



The Centre for Social Concern

Basic Needs Basket

Cost of Living for April 2026

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Slight Decline in Cost of Living Offers Limited Relief as Gap with Minimum Wage Remains Wide

The Centre for Social Concern has released its April 2026 Cost of Living Analysis, based on monthly monitoring of commodity prices across major urban centres in Malawi. The findings show a *marginal decline* in the cost of living between March and April 2026, largely driven by a reduction in maize prices.

The average cost of living for a family of six decreased from MK1, 021,771 in March to MK1, 018,012 in April 2026, representing a 0.37% decrease. While this drop provides slight relief, it is not significant enough to meaningfully improve the welfare of low-income households.

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

Lilongwe cost of living for a household of six people for April 2026

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	47,500	95,000	Charcoal (50Kg)	50,000	100,000
Milling (Including grinding)	3,286	46004	Protex	2,713	27,130
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	5,438	34805	Boom	2,438	19,504
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	39,844	39844	Clere body lotion	4,000	8,000
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	35,565	28452	Vaseline Blue Seal	6,156	12,312
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	24,752	24,752
Beef (1 Kg/day) 4 days	13,250	53000	Running Water (meter)	10,679	10,679
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	500	24000	Housing (3 bedrooms)	126,256	126,256
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,489	33503	Sub-Total		328,633
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	4,588	68,820	Lilongwe Total Basic Needs		967,377
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	5,311	18,589			
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys	1,900	28,500	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys	8,619	25,857	Education		
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days	3,150	63,000	Secondary(fees) per year		0
Sugar (2Kgs/week)	5,525	44,200	Primary(GPF) per year		0
Kitchen Salt	1,813	1,813	Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year		14,2812
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	484	19,360	Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year		13,5147
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)	875	14,000	Other (pens,books, etc)/term		49650
Sub-Total		638,744	Sub-Total		

Zomba cost of living for a household of six people for April 2026

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	62,000	124,000	Charcoal (50Kg)	25,000	50,000
Milling (Including grinding)	1,500	21,000	Protex	2,814	28,140
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	8,000	51,200	Boom	2,571	20,568
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	22,857	22,857	Clere body lotion	4,157	8,314
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	25,000	20,000	Vaseline Blue Seal	6,929	13,858
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0	Electricity	22,436	22,436
Beef (1 Kg/day) 4 days	14,000	56,000	Running Water (meter)	18,299	18,299
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	500	24,000	Housing (3 bedrooms)	96,827	96,827
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	2,429	54,653	Sub-Total		258,442
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	2,921	43,815	Zomba Total Basic Needs		889,802
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	3,829	13,402			
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys	1,886	28,290	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys	9,357	28,071	Education		
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days	2,800	56,000	Secondary(fees) per year		0
Sugar (2Kgs/week)	5,100	40,800	Primary(GPF) per year		0
Kitchen Salt	1,857	1,857	Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year		165,995
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	621	24,840	Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year		150,384
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)	1,286	20,576	Other (pens,books, etc)/term		41,136
Sub-Total		631,360	Sub-Total		357,515

Blantyre cost of living for a household of six people for April 2026

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	55,833	111,666	Charcoal (50Kg)	128571	257142
Milling (Including grinding)	500	7,000	Protex	2471	24710
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	6,429	41,146	Boom	2,414	19,312
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	38,143	38,143	Clere body lotion	34,86	6,972
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	45,714	36,571	Vaseline Blue Seal	1,307	2,614
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	56,429	45,143	Electricity	25,145	25,145
Beef (1 Kg/day) 4 days	12,286	49,144	Running Water (meter)	25,482	25,482
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	500	24,000	Housing (3 bedrooms)	105,987	105,987
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,400	315,00	Sub-Total	467,364	
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	4,400	66,000	Blantyre Total Basic Needs		1,157,882
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	686	21,301			
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys	1,786	26,790	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys	9,364	28,092	Education		
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days	2,771	55,420	Secondary(fees) per year	0	
Sugar (2Kgs/week)	5,500	44,000	Primary(GPF) per year	0	
Kitchen Salt	1,914	1,914	Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year	156,722	
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	150	6,000	Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year	119,068	
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)	3,543	56,688	Other (pens,books, etc)/term	58,459	
Sub-Total		690.518	Sub-Total		334,249

