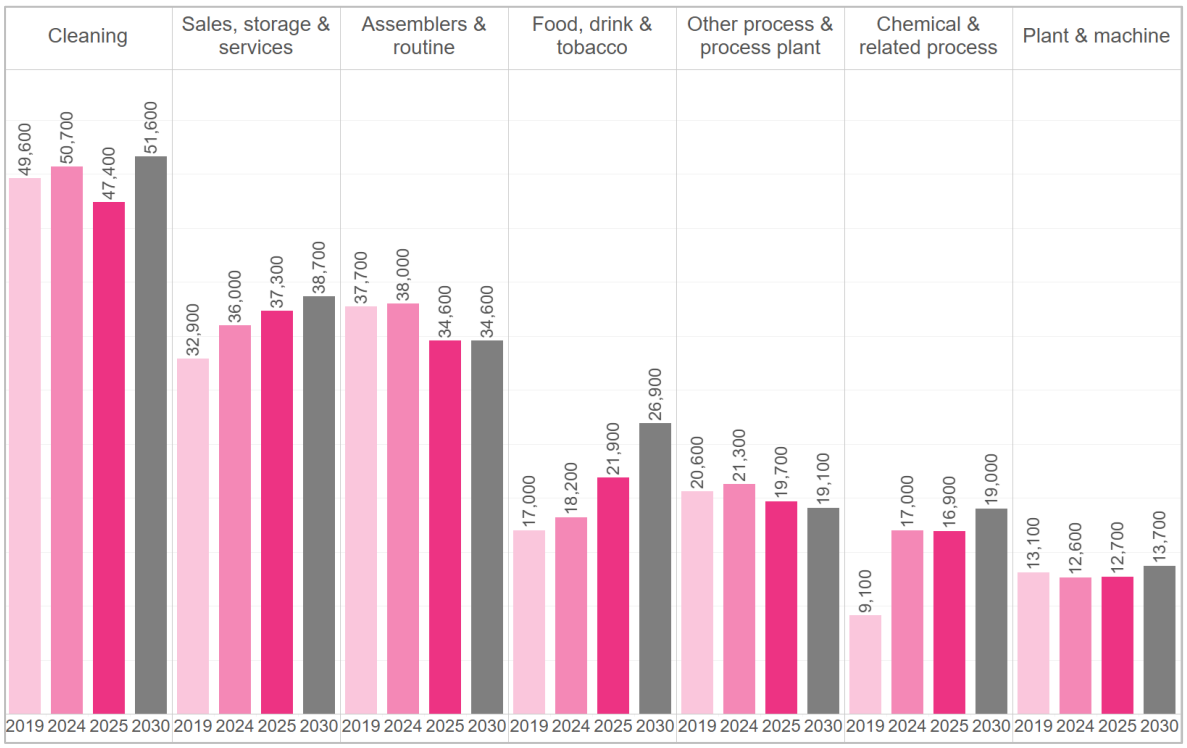
0.16 Operatives & Elementary Occupations n.e.c.

Overall employment	190,400
Share of total workforce	7.0%
Main sectors of employment	56% - Industry 10% - Administrative and support services 10% - Wholesale & retail
Employment growth	+10,500 between 2019 and 2025 +0.9% on average annually (compared to +3.4% for total workforce) -1.8% growth since 2024 (compared to +2.2% for total workforce) Projected annual average growth (2025-2030): **1.3%**
Key skills identified in OJAs	adaptability, teamwork, attend to detail, provide information, quality standards, manage budgets/finances, manage quality, technical drawings, create solutions to problems, clean equipment

Overall employment levels have seen little change in recent years for this occupational group, with employment growth for food operatives offsetting declines for other operatives or elementary occupations. Future growth is projected to be primarily related to domestic industrial enterprises and those employed as food operatives, followed by cleaners. Over a quarter of those working in this occupation held third level qualifications, and while this share was below the national average, it points to an element of over-qualification for some roles as operative and elementary occupations typically do not require higher levels of education.

Figure 10.16 Annual Average Employment (2019, 2024 & 2025) & Employment Projections (2030)



Source: SLMRU (SOLAS) analysis of CSO (LFS) data

Table 10.16 Labour Market Profile of Operative and Elementary Occupations

	Annual average growth		Quarter 4 2025					2025	
	2019-2025	2025-2030f	% Female	% Full-time	% Age 55 yrs +	% Irish citizens	% Third level grads	No. of new emp. permits	RAS
Food, drink & tobacco	4.3%	4.2%	[35%]	86%	…	61%	…	16	✓
Chemical & related process	10.9%	2.4%	…	95%	…	73%	[55%]	…	
Other process operatives	-0.7%	-0.6%	…	86%	…	66%	…	19	✓
Plant & machine	-0.5%	1.5%	…	93%	…	74%	…	50	
Assemblers & routine operatives	-1.4%	0.0%	39%	89%	[18%]	77%	40%	6	
Cleaning	-0.8%	1.7%	69%	43%	25%	55%	[19%]	1	✓
Sales, storage & services	2.1%	0.8%	[21%]	75%	[14%]	65%	[25%]	2	✓
Overall total	**0.9%**	**1.3%**	**39%**	**76%**	**19%**	**66%**	**29%**	**94**	

