Northern Ireland Ports Traffic 2020

09 September 2021

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 2020 was 27.1 million tonnes[1], a decrease of 1.1% compared to 27.4 million tonnes the previous year. Total freight traffic through United Kingdom (UK) ports in 2020 was 438.9 million tonnes, compared to 482.5 million tonnes the previous year, a decrease of 9.0%.

- Over the year in NI, the total tonnage of inward traffic decreased by 1.9% to 16.3 million tonnes, and outward traffic increased by 0.1% to 10.8 million tonnes. For the UK as a whole, the volume of inward traffic for 2020 decreased by 10.6% to 279.1 million tonnes and outward traffic decreased by 6.2% to 159.8 million tonnes.

- The majority of total NI traffic came through the Belfast Port (68.6%), while Warrenpoint accounted for the second highest level of total traffic (11.8%), followed by 10.1% through the Port of Larne. The most popular UK port was London, which handled 11.0% of total UK port traffic in 2020.

- A total of 839,071 road goods vehicles passed through Northern Ireland ports in 2020 – a decrease of 3.3% from 867,698 in 2019. In total, 7.0 million road goods vehicles passed through the UK in 2020 – a decrease of 5.1% from 2019.

- A total of 296,094 non-freight vehicles passed through Northern Ireland ports in 2020. This compared with a figure of 468,165 in 2019 – a decrease of 36.8%. In total, 2.0 million non-freight vehicles passed through the UK in 2020 – a decrease of 67.4% from 2019.

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[1] Please note that this figure includes all major and minor ports, see Table 1 on NI Ports Traffic

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 (2020) are available on the DfT Statistics website:

UK Port Freight Statistics 2020

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 2019

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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 2020 was 27.1 million tonnes

- This represented a decrease of 1.1% on the figure of 27.4 million tonnes for 2019

- In 2020, the majority of total NI traffic came through Belfast Port (68.9%)

Figure 1: Total tonnage through NI Ports has been gradually increasing over the last 20 years

Total thousand tonnes for inward and outward traffic for Northern Ireland, 1998-2020
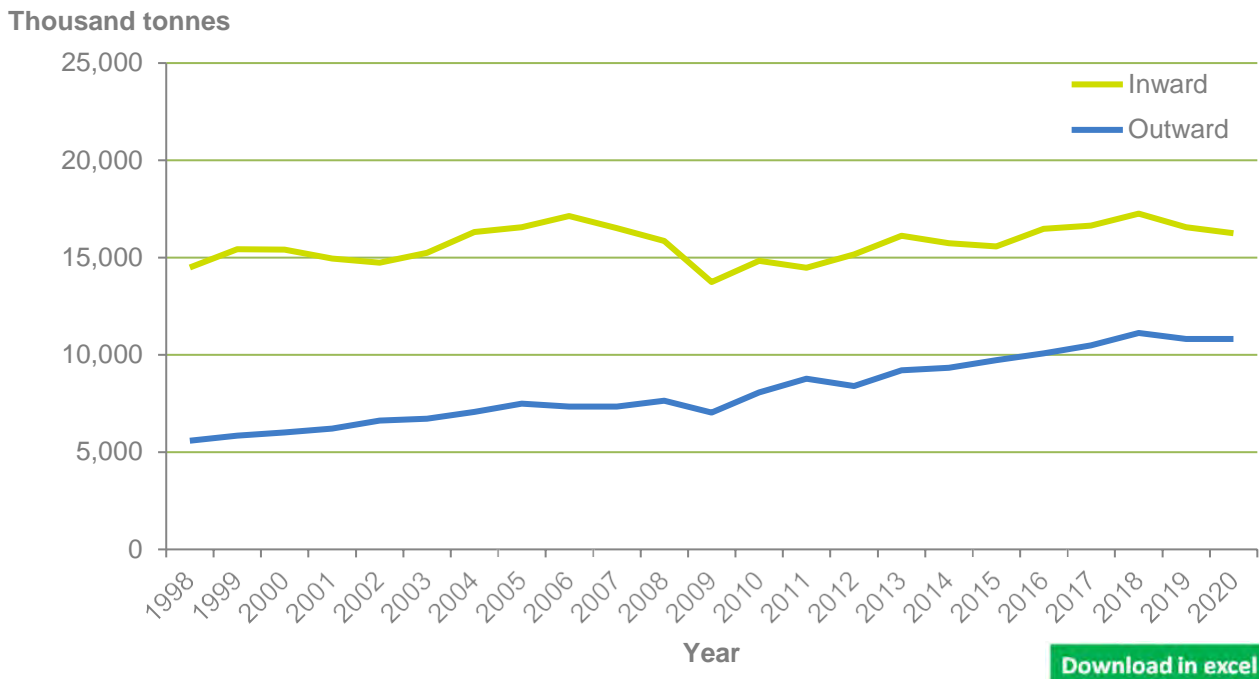