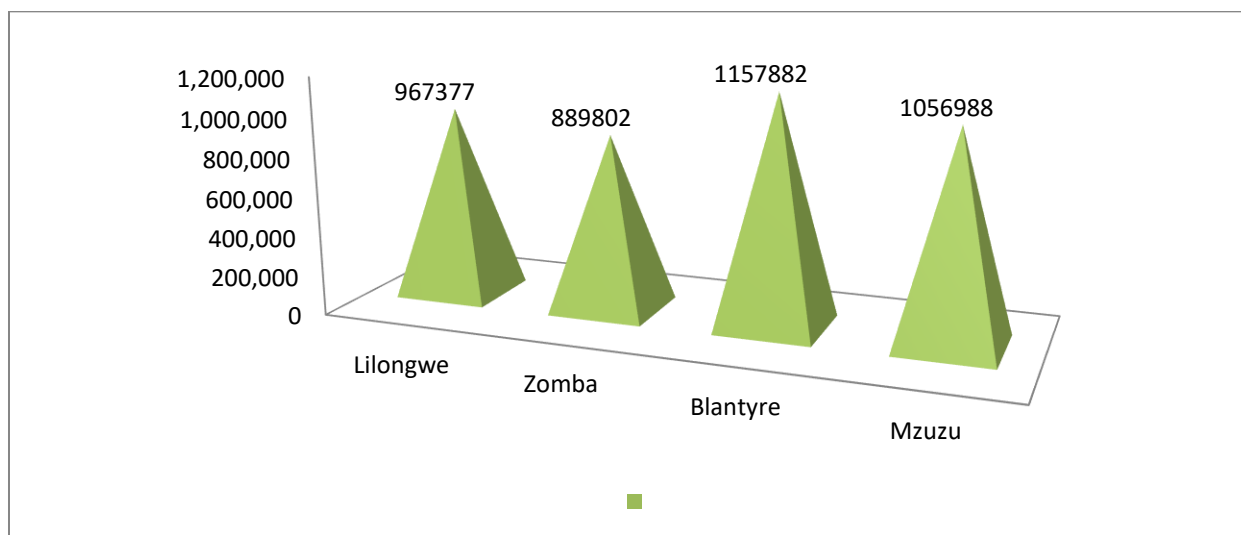
Mzuzu cost of living for a household of six people for April 2026

A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	41,250	82,500	Charcoal (50Kg)	50,000	100,000
Milling (Including grinding)	5,167	72,338	Protex	3,433	34,330
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	11,250	72,000	Boom	2,767	22,136
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	20,000	20,000	Clere body lotion	4,500	9,000
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	71,133	56,906	Vaseline Blue Seal	5,550	1,066
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	15,000	12,000	Electricity	23,492	23,492
Beef (1 Kg/day) 4 days	14,000	56,000	Running Water (meter)	16,362	16,362
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	517	24,816	Housing (3 bedrooms)	115,954	115,954
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	3,800	85,500	Sub-Total	322,340	
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	2,505	37,575	Mzuzu Total Basic Needs		1,056,988
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	2,780	9,730			
A. FOOD ITEMS			B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys	2,400	36,000	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys	10,517	31,551	Education		
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days	3,500	70,000	Secondary(fees) per year	0	
Sugar (2Kgs/week)	5,333	42,664	Primary(GPF) per year	0	
Kitchen Salt	4,180	4,180	Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year	134,998	
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	383	15,320	Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year	169,757	
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)	348	5,568	Other (pens,books, etc)/term	11,966	
Sub-Total		734,648	Sub-Total		316,721

Table showing cost of living per district

District	Food Items	Non Food Items	Total Basic Needs
Lilongwe	638,744	328,633	967,377
Zomba	631,360	258,442	889,802
Blantyre	690,518	467,364	1,157,882
Mzuzu	734,648	322,340	1,056,988

Graph showing average cost of living per district



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

Maize Prices Drive the Slight Decline

Maize remains the most influential commodity in the cost-of-living basket. The April results show notable price reductions in most cities related to March figures:

- In Lilongwe, maize dropped from **MK48,125 to MK47,500** per 50kg bag.
- In Blantyre, prices fell significantly from **MK62,500 to MK55,833**.
- In Mzuzu, maize declined from **MK47,083 to MK41,250**.
- However, in Zomba, the price remained unchanged at **MK62,000**.

These reductions contributed to the modest decline in the overall cost of living, demonstrating the strong influence of staple food prices on household welfare.

Cost of Living Still Far Above Minimum Wage

Despite the slight drop, the cost of living remains dramatically higher than the national minimum wage of MK126,000. This means that a worker earning the minimum wage can meet only a small fraction of the basic needs of a typical family.

