

Living wage in the Republic of Moldova



Case study: garment industry

Clean
Clothes
Campaign




**FRIEDRICH
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List of abbreviations

AFW	Asia Floor Wage
BNS	National Bureau of Statistics
CCC	Clean Clothes Campaign
CINDI	Countrywide integrated noncommunicable disease intervention Programme
CNSM	National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
ILO	International Labour Organisation
WHO	World Health Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
PPP	Purchasing power parity
TAFL	Textile, Apparel, Fashion, Leather

Executive summary

The legal framework on wages in the Republic of Moldova is rather complex, consisting of several organic laws and regulations establishing the size and the way of setting wages in different fields. The latest reform in the field – *Law no. 270 of 23.11.2018 on the unitary pay system in the public sector* – simplifies and unifies the methods of calculating the wages for the employees in the public sector. Thus, the law establishes a minimum guaranteed state salary of 2000 MDL in the public sector. In the real (private) sector, the gross minimum wage accounts for 2610 MDL.

According to a research from Eurofound¹ (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions), several countries, including from the European Union, have abandoned or are under the process of abolishing the minimum wage concept deemed to be outdated and not reflecting the real costs for a decent living. In the UK, for example, the concept of the *living wage* is regulated by the law meant to ensure sufficient income for a decent living of employees and their families.

The *living wage* calculation methodology proposed by this study, which is both a cost-effective methodology for measuring the living costs and an advocacy tool, is part of the instruments used by the trade unions and NGO alliances in the area of workers' rights protection, such as *Clean Clothes Campaign* and *Asia Floor Wage*.

The sums calculated according to these methodologies are used as an instrument of pressure on the companies (*brands, retailers, local subcontractors*) to increase wages. This pressure aims at making the corporations directly accountable, forcing them through campaigns, ethics standards and certifications, appeals to the moral conscience of buyers, and corporate social responsibility, to pay living wages.

Such strategies have the advantage of being sustained by alliances at regional or sub-continental levels, as it is the case in South East Asia, between workers, trade unions and civil society. Thus, the corporations are prevented from putting the workers and unions in a country/ region in competition with workers/ unions in a neighbouring country/ region, while reducing the pressure of the production relocation threat. Since the workers and unions act in regional or even continental

blocks to set the same labour conditions and wages across borders, relocation of the production from one country to another would be pointless, since the corporations would still have to ensure proper labour conditions and pay a living wage.

The methodology for calculating the living wage consists in assessing the MINIMAL REAL food and non-food costs of the garment workers. The total amount of food expenditure of workers is calculated based on the evidence provided by garment workers from concrete factories on the food they consume (quantities, costs, etc.). This food basket is built on a diet of about 3000 calories a day. An amount (derived from the national consumption expenditure statistics) of non-food goods and services is added to these expenditures. Thus, the *living wage* represents the total amount of these real food and non-food expenses over one-month period, multiplied by 3 consumer units (2 adults, each considered as a consumer unit and 2 children considered to be one single consumer unit).

For the Republic of Moldova, our research calculated a minimum living wage in the urban area of **12306.8 MDL**, and in the rural area – **11359.6 MDL** per month. This level is twice as big as the average salary in the economy, not to mention the minimum state guaranteed salary.

In order to promote the living wage in the national economy, a series of recommendations have been formulated for various stakeholders. Thus, the authors recommend to the government to develop and establish the living wage through law, as well as the calculation methodology for it. The international corporations and brands should implement concrete measures to ensure decent income for their employees, while the media and civil society – to support and implement awareness raising and *advocacy* campaigns to promote the living wage concept.

The results of this research will be used in our collective effort², together with the Clean Clothes Campaign and other stakeholders such as the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, in advocacy campaigns and initiatives at the local, national, regional, and eventually global level, aimed at putting pressure on the brands to pay living wages to their workers.

Introduction

TAFL (manufacture of textiles, clothing, leather and footwear) is one of the most important sectors of the national economy: for instance, its export value is three times higher than that of the wine industry. However, statistics show that the remuneration of TAFL workers is one of the lowest in the industrial and manufacturing sectors, well below the average in the sector.

Studies, workers' personal evidences as well as media investigations show that one of the lowest wages in the textile industry are paid by factories working in Outward Processing Trade system, through which certain textile production processes are outsourced to areas/ countries that offer low labour costs, liberalization of tax regime etc.

The Government of the Republic of Moldova provides a number of facilities to the TAFL sector but also to other industrial sectors such as reduction of bureaucratic burden, diminishing of the control bodies or even moratoriums on state bodies' controls, etc.

However, this does not automatically translate into higher wages and better working conditions for the workers in the industry. On the contrary, several factories are witnessing steady worsening of the wage and labour conditions, reflected by the increase in the workload (the workers are paid based on a quota system – a number of items that workers have to produce since the quotas are intentionally set to high, the workers fail to achieve it) and in the penalties for unauthorised absence from work etc.

The state policy in this area is often limited to monitoring the compliance by employers with the minimum

wage provisions in the private sector. Beyond that, the state leaves it at the discretion of entrepreneurs to determine the remuneration of workers according to their possibilities.

On the other hand, workers demand higher wages, motivated by both increased living expenses and insufficient income. In their turn, the companies refuse to increase wages, arguing that, since they pay at least the minimum wage, they are not obliged to take other indicators into account.

The wages in the textile industry are intentionally and deliberately small, because³:

- Governments fail to set a decent statutory minimum wage;
- Low unionisation rates do not allow for collective bargaining between employees and the employer and therefore wages remain low;
- The minimum wage is not adjusted regularly to reflect the steady rise in the cost of living;
- The weakening of the legal protection of workers' rights provides employers with legal levers of exploitation.

Thus, in order to overcome these impediments, it is necessary to introduce and promote the living wage concept that reflects the real living costs of the workers, but also allows for a decent living for them and their families.

1. Context: Short definition of basic concepts – wage, minimum wage and poverty

Wages in the Republic of Moldova

According to the *Law no. 847 of 14.02.2002 on Salaries*, the wage is defined as “any reward or gain assessed in money paid to employees by the employer or by the body empowered by the employer under the individual employment contract for the work performed or to be performed” (Art.1)⁴.

