

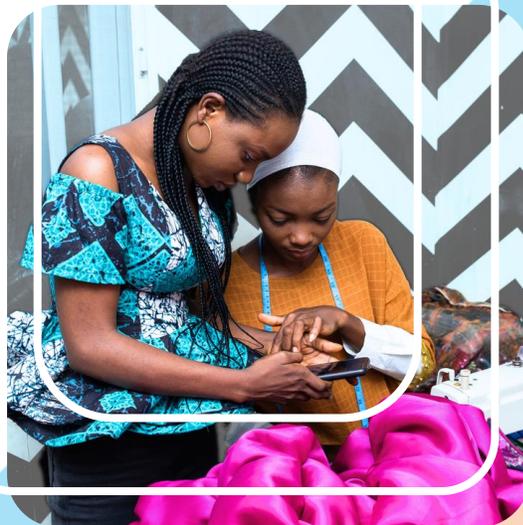


Unlocking Opportunities for Youth in the **Orange Economy**:

Spotlight on the Fashion Industry

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The Orange Economy Series



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This note is the fifth in a series of [Solutions for Youth Employment \(S4YE\)](#) knowledge briefs focused on the Orange Economy or creative sectors. The first note in the series, “[Orange Economy: As a Driver of Jobs for Youth](#),” addressed interventions that can enable job creation for youth in the creative sector. The second note in the series, “[Unlocking Opportunities for Youth in the Orange Economy: Music in Africa](#),” focused on jobs and emerging trends for youth in the music industry in Africa. The third note, “[Unlocking Opportunities for Youth in the Orange Economy: Spotlight on the Film Industry](#),” highlighted changing skill demands and the opportunity for governments and the private sector to collaboratively invest in the film industry in regions such as Latin America. IFC’s analysis of Nigeria’s skills gap in the film industry is spotlighted. The fourth note, “[Jobs in the Orange Economy: Impact of Disruptive Technologies](#),” highlighted how disruptive technologies are likely to transform businesses, create new jobs for youth, and change the nature of existing jobs in the creative and cultural industries.

This note analyzes the importance of the fashion industry for socio-economic growth and examines its potential as a source of job opportunities for young people. It discusses jobs along the industry’s value chain, its contribution to global revenues and trade, and its evolution with changes in technology, environmental concerns, and changing consumption patterns. The note also highlights the skills required for jobs in the fashion industry and presents analysis to support the claim that the industry is a key driver of jobs for youth and women. The note concludes with policy recommendations to promote circular economy job creation, skill development of young talent, and investment in micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in the fashion industry.

These notes are part of S4YE’s focus on the potential for creative sectors to stimulate new types of work opportunities for youth. This focus led to the creation of the [Creative Economy Alliance](#), a joint platform launched by [S4YE](#) and [GIZ](#) with several development partners.

1. Why analyze the fashion industry?

The fashion industry is a key part of the creative economy, which is regarded as one of the world’s fastest growing sectors that could account for 10 percent of global GDP by 2030¹. Fashion is one such fast-growing, vibrant industry in the creative economy, which has potential to drive growth in jobs and inclusion, particularly in emerging markets.

The fashion industry holds socio-cultural significance. Its importance to culture and creative expression can be traced back to the times of ancient Rome and Egypt where clothing was a symbol of social status. Families with higher income wore colorful and elegant clothes, while those from low-income households wore neutral colors². Fashion thus conveyed identity, culture, ethnicity, and personal or religious values, which continues to this day³.

Socio-economic trends and political movements, such as the call for women’s rights in the past and climate change in present day, have influenced changes in the world of fashion over time. While the 1940s saw women wearing pants, as they occupied public spaces traditionally dominated by men, the 1990s ushered in globalization and transition of western fashion trends to emerging markets⁴. One of the key differences in fashion of ancient and modern times is the change in methods of production. With industrialization, the process of manufacturing clothing shifted toward mass production at lower costs⁵.

¹ IFC: What we do. Sector: Creative Industries. Available at: <https://www.ifc.org/en/what-we-do/sector-expertise/creative-industries>

² The History of Fashion: Evolution, Timeline & Trends. April 2022. Available at: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/the-history-of-fashion-trends-design.html>

³ The Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. 2018. News & Notes: Members’ Magazine. Issue 239, Fall 2018. Fashion. Available at: https://isac.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/uploads/shared/N_and_N/nn239.pdf

⁴ The History of Fashion: Evolution, Timeline & Trends. April 2022. Available at: <https://study.com/academy/lesson/the-history-of-fashion-trends-design.html>

⁵ Major, J. S. & Steele, V. 2024. Britannica: Fashion industry. Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/art/fashion-industry>

This has further manifested into fast fashion in the present day, which is now being challenged by shifting consumer priorities to sustainable purchasing practices and conscious living.

In addition, technology has transformed the fashion trends of the 21st century. As in many other industries, digitization is bringing both progress and challenges to the fashion industry. Technological progress is changing consumption patterns faster than normal, causing fashion brands to fall short of consumer expectations⁶. Fashion is also exposed to uncertainty due to shifts in manufacturing and events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This generates pressure in terms of growth and cost efficiency⁷. In response to these challenges, fashion producers have made efforts to improve access to markets by innovating product design, using digital tools and technologies such as artificial intelligence to design clothing, revamping manufacturing processes, and establishing supply chains locally. The fashion industry has also been impacted by the expansion of social media channels, where youth are constantly influencing, as well as consuming, new fashion trends.

1.1 The fashion industry is critical for economic growth

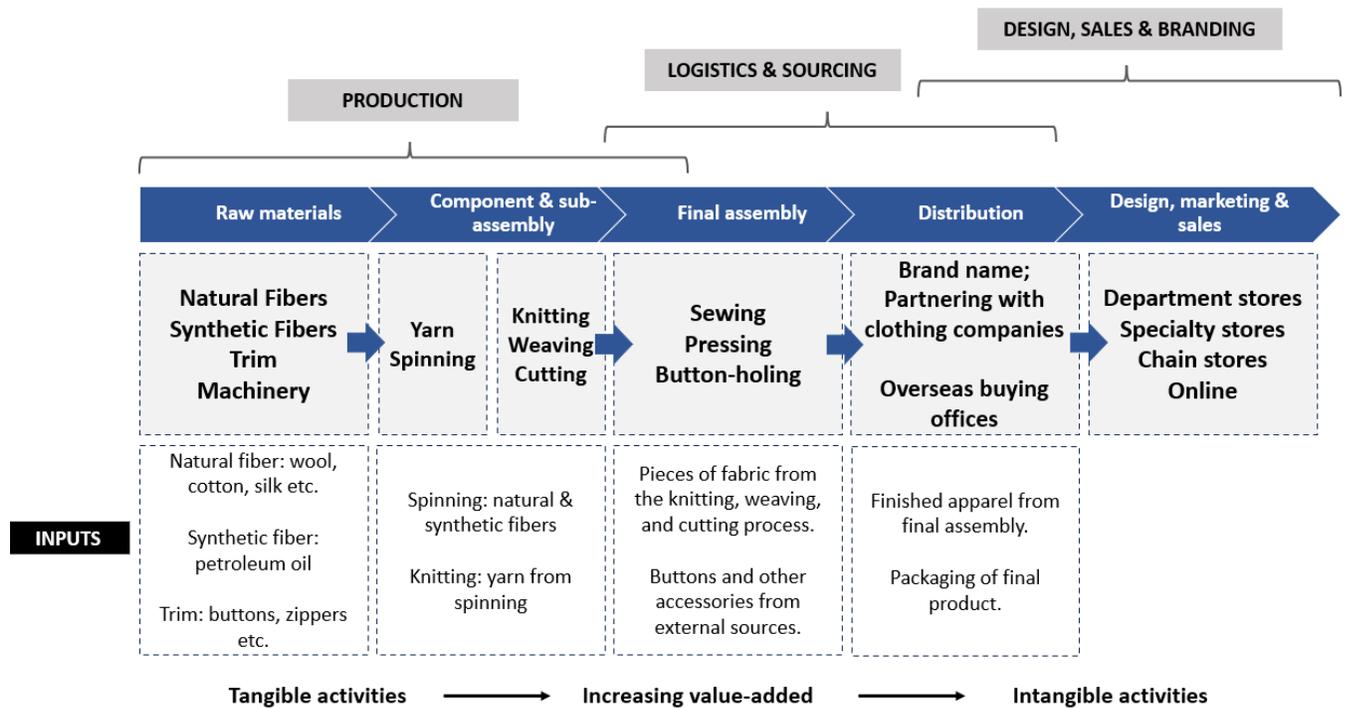
The fashion industry includes the production, distribution and consumption of clothing or apparel, accessories, and related fashion services⁸. A value chain analysis of the fashion industry reveals the economic activities required to bring apparel from conception in the form of raw material in the textile industry, to manufacturing and the creation of intermediate inputs such as fabric and leather, to design, marketing, and finally distribution to the consumer through retail channels or to high-end customers through fashion shows and the luxury apparel category (Figure 1).

⁶ Deloitte. 2018. Digital transformation – the ultimate challenge for the fashion industry. August 9, 2018. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/ch/en/pages/consumer-industrial-products/articles/ultimate-challenge-fashion-industry-digital-age.html>

⁷ [Ibid.](#)

⁸ Global Fashion Industry Statistics. Fashion United. Available at: <https://fashionunited.com/global-fashion-industry-statistics>

Figure 1: Understanding the fashion industry value chain⁹ (Duke University, 2017)



On one end of value chain, textile fashion jobs include workers working in cotton fields, factories, warehouses, transport, and logistics. On the other end of the fashion value chain, jobs include workers employed to operate digital fashion platforms¹⁰.

1.1.1 The industry’s contribution to global revenue

Generating \$1.7 trillion dollars in global revenue, the fashion industry is one of the key value creating industries for the global economy¹¹ (Figure 2). According to estimates from McKinsey, if the industry was ranked beside countries’ GDP, it would represent the seventh largest economy globally¹². As is evident from the dip in global apparel market revenues in 2020 in Figure 1, the industry suffered a setback in 2020-2021 due to the shock caused by a lower demand for clothing and accessories because of the global supply chain disruptions caused by COVID-19. However, global apparel market revenues fully recovered in the years that followed. The recovering market and corresponding creation of job opportunities point toward the potential for youth employment in the fashion industry.

