



Road goods vehicles travelling to Europe: April 2017 to March 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 (outbound only) on all the ferry routes between Great Britain and Europe, plus the Channel Tunnel.

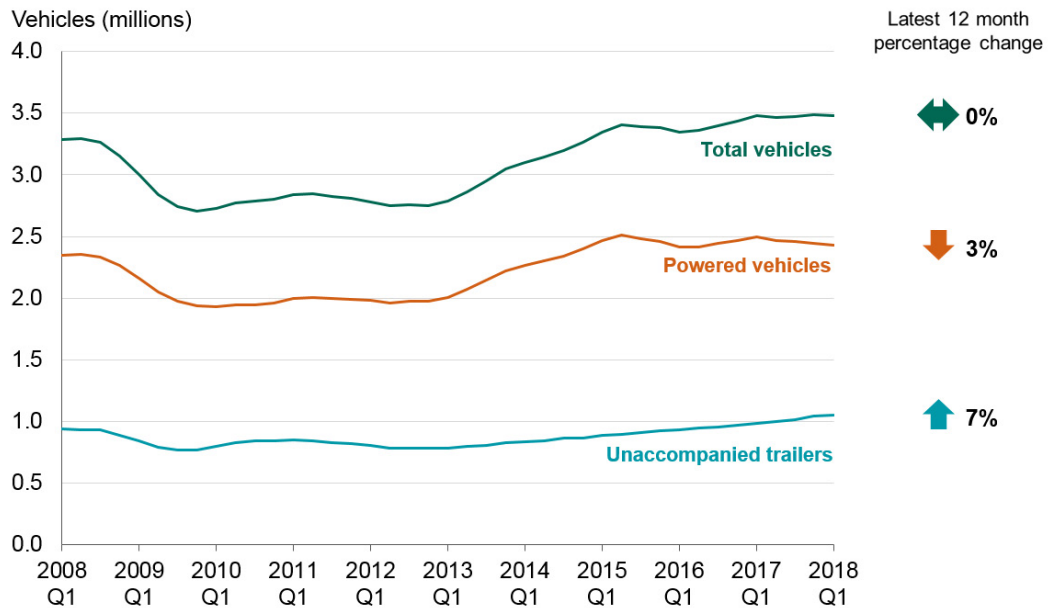
Domestic routes within the UK are excluded from the main findings, however information on routes to Northern Ireland is contained in a separate section, on [page 7](#) of this release.

The number of road goods vehicles travelling to Europe from Great Britain remains unchanged on the previous year.

A total of 3.5 million road goods vehicles travelled from Great Britain to Europe in the 12 months ending March 2018, within this:

- ▶ 2.4 million were **powered vehicles**, a 3% decrease compared to the year ending March 2017.
- ▶ 1.1 million were **unaccompanied trailers**, a 7% increase compared to the year ending March 2017.

Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, rolling 12 month totals, March 2008 to March 2018 (Table [RoRo0101](#))



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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.



Travelling to Europe: International ferry and Channel Tunnel routes leaving Great Britain for the commonly held geographical description of Europe, including all associated islands. See [background notes](#) for more details.

