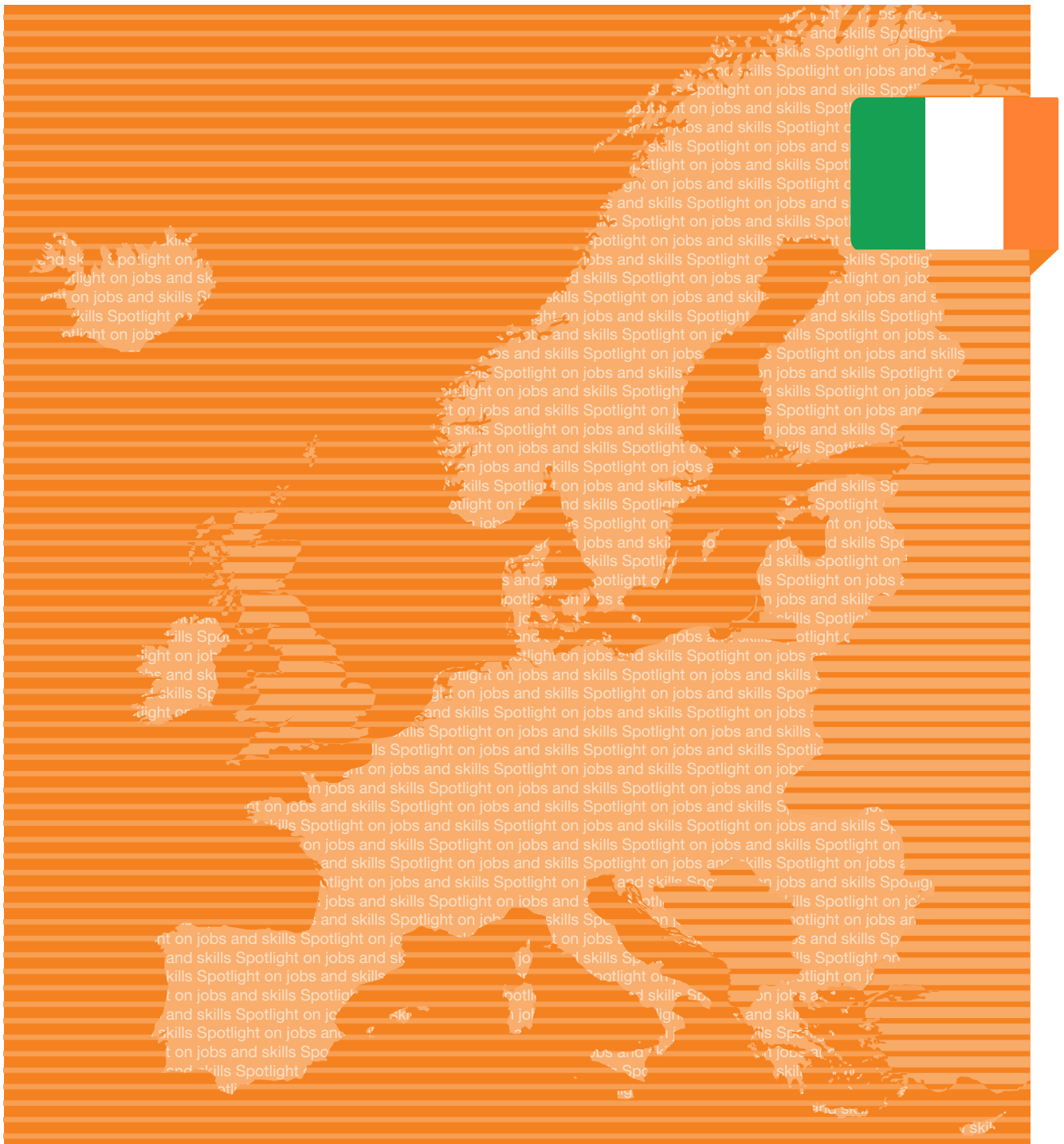




SPOTLIGHT ON JOBS AND SKILLS IRELAND

2026

Introduction

Drawing on its rich country-level skills intelligence, Cedefop develops its Spotlights on jobs and skills for EU-27 Member States, Iceland and Norway. The Spotlights provide insights into the current labour market landscape, future trends, and skills anticipation in each country. The analysis is based on Cedefop's skills intelligence online tool, its skills forecast, the European Skills Index (ESI), online job advertisements, sectoral and occupational skills intelligence, and country-specific skills anticipation reports.

