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In focus

## FOR MANY MIGRANTS, AMERICAN DREAM TURNS TO NIGHTMARE

By Jocelyne Zablit

Every weekday, year-round, Esteban Yanez rises at the crack of dawn and heads to his job as a construction worker near the largely Hispanic desert town of Perris, south of Los Angeles.

On weekends, he does odd jobs to complement his salary. Though the 49-year-old father of four pays income tax and social security, he has no annual vacation, no health insurance and no work benefits. Yanez, who is Mexican, is among the estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States at the heart of a contentious debate that has stirred up passions and become a defining issue in the presidential race. Donald Trump, the billionaire businessman and presumptive Republican nominee, has made deporting America's entire illegal immigrant population and building a wall on the US border with Mexico a centerpiece of his campaign. His inflamed rhetoric, constantly hammered home at campaign appearances, has resonated with a large part of the US electorate, but has also enraged many, including people like Yanez who call America home.

"I came here 16 years ago in search of the American dream and to offer my kids a better future," Yanez told AFP during a recent meeting at the end of his 12-hour workday.

"And I do the kind of backbreaking work that only immigrants are willing to do. Others don't want to get their hands dirty with this kind of job."

### 'They're here to stay'

According to the Public Policy Institute of California, almost a quarter (2.67 million) of the nation's undocumented immigrants live in California, where they make up slightly more than six percent of the state's population of nearly 40 million. The majority hail from Mexico and work in farming, construction, housekeeping, elderly care, landscaping or for moving and transport companies.

"We work, we pay our dues, we take no handouts and we are not hurting anyone," sighed Maria Delosangeles, 52, who arrived in the US from Mexico 18 years ago and works as a housekeeper in the Los Angeles area. "How does it adversely affect Trump for us to be here?"

Nationwide, undocumented immigrants collectively pay almost \$12 billion a year in state and local taxes, with more than \$3.1 billion coming from California alone, according to The Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. Advocates emphasize that they reap no benefits from their contributions. "These people are as much a part of our landscape and culture as anyone else that's here," said Harold McClarty, a farmer in central California—a region known as "America's salad bowl"—and head of the California Fresh Fruit Association.

"We need to recognize that they're here to stay and that it's ridiculous to say we're going to send them back because that's beyond not practical—it's immoral," he added.

### America would go hungry

McClarty and other immigration reform advocates emphasize that were millions of undocumented farmworkers kicked out, as Trump would have it, America would essentially go hungry. They point, as an example, to the state of Georgia, where an immigration crackdown in 2011 backfired, leading to crops rotting in fields and the agriculture industry losing tens of millions of dollars for lack of other "legal" laborers willing to take on such work.

"The country's economy would basically collapse if we didn't have undocumented workers," said Los Angeles-based Jose Antonio Vargas, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist-turned-activist, who came out as an undocumented immigrant several years ago.

Vargas, founder of Define America, a non-profit that tries to humanize the debate over immigration, said if anything, Trump's rhetoric had forced the issue to the forefront and could finally spur immigration reform. "Trump has opened the conversation and, in some ways, this really is a defining moment for all of us to try and figure out whether we keep hiding, or do we show people who we are," said Vargas, 35, who was born in the Philippines and was raised by his grandparents in the United States from the age of 12.

The community suffered a setback on Thursday, however, when the Supreme Court dealt a major blow to President Barack Obama's plan to spare millions from being deported and to allow them to legally work in the country. A tie vote by the justices left in place a lower court ruling blocking Obama's plan.

### 'Nothing to hide'

The mounting frustration of this growing population living in the shadows was evident during interviews with several undocumented workers who willingly shared their identity and their stories, expressing anger at how their community has been demonized. Jaime and Ana Flores, who arrived in the US from Mexico 27 years ago and now run a landscaping service in Perris, proudly pointed out that their modest success had come by the sweat of their brow. — AFP

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## STURGEON PLANS EU FUTURE FOR SCOTLAND

By Dario Thuburn and Naomi O'Leary

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon yesterday vowed to protect Scotland against the "devastating" fallout of Brexit and hinted her government may use legal means to try to block Britain's departure from the EU. Sturgeon said the United Kingdom that Scotland voted to remain a part of in a 2014 independence referendum "does not exist anymore" after Thursday's referendum to leave the EU.

"What's going to happen with the UK is that there are going to be deeply damaging and painful consequences... I want to try and protect Scotland from that," Sturgeon told the BBC's Andrew Marr Show. In a round of broadcast interviews, she also said it was possible that the Scottish parliament may have to give its consent to laws to extricate Britain from the EU.

Asked whether she would consider asking Scottish lawmakers not to give that consent, she replied: "Of course." Sturgeon leads the pro-independence Scottish National Party, which has 63 out of 129 seats in the devolved parliament, as well as 54 out of 650 seats in Britain's House of Commons lower house of parliament.

Britain as a whole voted by 52 percent to 48 percent to leave the EU but Scotland voted strongly for Britain to remain—by 62 percent to 38 percent. Within hours of the result on Friday, Sturgeon said a new independence referendum within two years was now "highly likely" and on Saturday she said

Scotland was seeking "immediate discussions" with European leaders.

Two new polls taken after Thursday's vote showed a majority of Scots would now support independence.