Overall trend in road goods vehicles travelling to Europe

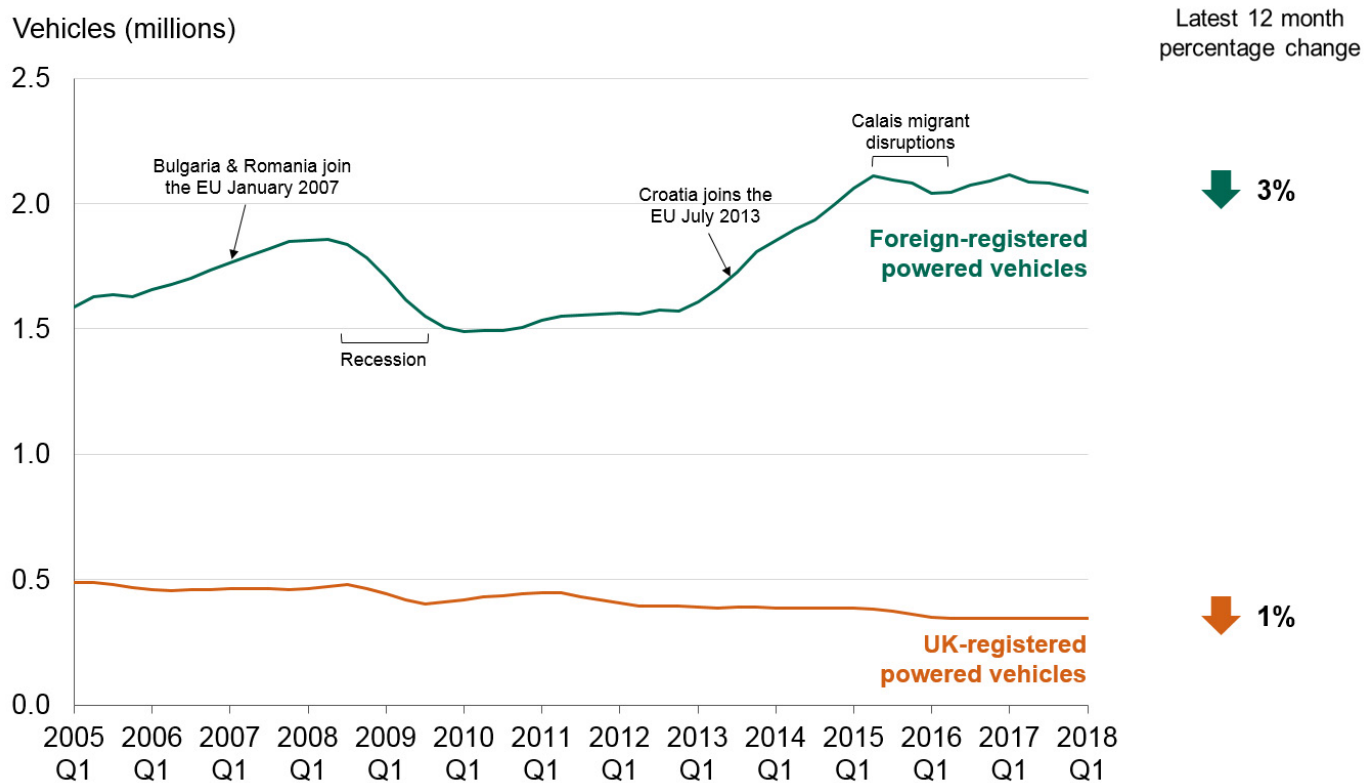
A total of 3.5 million road goods vehicles travelled from Great Britain to Europe in the year ending March 2018, comprising 2.4 million powered vehicles and 1.1 million unaccompanied trailers. This overall total remains unchanged in comparison to the year ending March 2017.

The long term trend shows that the total number of road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has been increasing, with the figure in the year ending March 2018 being 6% higher than the figure in the year ending March 2008.

There are more foreign-registered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, than UK-registered vehicles. In the year ending March 2018 the number of **foreign-registered** powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe (2.0 million) decreased by 3%. In comparison, the number of **UK-registered** powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe (0.3 million) decreased by 1% compared to the previous year.

Generally, the number of UK-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has been in gradual decline, while the number of foreign-registered powered vehicles has been steadily increasing, with the exception of a recession related dip between 2008 and 2009. However, since 2015, the number of foreign-registered vehicles travelling to Europe has remained between 2.0 and 2.1 million, suggesting the trend may be starting to level.