The law does not set out one single way of assessing the amount of the reward or a general procedure for calculating the size of wage, leaving it at the discretion of employers, both in the public and private sectors.

In the public sector, until 1 December 2018, the wage scale was governed by the provisions of several laws: *Law No. 355 of 23.12.2005 on the wage system in the public sector*, *Law no. 48/2012 on the wage system for civil servants* and *Law no. 328/2013 on the remuneration of judges and prosecutors*.

In autumn 2018, the Government of Moldova promoted, and afterwards the Parliament adopted a new law – *Law No. 270 of 23 November 2018 on the Unitary Pay System in the budgetary sector*⁵ – which purpose, according to the authorities, is to “reduce the number of normative acts laying down the conditions for remuneration (...)”⁶ and to ensure a single, transparent and fair pay system by establishing a single wage scale for all public authorities and institutions.

The new law creates a register of functions in the budgetary sector comprising 8 occupational groups, and each function is divided into several subgroups of functions, grouped around certain common features. Each function is also composed of 6 pay steps corresponding to periods of seniority in service.

In the public sector, according to the new law, the wage consists of a fixed part (which includes the basic salary and a series of monthly bonuses) and a variable part (performance bonuses, etc.). Also, a number of bonuses are provided for the work conducted under unfavourable conditions, for overtime, etc.

According to art. 9 of this law, the wage scale in the public sector ensures the establishment of the basic salary for each position, according to the hierarchy of posts, and includes the wage grades, wage classes and wage coefficients. The base salary compression rate (reference coefficients) in the budget sector varies from 1 to 15.

The reference value corresponding to the salary coefficient of 1.00 is set in the state budget law for the current year and accounts – 1500 MDL⁷ (or 1300 MDL for some categories by derogation), according to the draft State Budget for 2019. These amounts can be considered as minimum wages in the public sector (until the entry into force of this law, they corresponded to the base category I salary in the budgetary sector.) Law No.270, however, establishes also that any wage below the 2000 MDL level shall be increased/ compensated by supplements so as the minimum guaranteed wage in the budgetary sector shall not be less than 2000 MDL.

For obvious reasons there is no similar unified pay legal framework for wages in the real sector of the economy, the employers being free to decide on the size of rewards and bonuses.

However, the legislation establishes the lowest limit for the reward of work that the employer, regardless of the type of property and the legal form of organization, doesn't have the right to go under while paying for the monthly or hourly workload performed by the employee. This limit is known as the minimum wage in the real (private) sector, which accounts for 2610 MDL gross per month.

Minimum wage

The minimum wage in the real sector is regulated by the provisions of *Law no. 1432 of 28.12.2000 on the way of setting and reviewing the minimum wage*⁸. It stipulates that in enterprises, organizations, institutions

with financial autonomy, no employer, irrespective of the type of ownership and legal form of organization, can pay its employees below the minimum wage. This amount cannot be reduced either by collective agreement or individual employment contract.

According to the law, the minimum wage does not include additions, bonuses, compensation payments and incentives (Art. 2.3). The size of the minimum wage is determined by several macroeconomic parameters – economic development indicators, average wage

level in national economy, forecasted inflation rate, consumer price index, gross domestic product volume, labour productivity, etc. (Art.3.4). The minimum wage rate in the real sector is determined annually by the government after negotiations and consultations with employers and trade unions⁹ and is published in the Official Gazette. It is calculated for a full-time work programme averaging 169 hours per month.

The table below shows the progress of the minimum wage in the period 2014-2018 (MDL per month):

Table 1.

Reference year	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Gross minimum wage in the real sector (MDL)	1650	1900	2100	2380	2610

Poverty threshold

Poverty, according to most definitions, is the condition of the lack of vital resources¹⁰ – food, housing, clothing and footwear etc.

In the academic and expert circles, there are debates about how poverty is measured (income levels, living conditions, consumption or spending patterns) and what are its key indicators. For example, the EU sets the poverty line as being the proportion of the population having an available income equivalent to 60% of the national average income, while the World Bank uses another methodology, which calculates the percentage of the population that lives on less than \$1 or \$2 per day.

These debates highlight the extremely complex nature of this phenomenon, as well as the methodological and cultural barriers that need to be overcome in order to achieve poverty assessments at both intra-national, regional, international and global levels.

In the Republic of Moldova, poverty is measured by the National Bureau of Statistics (BNS) based on the results of the Household Budget Surveys. BNS uses consumption as an indicator of living standards.

The poverty threshold is established using the “basic needs”¹¹, based on existing standards in the Republic of Moldova¹². According to this methodology, the people who have expended less than the poverty threshold are considered poor.

Thus, the establishment of the poverty threshold takes place in two stages:

I) The minimum food basket is established on the basis of recommendations made by the Academy of Science regarding the minimum dietary requirements. According to the BNS, “the extreme poverty threshold is the amount of food expenditure that provides a consumption of 2,400 cal/ person/ day¹³”.

II) The minimum non-food basket is established on the basis of the minimum food basket. BNS uses two indicators, both based on the Study of consumption of several reference groups, as follows:

a) *the inferior poverty non-food basket* is calculated by measuring the share of food consumption of the population whose total expenditures is equal to the food poverty threshold¹⁴. This calculation is based on the assumption that if these people

have replaced some food expenditure with some non-food expenditure, these non-food costs are essential.

b) *the superior poverty non-food basket* is calculated by measuring the average non-food consumption of the population whose food consumption is equal to the minimum food basket. The calculation is based on the assumption that if a person spends the minimum necessary on food, that person has also bought a minimum of non-food goods that he/ she considers essential.

The old BNS methodology used the inferior non-food

basket as a tool for measuring the poverty threshold. The new methodology uses the superior poverty non-food basket, based on which the superior poverty threshold is calculated.

The reasoning behind this change is that the standard of living has increased in Moldova in recent years and there are few households (which is an exception rather than the rule) with a total consumption equal to the extreme poverty threshold.