Recent employment developments

Unemployment in Ireland has consistently remained below the EU average in recent years. In 2020, at 6 %, the unemployment rate was lower than the EU average of 7 %. By 2023, unemployment had declined to 4 %, dropping faster than in the EU on average (6 %). Unemployment among young people (aged 15–24) fell from 15 % in 2020 to 10 % in 2023. Among adults aged 25–49, it decreased from 5 % to 4 %, and from 4 % to 3 % for people aged 50–64. There was no significant gender gap in unemployment in 2020, and this remained the case in 2023 as unemployment declined equally for women and men.

The labour market has shown robust growth over the past decade. Employment between 2015 and 2019 grew faster than in the EU on average (+3 % annually versus +1 % in the EU). Between 2019 and 2020, employment declined by almost -3 % annually compared with -1 % in the EU. The economic rebound between 2020 and 2023 translated into annual employment growth of +5 %, far above the EU-27 average of +1 %. Between 2018 and 2023, Ireland's employed population grew by 21 %, significantly outpacing the EU average employment growth of 4 %.

In 2023, employment was distributed across a broad range of sectors ([Figure 1](#)). Health and social

care had the highest employment share ⁽¹⁾ (13 % compared with 11 % in the EU-27). The employment shares of wholesale and retail trade (12 % compared with 14 % in the EU), and manufacturing (10 % versus 16 %) were also substantial. By contrast, the lowest sectoral employment shares, at less than 1 %, were recorded in energy supply and water and waste treatment.

With an employment share of 28 % in 2023, highly qualified professionals were the largest occupational group in the country. The top three sectors employing professionals were education (23 % of professional employment), health and social care (21 %) and ICT services (14 %). Ireland has one of the largest employment shares of health professionals in the EU (6 % compared with the EU average of 3 %). The employment shares of service and sales workers (17 % of employment), associate professionals (12 %), managers (10 %), clerks (9 %), and trades workers (8 %), were also significant.

Ireland's employed population is predominantly high- or medium-qualified. In 2023, more than half of workers held a high-level qualification, one third had a medium-level qualification, while 1 in 10 had no qualification or a low-level qualification. Men accounted for 54 % of the employed population in 2023. The workforce is concentrated in the 25–49 age group, which makes up 57 % of employment. The employment share of workers aged 50–64 was 26 %, and the share of those aged 15–24 was 13 %. Workers aged 65+ accounted for 5 %.

In 2023, the rate of young people (aged 15–24) [neither in employment nor education or training](#) (NEET) was 5 %, well below the EU average of 9 %. The NEET rate fell rapidly, by seven percentage points, between 2020 and 2023. There were no gender differences in the NEET rates for young women and men.

Recent skills and learning developments

Analysis of [Cedefop's online job advertisements](#) (OJAs) shows that over half of all job advertisements

⁽¹⁾ To learn more about the classification of sectors, occupations, and qualification levels discussed in this report, see Annex 2 of [Cedefop's skills forecast methodological framework](#) (April 2023).

collected from Ireland in 2023 were for professionals (33 % of OJAs) and associate professionals (20 %). Job advertisements for managers accounted for 15 % of OJAs, followed by clerks (9 %), service and sales workers (9 %), trades workers (5 %), and operators and assemblers (5 %). Most OJAs for professional jobs were for researchers and engineers (28 % of OJAs for professionals), ICT professionals (25 %) or office professionals (25 %). Most OJAs for researchers and engineers (73 %) were for engineering professionals (excluding electrotechnology); 13 % were for electrotechnology engineers, and 9 % were for architects, planners, surveyors and designers.