Chart 1: UK and foreign-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, rolling 12 month totals, March 2005 to March 2018 (Table [RoRo0101](#))



Note: 2005 Q1 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

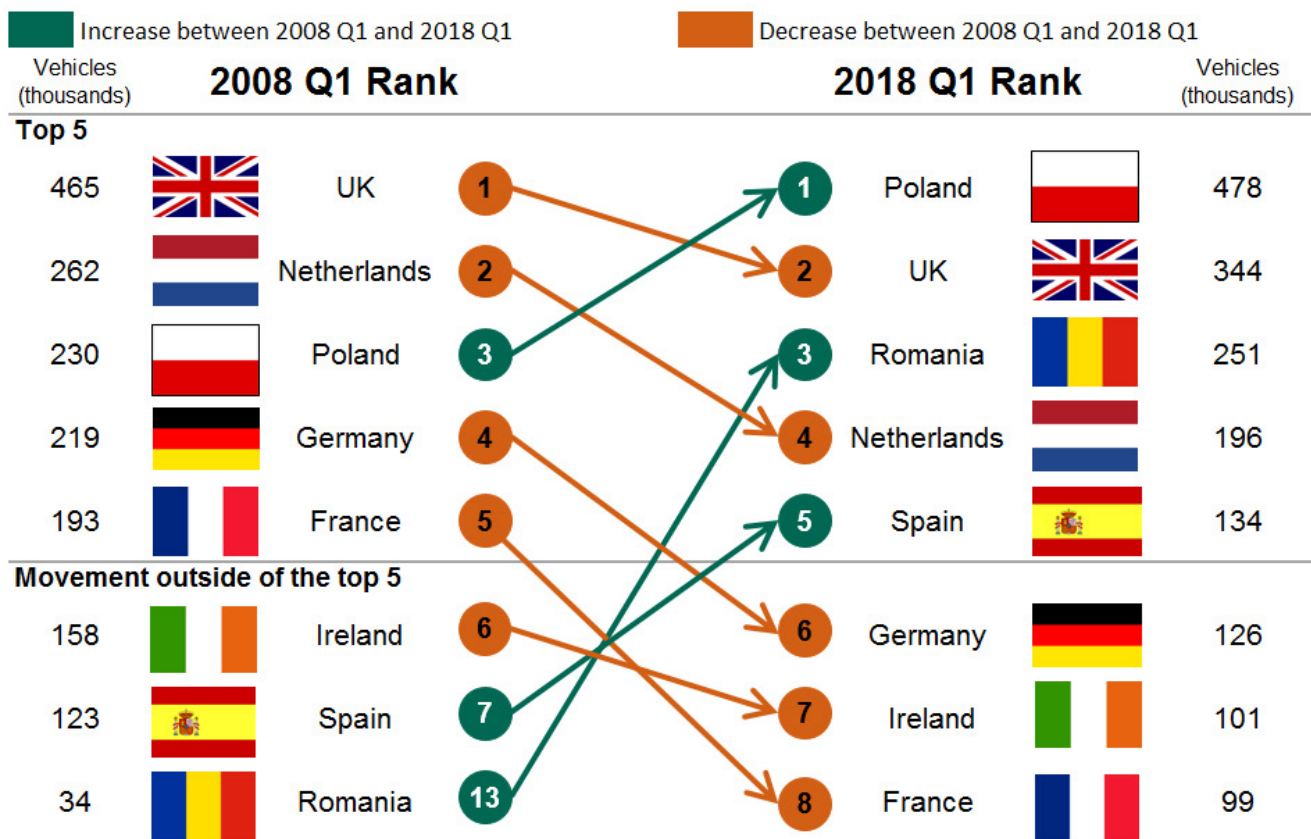
The proportion of powered vehicles registered to countries such as the **UK, Netherlands, Germany** and **France**, that travelled from Great Britain to Europe has fallen as a number of other countries have greatly increased their share since joining the European Union (EU).

The volume of powered goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe registered to **Poland** has increased from 3% when it first joined the EU (in 2004), to 20% in the year ending March 2018 - the largest share of any country.

Since **Romania** joined the EU (in 2007), its share of powered goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe has risen from 1% in the year ending March 2008, to 10% in the year ending March 2018, making it the third largest nationality of HGVs leaving Great Britain to Europe.

