



CISC

The Centre for Social Concern

Basic Needs Basket

Cost of Living for August 2025



A RISE IN FOOD AND ESSENTIAL COMMODITY PRICES PUSHES UP COST OF LIVING IN MALAWI

The Centre for Social Concern's findings for August 2025 show a continued upward trend in the cost of living. The average cost of living for a family of six has risen from K896,980 in July to K910,131 in August, representing a 1.5% increase in just one month. While the percentage increase may appear modest, its impact on struggling households is significant given stagnant incomes, high unemployment, and widespread poverty.

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

For More Information Contact Us On:

Centre for Social Concern

P.O. Box 40049

Kanengo, Lilongwe 4

Malawi

Tel: +265 999 351 439

E-mail: director@cfscmafr.org

Website: www.cfscmafr.org

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

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	59,500	119,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	62,500	125,000
Milling (Including Grinding)	2,100	29,400	Protex	1,613	16,130
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	7,038	45,043	Boom	2,413	19,304
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	39,554	39,554	Clere Body Lotion	3,700	7,400
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	35,700	28,560	Vaseline Blue Seal	5,525	11,050
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	24,093	24,093
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	11,875	47,500	Running Water (meter)	22,491	22,491
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	513	24,624	Housing (3 bedroom)	105,980	105,980
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,246	28,035			
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	2,462	36,930	Sub-Total		331,448
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,451	8,579	Lilongwe Total Basic Needs		918,804
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,863	27,945	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	9,788	29,364	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	3,175	63,500	Secondary (fees) per year		96,000
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,475	27,800	Primary (GPF) per year		3,000
Kitchen Salt	1,738	1,738	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		45,000
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	375	15,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		63,375
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	924	14,784	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		31,150
	Sub-Total	587,356		Sub-Total	238,525

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

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	70,286	140,572	Charcoal (50 kgs)	27,429	54,858
Milling (Including Grinding)	1,157	16,198	Protex	2,000	20,000
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	7,357	47,085	Boom	3,000	24,000
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	37,143	37,143	Clere Body Lotion	4,086	8,172
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	38,571	30,857	Vaseline Blue Seal	7,143	14,286
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	22,418	22,418
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	12,000	48,000	Running Water (meter)	18,998	18,998
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	500	24,000	Housing (3 bedroom)	85,177	85,177
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,486	33,435			
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	3,086	46,290	Sub-Total		247,909
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	2,093	7,326	Zomba Total Basic Needs		845,900
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,500	22,500	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	9,929	29,787	Education		
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	3,000	60,000	Secondary (fees) per year		105,868
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,457	27,656	Primary (GPF) per year		9,000
Kitchen Salt	1,543	1,543	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		82,602
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	200	8,000	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		89,144
Cassava /potatoes (2Kgx2Bkfst/)	1,100	17,600	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		36,878
	Sub-Total	597,991		Sub-Total	323,491

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

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	70,000	140,000	Charcoal (50 kgs)	92,143	184,286
Milling (Including Grinding)	500	7,000	Protex	1,557	15,570
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	6,657	42,605	Boom	2,371	18,968
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	40,714	40,714	Clere Body Lotion	3,686	7,372
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	48,714	38,971	Vaseline Blue Seal	4,614	9,228
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	51,429	41,143	Electricity	24,880	24,880
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	10,000	40,000	Running Water (meter)	22,821	22,821
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	500	24,000	Housing (3 bedroom)	101,230	101,230
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	929	20,903	Sub-Total	384,355	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	3,407	51,105	Blantyre Total Basic Needs		1,012,632
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	3,614	12,649	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	1,614	24,210	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	9,471	28,413	Secondary (fees) per year		75,000
Bread (5 bkfsts / wk) 20 days	2,843	56,860	Primary (GPF) per year		3,000
Sugar (2 Kgs /Week)	3,500	28,000	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		127,220
Kitchen Salt	1,200	1,200	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		100,694
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	157	6,280	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		53,525
Cassava /potatoes (2KgX2Bkfst/)	1,514	24,224	Sub-Total	Sub-Total	359,439
Sub-Total			628,277		

