



Department for Transport

Road goods vehicles travelling to Europe: 2020

About this release

This statistical release summarises the number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe. It collects information from roll-on roll-off (also called 'RoRo') ferry operators and Eurotunnel, on the number of trips made by powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers, on all the ferry routes from Great Britain to 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 7](#) of this release.

To note, some of the figures in this release may not sum due to rounding.

In this publication

- Overall results [p2](#)
- Long-term trends [p3](#)
- Country of vehicle registration [p4](#)
- Port group [p5](#)
- Country of disembarkation [p6](#)
- Island of Ireland [p7](#)
- Data strengths and weaknesses [p8](#)
- Background notes [p8](#)

Recent trends in road freight have been affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the UK. In 2020, **Road goods vehicles made 3.2 million trips** travelling from Great Britain to Europe in 2020, a 5% decrease compared to the previous year. This comprised of:

2.1 million trips by powered vehicles



Compared to 2019

↓ 7%

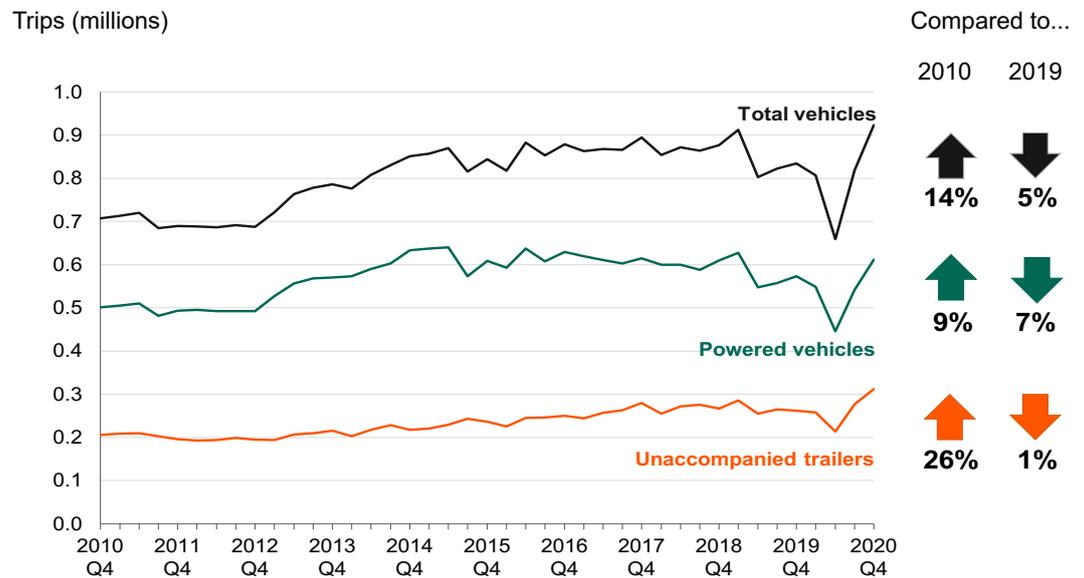
1.1 million trips by unaccompanied trailers



↓ 1%

These statistics include the period following the government's announcement of measures to limit the impact and transmission of the coronavirus pandemic. More information can be found on page 2.

Chart 1: Number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, 2010 to 2020 (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 results