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

Chart 2: Powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, by country of registration, rolling 12 month totals, March 2008 to March 2018 (Table [RoRo0201](#))



Port Group

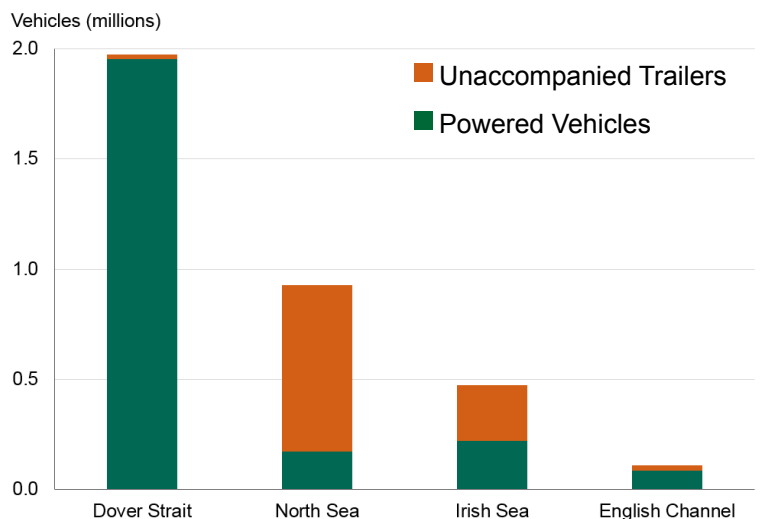
In the year ending March 2018, more vehicles left through the Dover Strait port group than all of the other port groups combined. Around 2 million road goods vehicles travelling to Europe used the **Dover Strait** port group (57% of the total), 926 thousand used the **North Sea** port group (27% of the total), 472 thousand used the **Irish Sea** port group (14% of the total) and 110 thousand used the **English Channel** port group (3% of the total). *Percentages are subject to rounding

The majority of **powered vehicles** travelling to Europe left via the Dover Strait port group (80%), while the majority of **unaccompanied trailers** travelled from the North Sea port group (72%).

Map 1: Port Locations



Chart 3: Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe by port group and type, April 2017 to March 2018 (Tables [RoRo0401](#), [RoRo0501](#))

