**Clean Clothes Campaign**

**Rejoinder on Benetton’s and Max Mara’s** [**responses**](https://www.business-humanrights.org/en/romania-report-finds-poor-wages-forced-labour-unpaid-overtime-other-abuses-in-garment-sector-incl-co-responses) **on CCC’s 2019 Romania country profile**

The core issue uncovered by CCC’s new Romania briefing is workers’ wages. Brands and fashion retailers, including Benetton and Marx Mara, must set public, concrete, measurable steps throughout their supply chain to ensure garment workers get paid a living wage within a reasonable timeframe. They should also negotiate and sign legally-binding, enforceable agreements with worker representatives that require the payment of significantly higher prices to suppliers, affording them the financial capacity to pay a living wage that covers the basic needs of a worker and her/his family (see “[Tailored Wages 2019](https://cleanclothes.org/news/2019/06/05/major-brands-are-failing-on-living-wage-commitments)”).

Benetton argues mainly along two lines:

1. ‘We have an audit program in place to check compliance with our supplier code of conduct.’

It is clear and broadly accepted in the fashion sector that audits are not an effective instrument to uncover working conditions and wages of workers as well as for monitoring implementation of laws and codes of conduct (see [CCC study](https://cleanclothes.org/resources/publications/05-quick-fix.pdf/view) and [ECCHR report](https://www.ecchr.eu/en/publication/liability-of-social-auditors-in-the-textile-industry/) amongst others). One of the major systemic law and human rights violations found in Romania is the non-payment of the legal minimum wage within regular working hours, forced labour and the non-payment of a living wages. It is obvious that audits have not prevented suppliers from violating the Romanian law. Immediate attention is needed to observe the Romanian law and cooperate with mandated state institutions.

1. ‘EU member states are low-risk areas “because the legislation adequately protects workers’ rights and the compliance controls of the various bodies in charge are considered effective”.’

CCC’s [investigation results on the South East Europe region](https://cleanclothes.org/livingwage/europe) have shown for long that Romania and Bulgaria as EU member states are principally not different from countries like Serbia or Macedonia (non-EU member states) or India or Cambodia when it comes to labour rights irregularities. On the contrary, the gap between the legal minimum wage and an estimated base living wage tends to be bigger in EU member states – due to higher prices for basic needs like housing and health. According to Benetton’s published [supplier list 2018](http://assets.benettongroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Benetton_Supplier_List-2018-2.pdf) there are 22 suppliers all over Romania – and many more subcontractors. It is disappointing that a brand with this heavy presence in Romania still rates conditions there as non-risky.

Max Mara tries to evade responsibility by pointing to suppliers and the Romanian government to fix law and human rights violations. According to our investigations in Europe-East/South, Max Mara’s production can be found in many countries – with similar irregularities. In all places, workers are afraid of speaking out and agreeing to publishing their factory names. This alone indicates to repressive conditions under which they work.