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Stitched Up

Poverty wages for garment workers in Eastern Europe and Turkey

Clean Clothes Campaign works with garment workers all over the world. While many people are aware of the terrible working conditions and poverty wages



garment workers in Asia receive, a new report - [Stitched Up](#) - highlights that poverty wages and shocking working conditions are endemic in the global garment industry.

Far from being a problem confined to garment workers in Asia [Stitched Up](#) has found that the idea that "Made in Europe" means better conditions for workers is a myth.

The report interviewed workers in 10 countries - [Bosnia & Herzegovina](#), [Bulgaria](#), [Croatia](#), [Czech Republic](#), [Georgia](#), [Macedonia \(FYROM\)](#), [Moldova](#), [Poland](#), [Romania](#), [Slovakia](#), [Turkey](#) and [Ukraine](#).

Cheap labour in our own back yard

[Stitched Up](#) shows that post-socialist European countries function as the cheap labour sewing backyard for Western European fashion brands and retailers.

Despite a long history in garment production and the highly skilled workforce, researchers found that nearly all those producing clothes for major European retailers such as Hugo Boss, Adidas, Zara, H&M or Benetton are paid below the poverty line, and many have to

rely on subsistence agriculture or a second job just to survive. The report reveals that the legal minimum wages only covers between 14% (Bulgaria, Ukraine, Macedonia) and 36% (Croatia) of a basic living wage.

European garment workers are working long hours for wages that cannot sustain even their most basic of needs. Complex and opaque supply chains are not an excuse for denying people their basic right to a living wage. While brands such as

Read the full report

- [Stitched Up - Poverty Wages in Eastern Europe and Turkey](#)
- [Executive Summary](#)

In their own words

[Listen to workers telling their stories in this short video.](#)

"By profession I am an economist. But due to lack of job opportunities I have to sew. There, people work like robots. No rest. Nerves are ruined, eyes are spoiled."

- Bulgarian worker

"You are wondering how do we survive, but tell me what can I do? It will be worse without this job. At least we get paid

Zara and H&M enjoy rising profits even during the crisis, working conditions in the production countries of the researched region have deteriorated particularly since 2008/9.

Workers in the region are also hampered by the inability of unions to fight for their most basic rights. A Croatian unionist stated that “unions do not have the opportunity to bargain for higher wages since they have to constantly fight illegal practices such as long-term unpaid overtime and unpaid social contributions or long-term unpaid wages.”



Busting the myths

The report shows that there are no good guys.

It is important that we put an end to the myths that paying more for clothes or sourcing from Europe guarantees decent working conditions.

Brands and retailers have to take clear steps and show a true

commitment within their own supply chain in order to ensure all those who work for them, wherever they may live, are paid a living wage.

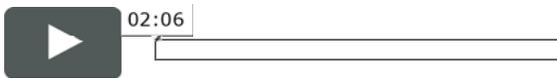
Campaigners and workers are calling on European fashion brands to make sure as a first immediate step that workers in the researched region **receive a basic net wage of at least 60% of the national average wage**. Buying prices must be calculated on this basis and allow for these wage hikes.

Brands need to act now and make sure that garment workers in their own supply chain – be it Asia or Europe- receive a living wage.



A real BOSS pays a living wage

from [Entwicklungspolitisches Netzwerk](#) PLUS



[Hugo Boss, pay a living wage!](#) from [Entwicklungspolitisches Netzwerk](#) on [Vimeo](#).

every month.”

- Macedonian worker

“It is impossible. We work in continuous flux and I only come back with pennies at the end of the month.”

- Romanian worker

“If there is no overtime, there is no money. Because our wage is not enough as you can see. How can I make my living when I pay 950 TL for our house and what remains is not enough for the rest of the cost?”

- Turkish worker

“It was not the lack of orders that was the problem? No! We were up to our eyes in work, just as long as we worked without leave, for the lowest wage, did overtime and kept quiet. This hard work made someone very well-off. Everybody knows that with each extra piece there's extra profit, so they press you right till the end.”

- Polish worker

Country

Factsheets

Find out more about the

countries researched.

- [Bosnia & Herzegovina](#)
- [Bulgaria](#)
- [Croatia](#)
- [Czech Republic](#)
- [Georgia](#)
- [Macedonia \(FYROM\)](#)
- [Moldova](#) (Also available in [Romanian](#))
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