For this reason, BNS uses the superior poverty line indicator. In 2016, the superior poverty threshold was calculated by BNS at 1852.4 MDL.

Table 2.

	Inferior threshold	Superior threshold
Food basket (extreme poverty threshold), MDL	931,2	931,2
Non-food basket, MDL	388,7	921,2
Extreme poverty threshold, MDL	1319,9	1852,4
Share of food basket, %	70,6	50,3
Extreme poverty rate, %	5,8	25,6

Data source: National Bureau of Statistics: Methodology for calculating the extreme poverty line (2018)

Since the inferior poverty threshold is used to measure the extreme poverty rate, in 2016, only 5.8% of the population could be considered poor. If, on the contrary, the superior extreme poverty threshold is used, 25.6% (one quarter of the population) is qualified as poor.

Unfortunately, more recent estimates of the poverty level are not available yet – BNS adopted the new methodology for calculating the extreme poverty threshold only in August 2018.

2. The Living Wage

Even though it is a concept used mostly by the labour activist groups and the organisations doing advocacy campaigns in this area, the living wage was formally introduced/invented by them. On the contrary, **the living wage** (as a decent pay for work) is an older idea present in several philosophical-religious systems of different cultures. It is also enshrined in several treaties and international legal norms. Prior mentioning of the living wage idea can be found in the works of Adam Smith, Karl Marx, Plato and others.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights stipulates, in art. 23 (3), that “Everyone who works has the right to a just and favourable remuneration ensuring for him/herself and his/her family an existence worthy of human dignity and supplemented, if necessary, by other means of social protection¹⁵”.

The European Social Charter¹⁶, adopted in 1961, which is a supplement to the European Convention on Human Rights on the economic dimension and rights, stipulates in Article 4 that “All workers have the right to a fair remuneration sufficient for a decent standard of living for themselves and their families¹⁷”.

Some countries have gone further and incorporated “the living wage” into their national legislation, including in the Constitutions. Thus, in the United Kingdom, the living wage is regulated by the law¹⁸, which replaces the concept of the *national minimum wage* with the concept of the *national living wage*. As a result of this legal initiative, a significant increase in the national average income is planned by 2020¹⁹. Another example is the Constitution of the Republic of Ecuador stipulating the state’s obligation to ensure living wages for workers (*salario digno*)²⁰. Living wage provisions and the need for decent pay appear also in the constitutions of such countries as India, Brazil, Namibia, Mexico²¹ etc.

In some countries, civil society organizations have developed extensive campaigns to force employers to pay decent remuneration. In the UK, for instance, over 2000 companies and organizations have become “companies that pay living wages”²². In the USA, over 100 municipalities have clear rules concerning living wages for public sector employees and subcontractors.

Several international organizations such as Fair Trade International²³ issue certificates containing compliance with the provisions on decent work remuneration, while international trade union confederations such as IndustriALL²⁴ conducts extensive global awareness raising campaigns to negotiate decent wages with employers.

Several economists and philosophers have sought to calculate the level of “decent remuneration” and provide it with a philosophical and economic basis. Amartya Sen, a Nobel Laureate, and Martha Nussbaum, philosopher, have developed the capabilities approach theory²⁵. According to this concept, poverty is not measured in an abstract way, but based on the ability of individuals to achieve a range of capabilities – the ability to read and write, the ability to live long and healthy, to benefit from freedom and to be able to fully participate in the civic life of the community.

The diversity of “decent pay” concepts translates into a variety of ways of calculating the living wage. In a study for the International Labour Organization (ILO), Richard and Martha Anker have presented and examined 26 existing living wage calculation methodologies²⁶.

Most of them calculate the living wage summing up the food and a non-food components. Some methodologies use official statistical data, while others measure the living costs in specific contexts (at the region level or even at factory level).

Regarding the assessment of the living wage, experts draw the attention to a few aspects:

- the diversity of methodologies does not necessarily mean a contradiction between them but, rather, attempts to make varied estimates to contain different scenarios that include various regional, cultural contexts, etc.
- most of the times, the living wage estimates based on real food consumption reflect the current level of food consumption. The current real food consumption is inferior, because the current

living standards of workers are low, and measurements only reflect this.

- the living wage depends on the time and place of

measurement. The variables, which are difficult to measure, such as seasonal price variations, high rental costs, additional work, and additional time allotted affect considerably the living wage.

Most methodologies for measuring living wages are guided by the following principles:

1. The living wage is a **family concept** (as opposed to the official minimum salary concepts using the concept of individual wages). Every worker, irrespective of his/her matrimonial status, should receive a salary sufficient to support him/her and his/ her family.
2. The living wage is the **net salary** earned during a regular working month, excluding overtime, before premiums and allowances, and after tax. It's the take-home salary that the workers get at the end of the month.
3. The living wages is a **fundamental right** of all workers. No worker should receive less than a living wage. Every worker has the right to a decent life.
4. The living wage is **paid in cash** (not in vouchers or other goods). Only the salary paid in cash does not limit the economic freedom of workers.
5. The living wage is calculated regardless of the economic productivity or capacity of the workers, being simply based on needs. The living wage is sufficient to cover the **basic needs**: food, housing (rent, maintenance, and utilities), health, education, culture, clothing, transport.
6. The living wage allows to allocate 10% of the salary for **unforeseen expenditures**.

Source: Clean Clothes Campaign

The living wage should cover the following expenses:

Picture 1.

