

26 September 2019

# Northern Ireland Ports Traffic 2018

Geographical Area: Northern Ireland  
Theme: Business  
Frequency: Annual

## Introduction

The Northern Ireland Ports Traffic is an analysis of the Department for Transport's UK Port Freight Statistics, at a Northern Ireland level. It provides statistics on the volume and tonnage of traffic at Northern Ireland ports.

## Key points

- The total tonnage through Northern Ireland (NI) ports in 2018 was 28.4 million tonnes<sup>1</sup>, an increase of 4.6% compared to 27.1 million tonnes the previous year. Total freight traffic through United Kingdom (UK) ports in 2018 was 483.3 million tonnes, compared to 481.8 million tonnes the previous year, an increase of 0.3%.
- Over the year in NI, the total tonnage of inward traffic increased by 3.7% to 17.3 million tonnes, and outward traffic increased by 6.0% to 11.1 million tonnes. For the UK as a whole, the volume of inward traffic for 2018 increased by 3.0% to 310.1 million tonnes and outward traffic decreased by 4.2% to 173.2 million tonnes.
- The majority of total NI traffic came through the Belfast Port (67%), while Warrenpoint accounted for the second highest level of total traffic (12%), followed by 10% through the Port of Larne. The most popular UK port was Grimsby & Immingham, which handled 12% of total UK port traffic in 2018.
- A total of 863,511 road goods vehicles passed through Northern Ireland ports in 2018 – an increase of 2.1% from 846,030 in 2017. In total, 7.4 million road goods vehicles passed through the UK in 2018 – a decrease of 3.9% from 2017.
- A total of 464,286 non-freight vehicles passed through Northern Ireland ports in 2018. This compared with a figure of 470,418 in 2017 – a decrease of 1.3%. In total, 5.9 million non-freight vehicles passed through the UK in 2018 – an increase of 6.4% from 2017.

<sup>1</sup> Please note that this figure includes all major and minor ports

## Context

The Department for Transport (DfT) collects and publishes statistics about passenger and freight traffic through the ports of the UK.

The importance of shipping and trade to the economy of the UK, an island nation, has resulted in the establishment of a large number of ports around the coast, which are very diverse in terms of size and type of cargo handled. Around 95 per cent by volume of the UK's international trade is transported by sea, and, at least until recently, the UK port sector handled a greater weight of goods than any other in Europe.

Statistics on UK port traffic (2018) are available on the DfT Statistics website:

### [UK Port Freight Statistics 2018](#)

Following publication of the detailed final annual release by DfT, statisticians within the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency analyse the data which relate to Northern Ireland ports and release this information as the 'Northern Ireland Ports Traffic' publication in September each year.

This Northern Ireland Ports Traffic publication provides statistics on passenger and freight traffic through Northern Ireland ports. Full details including information on quality and methodology can be found in the Ports Traffic section of the NISRA website:

### [NI Ports Traffic](#)

This release includes information on non-freight traffic through NI Ports and is based on already published data. For information on external visitors to NI please see:

### [Annual Tourism Statistics 2018](#)

**This Ports Traffic report contains the following chapters:**

	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. Goods through principal ports</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Road goods vehicles through principal ports</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Non-freight vehicles through principal ports</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. Lift on-Lift off (Lo-Lo) cargo through principal ports</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>5. Further information</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>6. Index of tables</b>	<b>13</b>

## **National Statistics**

The United Kingdom Statistics Authority has designated these statistics as National Statistics, in accordance with the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 and signifying compliance with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

National Statistics status means that official statistics meet the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value.

All official statistics should comply with all aspects of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are awarded National Statistics status following an assessment by the Authority's regulatory arm. The Authority considers whether the statistics meet the highest standards of Code compliance, including the value they add to public decisions and debate.

It is a producer's responsibility to maintain compliance with the standards expected of National Statistics. If we become concerned about whether these statistics are still meeting the appropriate standards, we will discuss any concerns with the Authority promptly. National Statistics status can be removed at any point when the highest standards are not maintained, and reinstated when standards are restored.

