



What's in Store: The Future of Work in Retail

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Background Information

In today's discussion, panelists will consider how changes in the retail industry — in technology, business strategies, and customer preferences — will affect frontline workers. How will these trends influence employment practices and the shape of retail jobs? What are the opportunities to create new jobs with potentially more productive, meaningful, and rewarding work? Below we present background information to inform the discussion.

How many people are employed by the retail industry?

Retail is one of the largest employment sectors in the US economy. In October 2017, there were 15.8 million retail employees in the United States, representing 10.8% of total US employment, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics.¹

Who works in retail?

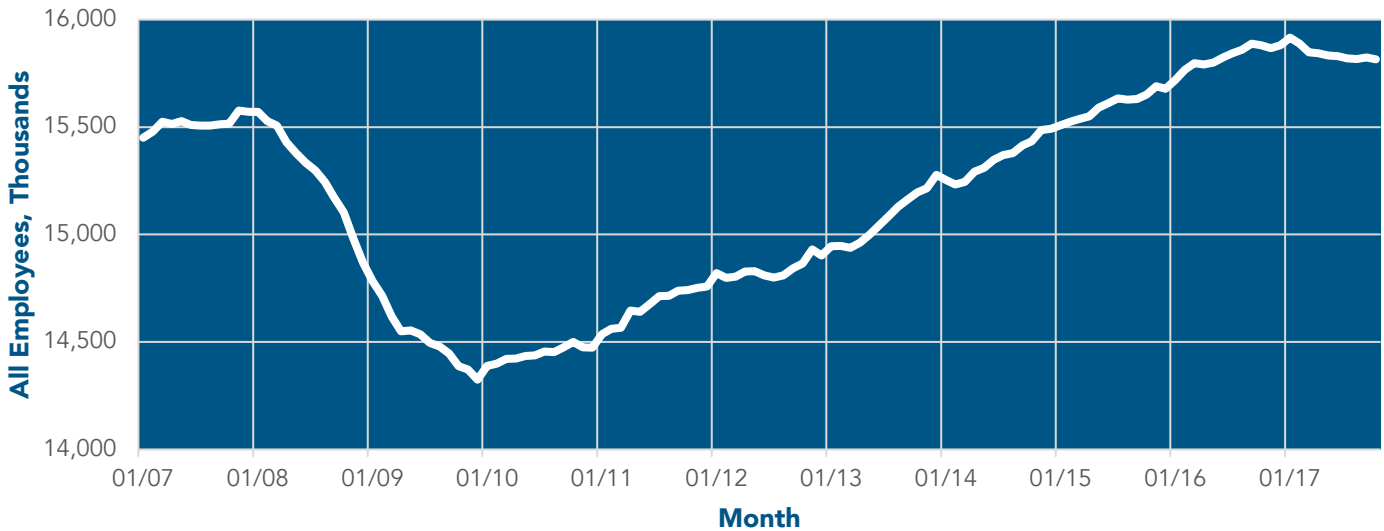
Several of the most recent surveys from the Bureau of Labor Statistics paint a picture of who works in the largest retail occupations. These data reveal that women and people of color tend to be overrepresented in several frontline retail positions but underrepresented in supervisory roles, which come with slightly higher wages.

Occupation	Employment	Median Hourly Wages ²	Median Age ³	Percent Women ⁴	Percent Black or African American	Percent Hispanic or Latino
Retail Salespersons	4,528,550	\$10.90	36.1	48.4%	12.3%	18.2%
Cashiers	3,564,130	\$9.71	26.8	73.2%	17.8%	20.7%
Stock Clerks and Order Fillers	2,016,340	\$11.46	34.2	37.0%	18.8%	19.5%
First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers	1,194,220	\$18.77	42.6	44.1%	8.9%	14.7%
All Occupations	140,400,040	\$17.81	42.2	46.8%	11.9%	16.7%

Learn more at [as.pn/retail](https://aspeninstitute.org/working-in-america/retail)