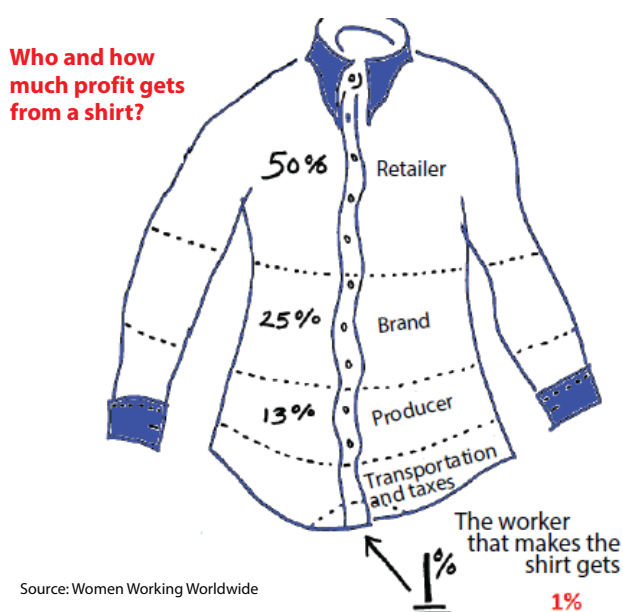


Source: Clean Clothes Campaign

2.1. Living wage as a tool for advocacy and defence of workers' rights in the garment industry

In another study²⁷ we show that the global apparel industry, which is estimated at about \$3 trillion, or 2% of the world GDP – is organised in the so-called *global value chains*, which are networks of companies located in different parts of the globe, dealing with various manufacture processes of garment products. Although the global commodity chains are broadly decentralized, they still imply clear hierarchies: on the one hand, some centres (situated usually in the rich global North) dealing with the design, marketing and promotion, on the other hand part, other centres dealing with simpler (and more demanding) stages of the production process. This distribution of roles is also reflected in the distribution of profits within the global commodity chain: the centres involved in the production process get the least part of the profit (and do most of the work), while the centres dealing with the more “creative” parts of the production process – marketing, design, promotion – collect the biggest part of the profit. Women Working Worldwide²⁸ has calculated that out of the entire profit generated by the sale of one shirt, the worker who produces it directly (sewing, shredding, cutting the fabric, adding labels and buttons, etc.) earns only 1% of its price²⁹.

Picture 2.



The brands (transnational corporations) take advantage of the low labour costs in some countries (usually developing countries) and of the high sale prices (also set by them) and/or small prices but large sales volumes in other countries (usually developed countries) – and thus larger revenues. These differences between the production and the consumption patterns arise from differences in the living standards, currency exchange rates, price levels, etc. That is, the brands pay for the work in one currency (of the underdeveloped country) and sell the commodity in a different currency (of the developed country).

In this way, the profit is decoupled from the production process on which it doesn't depend in any way. Many brands don't have any factories any longer, being “factory-free producers”.

The dominant economic development model (also reinforced by the policies of international organizations such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank) states that for developing countries there is no better model than increasing the attractiveness of their economies for foreign investors. This attractiveness is achieved, in this context, by maintaining a low tax level/ corporate tax, weakening of environmental regulations, reducing bureaucratic burdens for foreign investors and, in particular, by reducing the rights of workers in the manufacturing industries³⁰. The rationale is based on the assumption that these measures stimulate foreign investors to come into an economy and create new jobs in different sectors. These investments will then produce benefits for the rest of the national economy³¹.

The empirical evidence supporting the validity of this model is rather ambiguous as the success of economic development depends on several factors and conjunctions, including political, geopolitical, institutional and cultural.

However, the model also known as the Washington Consensus³² is perceived as “self-evident”, which needs to be implemented by the developing countries without being questioned.

The weakening of labour rights occupies a special place in this model. Certain indicators, such as the *Cost of Doing Business*³³ of the World Bank, measured until recently the “rigidity of the labour market” (labour regulations, unionisation rights) as a factor that negatively affects the degree of liberalization of an economy.

The living wage is one of the strategies by which garment workers are trying to undermine this global “anti-labour rights” climate imposed by both the developed countries, transnational corporations (located in these developed countries) and international organizations.

2.2 Methodologies for calculating the living wage

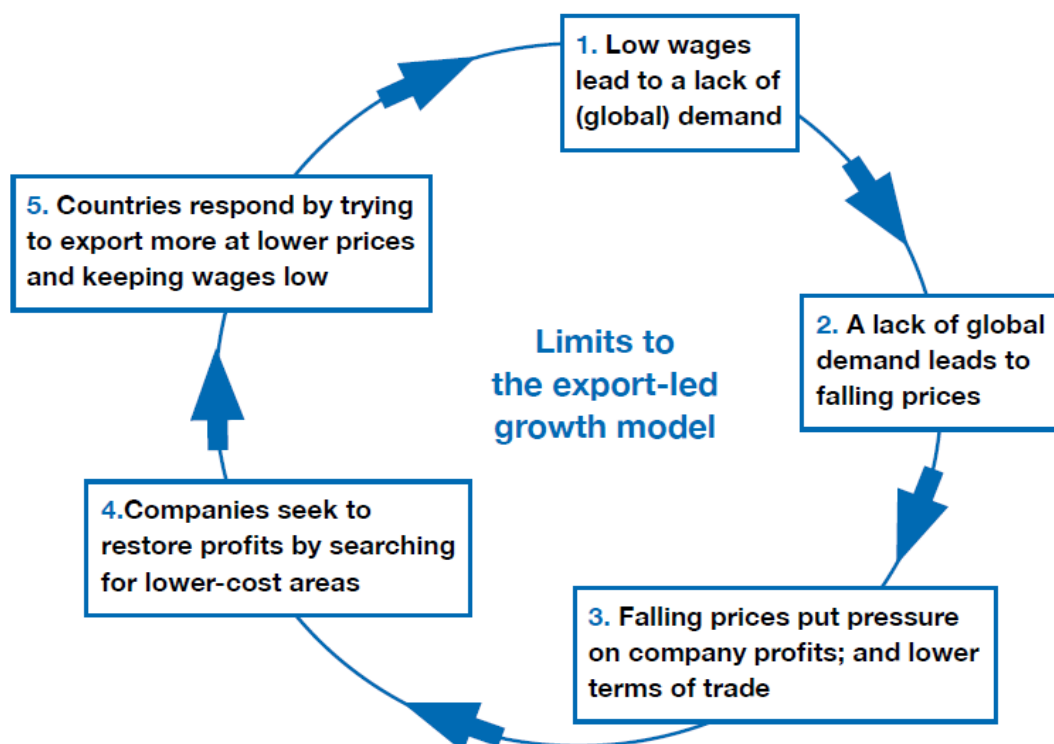
2.2.1 Methodology for calculation the living wage according to Asia Floor Wage

The *Asia Floor Wage Alliance* is composed of various organizations fighting for labour rights in a number of Asian countries where the domestic economy relies on the garment industry, such as India, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Indonesia, Shri Lanka, Thailand, China and Hong Kong. Asia Floor Wage (AFW) is the Asia Floor Wage Alliance’s strategy for collective bargaining in the garment industry. In the garment industry, it is the transnational corporations that hold the monopoly on the commodity chain. And in a global industry, as is the case with the garment industry, a national living wage implementation is extremely hard to achieve.