Figure 1 above shows that the total tonnage handled at Northern Ireland ports has been increasing over the last 20 years. Inward tonnage has slightly increased over the 20 year period, peaking in 2006 prior to the 2007 to 2009 recession, and generally increasing thereafter prior to the fall in 2020. Outward tonnage has seen a very strong growth over the last 20 years, from some 6.0 million tonnes in 2000 to 10.8 million tonnes in 2020.

The **total tonnage** through Northern Ireland ports has exceeded 25 million tonnes of total traffic in each of the last eight years. In 2020 it amounted to 27.1 million tonnes, which:

- comprised 16.3 million tonnes of inward traffic and 10.8 million tonnes of outward traffic

- represented a decrease of 1.1% on the figure of 27.4 million tonnes in 2019, which comprised 16.6 million tonnes of inward traffic and 10.8 million tonnes of outward traffic

Of all **NI ports** in 2020:

- the majority of total traffic came through the Belfast Port (68.6%), with the remainder coming through Warrenpoint (11.8%), Larne (10.1 %), Londonderry (6.5%) and other minor ports (3.0%)

- the majority of inward traffic came through the Belfast Port (67.7%), with 10.0 % through Warrenpoint, 10.0% through Londonderry, 9.2% through Larne and the remainder through other minor ports (3.0%)

- 69.9% of outward traffic went through the Belfast Port, with 14.5% through Warrenpoint, 11.3% through Larne and the remainder through Londonderry (1.3%) and other minor ports (2.9%)

- In 2020, Belfast remained the UK port that handles the most domestic traffic – 12.3 million tonnes.

In 2020, total freight traffic through **UK ports** was 438.9 million tonnes, which:

- was a decrease of 9.0% on the figure in 2019 (482.5 million tonnes)
- was some 24.9% below the peak in the series in 2005 (584.5 million tonnes)
- comprised 279.1 million tonnes of inward traffic, a decrease of 10.6% since 2019
- comprised 160.0 million tonnes of outward traffic, a decrease of 6.2% since 2019.

Of all **UK ports** in 2020:

- London was the UK's leading port, handling 47.4 million tonnes (10.8% of UK traffic), followed by Grimsby and Immingham with 45.6 million tonnes (10.4%), Milford Haven with 33.6 million tonnes (7.7%) and Liverpool with 31.1 million tonnes (7.1%).

Northern Ireland Ports data contained in this section can be found in Table 1 of the Northern Ireland Ports Traffic 2020 file on the NISRA Ports Traffic webpage.

UK Port Data contained in this section can be found in table port0101 of the Department for Transports Port Freight Annual Statistics: 2020 tables.

2 Road goods vehicles through principal ports

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

Key points

- Just under 0.84 million **road goods vehicles** passed through NI ports

- Belfast accounted for 66% of this traffic

Figure 2: Increase in the number of road goods vehicles at Northern Ireland ports over last 20 years

