


Living Wage Update Report: Urban China, Suzhou (August 2021)

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**Cost of decent standard
of living for a family**

RMB 6,335
(USD 979)



**Gross Living Wage
per month**

RMB 3,976
(USD 615)



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By:

Lykke E. Andersen *

Alejandra Gonzales **

Richard Anker ***

Martha Anker ***

Abstract:

This report provides updated estimates of family living expenses and living wages for Suzhou, China. The update to August 2021 takes into account inflation and changes in payroll deductions since the original Anker living wage study carried out in August 2015 (Yuan, Ke, Jing & Feng, 2015).

Keywords: Living costs, living wages, Anker Methodology, China

JEL classifications: J30, J50, J80.

* SDSN Bolivia, E-mail: Lykke.E.Andersen@gmail.com.

** SDSN Bolivia, E-mail: Alejandra.Gonzales@sdsnbolivia.org.

*** Anker Research Institute, E-mail: marthaandrichard@gmail.com.

1. BACKGROUND

This report updates the living wage and family living expenses for Suzhou, China, with a focus on manufacturing industry parks. The net living wage and family living expenses are updated to the study month of the most recent calendar year – August 2021 – to take into account the amount of inflation since the original August 2015 living wage study. Without accounting for inflation, the net living wage estimated in 2015 would not be sufficient for workers to have a basic but decent standard of living in 2021 because the purchasing power of the living wage would have decreased compared to what it was in 2015. Similarly, living expenses for a reference family are also updated to August 2021 to account for inflation.

The gross living wage is updated to August 2021 by taking into consideration income taxes and mandatory deductions from pay that workers would need to pay on the updated living wage using 2021 laws.

2. LIVING WAGE ESTIMATE IN ORIGINAL COUNTRY REPORT FROM AUGUST 2015

The original living wage country report estimated the net living wage as RMB 3,163 in August 2015. This was the required take-home pay for workers for decency in August 2015. The gross living wage, which also takes into account income taxes and mandatory deductions from pay for social security and union dues, was estimated as RMB 3,534 in August 2015. The living expenses for a basic but decent standard of living for a reference family in the original country report was estimated as RMB 5,631 in August 2015.

3. INFLATION RATE USED FOR UPDATE

The National Bureau Statistics of China (NBSC) is the government body responsible for computing and reporting price indices in China. It reports several different consumer price indices, such as the average for the country, urban and rural price indices for the national level and for the provinces and urban price indices for each of the main 70 cities. There is no specific data for Suzhou, so we used the data for the urban part of the Jiangsu Province, where Suzhou is located.

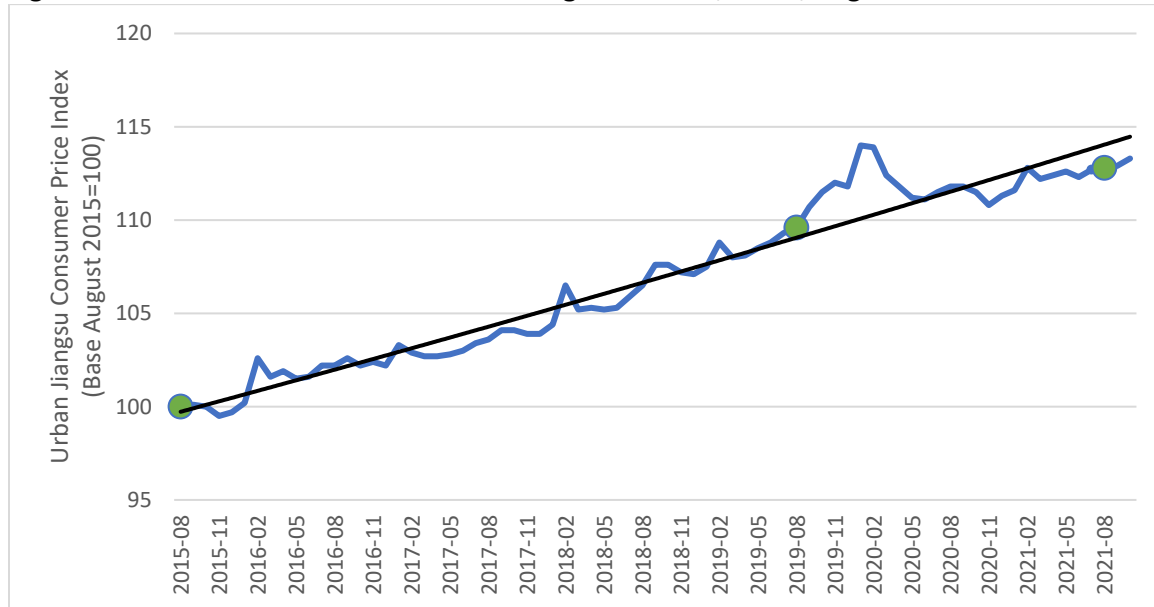
There are two reasons for using the Urban Household Consumer Price Index for Jiangsu Province. The first one is that this index is calculated for the urban level in the province, and in the absence of a specific city-level index, this is the closest indicator that resembles the prices for manufacturing workers in Suzhou over the period (2015-2021). The second one is that this is a Household Consumer Price Index, i.e., also very close to the living wage concept, that is concerned with family costs.

