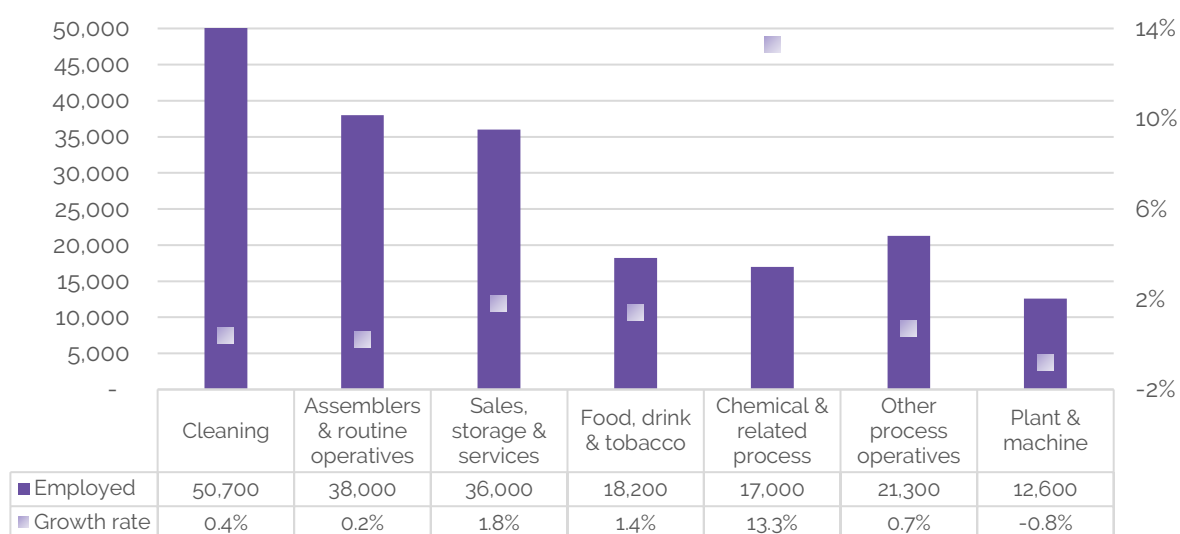


10.16 Operatives & Elementary Occupations n.e.c.

Figure 10.16 Annual Average Employment (2024) & Annual Average Growth Rates (2019-2024)



Overall employment	193,800
Share of total workforce	7.0%
Main sectors of employment	51% - Industry 13% - Administrative and support services 13% - Wholesale & retail
Employment growth	+13,800 between 2019 and 2024 +1.5% on average annually (compared to +3.4% for total workforce)

2024	% 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	...	84%	...	[51%]	...	1,014	✓
Chemical & related process		95%	...	81%	[43%]		
Other process operatives	[37%]	80%	[25%]	67%	...	30	✓
Plant & machine	...	88%	...	76%	...	55	
Assemblers & routine operatives	43%	91%	...	75%	46%	2	
Cleaning	65%	42%	30%	58%	[18%]	1	✓
Sales, storage & services	...	73%	[21%]	82%	...	5	✓
Overall total	37%	74%	21%	70%	24%	1,107	

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

Overall employment levels for this occupational group have only seen small growth since 2022. However, there was a high volume of both recent job hires and leavers indicating a high level of churn for at least some of these occupations. More than half (51%) of the jobs in this group were in industry, a further 14% were in administrative support services (e.g. cleaners) and 11% in wholesale and retail (e.g. warehouse operatives). Almost a fifth (19%) of those employed held at most a lower secondary education, the third highest share with this level of education after agriculture and transport-related occupations. As such, upskilling/reskilling opportunities will be key for this cohort with increased digitalisation of tasks in these jobs.

Occupation	Economic summary
Food, drink & tobacco	Employment levels have seen little change over the five-year period, with a decline of 1,300 persons employed since 2023. Almost two-thirds of those employed held higher secondary/FET education and the majority employed were male. This occupation had the highest share of non-Irish employed at 49%, although the numbers involved are small and should be treated with caution. This is reflected in the high number of both new and renewal employment permits issued, primarily for meat processing operatives (but also for boning hall/abattoir and general operatives). There was a high volume of vacancy posts for meat processing operatives notified through the DSP Jobs Ireland portal while almost half of all OJAs notified for this group related to food etc. operatives. Difficult-to-fill vacancies mentioned in the Recruitment Agency Survey included food operatives and meat boners with general operatives appearing in the Skills for Growth data. The lack of employment growth for this occupational group indicates that most job opportunities for these roles relate to replacement demand, with the perceived attractiveness of the job impacting on recruitment.
Chemical & related process	The above average employment growth relates mainly to increases in 2021 and 2022; employment fell by 1,400 persons since 2023. Most employed were male, while almost two-fifths held third-level qualifications. Given the small volume of vacancy notifications (DSP Jobs Ireland) and online job adverts (Eurostat/CEDEFOP) for this occupation and the recent fall in employment levels, no issues have been identified.
Other process operatives & process plant occupations (e.g. packers, bottlers)	Employment in this occupation fell in the early part of the five-year period, but increased annually since 2022, with employment in 2024 exceeding 2019 levels for the first time over the period. A third of those employed were non-Irish citizens, exceeding the national average. Posts notified through DSP Jobs Ireland were primarily for general operatives but also included concrete finishers/moulders and galvanisers. A small number of employment permits were issued (for roles including galvanisers) with difficult-to-fill mentions in the Recruitment Agency Survey for general/packaging operatives with general operatives in construction and manufacturing highlighted in the Skills for Growth data. Issues with recruitment relate, at least to some extent, to the perceived attractiveness of the job (e.g. shift work)
Plant & machine operatives (e.g. quarry workers, energy & sewerage plant operatives)	Employment levels have seen little change over the five-year period with employment in 2024 below 2019 levels. Vacancy posts included wood machine operatives and overhead power networks patrollers (DSP Jobs Ireland). A small number of new employment permits were issued including for wood machine operatives. While the green transition may lead to a higher demand for elementary workers in energy and wastewater plant operations, the data does not point to difficulties in sourcing personnel for these positions at present.
Assemblers & routine operatives	This occupation has seen considerable fluctuations in employment over the five-year period, with employment in 2024 similar to 2019 levels. The share of non-Irish citizens employed in this occupation, at 25%, was above the national average and almost half (46%) held third-level qualifications with over-qualification likely to be a factor for some in these roles. There was a high level of recent job hires indicating that job churn is occurring and DSP jobseeker data (from December 2024) shows a high volume of

	persons on the Live Register who were previously employed in jobs classified as assemblers/line workers and other routine process workers.
Cleaning operatives	Employment levels have fluctuated in this occupation over the five-year period, with 2024 employment only marginally above 2019 levels. Two-thirds of those employed were female, 58% worked part-time, 31% held at most lower secondary education, 42% were non-Irish citizens (over double the national average), and 30% were aged 55 years or over. There was a high volume of recent job hires which would indicate that even when employment is decreasing, job opportunities are arising due to replacement demand.
Sales, storage & services	Despite a below average employment growth rate over the five-year period, employment grew by 4,100 persons in 2024. Most employed were male, a quarter worked part-time, and two-thirds held higher secondary/FET qualifications. The high volume of recent job hires suggests a high level of job churn for these roles. Vacancy adverts (DSP Jobs Ireland) related mainly to warehouse operatives. These roles were also mentioned as difficult to fill vacancies (Recruitment Agency Survey and Skills for Growth data), with shift work perceived to be an issue; digital, legal, quality, forklift, and customer service skills were identified as being in demand.