

Spring Skills Bulletin 2023

Young people's contribution to the Irish
labour force

(Q3 2019 - Q3 2022)



1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the associated restrictions that began in 2020 had a significant impact on young people's participation in the Irish labour market. With the easing of restrictions and the bounce back of the economy, those aged 15-24 years have seen employment levels recover and an increased demand for labour. The youth population provides an important source of flexible employment (part-time) to the Irish economy especially for particular sectors and occupations. In quarter 3 2022, there were a total of 311,900 young people (aged 15-24 years) employed, representing 13.3% of the total labour force. Between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022, employment increased by 45,300, or 17.0%, for this age cohort, compared to a 9.9% increase across all age groups.

This report has the following three aims:

1. track the most recent trends in the labour force participation of the youth population in Ireland and to make some comparisons with patterns across the EU
2. consider recent changes in the employment rate and youth population to establish if the higher labour force participation can be attributed to a real increase in young people working or demographic factors
3. discuss several key aspects of youth employment compared to the rest of the working age population in Ireland; this will involve looking at the share of part-time/full-time work along with some indicators of precarious employment such as temporary contracts and the National Minimum Wage, and youth employment trends by economic sector and occupation.

2. Key trends in youth participation

2.1. Labour force, employment and population

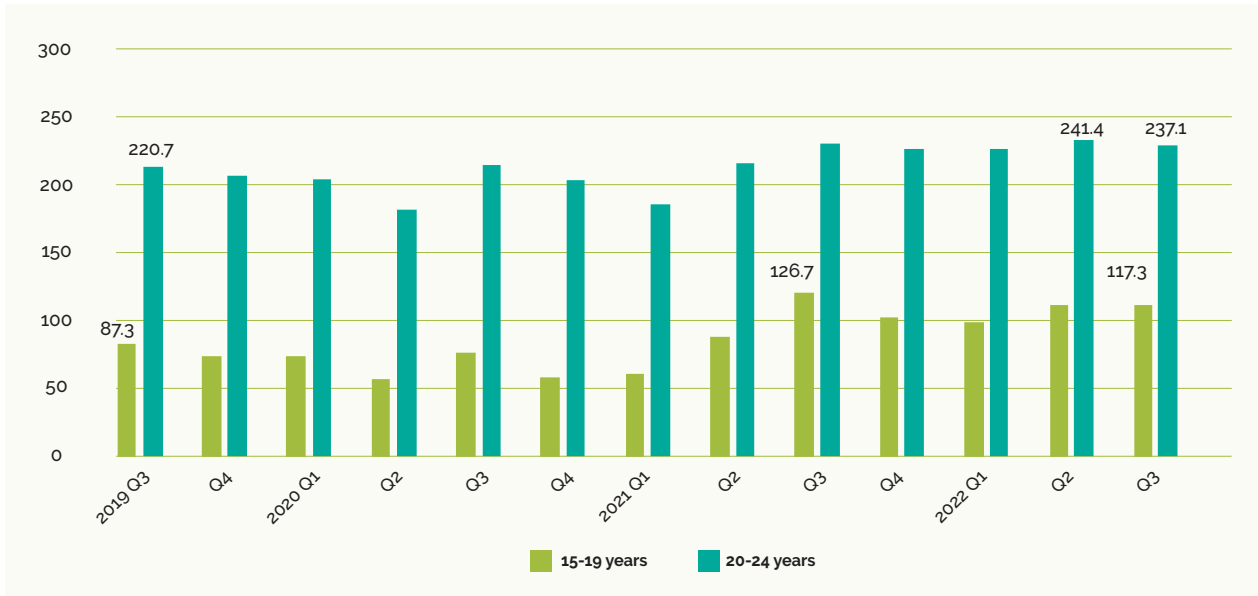
Labour force: labour force participation measures the proportion of the population who are actively engaging in the labour force, i.e. either employed or unemployed. CSO data shows that the number of persons in the labour force (aged 15+ years) increased from 2.45 million in quarter 3 2019 to 2.67 million in quarter 3 2022, which represents a rise of 221,800 (or 9.0%). Figure 1 examines labour force participation rates for those aged 15-24 years and highlights the fact that participation rates were highest for those aged 20-24 years over the time period examined, which at 74.4% in quarter 3 2022 was twice as high as the participation rate of 35.1% for those aged 15-19 years, reflecting the high share of this age cohort engaged in education and training. However, the 15-19 year old cohort experienced the largest increase in participation rates over the period from quarter 3 2019 to quarter 3 2022, increasing by 7.8 percentage points compared to 0.7 percentage points for those aged 20-24 years.

Figure 1. Labour force participation rates (%) by age (15-24 years), Q3 2019 - Q3 2022



In quarter 3 2022, there were 354,400 persons aged 15-24 year olds in the labour force. Figure 2 shows that the number of young people in the labour force increased particularly in mid-2021, peaking at 126,700 for 15-19 year olds in quarter 3 2021. The highest number of 20-24 year olds in the labour force occurred in quarter 2 2022 at 241,400 persons.

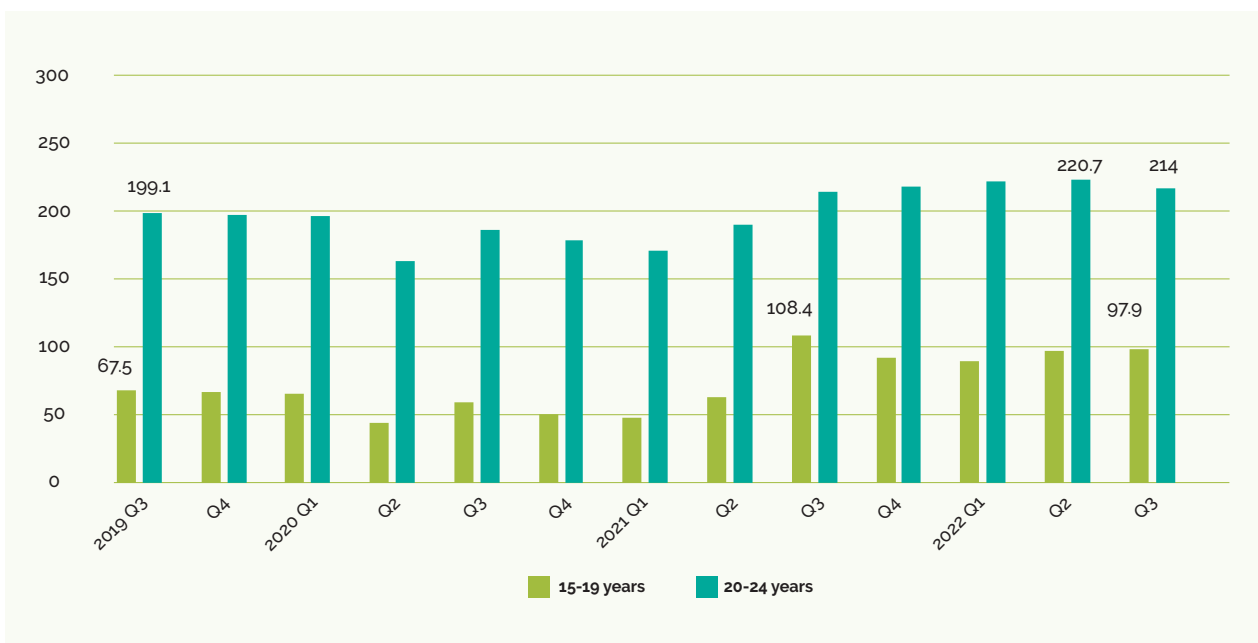
Figure 2. Labour force (000s) by age (15-24 years), Q3 2019 – Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO data

Employment: the numbers employed (aged 15+ years) went up from 2.32 million in quarter 3 2019 to 2.55 million in quarter 3 2022, an increase of 230,900 (or 9.9%). Those employed aged 15-24 years increased by 45,300, or 17%, to reach 311,900 in quarter 3 2022. In quarter 3 2022, 68.6% of all youth employed were aged 20-24 years (214,000 persons), while 31.4% were aged 15-19 years (97,900 persons). Figure 3 shows that employment declined for both those aged 15-19 years and 20-24 years during the COVID-19 restrictions. However, between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022, the largest increase in employment was for those aged 15-19 years, with an increase of 30,400 persons employed; employment for those aged 20-24 years increased by 14,900 persons over the same period.