Road goods vehicles (units) - Northern Ireland, 1998-2020
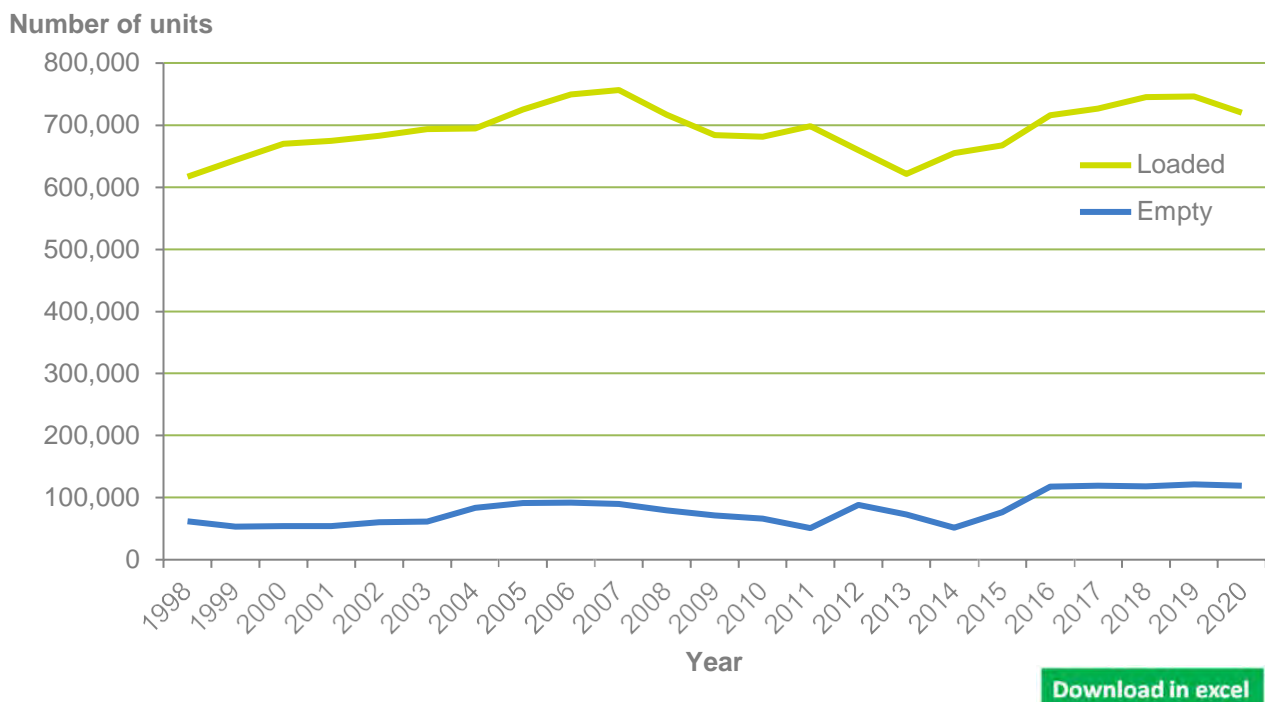

Figure 2 above shows that the number of road goods vehicles passing through Northern Ireland ports has been increasing over the last 20 years. Total road goods vehicle units have increased by 15.8%, from 725,000 units in 2000 to 839,000 units in 2020. Loaded road goods vehicles has slightly increased over the 20 year period, by 7.4% from 2000. Empty road goods vehicles have seen a very strong growth over the last 20 years, increasing by 119.1% from 55,000 units in 2000 to 119,000 units in 2020.

A total of 839,071 road goods vehicles passed through **Northern Ireland ports** in 2020, which:

- represented a decrease of 3.3% on 2019 figures
- comprised 421,678 road goods vehicles arriving in NI and 417,393 leaving
- included 719,581 loaded and 119,490 empty road goods vehicles
- mostly passed through the Belfast Port (66.3%), with the remainder passing through the Port of Larne (22.0%) and Warrenpoint (11.7%)
- was 15.8% above the number of road goods vehicles passing through ports in 2000.

A total of 7.0 million road goods vehicles passed through **UK ports** in 2020, which:

- represented a decrease of 5.2% on 2019 figures
- comprised 3.5 million road goods vehicles inward and 3.5 million outward
- passed in largest numbers through the Port of Dover, accounting for 2.3 million road goods vehicles or 32.4% of the total UK road goods vehicle traffic.

Northern Ireland Ports data contained in this section can be found in Table 2 and Table 2a of the Northern Ireland Ports Traffic 2020 file on the NISRA Ports Traffic webpage.

