

## Tech workers feel poor in Silicon Valley

### Level 1 • Pre-intermediate / Intermediate

#### 1 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then, find them in the article to read them in context. The paragraph numbers will help you.

boom

commute

hip

income

soar

1. money that you get from working \_\_\_\_\_ (para 1)
2. modern and fashionable \_\_\_\_\_ (para 3)
3. when a particular industry becomes very successful \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
4. quickly increase to a high level \_\_\_\_\_ (para 4)
5. the journey to and from work every day \_\_\_\_\_ (para 8)

better off

complain

relocate

salary

sympathize

6. a fixed amount of money that you earn each month or year from your job \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
7. move to a different place for work reasons \_\_\_\_\_ (para 10)
8. having more money \_\_\_\_\_ (para 11)
9. say that you are not happy with something \_\_\_\_\_ (para 14)
10. show that you understand someone's problems \_\_\_\_\_ (para 14)

#### 2 Understanding the headline

Discuss the meaning of this part of the headline with your partner.

Tech workers feel poor in Silicon Valley

1. Who are 'tech workers'?
2. What and where is Silicon Valley?
3. Tech workers normally earn a lot of money, so why do you think they feel poor?

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#### Getting by on six figures? Tech workers feel poor in Silicon Valley's wealth bubble

Olivia Solon

27 February, 2017

- 1 A Twitter employee in his early 40s who earns \$160,000 says it is a "pretty bad" income for raising a family in the Bay Area.
- 2 The biggest cost is his \$3,000 rent – which he said was "super cheap" for the area – for a two-bedroom house in San Francisco, where he lives with his wife and two kids. He'd like a bigger house but groups of young people are happy to pay up to \$2,000 for a single room in a shared house and this makes prices higher for everyone.
- 3 "Families cannot afford to live here," he said. He also said that cafés that welcome families and restaurants are closing and there are "hip coffee shops" instead.
- 4 Silicon Valley's most recent tech boom, combined with not enough houses, has caused rents to soar in the last five years. The city's rents are now the highest in the world.
- 5 The high costs have meant that many people such as teachers, city workers and firefighters have had to leave the city.
- 6 Many tech workers are among the highest 1% of earners but, now, they are complaining that they, too, cannot afford to live there.
- 7 "Together, we make over \$1 million but we can't afford a house," said a woman in her 50s who works in digital marketing. "The American Dream is not working here."
- 8 Michael is a 41-year-old tech worker who works in Silicon Valley. In 2016, he earned \$700,000. He hates his 22-mile commute to work, which can sometimes take up to two and half hours, and so he tried to buy a house nearer work.
- 9 "We looked at a house in Los Gatos that would shorten my commute by eight miles. It was 1,700 square feet and the price was \$1.4 million. It sold in 24 hours for \$1.7 million," he said.
- 10 His salary is high so he can afford to live a nice life but he's had enough. He has accepted a 50% reduction in pay and is going to relocate to San Diego.
- 11 "We will certainly be better off than we are now." He said he won't miss some of the day-to-day costs, like spending \$8 on a bagel and coffee or \$12 on fresh juice.
- 12 Michael isn't the only tech worker who wants to leave Silicon Valley to have a better life. A Canadian IT specialist in his late 40s, earning more than \$200,000, has a similar plan. "When I came to the Bay Area, my salary seemed crazy," he said. But the cost of rent and childcare, which cost "more than I paid for my university education in Canada", has been hard.
- 13 Sam, 40, lives with his wife and three kids in San Jose. He earns around \$120,000 a year. "I have a very good salary but I have three kids and childcare is extremely expensive so my wife can't afford to work," he said.
- 14 Many well-paid tech workers who complain about their own difficult situation say they also sympathize with people on more ordinary incomes.
- 15 "We think a lot about how people with normal jobs afford to live here," said the woman who works in digital marketing. "The answer is: they can't. They commute from far away. Some secretaries commute three hours into work. It's crazy."
- 16 Some tech workers felt bad about their complaints when there are so many homeless people in San Francisco.
- 17 "You have to step over people to get to your job to make hundreds of thousands of dollars," said Michael. "How can you live your life as if homelessness is not important?"