Figure 3. Employment (000s) by age (15-24 years), Q3 2019 – Q3 2022

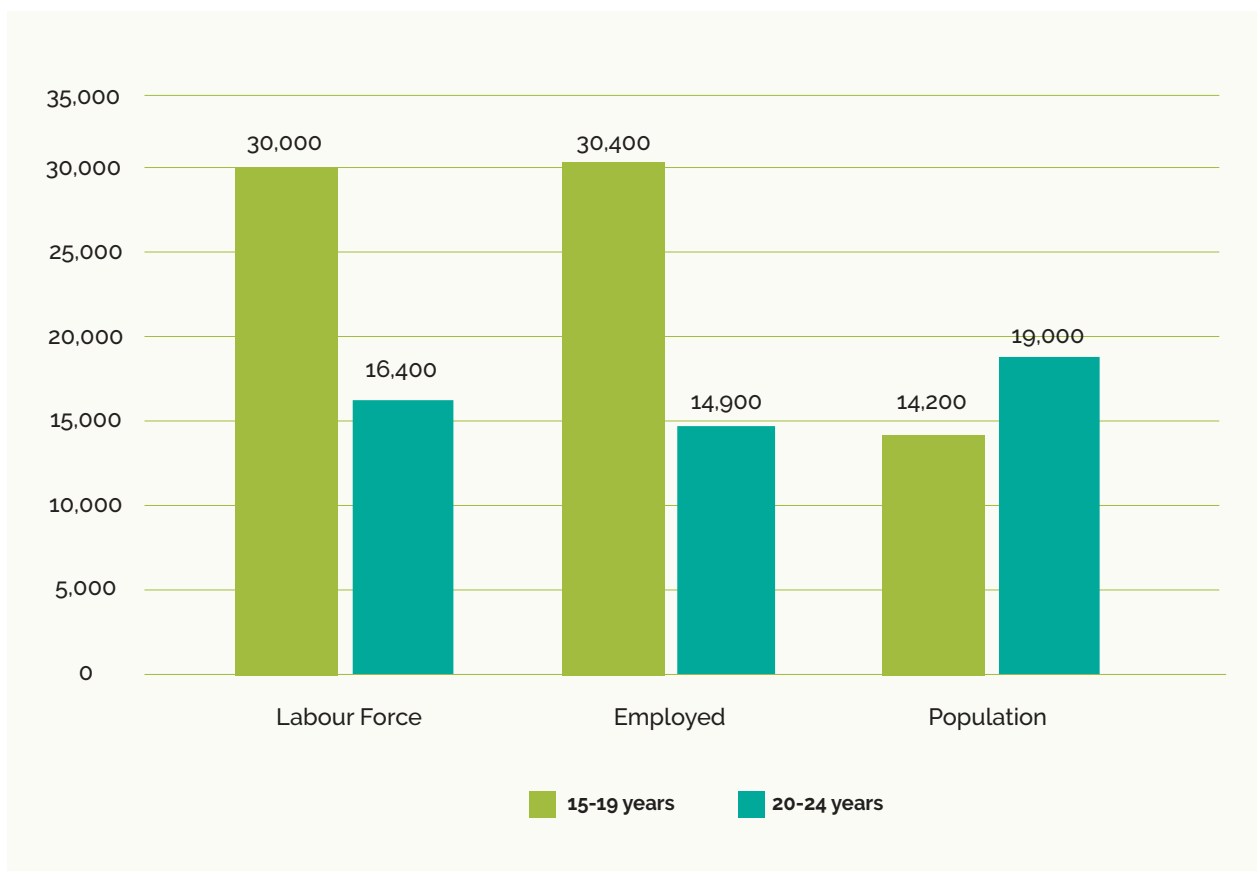


Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO data

Population: the number of persons aged 15-24 years old increased from 619,800 in quarter 3 2019 to 652,900 in quarter 3 2022 (Eurostat). While population growth exceeded the employment and labour force growth for those aged 20-24 years, the reverse was the case for 15-19 year olds, with employment growth far exceeding population growth. Figure 4 shows that the greater participation of the youth population was driven by a real increase in employment and the labour force by the 15-19 year old age cohort over this three-year period.

- The number of 15-19 year olds in the population increased by 14,200 (4.4%) between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022, but their labour force participation jumped by 30,000 (34.4%), and the number of those employed increased by 30,400 (45.0%).
- Looking at 20-24 year olds, the increasing number in the labour force (+16,400) and employed (+14,900) were slightly less than the population increase (+19,000).

Figure 4. Change in the labour force, employment and population aged 15-24 years, Q3 2019 - Q3 2022



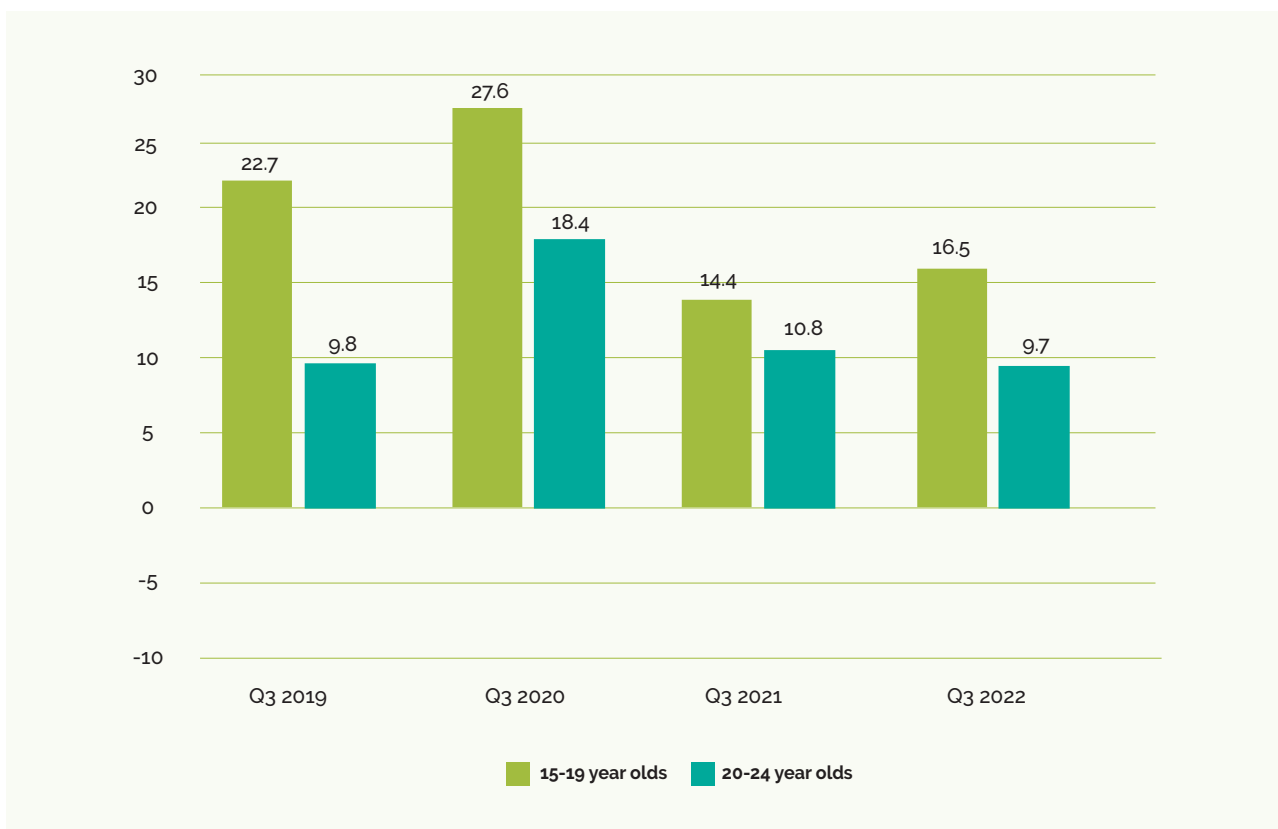
Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

2.2. Declining rate in youth unemployment

The unemployment rate measures the number of unemployed persons (aged 15-74 years) as a percentage of the labour force. Between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022, the overall unemployment rate fell from 5.2% to 4.5%. Corresponding to an increase in employment amongst the youth population over this time, there was a general decline in the rate of youth unemployment over the period, in particular amongst those aged 15-19 years, despite increases during COVID-19 restrictions, as can be seen in Figure 5.