According to [Cedefop's European Skills Index](#) (ESI), Ireland ranked 22nd out of 31 countries in 2024, improving its position from 27th place in 2017. At the ESI pillar level, Ireland ranked 16th in skills development, sixth in skills activation, and 26th in skills matching. The ESI indicators with the best performance are reading, maths and science scores among 15-year-olds (ranked second), and the share of early leavers from training (ranked third). The weakest indicator is the share of low-wage workers with ISCED 5–8 educational attainment (ranked 31st). Between 2017 and 2024, improvements were most notable in the long-term unemployment rate, which declined from 5.3 % to 1.3 %, and the share of early leavers from education and training, which dropped from 5 % to 2 %. The largest performance decline was the increase, from 15 % to 19 %, in the share of low-wage workers with ISCED 5–8 educational attainment ([Figure 2](#)).

In 2023, 44 % of the population had digital skills above the basic level, far exceeding the EU average of 27 %. Digital skills above the basic level were most common among the employed population and people aged 25–34; the shares were 55 % and 54 % respectively, much higher than the EU averages of 33 % and 39 %.

In 2023, 14 % of the employed population took part in learning, a rate similar to the EU average. Participation was higher among women (18 %) than men (11 %). Among adults aged 25–49, 15 % participated in learning; among people aged 50–64, the share was 12 %.

Future employment trends

Looking ahead, employment is projected to grow by approximately 2 % per year between 2022 and 2030, and at a similar rate between 2030 and 2035. These rates are substantially higher than the EU average annual growth rate of around 0.4 % over the same periods.

[Cedefop's skills forecast](#) projections show that employment is expected to grow by up to 50 % between 2022 and 2035 in sectors such as construction, and financial and insurance activities. Substantial employment growth is also projected in transportation and storage, in the electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply sector, and in accommodation and food service activities. Employment in agriculture, forestry and fishing is projected to decline (-3 %).

According to forecast projections, by 2035, professionals (25 % of employment) and service and sales workers (17 %) are expected to account for the largest employment shares. Employment is projected to grow rapidly for technicians and associate professionals (+37 %), and craft and related trades workers (+36 %). Notable employment growth is also expected for plant and machine operators and assemblers (+24 %), and professionals (+23 %). Employment is projected to decline for skilled agricultural and fishery workers (-22 %) and employment in elementary occupations is forecast to fall marginally (-0.4 %).

The projected expansion of high-skilled employment signals that the labour force is expected to become increasingly highly qualified. The number of highly qualified workers is projected to grow by +2 % annually, far exceeding the EU average of +0.2 %. The low-qualified workforce is projected to decline by -5 % annually, much faster than the EU average decline of -3 %. Female labour force participation is forecast to grow while male participation is forecast to decline (+2 % versus -1 % annually). With population ageing, labour force growth will be strongest for the 65+ and 60–64 age groups (about +4 % per year each). Annual growth in the 55–59 and 50–54 age groups (+3 % and +2 % respectively) will exceed the EU averages.

Future skills and learning trends

Between 2022 and 2035, Ireland's labour market is projected to undergo notable structural shifts towards higher-skilled roles and skill demand. Employment in high-skilled non-manual occupations will increase by +30 % and account for half of all employment. Jobs in skilled non-manual occupations will represent one quarter of employment, while employment in skilled manual occupations will rise by 21 % and make up 19 % of the workforce by 2035. With employment declining marginally, elementary occupations will account for 6 % of employment.

In Ireland, [employment in high-tech occupations](#) is forecast to grow by +10 % between 2030 and 2035, surpassing the EU-27 average of almost +7 %. In the same period, employment in the broader [high-tech economy](#) is projected to grow by +8 %, substantially above the EU-27 average trend of +5 %. Growth in high-technology manufacturing will be much stronger than the EU average (+7 % versus +2 %).

