



# Trends in Wages of Casual Workers in India's Informal Sector: Evidence from PLFS (2020–2024)

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## Abstracts:

*This paper attempts to examine the trend of average daily wage earnings (₹ per day) of casual labourers engaged in work other than public works in the CWS category at the all-India level. The main objective of the study is to analyse the wage trend from 2020–21 to 2023–24. The study is based on secondary data collected from reliable and authentic sources such as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) published by the Government of India, MoSPI. Simple statistical tools such as tables and line graphs analysis have been used to analyse the data. The findings reveal that during the period 2020–21 to 2023–24, wages showed a consistent increase with only minor fluctuations. However, in the prevailing inflationary situation, the wage levels of casual workers remain insufficient to ensure a decent standard of living.*

**Keywords:** Wages, Casual Workers, Informal sector, PLFS

## Introduction:

Casual labour constitutes a significant segment of the Indian workforce and is typically characterised by relatively lower job security and income stability. The present paper attempts to analyse the trends in wages of casual labour workers (excluding public works) in current weekly status for all-India by combining both rural and urban workers.

The present study analyses the trends in average daily wages of casual workers (other than public works) in India. The analysis is based on data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS), published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India. The study covers the period from July–September 2020 to April–June 2024 and focuses on all-India estimates by combining both rural and urban areas.

The study examines wage trends for casual workers by gender, considering male and female workers separately as well as in combination. A descriptive approach is adopted, and the data are presented using tabular and graphical (line graph) methods to highlight changes in wage levels over time. By tracing these trends, the paper aims to provide insights into the evolving wage scenario of casual labour in India during the post-pandemic period.

**Methodology and Data Sources:**

The study is purely based on secondary data obtained from authentic sources such as the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) reports published by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), Government of India. Simple tabular and graphical methods have been employed to analyse the data.

The analysis covers the period from 2020–21 to 2023–24 and focuses on examining the trend in wages over time. The data reveal a consistent increase in average daily wages during the study period; however, the growth rate remains relatively low. Moreover, wage levels continue to be inadequate to meet rising inflationary pressures, indicating persistent vulnerabilities among casual workers.

**Growth and Trends of Wages among Casual Workers:**

From Table 1, it can be observed that during the period July–September 2020, the average daily wage earnings of male casual labourers (other than public works) in the Current Weekly Status for India stood at ₹340 per day. A slight increase was recorded in the subsequent quarter, October–December 2020, when wages rose to ₹341 per day. A relatively higher growth in wages was witnessed during January–March 2021, with the average daily wage increasing to ₹352, followed by a further rise to ₹357 in April–June 2021.

In the July–September 2021 quarter, the average daily wage reached ₹392. This upward trend continued in the following quarter, increasing to ₹401. During January–March 2022, wages further increased to ₹406 and showed a marginal rise to ₹408 in April–June 2022.

An analysis of the period from 2022 to 2023 reveals that the average daily wage gradually increased to ₹443 during July–September 2022. However, a decline was observed in the October–December 2022 quarter, when wages fell to ₹428 per day, and remained nearly constant during January–March 2023. In the subsequent quarter, wages again increased to ₹432 per day.

For the period 2023–2024, the average daily wage began at ₹439 in the July–September 2023 quarter. A comparatively higher increase was observed in October–December 2023, with wages rising to ₹451. This level remained constant during January–March 2024, before increasing further to ₹459 per day in the April–June 2024 quarter.

	Rural + Urban		
	Male	Female	Person
July-Sept, 2020	340	218	314
Oct-Dec, 2020	341	221	311
Jan-Mar, 2021	352	229	322
April-June, 2021	357	233	327
July-Sept, 2021	392	266	364
Oct-Dec, 2021	401	267	373
Jan-Mar, 2022	406	264	376
April-June, 2022	408	272	383
July-Sept, 2022	443	265	415
Oct-Dec, 2022	428	276	394
Jan-Mar, 2023	429	286	398
April-June, 2023	432	291	403
July-Sept, 2023	439	293	404
Oct-Dec, 2023	451	293	416
Jan-Mar, 2024	451	293	419
April-June, 2024	459	306	433

**Table 1: Average Wage Earning (Rs.0.00) per day from Casual Labour work other than public work in CWS for India**

Source: PLFS (2020-21 TO 2023-24), MoSPI, Government of India

The average daily wage earnings of female casual labourers (excluding public works) in India, based on the Current Weekly Status (CWS), from 2020–21 to 2023–24 show a generally increasing trend with minor fluctuations across different quarters.