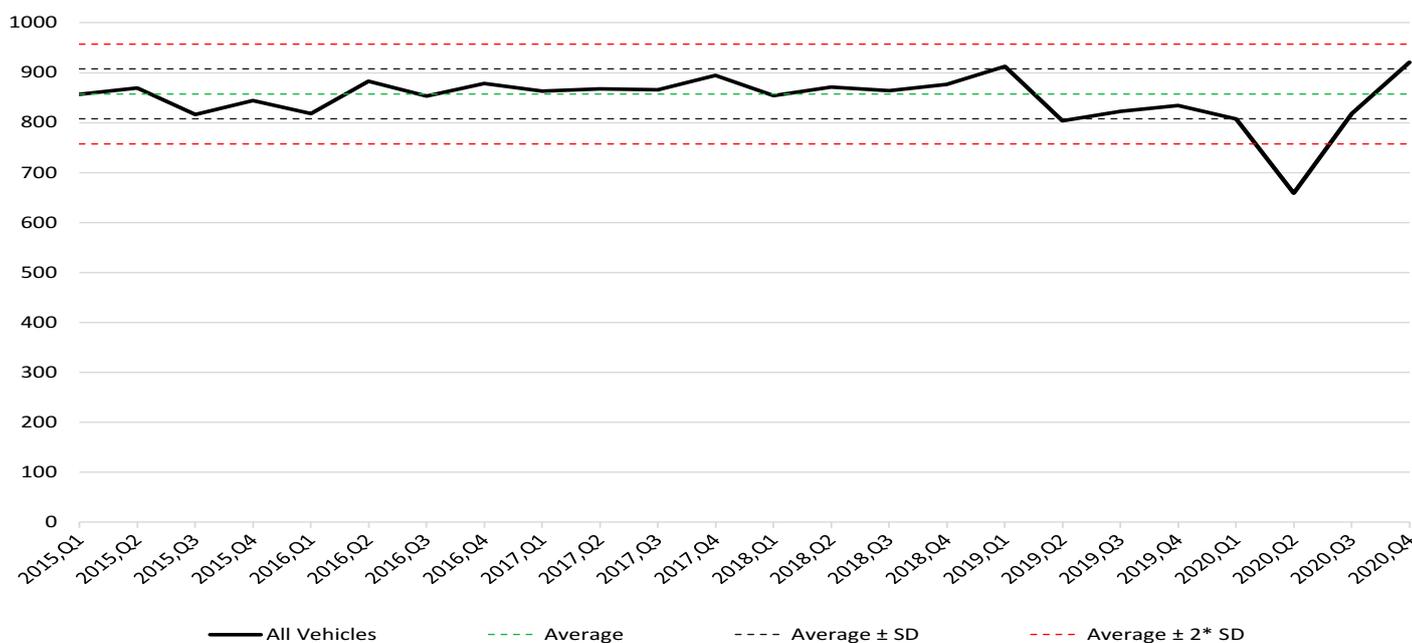
These statistics include the period following the government's announcement of measures to limit the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

In early March 2020, the UK government set out its response to the coronavirus pandemic, including restrictions on travel. Coronavirus has had a wide impact on UK society and economic activity since March 2020.

As these data are affected by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in the UK, caution should be taken when interpreting these data and comparing them with previous time periods. Data collection was unaffected during this time. Intelligence from industry reports suggests that some Roll on Roll Off ferry routes ceased operating from April to June, whilst others only carried unaccompanied trailers. A fall in activity was seen across most of the routes surveyed during the April to June period, with some recovery taking place from July to September and a return to expected levels of movements from October onwards.

Chart 2: Number of trips made by roads goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, 2015 to 2020 (Table [RORO0101](#))

Trips (thousands)



