



The Centre for Social Concern

Basic Needs Basket

Cost of Living for May 2026

MISEREOR
IHR HILFSWERK

For More Information
Contact Us On:
**Centre for Social
Concern**
P.O. Box 40049
Kanengo, Lilongwe 4
Malawi
Tel: +265 999351439
E-mail:
director@cfscmafr.org
Website:
www.cfscmafr.org



COST OF LIVING DECLINES SLIGHTLY BUT REMAINS BEYOND THE REACH OF MOST MALAWIANS

The Centre for Social Concern (CfSC) notes with cautious optimism that the average cost of living, as measured by the Basic Needs Basket (BNB), declined from MK1,018,012 in April 2026 to MK987,844 in May 2026. This represents a reduction of MK30,168 or approximately 2.96 percent.

The decline was largely driven by reductions in the prices of maize, beans, cassava, potatoes, kitchen salt and some household necessities. Improved availability of food commodities following harvests contributed significantly to the easing of prices in some markets.

*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 May 2026						
A. FOOD ITEMS				B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	39,375	78,750		Charcoal (50Kg)	50,000	100,000
Milling (Including grinding)	3,000	42,000		Protex	2,525	25,250
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	5,125	32,800		Boom	2,388	19,104
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	42,925	42,925		Clere body lotion	3,938	7,876
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	35,360	28,288		Vaseline Blue Seal	6,306	12,612
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	0	0		Electricity	24,752	24,752
Beef (1 Kg/day) 4 days	14,000	56,000		Running Water (meter)	10,679	10,679
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	550	26,400		Housing (3 bedrooms)	126,256	126,256
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	1,570	35,325		Sub-Total		326,599
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	4,420	66,300		Lilongwe Total Basic Needs		959,522
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	5,774	20,209				
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys			1,913	28,695	C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS	
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys			8,681	26,043	Education	
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days			3,525	70,500	Secondary(fees) per year	
Sugar (2Kgs/week)			5,700	45,600	Primary(GPF) per year	
Kitchen Salt			1,638	1,638	Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year	
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)			438	17,520	Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year	
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)			875	14,000	Other (pens,books, etc)/term	
Sub-Total				632,993	Sub-Total	

Zomba cost of living for a household of six people for May 2026							
A. FOOD ITEMS					B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	36,000	72,000		Charcoal (50Kg)	31,691	63,382	
Milling (Including grinding)	1,500	21,000		Protex	2,857	28,570	
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	6,571	42,054		Boom	2,557	20,456	
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	30,000	30,000		Clere body lotion	3,800	7,600	
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	32,857	26,286		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	558	26,784		Housing (3 bedrooms)	96,827	96,827	
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	2,171	48,848		Sub-Total		573,511	
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	3,086	46,290		Zomba Total Basic Needs		844,939	
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	3,071	10,749					
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys		1,800	27,000		C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys		9,114	27,342		Education		
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days		2,767	55,340		Secondary(fees) per year		
Sugar (2Kgs/week)		5,500	44,000		Primary(GPF) per year		
Kitchen Salt		1,771	1,771		Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year		
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)		614	24,560		Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year		
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)		843	13,488		Other (pens,books, etc)/term		
Sub-Total		271,428			Sub-Total		

Blantyre cost of living for a household of six people for May 2026						
A. FOOD ITEMS				B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	32,917	65,834		Charcoal (50Kg)	128,571	257,142
Milling (Including grinding)	2,500	35,000		Protex	2,600	26,000
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	5,429	34,746		Boom	2,500	20,000
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	42,857	42,857		Clere body lotion	3,900	7,800
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	56,429	45,143		Vaseline Blue Seal	1,307	2,614
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	59,286	47,429		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	1,171	26,348		Sub-Total		470,170
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	7,643	114,645		Blantyre Total Basic Needs		1,187,492
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	6,943	24,301				
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys	1,971	29,565		C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys	9,271	27,813		Education		
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days	2,986	59,720		Secondary(fees) per year		
Sugar (2Kgs/week)	5,500	44,000		Primary(GPF) per year		
Kitchen Salt	1,914	1,914		Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year		
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	150	6,000		Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year		
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)	2,429	38,864		Other (pens,books, etc)/term		
Sub-Total		717,322		Sub-Total		