In July–September 2020, female casual workers earned an average of ₹218 per day. This wage increased slightly to ₹221 in October–December 2020 and further rose to ₹229 during January–March 2021. The upward trend continued in April–June 2021, reaching ₹233 per day.

During 2021–22, wages increased more noticeably, reaching ₹266 per day in July–September 2021 and remaining almost stable at ₹267 in October–December 2021. However, a slight decline was observed in January–March 2022, with wages falling to ₹264 per day. This was followed by an increase to ₹272 per day in April–June 2022.

In 2022–23, the data again show a marginal decline to ₹265 per day in July–September 2022, followed by a steady rise to ₹276 in October–December 2022, ₹286 in January–March 2023, and ₹291 in April–June 2023.

Further, in July–September 2023, the average daily wage increased to ₹293. This level remained constant during October–December 2023 and January–March 2024. Finally, a notable increase was recorded in April–June 2024, with wages rising to ₹306 per day.

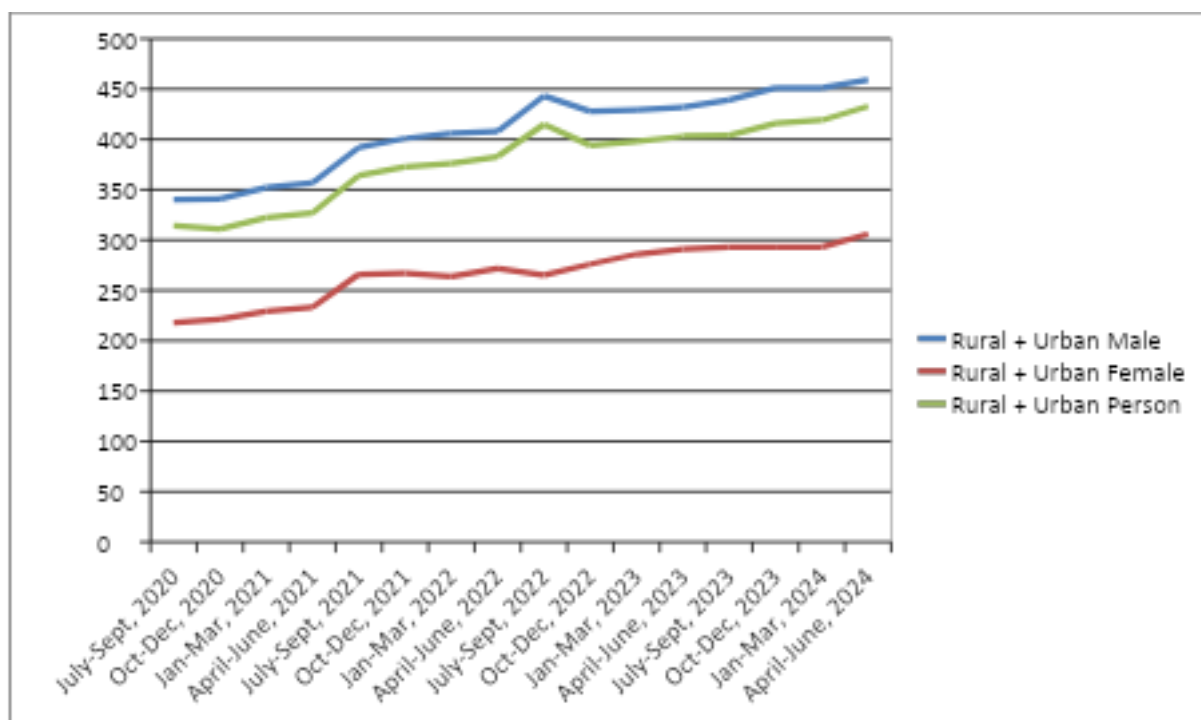
The average daily wage earnings (₹) for persons (both male and female combined) casual labourers engaged in work other than public works (CWS) in India show noticeable variations across quarters. In the quarter July–September 2020, the average daily wage was ₹314. This was followed by a slight decline in the October–December 2020 quarter, when wages fell to ₹311 per day. However, wages increased in the subsequent quarters, rising to ₹322 during January–March 2021 and further to ₹327 in April–June 2021.

