EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO

THE MOTOR VEHICLES (EXCHANGEABLE LICENCES) (AMENDMENT) ORDER (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2026

2026 No. 79

1. Introduction

1.1. This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Department for Infrastructure to accompany the Order (details above) which is laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

1.2. The Statutory Rule is made under Articles 19D(2)(b), (2A) and (2B) and 218 of the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1981 and is subject to the negative resolution procedure.

2. Purpose

2.1. The purpose of the Statutory Rule covered by this Memorandum is to designate Moldova as making satisfactory provision for the issue of certain classes of driving licences for the purpose of licence exchange. This will enable a person holding one of those licences to exchange it for a corresponding Northern Ireland licence.

3. Background

3.1. Under international agreements people coming to stay in Northern Ireland from outside the European Economic Area ("EEA") are allowed to drive small vehicles for up to a year on their valid national driving licence. To continue to drive after that period they must pass a NI driving test and obtain a full NI driving licence or they may exchange their driving licence for a NI licence if they hold a licence issued in a country or territory designated for the purposes of exchange of licences, subject to the normal requirements in respect of age and health.

3.2. In order to be designated the testing and licensing arrangements of the country or territory in question must have been assessed as being of a comparable standard to those in NI. Entitlement is generally only granted to drive small vehicles such as cars, small goods vehicles, vehicle combinations up to 3500kg maximum authorised mass, motorcycles, mopeds, tractors, pedestrian controlled vehicles and mowing machines with restrictions placed on some classes of vehicles in certain cases.

3.3. The Motor Vehicles (Exchangeable Licences) Order (Northern Ireland) 2022 designates countries and territories as making satisfactory provision for the grant of certain classes of driving licences.

3.4. Most countries are designated in respect of licences to drive all categories of mopeds and motorcycles, cars, small goods vehicles and vehicle combinations up to 3,500kg maximum authorised mass, tractors, pedestrian controlled vehicles and mowing machines.

3.5. Licences granted in designated countries or territories or granted by them by way of exchange for a licence granted in an EEA State, the United Kingdom, one of the other countries or territories designated in the Order or in Gibraltar, Jersey, Guernsey or the Isle of Man to a person who passed the driving test in the respective State, country or territory may be exchanged for a corresponding NI licence.

3.6. Specific provision is made in respect of driving licences which authorise the driving of certain categories of mopeds and motorcycles and are dependent on where the driving test was passed.

3.7. In the case of all designations if the licence was granted to a person who passed a driving test in a vehicle with automatic transmission the licence shall only be exchangeable only to the extent that it authorises the driving of vehicles with automatic transmission.

3.8. This Order designates Moldova in respect of licences which authorise the driving of a class of vehicle corresponding to a class of vehicle in licensing category B (cars and light vans).

4. Consultation

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency consulted with representative organisations and the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency assessed Moldova as having driver testing and licencing standards equivalent to those in the UK. A further separate consultation exercise in NI was not considered necessary given the non-contentious nature of the proposals and the fact that the proposed Order would have no impact on businesses or public services and will reduce legislative disparity between NI and GB in the area of exchangeable driving licences.

5. Equality Impact

5.1. In accordance with its duty under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, the Department conducted a screening exercise on the proposals and concluded that they did not have implications for equality of opportunity. The measures will not affect any group disproportionately. In light of this the Department considered that an equality impact assessment is not necessary.

6. Regulatory Impact

6.1. A Regulatory Impact Assessment was not considered necessary as there are no costs to business, the public sector or the voluntary sector associated with the Order.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 There are no financial implications associated with the Order.

8. Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998

8.1. The Department is satisfied that the Order is compatible with section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

9. European Union Withdrawal and Windsor Framework Implications

9.1. The Order does not relate to the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the European Union.

9.2. The Order does not engage the Windsor Framework.

10. Parity or replicatory measure

10.1 The Order is based on similar provisions contained in GB S.I 2025 No. 811

11. Additional information

11.1. Not applicable.