



CfSC

The Centre for Social Concern

Basic Needs Basket

Cost of Living for May 2025



COST OF LIVING DROPS marginally BUT REMAINS HIGH FOR LOW-INCOME EARNERS

The Centre for Social Concern (CfSC) has released its latest monthly cost of living survey covering the cities of Blantyre, Lilongwe, Zomba, and Mzuzu. The results show that the cost of living has dropped from MK841, 219 in March to MK825, 520 in May 2025, representing a 1.9% decrease. This slight drop is largely attributed to declining maize prices, a key staple that heavily influences household spending in Malawi.

*Centre for Reflection,
Research and Action on
Issues of Social Concern
in the Light of the
Gospel and the Church's
Social Teaching*

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Lilongwe cost of living for a household of six people for May 2025

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	50,000	100,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	60,000	120,000
Milling (Including Grinding)	2,000	28,000	Protex	1,481	14,810
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	6,000	38,400	Boom	2,250	18,000
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	29,089	29,089	Clere Body Lotion	3,463	6,926
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	29,600	23,680	Vaseline Blue Seal	3,725	7,450
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	23,499	23,499
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	9,000	36,000	Running Water (meter)	13,675	13,675
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	413	19,824	Housing (3 bedroom)	100,262	100,262
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,005	22,613	Sub-Total		304,622
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	2,192	32,880	Lilongwe Total Basic Needs		814,690
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,288	8,008			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,338	20,070	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	9,031	27,093	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	3,163	63,260	Secondary (fees) per year		96,000
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,463	27,704	Primary (GPF) per year		3,000
Kitchen Salt	1,575	1,575	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		45,000
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	338	13,520	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		63,375
Cassava /potatoes (2KgX2Bkfst/)	1,147	18,352	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		31,150
Sub-Total		510,068	Sub-Total		238,525

Zomba cost of living for a household of six people for May 2025

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	46,286	92,572	Charcoal (50 kgs)	46,429	92,858
Milling (Including Grinding)	1,200	16,800	Protex	1,857	18,570
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	6,000	38,400	Boom	2,414	19,312
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	32,857	32,857	Clere Body Lotion	4,300	8,600
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	35,714	28,571	Vaseline Blue Seal	4,571	9,142
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	21,149	21,149
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	10,000	40,000	Running Water (meter)	17,706	17,706
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	450	21,600	Housing (3 bedroom)	83,286	83,286
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	943	21,218	Sub-Total		270,623
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	943	14,145	Zomba Total Basic Needs		758,137
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	1,429	5,002			
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,500	22,500	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	11,114	33,342	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	3,000	60,000	Secondary (fees) per year		105,868
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	4,429	35,432	Primary (GPF) per year		9,000
Kitchen Salt	1,540	1,540	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		82,602
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	200	8,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		89,144
Cassava /potatoes (2KgX2Bkfst/)	971	15,536	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		36,878
Sub-Total		487,514	Sub-Total		323,491

Blantyre cost of living for a household of six people for May 2025

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	49,643	99,286	Charcoal (50 kgs)	85,714	171,428
Milling (Including Grinding)	500	7,000	Protex	1,586	15,860
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	5,786	37,030	Boom	2,457	19,656
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	41,857	41,857	Clere Body Lotion	3,514	7,028
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	38,571	30,857	Vaseline Blue Seal	4,057	8,114
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	58,571	46,857	Electricity	20,018	20,018
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	7,571	30,284	Running Water (meter)	21,158	21,158
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	443	21,264	Housing (3 bedroom)	88,288	88,288
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,029	23,153	Sub-Total	351,550	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	1,926	28,890	Blantyre Total Basic Needs		895,703
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,857	10,000	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,357	20,355	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	9,500	28,500	Secondary (fees) per year		75,000
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	2,800	56,000	Primary (GPF) per year		3,000
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	4,000	32,000	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		127,220
Kitchen Salt	1,229	1,229	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		100,694
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	157	6,280	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		53,525
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	1,457	23,312	Sub-Total	Sub-Total	359,439