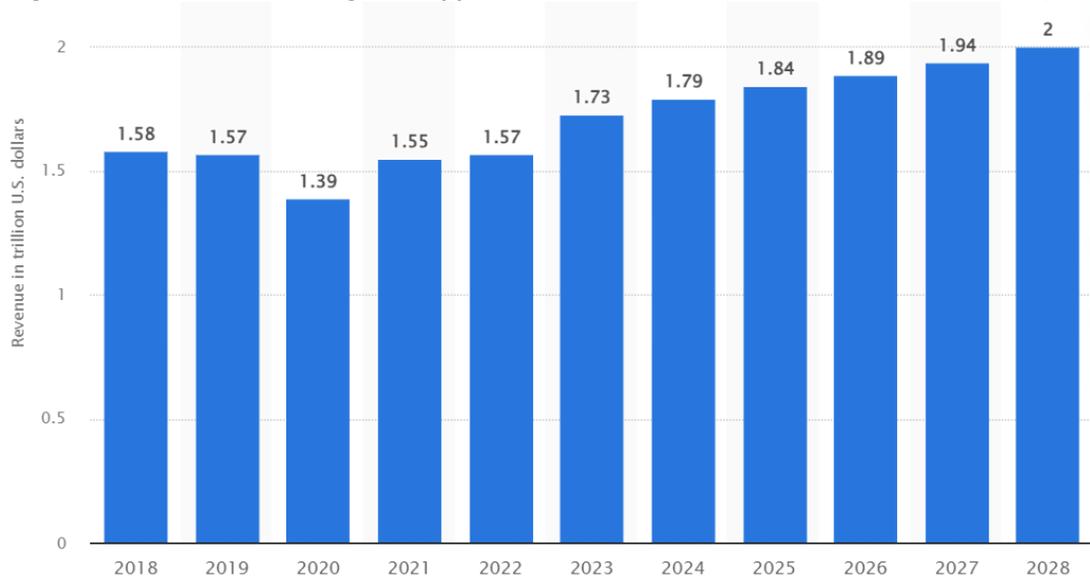
⁹ Duke University. 2017. The Apparel Industry. From Factories to Retail Stores: A GVC Analysis. Available at: https://sites.duke.edu/sociol342d_01d_s2017_team-7/2-global-value-chain/

¹⁰ Licata, M. & Kemp, W. 2020. UN today. The future of work in fashion. Available at: <https://untoday.org/the-future-of-work-in-fashion/>

¹¹ McKinsey & Company. 2022. State of Fashion 2022: An uneven recovery and new frontiers. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/industries/retail/our%20insights/state%20of%20fashion/2022/the-state-of-fashion-2022.pdf>

¹² McKinsey & Company and The Business of Fashion. 2016. The State of Fashion 2017. Report. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/McKinsey/Industries/Retail/Our%20Insights/The%20state%20of%20fashion/The-state-of-fashion-2017-McK-BoF-report.pdf>

Figure 2: Revenue from the global apparel market between 2018-2028 (in trillion USD)¹³



1.1.2 The industry’s contribution to global trade

In terms of contribution to global trade, clothing or apparel exports totaled \$576 billion in 2022, and textile exports totaled \$339 billion. This was lower than in previous years due to the slowed economic growth caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and high inflation in apparel import markets such as the United States and Western European countries.

The top 10 apparel and textile export markets in 2022 are relevant as they indicate the potential for job creation in the fashion industry (Table 1). China and the EU are the main economic players in the fashion industry, impacting the global economy through trade in textile and apparel. The world's leading exporter of apparel and textiles in 2022 was China, with the EU, the second-biggest exporter in terms of apparel and textiles, far behind. The country leading global imports of textiles and clothing is the USA.

Table 1: Top 10 textile and apparel export markets in 2022 (WTO, 2023)¹⁴

		Value of textile export (in \$B)	Market share (in %)			Value of apparel export (in \$B)	Market share (in %)
1	China	147.8	43.6	1	China	182.4	31.7
2	EU	71.5	21.1	2	EU	156.4	27.1
3	India	19.4	7.4	3	Bangladesh	45.3	7.9
4	Turkey	14.6	5.7	4	Vietnam	35.3	6.1
5	USA	13.8	4.3	5	Turkey	19.9	3.5
6	Vietnam	10.8	4.1	6	India	17.7	3.1
7	Pakistan	8.7	3.2	7	Indonesia	10.1	1.7
8	Taiwan	8.3	2.6	8	Cambodia	9.1	1.6

¹³ Statista. 2024. Revenue of the apparel market worldwide from 2018 to 2028 (in trillion USD). Available at: <https://www.statista.com/forecasts/821415/value-of-the-global-apparel-market>

¹⁴ WTO. 2023. World Trade Statistical Review 2023. Available at: https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/booksp_e/wtsr_2023_e.pdf

9	South Korea	8.3	2.5	9	Pakistan	8.9	1.5
10	Japan	6	2.4	10	USA	7.2	1.2

Furthermore, the majority of the producers or manufacturers of clothing and textiles are in Asia. Production of textiles and clothing is an important component of the manufacturing sector in low- and lower-middle income countries. In Bangladesh, textile and clothing-related manufacturing activities contributed 57 percent of value-added in the manufacturing sector while, in Pakistan, the sectors contributed 29 percent of value added in manufacturing (Box 1). This dropped significantly for Spain and the United States, where textiles and clothing represent only 3 percent and 1 percent of value-added in manufacturing, respectively (Figure 3). Apparel companies with the highest sales and market capitalization are in Europe and the United States (Box 2).

It is important to note that while two-thirds of African countries produce cotton, particularly in West Africa, more than 81 percent of the cotton produced is exported, leaving little for use in local fashion and textile sectors. UNESCO has flagged this, warning that exports are restricting the growth of the region’s fashion industry and hampering its potential for job opportunities and economic growth¹⁵.

Box 1: Investing Pakistan’s fashion sector to help create jobs in a key sector and support women (IFC, 2022)¹⁶

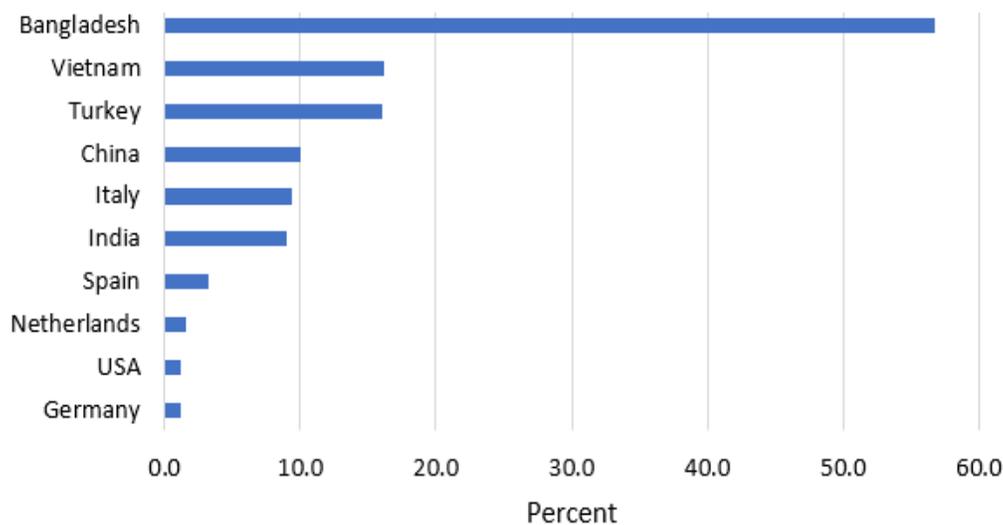
Pakistan’s clothing retail and textile sector accounts for 9 percent of the economy’s GDP and provides 40 percent of its total employment. Of those employed in the textile sector, approximately one-third are women. The textile and retail industry in Pakistan is a core part of their economy and employs a majority of women.

By investing \$25 million in Khaadi Corporation in Pakistan, IFC intends to enable the fashion industry to grow, formalize, and create more jobs and economic opportunities for women. Khaadi is the largest fashion and apparel company in Pakistan; it operates in four countries and has 57 retail outlets across Pakistan, with presence in the United Kingdom and GCC countries. The company employs a 1,000-person strong workforce from more than 14 countries. The investment will enable the company to accelerate growth, expand its retail and online global sales, and indirectly strengthen the retailer’s suppliers in Pakistan, which are small businesses.

¹⁵ UNESCO. 2023. The African fashion sector: trends, challenges & opportunities for growth. Available at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000387230>

¹⁶ IFC. 2022. Pressroom: IFC invests in Pakistan’s key fashion retail sector to help create jobs, support women. Available at: <https://pressroom.ifc.org/all/pages/PressDetail.aspx?ID=26999>

Figure 3: Textiles and clothing (% of value added in manufacturing)¹⁷



Box 2: Apparel retail companies with the highest sales and market capitalization are in Europe and the United States

The apparel market is dominated by retail companies located in European countries and the United States. The Spanish group, Inditex, generated the highest revenues from the sale of clothing and accessories in 2021. It was followed by the Swedish retailer, H&M, and the American retailer, Gap.

The most valued fashion retailers in terms of market capitalization are also in Europe and the United States. The leading corporation by market capitalization is the French company LVMH, which constitutes businesses such as wines and spirits, fashion and leather goods, perfumes and cosmetics, watches and jewelry, selective retail sales, and other activities. It is followed by the American company, Nike, and the French company, Dior¹⁸.

1.1.3 Household-level spending on fashion

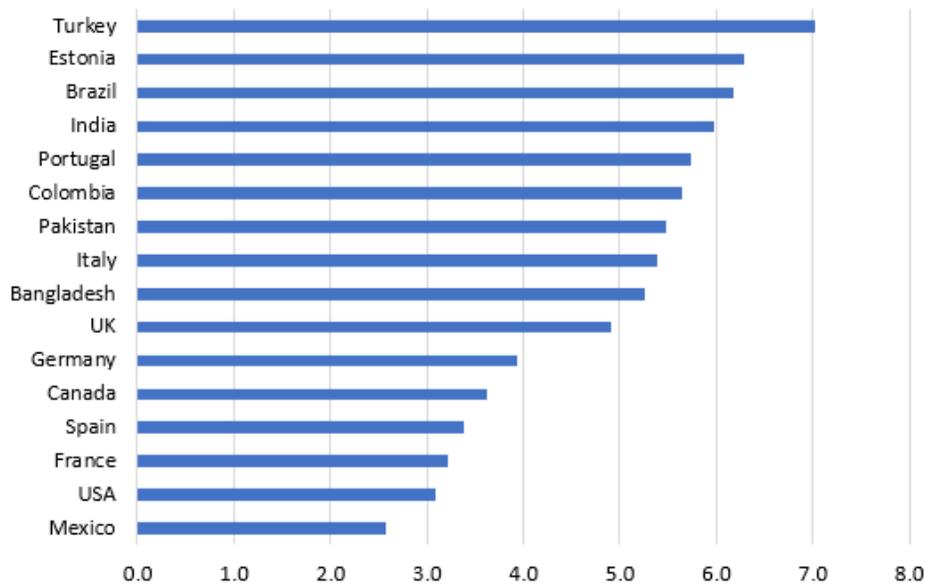
At the household level, global consumer spending has grown substantially in recent years, going from an average per capita consumption of clothing and footwear of 15 units in 2016 to 16.7 units in 2021¹⁹. Households spend, on average, between 3 to 6 percent of their total annual budget on clothing and footwear. In Turkey, Estonia, and Brazil, households rank clothing and footwear high within their total budget, relative to other household products (Figure 4). For these reasons, analyzing this growing industry and its impacts on job creation for youth and women is critical.

¹⁷ United Nations Industrial Development Organization, International Yearbook of Industrial Statistics. World Bank WDI, April 2024. Available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.MNF.TXTL.ZS.UN>

¹⁸ Statista. 2024. Leading clothing companies worldwide as of December 2023, by market capitalization (in billion USD). Available at: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1293538/clothing-companies-market-cap/>

¹⁹ Global Fashion Industry Statistics. Fashion United. Available at: <https://fashionunited.com/global-fashion-industry-statistics>

Figure 4: Household consumption of clothing and footwear (% of total consumption) (OECD and the World Bank, 2023)²⁰



1.2 The fashion industry’s contribution to socio-cultural capital

The fashion industry stimulates tourism and economic growth. Traditional crafts constitute an important segment of the fashion industry, impacting it both economically and culturally. Artisans draw from cultural identity to produce garments and accessories which may also represent national symbols and transmit cultural heritage²¹. Through handicrafts, fashion contributes to economic growth, tourism, and development, especially in rural areas. In several countries, artisanal markets for clothing and accessories are the center of tourist activities. For example, the Pisac Market in Peru is known for crafts made by Quechua artisans. Other craft markets that attract tourists include the Otavalo Market in Ecuador, the Monastir Aki Market in Greece, and the Grabs Bazaar Market in Turkey.

