

10.16 Operatives & Elementary Occupations n.e.c. Figure 10.16 Annual Average Employment (2023) & Annual Average Growth Rates (2018-2023)



Overall employment	189,600
Share of total workforce	7.0%
Main sectors of employment	53% - Industry 14% - Administrative and support services 11% - Wholesale & retail
Employment growth	+20,900 between 2018 and 2023 +2.4% on average annually (compared to +3.5% for total workforce)

2023	% Female Q4	% Full-time Q4	% Aged 55 years & over Q4	% Irish citizens Q4	% Third level graduates Q4	Number of new employment permits	Recruitment Agency Survey
Food, drink & tobacco	...	85%	...	56%	...	441	✓
Chemical & related process	[37%]	98%	...	78%	[44%]		
Other process operatives	[39%]	83%	...	65%	...	15	✓
Plant & machine	...	90%	...	78%	...	4	
Assemblers & routine operatives	46%	93%	[15%]	72%	35%	11	
Cleaning	68%	45%	23%	58%	[16%]	1	✓
Sales, storage & services	...	70%	...	78%	...		✓
Overall total	40%	75%	18%	68%	25%	472	

Source: SLMRU (SOLAS) analysis of CSO (LFS) data, DETE, and SLMRU Recruitment Agency Survey (RAS)
Numbers in square brackets should be treated with caution; an ellipsis (...) denotes numbers too small to report

Overall Outlook for these Occupations

With little change in employment levels since 2022, the annual average growth over the five-year period to 2023 was below the national average. Over half of employment in this occupational group was in industry, with 14% in administrative support services (e.g. cleaners) and 11% in wholesale and retail (e.g. warehouse operatives). Almost a third of those employed were non-Irish citizens and a high share of recent job hires in some roles suggests a high level of churn and issues in relation to the attractiveness of the job. The relatively high share of those employed who held at most lower secondary education (at 18%) indicates that upskilling/reskilling requirements will be key for this cohort with increased digitalisation of tasks in these jobs.

Occupation	Economic summary
Food, drink & tobacco	Despite some growth since 2022, the employment growth rate was below average for this occupation. The share of non-Irish citizens in this occupation continues to grow, reaching 44% in quarter 4 2023. Employment permits issued related primarily to meat processing operatives and these roles were also mentioned in the Recruitment Agency Survey. The high volume of vacancies for meat processing operatives advertised through DSP Jobs Ireland may relate in part at least to notification obligations for the employment permit system. Skills for Growth data identified issues with recruiting food processing operatives and process technicians to operate high tech machinery (with Leaving Cert or NQF 6 level of education). Issues with recruitment for meat processing operatives are likely to persist due to the perceived attractiveness of the job, although targets to reduce agricultural carbon emissions may see demand for this occupation curtailed in future years.
Chemical & related process	The strong employment growth rate for this occupation relates to significant growth in employment occurring between 2021 and 2022, with only small increases to 2023. With few vacancy notifications (DSP) and online job adverts (Eurostat/CEDEFOP) and a levelling of employment, no issues have been identified for this occupation.
Other process operatives & process plant occupations (e.g. packers, bottlers)	Despite employment levels increasing annually since 2021, they remained below pre-COVID-19 levels. There was a relatively high volume of online job adverts (Eurostat/CEDEFOP) for this occupation, primarily for packers, although the level of adverts has fallen since 2022. Posts advertised through DSP related mostly to general operatives. These roles were also highlighted as difficult-to-fill in the Recruitment Agency Survey and Skills for Growth data (along with shift operators), with the perceived attractiveness of the job (e.g. shift work) a potential contributing factor in terms of recruitment issues for this occupation.
Plant & machine operatives (e.g. quarry workers, energy & sewerage plant operatives)	The employment growth rate was on a par with the national average, although employment levels declined marginally in 2023. There was a relatively high volume of online job adverts (Eurostat/CEDEFOP), mostly for paper and wood machine operatives, although the number of adverts has fallen since 2022. Although the green transition may result in an increased demand for elementary workers in energy and sewerage plant operations, there is no current evidence that issues exist with sourcing personnel for these roles.
Assemblers & routine operatives	A large decline in employment levels in 2023 for this occupation (by 6,100 persons) resulted in a below average growth rate. The share of non-Irish citizens, at 28%, was above the national average and over a third employed held third-level qualifications, indicating that over-qualification may be a factor for some persons in these roles.
Cleaning operatives	Employment levels for cleaners fell in 2020 and 2021 as a result of COVID-19 restrictions; employment has grown strongly since 2022 although the employment growth rate was below average. Over two-thirds of those employed were female, over half worked part-time, almost a quarter were aged 55 years or over and 42% were non-Irish citizens, with the shares for each of these categories being above the national average. The level of educational attainment for those employed as cleaners was below average; 30% had attained at most a lower secondary education and a further 54% had attained a higher secondary/FET level of education. Recent job hires in 2023 far exceeded employment growth indicating that job churn is occurring in this role.
Sales, storage & services	Employment levels have remained relatively stable in recent years, although small declines occurred since 2022. Despite this decline, a high volume of recent job hires occurred. A higher than average share (30% compared to 12% nationally) employed were aged 15-24 years. Difficult to fill vacancies identified for this occupation in the Recruitment Agency Survey and Skills for Growth data related to warehouse operatives in the wholesale & retail sector and industry, with shift work perceived to be an issue. Vacancy adverts (DSP) and online job adverts (Eurostat/CEDEFOP) also related mainly to these roles.