UK Port Data contained in this section can be found in table port0499 of the Department for Transports Port Freight Annual Statistics: 2020 tables.

3 Non-freight vehicles through principal ports

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

Key points

- Over 296,000 **non-freight vehicles** passed through NI ports

- Belfast accounted for 80.3% of the traffic

Figure 3: Steady decline in non-freight vehicles through Northern Ireland ports over last 20 years

Unit load carrier non-freight vehicles - Northern Ireland, 1998-2020
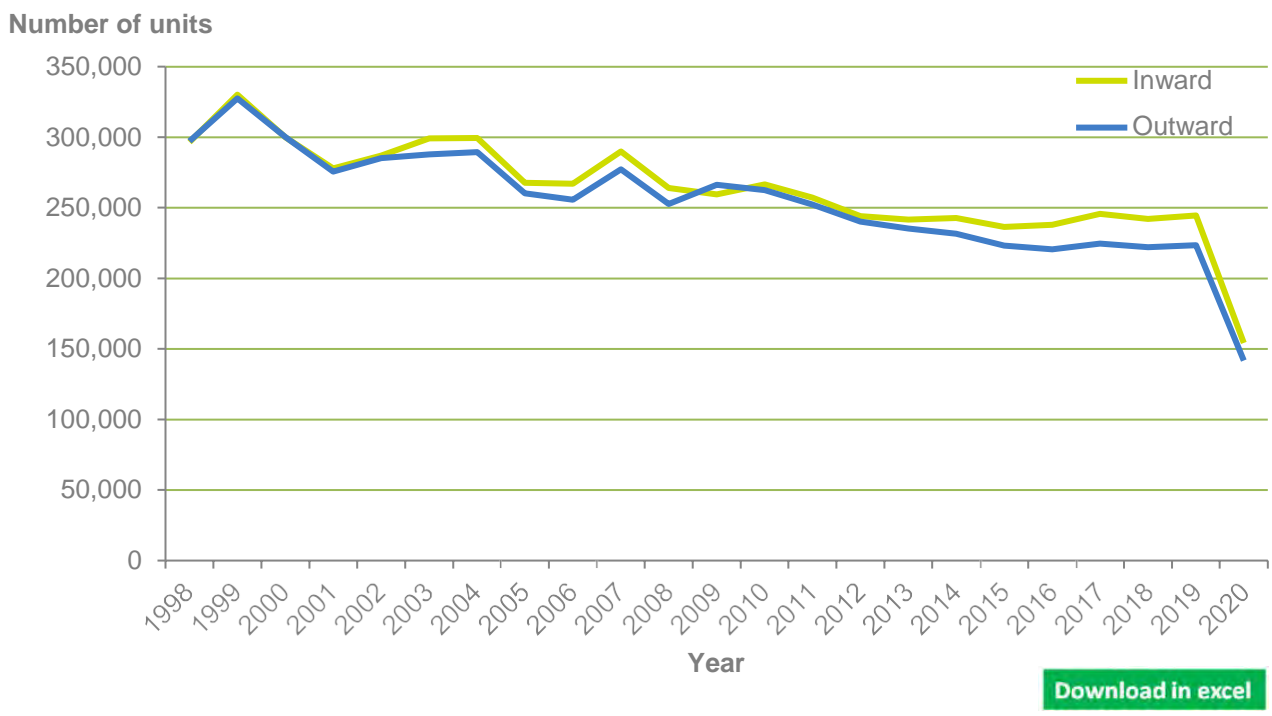

Figure 3 above shows that there has been a steady decline in the number of non-freight vehicles passing through Northern Ireland ports over the last 20 years, with a similar declining trend in both the inward and outward flow of non-freight vehicles. Total non-freight vehicle units have decreased by 55.0% since 1999, which is the peak in the data series with 658,000 non-freight vehicles. There was a decline to 468,000 non-freight vehicles passing through NI ports in 2019; however due to the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns and travel restrictions the number of non-freight vehicles passing through NI ports decreased to 296,000 units in 2020.