In urban areas, fashion-related events like fashion week and fashion award shows attract tourists and create additional jobs. Fashion weeks, held twice a year for the spring and fall seasons, constitute a formal meeting point for designers and brands to showcase their latest clothing and accessories to buyers and the media. The most well-known fashion weeks are held in New York, Paris, London, Tokyo, Milan, and Shanghai. This tradition began in the nineteenth century. Fashion awards recognize excellence and support industry-wide fundraising activities, which contribute to the development of the industry. For example, the Met Gala raised \$17.4 million in 2022²².

²⁰ OECD Aggregate National Accounts Database & World Bank 2010 Global Consumption Database. Available at: <https://datatopics.worldbank.org/consumption/>

²¹ UNESCO. 2023. Traditional craftsmanship. Available at: <https://ich.unesco.org/en/traditional-craftsmanship-00057>

²² Billboard. 2022. Lifestyle: 2022 Met Gala brings in a record \$17.4 million. Available at: <https://www.billboard.com/culture/lifestyle/2022-met-gala-donations-1235067641/>

2. Skills required for fashion industry jobs

The fashion industry employs a variety of high and low-skilled workers along the fashion value chain, going beyond retailers, online stores, and creative design. Fashion jobs include activities carried out by artisans, florists, embroiderers, seamstresses, tailors, and perfumery producers²³. The industry also includes jobs which support events such as fashion shows: stylists, hair and makeup artists, modeling agents, photographers, and other fashion-adjacent businesses.

Due to the varied types of fashion industry jobs, the skills required of workers in the fashion industry also vary (Table 2). However, since the nature of the work is creative, all fashion industry jobs require skills such as creativity and innovation. An interview with 28 fashion industry professionals found that the four critical skills needed for the industry include novel or creative thought processes, determination, open-mindedness, and risk-taking²⁴. Strategies for developing creative thinking were highlighted, including practicing creative thinking strategies, formal training on the creative arts, exposure to diverse experiences, and creating safe and challenging environments to nurture ideas²⁵.

Table 2: The difference in skillsets of a fashion designer and textile designer in India²⁶

Fashion designer <i>Focuses on the creation and design of clothing and accessories.</i>	Textile designer <i>Focuses on the process of creating structures and designs for knitted, woven, printed or ornamented fabrics.</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eye for detail Creative and artistic skills Spontaneous ideas Strong drawing skills Strong communication skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technical knowledge Research skills Data handling ability Analytical skills

Young people do not necessarily want to work in the sectors which they believe have the most vacancies, but rather in ones that offer the highest returns. The ILS-RAND Mongolian Youth Survey found that young people perceived the services sector as an opportunity to earn more money²⁷. However, young people are also critical of the poor working conditions offered in the retail sector and perceived store discounts and flexible hours as compensation for low wages²⁸. In this context, increasing knowledge among youth about the potential career growth opportunities in the industry could facilitate their entry to the fashion job market. Training young people in creative skills and investing in the local fashion industry (Box 3) may also be key to offering youth the opportunity to engage in the fashion services sector.

²³ Library of Congress. 2023. Fashion Industry: A Resource Guide. Available at: <https://guides.loc.gov/fashion-industry>

²⁴ Karpova, E., Marcketti, S. & Kamm, C. 2013. Fashion industry professionals' viewpoints on creative traits and, strategies for creativity development. Science Direct Journal. Thinking Skills and Creativity. Volume 10. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1871187113000576>

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ College Dekho. Course Comparison: Fashion Design vs. Textile Design. Available at: <https://www.collegedekho.com/articles/course-comparison-fashion-textile-designing-eligibility-exams-syllabus-colleges-careers/>

²⁷ Institute for Labour Studies (ILS) & RAND Corporation. 2015. Improving the Mongolian Labor Market and Enhancing Opportunities for Youth. Available at: https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1000/RR1092/RAND_RR1092.pdf

²⁸ Misra, J. & Walters, K. 2016. All Fun and Cool Clothes? Youth Workers Consumer Identity in Clothing Retail. Sage Journals. Work and Occupations: Volume 43. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0730888416644949>

Box 3: Will increased investment in the fashion industry in Africa establish it as the next fashion capital of the world?

The African continent may be the next global fashion leader. It is a major producer of raw material—37 of 54 African countries produce cotton. It exports \$15.5 billion in textiles annually, and imports \$23.1 billion in textiles, clothing, and footwear annually²⁹. The sector could also empower women, given that only 17 percent of 3.5 million cotton workers in the least developed countries in Africa are women³⁰.

The “Made in Africa” movement has gained significant momentum, particularly amongst young people, who constitute 50 percent of the continent’s total population, and the middle class, who constitute more than one-third of the population. This has opened up new segments of consumers for the fashion industry.

African fabric is also increasingly being used in contemporary designs and embraced by young designers³¹ such as Sébastien Bazemo. He has brought Kôkô Dunda, a dyed textile which originated in the city of Bobo Dioulasso, Burkina Faso, back into style³². Over the next decade, a 42 percent increase in demand for African haute couture is expected, according to estimates from UNESCO³³. The 32 fashion weeks held across the continent each year, are a testament to this.

However, high cost of production and imports have affected pricing. This has made the designs of African creatives inaccessible to the average citizen. Investment in the local fashion industry may address these challenges. Small- and medium-enterprises constitute 90 percent of businesses in the fashion industry in Africa³⁴. Investing in them could be key to local employment and empowerment of young people who are vying to enter the industry. In addition, given that Africa is rich in traditional textile skills and techniques, countries should engage in formal training to ensure practices are passed on to the next generation³⁵. UNESCO has also called for an increase in training in fashion-related professions such as quality control specialists, commercial lawyers, marketing specialists, as well as training in fashion-related technologies such as 3D printing and e-commerce.

²⁹ UNESCO. 2023. New UNESCO publication on the African fashion sector – The fashion sector in Africa: trends, challenges and opportunities for growth. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/empowering-african-fashion-sector-unesco-partnerships-incubator-opportunities-growth#:~:text=Today%2C%20African%20fashion%20is%20booming,an%20increase%20in%20local%20consumers>

³⁰ [Ibid.](#)

³¹ The Guardian. 2022. The designers kickstarting Africa’s style revolution. April 23, 2022. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2022/apr/23/the-designers-kickstarting-africas-style-revolution>

³² The Guardian. 2024. ‘Fashion can change Africa’: the pioneering designers chasing a world of opportunity. January 1, 2024. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/jan/01/fashion-can-change-africa-the-pioneering-designers-chasing-a-world-of-opportunity>

³³ UNESCO. 2023. New UNESCO publication on the African fashion sector – The fashion sector in Africa: trends, challenges and opportunities for growth. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/empowering-african-fashion-sector-unesco-partnerships-incubator-opportunities-growth#:~:text=Today%2C%20African%20fashion%20is%20booming,an%20increase%20in%20local%20consumers>

³⁴ The Guardian. 2024. ‘Fashion can change Africa’: the pioneering designers chasing a world of opportunity. January 1, 2024. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2024/jan/01/fashion-can-change-africa-the-pioneering-designers-chasing-a-world-of-opportunity>

³⁵ UNESCO. 2023. New UNESCO publication on the African fashion sector – The fashion sector in Africa: trends, challenges and opportunities for growth. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/empowering-african-fashion-sector-unesco-partnerships-incubator-opportunities-growth#:~:text=Today%2C%20African%20fashion%20is%20booming,an%20increase%20in%20local%20consumers>

Salaries in the fashion sector may also become more competitive as higher-value activities associated with the fashion industry—such as fashion shows, e-commerce, sales, and marketing—continue to develop. Table 3 lists fashion jobs in industries associated with the fashion industry in developed economies such as the United States. For the selected jobs, the annual average salary ranges from \$53,700 to \$102,400, with education qualifications ranging from no education to a bachelor’s degree. This salary range is greater than the US median salary for those aged 25-34 (US\$52,900), those aged 35-44 (US\$63,600), and other age groups with a similar level of education in the US³⁶. The salaries, educational qualifications, experience, and skills required are indicative of the possible growth opportunities for young people interested in entering the industry.

Table 3: Jobs in industries associated with fashion in the United States³⁷

Job Type	Job Tasks	Annual avg. salary	Experience	Education
Stylist	Plan and coordinate outfits to help clients. They may select clothing for photo shoots, advertising campaigns, television and film productions or appearances made by public figures.	\$53,686	Soft skills creating welcoming environments.	NA
Fashion designer	Creates original clothing and accessories, usually specializing in certain products. They are involved in the full creation process of a collection, from conceptualizing and sketching design ideas.	\$57,352	1 year in garment construction, fashion design, and Adobe.	Bachelor's degree in design or fine arts, or college degree in fashion.
Public relations manager	Direct the public relations and communications departments for a company, ensuring to uphold its positive reputation. They are responsible for overseeing and executing public relations strategies.	\$60,834	5-7 years working in fashion public relations.	Bachelor's degree.
E-commerce manager	Oversee a retail organization's online sales presence, with the goal of generating more purchases. Responsibilities include reviewing sales data and inventory levels, creating pricing strategies and promotional campaigns.	\$64,944	Minimum of 2 years of experience in a similar role.	Degree in marketing, fashion or business-related major or equivalent experience.
Brand manager	Oversee the maintenance and creation of a company's image to attract and retain customers. Collaborate with the creative, marketing, and product development teams.	\$66,023	2+ years of related experience and/or training is required.	Bachelor's degree from a four-year college or university.
Marketing manager	Determine the marketing strategies that will best drive sales for a company or brand. They are responsible for managing branding efforts, creating advertising campaigns, and analyzing its results.	\$67,216	3-5+ years of experience in related field.	Four-year college degree preferred.
Account executive	Promote retail chains or designer brands to sell products. They meet with media outlets and representatives to coordinate ad campaigns.	\$68,239	3+ years' experience in sales or merchandising in wholesale fashion.	Bachelor's degree.
Merchandising manager	Make decisions regarding the stock, prices, and presentation of products at retail stores. Responsibilities include maintaining a store's visual appearance, coordinating sales promotions, and checking inventory levels.	\$69,407	3+ years of retail management experience is an asset.	College degree preferred.
Fashion buyer	Watch the latest fashion trends and work with retail or department stores to select the products sold in their stores. The job may require buyers to attend trade shows and fashion shows or meet with designers to find products.	\$70,334	Procurement: 3 years & Purchasing: 5 years.	Bachelor's degree.
Editor-in-chief	Oversee digital or print publications and makes the final decisions on what is published.	\$70,591	5 years of media experience, and at least 3 years of reporting experience.	Bachelor's degree.
Art director	Supervise the creation of visual materials for advertising campaigns, magazines, and other media. Create the vision for the images and manage creative staff.	\$71,204	5+ years of experience in fashion industry.	Bachelor's degree in design.

³⁶ Haan, K. Forbes. 2023. Advisor: Business. Average salary by age in 2024. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/average-salary-by-age/>

³⁷ Indeed. 2023. 15 Highest-Paying Fashion Jobs. Available at: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/finding-a-job/highest-paying-fashion-jobs>

Creative director	Develop the vision for publications, such as magazines, or a company's products and branding. Within fashion product development, the creative director will communicate a vision to the design team and have the final say on details.	\$86,660	5+ years of relevant experience in related industry.	Background in graphic design, animation, branding, or similar.
Design director	Manage a team of designers to develop product lines for a retailer or brand. They provide creative direction to their team each fashion season, ensuring that the products align with current trends and market demands.	\$96,178	5+ years of relevant experience in related industry.	Background in graphic design, animation, branding, or similar field.
Sourcing manager	Work within the manufacturing sector and are responsible for keeping the process on schedule and cost-effective. Also is responsible for sourcing a variety of items for manufacturing clothing and accessories.	\$98,439	3+ years of experience in supporting complex logistics/supply chain.	Bachelor's degree in supply chain, finance, engineering, or related area.
Product manager	Oversees the product development, design, and sales teams through its manufacturing lifecycle from conception to release.	\$102,415	5+ years professional experience.	Bachelor's degree.