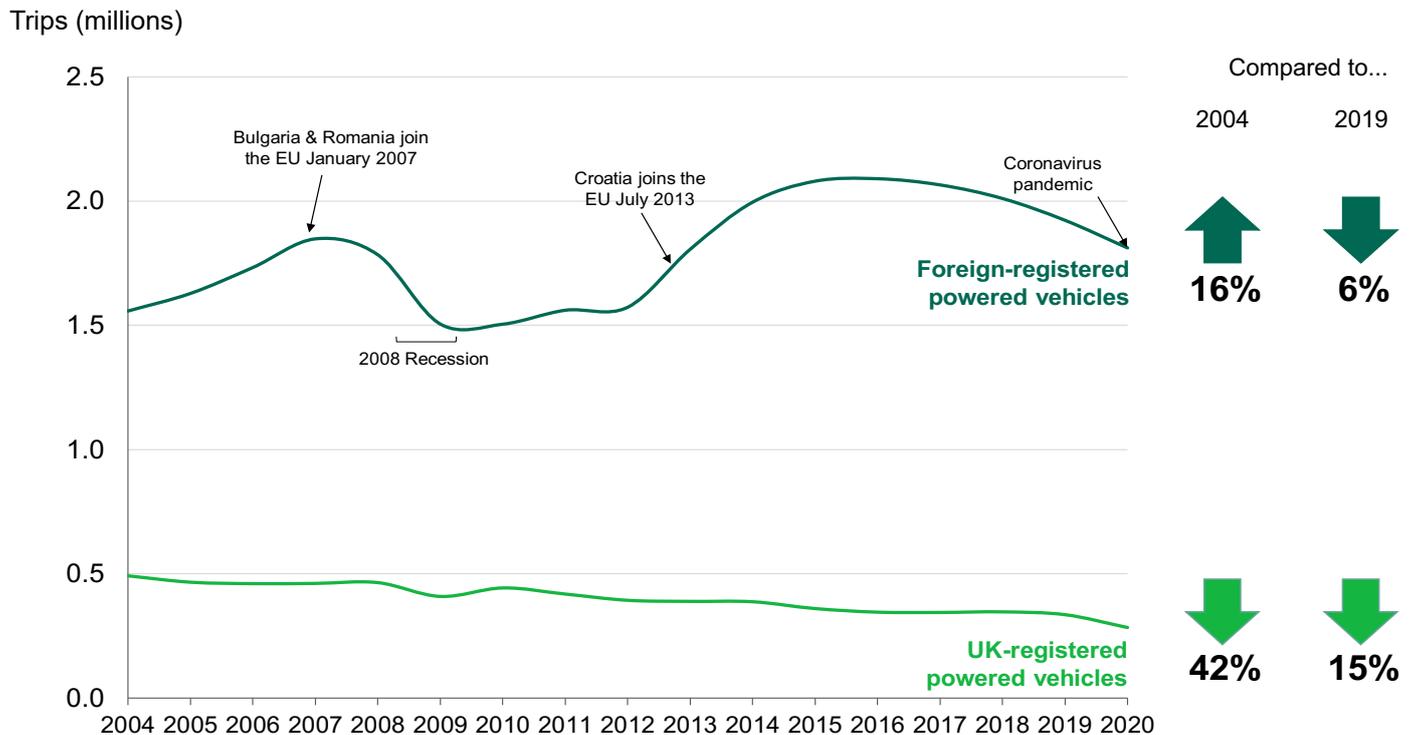
The graph shows the average number of trips over 2015-2020 as well as the expected variance from this average. The number of trips fall within the expected variance (± 1 standard deviation) for most quarters. There has been some wider variance (± 2 standard deviations of the average) in recent quarters, potentially impacted by logistics planning in the lead up to EU exit dates.

Quarter 2 2020 (April to June) fell far below this expected variance, with a drop of 18% when compared to quarter 1 (January to March). The number of trips between July and September showed some return to expected variance, with an increase of 24% when compared to quarter 2 (April to June). Trips from October onward rose to between 1 to 2 standard deviations above average, with an increase of 12% when compared to quarter 3 (July to September).

Long-term trends in powered vehicle trips travelling to Europe

There have been more trips by powered **foreign-registered** vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe than **UK-registered** vehicles since 2004¹, which is the earliest comparable data. In 2020, the number of trips made by foreign-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe (1.8 million) decreased by 6% compared to the previous year. While the number of trips made by UK-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe (0.3 million) decreased by 15%.

Chart 3: Number of annual trips made by UK and foreign-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, 2004 to 2020 (Table [RORO0101](#))



Generally, the number of trips made by UK-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has been in gradual decline since 2004¹, while the number of trips by foreign-registered powered vehicles has been steadily increasing up to 2016 (with the exception of the recession related falls seen between 2008 and 2013). From 2016 onwards the number of trips made by foreign registered powered vehicles also began to fall reaching 1.8 million in 2020. This could be down to multiple factors, one of which may be due to the increase in the proportion of trips made by unaccompanied trailers over the same period.

The fall in trips made by foreign registered vehicles up to 2020, should be taken in context with the wider downward trend seen over the previous 3 years. The lead up to the United Kingdom's departure from the European Union combined with business and manufacturers bringing forward their international activity (as reported by the Office of National Statistics) are likely to have played a part in the fall during 2019.

Note:

¹ Figures prior to 2004 do not include data for sea routes to the Republic of Ireland. Long term comparisons in this release therefore use data from 2004 onwards and care should be taken when comparing data before and after this date.