A Panelbase survey for the Sunday Times found 52 percent of respondents now wanted to break with the rest of Britain, while 48 percent were opposed. In a poll for Scotland's Sunday Post, ScotPulse found that 59 percent would vote for independence.

### 'Scotland staying' in EU

Sturgeon yesterday warned that the consequences of dragging Scotland out of the European Union "against its will" would be "devastating". Asked what Scotland's negotiating position with Brussels could be and whether it would have to join the EU as a new member state, she said: "This would not be a decision about Scotland leaving... this would actually be a decision about Scotland staying."

"Our argument is that we don't want to leave. It's not that we want to leave and get back in," she said. She also cautioned any future British prime minister against vetoing a new Scottish independence vote. "I think people in Scotland would find that completely unacceptable," she said.

Andrew Scott, a professor of European Union studies at the University of Edinburgh, said one way in which Scotland could remain in the EU would be to vote for independence before Britain's departure is

finalized. It could then define itself as a "successor state" and effectively inherit Britain's EU membership, including the budget rebate, he argued.

A second option would be for an independent Scotland to leave the EU and then re-apply while in the meantime joining the European Economic Area, he said. "I think the European Union would have no reason to reject Scotland's participation or continuing membership of the EU," Scott added.

EU officials have cautioned in recent days that Scotland may have to apply like other new member states, which are required to adopt the euro.

### 'I feel more European'

In the streets of Edinburgh, many people backed independence. Chris Dougray, a financial advisor, said he was concerned about the impact on investment in Scotland if it is forced out of the European Union. "If it meant that we stay in the European Union, I would vote for independence, yes," he said.

Zoe Cuthbert, a 23-year-old student of international law, said: "I feel more European than I do British. 'We've clearly made our voice heard that we look more to Europe than we do to the rest of the UK.' But Evelyn Hutchen, a 68-year-old Glaswegian, said she had voted to leave the European Union.

"Britain isn't ours anymore because of the EU," she said, adding: "Sometimes I feel they're stripping the British away from us." — AFP

## BLAME FLOWS FREELY AS WEST BANK TAPS RUN DRY

By Sarah Benhaida

Fatma Ali stands in her small patch of garden in the parched West Bank and wonders how to feed her family of seven when she's had no water in nearly a week. "I can't cook, do the dishes or serve drinks," she says, surveying the cracked earth and dried-up fountain in her yard in Salfit, north of Ramallah.

Ali is one of tens of thousands of Palestinians in the Israeli-occupied West Bank who have gone without water in recent weeks, victims of the latest dispute between Israeli and Palestinian officials over the region's most valuable resource. She and her family are among some of Salfit's 15,000 inhabitants who have been without water for five days even as temperatures have topped 40 degrees Celsius (105 Fahrenheit).

The town-like nearly all Palestinian towns-gets its water from the mains network of Israel, which has diverted supplies to Jewish settlements in the West Bank while the high temperatures persist, Palestinian authorities say. "I have grandchildren who can't shower and who need something to drink," Ali says. The shortage is felt all the more by Salfit's residents as it comes during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, when families gather each night for the iftar meal which breaks the daytime fast.

In addition to families being unable to clean dishes or wash fruit and vegetables, the shortage is hitting the area's olive and date trees, which require regular watering. Although the shortage is recent, the dispute over water has long been one of the main bones of contention in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict. "Salfit sits on what have been the largest water reserves in historical Palestine and yet we have nothing to drink because our water is diverted to Israeli settlements," Mayor Shaher Eshthieh complained.

But according to Uri Schor, a spokesman for Israel's water authority, both Israelis and Palestinians are suffering from the shortage, which he attributes to an excess of demand. He puts supply problems down to the "total refusal" by Palestinian officials to replace dilapidated pipelines, which can limit water capacity.

### 'I've lost so much'

According to EWASH, a collection of NGOs dealing with water in the Palestinian Territories, each West Bank inhabitant uses 73 litres (16 gallons) of water per day. That's below the 100-litre level advised by the World Health Organization and less than a third of the 240 litres used daily by Israelis.

Palestinian authorities accuse Israel of stalling permission to upgrade existing water infrastructure, which they say includes wells and pipes that have not

been checked in years. Saleh Ataneh, head of Salfit's water department, accused Israel of lying when it said that both communities were affected by cuts. He said shortages "only affect Palestinian towns and villages". But Israeli foreign affairs spokesman Emmanuel Nahshon accused the Palestinians of illegally syphoning off water from pipes and waterways. "No one steals water directly on the Israeli side," he says.

As the political blame game wears on, it is residents who are suffering the most

from the taps being switched off. Palestinian farmer Zaher Madi said it was having a catastrophic effect on his livestock. "I need 10 cubic metres (350 cubic feet) a day on my farm. I've received 10 cubic metres total in the last four days," he says, pointing to four buckets holding the remainder of the previous day's supply. "Sometimes I am afraid to feed the animals, because I'm scared they will need water afterwards. 'The animals are dead, the cows have had miscarriages, I have lost so much.'" — AFP



**SALFIT, Palestinian Territories: Members of the Salim family carry bottles filled with spring water in Salfit, north of Ramallah, where some of the West Bank village's inhabitants have been without water for days. — AFP**