3. The fashion industry is a key driver of jobs for youth and women

The fashion industry, which includes the textile and clothing industries, employs around 91 million workers globally³⁸, of whom 50 million are women. About half of the workers in creative industries are women, and these creative industries employ more people aged 15-29 than any other sector³⁹ (Box 4). In addition, since creativity is especially valued in the fashion industry, it presents an attractive employment opportunity for youth. When compared with other age groups in the labor force, youth possess skills such as creativity, flexibility, and the ability to generate spontaneous ideas—all of which are critical skills required by creative sectors such as the fashion industry. The fashion industry thus holds the potential to provide employment opportunities for young people.

Box 4: Partnering with Do the Right Thing (DTRT), Ghana to make West Africa a textile manufacturing hub (IFC, 2022)⁴⁰

West Africa is the sixth largest cotton producing region globally. West Africa's efficient port infrastructure, improving economic environment, affordable cost of labor, and proximity to apparel importing markets such as Europe and the United States give the region an advantage when it comes to the manufacturing and exporting of textiles and apparel. However, West Africa lacks an integrated textile value chain and knowledge of advanced manufacturing processes.

The Do the Right Thing (DTRT) Apparel Group in Accra, Ghana operates the largest apparel factory in West Africa and is a leader in sustainable, water-free fabric manufacturing. DTRT employs more than 3,000 workers, the majority of whom are women.

By partnering with DTRT, IFC aims to unlock a 1.5 trillion global market by increasing exports and creating jobs in the textile sector. The agenda is to establish the region as the next global textile and manufacturing hub, creating better jobs and higher value manufacturing for the emerging economy and introducing innovative sustainable fabric manufacturing technology, including the production of synthetic fibers from recycled material. This would solidify the region's position as a competitive global textiles cluster.

³⁸ ILO. 2022. The state of the apparel and footwear industry: Employment, automation and their gender dimensions. Background paper no. 3. January 2022. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_835423.pdf

³⁹ IFC: What we do. Sector: Creative Industries. Available at: <https://www.ifc.org/en/what-we-do/sector-expertise/creative-industries>

⁴⁰ IFC. 2022. Pressroom: IFC partners with DTRT to help make West Africa a major textiles manufacturing hub. Available at: <https://pressroom.ifc.org/all/pages/PressDetail.aspx?ID=26848>

3.1 Methodology: measuring jobs in the fashion industry

Using data from six codes of ILO’s labor force statistics database (ILOSTAT) (Table 4), this section captures the distribution of the labor force across the fashion industry—by sector (manufacturing or services), country, gender, and age category.

Codes 13, 14, and 15 cover jobs related to manufacture of textiles, apparel, leather, and related products in the production section of the fashion value chain (Figure 1). Codes 4771 and 4782 relate to jobs in fashion retail. Code 90 relates to jobs in the service sector relating to creative design, sales, and marketing. It also includes workers involved in the operation of facilities and provision of services for cultural and entertainment events, such as fashion shows or live performances.

Methodologically, however, there are limitations to including Code 90 in our calculations, as workers in these jobs may be in non-fashion creative industries like film and music. The numbers presented may therefore be overestimated when it comes to jobs in the fashion industry. We continue to include Code 90 since Codes 13, 14, and 15 are related to process-oriented manufacturing jobs and Codes 4771 and 4782 are related to fashion retail jobs, while Code 90 can be mapped to more intangible “creative” work in the fashion industry.

Table 4: Description of fashion industry jobs by ISIC Codes (UNSD)

ISIC Code	Description
ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 13: Manufacture of textiles⁴¹ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group 131: Spinning, weaving and finishing of textiles Group 139: Manufacture of other textiles 	This division includes workers involved in preparation and spinning of textile fibers as well as textile weaving, finishing of textiles and wearing apparel, manufacture of made-up textile articles, except apparel (for example: household linen, blankets, rugs, cordage etc.).
ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 14: Manufacture of wearing apparel⁴² <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group 141: Manufacture of wearing apparel, except fur Group 142: Manufacture of articles of fur Group 143: Manufacture of knitted and crocheted apparel 	This division includes workers involved in tailoring (ready-to-wear or made-to-measure), in all materials (for example: leather, fabric, knitted and crocheted fabrics etc.), of all items of clothing (for example: outerwear, underwear for men, women or children; work, city or casual clothing etc.) and accessories. There is no distinction made between clothing for adults and clothing for children, or between modern and traditional clothing. It also includes the fur industry (fur skins and wearing apparel).
ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 15: Manufacture of leather and related products⁴³ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group 151: Tanning and dressing of leather; manufacture of luggage, handbags, saddlery and harness; dressing and dyeing of fur Group 152: Manufacture of footwear 	This division includes workers involved in dressing and dyeing of fur and the transformation of hides into leather by tanning or curing and fabricating the leather into products for final consumption. It also includes the manufacture of similar products from other materials (imitation leathers or leather substitutes), such as rubber footwear, textile luggage etc. The products made from leather substitutes are included here, since

⁴¹ ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 13. United Nations. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/classifications/Econ/Detail/EN/27/13>

⁴² ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 14. United Nations. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/classifications/Econ/Detail/EN/27/14>

⁴³ ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 15. United Nations. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/classifications/Econ/Detail/EN/27/15>

	they are made in ways like those in which leather products are made and are often produced in the same unit.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 4771: Retail sale of clothing, footwear, and leather articles in specialized stores⁴⁴ 	This class includes workers involved in the retail sale of: articles of clothing; articles of fur; clothing accessories such as gloves, ties, braces; umbrellas; footwear; leather goods; travel accessories of leather and leather substitutes.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 4782: Retail sale via stalls and markets of textiles, clothing, and footwear⁴⁵ 	This class includes workers involved in retail sale of textiles, clothing, and footwear via stalls or markets.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 90/900/9000: Creative, arts and entertainment activities⁴⁶ 	This class includes workers involved in the operation of facilities and provision of services to meet the cultural and entertainment interests of their customers. This includes the production and promotion of, and participation in, live performances, events or exhibits intended for public viewing, the provision of artistic, creative, or technical skills for the production of artistic products and live performances. This last series includes industries that are related but go beyond fashion, hence non-fashion creative activities are also considered in these figures.

3.2 On average, in LMICs, young fashion workers are employed in manufacturing jobs; while In HICs, they are employed in creative service jobs

Lower-middle income countries (LMICs) such as Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Vietnam employ a large share of fashion workers aged 15-24 years in the textile, apparel, and leather (manufacturing) segment relating to Codes 13, 14, and 15. On the other hand, high-income countries (HICs) such as Japan and France employ a relatively larger share of young fashion workers in the creative segment, relating to Code 90 (Figure 5). While textile and apparel manufacturing has increased significantly in the past decade, the creative jobs of the fashion industry are concentrated in high-income countries, while production and manufacturing activities associated with the fashion industry are in low- and lower-middle income countries (Figure 6).

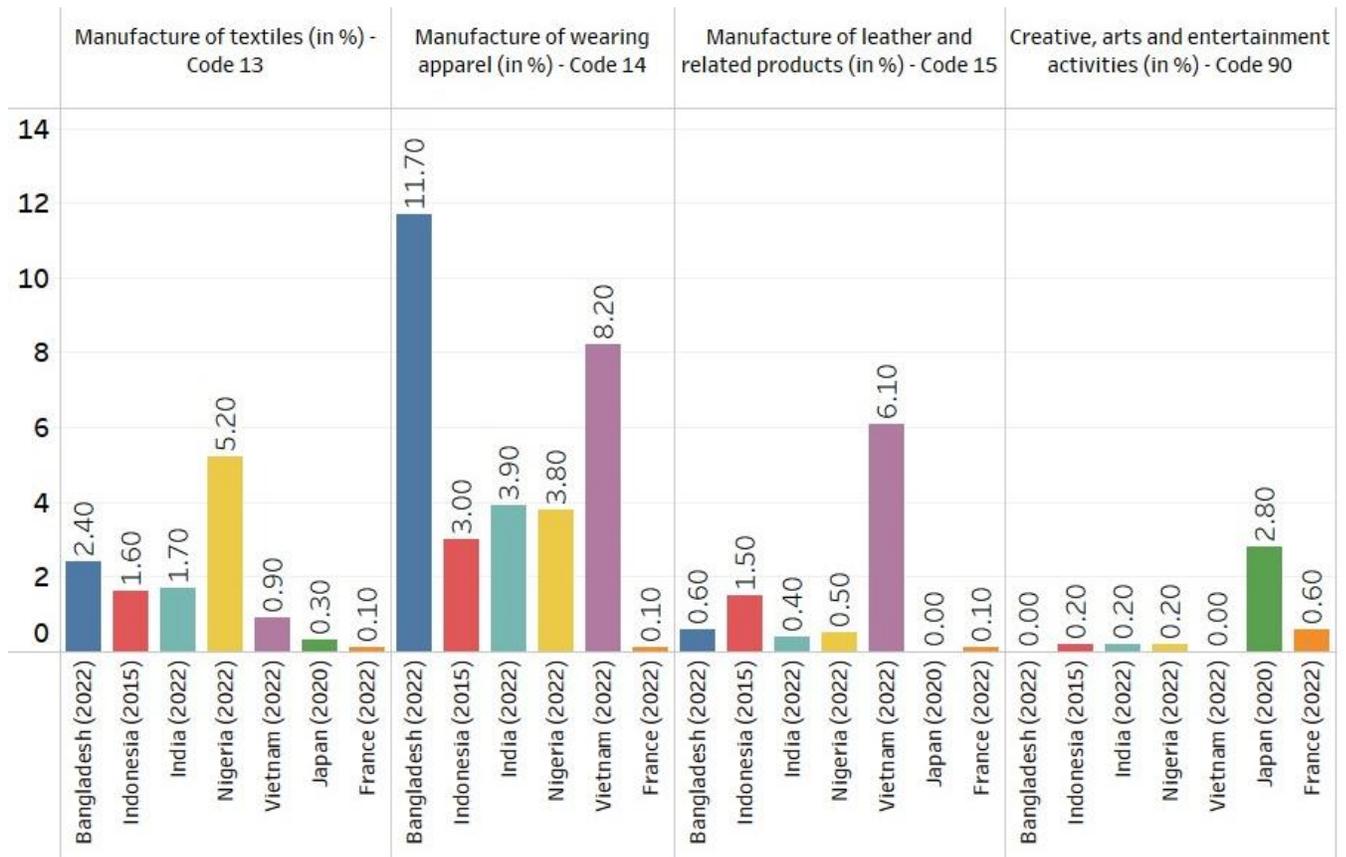
Expansion in the global fashion value chain has created new job opportunities for workers in low- and lower-middle income countries, however, it has also deepened the gap between low- and high-skilled workers. High-skilled workers from the fashion industry typically work in high-income countries, while low-skilled employees work in lower-middle income countries. These low-skilled jobs in manufacturing are also associated with low wages and poor working conditions.

