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UK: Women bear the brunt of high street closures and job losses

Friday 10 May 2019, by [JOLLY Jasper](#) (Date first published: 26 April 2019).

In 2019 the number of retail jobs held by women fell by 3.4% but for men it was down only 0.2%.

The wave of store closures and job losses that is hollowing out the British high street has a disproportionate impact on women.

Higher costs and the shift to online shopping have left many of the UK's biggest retailers struggling in the past two years. The result has been hundreds of store closures and tens of thousands of job losses. The [announcement of more cuts at Debenhams](#) is just the latest example.

The retail trade – excluding vehicle sales – is the largest private sector employer in the UK, accounting for 3.2m jobs, and women outnumber men by more than 500,000.

Last year, the number of retail jobs held by women fell by 3.4%, while the number of jobs held by men fell by only 0.2% in the same period, according to figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The British Retail Consortium, which represents the industry's largest employers, estimated that 74,000 retail jobs were lost over the course of 2018. The group has warned there could be as many as 900,000 retail jobs losses by 2025, which would represent a huge shift in the structure of the British labour market.

The Labour MP Liz Twist said retail sector workers need better access to training. "Sometimes retail work is undervalued but we all rely on retail staff," she said. "I think retail workers deserve a much better deal, all considered."

Women are more likely to be in lower-paid roles across the economy and retail is one of the sectors with the highest proportion of low-paid jobs, according to [analysis](#) by the Resolution Foundation, a thinktank.

Rachel Reeves, the Labour MP who chairs parliament's business select committee, said the "everyday economy", including sectors such as retail and hospitality, is too often neglected in political debates.

She said: "The very least that government should do is ensure that its flagship industrial strategy doesn't just favour hi-tech, male-dominated industries but that it properly engages with sectors such as retail to help them prosper in the future."

Helen Dickinson, the chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, said the flexible hours offered by some retail roles were one of the reasons that three in five retail workers are women but added

that there is still a gender gap within the industry.

However, she said: “While the proportion of women in senior and board-level roles has been rising steadily, there is still further to go before we reach parity and it is disappointing that recent job losses in retail have fallen hardest on women and vulnerable communities.”

Here are some of the retailers to have announced job losses:

Debenhams

1,200 jobs

The department store chain published [a list of the 22 stores it is planning to close](#) in early 2020 [putting 1,200 jobs at risk](#). Debenhams said it would close a total of 50 of its worst-performing shops. It has yet to confirm the locations of the remaining stores at risk but it means that more jobs will go.

Tesco

10,700 jobs

In January, Britain’s largest supermarket said it would cut [as many as 9,000 jobs](#) as it closes its deli counters, with at least half unlikely to be redeployed in the business. A year earlier it said it would [strip out a layer of management](#)- putting another 1,700 jobs at risk.

Office Outlet

1,200 jobs

The stationery chain Office Outlet, formerly known as Staples, collapsed into administration in March, putting [1,200 UK jobs at risk](#).

Thomas Cook

320 jobs

The travel agent Thomas Cook announced plans in March to close 21 stores and cut back its retail workforce, with the [loss of 320 jobs](#).

Ikea

350

The Swedish flatpack-furniture retailer Ikea was not immune to the shift to online shopping, with [350 job cuts in the UK](#) announced in November as part of 7,500 redundancies worldwide.

John Lewis

700 jobs

The John Lewis Partnership reduced its overall headcount by 700 jobs in the year to June. More than [1,800 people](#) were made redundant - nearly three times the level in the previous year - although it added jobs elsewhere.

Homebase

1,500 jobs

The DIY retailer Homebase was rescued from complete collapse in August but at the cost of as many as [1,500 redundancies](#) and a sixth of its stores.

Poundworld

5,100 jobs

Poundworld collapsed in June after administrators Deloitte failed to find a buyer for the discount retailer, which was previously owned by a private equity firm. It had 335 stores and the closure resulted in the [loss of 5,100 jobs](#).

Marks & Spencer

1,850 jobs

M&S is in the middle of a five-year turnaround plan, which last year resulted in [380 job losses](#) at a London distribution centre followed by another [1,500 threatened](#) by the closure of 100 stores by 2022, announced last summer.

Morrisons

700 jobs

Morrisons in February 2018 said it would [axe 1,500 middle-management roles](#). While it also planned to increase the number of customer-facing staff, at least 700 faced redundancy or a lower-paid job.

Toys R Us

3,000 jobs

Toys R Us collapsed last year with the loss [of 3,000 jobs](#). The company, owned by a now-bankrupt US parent by the same name, had built up 105 stores since arriving in the UK in 1985.

Maplin

2,500 jobs

The private equity-owned retailer Maplin Electronics had long struggled to pay its debts, [finally succumbing](#) on the same day in February 2018 as Toys R Us.

Jasper Jolly

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The Guardian

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