# 1 Goods through principal ports

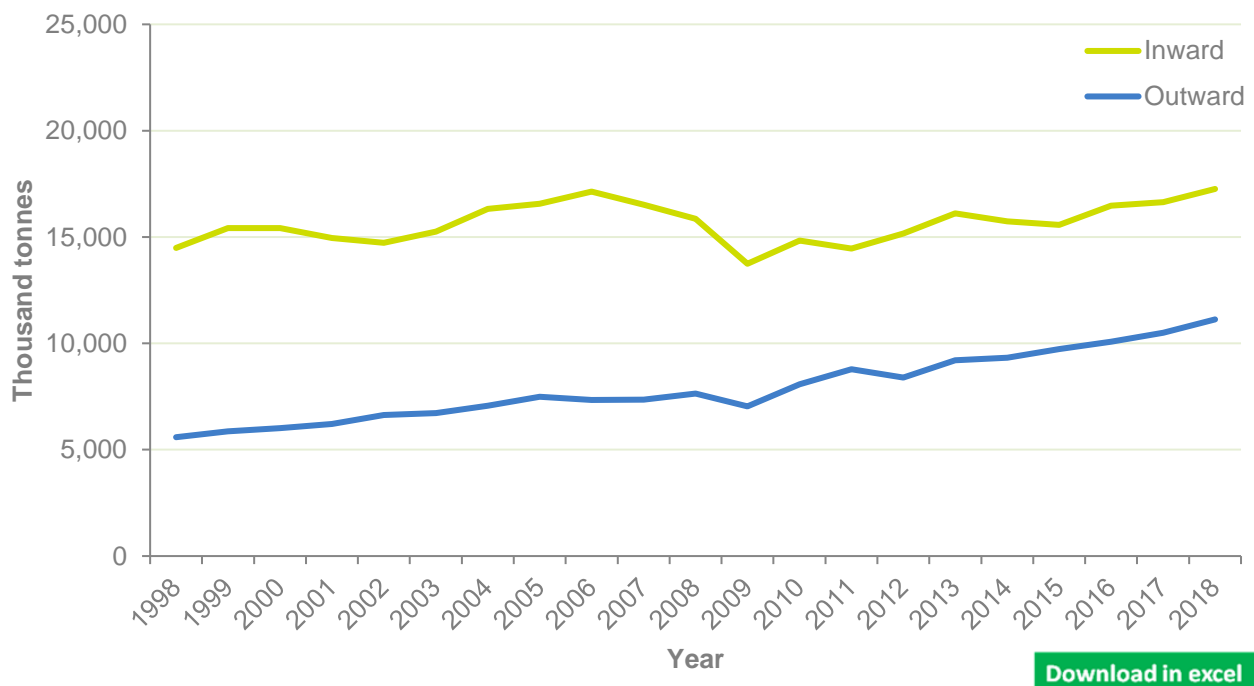
**Inward traffic** refers to all goods taken into Northern Ireland from Great Britain and elsewhere through the Northern Ireland ports. Northern Ireland is not necessarily the ultimate destination for these goods.

**Outward traffic** covers all goods taken out through Northern Ireland ports, destined for Great Britain or for foreign countries. The origin of the goods is not necessarily in Northern Ireland.

## Key points

- The **total tonnage** through Northern Ireland ports in 2018 was 28.4 million tonnes, the highest on record
- This represented an increase of 4.6% on the figure of 27.1 million tonnes for 2017
- In 2018, the majority of total NI traffic came through Belfast Port (67%)

Figure 1: Total inward and outward traffic for Northern Ireland, 1998-2018



The **total tonnage** through Northern Ireland ports in 2018 was 28.4 million tonnes, which:

- comprised 17.3 million tonnes of inward traffic and 11.1 million tonnes of outward traffic
- represented an increase of 4.6% on the figure of 27.1 million tonnes in 2017, which comprised 16.6 million tonnes of inward traffic and 10.5 million tonnes of outward traffic
- has exceeded 25 million tonnes of total traffic in each of the last six years.

Of all **NI ports** in 2018:

- the majority of total traffic came through the Belfast Port (66.7%), with the remainder coming through Warrenpoint (12.1%), Larne (10.2%), Londonderry (6.5%) and other minor ports (4.4%)
- the majority of inward traffic came through the Belfast Port (67.0%), with 10.6% through Warrenpoint, 10.1% through Londonderry, 9.0% through Larne and the remainder through other minor ports (3.2%)
- 66.3% of outward traffic went through the Belfast Port, with 14.5% through Warrenpoint, 12.1% through Larne and the remainder through Londonderry (0.9%) and other minor ports (6.2%).