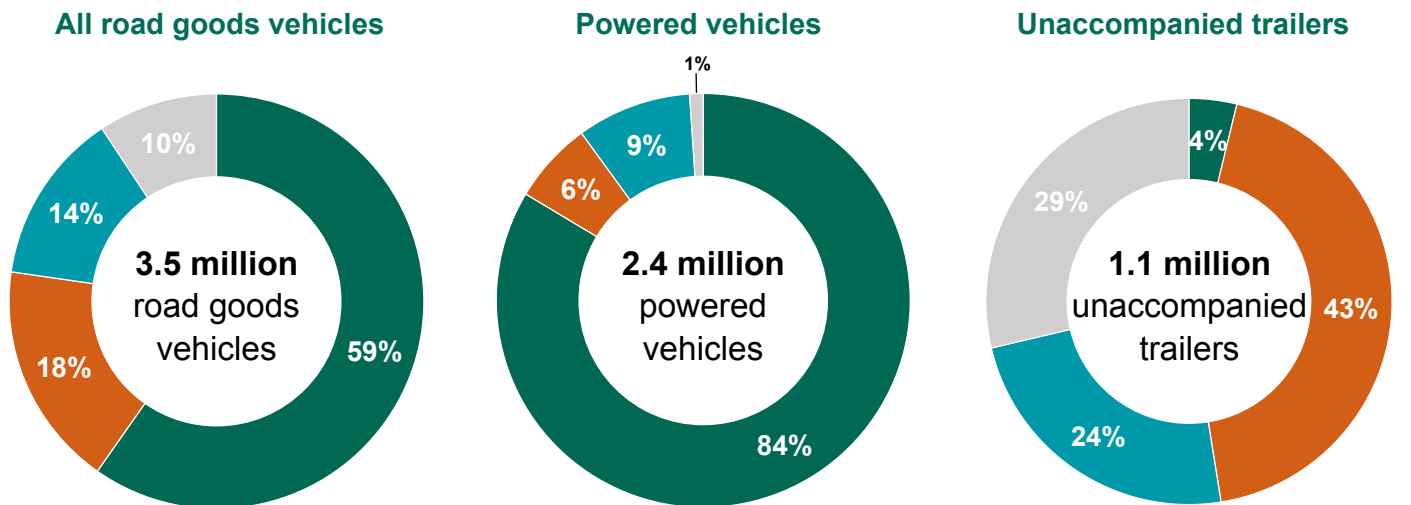


There is a prevalence of powered vehicles on shorter routes, such as to France from the **Dover Strait** port group, and a prevalence of unaccompanied trailers on longer routes, for example to the Netherlands from the **North Sea** port group. This is largely due to the fact that unaccompanied trailers are used on longer distance journeys instead of powered vehicles for less urgent cargo. There are also cost factors whereby haulage firms may seek to be more efficient by not using powered vehicles on longer routes due to the cost constraints of employing drivers, and the regulations on the number of hours drivers can operate. For the **Irish Sea** port group the overall number of powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers is approximately equal.

All the patterns outlined above regarding the dominance of activity in the Dover Strait port group, as well as the overall split between powered vehicles and unaccompanied trailers, are long term established trends which have been present for the previous 10 years.

Country of disembarkation

Chart 4: Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, by country of disembarkation, April 2017 to March 2018 (Tables [RoRo0301](#), [RoRo0401](#), [RoRo0501](#))



Percentages are subject to rounding

■ France ■ Netherlands ■ Republic of Ireland ■ Other

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

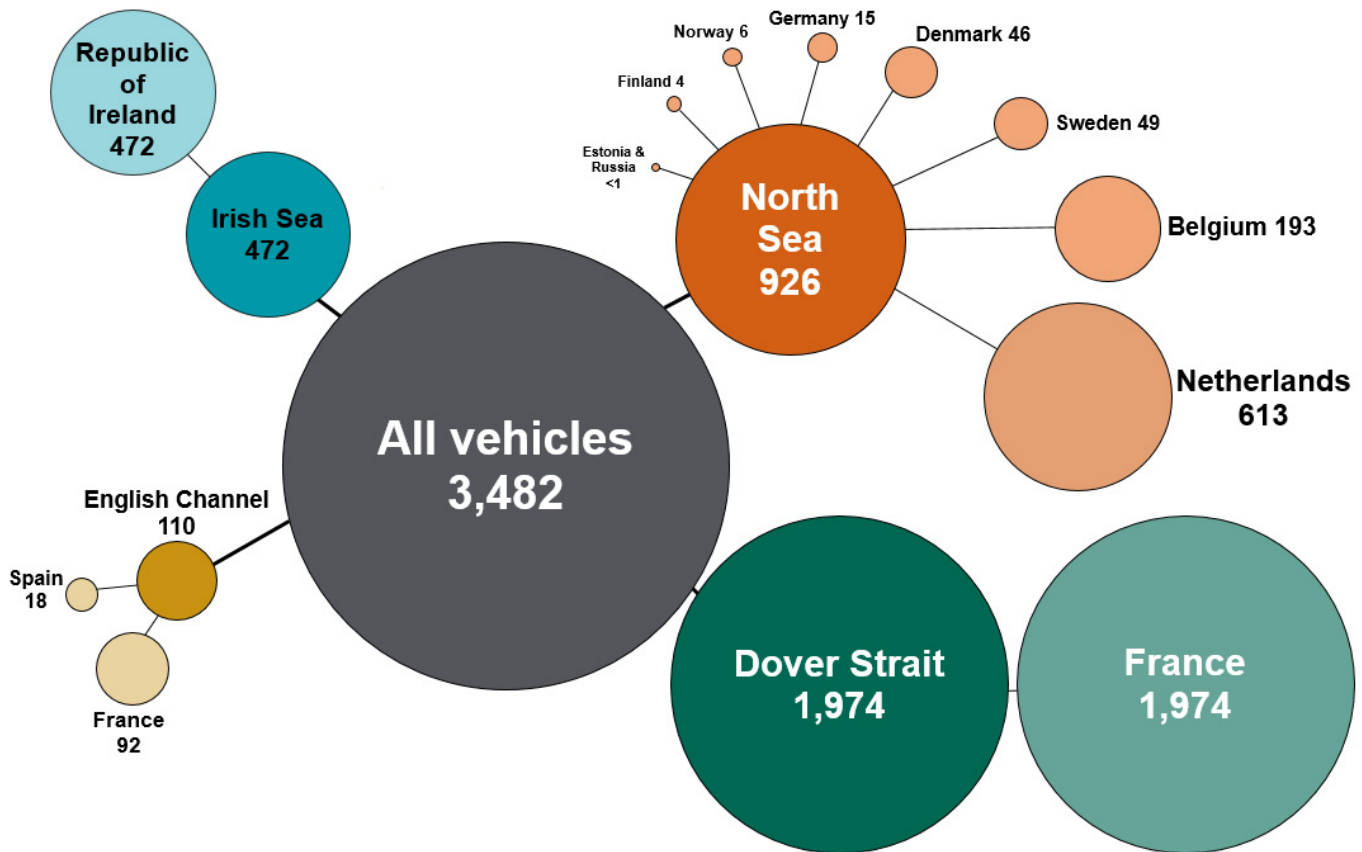
France is the most common country of disembarkation for all road goods vehicles and powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe, accounting for 59% of all road goods vehicles and 84% of powered vehicles. The majority of road goods vehicles which disembarked in France travelled from the **Dover Strait** port group (96%) with the remainder from the **English Channel** port group. In contrast only 4% of unaccompanied trailers were destined to France. France is the only country of disembarkation for the Channel Tunnel.