- The unemployment rate for 15-19 year olds fell from 22.7% (19,800 persons) in quarter 3 2019 to 16.5% (19,400 persons) in quarter 3 2022, a decline of 6.2 percentage points.
- The unemployment rate for 20-24 year olds returned to pre-COVID-19 levels by quarter 3 2022 at 9.7%, a decline of just 0.1 percentage points compared to quarter 3 2019, although in absolute terms the number of unemployed persons increased from 21,700 to 23,100 over this time.¹

Figure 5. Unemployment rates (%) by age (15-24 years), Q3 2019 - Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO data

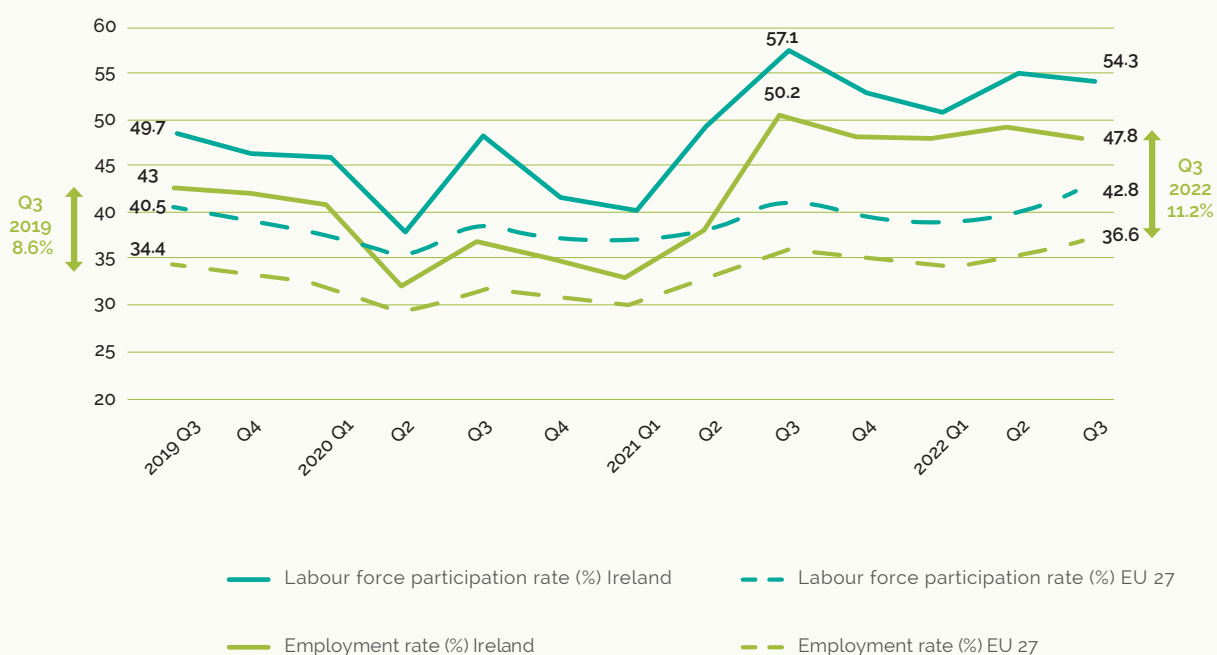
¹ When the two youth age groups are combined, the number of unemployed 15-24 year olds rose slightly from 41,400 in quarter 3 2019 to 42,400 in quarter 3 2022. However, the unemployment rate for 15-24 year olds fell from 13.5% to 12.0% over this time (CSO Labour Force Survey). Any small discrepancies in the data are due to rounding.

EU comparison: Labour force participation and employment rate

Figure 6 shows the labour force participation rate² and employment rate for the 15-24 year age group³ in Ireland and the EU 27 average between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022.

- The labour force participation rate and employment rate of those aged 15-24 years old are both higher in Ireland compared to the EU 27 average over the three-year period. For example, in quarter 3 2022, the youth employment rate in Ireland was 47.8% in quarter 3 2022, which was 11.2 percentage points higher than the EU 27 average of 36.6%.
- The gap between the rates in Ireland and the EU 27 average increased over the three-year period. Therefore, Ireland's youth employment and labour force participation rates have been increasing at a faster pace compared to the EU 27 average over this time.

Figure 6. Labour force participation and employment rates (%) for the 15-24 year age group in Ireland and EU 27 average, Q3 2019 - Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

² Eurostat data refers to the 'activity rate' and is the same as the labour force participation rate which measures the share of the population (aged 15+ years) in the labour force (i.e. those who are employed or unemployed).

³ This data table in the Eurostat data does not give a separate breakdown for the 15-19 and 20-24 year age groups.

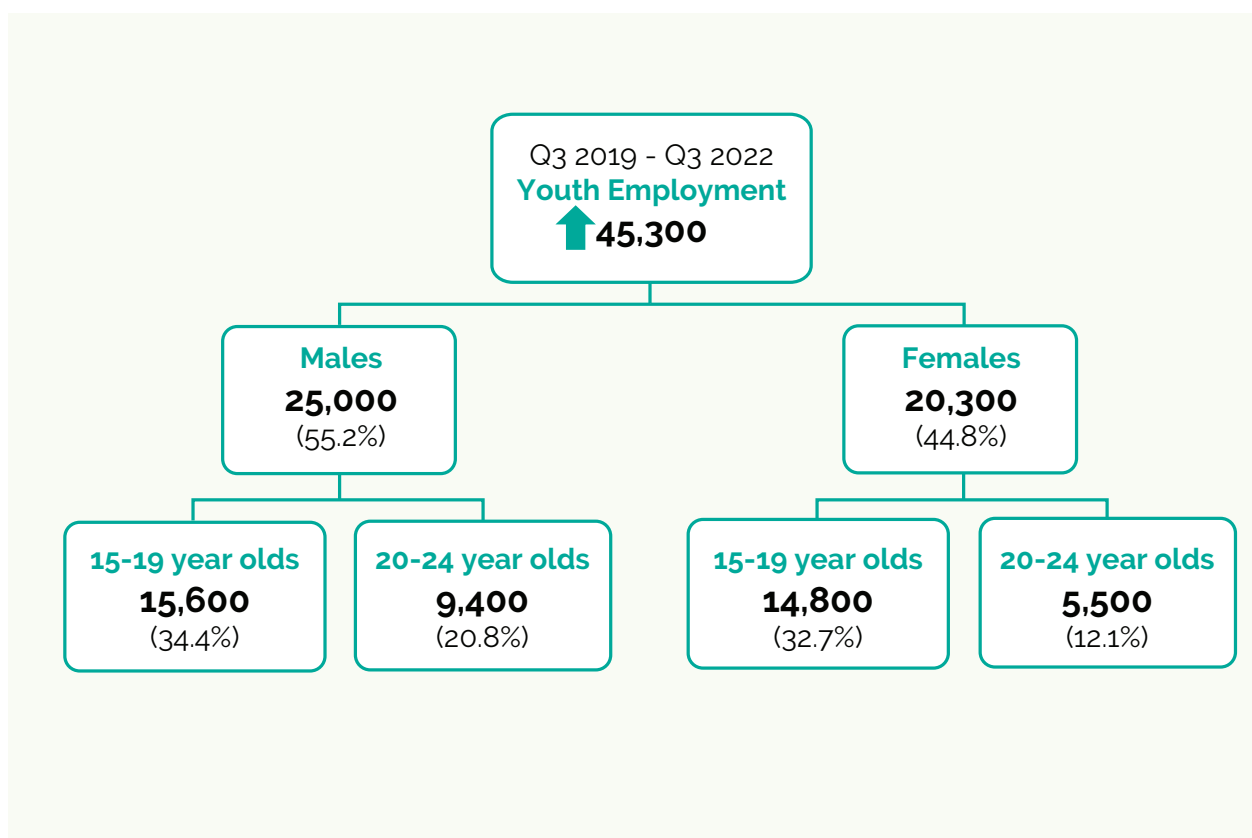
3. Socio-economic characteristics of employed young people

3.1. Gender

In quarter 3 2022, the gender breakdown of all employed individuals (aged 15+ years) was 53.7% male (1,371,800 persons) and 46.3% female (1,182,500 persons). Those aged 15-24 years in employment follow a similar gender breakdown with 52.7% male and 47.3% female (CSO Labour Force Survey). Figure 7 presents data on the **increase in youth employment** (+45,300) by age and gender between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022. It shows that:

- males accounted for 55.2% of the increase in youth employment compared to 44.8% who were female, which is similar to the overall gender breakdown of employed youth
- females aged 20-24 years had the smallest increase in employment at 5,500 representing 12.1% of the total increase in youth employment.