AFW aims to eliminate the race to the bottom. Thus, instead of competing for the cheapest labour in the region, Asia Floor Wage proposes to address the issue of the global commodity chain and tackle the threat of relocation by negotiating and adopting single, transnational demands for a living wage for all garment workers in Asia. The living wage calculated by AFW differs from one country to another, but has the same purchasing power of goods and services³⁴.

The living wage calculated by Asia Floor Wage distinguishes between food and non-food costs. The food

Picture 3.



Source: Stitching a decent wage across borders. The Asia Floor Wage proposal.

costs form the basis of calculation as the food costs are much higher in the Global South compared to the Global North, and workers often face difficulties in securing these costs. There is a pre-established relationship between income and food costs. This relationship is known as *Engel's Law* (after the name of a Belgian economist). According to Engel's law, as income increases, people tend to spend less on the food stuff as a share in the total household income. According to the official estimates, the income and food expenditure ratio in Asia is 1:1, which means that 50% of the Asian workers' income is spent on food.

Thus, the AFW methodology for calculating the living wage is as following³⁵:

A. Calculation of the living wage at national level

- 1) The first step is to calculate the food basket. The cost of the food basket is calculated based on a consumption of 3,000 calories a day per consumer unit (1 adult).
- 2) The living wage should be sufficient to support a family of 2 adults and 2 children (as one child consumes less than one adult, 2 children is equivalent to one consumer unit), i.e. 3 consumer units. After calculating the cost of the food basket of 3,000 calories a day, the sum obtained is multiplied by the 3 consumer units.
- 3) To obtain the cost of the monthly food basket needed to support a family, the amount is multiplied by 30 days.
- 4) The food and non-food costs ratio (clothing, housing, utilities, education, health, unforeseen expenditure, etc.) is 1: 1. The amount obtained is duplicated to cover non-food expenses.

B. Calculation of the living wage at transnational level. Calculation of the reference living wage for Asia.

- 1) Comparing decent living wages calculated at national level, in national currency; For a fair comparison of differences in the living costs across countries, the concept of *purchasing power parity* (PPP)³⁶ is used. Purchasing power parities are indicators of price level differences across countries. PPPs tell us how many currency units a given quantity of goods and services costs in different coun-

tries. PPP is used to calculate the amount of money needed for a non-US person to buy the same consumer basket that a US person can buy.

- 2) Converting decent living wages from national currency into PPPs;
- 3) Comparing living wages in PPPs across Asian countries. Establishing a decent living wage for Asia (Asia Floor Wage);
- 4) Converting the reference salary for Asia from PPP into national currency for each reference country.

2.2.2 Methodology for calculating the living wage used by the Clean Clothes Campaign

Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) is a global alliance set up in 1989, dedicated to improving the working conditions and empowering workers in the clothing and footwear industries³⁷.

While Asia Floor Wage is working to calculate the reference wage for Asia, CCC is doing it for Europe. The methodology for calculating the living wage used by CCC is based on the AFW methodology.

A. Calculation of the living wage at national level

- 1) From official sources a typical diet/ nutrition model is selected;
- 2) Based on the nutritional model, a consumer food basket of 3000 calories per day is defined;
- 3) Workers are asked how much they pay for the consumer basket and are requested to write daily the prices for each food item of the consumer basket for a period of at least 1 month;
- 4) The daily food costs are multiplied by 30 days to get the cost of the monthly food basket;
- 5) The monthly cost of the food basket is multi-

plied by 3 consumer units to get the cost of the monthly food basket for family support;

- 6) Non-food costs are added by using the proportion of food and non-food costs, according to official data;
- 7) 10% of the costs are added to the amount obtained to cover the unforeseen expenditures.

B. Calculation of the living wage at the European regional level

Calculation of the reference wage at European regional level draws the similar detailed steps as the Asia Floor Wage methodology.

2.2.3 The rational consumption budget according to the National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova

In 2016, the National Trade Unions Confederation of Moldova (CNSM) published a research on the methodology for estimating the labour costs based on the employees' needs³⁸. The research doesn't exactly calculate what we call the living wage, but because it is the only research in Moldova attempting to calculate something more than the minimum wage, we think it

is worthwhile mentioning it in this research.

The CNSM operates with the *rational consumption budget* concept understood as the value assessment of the composition and structure of the consumption of goods and services ensuring the complete satisfaction of a person's reasonable physiological, spiritual and social needs in accordance with rational scientifically based norms³⁹.

The principal differences between the *living wage* and the *rational consumption budget* are the following:

- The living wage criticizes the concept of the minimum wage, which is insufficient to cover the basic needs of workers, that is the living wage is also presented as an alternative to the minimum wage. The rational consumption budget is just an estimate of the average salary we should be targeting.
- The living wage is a fundamental right of all workers. As the rational consumption budget advocates, a higher average salary, it is not an inclusive benchmark.
- The living wage is the salary of a worker that should be sufficient to cover the basic needs of a family consisting of 2 adults and 2 children. The rational consumption budget calculates the budget of a family of two adults and two children, where both adults are employed.

The research calculates the value of the average monthly salary in national economy (equal to 18550 MDL including capital investment expenditures and 12560.16 MDL per month, excluding capital investment expenditures).