In comparison, the **Netherlands** is the most common country of disembarkation for unaccompanied trailers travelling from Great Britain to Europe, accounting for 43% of all unaccompanied trailers. In contrast only 6% of powered vehicles disembarked in the Netherlands.

The Republic of Ireland is the second most common country of disembarkation for powered vehicles (9%).

Belgium is the most predominant country in the 'Other' category, accounting for 58% of all road goods vehicles in this category. More information on different countries of disembarkation by port group can be found in Tables [RoRo0302](#), [RoRo0402](#), [RoRo0502](#).

Chart 5: Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe by port group and country of disembarkation, April 2017 to March 2018 (Table [RoRo0302](#))



Road goods vehicles (Thousands)
Numbers are subject to rounding

The majority (66%) of road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to Europe via the **North Sea** port group in the year ending March 2018 were destined for the **Netherlands** (0.6 million), whilst 21% disembarked in **Belgium** (0.2 million).

Most road goods vehicles travelling through the **English Channel** port group in the year ending March 2018 were destined for **France** (84%) with the remainder destined for **Spain**; whilst all road goods vehicles travelling through the **Dover Strait** port group were destined for France.

Since 2008, the **Republic of Ireland** has been the only country of disembarkation for the **Irish Sea** port group. The total number of vehicles ultimately travelling to the Republic of Ireland from Great Britain will be higher than reported here as vehicles that travel through the Irish Sea port group and continue on to the Republic of Ireland via Northern Ireland are not captured. However, there is information detailing activity between Great Britain and the island of Ireland as a whole on page 7 of this release.

