

WHAT CLEANING AND LAUNDRY HAVE ACTUALLY COST

Ten years of US laundry prices, laundry wages, workforce size and general inflation on one chart. Laundry wages have outrun prices; the workforce has almost halved.

Tobias Renshaw · APXXO Data — indices · 15 September 2026

DATA AS AT
August 2026

LAST CHECKED
2026-09-15

MEASURED IN
% change since January
2016

ROWS
5

+73.1%

WHAT THE INDUSTRY PAYS PER HOUR

Average hourly earnings in drycleaning and laundry services went from \$12.18 to \$21.08.

-41.8%

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE WORKFORCE

137.3 thousand people down to 79.9 thousand — about 57,400 jobs gone.

+13.6%

THE PRICE RISE THAT INFLATION DOES NOT EXPLAIN

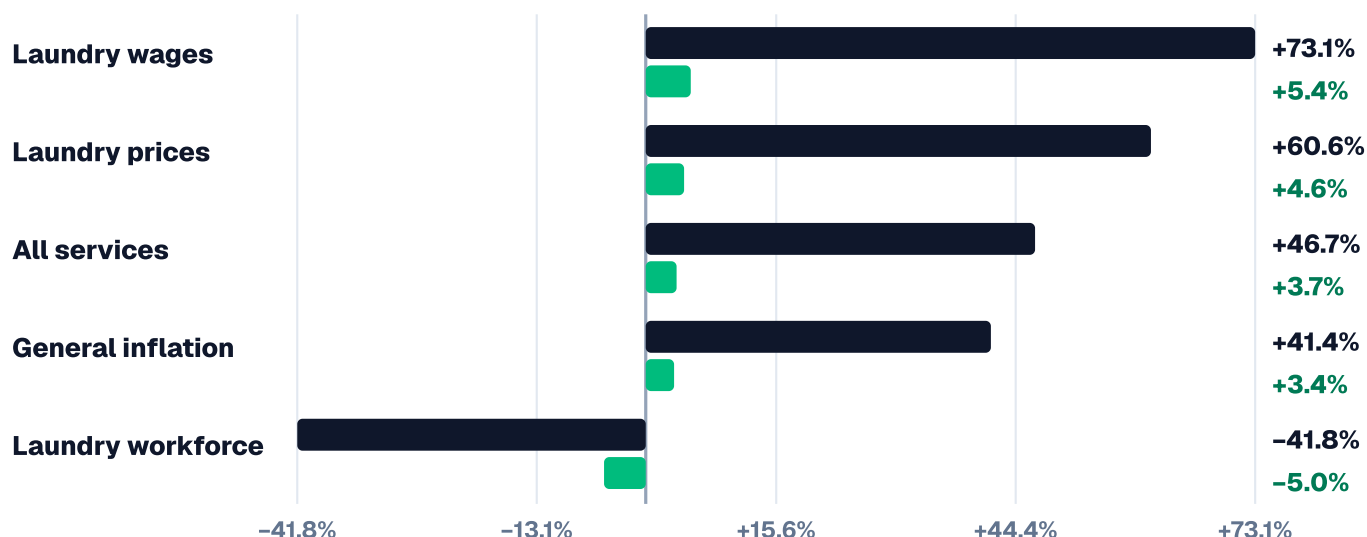
Laundry and dry cleaning rose 60.6% against general inflation of 41.4%.

AT A GLANCE

TOP 5 OF 5

Total change over the decade, against the same change expressed per year. Wages lead, prices follow, and the workforce is the only line going the other way.

■ CHANGE SINCE JANUARY 2016 (%) ■ PER YEAR (%)



WHAT THE FIGURES SHOW

Laundry has not tracked inflation, and it has not tracked services either

Between January 2016 and August 2026 the price of laundry and dry cleaning rose 60.6%. General inflation over the same 127 months was 41.4%, and services as a whole rose 46.7%.

So laundry outran the basket by 19.2 percentage points. In real terms, once inflation is taken out, it costs 13.6% more than it did a decade ago. That is the part a budget cannot absorb by pointing at the economy.

Laundry prices rose 19.2 points faster than everything else. That gap is not inflation — it is something specific to this industry.

Wages rose faster than prices, which means somebody absorbed the difference

Average hourly earnings in the industry went from \$12.18 to \$21.08, a rise of 73.1%. The prices the industry charges rose 60.6%.

That is a gap of 12.4 percentage points between what the work costs to do and what it can be sold for, sustained over a decade. It has to have gone somewhere: thinner margins, harder automation, or operators leaving. The next section suggests which.