3. “Typical Diet” for Moldova

One of the main aspects while calculating the living wage is the measurement of food consumption in terms of:

- *Content* (Nomenclature of ingredients and products);
- *Quantity of products consumed*;
- *Estimated prices* (for some categories the prices are relatively stable, while for the others, like seasonal vegetables, the prices are very volatile and show high variations based depending on the season or holidays such as New Year’s Eve, etc.);
- *Internal variations within a category of ingredients/ products*. To give an example: inclusion of milk seems to us a choice that needs no argument. However, most shops in the country offer a range of milk including several products that differ from each other in variable fat content, the company that produces it, additives, etc. In the same way, the inclusion of white or any other kind of bread is an obvious choice, but equally obvious is that each shop (or manufacturer) proposes several types of white bread that differ in its additions, tastes and flavours, shapes, packaging, manufacturer etc.

These distinctions are not unimportant: they are directly reflected in the price of the product so that the difference between the lowest and the highest price of a product can be of 5-6 times. Thus, we can have white bread for 4-5 lei or 20-25 lei for the same quantity but of different type.

Difficulties also include the fact that eating (personal diet) is an intimate area (linked to individual preferences), on the one hand, and on the other hand, it is heavily influenced by the cultural context that hierarchies’ certain preferences as “traditional” or “typical”. Likewise, food consumption is also marked by certain individual preferences or characteristics (food allergies or intolerances), as well as the economic possibilities of each individual/ group/ region, etc.

The process of establishing a “national cuisine” creates sufficient methodological difficulties for the reasons listed above and because many of these choices are not just cultural or individual choices but also... polit-

ical choices. That is the sets of rules, instructions and regulations governing the food sector (and detailing the different ways in which food is produced, transported, stored, marketed, packaged and consumed), but also certain sets of public policies (nutrition, healthy food, symbolic framing, especially by declaring some food items as “national symbols” or “registered trademarks of a country”)⁴⁰.

The considerations outlined above clearly show that the process of measuring a typical food basket for a country/ region involves several methodological choices (but also multiple variations).

In general terms, the assessment of the typical food basket has two strains: one is related to the *descriptive* aspect of the process: we have to describe what, in what quantities and at what price, our interest group buys the food – in this case the garment workers, and another one is related to the *prescriptive* aspect of the process (which is the amounts or general rules that should be respected in the field of nutrition – from the fact that the body should receive a certain amount of food daily to perpetuate its functions to the recommendations regarding the water consumption, the rules regarding the limitation of salt and fat or the standards on the carbohydrate, protein and lipid consumption, which should be respected for a long and healthy life).

In one way or another, establishing the “typical diet” is a difficult and controversial process.

The authors of the study failed to identify other studies or works that ambitiously describe a typical Moldovan diet, so we faced the problem of developing one.

Where they exist, the public policy documents are far too general and offer nothing more than generic guidelines – for example: The National Food and Nutrition Program for 2014-2020⁴¹ does not contain more than summary recommendations on the need to increase quantities of fruit and vegetables, reducing the consumption of fat, salt and sugars, without laying down specific recommendations as to what quantities should be consumed.

The minimum food basket developed by the Academy of Sciences of Moldova and used by the BNS to

measure the poverty line contains a list of food (displayed in recommended amounts) but this is done from one single perspective: the minimum that the body needs to perpetuate its functions and maintain its functionality. The dietary considerations are in this case secondary. However, this list has the advantage of providing a scientifically grounded indicator of affordable (and deemed indispensable) food in the Republic of Moldova.

Most public policy documents and nutrition papers⁴² refer to the World Health Organization (WHO) standards, in particular the *Countrywide integrated noncom-*

municable disease intervention (CINDI) program of the WHO Europe Regional Office.

The CINDI program⁴³ aims to develop indicators and policy recommendations for healthy lifestyle and nutrition. CINDI also aims to change the diet of Europeans by discouraging the consumption of certain products (fats, salt) and encouraging the consumption of other products (vegetables and fruits, microelements, etc.).

The Healthy Diet Principles developed by CINDI and other WHO diet programs are as follows (Table 3):

Table 3.

Component	Share in daily food consumption
Carbohydrates	50-55 % ⁴⁴
Proteins	15-25 %
Fats	>30 ⁴⁵
Sugar	<10 %
Salt	< 5 g
Fruits, vegetables	≥400 g ⁴⁶

CINDI has also produced a graphical picture for its recommendations:

Picture 4.



The food pyramid is built, from the chromatic point of view, according to the principle of the traffic light: with green (the lower part) are the products recommended for consumption, in the middle – with yellow – the products that require moderation (attention) and the upper part, with red, the products that should, as far as possible, be avoided.

The authors of the study have developed a typical food basket for the Republic of Moldova, taking into account:

- the list of ingredients and their caloric composition, developed by BNS;

- CINDI/ FAO/ WHO recommendations;
- the structure of real food consumption as shown by the questionnaires filled in by the workers of the two garment factories.

At the same time, in order for this study to comply with the Clean Clothes Campaign/ Asia Floor Wage methodologies, the authors excluded the processed products (salami, sausages, etc.) from the typical food basket.

The calorie content of each product was calculated on the basis of the BNS data, indicated in the Methodology for calculating the absolute poverty threshold⁴⁷.

Table 4. Typical food basket⁴⁸.

Product category	Products
Cereals and carbohydrates	White bread Rye bread Pasta Rice Potatoes Buckwheat Oat grains Cornflour
Meat/ fish	Chicken Fish
Eggs	
Dairy products	Cottage cheese Sheep cheese Milk Sour cream
Legumes	Beans

Product category	Products
Vegetables	White cabbage Bell pepper Tomatoes Onion Garlic Cucumbers Carrot Mushrooms Beet
Fruits	Citrus fruits Apples
Fats	Nuts Butter Sunflower oil
Sugar	Honey Sugar
Beverages	Tea Coffee
Spices	Black pepper Parsley Dill Salt Sour kvass

4. Research on the living wage in the Republic of Moldova: data collection and interpretation

The methodology used for the calculation of the living wage in the Republic of Moldova is in line with the CCC methodology (see above).

To calculate the cost of the food basket, we used the empirical method of questioning the workers in the garment industry with regard to household food expenditure. To this end, we have developed a questionnaire (Annex 2) in which we included a list of basic food products (i.e. unprocessed food items).

