



# Employment News

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## Packaging Industry in Transition Innovation, Sustainability and Emerging Careers

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The global packaging industry is undergoing rapid transformation as sustainability pressures and advances in automation and production technologies reshape the sector. The global packaging market is projected to grow from USD 1.28 trillion in 2025 to USD 1.69 trillion by 2034, registering a CAGR of 3.16%. Asia is leading this growth, with India emerging as a major hub, where the industry is expected to expand from USD 84 billion in 2024 to USD 143 billion by 2029, at a CAGR of 11%, driven by the rise of e-commerce and demand for packaged goods.

Packaging materials include paper and paperboard, plastics, metal, glass and biodegradable materials, with plastics accounting for nearly 40-45% of the global packaging market due to their versatility and cost-effectiveness. Materials such as polyethylene, polypropylene and PET remain widely used, and the plastic packaging segment is projected to grow at 4-5% CAGR.

At the same time, sustainability challenges are fundamentally changing the industry. Demand for recycled plastics, particularly recycled PET (rPET), is rising and expected to grow at 6-7% CAGR, supported by circular economy initiatives and stricter environmental regulations. However, the relatively low share of recycled plastics in overall packaging is accelerating the search for recyclable designs, bioplastics and plant-based materials.

Parallely, the adoption of automation, smart manufacturing, advanced printing, and digital production technologies is transforming packaging design, production and supply chains. These shifts are creating a strong demand for new skill sets in sustainable materials, packaging engineering, automation systems and digital manufacturing, requiring the industry to invest in skill upgrades and nurture a new generation of trained packaging professionals to meet future demands.

### Bridging the Skills Gap through Innovation and Training

The increasing integration of automation, sustainability, and digital technologies in packaging production is also creating a significant skills gap in the industry. As companies adopt automated packaging lines and advanced manufacturing systems, there is rising demand for professionals such as automation engineers, robotics technicians, and system integrators to manage and maintain these technologies.

At the same time, the shift toward environmentally responsible packaging is generating strong demand for sustainability specialists. It is estimated that nearly 25,000 professionals will be needed in areas such as Life Cycle Assessment (LCA), sustainable



packaging design, recyclable and compostable materials, and waste reduction strategies to support circular economy practices.

The growing use of smart packaging, IoT, data analytics, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) is further transforming packaging into a data-driven industry, increasing demand for experts in digital manufacturing, machine learning, and intelligent supply chain management. Alongside this, innovation in biodegradable materials, bio-based plastics, and eco-friendly barrier technologies is opening new research and development opportunities.

Addressing these emerging needs will require stronger collaboration between industry, academia, and research institutions, along with specialised training in automation, AI, and sustainable packaging technologies to build a future-ready workforce.

### Employment Projection and Salary Trends

The next-generation workforce will be a key to driving the packaging industry forward, ensuring it remains competitive and resilient in the face of technological change and environmental challenges. The packaging sector offers dynamic employment opportunities across five primary domains:

- Packaging Design and Development
- Innovative Packaging Materials Manufacturing and Operations
- Techno-Commercial Roles (Sales and Marketing)
- Packaging Logistics and Supply Chain
- Biodegradability, Sustainability and Compliance
- AI Application and IoT
- Quality Assurance and Management
- Digitalisation of Packaging Labels
- Smart Labelling and Active Packaging Systems
- Robotics, Packaging Automation and End of Line Solution
- Life Cycle Analysis and Carbon Mapping

### Machine Manufacturing and Packaging Converting

Salaries in the Indian packaging industry vary by specialisation and experience. Entry-level roles offer INR 5,00,000-6,00,000 annually, mid-level engineers and specialists earn between INR 8,00,000-15,00,000, and senior managers can exceed INR 20,00,000 per annum. The industry's cross-sector relevance offers opportunities for lateral movement and global exposure. The workforce in the packaging sector is expected to grow by 6-7% annually, with specific roles seeing significant increases in demand:

- Packaging Machine Operators: +45,000 jobs globally by 2026
- Packaging Engineers and Designers: +20,000 jobs globally by 2026
- Sustainability Consultants: +10,000 jobs globally by 2026
- Packaging Line Workers: +80,000 jobs globally by 2026

### Manpower Breakdown and Roles in Key Segments

1. **Production, Manufacturing and Operations**
  - **Machine Operators, Assembly Line Workers, and Maintenance Technicians:** With the increasing adoption of automation and robotics, there is a growing need for skilled operators and maintenance technicians. Over the next three years, the packaging industry will require an estimated 50,000 new machine operators to handle automated production lines.
  - **Packaging Line Workers:** As E-commerce and rapid production demands rise, the need for packaging line workers will grow. By 2026, the industry will need 80,000 additional line workers to ensure production efficiency.
  - **Operations Managers:** Operation managers are responsible for planning, coordinating, and supervising manufacturing activities

to meet production targets, manage resources, and drive continuous improvement.

### 2. Research & Development (R&D) and Design

• **Packaging Designers and Engineers:** Sustainability is a key driver in packaging design. By 2026, the packaging sector will require an additional 30,000-40,000 packaging designers and engineers focused on eco-friendly and innovative packaging solutions.

• **Sustainability Experts:** With heightened focus on reducing packaging waste and using recyclable materials, 10,000-15,000 sustainability experts will be needed over the next 5 years.

### Software/Automation Engineers:

As packaging systems increasingly integrate automation and smart technology (e.g., QR codes, freshness indicators), software and automation engineers will play a critical role in embedded systems design and manufacturing line automation.



### 3. Logistics and Supply Chain

• **Packaging Logistics Managers:** The growth of packaging logistics, especially in e-commerce, will demand an 8% annual increase in packaging logistics managers, leading to a substantial increase in the workforce.

• **Supply Chain Analysts:** With the integration of smart technologies in supply chains, the packaging industry will need an additional 15,000 supply chain analysts by 2026.

• **Customs and Compliance Specialists:** They manage import/export documentation and ensure compliance with international trade laws, customs regulations, and packaging standards for cross-border logistics.

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