Country of vehicle registration

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

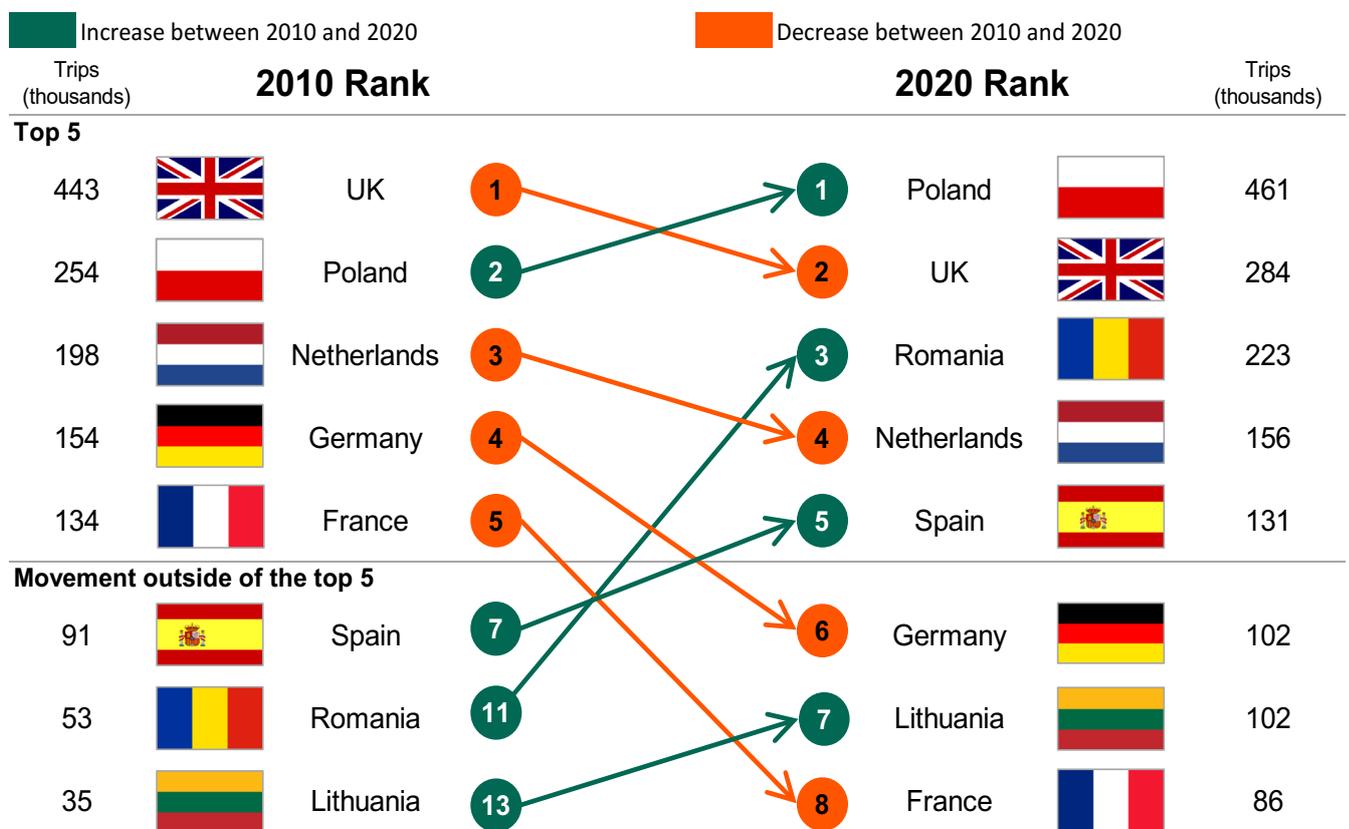
The volume of trips made by powered goods vehicles registered to **Poland** that travelled from Great Britain to Europe has increased from 3% when it first joined the EU in 2004 to 21% in 2020 - **the largest share of any country**.

The **UK** was the most prevalent country of vehicle registration making trips to Europe ten years ago. However, it is now second with a 13% share of all trips made by powered goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe.

Since **Romania** joined the EU in 2007, its share of trips made by powered goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has risen from 1% to 10% in 2020, making it the third largest country of vehicle registration.

The volume of trips made by powered vehicles registered to the **Republic of Ireland** travelling to Europe has decreased over the last ten years from 7% in 2010, to 4% in 2020.