A total of 296,094 non-freight vehicles passed through **Northern Ireland ports** in 2020, which:

- represented a decrease of 36.8% on 2019 figures
- comprised 154,285 vehicles arriving in NI and 141,809 leaving
- mostly passed through the Belfast Port (80.3%), with the remainder passing through the Port of Larne (19.7%)
- was 55.0% below the number of non-freight vehicles passing through ports in 1999.

A total of 2.0 million non-freight vehicles passed through **UK ports** in 2020, which:

- represented a decrease of 67.4% on 2019 figures
- comprised 1.0 million non-freight vehicles inward and 1.1 million outward
- passed in largest numbers through the Port of Dover, accounting for 0.6 million vehicles or 30.3% of the total UK non-freight vehicle traffic.

Northern Ireland Ports data contained in this section can be found in Table 3 of the Northern Ireland Ports Traffic 2020 file on the NISRA Ports Traffic webpage.

UK Port Data contained in this section can be found in table port0499 of the Department for Transports Port Freight Annual Statistics: 2020 tables.

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

- Over 237,000 TEUs of **container traffic** passed through Northern Ireland Ports in 2020

- This represents a decrease of 10.5% on the 265,400 TEUs of container traffic in 2019

- Belfast accounted for 85.1% of TEUs container traffic

Figure 4: Slight increase in the number of twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs) traffic at Northern Ireland ports over last 20 years

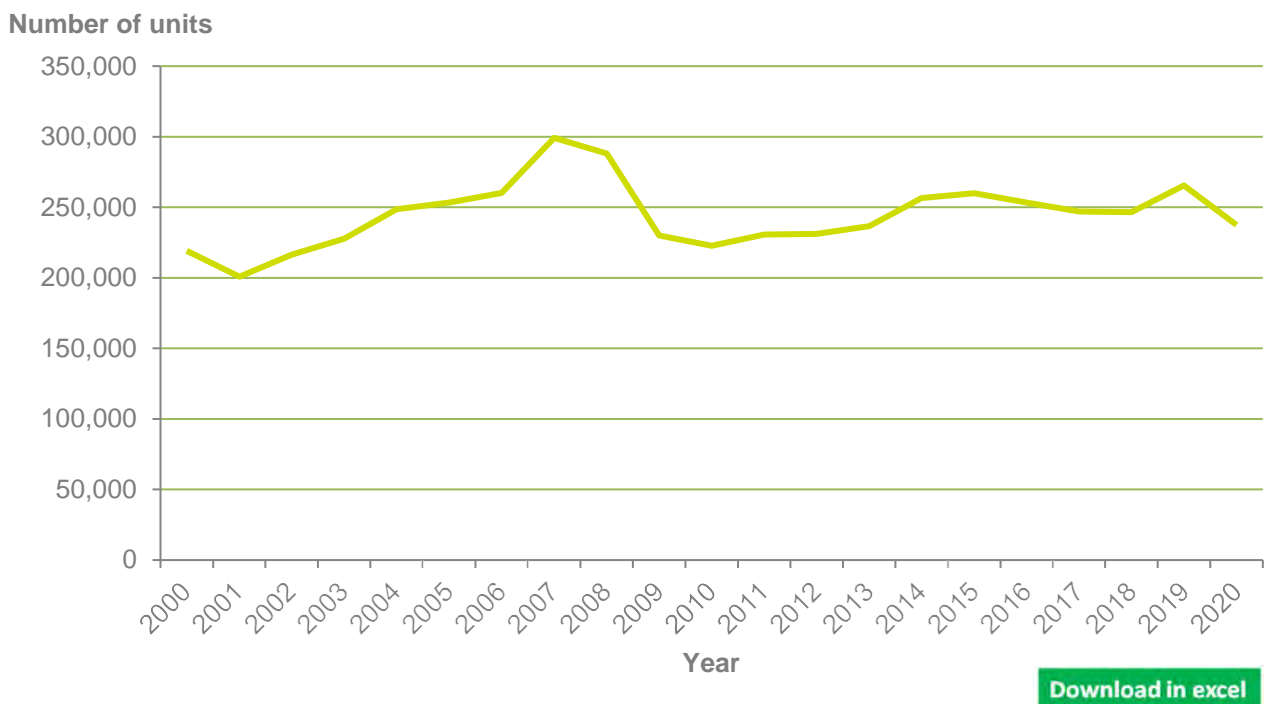**Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs) traffic - Northern Ireland, 2000-2020**

