

24072 Egypt's economic woes lure digital nomads – but cast others out to sea

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Bordered by the Red Sea and the Mediterranean, Egypt is a country blessed with many miles of coastline, and its resorts have long been tourist favourites. But in a country in which the divide between rich and poor has always been stark, Egypt's recent economic woes have had a seismic effect on society – and nowhere illustrates that better than the fortunes of those making their way to the country's two coasts.

Along the Red Sea's Gulf of Aqaba, the once-quiet fishing outpost of Dahab has become a haven for well-off young digital nomads.

The number of digital nomads rose sharply during the pandemic, when workplaces made the necessary switch to remote working and white-collar workers were suddenly released from geographical confines. In the intervening years, rising rents and the cost of living crisis in many countries have also driven out young professionals, and changing cities or even countries becomes a more affordable option. In Egypt, the exchange rate makes the country especially attractive to anyone paid in dollars or euros.

But millions of Egyptians are struggling in a stricken economy. Hit by record high inflation rates of close to 30%, the living standards of most of Egypt's 105 million people dropped sharply, pushing thousands to make the dangerous journey to Europe by sea. From 2020, the Arab world's most populous country had become the ninth-highest source of asylum applications to the European Union.

Meanwhile, digital nomads who are paid in dollars have found these economic circumstances ideal for enjoying year-round sunshine on its pristine beaches.

Nearly a third of Egypt's population fell below the national poverty line in 2019, most of whom live along the overcrowded, impoverished Nile delta, with overstretched services.

Poor economic prospects have pushed more people to leave Egypt, many choosing to overlook the hurdles of illegal immigration.

In November 2022, life changed for Samir. He had journeyed from his home to Egypt's north coast to start work as a mechanic. When he got there, he was told there was no longer a job for him. "I had nowhere to go," Samir says. A friend in Italy told him that a bus of would-be migrants was leaving for Salloum, near the Libyan border. There, he paid smugglers a fee of £1,000 before joining a group of people, mainly women and children. "We walked to Libya. I had no other choice: I had paid a large sum of money so I was committed," says Samir.

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