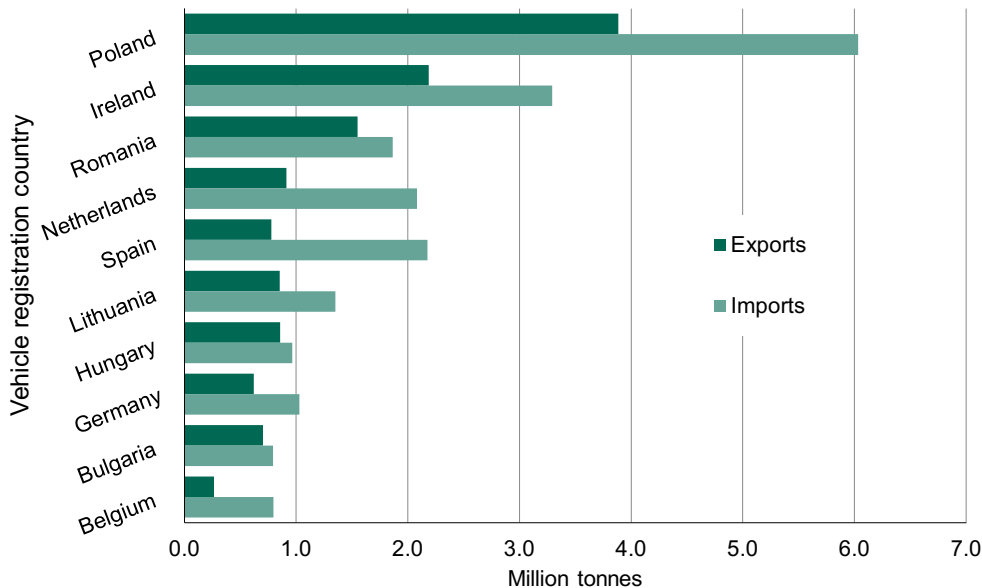
Data for 2018-2019 were not available at the time of producing this publication.

Road haulage by foreign-registered HGVs in the UK

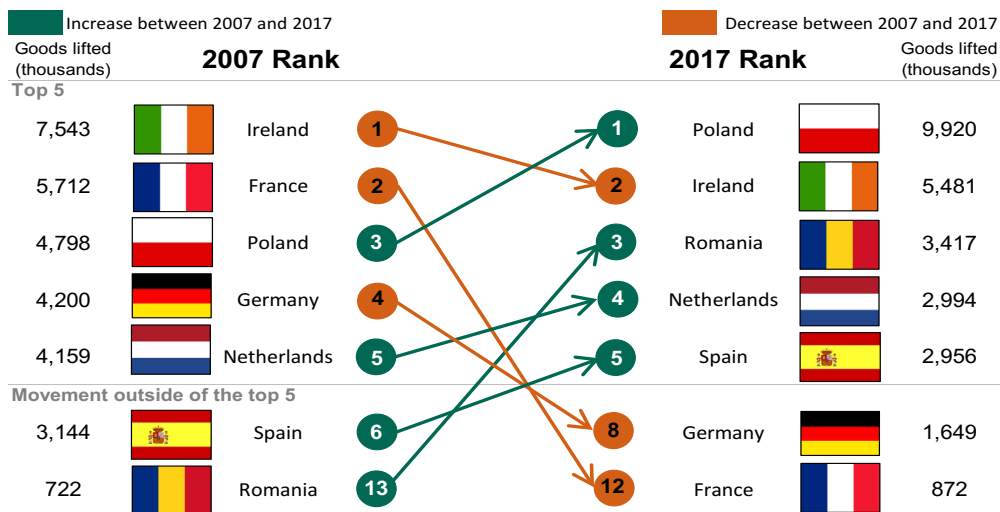
In 2017, 37.7 million tonnes of goods were lifted to and from the UK by foreign-registered HGVs, a decrease of 5% on 2016. Since 2009, Polish HGVs have lifted the largest tonnage of goods to and from the UK in total of all the EU28 countries, lifting 9.9 million tonnes in 2017. Prior to this, between 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 2017, as did Romanian, Dutch, Spanish, and Lithuanian HGVs (Chart 6 and Tables [RFS0208](#) and [RFS0209](#)).

Chart 6: Goods imported to and exported from the UK by foreign-registered HGVs: by vehicle registration country, 2017 [Tables [RFS0208](#) and [RFS0209](#)]

Goods lifted



Total goods imported to or exported from the UK by foreign-registered HGVs - Ten year comparison



Detailed statistics...

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

Eurostat data for 2018 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 HGVs