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#### 3 Comprehension check

Use the key words from task 2 to complete the sentences about the article.

boom	commute	hip	income	soar
better off	complain	relocate	salary	sympathize

- The tech \_\_\_\_\_ in Silicon Valley means that many people who earn lots of money are looking for somewhere to live in San Francisco.
- This has made rent prices in the area \_\_\_\_\_ in the last five years.
- Tech workers earn a good \_\_\_\_\_ but they \_\_\_\_\_ that they cannot afford to live near their work.
- Even everyday things are expensive. Many cafés that welcome families have closed and \_\_\_\_\_ coffee shops have opened instead.
- People with an ordinary \_\_\_\_\_ cannot afford to live in the city anymore.
- Some secretaries have to \_\_\_\_\_ for three hours to get to work.
- Michael plans to \_\_\_\_\_ to San Diego.
- He will only earn half his current salary but he says he will be \_\_\_\_\_.
- Even though they complain about their own situation, many tech workers say they \_\_\_\_\_ with ordinary and homeless people.

#### 4 Discussion

- How do you feel about the financial problems of Silicon Valley tech workers?**  
*I (don't) feel sorry for them because ...*
- What would you like to say to Sam, Michael and the other people in the article?**  
*Why don't you ...?*  
*You could ...*
- Are there any areas or cities in your country that are too expensive for people with 'normal' jobs?**
- Which areas of your town have the lowest and the highest rents?**

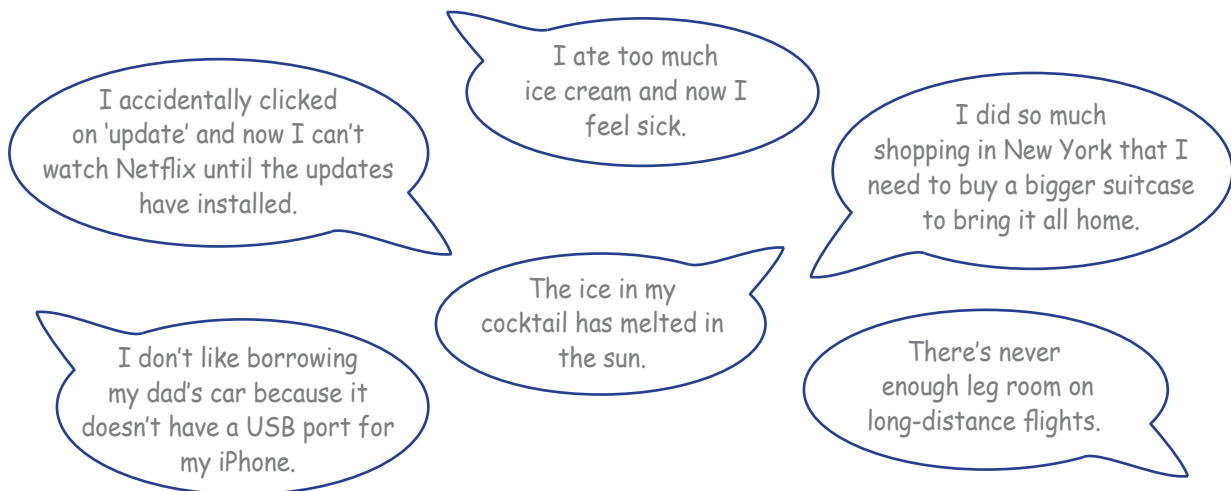
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#### 5 First-world problems

A first-world problem is something that some people think is a problem only because the person who experiences it is rich. People in developing countries would not think it is a real problem.

- Read and discuss these first-world problems.
- Write some more of your own.



#### 6 Research and presentation

- Choose one of the places in the box and research the answers to the questions below.



- What are the average rents for ...
    - a two-bedroom house;
    - a one-bedroom apartment?
  - Why are rent prices high or low there?
  - What can you rent there for \$3,000?
- Present your findings to the class.

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#### KEY

##### 1 Key words

1. income
2. hip
3. boom
4. soar
5. commute
6. salary
7. relocate
8. better off
9. complain
10. sympathize

##### 2 Understanding the headline

1. technology workers; people who work in the field of technology
2. an area in California, US, where many computer companies have their offices ('Silicon' refers to 'silicon chips' used in computers.)
3. because the cost of living is very high (Students can be encouraged to check their answer themselves by skimming the first two paragraphs of the article.)

##### 3 Comprehension check

1. boom
2. soar
3. salary; complain
4. hip
5. income
6. commute
7. relocate
8. better off
9. sympathize

##### 6 Research and presentation

**Teacher's tip:** This task can be set as homework and presented in the next lesson.