In 2018, total freight traffic through **UK ports** was 483.3 million tonnes, which:

- was an increase of 0.3% on the figure in 2017 (481.8 million tonnes)
- was some 17.3% below the peak in the series in 2005 (584.5 million tonnes)
- comprised 310.1 million tonnes of inward traffic, an increase of 3.0% since 2017
- comprised 173.2 million tonnes of outward traffic, a decrease of 4.2% since 2017.

Of all **UK ports** in 2018:

- Grimsby and Immingham was the UK's leading port, handling 55.6 million tonnes (11.5% of UK traffic), followed by London with 53.2 million tonnes (11.0%), Southampton with 34.5 million tonnes (7.1%) and Liverpool with 32.6 million tonnes (6.7%).

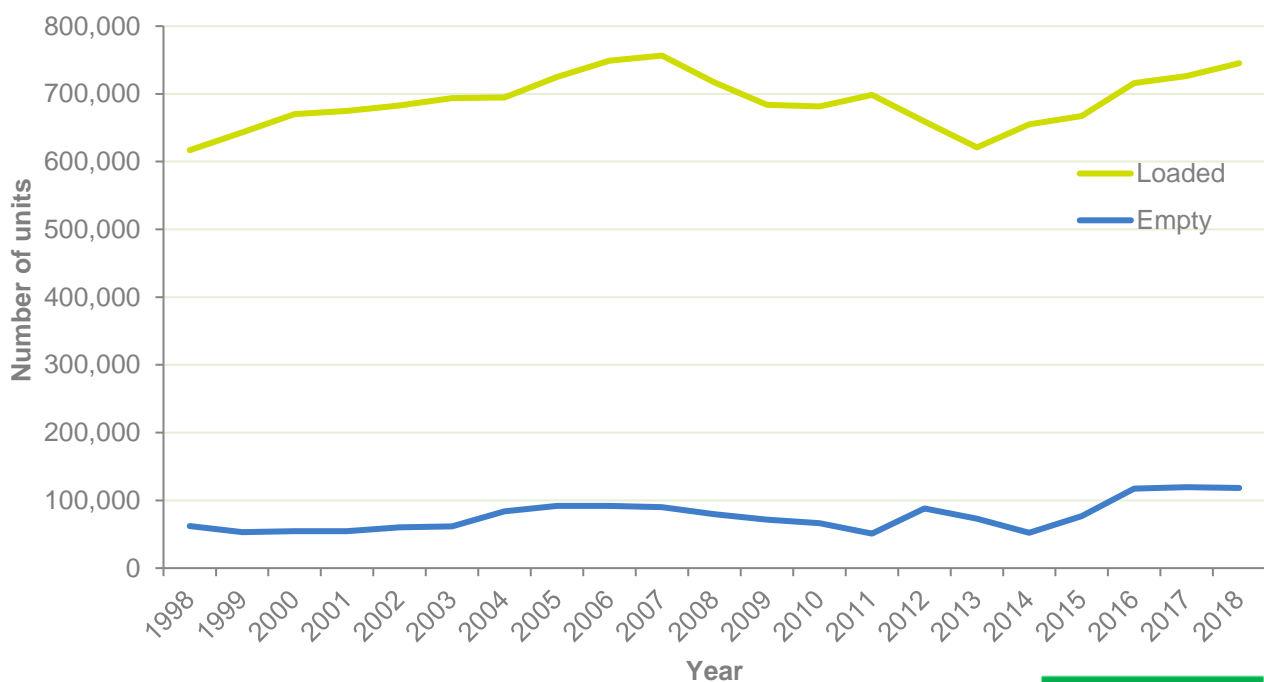
## 2 Road goods vehicles through principal ports

**Road goods vehicles** include road goods vehicles (with accompanying trailers) and unaccompanied road goods trailers.

### Key points

- Over 863 thousand **road goods vehicles** passed through NI ports
- Belfast accounted for 65% of this traffic

Figure 2: Road goods vehicles (units) - Northern Ireland, 1998-2018



A total of 863,511 road goods vehicles passed through **Northern Ireland ports** in 2018, which:

- represented an increase of 2.1% on 2017 figures
- comprised 432,912 road goods vehicles arriving in NI and 430,599 leaving
- included 745,158 loaded and 118,353 empty road goods vehicles
- mostly passed through the Belfast Port (65.2%), with the remainder passing through the Port of Larne (23.2%) and Warrenpoint (11.7%)
- was 23.9% above the number of road goods vehicles passing through ports in 1999.