Figure 7. Total increase (and % share of increase) in youth employment by age and gender between Q3 2019 & Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

3.2. Education level

The general breakdown of all persons employed (aged 15+ years) by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) level⁴ in quarter 3 2022 was as follows:

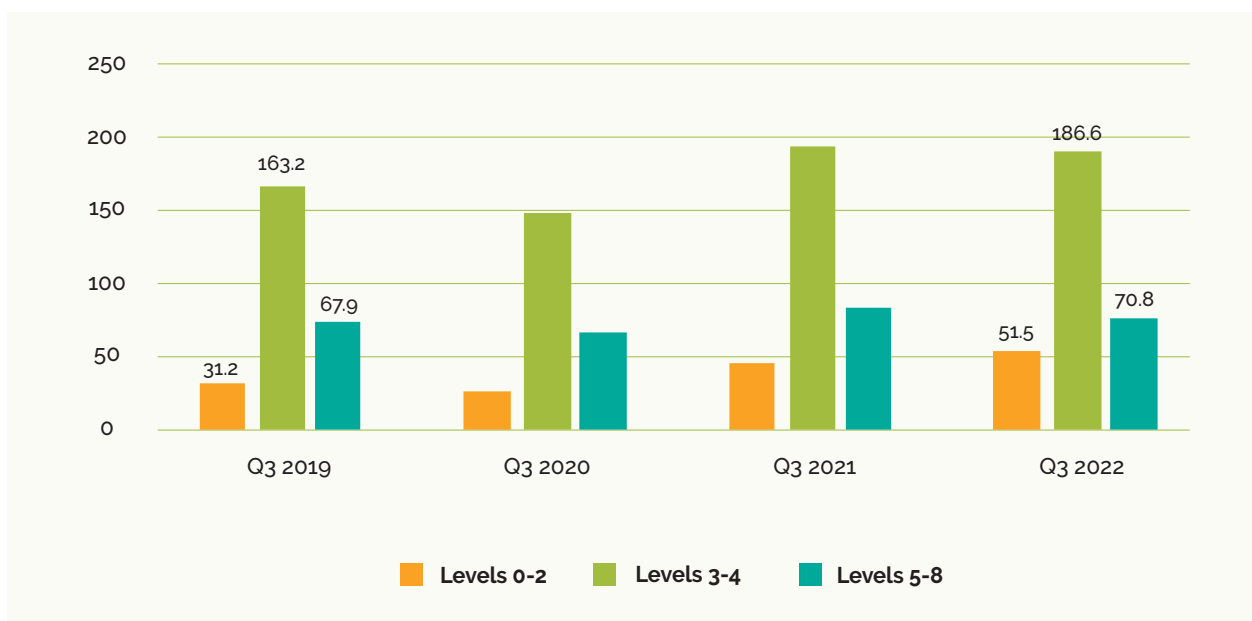
- 225,200 persons (9.2%) at levels 0-2, equivalent to at most a Junior Cert
- 888,100 persons (36.2%) at levels 3-4, equivalent to a Leaving Cert or FET
- 1,292,300 persons (52.6%) at levels 5-8⁵, equivalent to third level (CSO Labour Force Survey).

In contrast, data for employed 15-24 year olds shows that 60.4% (186,600 persons) have reached an education level of 3-4 (Figure 8). However, as many of these young people may be currently studying and planning to engage in further/higher education, this figure is likely to change over time.

Figure 8 also shows that between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022:

- the number of employed young people with ISCED levels 0-2 increased from 31,200 to 51,500 (+20,300 or +65.1%), while those with ISCED levels 3-4 rose from 163,200 to 186,600 (+23,400 or +14.3%)
- those with an ISCED level 5-8 went up slightly from 67,900 to 70,800 (+2,900 or +4.3%)
- a breakdown of the increase in youth employment (+45,300) by education level shows that 51.7% (23,400) was accounted for by persons with ISCED levels 3-4, and 44.8% (20,300) was represented by those with ISCED levels 0-2.⁶

Figure 8. Employed 15-24 year olds (000s) by educational attainment (ISCED 2011 level), Q3 2019 - Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

4 The ISCED 2011 levels are as follows: levels 0-2 (less than primary, primary and lower secondary education); levels 3-4 (upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education); and levels 5-8 (tertiary education). See <https://uis.unesco.org/sites/default/files/documents/international-standard-classification-of-education-isced-2011-en.pdf> (accessed 28th February 2023).

5 The education level for the remaining 49,200 persons (2.0%) was given as 'other' or 'not stated'.

6 The relatively small remaining share (3.5%) is accounted for by missing data and non-response. For example, there was no data on the number of 15-19 year olds with ISCED levels 5-8 as most were too young to have reached these higher education levels.

3.3 Citizenship

In terms of citizenship, non-Irish citizens made up 478,600 persons (or 18.7%) of all those employed (aged 15+ years) in quarter 3 2022 (CSO Labour Force Survey). However, the share of non-Irish citizens amongst young employed persons (aged 15-24 years) was smaller, making up 10.6% (or 33,300 persons) of all employed 15-24 year olds. Nonetheless, the number of employed non-Irish citizens aged 15-24 years increased from 24,000 in quarter 3 2019, which represents a rise of 9,300 people (+38.8%) (CSO, 2022). Therefore, of the 45,300 additional 15-24 year olds employed between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022, one in five were non-Irish citizens.

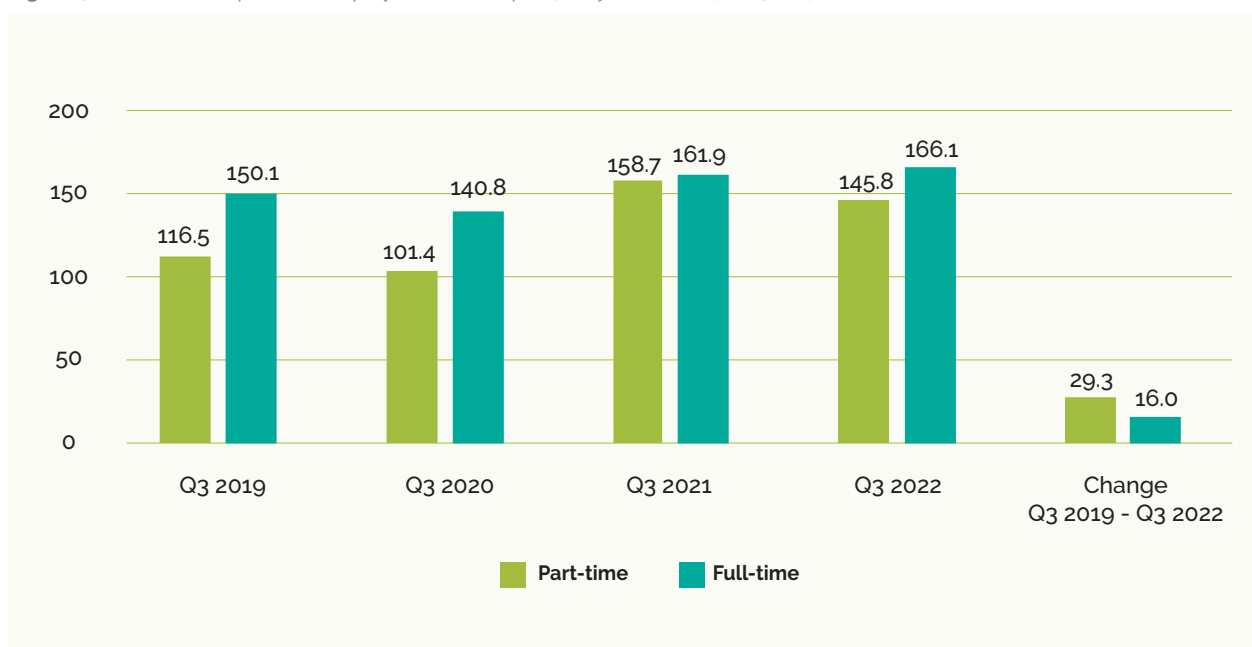
4. Key aspects of youth employment

4.1. Part-time and full-time employment

Figure 9 shows the number of persons in part-time and full-time employment aged 15-24 years between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022.