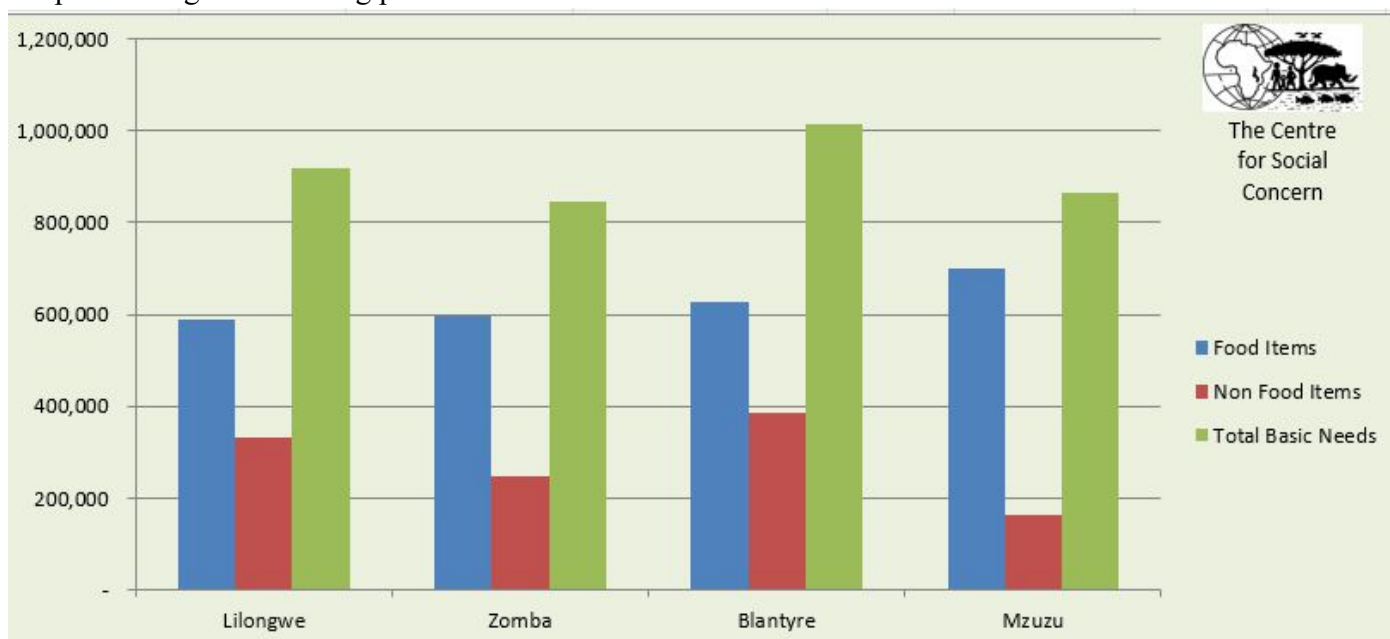
Mzuzu cost of living for a household of six people for August 2025

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	64,167	128,334	Charcoal (50 kgs)	24,167	48,334
Milling (Including Grinding)	3,000	42,000	Protex	2,433	24,330
Beans (0.8kg/day) 8 Days	6,250	40,000	Boom	2,317	18,536
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	40,000	40,000	Clere Body Lotion	3,383	6,766
Dry Utaka/Mcheni (200g/day) 4 days	60,167	48,134	Vaseline Blue Seal	5,350	1,066
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	27,500	22,000	Electricity	9,909	9,909
Beef(1 kg/day) 4 days	14,000	56,000	Running Water (meter)	8,529	8,529
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	525	25,200	Housing (3 bedroom)	45,461	45,461
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,833	41,243	Sub-Total	162,931	
Tomato (0.5 Kg/day) 30 days	3,637	54,555	Mzuzu Total Basic Needs		863,189
Onion (116g/day) 30 days	4,410	15,435	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh Milk (250ml/day) 30 days	2,400	36,000	Education		
Kazinga Cooking oil (100mls/day)30 days	11,450	34,350	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)	3,150	25,200	Uniform/shoes (Primary) per year		56,708
Kitchen Salt	3,200	3,200	Uniform/shoes (Secondary) per year		78,160
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	300	12,000	Other (pens, books, etc.) per term		25,068
Cassava /potatoes (2KgX2Bkfst/)	413	6,608	Sub-Total	Sub-Total	234,265
Sub-Total			700,258		