⁴⁴ ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 4771. United Nations. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/classifications/Econ/Structure/Detail/EN/27/4771>

⁴⁵ ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 4782. United Nations. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/classifications/Econ/Structure/Detail/EN/27/4782>

⁴⁶ ISIC, Rev. 4 - Code 9000. United Nations. Available at: <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/classifications/Econ/Detail/EN/27/9000>

Figure 5: Share of the youth workforce (15-24 years) in fashion industry-related jobs, by manufacturing and “creative” service jobs & by country (ILOSTAT)⁴⁷



To create better paying jobs in the fashion industry and mimic the growth trajectory of the industry in high-income countries, there is a need to develop higher value-added services which generate higher-profit margins⁴⁸, such as design, sales, marketing, and finance, in the fashion industry in lower-middle income countries. This can be enabled through targeted investment in the fashion industry in regions like Africa which are ripe for such investments. Investments may be prioritized by countries with the highest number and share of young workers employed in the fashion industry (Figure 6). This is also a critical step because lower value-added activities like manufacturing and assembly often do not offer career progression or opportunities to move to higher productivity and better paying jobs.

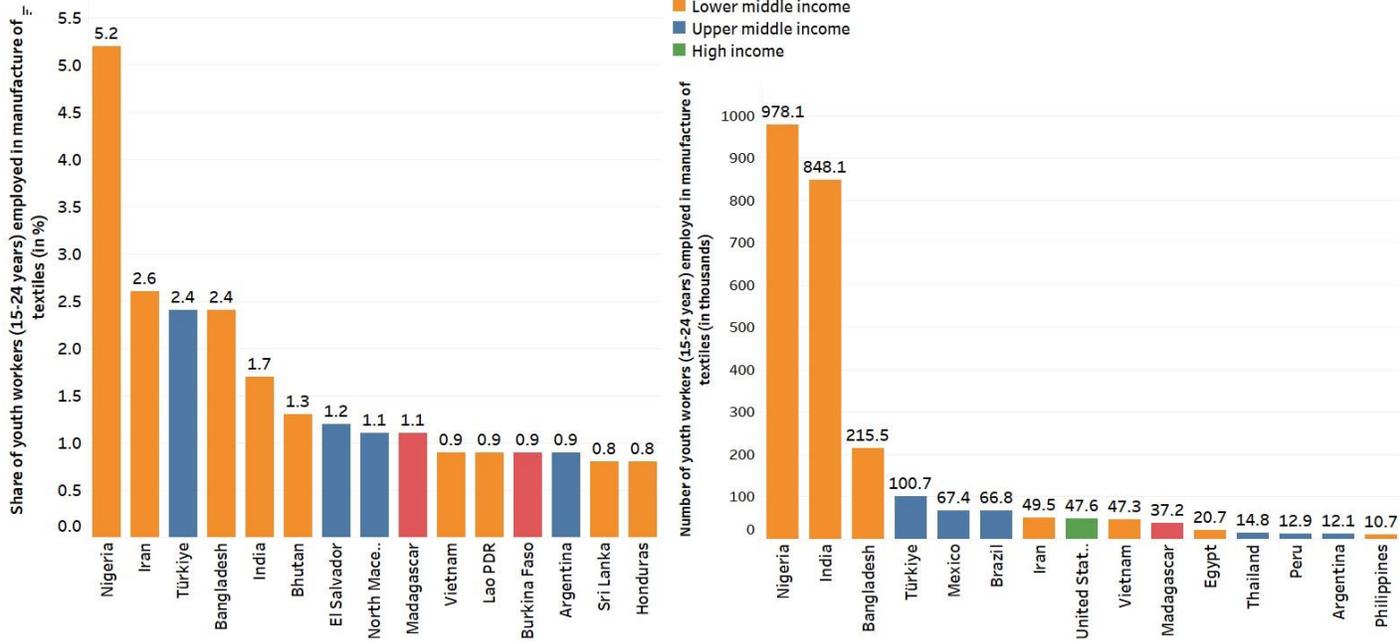
Please note that the data presented in Figures 5 and 6 include Code 90 and thus, may provide overestimations of fashion industry jobs, as this code includes jobs that may be in non-fashion creative industries, as well as creative fashion industry jobs.

⁴⁷ Figure 5 tells us: of all workers aged 15-24 years in the country, the share of youth workers employed in fashion sectors by code 13, 14, 15, and 90.

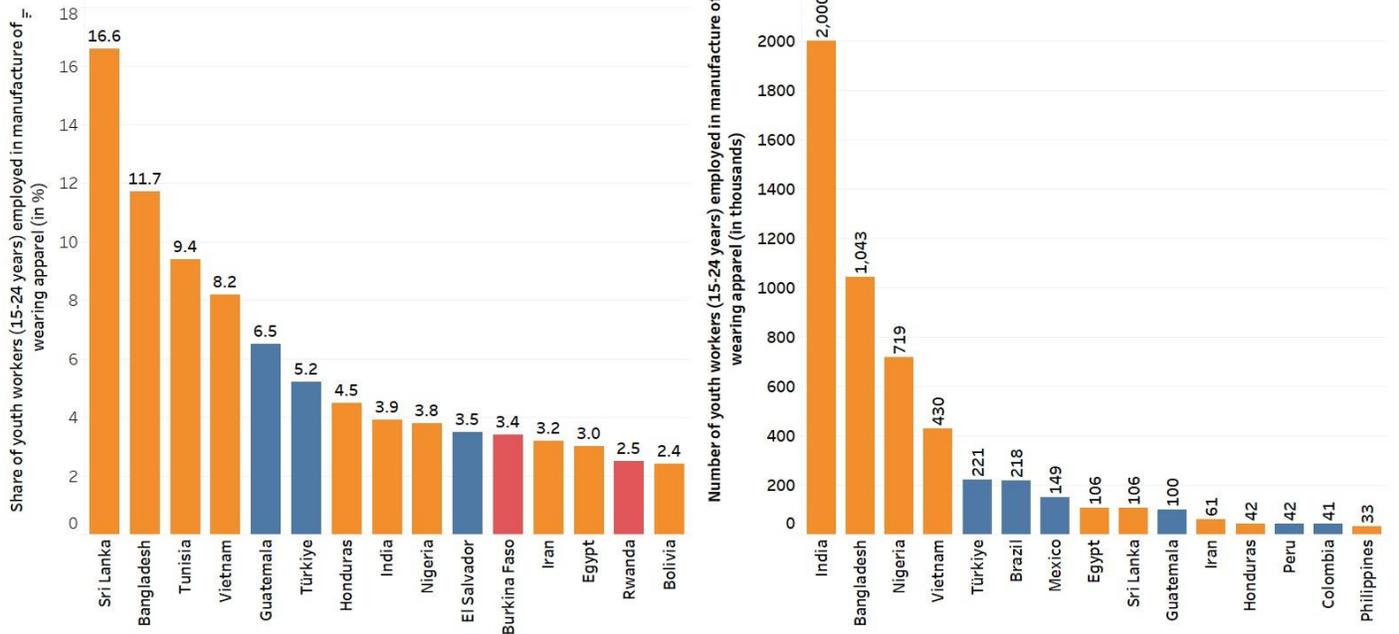
⁴⁸ The World Bank Group. 2021. From Jobs to Careers Apparel Exports and Career Paths for Women in Developing Countries. October 1, 2021. Available at: <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/427671638248679840/from-jobs-to-careers-apparel-exports-and-career-paths-for-women-in-developing-countries>

Figure 6: Share (on the left, in %) and number (on the right, in thousands) of the total youth workforce aged 15-24, employed in fashion industry-related jobs - by top 15 countries (ILOSTAT)

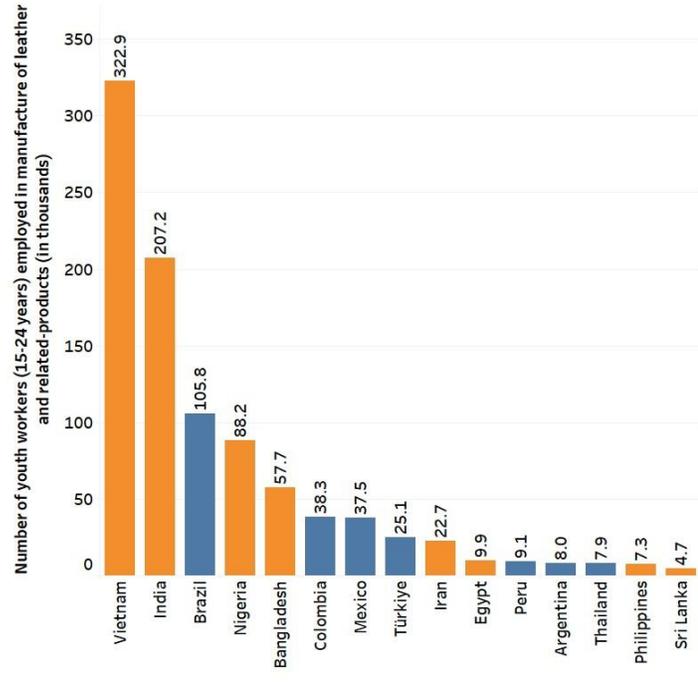
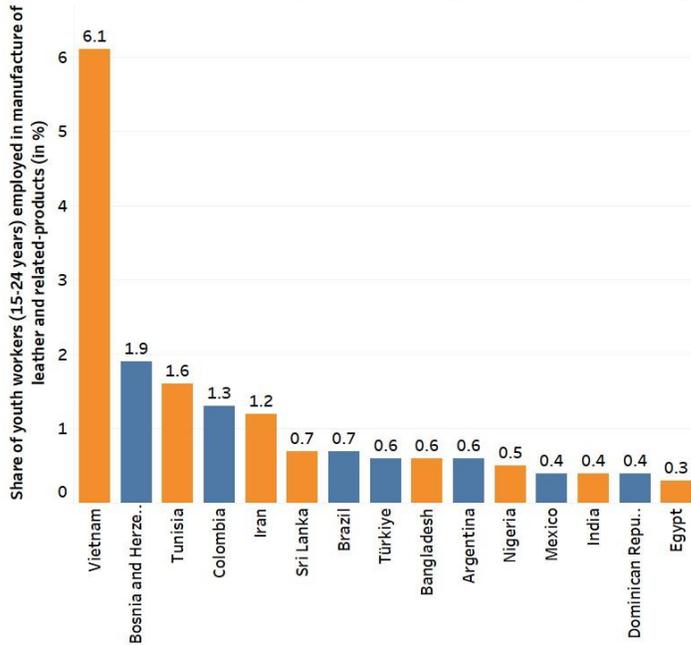
Manufacture of textiles (Code 13)