Two groups of workers from two different garment factories were identified. The first factory is situated in Chisinau and produces its own brand. The second factory, located in a southern town of Moldova, uses Lohn production and works exclusively for brands such as *Primark* and *New Look*. The workers from the second factory, who participated in this research, live in a nearby village and travel daily to work.

10 women from each factory filled in the questionnaire for a period of 30 days (10 November – 10 December). For reasons of protecting the personal lives of workers and their families, but also for security reasons (for this research will be used for advocacy purposes), the identity of the women and of the factories they are working for will not be revealed.

Since women do not buy food on a daily basis, they noted down the prices each time they went shopping, but not more seldom than once a week.

The selection of two groups of workers from both urban and rural areas allowed us to record the price fluctuations in a geographic space, while filling in the questionnaire during a period of 30 days allowed us to observe the price fluctuations over time.

Based on the questionnaires we developed a nutritional food basket, adapted to local specificities, taking into account the workers' preferences. For example, we chose chicken because it was most often bought by the workers. Based on the food basket, we developed a rational diet of 3000 calories a day.

After that, we calculated, separately for urban and rural areas, the average price per food item of the daily 3000-calorie diet. We have summed up the prices for each product and calculated the cost of the consumption basket for one day. To calculate the price of the food basket for one month, we multiplied the amount by 30 days. Since the living wage is a family concept, we have multiplied the monthly food costs by 3 consumer units.

After having calculated the necessary monthly food expenses for one family, we also had to calculate the non-food expenses.

In the first half of 2018, BNS calculated that the share of food expenditure in total household expenditures accounted for 43.9%. On the basis of this ratio of food and non-food costs, we have calculated the living wage for the Moldovan garment workers.

Table 5.

Average monthly consumption per person		
Total per country, semester I, 2018		
	MDL per person	Percentage of total
Consumer spending – total	2 329,8	100
Food items	1022,0	43.9

Source: BNS⁴⁹

5. Living wage for Moldovan garment workers

Based on our research, we have estimated that the minimum living wage for the urban area is **12,306.8 MDL**, while for the rural area – **11,359.6 MDL**. Thus, the minimum average (urban-rural) living wage in the garment industry in the Republic of Moldova is **11,833.2 MDL**.

Taking into account the fact that the prices indicated by the workers coincide with the prices for the cheapest food on the market (for example, all women have indicated the price of the cheapest bread, the cheapest pasta, rice, etc.), we tend to believe that the minimum living wage, in reality, may be much higher than the one calculated by us (to cover products of higher quality).

The price of the monthly food consumption basket for a person in rural areas is by 138.6 MDL lower than in urban areas. This is due to the fact that the diversity of food products available in rural areas is significantly smaller than that in urban areas. Typically,

there is only one type of rice, one type of pasta, etc. on the shop shelves in rural areas. In addition, the shops are also limited to 2-3 units. Thus, the prices indicated by the workers in rural areas proved to be more homogeneous than the ones in urban areas (the price difference is much lower). Price fluctuations were also registered in time, not only in space. Some agricultural products were cheaper during the harvest season.

On average, the monthly food basket cost per person, set at 1731.6 MDL, accounts for 84.2% of the minimum salary guaranteed by the state of the Republic of Moldova. The other expenses, as well as the food costs of other family members, have to be covered by the remaining 15% of the salary which accounts for 323 MDL.

Compared to the average wage in the textile industry, which in the third quarter of 2018 amounted to 6027 MDL, it represents 50% of the minimum wage.

Table 6.

Minimum living wage in the garment industry of the Republic of Moldova (2018)

	urban	rural	average
Food basket cost per consumer unit per day	60,03	55,41	57,72
Food basket cost per consumer unit per month	1800,9	1662,3	1731,6
Food basket cost per 3 consumer units per month	5402,7	4986,9	5194,8
Non-food expenditure for one month (the food and non-food expenditures ratio is 43.9% vs. 56.1%)	6904,1	6372,6	6638,4
Total expenses (food and non-food)	12306,8	11359,6	11833,2

6. Conclusions and recommendations

Our research has calculated for the Republic of Moldova a minimum average (urban-rural) living wage of 11833.2 MDL in 2018. This figure is by 4 times higher than the minimum wage in the real sector (calculated at 2610 MDL) and by 9 times higher than the minimum wage in the public sector (according to the Law on the Single Pay System). This figure is also twice as high as the average gross salary in the textile industry (textile, garment, apparel, footwear) (calculated at 5694.6 MDL in 2017) and almost 3 times higher than the gross average wage in the garment sector (calculated as 4425.7 MDL in 2017)⁵⁰.

At the same time, these assessments represent, as mentioned above, the lower limit of the living wage, its actual size being eventually higher.

How do families cover the enormous gap between the living costs (measured in terms of living wages or real family maintenance costs) and the current salaries they are paid in the workplace? The detailed study of the survival modes of employees in the garment industry is not the subject of this research, but from the interviews and testimonies of the workers we can advance some answers:

- immigration (some families have at least one family member working abroad temporarily or permanently);
- additional farm work supplementing the family incomes with food (meat, milk, eggs, nuts, fruits, vegetables) and non-food (wool, wood etc);
- small individual businesses (crafts, etc);
- reducing food and non-food expenditure (when food is not enough, consumption is deliberately reduced or food is replaced by other sources of energy and lower calories food – fats etc.).

Obviously, these figures are valid also for other sectors of the national economy – we can assume that, except for the sectors requiring additional physical effort, the size of the living wage for other industries – either agriculture or service sector – is similar.

What's next?

It seems natural for us at this stage to declare the popularization of the living wage concept in the Republic of Moldova as a priority. Though impressive, its results and methodology are not yet part of the country's statistical and scientific toolkit. And this state of affairs should change. We call on the trade unions, civil society organizations active in the field of labour rights, academia and journalists to promote the living wage concept, to evaluate it for various fields, and to advocate for it to be included in the official statistics. The trade unions should include the living wage within the collective bargaining and social dialogue mechanisms.

It also seems to be an excellent strategy for the trade unions, organizations and movements promoting workers' rights to use this concept in their organizing activities, public spaces, etc.

