

Europe's sweatshops: modern slavery in Ukraine and Serbia

«Made in Europe» is not fair

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The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, in cooperation with the Clean Clothes Campaign, has launched two new studies on working conditions in Ukrainian and Serbian garment factories.

Four Euro for working all Saturday

Wages that do not secure the existence. Unbearable heat in the summer. Overtime, which is not paid. Working pressure, so intense that one collapses. Under degrading conditions, women in Serbia and the Ukraine sew high-end fashion for primarily German and Italian companies. Union organizing does not take place as everyone is worried about their job. Laws are regularly violated. Many seamstresses in Ukraine and in Serbia as well as in other Eastern European countries do not even receive the already low statutory minimum wage. Whether or not being a EU member state, wages are widely paid far below a living wage.

How workers in the clothing and footwear industry are struggling to survive on a daily basis in the face of these constellations is now described in two recent studies on the two countries. Companies that have been researched are producing a lot of fashion for German and Italian brands.

The key findings from the interviews conducted with Serbian and Ukrainian employees are as follows:

- There are dramatic differences between real wages workers currently receive and livelihood costs in Central East and Southeastern Europe. A decent life is not possible with the wages paid for many of the predominantly women and their families.
- The implementation of new labor laws does not lead to better working conditions. Many of the employees achieve payout of the statutory minimum wage only by working overtime.

Our recommendations to the fashion brands:

- Pay a living wage. Start with the estimated minimum living wage!
- Stop the documented violations!

Our recommendations to governments:

- Raise the statutory minimum wage to a level that meets the goal set by the ILO corresponds to "guaranteeing a minimum wage for workers that will enable them and their families to have a decent standard of living"!
- Raise the pensions to a level that allows people a decent standard of living!
- Check the implementation of the laws!

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