- In quarter 3 2022, 46.7% of employed 15-24 year olds (145,800) were working part-time while 53.2% (166,100) were working full-time. The likelihood of working part-time was nearly three times higher for young people aged 15-24 years (46.7%) compared to older workers aged 25+ years (17.4%) (Eurostat).
- The number of 15-24 year olds in part-time employment increased from 116,500 persons in quarter 3 2019 to 145,800 persons in quarter 3 2022, a rise of 29,300, and peaked at 158,700 in quarter 3 2021.
- Of the total increase in youth employment between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022 (+45,300), almost two thirds, 64.7% (29,300) related to part-time workers and 35.3% (16,000) to full-time workers.

Figure 9. Part-time and full-time employment (000s) for 15-24 year olds, Q3 2019 - Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

Additional data from the CSO Labour Force Survey on average hours worked per week for persons aged 15-89 years in employment⁷ shows that young people aged 15-19 years worked on average 22.8 hours per week compared to 33.3 hours for 20-24 year olds in quarter 3 2022.⁸ Indeed, these were the lowest average hours worked across all five-year age cohorts for those aged 15-64 years. Therefore, the likelihood of working part-time is higher amongst this younger age cohort, mostly due to the fact that many are still likely to be engaged in education/training.

EU comparison: Part-time and full-time youth employment

Figure 10 shows that in quarter 3 2022:

- young people aged 15-24 years were more likely to work part-time than those aged 25+ years in Ireland and across the EU (based on the EU 27 average)
- furthermore, employed young people aged 15-24 years in Ireland were more likely to work part-time (46.7%) compared to the EU 27 average (31.3%)
- in contrast, the share of employed 25+ year olds working part-time/full-time in Ireland and the EU 27 average are very similar, e.g. 17.4% work part-time in Ireland compared to 17.1% who work part-time based on the EU 27 average.

Figure 10. Share of employed 15-24 year olds and 25+ year olds (%) working part-time/full-time in Ireland and EU 27 average, Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

⁷ CSO Labour Force Survey, Table QLF49, see https://ws.cso.ie/public/api.restful/PxStat.Data.Cube_API.ReadDataset/QLF49/XLSX/2007/en (accessed on 28th February 2023).

⁸ The average weekly hours worked were 36.2 for all persons employed aged 15+ years in quarter 3 2022 (CSO Labour Force Survey).

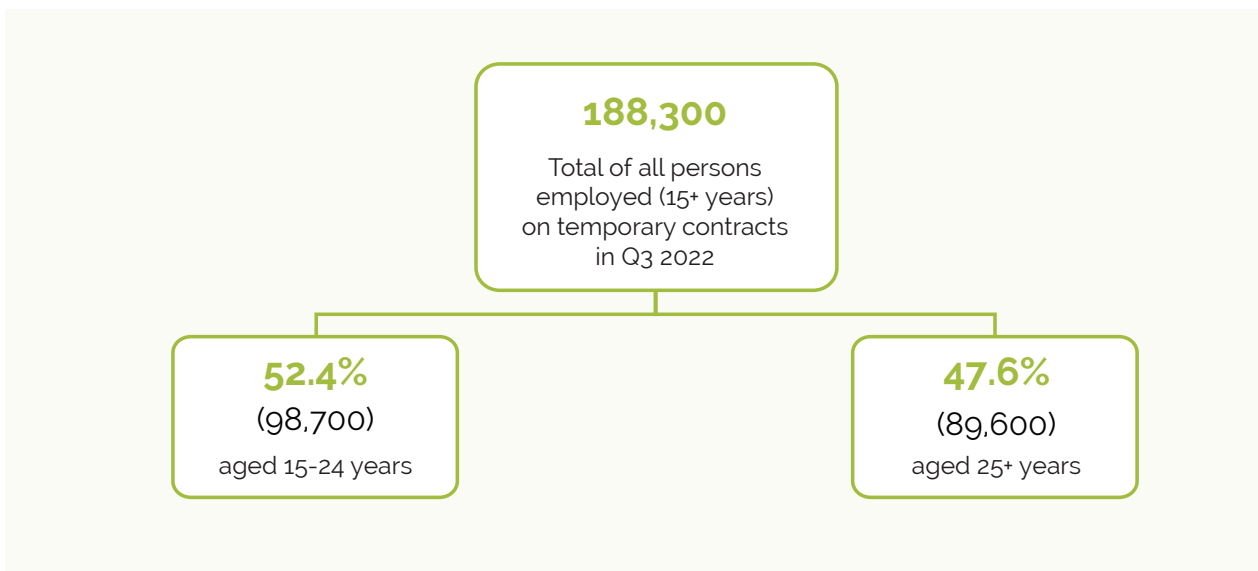
4.2. Students

Looking at CSO data on Principal Economic Status (PES), as expected, the majority of those employed who give their PES as 'Student' were aged 15-24 years old. In quarter 3 2022, there were 124,300 persons employed who classified themselves as students, of whom 115,900 (or 93.2%) were aged 15-24 years. In addition, the number of part-time employed young people aged 15-24 years who gave their PES as student increased from 62,800 in quarter 3 2019 to 99,300 in quarter 3 2022. Therefore, the tendency for young people to work part-time at the same time as studying remains a key feature of youth employment in the Irish labour market.

4.3. Temporary employment contracts

Temporary contracts can be an indicator of precarious employment as they do not give any certainty of work beyond a specified amount of time. Figure 11 shows that 188,300 persons were employed on a temporary contract in quarter 3 2022, 98,700 (or 52.4%) of whom were aged 15-24 years compared to 89,600 (or 47.6%) aged 25+ years. Therefore, young people were more likely to be employed on a temporary basis compared to older workers at this time.

Figure 11. Breakdown of persons employed on temporary contracts by age group (15-24 years and 25+ years), Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

In addition, CSO data shows that almost two thirds of young people aged 15-24 years on temporary contracts worked part-time (65.5%, or 64,600 people), while 34.5% (34,100) were employed full-time in quarter 3 2022. By contrast, older workers (25+ years) on temporary contracts were more likely to work full-time, at 57.7% (51,700), with the remaining 42.3% (37,900) working part-time.

EU comparison: Temporary employment contracts

Table 1 shows that:

- young people aged 15-24 years were more likely to be employed on a temporary contract than older workers (25+ years) in Ireland and across the EU (based on the EU 27 average)
- in quarter 3 2022, young employees aged 15-24 years were more likely to be on temporary contracts in the EU (51.2%, based on the EU 27 average) compared to their Irish counterparts (33.2%)
- in Ireland, between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022, the share of 15-24 year olds on a temporary contract fell by 5.6 percentage points, while it was similar in the EU (based on the EU 27 average) (+0.2 percentage points).