A total of 7.4 million road goods vehicles passed through **UK ports** in 2018, which:

- represented a decrease of 3.9% on 2017 figures
- comprised 3.7 million road goods vehicles inward and 3.7 million outward
- passed in largest numbers through the Port of Dover, accounting for 2.5 million road goods vehicles or 34.2% of the total UK road goods vehicle traffic.

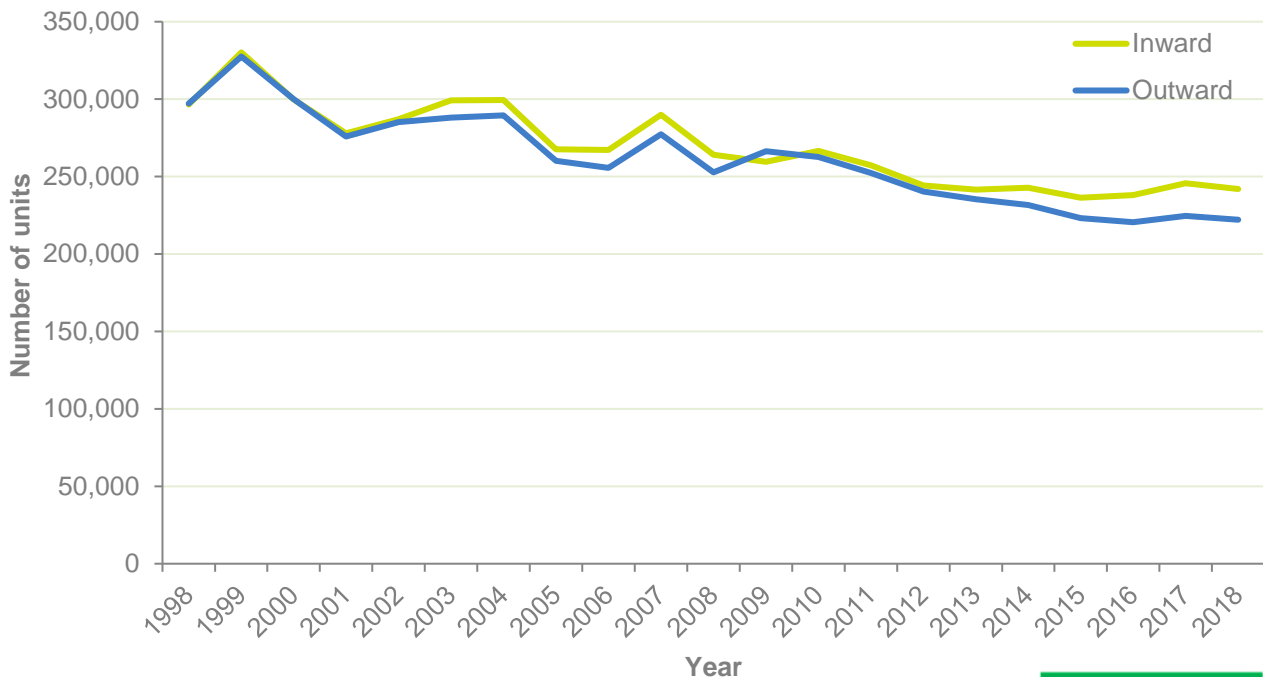
### 3 Non-freight vehicles through principal ports

**Non-freight vehicles** include passenger cars, motorcycles and accompanying trailers / caravans and passenger buses.

#### Key points

- Over 464 thousand **non-freight vehicles** passed through NI ports
- Belfast accounted for 71% of the traffic

Figure 3: Unit load carrier non-freight vehicles - Northern Ireland, 1998-2018



[Download in excel](#)

A total of 464,286 non-freight vehicles passed through **Northern Ireland ports** in 2018, which:

- represented a decrease of 1.3% on 2017 figures
- comprised 242,066 vehicles arriving in NI and 222,220 leaving
- mostly passed through the Belfast Port (71.0%), with the remainder passing through the Port of Larne (28.9%) and Warrenpoint (0.1%)
- was 29.4% below the number of non-freight vehicles passing through ports in 1999.