Chart 4: Number of trips made by powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, by country of vehicle registration, ten year comparison (Table [RORO0201](#))

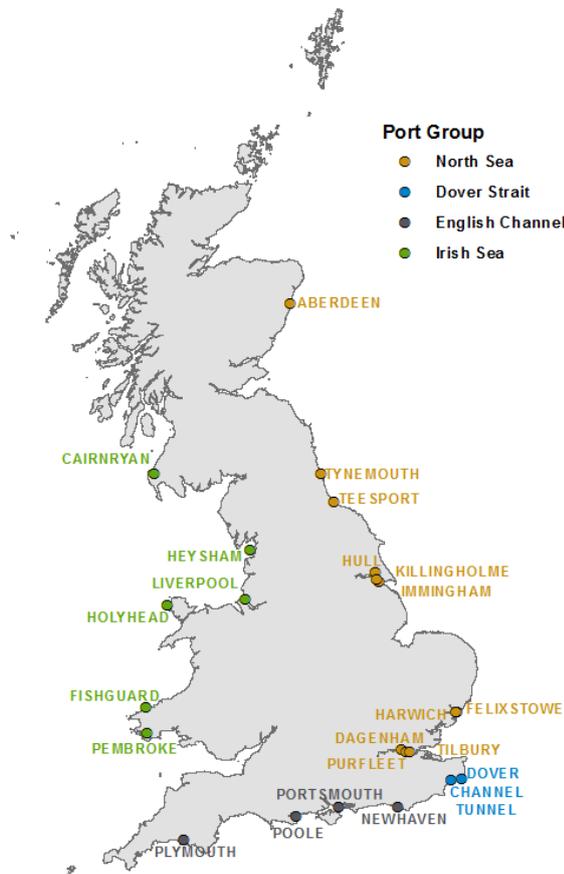


Note:

Please see page 8 for details about the accuracy of data on country of vehicle registration.

Map: Ferry ports with recorded roll-on roll-off activity from Great Britain to Europe in 2020

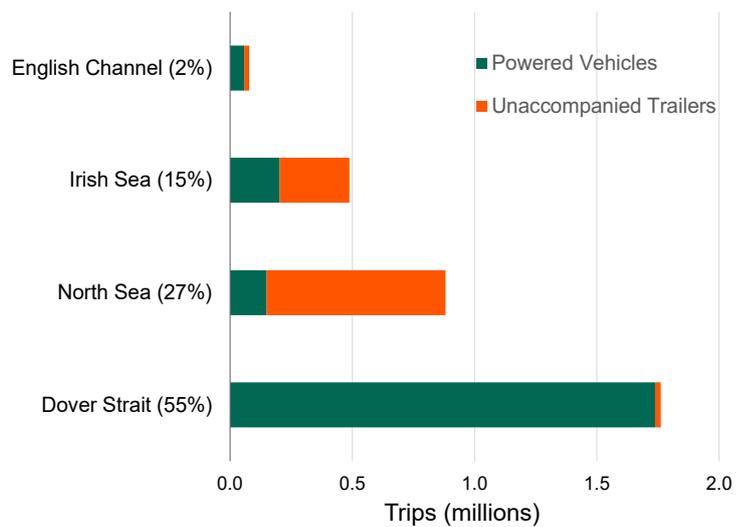
© Crown copyright and database rights 2020 Ordnance Survey – Licence Number 100039241



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).

Chart 5: Number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe by port group and type, 2020 (Table [RORO0301](#))



In 2020, more vehicles left Great Britain via the Dover Strait port group (55%) than all of the other port groups combined. The majority of trips by **powered vehicles** (81%) travelling to Europe were via the shorter routes on the Dover Strait port group, whereas the majority of **unaccompanied trailers** (69%) travelled via the longer North Sea port group routes. Detailed statistics can be found in Tables [RORO0301](#), [RORO0401](#) and [RORO0501](#).

Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe made 3.2 million trips in 2020, of which:

- ▶ 1,761 thousand trips (55%) were made via the Dover Strait. Of these, 99% (1,738 thousand) were by powered vehicles and 1% (22 thousand) were by unaccompanied trailers.
- ▶ 880 thousand trips (27%) were made via the North Sea. Of these, 17% (150 thousand) were by powered vehicles and 83% (731 thousand) were by unaccompanied trailers.
- ▶ 488 thousand trips (15%) were made via the Irish Sea. Of these, 41% (202 thousand) were by powered vehicles and 59% (286 thousand) were by unaccompanied trailers.
- ▶ 78 thousand trips (2%) were made via the English Channel. Of these, 74% (58 thousand) were by powered vehicles and 26% (21 thousand) were by unaccompanied trailers.