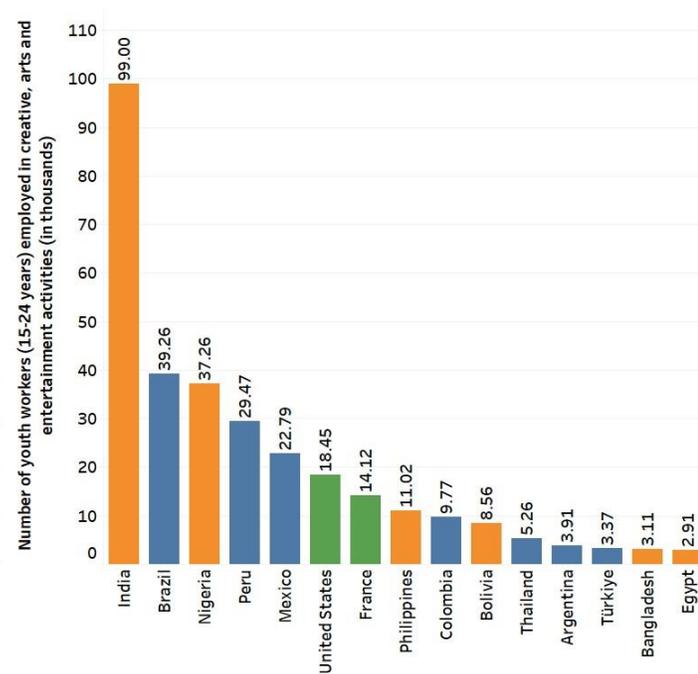
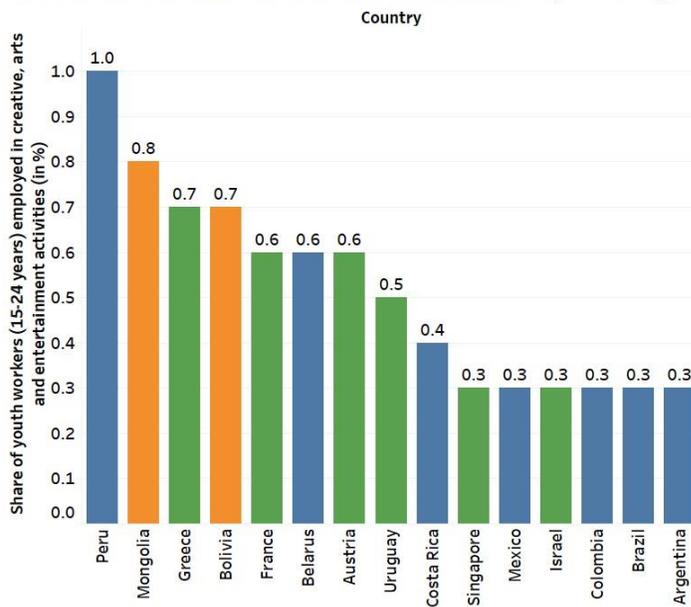
Manufacture of wearing apparel (Code 14)



Manufacture of leather and related-products (Code 15)



Creative, arts and entertainment activities (Code 90)



Box 5: From the WB Global Labor Database (GLD)

Relative to the rest of the economy, workers occupied in retail and manufacturing jobs in the fashion industry tend to be younger and female. A higher share of women are employed in retail fashion jobs, relative to manufacturing fashion jobs.

On analyzing the ISIC Rev. 4 industry codes relating to manufacturing and retail in the fashion industry (i.e., Codes 14, 15, 4771 and 4782 (defined in Table 4), and the youth population, aged 15-29 years – we find that relative to the rest of the economy, these sectors are younger and occupied by more female workers. In India, 6.2 million young workers or 5.13 percent of total employed youth were employed in the fashion industry. Of these workers, 1.6 million were employed in retail jobs alone. In Tanzania, 62,167 young workers or 0.76 percent of total employed youth were employed in the fashion industry – while 27,601 of these workers were employed in retail jobs alone (Table 5).

Analyzing the codes related to retail jobs in the fashion industry, we also find that a higher share of women are employed in retail fashion jobs, relative to manufacturing jobs in the fashion industry.

Table 5: Share of youth (aged 15-29 years) employed in fashion (Codes 14, 15) and retail (Codes 4771, 4782) jobs (Global Labor Database, Jobs Group, World Bank, 2024)

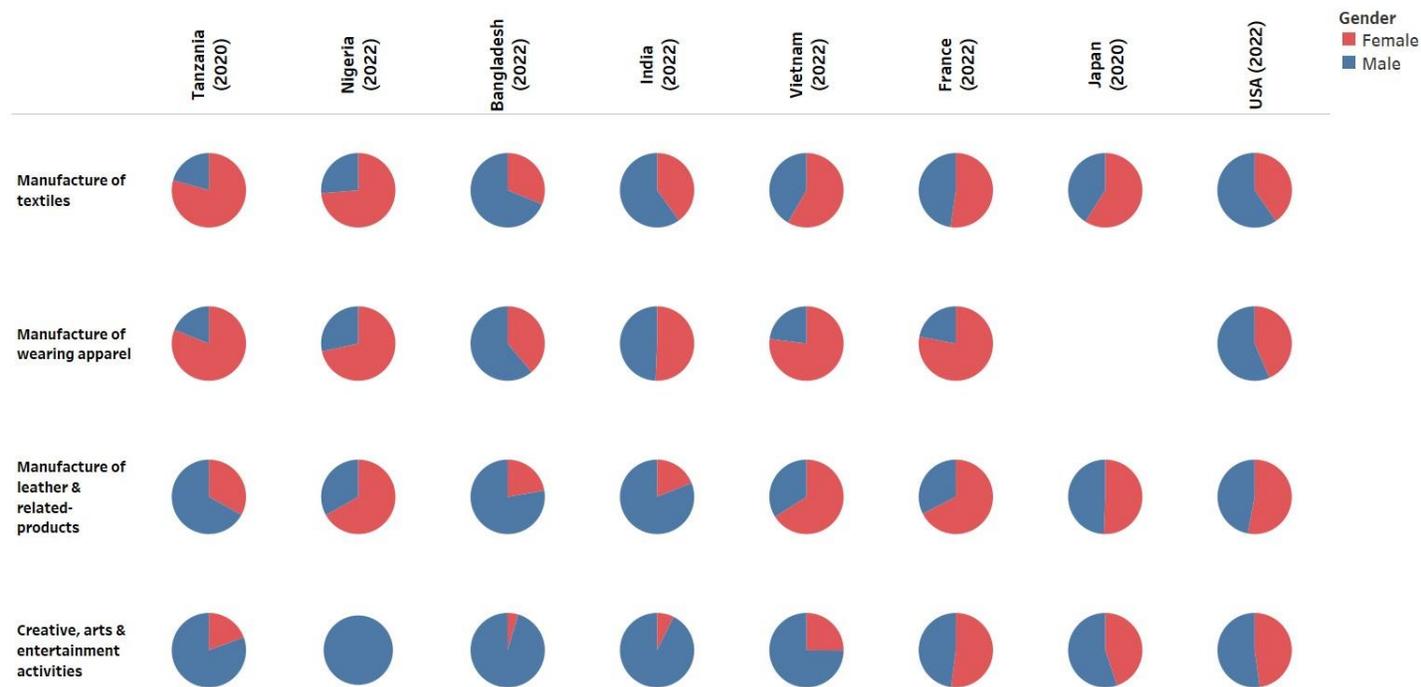
Country	Year	Employed in fashion jobs	Share employed in fashion jobs	Employed in retail jobs	Share employed in retail jobs
Ethiopia*	2021	51,961	0.35%	27,133	0.18%
India	2022	6,207,673	5.13%	1,615,214	1.33%
Pakistan	2020	1,553,096	6.50%	277,909	1.16%
Rwanda*	2021	33,665	2.79%	7,473	0.62%
Tanzania*	2020	62,167	0.76%	27,601	0.34%

* Please note available sample in the Global Labor Database (GLD) is less than 200.

3.3 A larger share of male fashion workers are employed in the creative service jobs, while a larger share of women fashion workers are employed in manufacturing jobs

The share of women working in manufacturing jobs under the textile, apparel, and leather segments (Codes 13, 14, 15) is higher than the proportion of women working in creative arts jobs (Code 90) in the fashion industry in LICs and LMICs, such as India, Bangladesh, Tanzania, Nigeria, and Vietnam (Figure 7). On average, males dominate fashion jobs in creative, arts and entertainment or fashion service-related roles. We also infer a positive correlation between a country’s GDP and the share of women fashion workers in the creative, arts and entertainment fashion industry (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Share of male and female workers (aged 15+ years) by fashion-related industry and country (ILOSTAT)



4. Recommendations: The role of policy and private sector in enabling fashion industry jobs

Policy plays a critical role in promoting the fashion industry: to increase its spillover effects on tourism, investment, economic growth, and higher productivity. In addition to the role of government, private sector retail and fashion conglomerates must also work toward enabling workers to enter and progress to higher value-add jobs within the fashion industry.

4.1 Upskill women to enter leadership roles in fashion and create safe working conditions for women in retail

We find that the fashion industry, across manufacturing and retail fashion jobs, has a greater share of women workers relative to the rest of the economy. Further, as a country’s GDP increases, the share of women in creative fashion-related roles also increases. At the same time, however, a study revealed that women occupy only 14 percent of leadership positions in the industry, despite designing 40 percent of womenswear fashion brands (Box 6). Furthermore, women led less than 13 percent of Fortune 1000 retail and apparel companies⁴⁹. Though they are a minority, it is the women fashion founders who are heralding change in the industry through sustainable fashion, the plus-size fashion revolution, and inclusive design.

⁴⁹ Palumbo, J. J. Forbes. 2022. How female founders in fashion are increasingly making their mark. Available at: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/jenniferpalumbo/2022/05/20/how-female-founders-in-fashion-are-increasingly-making-their-mark/?sh=1a1474a52a54>

In this context, upskilling, mentorship, and sponsorship of women to leadership roles within the fashion industry is the need of the hour. The rise of women in fashion leadership has been promising: 2020 witnessed a 95 percent growth in female CEOs in the apparel industry⁵⁰.

Our findings also show that a higher share of women are employed in retail fashion jobs, relative to manufacturing jobs in the fashion industry. Labor legislation is required across low- and lower-middle income countries to create safe workplaces for women in retail jobs and enable their career growth, among other measures. Increasing public enforcement of legislation, such as inspections, fines, and worker access to court systems, could be useful to reduce violations.

Box 6: The opportunity for gender equality in the garment industry⁵¹

Better Work, a joint initiative led by the International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Finance Corporation (IFC) aims to empower women garment workers, reduce sexual harassment, and close the gender pay gap. Garment workers are predominantly young, i.e., under the age of 30, and women. While women constitute 80 percent of the workforce in the garment sector globally, they occupy the lowest-paying, lowest-skilled jobs. These jobs are also often low-value occupations, such as sewing machine operators or helpers in garment production. Male garment workers, on the other hand, are more likely to be employed in higher-wage jobs and occupy leadership or managerial positions⁵².

Female garment factory workers earn about 21 percent less per hour than men in the same jobs. The gender pay gap is further heightened by social norms. Women workers are subject to sexual harassment during recruitment and at work and discriminated against when it comes to pay, career growth, and benefits including lack of maternity protection.

The Better Work program unites public and private partners to empower women garment workers by addressing the above challenges. Assessments of their program show that Better Work has:

- Decreased the gender pay gap by up to 17 percent
- Reduced sexual harassment by up to 18 percent
- Increased women's access to prenatal care by up to 26 percent
- Improved working conditions by enabling more female representation on worker management committees
- Enabled female supervisors or managers, which has led to a 22 percent increase in productivity in Better Work factories. A harassment-free workplace has also led to an increase in productivity and thus, profits.

⁵⁰ [Ibid.](#)

⁵¹ Better Work. 2018. Global Gender Strategy. January 30, 2018. Available at: <https://betterwork.org/reports-and-publications/global-gender-strategy/#:~:text=Better%20Work's%20five%2Dyear%20gender,paying%2C%20lowest%2Dskilled%20occupations.>

⁵² IFC & ILO. 2018. Gender Equality in the Global Garment Industry: Highlights of the Better Work Strategy 2018-2022. Available at: <https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/BW-GenderStrategy-Highlights-v4-Web.pdf>

4.2 Increase investment in small and medium enterprises which constitute 90 percent of the fashion industry in Africa

Investing in small and medium enterprises, particularly in countries with a growing fashion industry, could be key to local employment and empowerment of young people who are vying to enter the industry. It could also enable workers to transition to higher value-add creative roles on the creative side of fashion work. In addition, given that Africa is rich in traditional textile skills and techniques, countries should engage in formal training to ensure practices are passed on to the next generation⁵³ (Box 7).