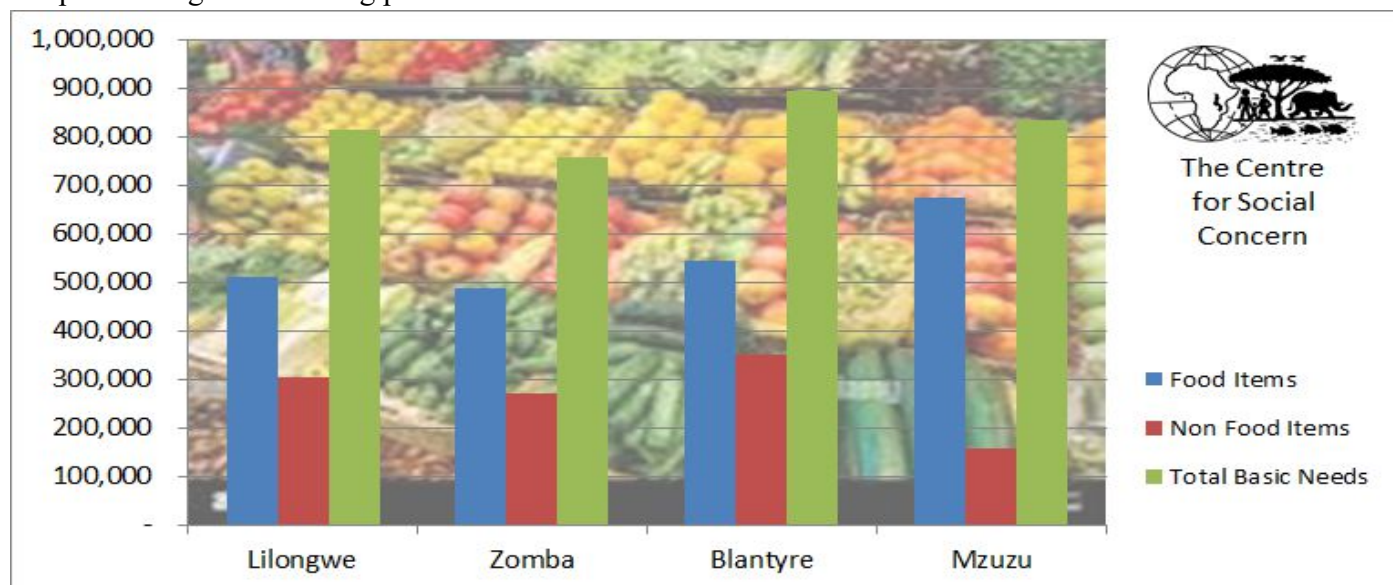
Mzuzu cost of living for a household of six people for May 2025

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	68,333	136,666	Charcoal (50 kgs)	24,050	48,100
Milling (Including Grinding)	3,000	42,000	Protex	2,433	24,330
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	5,033	32,211	Boom	2,100	16,800
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	30,000	30,000	Clere Body Lotion	3,000	6,000
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	54,667	43,734	Vaseline Blue Seal	3,088	1,066
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	14,167	11,334	Electricity	9,387	9,387
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	10,000	40,000	Running Water (meter)	9,021	9,021
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	450	21,600	Housing (3 bedroom)	43,819	43,819
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,885	42,413	Sub-Total	158,523	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	5,175	77,625	Mzuzu Total Basic Needs		833,550
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	3,853	13,486	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,800	27,000	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	8,832	26,496	Secondary (fees) per year		93,856
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	3,500	70,000	Primary (GPF) per year		5,541
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	4,767	38,136	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		56,708
Kitchen Salt	3,160	3,160	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		81,160
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	300	12,000	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		25,068
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	448	7,168	Sub-Total	Sub-Total	538,071

Table showing cost of living per district

District	Food Items	Non Food Items	Total Basic Needs
Lilongwe	510,068	304,622	814,690
Zomba	487,514	270,623	758,137
Blantyre	544,153	351,550	895,703
Mzuzu	675,027	158,523	833,550

Graph showing cost of living per district



Note: Total Basic Needs is calculated from Total Food Items + Total Non Food Items

A LOOK AT THE CITIES OF LILONGWE, ZOMBA, BLANTYRE AND MZUZU

Across the cities:

- **Lilongwe** recorded a **44% drop** in the price of maize (from MK89,375 to MK50,000 per 50Kg bag).
- **Zomba** registered a **35% drop**,
- **Blantyre** saw an **11% drop**, and
- **Mzuzu** had a **15% drop**.