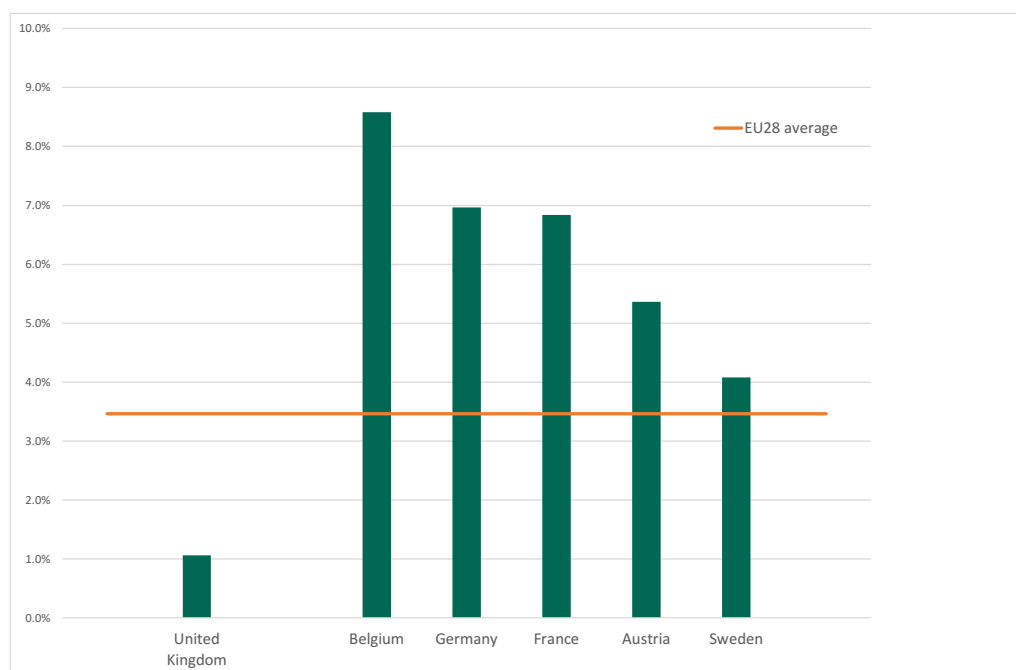
In 2017, the overall level of **cabotage goods moved** in the UK was 1.6 billion tonne kilometres, 1.1% of all internal HGV activity within the UK (147.6 billion tonne kilometres). The level of cabotage has remained relatively stable for the last decade, with the exception of a drop seen during the period following the 2008 recession. (Table [RFS0212](#)).

In terms of **goods moved**, the major participants carrying out cabotage in the UK were vehicles from Poland, Ireland and Bulgaria. These three countries accounted for 59% of cabotage in the UK. Romania, Netherlands and France together accounted for most of the remaining cabotage in 2017.

The amount of cabotage by Lithuanian vehicles in the UK has increased almost ten fold between 2006 and 2016 from 7.7 million tonnes kilometres to 73 million tonne kilometres.

The level of cabotage within the UK at 1.1% is below the EU28 average penetration rate of 3.5%. Levels of cabotage are highest in Belgium, Germany and France where rates are 8.6%, 7.0% and 6.8% respectively (Table [RFS0216](#)).

Chart 7: Cabotage penetration rates, 2017 [[Table RFS0216](#)]



Definitions

Cabotage: measured in tonne kilometres, 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 the activity of foreign registered HGVs can be obtained from the [Eurostat Transport Database](#).

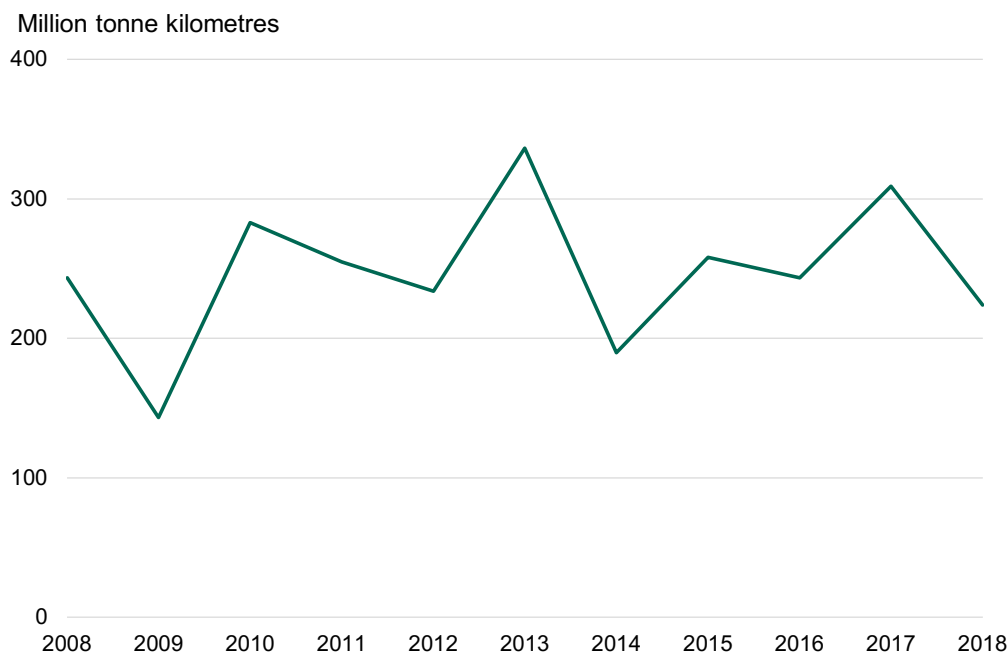
Eurostat data for 2018 were not available at the time of producing this publication.

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

Cabotage within the EU by UK registered HGVs

UK HGVs did approximately 224 million tonne kilometres of cabotage in foreign countries in 2018, down from 309 million tonne kilometres in 2017 (Table [RFS0130](#) and Chart 8).

Chart 8: Cabotage by UK registered HGVs, 2008-2018 [[Table RFS0130](#)]



Note: Cabotage by UK vehicles in the EU is measured using data from the International Road Haulage Survey only. This differs from the measure of cabotage within the UK by foreign vehicles which is calculated using data from Eurostat. At the time of publication the most recent Eurostat data was 2017.

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](#).

Background Notes

These statistics were [confirmed as National Statistics in December 2016](#). 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 2019, 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 <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/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 2020. It will contain statistics for 2019.



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