Table showing cost of living per district

District	Food Items	Non Food Items	Total Basic Needs
Lilongwe	587,356	331,448	918,804
Zomba	597,991	247,909	845,900
Blantyre	628,277	384,355	1,012,632
Mzuzu	700,258	162,931	863,189

Graph showing cost of living per district



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

KEY DRIVERS OF THE AUGUST 2025 COST OF LIVING INCREASE

Detailed commodity analysis reveals that the cost-of-living increase was not uniform across all products but was heavily influenced by sharp price increases in specific food and essential household commodities:

- **Mzuzu: Kapenta prices rose by 83%** (from K15, 000 to K27, 500 per kg). This sharp rise has made an important source of protein unaffordable for many households.
- **Zomba: Rape prices increased by 58%** (from K943 to K1, 486 per kg), and **Tomatoes rose by 40%** (from K2, 200 to K3, 086 per kg). Vegetables, once a fallback for the poor, are now becoming luxury items.
- **Blantyre: Tomatoes rose by 33%** (from K2, 557 to K3, 407 per kg), a worrying trend as tomatoes are a key ingredient in Malawian diets.
- **Lilongwe: Vaseline Blue Seal rose by 34%** (from K4, 138 to K5, 525 per bottle). Though non-food, this product is essential for household hygiene and well-being, and its price increase puts extra pressure on household budgets.

It is worth noting that although some commodities such as onions and charcoal registered price decreases in some cities, these reductions were not enough to offset the steep increases in maize, vegetables, cooking oil, fish, and other key items.

Impact on Low-Income Earners

Low-income households, who form the majority of urban dwellers in Malawi, are disproportionately affected by these increases. Many households survive on incomes far below the national poverty line of US\$3.00/day (approximately K5, 250 at current exchange rates). With the cost of living now standing at over K910, 000 per month, the gap between incomes and expenses continues to widen.

The immediate consequences include:

- **Food insecurity:** Families are being forced to cut down on meal frequency and dietary diversity, compromising nutrition, especially for children and pregnant women.
- **Erosion of household dignity:** Even basic hygiene products such as soap and body lotion are becoming unaffordable, lowering living standards.
- **Coping mechanisms:** Households are resorting to borrowing, withdrawing children from school, or engaging in unsustainable activities such as charcoal burning, which has long-term environmental consequences.

Broader Economic Context

This rise in the cost of living at this period when prices are expected to be stable is occurring against a backdrop of:

- **Currency depreciation**, which has increased the cost of imports including fuel, cooking oil, and other essential goods.
- **Erratic rainfall patterns**, which have negatively affected agricultural production, pushing up the prices of maize and vegetables.
- **Energy challenges**, with reliance on charcoal remaining high due to limited access to reliable and affordable electricity.
- **Weak wage growth**, as most formal and informal workers' incomes have not adjusted to match inflation.

This convergence of factors continues to trap Malawian households in cycles of poverty and vulnerability.

Recommendations to Government of Malawi

CfSC believes that the current cost of living crisis requires urgent and multi-pronged government action. We propose the following:

1. Short-term Measures

- **Stabilize maize prices** by strengthening ADMARC's presence in local markets to counter speculative pricing.
- **Expand social protection**, including cash transfers and food aid, targeting vulnerable groups in both rural and urban areas.
- **Enforce fair trade practices**, monitoring price manipulation in urban markets.