This decline is largely because of the harvesting season and it offers short-term relief to many households, particularly as maize constitutes a large portion of household food consumption.

Persistently High Cost of Living Still a Burden

Despite this temporary decline, MK825, 520 remain out of reach for most Malawians, especially those in low-income jobs and informal employment. The reality is that majority of Malawians earn far less than what is needed to meet basic needs such as food, shelter, education, transport, and health care. High inflation, volatile food prices, and low wages continue to compromise the right to food and the right to development, particularly for vulnerable populations.

The Effects of the High Cost of Living Include

- **Increased food insecurity**, with many families reducing the number of meals or compromising on nutrition quality.
- **Increased school dropout rates**, as households struggle to balance school fees with basic needs.
- **Rising informal debt**, with families borrowing for food, leading to cycles of poverty.
- **Poor health outcomes**, as individuals prioritize food over healthcare needs.
- **Increased gender burden**, particularly on women and children who bear the brunt of poverty-related consequences.

CfSC's Proposed Short-, Medium-, and Long-Term Interventions

Short-Term Measures

- **Scale up targeted safety nets**, such as cash transfer programs, to reach low-income urban households.
- **Introduce a maize price stabilization mechanism** to prevent erratic price movements, particularly in lean seasons.
- **Provide subsidies or tax waivers on essential food and non-food items** that make up the basic needs' basket.

Medium-Term Measures:

- **Review and increase the minimum wage** to match the cost-of-living realities.
- **Strengthen ADMARC and the National Food Reserve Agency (NFRA)** to ensure timely and affordable access to maize across the country.
- **Support urban agriculture and food diversification**, especially in low-income communities.
- **Stablished the value of the local currency (Kwacha) and ensure the availability of foreign currency for importers.**

Long-Term Measures:

- **Invest in pro-poor economic development**, focusing on inclusive job creation in agro-processing, manufacturing, and services.
- **Promote land and market access for smallholder farmers**, particularly women and youth, to sustainably produce food.
- **Implement comprehensive social protection systems** aligned with Malawi's commitments under the **Right to Food Guidelines and Agenda 2030**.
- **Move the Malawi economy from import-dependent economy to a production economy.**

Conclusion

While the recent drop in maize prices has provided momentary relief, the broader cost of living remains unacceptably high for many Malawians. CfSC calls upon the **Government of Malawi, development partners,** and **civil society** to take coordinated and rights-based action to ensure **economic justice** and **food security** for all, especially the poor and marginalized.

Table showing monthly average for the cost of living

Monthly Average	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2025	2025	2025	2025
	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	May
Amount (MWK)	500,154	510,634	516,377	519,763	523,648	540,353	578,843	615,138	694,653	797,908	841,219	825,520

Graph showing monthly average for the cost of living



Fuel Cost

Fuel (cost at the pump)	
Diesel (per litre)	K2734
Petrol (per litre)	K2530
Paraffin (per litre)	K1920

Minibus Fare

Minibus fare to town and back	
Lilongwe	K4000
Zomba	K2000
Blantyre	K1800
Mzuzu	K 1800

NB: 1 USA dollar (\$) = K1, 726.64 Malawian Kwacha (MK). Source: <https://www.oanda.com/currency-converter/en/> : The Social Conditions Research Programme of the Centre for Social Concern
 Conducted these surveys from 6th to 7th May, 2025 in the cities of Blantyre, Zomba, Lilongwe and Mzuzu.

NOTE: The data on electricity, housing, water and other additional costs is collected and analyzed on quarterly basis

