**Clean Clothes Campaign: European garment workers face forced overtime and poverty wages**

The text “Made in Europe” on a label is frequently perceived as a guarantee of good working conditions in the production of garments. However, two new country researches of Clean Clothes Campaign into working conditions in Poland and the Czech Republic show that workers in the garment industry in the European Union get poverty wages and are confronted with forced overtime which sometimes goes unpaid.

Poland and the Czech Republic compete in the clothing production business with the claim that their production is of high quality. Beyond this claim however another story of low wages can be found. Production sites in Poland and the Czech Republic produce for high-price brands, but workers just earn the legal minimum wage or less. In 2015 the net minimum wage in Poland was € 312, in the Czech Republic € 390. Workers producing for Calvin Klein, Schießer, Hugo Boss reported to the Clean Clothes Campaign that they would need up to three times this amount to lead a decent live. At the same time some workers reported that they can only reach the legal minimum wage after working overtime hours. While this is a violation of the law, the denial of a living wage amounts to a violation of workers' human right and dignity.

Very little of the profits made in the garment industry trickle down to the workers: *“Was it 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”*, says a Polish worker.

In addition to low wages, workers report on forced and unpaid overtime and a work environment that harms the health of workers. The researchers stress that the state of pay in the clothing industry has a lot to do with the fact that most workers are women.

**Environment of fear**

Lenka Simerska, who conducted the Czech research, emphasises: *“Even after 20 years working in the factory some women still earn the minimum wage and don’t get overtime bonus paid according to the law.”* Anna Paluszek, the Polish researcher, says: *“Workers are under constant pressure because of the quick turn overs brands demand from the factories. They are afraid to speak about working conditions for risk of losing their job.”* Factories are pressured by buyers and brands on purchasing prices and conditions, primarily with threats of loss of orders. In the overwhelming majority of the factories no unions are active.

Garment wages are the lowest of all industrial sectors, even though it is an important sector for employment and exports. Between 70 and 90% of production in both countries is exported. The industry employs 110.000 registered workers.

“*It is high time brands, buyers and governments enable workers in the fashion industry to earn a living, not a pittance. Brands and buyers must raise purchasing prices to enable wage hikes to at least 60% of the national average wage and governments have to raise legal minimum wages to this threshold,”* says Bettina Musiolek from the Clean Clothes Campaign.

**Notes:**

* The country profiles for Poland and Czech Republic as well as further information on wages in the garment industry in Europe's low wage countries can be found here:[http://www.cleanclothes.org/livingwage/stitched-up](http://crm.cleanclothes.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=178&qid=39690).
* The individual factsheets can be found here: Poland: [http://www.cleanclothes.org/livingwage/stitched-up-factsheets/poland-factsheet](http://crm.cleanclothes.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=179&qid=39690). Czech Republic: [http://www.cleanclothes.org/livingwage/stitched-up-factsheets/czech-republic-factsheet](http://crm.cleanclothes.org/sites/all/modules/civicrm/extern/url.php?u=180&qid=39690).
* An overview of the minimum net wages in relation to average wage and estimated living wage:

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| **Figures for 2015 in EUR** | **Poland** | **Czech Republic** |
| **Legal minimum net wage** | € 312 | € 390 |
| **Average wage of interviewed workers net including overtime and bonuses** | € 315 | € 417 |
| **60% of national average wage** | € 401 | € 499 |
| **Estimated by workers minimum living wage** | € 1.032 | € 980 |

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