

400,000 tea garden workers reeling under Covid-19 impact

Synopsis

While both the BJP and Trinamool Congress had promised Rs 350 as minimum wage for tea garden workers during the 2021 assembly poll campaign, no meeting under the Minimum Wages Act and statutory labour regulations, has been held so far. Low wages c...

By [Jayatri Nag](#), ET Bureau | Aug 11, 2021, 11:33 PM IST

More than four lakh tea garden workers in North Bengal's **Darjeeling**, Doors and Terai regions are reeling under utter poverty post the Covid-19 second wave as the promised minimum wage revision remains a distant dream and the lack of digitised ration cards in many places has deprived many of them the ration due to them.

While both the BJP and **Trinamool Congress** had promised Rs 350 as minimum wage for tea garden workers during the 2021 assembly poll campaign, no meeting under the Minimum Wages Act and statutory labour regulations, has been held so far. Low wages coupled with the slow vaccination process are making life tough for these workers. There is almost 80% attendance in tea gardens, known to be the country's second largest employer.

The demand for minimum wage revision has been going on for years. "The last wage revision was done in 2015. After that, whenever the garden workers intensified their demands and protests, miniscule hikes were given. Some minor wage increments were made, the last one being in 2020 before the assembly polls. With a meagre wage of Rs 202, workers are struggling amid the pandemic with less ration, lack of healthcare system and education," Saman Pathak, working president of Darjeeling **District Chiya Kaman Mazdoor Union** (DDCKMU), told ET.

LEFT IN THE LURCH

₹202 Daily wage of a tea garden worker	₹350 Promised minimum wage during 2021 assembly poll campaign
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TEA WORKERS' DEMAND

Raise in minimum wage

Need for social security, including education, land, electricity and food security



With a meagre wage of ₹202, workers are struggling amid the pandemic with less ration, lack of healthcare system and education

SAMAN PATHAK,
Working President, DDCKMU

The tea workers had organised a movement in 2018 to raise the minimum wage, with the unions insisting on the need for **social security**, including education, land, electricity and food security.

Workers are deprived of basic amenities like basic healthcare and education. There is widespread poverty, malnutrition and even deaths due to starvation.

“Earlier, the workers used to get a fixed amount for ration, which was part of their wages. From 2016, the ration system was started while the previous system was stopped. The amount is much less and the workers are unhappy as they are losing out on the money, which was stopped by the garden owners,” Pathak added.

According to the tea garden workers, the drive to digitise ration cards is still incomplete in many tea gardens. Without digitised ration cards, workers face problems in getting their share of rice and wheat from the ration shops.

<https://m.economictimes.com/news/india/400000-tea-garden-workers-reeling-under-covid-19-impact/articleshow/85251308.cms>