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

Food, drink & tobacco operatives

This occupation was one of the few roles in this broad occupational group which saw employment growth since 2024 (increasing by 3,700 persons); it also has the highest projected annual average growth rate to 2030, with employment expected to reach approximately 27,000 persons. The share of non-Irish employed (at 39%) was significantly above the national average, most employed were working full-time, four-fifths held a higher secondary/FET qualification, and most (65%) were male.

Difficult-to-fill mentions in the Recruitment Agency Survey and Skills for Growth data related to food operatives. There was a high volume of vacancy posts for meat processing operatives notified through the DSP Jobs Ireland. Although there was a fall in the number of new employment permits issued for these roles (thought to be related to a filling of quotas), there were 400 renewal permits issued in 2025 for meat processing operatives.

Chemical & related process operatives

The above average employment growth for this occupation primarily relates to increases between 2021 and 2022, with employment levels falling annually since 2023. Most employed were male, working full-time, over a quarter were non-Irish citizens and more than a half held third level qualifications with the remainder holding a higher secondary/FET qualification. Difficult-to-fill mentions were confined to Skills for Growth data, with factory, production, and general operatives required for mostly medium-high and medium-low technology manufacturing.

No issues have been identified, although employment is projected to grow in the coming years, reaching 19,000 by the year 2030.

Other process operatives (e.g. packers, bottlers)

Despite annual increases between 2022 and 2024, the number of persons employed as other process operatives was marginally lower in 2025 than in 2019, with a negative annual average growth rate for

the period. Two-thirds of those employed held a higher secondary/FET qualification, most were male and working full-time, and 34% were non-Irish citizens, far above the national average.

Vacancy posts notified through the DSP Jobs Ireland for this occupation included concrete finishers/moulders, packing staff, general/maintenance operatives. Difficult-to-fill mentions in the Recruitment Agency Survey and Skills for Growth data related to packaging and general operatives.

Plant & machine operatives (e.g. quarry workers, energy & sewerage plant operatives)

This is one of the smallest occupations within this group. Employment levels have remained broadly unchanged, with only minor gains in recent years. Most employed were male and working full-time, half held a higher secondary/FET qualification and 26% were non-Irish citizens.

New employment permits issued in 2025 were mainly for wood machine/working technicians. Job creation in approved projects in IDA client companies include a number of operatives in machinery manufacturing segments over the coming years.

Assemblers & routine operatives

The number of persons working as assemblers and routine operatives fell sharply (by 3,400 persons) since 2024 and employment levels in 2025 were below those observed in 2019. Employment for this occupation is projected to remain broadly unchanged in the years to 2030, and increased automation for routine operative roles could potentially result in further declines for this occupation.

Cleaning

The number of persons employed as cleaners has fluctuated substantially over the period 2019-2025, with employment levels falling during the COVID-19 pandemic, recovering in subsequent years, but declining again in both 2024 and 2025. Although employment growth is projected to be above average in the period to 2030, employment is nonetheless expected to remain below 2023 levels. The high prevalence of part-time working in this role may also mean that any employment growth may not result in an increase in FTE employment. The share of non-Irish citizens, at 45%, far exceeds the national average. Approximately a fifth of those working in the occupation held third level qualifications, pointing to possible skills mismatches among cleaning staff.

Despite the fall in employment, there was a high volume of recent job hires indicating a high level of job churn for this role. The attractiveness of the job may be a key issue for these roles with cleaning staff mentioned as roles which were difficult to fill in the Recruitment Agency Survey.

Sales, storage & services

Having grown strongly in 2024, employment levels in this occupation saw more modest growth in 2025. The wholesale/retail and transport sectors combined accounted for 57% of total employment. Most employed were male and there was a high share employed who were non-Irish citizens (35%). The high volume of recent job hires points to job churn issues, far exceeding any employment growth in the past year. Vacancies for warehouse operative roles proved difficult to fill, as mentioned in both the Recruitment Agency Survey and Skills for Growth data, with skills and knowledge in areas such as health and safety, and forklifting in demand. Data relating to job creating projects approved in IDA client companies points to sustained demand for warehousing and logistics staff (particularly in high-tech manufacturing) in the coming years.