Audio script – Spotlight on Fashion

Throughout history, fashion has greatly influenced the “fabric” of societies all over the world. Terms like “white collar” and “blue collar” are often used to describe the nature of one's occupation and serve as a reminder that we often make assumptions about people's socioeconomic status based on the clothes they wear.

The fashion industry is a global industry, where fashion designers, manufacturers, merchandisers, and retailers from all over the world collaborate to design, manufacture, and sell clothing, shoes, and accessories. In this Spotlight, we take a look at the fashion industry's supply chain—including import, producer, and consumer prices, spending, employment, pay, labor productivity, and safety and health.

Here are some BLS data that provide insight into the fashion industry:

* In 2010, households spent, on average, $1,700 (in nominal terms) on apparel, footwear, and related products and services—3.5 percent of average annual expenditures.
* Employment in the apparel manufacturing industry has declined by more than 80 percent (from about 900,000 to 150,000 jobs) over the past two decades.
* In 2010, there were 7,855 private business establishments in the apparel manufacturing industry, employing 157,587 workers—compared with 15,478 establishments and 426,027 workers in 2001.
* In May 2010, almost 75 percent of all salaried fashion designers worked in New York and California. Fashion designers earned an annual mean wage of $73,930 in 2010, over $25,000 more than the average for all occupations.
* Over the 2010–2020 period, as clothing continues to be made in other countries and the demand for custom clothing keeps declining, occupations such as sewing machine operators, fabric and apparel patternmakers, textile and garment pressers, and textile knitting and weaving machine setters, operators, and tenders are all projected to decrease in employment.
* From 1996 to 2011, the U.S. apparel manufacturing industry experienced many job losses—averaging 323 mass layoff events per year.
* From 1987-2010, labor productivity more than doubled in U.S. textile mills and nearly doubled in footwear manufacturing. Labor productivity in apparel manufacturing followed a different pattern; it grew at about the same rate as overall manufacturing productivity from 1987 to 2000 but generally declined from 2000 to 2010.
* In 2007, among those countries studied by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Germany had the highest hourly compensation costs within the apparel manufacturing industry. The Philippines, with compensation costs at 88 cents per hour, had the lowest among those countries studied.

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