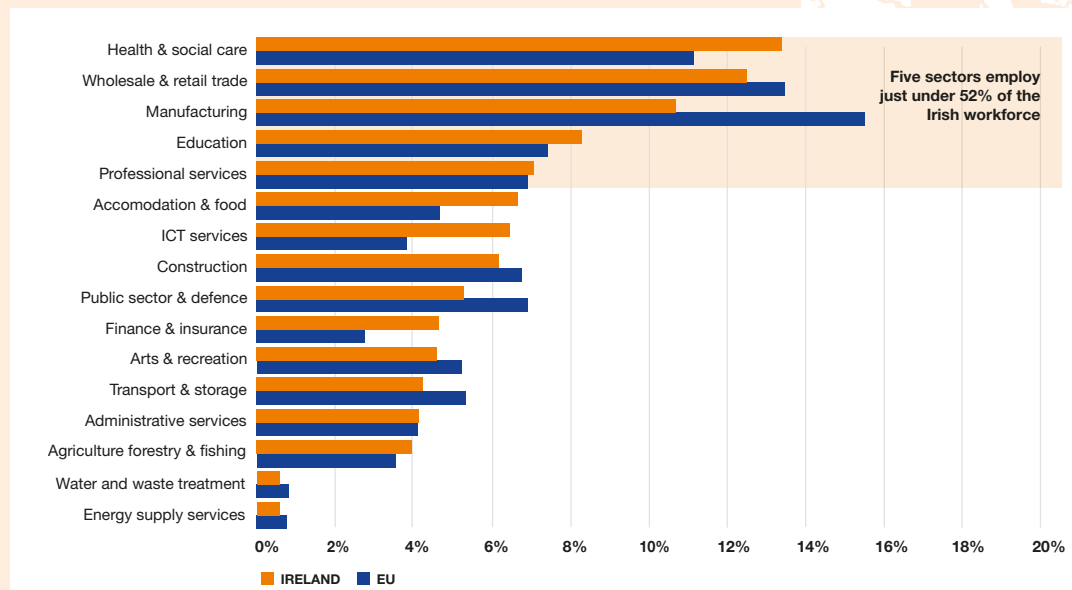
Expected skill shortages

[Cedefop's Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#) shows that employers in Ireland are likely to face shortages across several occupational groups in the years leading up to 2035. Employers recruiting administrative and commercial managers are expected to face the most acute shortages due to high employment growth and strong replacement demand. For skilled manual occupations, employers are expected to face the most severe hiring difficulties for drivers and mobile plant operators, building and related trades workers, and metal and machinery workers. Staff shortages in elementary occupations are also expected to be substantial.



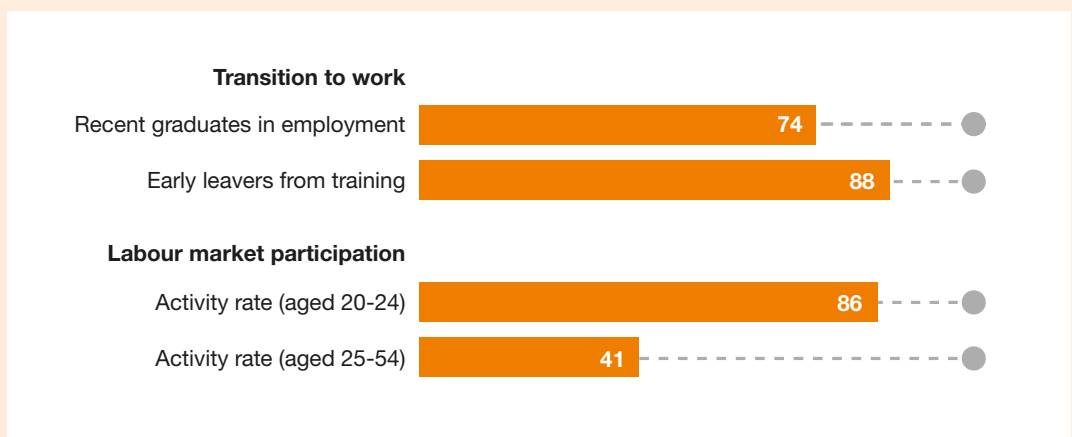
Jobs and skills in figures

Distribution of employment across sectors in Ireland and the EU, 2023 (%)



Source: [Cedefop Skills Intelligence tool](#).