Table 1. Share of all employees with a temporary contract (%) by age in Ireland and EU 27 average, Q3 2019 & Q3 2022

	Q3 2019	Q3 2022	Change Q3 2019-Q3 2022
Ireland 15-24 years	38.8%	33.2%	-5.6%
EU 27 average 15-24 years	51.0%	51.2%	0.2%
Ireland 25+ years	6.1%	4.8%	-1.3%
EU 27 average 25+ years	11.8%	10.5%	-1.3%

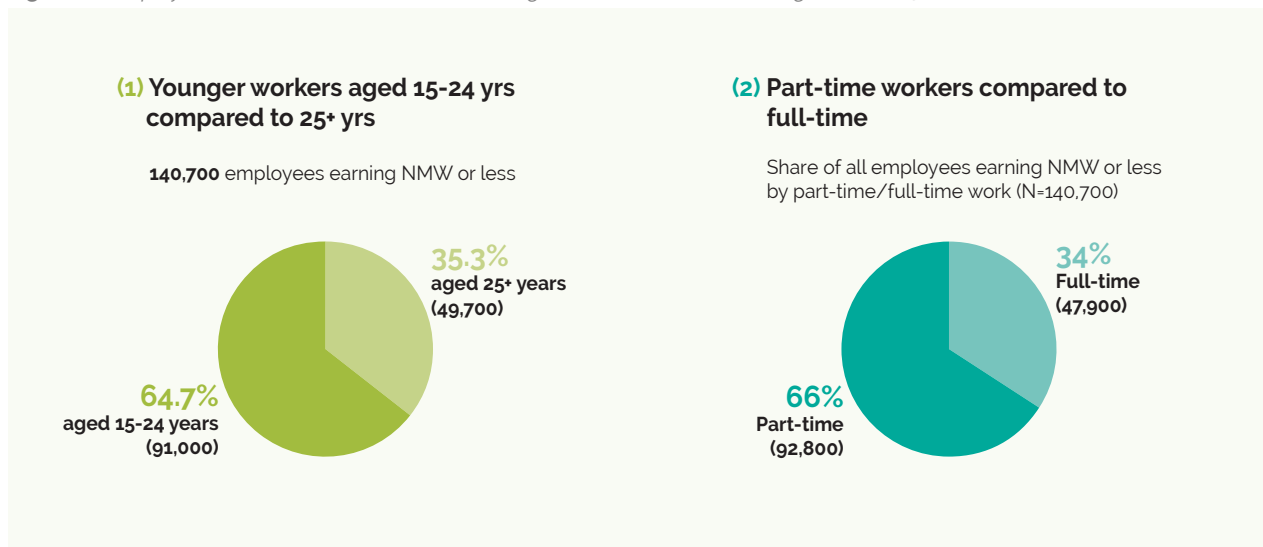
Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

4.4. National Minimum Wage earners: youth population and part-time employees

Since 1st January 2023, the National Minimum Wage has been set at €11.30 per hour for employees aged 20 years and over, with proportionately lower hourly rates for younger workers.⁹ The CSO Labour Force Survey data estimates show two employment characteristics typically associated with earning the National Minimum Wage (NMW) or less, as shown in Figure 12.

⁹ The hourly rate that applies for those aged under 20 years old is as follows: €10.17ph for 19 year olds (90% of the full NMW); €9.04 for 18 year olds (80% of the NMW); and €7.91ph for those aged under 18 years old (70% of the NMW). See <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/1786c-national-minimum-wage-increase-1-january/> (accessed on 28th February 2023).

Figure 12. Employment characteristics linked to earning the National Minimum Wage or less, Q3 2022



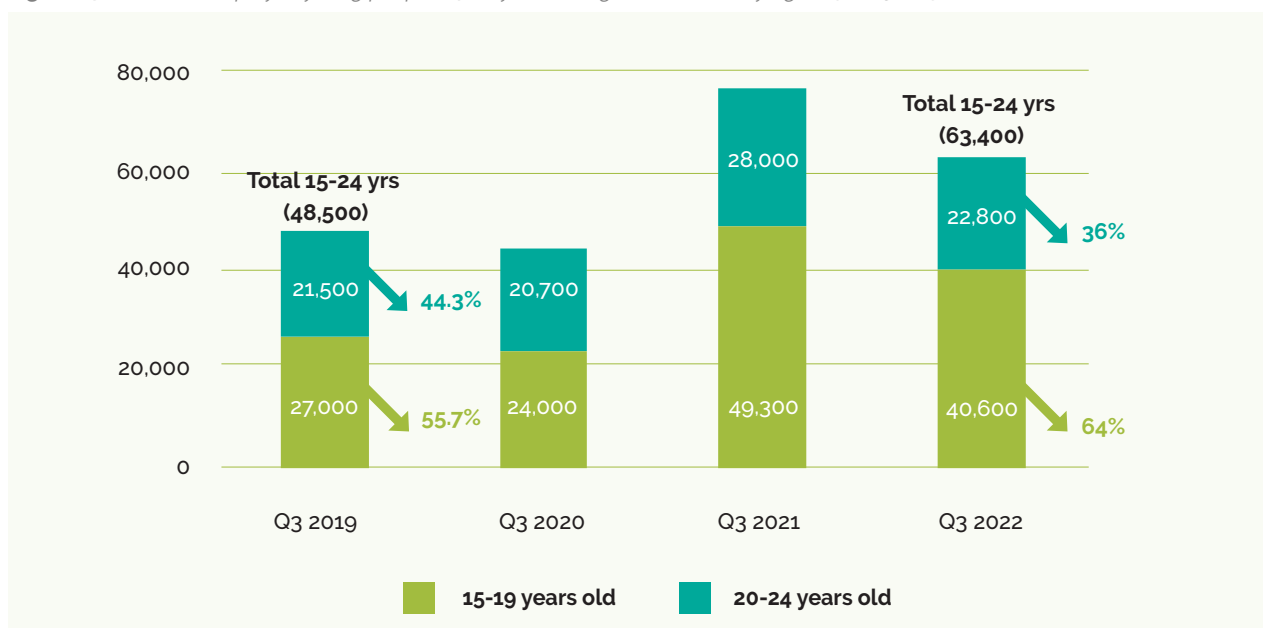
Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO data

Of the 91,000 15-24 year olds earning the NMW or less in quarter 3 2022, 55.7% were aged 15-19 years old (50,700 persons). Furthermore, young people aged **15-19 years old who work part-time** are more likely to be earning the NMW or less compared to those aged 20-24 years, as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13 shows that between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022:

- the number of young people working part-time who earned the NMW or less increased from 48,500 to 63,400 (+14,900), with a peak of 77,300 in quarter 3 2021
- the share of those aged 15-19 years working part-time on the NMW or less increased from 55.7% to 64.0%, while it fell from 44.3% to 36.0% for 20-24 year olds
- the increase of 14,900 young people working part-time earning the NMW represents one third (32.9%) of the total increase in youth employment (+45,300).

Figure 13. Part-time employed young people (15-24 yrs) earning NMW or less by age, Q3 2019 - Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of CSO data

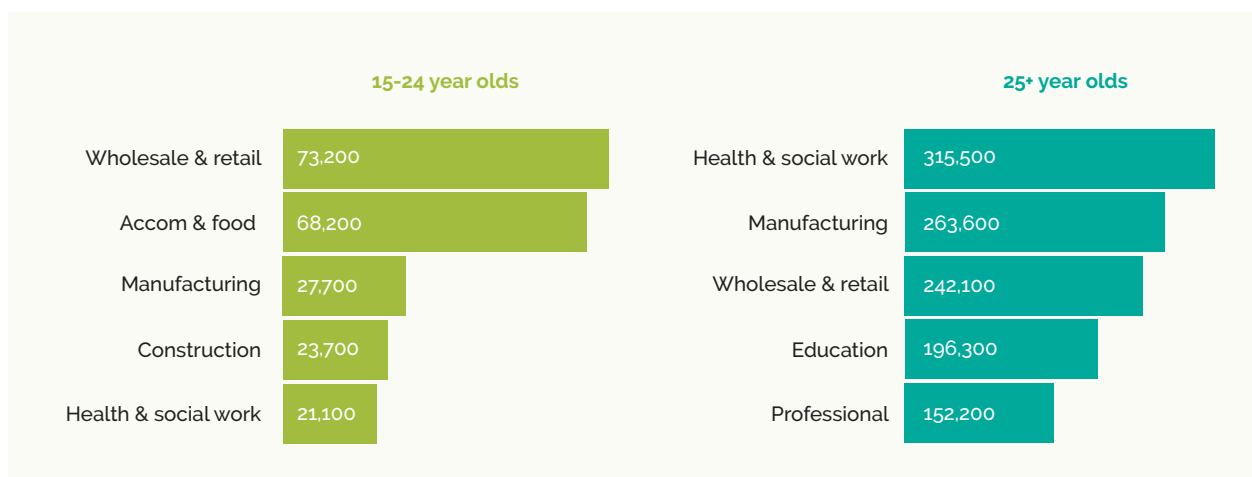
5. Trends in youth employment by economic sector and occupation

Data from the CSO Labour Force Survey shows that the youth population were more likely to be employed in certain economic sectors and occupations compared to older workers.