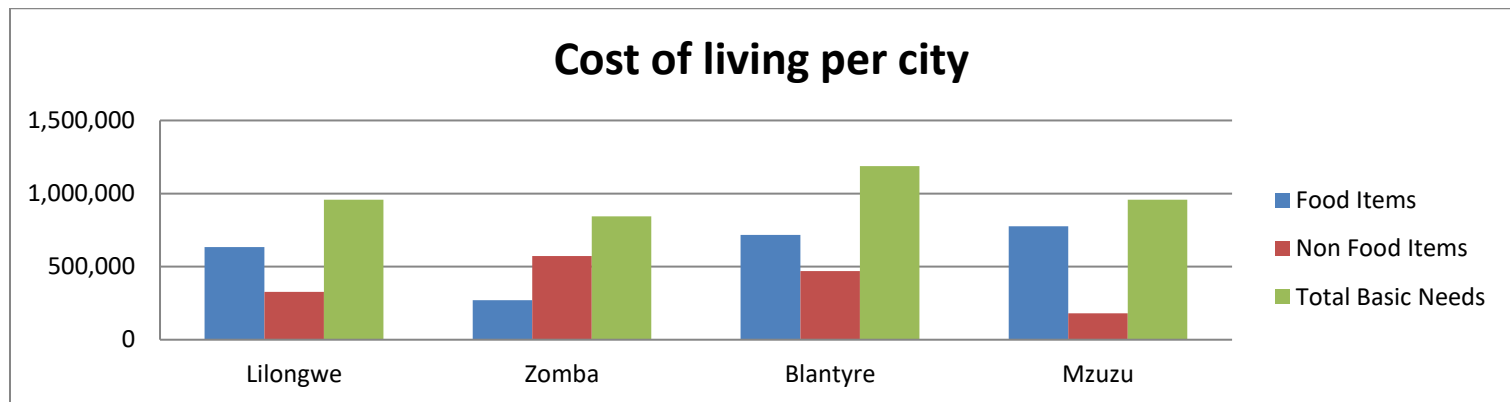
Mzuzu cost of living for a household of six people for May 2026						
A. FOOD ITEMS				B. NON FOOD ITEMS		
Maize	56,500	113,000		Charcoal (50Kg)	57,639	115,278
Milling (Including grinding)	4,167	58,338		Protex	3,433	34,330
Beans(0.8Kg/day) 8 days	10,333	66,131		Boom	2,767	22,136
Dry Usipa (250g/day) 4 days	20,000	20,000		Clere body lotion	4,417	8,834
Dry Utaka (200g/day) 4 days	66,133	52,906		Vaseline Blue Seal	5,525	1,066
Kapenta (200g/day) 4 days	14,167	11,334		Electricity	0	0
Beef (1 Kg/day) 4 days	14,000	56,000		Running Water (meter)	0	0
Eggs (12/day) 4 days	550	26,400		Housing (3 bedrooms)	0	0
Rape (750g/day) for 30 days	3,330	74,925		Sub-Total		181,644
Tomato (0.5Kg/day) 30 days	3,917	58,755		Mzuzu Total Basic Needs		957,844
Onion (116g/day) for 30 days	5,363	18,771				
				C. SOME OTHER ADDITIONAL COSTS		
Fresh milk(250mls/day)30 dys	2,433	36,495		Education		
Kukoma Oil(100mls) for 30dys	11,167	33,501				
Bread (5 bkfs/wk) for 20 days	3,700	74,000		Secondary(fees) per year		
Sugar (2Kgs/week)	5,933	47,464		Primary(GPF) per year		
Kitchen Salt	4,180	4,180		Uniform/Shoes(primary)/year		
Tea leaves (Chisangalalo)	400	16,000		Uniform/Shoes(Secondary)/year		
Cassava/Potatoes(2Kgs/Bkfs)	500	8,000		Other (pens,books, etc)/term		
Sub-Total		776,200		Sub-Total		



Table showing cost of living per district

District	Food Items	Non Food Items	Total Basic Needs
Lilongwe	632,993	326,599	957,522
Zomba	271,428	573,511	844,939
Blantyre	717,332	470,170	1,187,492
Mzuzu	776,200	181,644	957,844

Graph showing cost of living per district



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

ITEMS THAT CONTRIBUTED TO THE REDUCTION IN THE COST OF LIVING

The decline in the cost of living was mainly driven by reduction in the price of several key food commodities and some household necessities:

1. **Maize prices declined significantly** in most cities, particularly in Lilongwe, Zomba, and Blantyre, reflecting improved market supplies and seasonal availability.
2. **Beans became cheaper** in all four cities, reducing the cost of obtaining protein from plant sources.
3. **Cassava and potatoes prices declined**, especially in Blantyre and Zomba, providing cheaper alternative staple foods.
4. **Kitchen salt price decreased** across most markets.
5. **Tea leaves price remained stable or declined slightly.**
6. **Some household items such as Clere body lotion and Boom detergent recorded slight reductions.**
7. **Housing, electricity, and water costs remained largely unchanged**, implying that the overall reduction was primarily food-price driven.

However, the reduction was moderated by increase in the prices of:

- Dry Usipa,
- Dry Utaka,
- Tomatoes,

- Onions,
 - Sugar,
 - Charcoal (in some cities),
- which prevented a larger decline in the overall basket cost.