Impact on Low-Income Earners

For low-income households, the situation remains extremely challenging:

- The small decrease in living costs does not translate into real relief, as incomes remain stagnant.
- Families continue to face food insecurity, forcing them to reduce meal frequency and dietary diversity.
- Households are likely to cut spending on health, education, and housing, increasing long-term vulnerability.
- Many workers remain trapped in a cycle of debt and informal borrowing to survive.

In practical terms, the slight price decline only slows the rate of hardship rather than reversing it.

Recommended Government Interventions

To cushion vulnerable households, the Centre for Social Concern recommends that the Government consider the following strategies:

1. Review and Adjust the Minimum Wage

The minimum wage must be aligned with the realities of the cost of living. A periodic review mechanism linked to inflation and living costs is urgently needed.

2. Stabilize Food Prices

Government should strengthen strategic grain reserves and improve agricultural support programmes to ensure stable maize supply and prevent seasonal price spikes.

3. Expand Social Protection Programmes

Cash transfer programmes and targeted subsidies for low-income households should be expanded to protect the most vulnerable from rising living costs.

4. Support Income-Generating Opportunities

Investments in small businesses, agriculture value chains, and job creation can help households increase income and resilience.

5. Improve Market Regulation and Monitoring

Enhanced monitoring of commodity markets can help prevent unjustified price increases and protect consumers.

6. Realistic exchange rate needed

It is believed that the current exchange rate is not realistic therefore allowing the black market to expand. A realistic exchange rate will reduce the place of the black market and increase the purchasing power of Malawians.

Conclusion

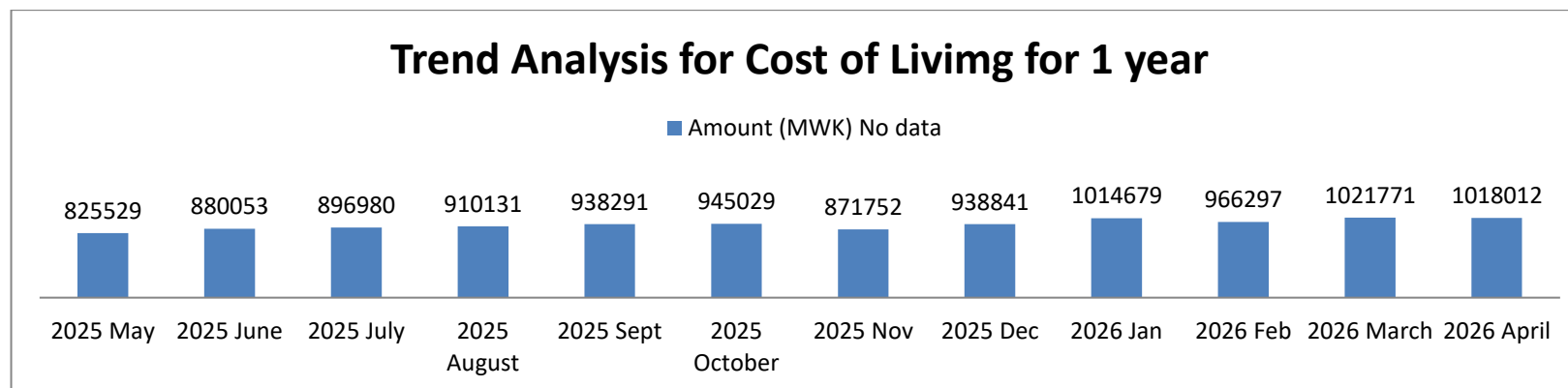
While the April 2026 cost-of-living analysis shows a slight decline, the reduction is too small to significantly ease the burden on Malawian households. The persistent gap between wages and the cost of living remains a major concern requiring urgent policy action.

The Centre for Social Concern will continue to monitor price trends and advocate for policies that protect the welfare and dignity of all Malawians.

Table showing monthly average for the cost of living

Monthly Average	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2026	2026	2026	2026
	April	May	June	July	August	Sept	October	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April
Amount (MWK)	No data	825,529	880,053	896,980	910,131	938,291	945,029	871,752	938,841	1,014,679	966,297	1,021,771	1,018,012

Graph showing monthly average for the cost of living



Fuel Cost

Fuel (cost at the pump)	
Diesel (per litre)	K6,772
Petrol (per litre)	K6,772
Paraffin (per litre)	

Minibus Fare

Minibus fare to town and back	
Lilongwe	K10,000
Zomba	K6000
Blantyre	K6000
Mzuzu	K 6000

NB: 1 USA dollar (\$) = K1,742.05 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 7th to 8th April, 2026 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