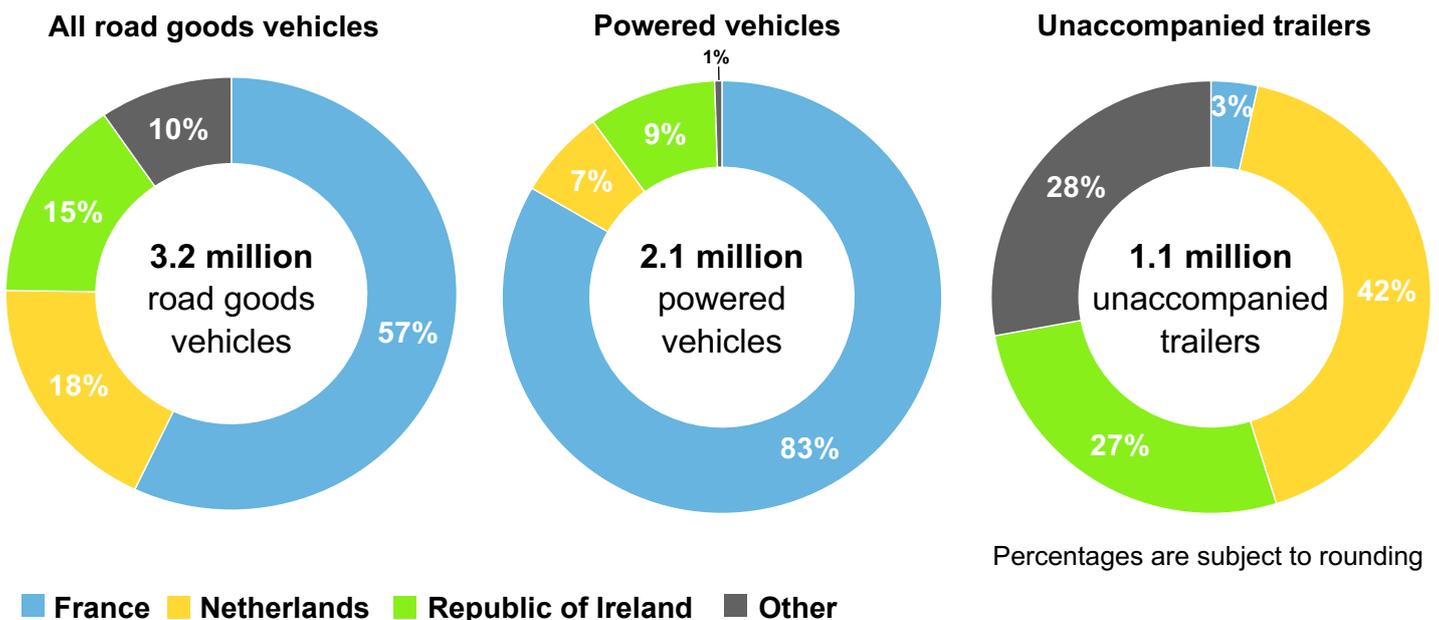
Country of disembarkation

Overall, while the majority of the 3.2 million trips made by all road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe disembarked in France (57%), there are large differences in the country of disembarkation between powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers.

Of the 2.1 million trips made by powered vehicles, 83% disembarked in France while only 7% disembarked in the Netherlands and 9% in the Republic of Ireland (these countries being the overall top 3 biggest nations of disembarkation). However of the 1.1 million trips made by unaccompanied trailers, the Netherlands was the biggest single country of trip disembarkation accounting for 42% of all trips while the Republic of Ireland accounted for 27% of trips and France accounted for just 3%.

The prevalence of powered vehicles (those accompanied by drivers to allow a continuous, faster journey) on the shorter Dover Strait routes (such as Dover to Calais) is a result of these routes being used to transport more urgent freight such as machine parts or perishable goods. Freight which is less time critical is often shipped on the longer and slower North Sea routes (such as Hull to Rotterdam), using unaccompanied trailers which are subject to stoppages in transition.

Chart 6: Number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe by country of disembarkation, 2020 (Tables [RORO0301](#), [RORO0401](#), [RORO0501](#))



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

Detailed statistics on road goods vehicles travelling to Europe by country of disembarkation and port group can be found [here](#).

Definition

Country of disembarkation is the country of the foreign port where the vehicle gets off from the roll-on roll-off ferry it was carried by.