The workforce did not shrink gently

Employment in drycleaning and laundry services fell 41.8%, from 137.3 thousand to 79.9 thousand. Roughly 57,400 jobs, in an industry that still had to wash the same hotels and hospitals at the end of it.

A sector losing four workers in ten while its wages rise faster than its prices is not a sector with spare capacity. It is one consolidating into fewer, larger operations, because that is the only place the volume can go.

Two things follow for anyone buying laundry as a service. The first is that price pressure here is structural rather than cyclical, so waiting it out is not a strategy. The second is that scale is doing the absorbing, which is why the cost of an individual site has moved differently from the cost of a contract.

Wages up 73%, prices up 61%, and four workers in ten gone. That is a capacity story wearing a price tag.

What this is useful for, and what it is not

These are national figures. A commercial contract in one city is not the CPI, and a laundry serving hospitals does not price like one serving households. Read this as the direction and the size of the movement, not as a quotation.

The Consumer Price Index measures what households pay. The employment and earnings figures come from a survey of employers. They are different instruments pointed at the same industry, which is why they are shown together rather than combined into a single number.

HOW WE WORKED THIS OUT

Every figure is a US Bureau of Labor Statistics series, indexed to January 2016 and read to August 2026 - 127 monthly observations for each.

Prices are the Consumer Price Index, not seasonally adjusted. Wages and workforce are the Current Employment Statistics survey of the drycleaning and laundry services industry.

In real terms, after general inflation, the price of laundry and dry cleaning has changed by +13.6%.

Wages in the industry rose 73.1% while the prices it charges rose 60.6% - a gap of 12.4 percentage points, absorbed somewhere between the two.

Over the same period the workforce changed by -41.8%.

Not every series publishes on the same lag. Figures run to August 2026 except: Average hourly earnings of all employees, drycleaning and laundry services, except coin-operated to July 2026; All employees, thousands, drycleaning and laundry services, except coin-operated to July 2026.

Every series label on this page is the official BLS title, fetched from the BLS catalogue at build time rather than written by us.

CPI measures what consumers pay, which is not the same as what a commercial contract costs. Treat these as direction and magnitude, not as a quotation.

THE NUMBERS

5 ROWS · AS AT AUGUST 2026

REGION	% CHANGE SINCE JANUARY 2016	PER YEAR (%)	AT JANUARY 2016	AT AUGUST 2026
Laundry wages	+73.1%	▲ +5.4%	12.18	21.08
Laundry prices	+60.6%	▲ +4.6%	158.52	254.64
All services	+46.7%	▲ +3.7%	295.38	433.29
General inflation	+41.4%	▲ +3.4%	236.92	334.98
Laundry workforce	-41.8%	▼ -5.0%	137.30	79.90

COLOUR KEY

▲ rises once adjusted

▼ falls once adjusted

dearer than the US average

cheaper than the US average

The arrow carries the same meaning as the colour, so neither is needed on its own.

WHAT TO TAKE AWAY

Laundry is not an inflation story. Prices outran the basket by 19.2 points, wages outran prices by 12.4 more, and the workforce fell 42% — the cost is coming from scarcity of people, and it is not going back.

WHERE IT CAME FROM

US Bureau of Labor Statistics — Consumer Price Index (<https://www.bls.gov/cpi/>)

US federal government — public domain · published monthly

WHEN THIS PAGE CHANGES NEXT

Both sources publish monthly. This page changes whenever BLS releases a new Consumer Price Index or Current Employment Statistics month, which is usually within a fortnight of the period ending. The pipeline checks every week.

LAST CHECKED 15 SEPTEMBER 2026

This page is free to use and free to quote. If you cite it, please link back so readers can check the figures and the method for themselves.

CITE THIS PAGE

Free to quote, with or without permission. A link back means your readers can check the figures and the method for themselves. The chart can be embedded straight into your own page, and it carries the attribution with it.

Tobias Renshaw, "What cleaning and laundry have actually cost", APXX0, 2026.
<https://apxxo.com/en-us/data/cleaning-laundry-cost-index/>

MORE DATA FROM APXXO

AS AT 2026-06

What commercial electricity costs, by US state

Updated monthly. Free to download.

([en-us/data/commercial-electricity-cost/](/en-us/data/commercial-electricity-cost/))

AS AT 2025 (PROVISIONAL) · BLS 2025 · FX 2026-09-15

What cleaning and laundry staff earn: London vs New York

Two governments, two classifications, one comparison. Free to download.

(/en-us/data/cleaning-wages-london-new-york/)

AS AT 2025

What cleaning labour costs, by US state

Updated annually. Free to download.

(/en-us/data/cleaning-labour-cost-by-state/)

ALL DATA PAGES → (/EN-US/DATA/)