Figure 4 above shows an increase in the number of twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) over the last 20 years, by 22.8% from 2000. There was steady growth in the number of TEUs from 2000 to 2007, followed by a decline until 2010. The number of TEUs in 2020 is now 6.6% above the value recorded in 2010.

A total of 237,577 TEU containers passed through **Northern Ireland ports** in 2020, which:

- represented a decrease of 10.5% on 2019 figures

- comprised 120,138 TEUs inward and 117,439 outward

- mostly passed through the Belfast Port (85.1%), with the remainder passing through Warrenpoint (14.9%)

- was 22.8% above the number of TEU containers passing through NI ports in 2000.

A total of 9.7 million TEU containers passed through **UK ports** in 2020, which:

- was a decrease of 7.0% on 2019 figures

- comprised 5.0 million TEUs inward and 4.8 million outward

- passed in largest numbers through Felixstowe, accounting for 3.5 million TEUs or 35.9% of the total UK TEUs traffic.

Northern Ireland Ports data contained in this section can be found in Table 4 of the Northern Ireland Ports Traffic 2020 file on the NISRA Ports Traffic webpage.

UK Port Data contained in this section can be found in table port0499 of the Department for Transports Port Freight Annual Statistics: 2020 tables.

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 2000-2020 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:

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The next Northern Ireland Ports Traffic bulletin, including estimates for 2021, will be published in November 2022.

6   Index of tables

Northern Ireland Ports data (1998-2000) contained in this report can be found in the tables contained in the Northern Ireland Ports Traffic 2020 file on the NISRA Ports Traffic webpage. These include:

Table 1: Tonnage of goods through the principal ports in Northern Ireland

Table 2a: Number of road goods vehicles through the principal ports in Northern Ireland

Table 2b: Tonnage of goods on road goods vehicles through the principal ports in Northern Ireland

Table 3: Number of non-freight vehicles through the principal ports in Northern Ireland

Table 4: Number of twenty-foot equivalent units through the principal ports in Northern Ireland

UK Port Data contained in this section can be found in the tables of the Department for Transports Port Freight Annual Statistics: 2020 tables.

The following additional tables containing Northern Ireland Ports Traffic data for 1998-2020 can be found on the website:

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.

TEUs (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

Northern Ireland Major Ports Traffic Data

The microdata for Northern Ireland Ports Traffic provides data from 2000-2020 and can be found on the website:

The file contains a number of pivot tables that have been generated using the different variables available for the NI Major Ports Traffic data. These pivot tables can then be further manipulated by selecting the variables that are of interest and / or the particular elements of these variables that are of interest.

More information and a demonstration can be found on the 'User Guide' tab of the data file.

The variables included in the data set are:

Year: calendar year data from 2000 to 2020

Major Port: the name of the Northern Ireland Major Port (excludes any minor ports)

Region: Regions of the world NI Major Port freight is with

Country: Country of the world NI Major Port freight is with

Direction: Direction of port traffic (inwards or outwards)

Cargo Group: Cargo category based on the means by which goods are loaded onto or off of the vessel

Cargo Category: Numerical classification of port freight traffic for the EC Directive on statistical returns in respect of the carriage of goods and passengers by sea

Cargo Description: Matching description for cargo category

Tonnage (thousands): Weight of cargo in tonnes (thousands). Ro-Ro tonnage does not include the weight of the vehicle itself, only the cargo. No tonnage is recorded for passenger vehicles

Loaded Units (thousands): The number of loaded units (thousands) handled for each category

Empty Units (thousands): The number of empty units (thousands) handled for each category

Total Units (thousands): The total number of units (thousands) handled for each category (Loaded and Empty)

TEUs (twenty-foot equivalent units): This is a standardised measure to allow for the different sizes of container boxes