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 from Great Britain to the **island of Ireland**, i.e. the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland combined. Detailed statistics can be found in Table [RORO1001](#). Data on road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland are affected by the coronavirus, similar to data on road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe as a whole. Please see page 2 for more information.

Overall trends

In 2020, a total of 879 thousand trips were made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland, a 1% decrease compared to the previous year, of which there were:

- ▶ 332 thousand (38%) trips by **powered vehicles**, a 9% decrease compared to 2019. Of these, 202 thousand (61%) disembarked in the Republic of Ireland and 130 thousand (39%) disembarked in Northern Ireland.
- ▶ 547 thousand (62%) trips by **unaccompanied trailers**, a 4% increase compared to 2019. Of these, 286 thousand (52%) disembarked in the Republic of Ireland and 261 thousand (48%) disembarked in Northern Ireland.

Chart 7: Number of trips made by road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland, 2010 to 2020 (Table [RORO1001](#))

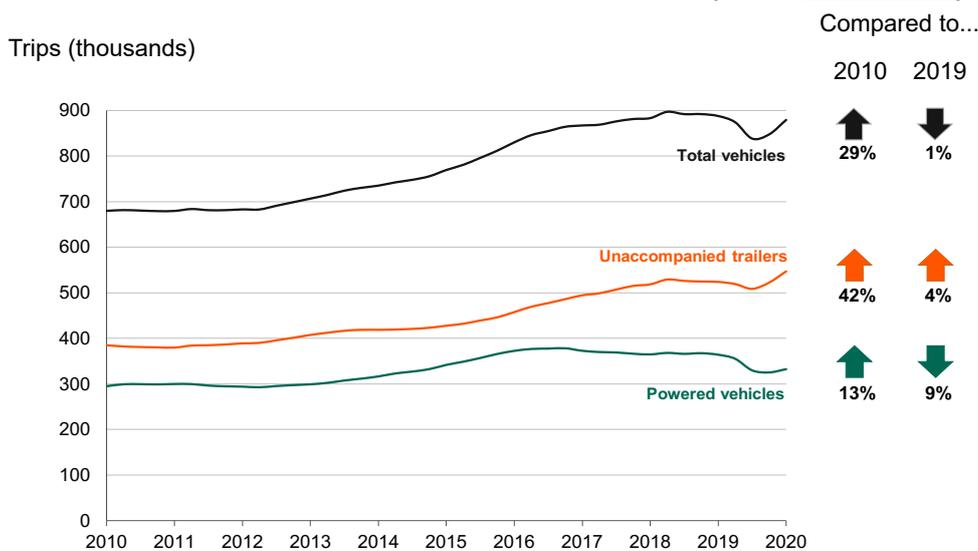
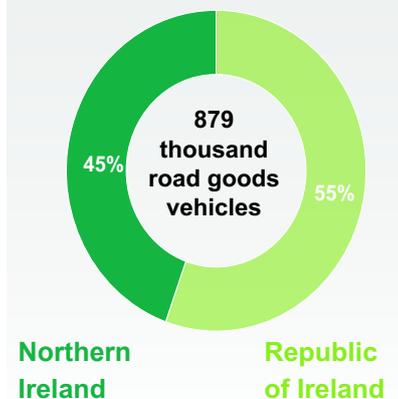


Chart 8: Country of disembarkation for Irish Sea ports, 2020



Country of vehicle registration

In 2020, trips made by powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland were predominantly either UK or Irish-registered (75% in total). However, there are differences in the proportion of trips made by UK and Irish-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland:

- ▶ 130 thousand trips made by powered vehicles disembarked in Northern Ireland, of which 91% were UK-registered and 6% were Irish registered.
- ▶ 197 thousand trips made by powered vehicles disembarked in the Republic of Ireland, of which 39% were UK-registered and 23% were Irish registered.

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

Data 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. Operators are requested to provide the number of trips made by 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

The statistical release for Road Goods Vehicles travelling to Europe 2020 underwent an audit for data covering the period October 2020 to December 2020. This led to a discovery of omission of data from some of the ferry routes which resulted in an increase of 52,409 (20%) trips made by unaccompanied trailers. There was no change to the figures for powered vehicles during this period.

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>.



To hear more about DfT statistics publications as they are released please follow us on Twitter via our @DfTstats account: <http://www.twitter.com/DfTstats>. TWITTER, TWEET, RETWEET and the Twitter logo are trademarks of Twitter, Inc. or its affiliates.