Figure 14 shows that:

- three of the same sectors appear in the top 5 for both age groups in different rank order of importance in quarter 3 2022: **(1) wholesale and retail; (2) manufacturing; and (3) health and social work**
- the **wholesale and retail** sector employed the **highest number of 15-24 year olds** (73,200) while health and social work accounted for the highest number of 25+ year olds (315,500)
- the **accommodation and food** sector was the **second highest sector of youth employment**, at 68,200 in quarter 3 2022
- these two sectors combined accounted for **45.3%** of total employment for those aged 15-24 years in quarter 3 2022.

Figure 14. Top five economic sectors based on number employed by age (15-24 and 25+ years), Q3 2022

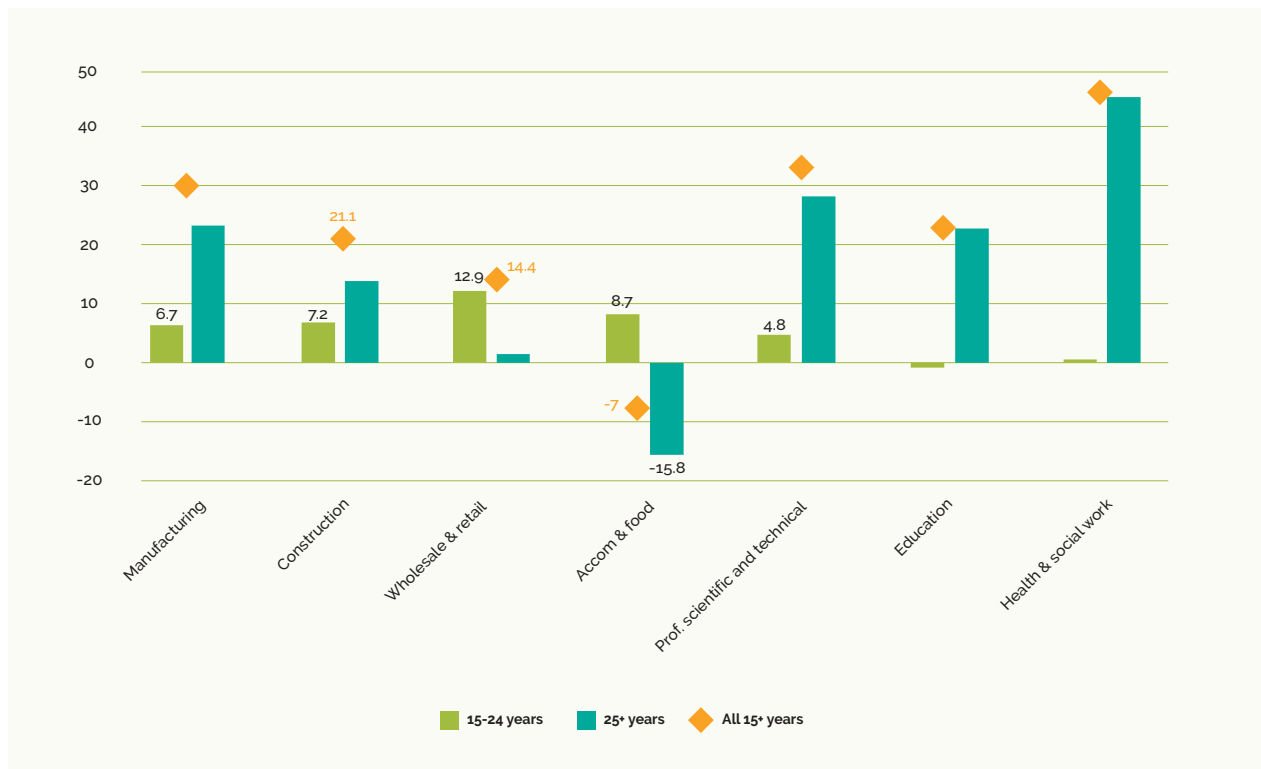


Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

Figure 15 shows that between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022:

- the **biggest increase in employed 15-24 year olds** was in the **wholesale and retail sector** (+12,900), which represented most of the total rise in employment in the sector for all ages (15+ years) at 14,400 persons
- **accommodation and food** saw the **second largest rise in youth employment** of 8,700 persons compared to a decline of 15,800 25+ year olds and an overall fall of 7,000 persons of all ages employed in the sector
- an additional 7,200 young people were employed in the **construction** sector, which made up **one third of the total increase** (+34.1%) in employment in the sector (+21,100)
- **almost half (47.7%) of the total increase in youth employment** across all sectors (+45,300), was accounted for by just two sectors: **wholesale & retail** and **accommodation & food** (total +21,600).

Figure 15. Change in employment (000s) by age (15-24 years and 25+ years) in selected economic sectors¹⁰, Q3 2019 - Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

In addition to the differences in employment by sector for the youth population (15-24 years), there were also variations by occupation as shown in Figure 16. The data on occupation is based on the International Standard Classification of Occupations 2008 (ISCO-08) of which there are 10 in total.¹¹

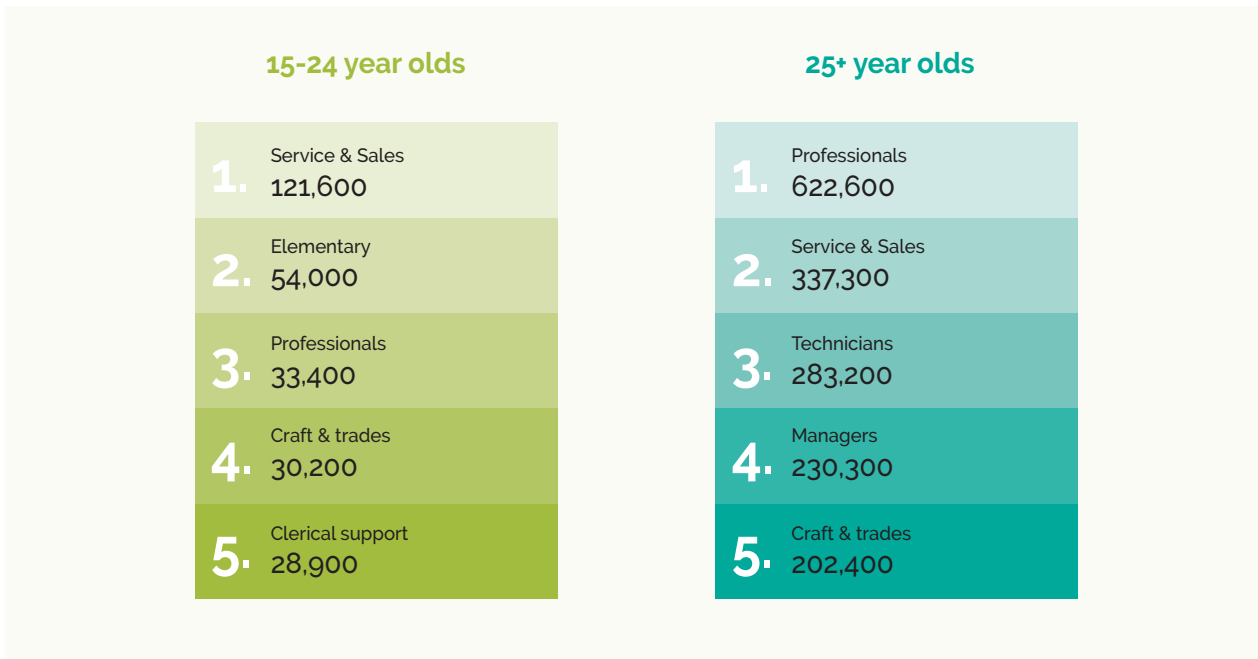
Figure 16 shows that:

- three of the same occupations feature in the top 5 ranking occupations for both age groups albeit in different order: **(1) service & sales**; **(2) professionals**; and **(3) craft & trade**; the ranking of the top 5 occupations for both age groups was the same in quarter 3 2022 as in quarter 3 2019
- **service & sales** occupations had the **highest number of young people employed** at 121,600 in quarter 3 2022, which was the second highest occupation for 25+ year olds
- **elementary** occupations were ranked **second highest for employed youth** at 54,000 in quarter 3 2022
- these two occupations combined accounted for more than half, **56.3%**, of youth employment in quarter 3 2022.