Based on the research and the experience of other similar initiatives, and the living wage methodology, we come up with the following recommendations for the different stakeholders:

Brands/ Corporations

- Develop and implement concrete measures to ensure that workers in their commodity chain receive a living wage;
- Refuse to work with suppliers that do not abide to due diligence with regards to living wages;
- Adhere to ethical standards on workers' wages, working conditions, environmental protection etc.;
- Publish the list of companies in the supplier chain to make it possible for the civil society and trade unions to monitor their compliance with the living wage provisions etc.;
- Adopt sustainable development models that take account of the environment, workers' rights and satisfaction (following the model of such companies as Mondragon, etc.).

Government

- Adopt officially/legally the living wage concept as well as the living wage calculation methodology;
- Set up a minimum salary as close as possible to the living wage in both real and public sectors of the national economy;
- Strengthen the State Labour Inspectorate and other labour institutions and make sure to implement and improve labour rights protection by stronger and better enforced labour laws.

Trade Unions

- Increase the unionization rate of workers in the garment industry, but also in other industries, to the full coverage;
- Develop forms of symbolic reward (ethical certi-

cates, community standards) for the companies that pay living wages to their workers;

- Include the living wage within the social dialogue mechanism, in the collective bargaining with the employers' organisations, Government and companies.

Trade unions, civil society and mass media

- Organize public awareness and advocacy campaigns to promote the living wage in the garment industry and further expand the campaigns to other sectors of the national economy;
- Organize and participate in regional and global alliances aiming at making the living wage a remuneration standard in the economy;
- Mass media should take over and disseminate the living wage concept, including by explaining the benefits to all stakeholders.

ANNEXES

Annex 1 Detailed Consumer Basket Model

Nr.	Food items	Nutritional value		
		Caloric value/100g, calories	Caloric value per day, calories	Quantity per day, grams
1	Cereals and carbohydrates			
1.1	White bread	224.5	168.3	75
1.2	Rye bread	324.9	243.6	75
1.3	Pasta	330.6	198.3	60
1.4	Rice	319.8	255.84	80
1.5	Potatoes	58.9	88.35	150
1.6	Buckwheat	313.6	188.16	60
1.7	Oat grains	313.6	188.16	60
1.8	Cornflour	316.7	190	60
	Total cereals, carbohydrates		1520.71	
2	Meat / Fish			
2.1	Chicken	137.5	165	120
2.2	Fish	54.1	32.46	60
	Total fish		197.46	
3	Eggs	150/buc	75	50
	Total eggs		75	
4	Dairy products			
4.1	Cottage cheese	173.1	86.55	50
4.2	Sheep cheese	290.5	87.15	30
4.3	Milk	57.4	114.8	200
4.4	Sour cream	205	92.25	45
	Total dairy products		380.75	
5	Legume			
5.1	Beans	278.1	139.05	50
	Total legume		139.05	
6	Vegetables			
6.1	White cabbage	17.9	17.9	100
6.2	Bell pepper	27.5	8.25	30
6.3	Tomatoes	14	14	100
6.4	Onion	27.5	11	40
6.5	Garlic	27.5	4.12	15
6.6	Cucumbers	14	8.4	60
6.7	Carrots	27.9	16.7	60
6.8	Mushrooms	13.4	8	60

Annex 2 Questionnaire for expenditure records

Basic food basket			Calendar							
Nr.	Food items		Day 0	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day NN	Day 30
		Example								
1	Cereals and carbohydrates									
1.1	White bread									
1.2	Rye bread									
1.3	Whole bread									
1.4	White flour	1 kg / 28 lei								
1.5	Pasta									
1.6	Rice	1 kg / 25 lei								
1.7	Potatoes									
1.8	Buckwheat									
1.9	Oat grains									
1.10	Cornflour									
2	Meat/ Fish									
2.1	Chicken	1 kg / 60 lei								
2.2	Cattle									
2.3	Pork									
2.4	Mutton									
2.5	Carp	0.5 kg / 30 lei								
2.6	Crucian carp									
2.7	Silver carp									
2.8	Hake									
3	Eggs	10 buc/20 lei								
4	Dairy products									
4.1	Goat cheese									
4.2	Cottage cheese									
4.3	Sheep cheese									
4.4	Curd									
4.5	Cheese									
4.6	Yogurt	250 g./10 lei								
4.7	Milk									
4.8	Sour cream	250 g. /15 lei								
5	Legumes									
5.1	Beans									
5.2	Peas									
5.3	Chickpeas									
6	Vegetables									
6.1	Zucchini									
6.2	White cabbage	1 kg./5 lei								
6.3	Eggplant									

Basic food basket			Calendar							
Nr.	Food items		Day 0	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day NN	Day 30
			Example							
6.4	Broccoli									
6.5	Bell pepper									
6.6	Tomatoes									
6.7	Onion									
6.8	Garlic	200 g/10 lei								
6.9	Cucumbers									
6.10	Carrots									
6.11	Mushrooms									
6.12	Beet									
7	Fruits									
7.1	Bananas									
7.2	Oranges									
7.3	Tangerines									
7.4	Apples									
8	Fats									
8.1	Nuts									
8.2	Butter									
8.3	Sunflower oil									
9	Sugar									
9.1	Honey									
9.2	Sugar									
10	Beverages									
10.1	Water									
10.2	Tea	25 teabags/ 26 lei								
10.3	Coffee									
11	Spices									
11.1	Black pepper									
11.2	Parsley	10 g / 5 lei								
11.3	Dill									
11.4	Salt									
11.5	Sour kvass	1 litter/12 lei								

Endnotes

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Clean Clothers Campaign (CCC)

Clean Clothers Campaing – is a global alliance dedicated to improving working conditions and empowering workers in the clothing and footwear industry worldwide. www.cleanclothes.org

Platzforma (PZF)

The portal <http://www.platzforma.md> is an online platform for critical discussion and qualified analysis of certain phenomena and social issues neglected or naipulated in public space (inequalities, vulgarity, oppression, identities, cultures, ideologies, etc.)

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