

December 22, 1964

Information about the Standard of Living in North Korea

Citation:

"Information about the Standard of Living in North Korea", December 22, 1964, Wilson Center Digital Archive, SAPMO-BA, DY 30, IV A2/20/250. Translated for NKIDP by Bernd Schaefer. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/111814>

Summary:

The GDR Embassy in Pyongyang reports to the SED Central Committee on everyday life in North Korea including income, the nutrition situation, medical care and social care.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from ROK Ministry of Unification

Original Language:

German

Contents:

Translation - English

SED Central Committee
Department of International Relations
SAPMO-BA, DY 30, IV A2/20/250

GDR Embassy in DPRK
B 7/805/219

Pyongyang, 22 December 1964

Confidential

Information about the Living Standards in the DPRK in 1964

The information below ought to be viewed just as a preliminary study for further ongoing analysis.

☐ ~~W~~ages

☐☐

The medium average income is 45.00 Won - if one is excepting agriculture. Women and men receive identical wages for the same kind of work. The payment scale in different areas is based on a division into categories - and according to qualifications.

Mining and steel workers 90.00 - 100.00 Won
Workers in textile industry 30.00 - 40.00 Won
Graduate engineers 60.00 Won
Teachers 60.00 - 70.00 Won
Workers in light industry 25.00 Won
Army officers 120.00 - 150.00 Won
Students 17.00 Won
Clerical workers (average salary) 45.00 Won

According to our material from 1962, it is noteworthy here that there has been no rise in wages. If the plan of a factory is not fulfilled, the workers accordingly receive lower wages. A graduate engineer with a salary of 60.00 Won is paid approximately 40.00 Won in wages. 20.00 Won are withheld for insurance, contributions, movie and theater fees, et cetera. For instance, the fees for movies and theater are withheld regardless of whether or not respective events were actually attended.

According to Korean figures, in 1963 the [annual] wage in agriculture was 2.5 tons of grain and 1500.00 Won per family (household). A news report in "Nodong Sinmun" from 15 December 1964 mentioned a distribution of about 2.1 tons of grain and 806.00 Won cash per household in an agricultural collective; this is now an amount at the upper end. For instance, it is worth noting that in the North of the DPRK, the grain distributed per household [...] [one line missing on document copy].

☐☐ Rice Rations (on ration cards per day)

☐☐

Mining workers 900 grams
Workers 700 grams - 800 grams
Graduate engineers 700 grams - 800 grams
Clerical workers 700 grams - 800 grams
[University] Students 700 grams
Retirees 600 grams
[School] Students 400 grams - 500 grams
Infants 300 grams

Here it is noteworthy that distribution is done on the basis of rice, corn, flour, as well as other types of grain (for instance, potatoes and peanuts are also defined as grain). According to seasons, the rations of rice do vary. Rice and other types of grain, such as corn, flour, millet, et cetera, on ration cards cost 10.00 Won per month for a family of four. Since the year 1964 had lower harvests of rice than initially expected, there exists problems to provide the needed supply of rice.

Daily rations have been severely cut since November. People who once received 800 grams now receive only 700 grams. The lower categories suffer from cuts by 50 grams. A family of seven with four working individuals now receives 500 grams of rice, respectively grain, less per day - this is 15 kilograms less per month.

The Korean side provided as a reason for these cuts necessary savings for the reunification of the country. At the end of 1964 there were also, among other things, reductions of rations for vegetables (and turnips) in comparison to 1963 (for the production of kimchi).

☐☐ Social Benefits

☐☐

In case of accidents or sickness, workers receive 50 percent of wages as sickness payment. Depending on the type of work, workers have between two and four weeks of vacation. The minimum vacation is two weeks. In the case of four-week vacations, workers have to spend two weeks in the factory sanatorium.

Women receive a total of 78 days of maternity leave on average. There is no special allowance for children. However, there are price reductions between 30 and 60 percent for families with many children for [...] [one line missing on document copy].

Medical care is free for workers and their family dependents. Medicine and antibiotics must be paid. Patients receive medicine for free if it is produced from herbs (antibiotics are very expensive).

Social insurance fees are 5 to 8 percent of wages. After more than six years of work, retirees receive 80 percent of their average wage as pension; 60 percent after two years of work.

☐☐ Prices

☐☐

Differences between Intourist prices (sales to foreigners and Korean officials for

Talons) and those of Korean people are significant.

In 1964 prices were as follows:

Rice per kilogram (rationed) 0.05 Won (0.08 Won Intourist)
Corn per kilogram (rationed) 0.05 Won
Flour per kilogram (rationed) 0.10 Won
Potatoes per kilogram about 1.20 Won (0.30 Won Intourist)
Fish per kilogram 0.20 - 4.00 Won (3.00 Won Intourist)
Meat per kilogram 6.00 - 8.00 Won (3.50 Won Intourist)
Eggs per piece 0.25 Won
Chinese cabbage per kilogram (rationed) 0.08 Won
Radish per kilogram (rationed) 0.08 Won (0.30 Won Intourist)
Peppers per kilogram (rationed) 15.00 Won
Milk per liter 0.70 Won
Apples per kilogram 0.80 Won (1.00 Intourist)
[Cooking] Oil per 100 grams (rationed) 4.00 Won

A good suit costs in retail up to 300.00 Won.
Working suits in retail are between 120.00 and 150.00 Won.
A shirt (white, good quality): 20.00 to 25.00 Won.
A shirt (medium quality): 15.00 to 18.00 Won.
A pair of shoes (with rubber soles): 15.00 to 20.00 Won.

Workers are provided with working cloths and respective protective gear by their factories on a loan basis. Winter clothing is loaned for free by the factories, for example, for the period from 20 October to 20 April. Rationing of cooking oil (on cards) is 100 grams per person per month for the price listed above [4.00 Won]. The distribution of food, clothing, coal etc. to the population is mostly accomplished through allocation in factories and through housing collectives. If people want to purchase pots, for instance, they have to hand in aluminum and brass. For children's clothing, if allocated, one has to pay a certain percentage amount. The latter depends on the number of children per family.

□ Notes

□□

In recent months, an increase in the supply of consumer goods was noted in Pyongyang. However, the quality of goods does not yet meet standards (clothing, china, sewing machines). Outside of Pyongyang, however, the supply of consumer goods and food continues to be bad. Allocation is done on the basis of ration cards and Talons handed out by the factories. In free trading, prices are significantly higher.

According to our material and information, there is no improvement in the development of living standards compared to our material and information from the years of 1962 and 1963.

[signed]
Merten
3rd Secretary

CC:
1x 1st Extra-European Affairs Department (Foreign Ministry)

1x Central Committee, Department International Relations
1x Embassy/Culture