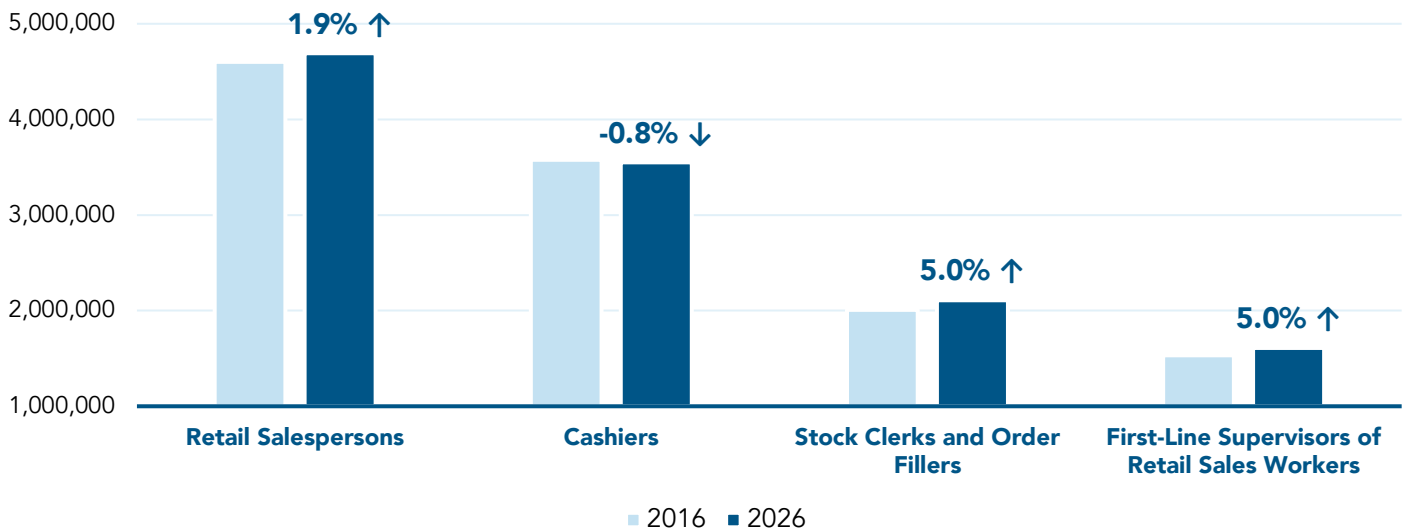
How is the retail industry changing?

- Retail employment increased steadily from January 2010 to January 2017, a period of economic recovery. In January 2017, employment reached a peak of 15,916,300 employees. Since then, employment has fallen to 15,815,200, a loss of more than 100,000 employees. This represents a less than 1% decrease in retail employment since January 2017.⁵



- Some attribute the fall in retail employment to a rise in ecommerce. In the past 15 years, sales from ecommerce have increased as a percent of total sales, going from 1.4% in 2002⁶ to 8.9% in the second quarter of 2017.⁷
- Labor productivity has increased. In 2016, labor productivity rose 4.6% in retail trade. The electronic shopping and mail-order houses industry experienced the largest growth in output, resulting in an 11.4% increase in productivity.⁸
- Union membership among workers in retail has decreased. In 2003, union membership reached a 15-year high of 6.4%. Since then, union membership has declined, reaching a low of 4.3% in 2016, the latest year for which data is available.⁹ In contrast, union membership for all US employees was 12.9% in 2003 and 10.7% in 2016.¹⁰
- In the next 10 years, the Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that some of the current largest occupations in retail will experience increases in employment, and others will experience decreases. In comparison, employment in all occupations is expected to increase by 7.4%.¹¹

Projected Change in Employment for Largest Retail Occupations, 2016 - 2026



Learn more at as.pn/retail

From our speakers

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Gina Schaefer, "Why My Business Values Its Employees," *The Washington Post*, March 28, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/all-opinions-are-local/wp/2016/03/28/why-my-business-values-its-employees/>.

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¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment, Hours, and Earnings from the Current Employment Statistics Survey (National), preliminary data for October 2017 from "All Employees, Thousands, Retail Trade, Seasonally Adjusted," in data extracted November 8, 2017:

https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/CES4200000001?amp%253bdata_tool=XGtable&output_view=data&include_graphs=true.

² Employment and wage data from the Occupational Employment Statistics Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, presented in "Table 1. National Employment and Wage Data from the Occupational Employment Statistics Survey by Occupation, May 2016,"

<https://www.bls.gov/news.release/ocwage.t01.htm>.

³ 2016 age data from the Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 11b. Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation and Age," <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11b.htm>.

⁴ 2016 gender, race, and ethnicity data from the Current Population Survey, Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 11. Employed Persons by Detailed Occupation, Sex, Race, and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity," <https://www.bls.gov/cps/cpsaat11.htm>.

⁵ Ibid, 1.

⁶ Analyzed based on data from Annual Retail Trade Survey – 2015, US Retail Trade Sales – Total and Ecommerce (1998-2015), <https://www.census.gov/retail/index.html>.

⁷ US Census Bureau, "Quarterly Retail E-Commerce Sales: 2nd Quarter 2017," Press Release, August 17, 2017, https://www.census.gov/retail/mrts/www/data/pdf/ec_current.pdf.

⁸ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Productivity and Costs by Industry: Wholesale Trade, Retail Trade, and Food Services and Drinking Places Industries – 2016," Press Release, August 3, 2017, <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/prin1.pdf>.

⁹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Union Affiliation Data from the Current Population Survey, "Percent of Employed, Private Wage and Salary Workers, Members of Unions, Retail Trade," data extracted November 9, 2017: <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LUU020491100>.

¹⁰ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Union Affiliation Data from the Current Population Survey, "Percent of Employed, Members of Unions," data extracted November 9, 2017, <https://beta.bls.gov/dataViewer/view/timeseries/LUU0204899600>.

¹¹ Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 1.2. Employment by Detailed Occupation, 2016 and Projected 2026," https://www.bls.gov/emp/ep_table_102.htm.