# Immigration policy shifts threaten Texas Panhandle’s vital immigrant workforce



In the quiet towns of the Texas Panhandle, a region known for its vast cattle ranches and meatpacking plants, immigrant workers are facing significant uncertainty about their future in the United States. Many of these individuals, who fled violence and hardship in their home countries, came legally to seek better opportunities but are now caught in the crosshairs of changing immigration policies instituted under the Trump administration and carried forward amid ongoing legal challenges.

Kevenson Jean, a Haitian truck driver residing in the town of Panhandle, embodies this precarious situation. Jean and his wife, Sherlie, who came to the U.S. in 2023, had hoped to build a stable life after escaping violence in Haiti. Their modest two-bedroom home proudly displays both the Haitian and American flags, symbols of their dual hopes and identities, though these flags now fade with the sun—a metaphor for their uncertain status. Jean spoke about his experience, saying, “We are not criminals. We’re not taking American jobs.” He reflected on his integration into American culture, from enjoying Bud Light and fishing to supporting the Dallas Cowboys, while his wife improved her English by reading romance novels.

The couple's life, like that of many others, has been complicated by a Department of Homeland Security directive in early April, which bluntly stated to some immigrants with legal permission: “It’s time for you to leave the United States… the federal government will find you.” This directive affects roughly two million immigrants living in the U.S. under temporary protected status, many of whom fled countries in crisis including Haiti, Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Afghanistan, Myanmar, and Sudan. These people mostly contribute to the workforce, especially in labor-intensive industries like meatpacking, and pay taxes.

The Trump administration’s immigration crackdown aimed to end many legal pathways for immigrants while revoking the temporary status from hundreds of thousands, citing concerns about inadequate vetting. This move included notices sent to over 500,000 Cubans, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans, and Haitians warning that their legal protections would end by late April 2024, though court rulings have delayed enforcement. Another 500,000 Haitians face potential status loss by August 2024.

Lesvia Mendoza, a special education teacher from Venezuela living in Amarillo, expressed her confusion and frustration about these measures, highlighting her commitment to the country’s legal requirements and contribution to the economy. She noted the contradiction in the government’s stance, saying, “But all the jobs, all the production that happens because of immigrants? It’s obvious we’re needed.” Yet, she added that she would comply if ordered to leave.

Others, like a Haitian meatpacking worker who chose to be identified only as Nicole, expressed deep concern about returning to her homeland, where conditions remain perilous. Nicole’s job at the slaughterhouse pays over $20 an hour, but she fears deportation despite having legal protections under the law.

The meatpacking industry, centred around towns like Cactus, Texas, heavily depends on immigrant labour. JBS, the world’s largest beef producer, operates a plant in Cactus employing more than 3,700 workers, many of whom are foreign-born. Mark Lauritsen of the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union emphasised the potential impact of immigration restrictions on the workforce, noting, “We’re going to be back in this situation of constant turnover,” with an assumption that replacement labour would be hard to find. Historically, immigrant communities have sustained these plants, shifting over decades from Mexican and Central American workers to refugees and asylum seekers from across the globe.

Among those impacted is Idaneau Mintor, another Haitian worker at the JBS plant, who lives a sparse life in the nearby town of Dumas. He sends remittances to support his family in Haiti while grappling with the daily anxiety of potential deportation, saying, “I follow the rules. I respect everything.” Mintor avoids socialising, spending much of his time at home worrying about the precariousness of his situation.

For trucker Kevenson Jean, the immigration uncertainty reached a personal crossroads when he prepared for what he believed to be his final haul in America. His journey into trucking started soon after arriving in the U.S., and his attachment to his Kenworth truck is profound. Jean described a poignant moment before setting off on what he dreaded to be his last job: “It’s going to be my last week with my baby,” he said. After a brief reprieve granted by a court order, his status—and ability to work—remained uncertain.

This story, as reported by The Independent and AP News, illustrates the complex and often unsettling realities faced by immigrants legally residing and working in the U.S., particularly in sectors vital to regional economies. It highlights the human side of immigration policies and their broad implications for individuals, communities, and industries across the nation.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

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