A total of 5.9 million non-freight vehicles passed through **UK ports** in 2018, which:

- represented an increase of 6.4% on 2017 figures
- comprised 2.9 million non-freight vehicles inward and 3.0 million outward
- passed in largest numbers through the Port of Dover, accounting for 2.3 million vehicles or 38.9% of the total UK non-freight vehicle traffic.



## 4 Lift on-Lift off (Lo-Lo) traffic through principal ports

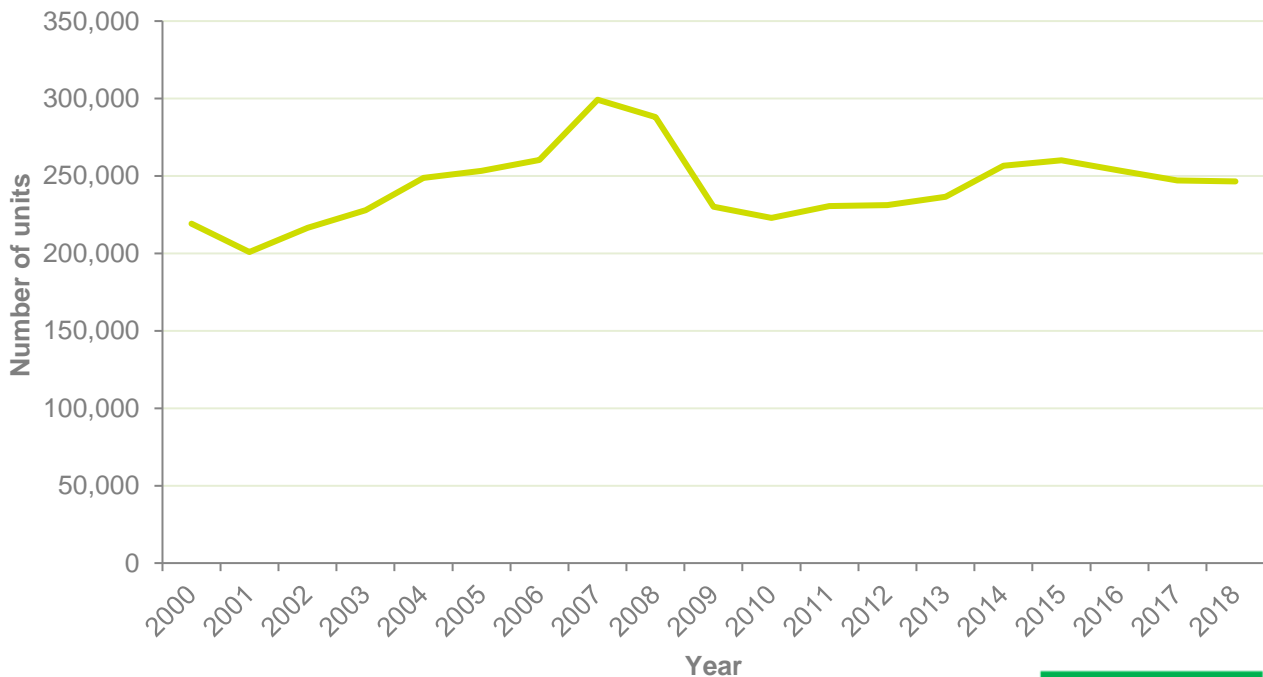
**Lift on-Lift off (Lo-Lo)** traffic refers to standard shipping containers that are lifted on or off ships.

**TEU (twenty-foot equivalent units)** is a standardised measure to allow for the different sizes of container boxes.

### Key points

- 246,600 TEUs of **container traffic** passed through Northern Ireland Ports in 2018
- This represents a decrease of 0.2% on the 247,100 TEUs of container traffic in 2017
- Belfast accounted for 89.5% of TEUs container traffic

Figure 4: Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs) traffic - Northern Ireland, 2000-2018



[Download in excel](#)

A total of 246,600 TEU containers passed through **Northern Ireland ports** in 2018, which:

- represented a decrease of 0.2% on 2017 figures
- comprised 123,900 TEUs inward and 122,600 outward
- mostly passed through the Belfast Port (89.5%), with the remainder passing through Warrenpoint (10.5%)
- was 12.5% above the number of TEU containers passing through NI ports in 2000.