A gradual increase in wages was observed in July–September 2021, reaching ₹364 per day, followed by an increase to ₹373 in October–December 2021. The upward trend continued into January–March 2022, with wages rising marginally to ₹376 per day, and further to ₹383 during April–June 2022.

A sharp increase was recorded in July–September 2022, when wages reached ₹415 per day, indicating a significant rise compared to the previous quarter. However, a decline in wages was witnessed thereafter, with average daily earnings falling to ₹394 in October–December 2022 and further to ₹398 in January–March 2023, followed by ₹403 in April–June 2023.

During the period 2023–24, wages exhibited a consistent upward trend. The average daily wage increased from ₹404 in July–September 2023 to ₹416 in October–December 2023, and further to ₹419 in January–March 2024. A comparatively higher increase was observed in April–June 2024, with wages reaching ₹433 per day.

**Figure 1: Average Wage Earning (Rs.0.00) per day from Casual Labour work other than public work in CWS for India**



Source: PLFS (2020-21 TO 2023-24), MoSPI, Government of India

Figure 1 illustrates the quarterly trend in average daily wage earnings (₹ per day) of casual workers engaged in work other than public works under the Current Weekly Status (CWS) in India, covering the period from July–September 2020 to April–June 2024. The figure is based on PLFS data and presents wage movements for male, female, and persons (combined), with particular emphasis on the overall trend for all workers.

The most prominent feature of the figure is the steady upward movement in the average wages of persons (male and female combined) over the study period. Beginning at ₹314 per day in July–September 2020, average wages show a gradual increase despite minor quarterly fluctuations, reaching ₹433 per day by April–June 2024. This consistent rise suggests a gradual recovery of casual labour earnings in the post-COVID period, reflecting improved economic activity and labour demand across both rural and urban areas.

The upward trend becomes more pronounced from mid-2021 onwards, coinciding with the easing of pandemic-related restrictions and the resumption of economic activities. Although short-term declines are visible in certain quarters (particularly during late 2022) the overall trajectory remains positive, indicating resilience in nominal wage growth for casual workers.

While the figure also shows separate wage trends for male and female workers, these primarily serve to contextualise the combined wage movement. Both categories broadly follow a similar rising pattern, reinforcing the observation that wage growth among casual workers has been broad-based rather than confined to a specific group.

Overall, Figure 1 highlights that although casual workers' wages in India have increased steadily during 2020–2024, the growth has been moderate. When viewed against rising inflation and living costs, the observed wage improvements, though encouraging, may still be insufficient to ensure a substantial enhancement in real income and living standards for casual workers.

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

The present study examined the trends in average daily wages of casual workers engaged in work other than public works in India using quarterly PLFS data for the period 2020–21 to 2023–24. The analysis reveals a gradual and consistent increase in nominal wages of casual workers across rural and urban areas during the post-pandemic period. The combined wage trend for all workers (male and female together) shows a steady upward movement, indicating a slow recovery of the informal labour market after the severe disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite this positive trend, the pace of wage growth remains modest and uneven across quarters. Periodic stagnation and minor declines suggest continued vulnerability of casual workers to economic shocks, seasonal fluctuations, and changing labour demand. More importantly, when viewed in the context of rising inflation and cost of living, the observed increase in nominal wages does not necessarily translate into a substantial improvement in real income or living standards for casual workers. This highlights the persistent economic insecurity faced by a large segment of India's informal workforce.

The findings underline that while market forces have contributed to some recovery in wages, structural weaknesses in the informal labour market continue to limit meaningful income gains. The absence of employment security, limited bargaining power, and inadequate social protection remain key challenges affecting casual workers' welfare.

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