¹⁰ The selected sectors in Figure 15 comprise the top 5 sectors in terms of the highest number of persons employed for both age groups (15-24 years and 25+ years old) in Figure 14.

¹¹ See <https://www.ilo.org/public/english/bureau/stat/isco/isco08/> (accessed on 28th February 2023) for more information.

Figure 16. Top 5 ISCO-08 occupations based on number employed by age (15-24 and 25+ years), Q3 2022

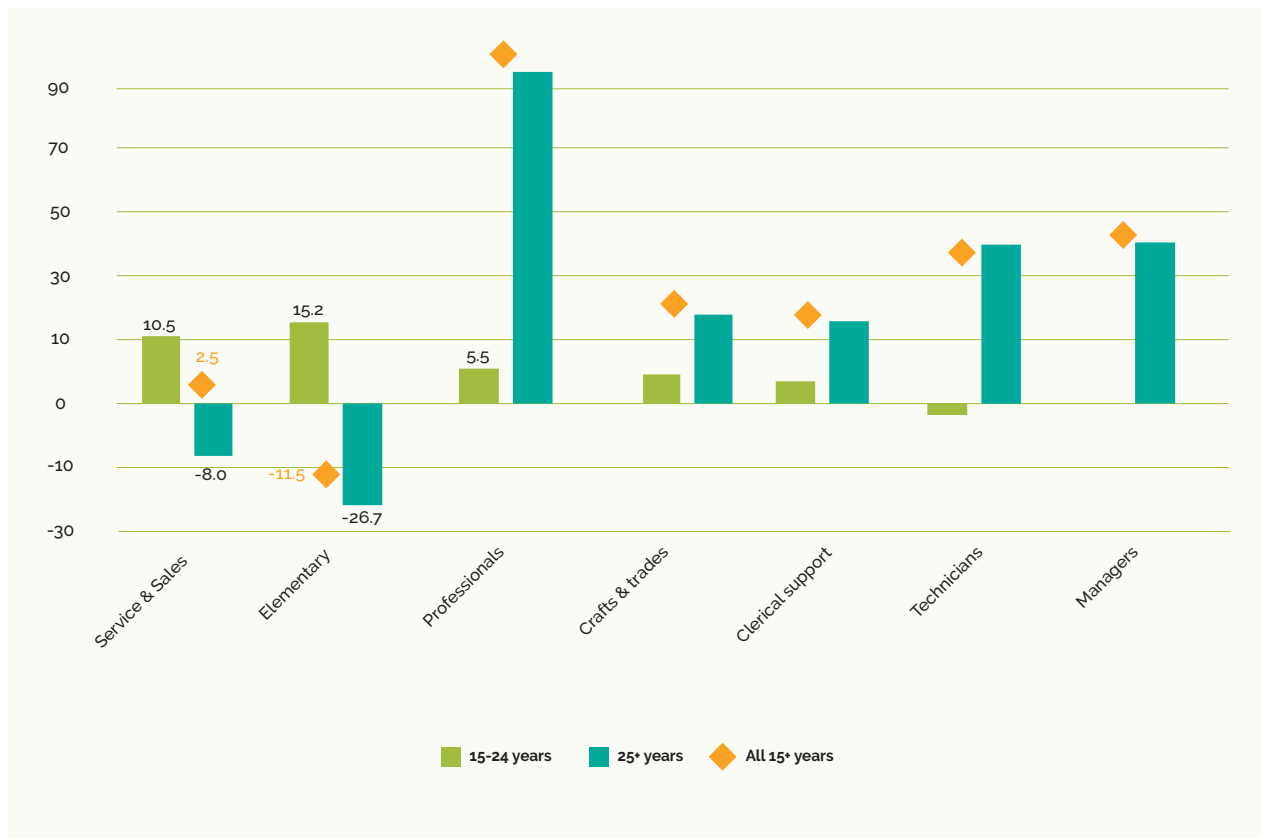


Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

Figure 17 shows that between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022:

- **elementary occupations** (e.g. cleaners, food preparation assistants) had the **largest increase** in the number of **15-24 year olds employed** (+15,200), but the greatest decline in employed 25+ year olds (26,700), which resulted in a general decrease of 11,500 persons (all aged 15+ years)
- similarly, **youth employment** (15-24 year olds) in **service & sales** occupations (e.g. sales assistants) rose by 10,500 persons while the number of 25+ year olds fell by 8,000 persons, which contributed to an overall increase of 2,500 persons
- **professional occupations** (e.g. business professionals, software developers/analysts and scientists) saw the **third highest increase** in the number of 15-24 year olds employed (+5,500), although the increase for those aged 25+ years was far greater
- **over half (56.7%) of the total increase in youth employment** across all occupations (+45,300) was accounted for by just two occupations: **elementary** and **service & sales** (total +25,700).

Figure 17. Change in employment (000s) by age (15-24 and 25+ years) in selected ISCO-08 occupations, Q3 2019 - Q3 2022



Source: SLMRU analysis of Eurostat data

These trends in employment by occupation for 15-24 year olds support the results found by sector, which showed an increase in youth employment in the wholesale & retail and the accommodation & food sectors as these include roles in both service & sales and elementary occupations, e.g. sales assistant, bar staff and waiters/waitresses.

As stated earlier, the youth working age population are more likely to be employed in certain economic sectors and occupations; in particular, the accommodation and food and wholesale and retail sectors along with having jobs in service & sales and elementary occupations. CSO data shows that these sectors and occupations have the highest prevalence of employees earning the National Minimum Wage or less. For example, in quarter 3 2020, the sector with the highest rate was accommodation and food at 30.0%, followed by wholesale and retail at 15.1%. In terms of occupations, service & sales and elementary had the highest rates at 20.3% and 5.4% respectively in quarter 3 2020 (CSO).

6. Summary

Between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022, the number of employed 15-24 year olds increased by 45,300 persons (+17.0%), and stood at 311,900 in quarter 3 2022. Over the same time period, the total number of employed persons (aged 15+) increased by 230,900, meaning that young people accounted for approximately one fifth of overall employment growth.

Increases in youth employment and labour force participation were in line with increasing population for 20-24 year olds, but far exceeded population growth for those aged 15-19 years between quarter 3 2019 and quarter 3 2022. Furthermore, this younger age cohort had the largest share of the increase in youth employment (67.1%) compared to 20-24 year olds; however, much of this increase in employment comprised of part-time, temporary roles earning the National Minimum Wage or less. In addition, there were variations in the sectors and occupations engaged in by the youth population (15-24 years), with increasing numbers of young people working in the wholesale/retail and accommodation/food sectors, while the number of older workers (25+ years) declined in these sectors.

The labour force participation and employment of young people (15-24 years old) in Ireland have been consistently higher than the EU 27 average; with an employment rate of 47.8% for 15-24 year olds in Ireland in quarter 3 2022, which was 11.2 percentage points higher than 36.6% in the rest of the EU (based on the EU 27 average). The employment and labour force participation of 15-24 year olds in Ireland peaked at 50.2% and 57.1% respectively in quarter 3 2021, which coincides with the summertime when many students take up seasonal employment but it was also when many sectors in the economy were re-opening following COVID-19 restrictions. During the years covered by this report, young people had an important role to play in the Irish labour force, especially at a critical time for the economy following the pandemic.

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