A total of 10.3 million TEU containers passed through **UK ports** in 2018, which:

- was an increase of 0.7% on 2017 figures
- comprised 5.2 million TEUs inward and 5.1 million outward
- passed in largest numbers through Felixstowe, accounting for 3.8 million TEUs or 36.7% of the total UK TEUs traffic.

## 5 Further information

Port freight traffic statistics are based on a combination of data reported to the DfT by port authorities and shipping lines or their agents. Prior to 2000, reporting was by port authorities only.

In January 2000, an EC Maritime Statistics Directive (Council Directive 95/64/EC on statistical returns in respect of the carriage of goods and passengers by sea, recast as Directive 2009/42/EC) was implemented in the UK. This required a complete overhaul of data collection methods. The information in this report has been shown as far as possible on the same or similar basis as previously published, but it should be noted that the different collection system for freight traffic has resulted in some discontinuities in the data series between 2000-2018 and previous years.

Under the Directive, information is required quarterly on foreign and domestic tonnages and freight units, for major ports (i.e. those that have over one million tonnes of freight per annum), by route, flag and cargo type. Much less information is required for smaller ports. Most of the detailed freight information is collected from shipping lines, operators and shipping agents, because the detailed route and ship flag information required by the Directive is only generally available from them. The ports supply more limited information quarterly and annually, which is used to provide control totals and also to publish more timely provisional results.

A technical note, published by the Department for Transport, provides further information on the current and previous data collection systems, and explains the methods and quality standards implemented in the DfT Port Freight Statistics publication, and the Northern Ireland Ports Traffic publication. It is available at:

[DfT Port Freight Statistics notes and definitions](#)

### Contact information

If you require further information about the figures contained in this publication or the accompanying tables, please contact:

Patrick O’Kane  
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency  
Economic and Labour Market Statistics Branch  
Colby House  
Stranmillis Court  
Belfast BT9 5RR

Telephone: +44 (0)28 9025 5161

Email: [patrick.o'kane@nisra.gov.uk](mailto:patrick.o'kane@nisra.gov.uk)

Web: [Ports traffic](#)

The next Northern Ireland Ports Traffic bulletin, including estimates for 2019, will be published in November 2020.

# 6 Index of tables

---

The following tables containing Northern Ireland Ports Traffic data for 1998-2018 can be found on the website:

[Table 1 - Tonnage of goods through the principal ports in Northern Ireland](#)

[Table 2 - Unit load carrier cross channel traffic](#)

[Table 3 - Unit load carrier foreign traffic](#)

[Table 4 - Unit load carrier total traffic](#)

[Table 5 - Other traffic \(cross channel, foreign and total\)](#)

[Table 6 - Unit load carrier traffic non-freight vehicles](#)

## Notes and definitions:

Tables 1-5 give tonnage of goods through the ports and exclude weights of containers and weights of materials shipped for dumping at sea.

### Inward traffic

Inward traffic refers to all goods taken into Northern Ireland from Great Britain and elsewhere through the Northern Ireland ports. Northern Ireland is not necessarily the ultimate destination for these goods.

### Outward traffic

Outward traffic covers all goods taken out through Northern Ireland ports, destined for Great Britain or for foreign countries. The origin of the goods is not necessarily in Northern Ireland.

### Tonnage

The weight of goods transported, including crates and other packaging.

### Road goods vehicles

Road goods vehicles include road goods vehicles (with accompanying trailers) and unaccompanied road goods trailers.

### Non-freight vehicles

Non-freight vehicles include passenger cars, motorcycles and accompanying trailers / caravans and passenger buses.

### Lift on-Lift off (Lo-Lo) traffic

Lift on-Lift off (Lo-Lo) refers to standard shipping containers that are lifted on or off ships.

**TEU (twenty-foot equivalent units)**

This is a standardised measure to allow for the different sizes of container boxes.

Size	TEU
20ft	1
40ft	2
>20ft & <40ft	1.5
>40ft	2.25