Effects of the High Cost of Living on Low-Income Earners

Despite the slight reduction, the cost of living remains extremely high and continues to affect low-income households in several ways:

1. Increased Food Insecurity

Many households cannot afford a balanced diet and are forced to reduce meal frequency, quantity, and dietary diversity, increasing malnutrition risks.

2. Reduced Purchasing Power

Wages and incomes have not increased at the same pace as living costs. Families are therefore unable to meet basic needs despite working full-time.

3. Growth in Household Debt

Households increasingly rely on borrowing from friends, relatives, savings groups, and money lenders to survive.

4. Reduced Access to Education

Parents struggle to pay school fees, buy uniforms, and meet educational expenses, leading to absenteeism and school dropouts.

5. Poor Health Outcomes

Families may delay seeking medical treatment or fail to purchase prescribed medicines due to financial constraints.

6. Increased Vulnerability and Poverty

High living costs force households to sell productive assets, reducing their future ability to generate income and trapping them in poverty.

7. Social Stress and Family Conflicts

Economic hardship contributes to domestic conflicts, mental stress, and social instability.

Strategies the Government of Malawi Should Follow

To sustainably reduce the cost of living and improve household welfare, Government should consider the following measures:

1. Strengthen Agricultural Production

- Expand access to affordable fertilizer and quality seed.
- Promote irrigation farming to reduce dependence on rainfall.
- Support farmer cooperatives and market linkages.

2. Stabilize Maize Markets

- Improve strategic grain reserves through the National Food Reserve Agency.
- Ensure timely and transparent maize sales during lean seasons.
- Reduce speculative trading and hoarding.

3. Promote Job Creation

- Invest in labor-intensive public works.
- Support small and medium enterprises through affordable credit.
- Encourage value addition and agro-processing industries.

4. Improve Energy Access

- Increase electricity generation and reliability.
- Promote alternative energy sources to reduce dependence on charcoal.

5. Control Inflation and Exchange Rate Pressures

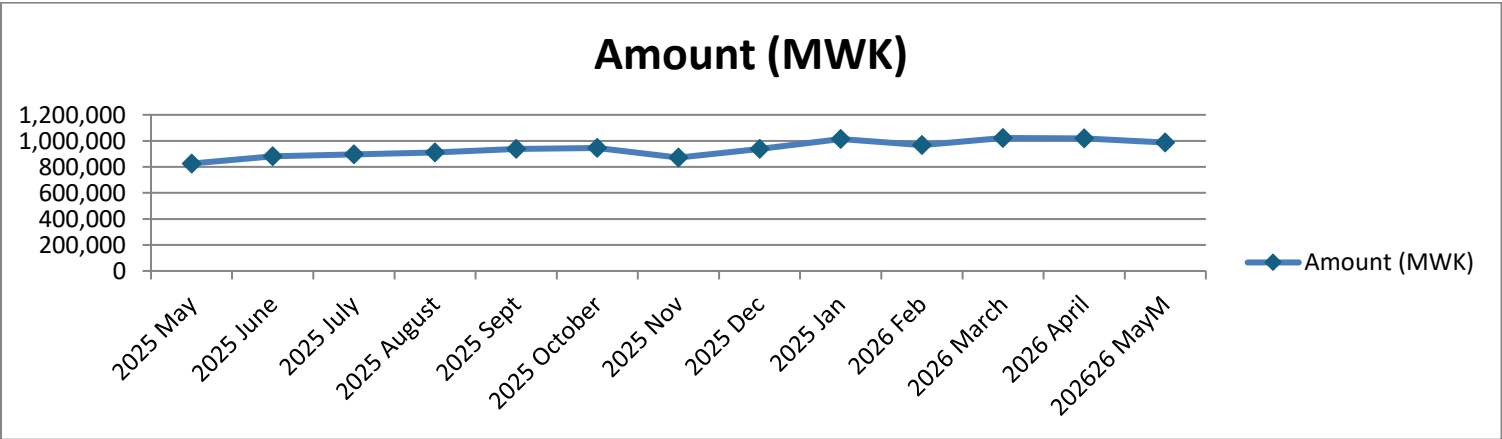
- Strengthen fiscal discipline.
- Increase foreign exchange earnings through export diversification.
- Support domestic production to reduce import dependence.

6. Expand Social Protection Programs

- Increase support for vulnerable households through cash transfers.
- Scale up school feeding programs.
- Strengthen nutrition interventions for children and pregnant women. **Table showing monthly average for the cost of living**

Monthly Average	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2025	2026	2026	2026	2026
	May	June	July	August	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	March	April	May
Amount (MWK)	825,529	880,053	896,980	910,131	938,281	945,029	871,752	938,841	1,014,679	966,297	1,021,771	1,018,012	987,844

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 (\$) = K1,737.60 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 5th to 6th May, 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