Box 7: How the African Development Bank (AfDB) and Co-Creation Hub partnership is enabling Africa's textile and apparel industry⁵⁴

In Africa, the fashion and textile industry is the second largest sector after agriculture. It has immense potential to create jobs for youth and women. However, the industry faces several challenges such as lack of capital in fashion SMEs (which constitute the majority of the industry), low production capacity, skill shortages, lack of industry-specific training centers, and inadequate local and regional textiles and apparel production centers.

In this context, the Fashionomics Africa Program is implemented by the Co-creation Hub (CcHUB) and financed by the African Development Bank. Its aim is to support the growth of African fashion entrepreneurs and businesses by providing masterclass sessions, one-on-one mentoring on marketing strategies, advice on business models, governance, tax, and financial management, and more. The program trained 2,578 fashion entrepreneurs between 2022 and 2023—mostly young women—some of whom received a \$20,000 grant to expand their business.

Program outcomes show that more than 30 percent of the fashion entrepreneurs who participated in the trainings have established new sales channels and generated employment opportunities for their communities.

4.3 Provide government-funded support to the fashion industry through regulation, incentives, and job assistance to young designers—with focus on traditional crafts

The development of the fashion industry can be furthered through incentives to firms, such as tax cuts or subsidies. Further, the industry, and specifically designers, can also be protected through copyright laws and other protections (Box 8). This creates an enabling environment for the industry to flourish.

⁵³ UNESCO. 2023. New UNESCO publication on the African fashion sector – The fashion sector in Africa: trends, challenges and opportunities for growth. Available at: <https://sdgs.un.org/partnerships/empowering-african-fashion-sector-unesco-partnerships-incubator-opportunities-growth#:~:text=Today%2C%20African%20fashion%20is%20booming,an%20increase%20in%20local%20consumers>

⁵⁴ African Development Bank. 2023. How the African Development Bank's Fashionomics Africa Program is nurturing the continent's textile and apparel industry. August 22, 2023. Available at: <https://blogs.afdb.org/economic-growth/how-the-african-development-banks-fashionomics-africa-program-is-nurturing-the>

Box 8: Government-led support to the fashion industry in France and England has enabled it to prosper

France's national and city governments supported the fashion industry through tax cuts and regulations to support protection of product design. The government implemented patent laws, copyrights for designs, and trademark protection due to active demands from couturiers⁵⁵. The most influential couturiers created The Association for the Protection of Visual and Applied Arts, which brought together creators of applied arts to fight against copyists by pooling their financial resources and publicizing their activities in press campaigns⁵⁶. Other factors that supported the development of the industry include the availability of skilled craftsmen who drew on ancient traditions and inspiration from museums, art exhibitions, proximity to the royal court, city landscape, and prominent artist circles⁵⁷.

In England, the government supported the industry with grants and in-kind subsidies to young creatives. The government provided in-kind subsidies to young creative workers and businesses by offering short-term housing, for example. It also provides technical support, business plan development, and guidance on branding strategies. The development of the industry was also supported by the availability of young machinists and garment workers who lived and worked near the workshops of fashion designers at the height of the industry in the 1980s. In addition, designers used street markets and events across London to showcase their products. This enabled collaborations with other creative workers such as stylists, photographers, and journalists attending these events⁵⁸.

The government also plays a critical role in preserving traditional handicrafts. Enabling traditional artisans by providing access to markets and modernizing the supply chain may be key to economic empowerment in rural areas (Box 9).

Box 9: India's dual goal to preserve traditional handicrafts and increase rural artisans' incomes

In India, the government supported the fashion industry by setting up the All-India Handloom Board in 1952; and the National Institute of Design in 1961⁵⁹. The former was developed to promote hand-weaving and textile crafts, while the latter was to train designers and enable them to play a key role in modernizing the industry in response to emerging fashion trends. The dual goals were to 1) preserve handloom and handicraft traditions and 2) increase employment and income in rural areas to avoid migration to urban areas⁶⁰.

The origins of the luxury fashion industry in India can be traced to the mid-1980s when new educational institutes, fashion magazines, and specialized retailers grew rapidly. By 2005, the fashion industry was well established and generated a revenue of \$61.5 million⁶¹.

⁵⁵ United States Patent and Trademark Office. Trademark scope of protection. June 31, 2021. Available at:

<https://www.uspto.gov/trademarks/basics/scope-protection>

⁵⁶ Pouillard, V. 2011. Design Piracy in the Fashion Industries of Paris and New York in the Interwar Years. The President and Fellows of Harvard College. The Business History Review, Vol. 85, No. 2. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41301394>

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Feminist Review. 2002. Fashion Culture: Creative Work, Female Individualization. Sage Publications. No. 71. Fashion and Beauty. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i260675>

⁵⁹ Das, A. 2023. Indian Institute of Art & Design. History of the Indian Textile Industry. Available at: <https://www.iiad.edu.in/the-circle/history-of-the-indian-textile-industry/>

⁶⁰ Khaire, M. 2011. The Indian Fashion Industry and Traditional Indian Crafts. The Business History Review, Vol. 85, No. 2. Available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41301395>

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

4.4 Multilateral development banks and international organizations may invest in empowering vulnerable communities through jobs in the fashion industry

International organizations have implemented several collaborative projects to enable fashion industry workers (Box 10). UNESCO implemented the Handicrafts and Employment Generation for the Poorest Youth and Women project which aimed at developing small handicraft enterprises and generating income and employment for vulnerable populations. The International Labour Organization (ILO) and International Finance Corporation (IFC) have collaborated to implement the Better Work program in 12 garment producing countries to raise compliance with international labor and national laws, while also improving participating firms' competitiveness⁶² (also referred to in Box 5). The initiative has provided support to more than 2.4 million workers, particularly women garment workers⁶³. Better Work factories have improved working conditions, relative to peers in non-enrolled factories. Workers report improved workplace communication, higher pay, fewer hours of work driven by higher legal compliance, and more support to women with childcare responsibilities. Their interventions also contribute to curbing sexual harassment, which is a common industry challenge. Firms associated with Better Work have higher export volumes, higher prices, and thus better revenue and profitability⁶⁴.

Box 10: The International Trade Center's GTEX and MENATEX Programs to create jobs and enable MSMEs in the textile and clothing industry⁶⁵

The Global Textiles and Clothing Programme (GTEX) and its related work in the MENA region (MENATEX), led by the International Trade Center (ITC), is dedicated to link academia and the fashion industry by creating training centers for fashion industry workers. The aim is to create jobs and increase incomes of MSMEs in the textile and clothing industry. They have directly enabled 179 MSMEs to improve dyeing and finishing processes and enabled small businesses to diversify their exports, increase their international competitiveness, and aided academic and vocational training institutions. ITC also works with governments to draft policies aimed at improved the industry's business environment and competitiveness.

Through the GTEX and MENATEX programs, they have trained 596 workers and placed 1,152 students in internships since 2019. Some examples include:

- **Egypt:** Created the Ready-Made Garments Board at Helwan University to ensure curricula match industry demand.
- **Central Asia:** Connected the academy with Tajik companies and opened four garment training centers at local universities.
- **Tajikistan:** Supported fashion students in Tajikistan by enabling them to enter national competitions.
- **Jordan:** Supported Jordanian fashion designers to showcase their designs at Jordan Fashion Week.
- **Morocco:** Supported local designers to participate in events such as Egypt Fashion Week.

⁶² ILO & IFC. Better Work. 2022. Understanding impact: Research insights from Better Work 2017-2022. Available at: <https://betterwork.org/wp-content/uploads/Understanding-impact-Research-insights-from-Better-Work-2017-2022.pdf>

⁶³ Licata, M. & Kemp, W. UNtoday. 2020. The future of work in fashion. July 5, 2020. Available at: <https://untoday.org/the-future-of-work-in-fashion/>

⁶⁴ ILO & IFC. Better Work. 2022. Reports: Overview. Understanding impact: Research insights from Better Work 2017-2022. Available at: <https://betterwork.org/reports-and-publications/impact-assessment/>

⁶⁵ International Trade Centre. Projects: Overview. GTEX/MENATEX: Global textiles and clothing programme. Available at: <https://intracen.org/our-work/projects/gtexmenatex-global-textiles-and-clothing-programme>

5. The next frontier for fashion: moving toward sustainability

The fashion industry is a major contributor to climate change: it is the second highest consumer of water globally, after agriculture⁶⁶. It produces 20 percent of global water waste, generates 8 percent of global carbon emissions, delivers around 21 billion tons of textiles to landfills, and uses high levels of insecticides and pesticides in cotton production⁶⁷. Fast fashion poses additional challenges. It refers to rapidly produced, cheap garments with a short lifespan, resulting in more frequent purchases, overproduction, and generation of more waste which ends up in landfills or polluting the air, if incinerated⁶⁸. Due to the use of oil-based synthetic fiber in fast fashion, it accounts for 50 percent of the fashion industry's total emissions⁶⁹.

Without changes to how the industry currently operates, its detrimental impact on the environment will only increase. Without abatement measures, the fashion industry will produce up to 2.7 billion metric tons of emissions by 2030⁷⁰. In response to these challenges and as part of the Sustainable Development Goals, the United Nations initiated the Alliance for Sustainable Fashion program on clothing and footwear to coordinate action in the fashion industry⁷¹.

Circular economy principles are being adopted by the fashion industry (Box 11). The 2022 S&P Global Corporate Sustainability Assessment (which is based on responses from 70 companies in the textile, apparel, and luxury goods industry) recorded that about 44 percent of companies have at least one circular fashion program, but fewer (only 16 percent) are measuring impact to track how much material the companies are removing from waste streams (Figure 8). Organizations such as Patagonia and H&M Foundation have embedded circular principles within their supply chains⁷² (Box 12).

⁶⁶ Turk, V. GWU Law Blogs. 2023. The GW Point Source: The GW Law Environmental and Energy Law Blog. Fast fashion: pollution our water millions of clothing items at a time. Available at: <https://blogs.gwu.edu/law-gwpointsource/2023/10/02/fast-fashion-polluting-our-water-millions-of-clothing-items-at-a-time/#:~:text=The%20fashion%20industry%20is%20the,producing%2020%25%20of%20wastewater%20worldwide>.