Island of Ireland

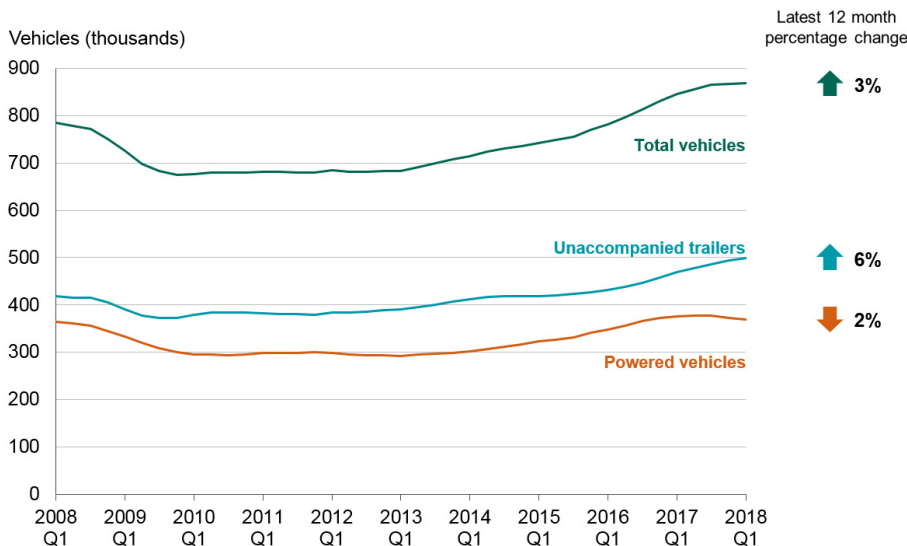
Vehicles travelling on domestic ferry routes from Great Britain to Northern Ireland are not included in the main part of this release; however this section includes statistics on those vehicles in order to give a complete picture of activity travelling from Great Britain to the **island of Ireland**, i.e. both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland combined. Detailed statistics can be found in Table [RoRo1001](#).

Overall trends

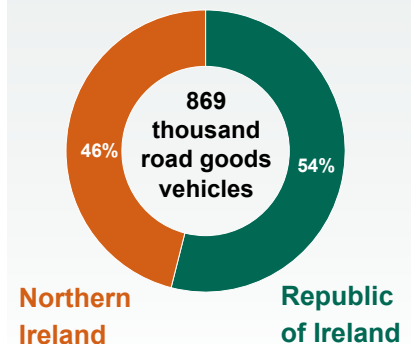
In the year ending March 2018, a total of 869 thousand road goods vehicles travelled from Great Britain to the island of Ireland, a 3% increase compared to the year ending March 2017, of which:

- ▶ 370 thousand (43%) were **powered vehicles**, a 2% decrease compared to the year ending March 2017. Of these, 220 thousand (59%) disembarked in the Republic of Ireland and 150 thousand (41%) disembarked in Northern Ireland.
- ▶ 499 thousand (57%) were **unaccompanied trailers**, a 6% increase compared to the year ending March 2017. Of these, 252 thousand (51%) disembarked in the Republic of Ireland and 247 thousand (49%) disembarked in Northern Ireland.

Chart 6: Road goods vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland, rolling 12 month totals, March 2008 to March 2018 (Table [RoRo1001](#))



Country of disembarkation for Irish Sea ports, April 2017 - March 2018



Country of vehicle registration to the island of Ireland, April 2017 - March 2018

= 10%



In the year ending March 2018, powered vehicles travelling to the island of Ireland were predominantly UK-registered (59%), with a further 21% being Irish-registered, and 20% registered elsewhere.

Country of vehicle registration

In the year ending March 2018, powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain to the island of Ireland were predominantly either UK or Irish-registered (80% in total). However, there are stark contrasts in the proportion of UK and Irish-registered powered vehicles travelling from Great Britain using the Irish Sea port group:

- ▶ 150 thousand powered vehicles disembarked in Northern Ireland, of which 90% were UK-registered and 7% were Irish registered.
- ▶ 220 thousand powered vehicles disembarked in the Republic of Ireland, of which 38% were UK-registered and 30% were Irish registered.

Strengths and weaknesses of the data

The figures in this release are derived from quarterly returns provided by the roll-on roll-off ferry operators, who provide the number of powered vehicles (by country of 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.

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 country of registration. Information on the country of registration for powered vehicles is derived by some operators from the registration number pattern, whilst others extract the nationality from the manifest or waybill. A few operators use the country of booking as a proxy for the country of registration.

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](#).

In the previous statistical release in this series, for 2017 Quarter 4, the scope of the publication was expanded to report activity in the Irish Sea port group since 2004, which includes routes to the Republic of Ireland and formally Portugal. More information on this change of scope can be found in the publication [here](#).

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>.



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