2. Medium-term Measures

- **Invest in irrigation and climate-smart agriculture** to reduce reliance on rain-fed production and stabilize supply of vegetables, legumes, and maize throughout the year.
- **Support smallholder farmers' cooperatives** with market access and storage facilities to reduce post-harvest losses and stabilize supply.
- **Encourage urban agriculture** initiatives to improve access to fresh foods for city residents.
- **Improve energy alternatives**, making cooking gas and electricity more affordable to reduce reliance on charcoal and relieve household expenditure.

3. Long-term Measures

- **Transform agricultural value chains** by promoting commercialization, agro-processing, and value addition to create jobs and reduce over-reliance on imported goods.
- **Strengthen macroeconomic stability** by improving fiscal discipline, enhancing export diversification, and stabilizing the Kwacha to reduce import costs.
- **Invest in renewable energy and infrastructure**, providing affordable and sustainable alternatives to charcoal and reducing household expenditures on energy.
- **Education and employment creation**, ensuring that incomes grow alongside the cost of living to sustainably lift households out of poverty.

Conclusion

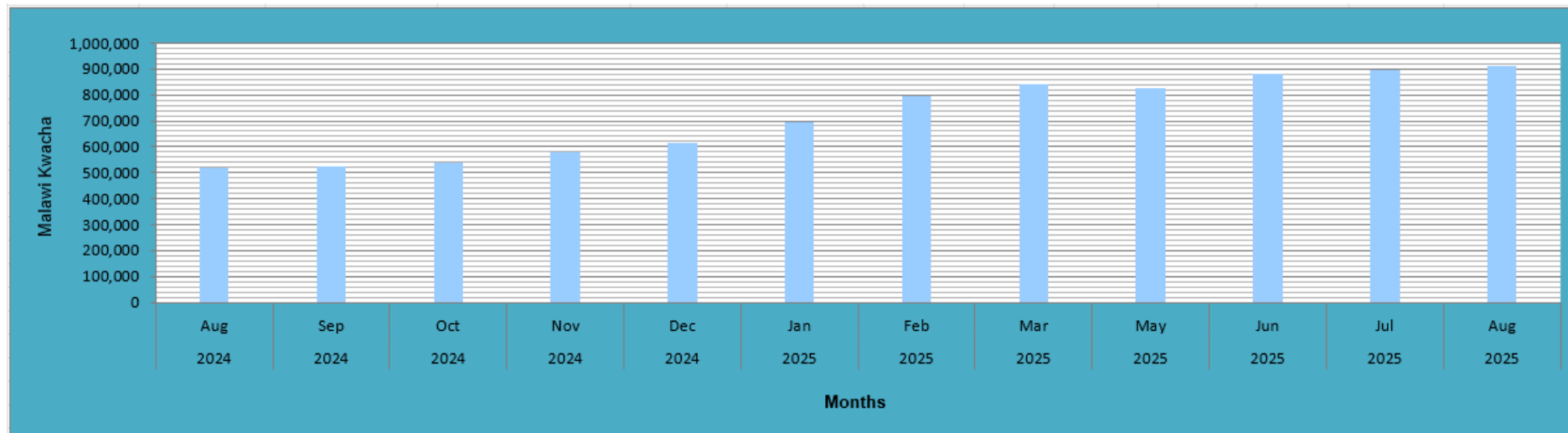
The August 2025 increase in the cost of living is a wake-up call that Malawi's economic system requires urgent structural reforms. It is not enough to address symptoms of the crisis through ad-hoc subsidies. What is required is a comprehensive national strategy that combines immediate cushioning measures with long-term reforms in agriculture, energy, and macroeconomic governance.

The Centre for Social Concern (CfSC) therefore urges Government, civil society, private sector, and international partners to work collectively in ensuring that Malawians are not condemned to perpetual poverty. Every Malawian deserves the right to food, shelter, energy, and dignity — and it is the duty of the State to make this a reality.

Table showing monthly average for the cost of living

Monthly Average	2024	2024	2024	2024	2024	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025
	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Amount (MWK)	519,763	523,648	540,353	578,843	615,138	694,653	797,908	841,219	825,520	880,053	896,980	910,131

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	K1800

NB: 1 USA dollar (\$) = K1, 728.74 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 4th and 5th August, 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

