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.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Employment</th>
<th>Median Hourly Wages²</th>
<th>Median Age³</th>
<th>Percent Women⁴</th>
<th>Percent Black or African American</th>
<th>Percent Hispanic or Latino</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retail Salespersons</td>
<td>4,528,550</td>
<td>$10.90</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>48.4%</td>
<td>12.3%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cashiers</td>
<td>3,564,130</td>
<td>$9.71</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>73.2%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stock Clerks and Order Fillers</td>
<td>2,016,340</td>
<td>$11.46</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>37.0%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Line Supervisors of Retail Sales Workers</td>
<td>1,194,220</td>
<td>$18.77</td>
<td>42.6</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Occupations</td>
<td>140,400,040</td>
<td>$17.81</td>
<td>42.2</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>11.9%</td>
<td>16.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Learn more at as.pn/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 2002\(^6\) 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%.\(^11\)
From our speakers


5 Ibid, 1.