⁶⁷ UNECE. 2018. Fashion and the SDGs: what role for the UN? Available at: https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/RCM_Website/RFSD_2018_Side_event_sustainable_fashion.pdf

⁶⁸ Whieldon, E., Costello, L., & Rossi, S. S&P Global. 2023. Fast on fashion, slow on sustainability: Clothing companies and the circular economy. Available at: <https://www.spglobal.com/esg/insights/fast-on-fashion-slow-on-sustainability-clothing-companies-and-the-circular-economy>

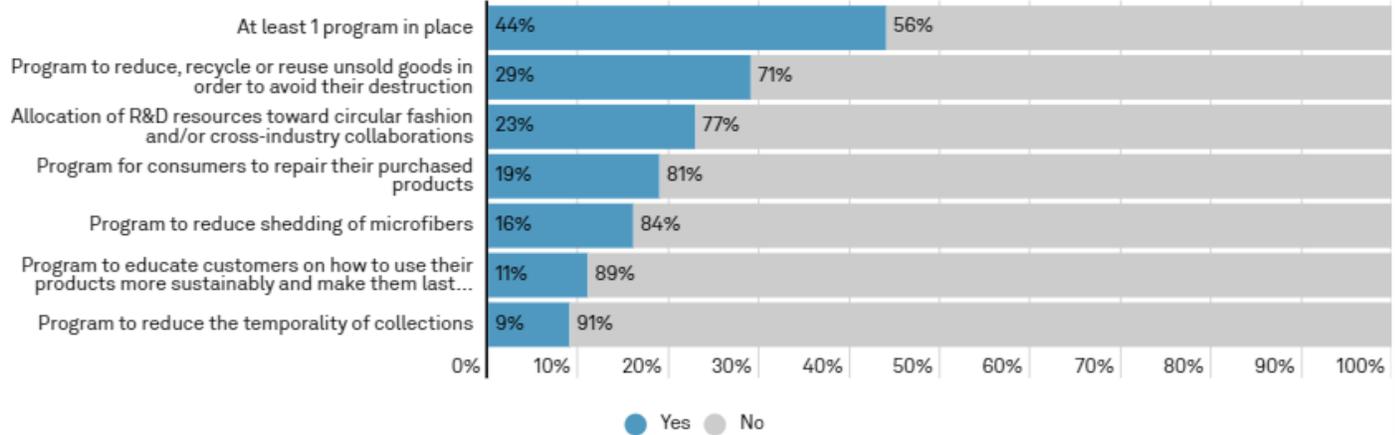
⁶⁹ Wren, B. 2022. Sustainable supply chain management in the fast fashion industry: A comparative study of current efforts and best practices to address the climate crisis. Science Direct. Volume 4. Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2772390922000051>

⁷⁰ McKinsey & Company. 2020. Fashion on climate. Report. Available at: <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/retail/our-insights/fashion-on-climate>

⁷¹ UN News. 2019. UN launches drive to highlight environmental cost of staying fashionable. Climate and Environment. Available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2019/03/1035161>

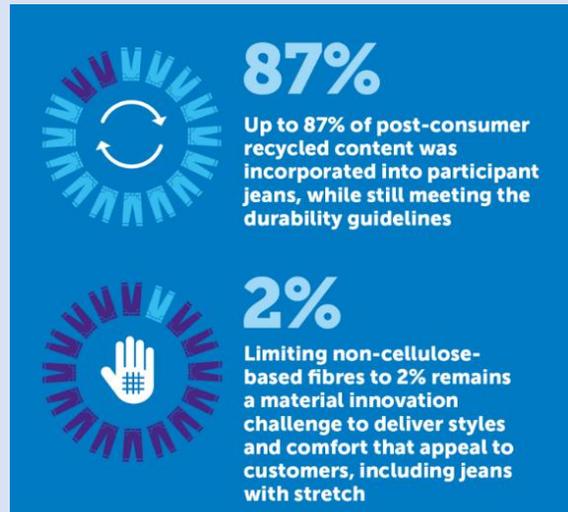
⁷² S4YE, The World Bank Group. 2021. The Circular Economy: Could it provide opportunities for greener and better jobs? Available at: https://www.s4ye.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/S4YE%20Discussion%20Note%20-Circular%20Economy%20and%20Jobs_2.pdf

Figure 8: Percentage of companies with circular fashion programs in place (S&P Global, 2022)⁷³



Box 11: The Ellen MacArthur Foundation’s vision of a circular economy for fashion⁷⁴

The Ellen MacArthur Foundation believes that a new model for the textile economy aligned with circular economy principles is needed, where clothes, fabric, and fibers re-enter the economy after first use and don’t end up as waste. Their Jeans Redesign project, implemented from 2019-2023, demonstrated how jeans could be designed in a circular manner⁷⁵. With input from 80 experts, they developed a set of guidelines to transform the way jeans are made. Using the guidelines, more than 100 organizations across 25 countries redesigned jeans, bringing 1.5 million redesigned and circular products to the market.



⁷³ Whieldon, E., Costello, L., & Rossi, S. S&P Global. 2023. Fast on fashion, slow on sustainability: Clothing companies and the circular economy. Available at: <https://www.spglobal.com/esg/insights/fast-on-fashion-slow-on-sustainability-clothing-companies-and-the-circular-economy>

⁷⁴ Ellen MacArthur Foundation. Fashion: Overview. Available at: <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/topics/fashion/overview>

⁷⁵ Ellen MacArthur Foundation. Fashion: The Jeans Resdesign: Overview. Available at: <https://www.ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/the-jeans-redesign/overview>

Box 12: Creating circular and socially inclusive opportunities along the textile value chain in India⁷⁶

In India, 62 million tons of waste is generated annually. Only 19 percent of this is processed and treated, while the rest is sent to the landfill. Recycling activities are driven by an informal workforce of about 1.5 to 4 million waste pickers. While these workers are key to waste retrieval and sorting—and are therefore critical stakeholders in the circular economy—they are paid low wages, live in poverty, face harassment, and do not have access to basic social services such as education, housing, and sanitation.

Through the [Saamuhika Shakti initiative](#), the H&M Foundation aims to address the challenge of waste and the challenges faced by informal waste pickers in Bengaluru by investing in catalyzing inclusive circularity. They do so by equipping informal waste pickers with multiple income streams while providing the textile industry with recycled materials. The Foundation has convened 11 local partners (including Hasiru Dala, WaterAid India, and Save the Children India) to support waste workers by advocating for and providing safe working conditions, upskilling or providing access to alternate employment opportunities, and using behavioral change communication to shift perceptions of waste pickers own selves and within the community—particularly empowering young girls and women.

Young people are likely to be important influencers in transitioning to circular approaches. Increased environmental awareness among young people has encouraged the fashion industry to adopt more ecological and circular trends. They are more aware of climate change issues, relative to older age groups, and are shifting consumer preferences toward greener products. They are also willing to pay extra for environmentally sustainable clothing and footwear⁷⁷. Additionally, there has been a rise of rental stores where buyers can lease clothes rather than buy new products, thus promoting reuse instead of fast-fashion consumption. This change in consumer preferences has led to new models of production involving organic or circular fibers and to the growth of second-hand and reuse retail stores. Furthermore, the circular economy offers the opportunity for emerging circular jobs within the fashion industry. A Solutions for Youth Employment (S4YE) note on [circular economy jobs](#) highlights circular job opportunities related to labor-intensive activities such as recycling, repair, and remanufacturing within the fashion industry. However, adopting circular approaches within the fashion industry and enabling young people to enter circular fashion jobs will require training or upskilling in green, circular, digital, and multidisciplinary skills (Figure 9).

Digital technologies are also enabling circular fashion practices. Recycling garments is often difficult without knowing information about the materials used and, due to lack of transparent data, nearly 80 percent of garments end up in landfills. To help address this issue, EON Group developed radio-frequency identification (RFID) tags to track the lifecycle of garments. Trackers could extend garment lifecycles, as well as reduce landfill waste⁷⁸.

⁷⁶ H&M Foundation. Catalyzing inclusive circularity in India – in solidarity with waste pickers. Available at: <https://hmfoundation.com/project/in-solidarity-with-waste-pickers/>

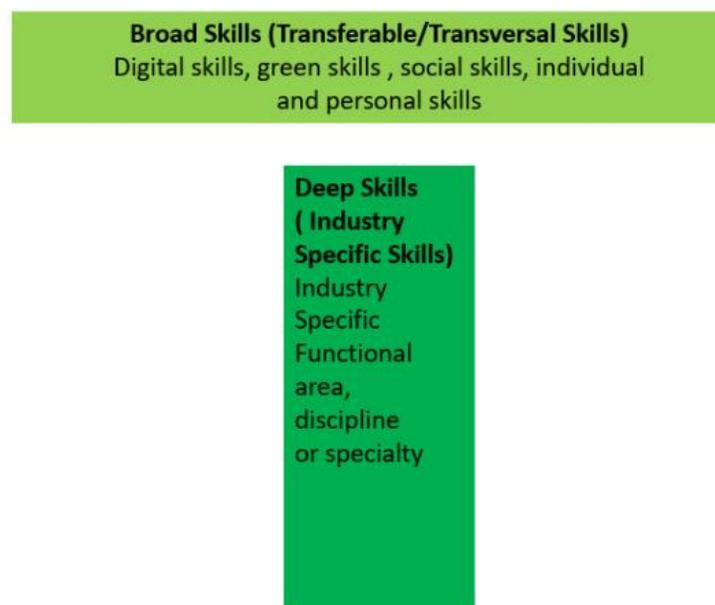
⁷⁷ S4YE, The World Bank Group. 2021. The Circular Economy: Could it provide opportunities for greener and better jobs? Available at: https://www.s4ye.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/S4YE%20Discussion%20Note%20-Circular%20Economy%20and%20Jobs_2.pdf

⁷⁸ Sullivan, J. & Hussain, B. 2020. Green Biz. How technology unlocks new value from the circular economy. Available at: <https://www.greenbiz.com/article/how-technology-unlocks-new-value-circular-economy>

As the fashion industry moves toward circular practices, sustainability, and digitization, we must capitalize on emerging job opportunities for youth. Young people will also require new and updated skills for these circular jobs (Figure 9). On one hand, circular economy activities provide entry-level opportunities in very labor-intensive activities, providing a key avenue for young informal workers in vulnerable situations to transition to the formal sector⁷⁹. On the other hand, the circular economy also provides opportunity at more advanced levels for higher skilled workers. For example, high-skilled opportunities exist in areas like research and analytics regarding the use of organic raw materials. These green and circular methods have the potential to expand the number and nature of jobs, but they require investment in education and skills development for young creative workers to train them for emerging jobs in the fashion industry.⁸⁰

Growth in the second-hand clothing market is also driven by a demand for clothing reuse and reducing waste. The second-hand global apparel market was valued at \$96 billion in 2021 and is expected to expand to \$218 billion by 2026⁸¹. This market provides an alternative to fast fashion consumption. It offers the consumer the opportunity to save money by buying items at lower prices and aligns with young people’s growing preference for sustainable and circular purchases. Governments and the private sector may collaborate to encourage and direct small business development investments in the second-hand fashion industry. This would not only support job creation for youth, but also encourage circularity in the industry.

Figure 9: T-shaped skill approach within the circular economy⁸²



⁷⁹ [Ibid.](#)

⁸⁰ [Ibid.](#)

⁸¹ Certilogo. Recycling textiles: challenges and opportunities. Available at: <https://discover.certilogo.com/blogs/insights/recycling-textiles-challenges-and-opportunities>

⁸² Circle Economy Foundation. 2021. Closing the Skills Gap: Vocational Education and Training for the Circular Economy. Available at: https://assets.website-files.com/5d26d80e8836af2d12ed1269/608c0aa6fec4df0fa7bd78e4_20210422%20-%20CJ%20VET%20Paper%20%20-%20297x210mm.pdf

In summary, fashion is a fast-evolving industry within the creative economy with immense potential to create jobs for youth, drive inclusion, and encourage growth in emerging economies. To further develop the industry, it is critical for public and private sector stakeholders to invest in emerging fashion markets, such as in the African region, and increase access to traditional handicrafts and local talent. Furthermore, young fashion entrepreneurs and MSMEs, which constitute a majority of the industry, must be empowered by providing access to capital, mentorship to expand their operations, and training. It is also critical to stay abreast of evolving trends driven by youth, such as the shift toward sustainable and circular fashion practices, thus capitalizing on new and creative job opportunities for young people.

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S4YE is a global program that brings together donors, governments, foundations, private sector companies, NGOs and youth to support catalytic actions to increase the number of young people engaged in productive work. S4YE is housed in the Jobs Group within the Social Protection and Jobs Global Practice at the World Bank Group.

This note does not necessarily reflect the views of the World Bank or each S4YE partner. For additional resources on youth employment, please visit <https://www.s4ye.org/s4ye-publications>

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