4. RECENT LEVEL OF INFLATION

China has low levels of inflation. Between August 2015 and August 2021, the inflation rate for the whole country was 11.6%, corresponding to an average annual rate of 1.8%. The inflation rate for Suzhou

between August 2015 and August 2021 was 12.5% (annual average of 1.98%), slightly higher than the inflation rate for all of China.

Figure 1: Consumer Price Index for Urban Jiangsu Province, China, August 2015 to October 2021



Notes: Green dots highlight the months of the original study and the updates. Black line is the fitted exponential trendline.

Source: Authors' calculations based on CPI data from NBSC.

5. MANDATORY DEDUCTIONS

According to the most recent information provided by the Salary Calculator of DirectHR¹, mandatory payroll deductions and income taxes in Suzhou is 10.5%, the same percentage as used in the original report from 2015.² The 10.5% consists of 8% to the Pension Fund, 2% to the Medical Insurance Fund, and 0.5% to the Unemployment Fund. Workers earning a living wage would not pay income tax, because the living wage is below the standard income tax deduction.

¹ <https://salary.directhr.cn/>

² We did not include employee contributions to the Housing Provident Fund when we calculated the amount of mandatory payroll deductions, despite this deduction being substantial when it is paid (e.g., 12, 7, 12, and 6 percent of wages in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, and Chengdu respectively according to <https://www.1421.consulting/2018/06/chinese-taxes-and-social-insurances/>). There are two reasons for this decision. First, it is quite common that workers outside government and white-collar firms, such as in manufacturing enterprises, do not contribute to the Housing Provident Fund according to FLA (Fair Labor Association) verification assessments. Second, if it is easy for workers to access contributions to their housing fund every year for ongoing expenses, then we would not count it as a mandatory deduction because it would not reduce the amount of money required for ongoing living expenses. In the case of the housing fund, it is not clear how easy it is to withdraw contributions every year. Withdrawals are allowed for home loan, home down payment, mortgage payment, home improvement, and medical emergencies, and in 2021 it might be possible to withdraw funds for rent payment (<https://www.tellerreport.com/business/2021-08-12-more-than-20-places-in-the-year-introduced-a-new-provident-fund-policy--these-rented-houses-can-be-mentioned-more.Ske-2SAGet.html>).

6. UPDATED LIVING WAGES AND FAMILY EXPENSES FOR AUGUST 2021

The updated net living wage, or take-home pay, for August 2021 is RMB 3,558 per month. The gross living wage, which also takes into account income taxes and mandatory payroll deductions, is RMB 3,976. Table 1 provides details of the original and the updated living wages and family living expenses.

Table 1: Living wages and living expenses with a focus on manufacturing industry parks for Suzhou, China (in RMB and US Dollars)

Item	August 2015 Original Study Date		August 2021 Latest Update Report	
	RMB	USD	RMB	USD
Living Expenses for Reference Family Per Month	5,631	880	6,335	979
Net Living Wage Per Month	3,163	494	3,558	550
Income Taxes and Payroll Deductions Per Month on Living Wage	371	58	417	65
Gross Living Wage Per Month	3,534	552	3,976	615
Exchange Rate to USD	6.40		6.47	
Source of Exchange Rate	Original Report		IMF Archive	

Source: Authors' calculations.

7. REFERENCES

Yuan, C., Ke, S., Jing, Q & Feng, W. (2015) *Living Wage Report: Urban Suzhou, China*. Unpublished.