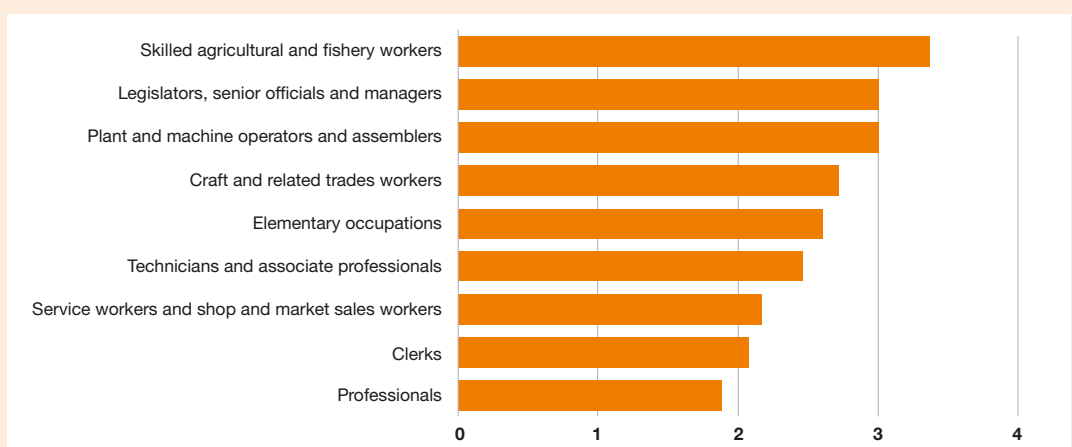
ESI skills activation pillar in Ireland, 2024



NB: The ESI measures countries' 'distance to the ideal' performance, i.e. the highest achieved by any country over a period of seven years. The ideal performance is scaled to 100, with national scores computed and compared to that. Example: a score of 65 suggests that the country has reached 65 % of the ideal performance, with 35 % (100-65) room for improvement.

Source: [Cedefop ESI](#).

Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index, 2022-35, Ireland



NB: The Labour and Skills Shortage Index is the simple average of the quartiles in each of the three pillars: (1) employment growth; (2) replacement demand; (3) supply/demand imbalance (IFIOD). A score of 4 indicates a higher level of shortage, and 1 no shortage. The outcome of the pillars is based on the relative evaluation in quartiles of the occupation (here for all EU-27).

Source: [Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#).



Further information

- Cedefop. (2023). [Skills anticipation in Ireland](#). Data insights series.
- Cedefop. (2024). [Evolution of European skills systems: performance 2015 to 2022](#). Publications Office of the European Union.
- Cedefop. (2025). [Skills forecast report: Ireland](#).
- Cedefop. (2025). [Vocational education and training policy briefs 2024: Ireland](#). National VET policy developments 2023-24.

[Cedefop Skills intelligence tool](#)

[Cedefop Skills forecast](#)

[Cedefop Skills OVATE](#)

[Cedefop European Skills Index](#)

[Cedefop Labour and Skills Shortage Index](#)

This Spotlight was drafted by Cedefop's Skills intelligence and foresight team.

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CEDEFOP

European Centre for the Development
of Vocational Training

Europe 123, 570 01 Thessaloniki (Pylaia), Greece
Postal: Cedefop service post, 570 01 Thermi, Greece
Tel. +30 2310490111, Fax +30 2310490020, Email: info@cedefop.europa.eu



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