



AS IT IS

## Human Smuggling a Profitable Business at Immigrants' Cost

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Ronald Garcia is a 39-year-old Guatemalan man who recently entered the United States illegally. He is currently at Casa Alitas, a shelter for immigrants in Tucson, Arizona. While there, he told about his border crossing.

Garcia said he paid **smugglers** \$20,000 to get him across the border. He said he had to sell all he owned to come to the U.S.

Crossing into the United States illegally is a big business in Central and South America. Many people leave their countries due to the violence and poverty. They pay huge amounts of money and risk their lives to leave.

Garcia said of his experience, "They put me in a **trunk** where you couldn't breathe, and well, thank God (I survived), because they say that all those who are put there, they die."

The U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) says illegal smuggling operations are big business.

A RAND Corporation study estimated smugglers made between \$200 million and \$2.3 billion in 2017 transporting people into the U.S., mostly from Central America.

USBP spokesman Mario Escalante said it is a dangerous business as well. He said smugglers sometimes **abandon** the migrants, steal from them, rape them and worse.

Garcia agrees.

"They ask for a quantity of money, and if they don't get it by the time and date they say, they'll kill you," he said.

Henry Cuellar is a U.S. lawmaker from Texas. The congressional area he represents stretches from San Antonio to the border town of McAllen in southern Texas.

Cuellar told VOA that smugglers also provide transport for illegal drug traffickers.

But it is not just criminal organizations making money from immigrants.

Private research business Dynamic Securities Analytics reports that the American financial industry also profits from the illegal business. They profit from fees connected to electronic payments made by undocumented immigrants.

President Joe Biden supports extensive immigration reform. Biden has also warned migrants against making illegal border crossings.

Former ambassador Roberta Jacobson is Biden's adviser on southern border issues. She told VOA that the administration is working with foreign intelligence sources to fight human smuggling operations.

I'm John Russell.

*Aline Barros and Celia Mendoza reported this story for Voice of America. Gregory Stachel adapted it for VOA Learning English. Caty Weaver was the editor.*

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## Words in This Story

**smuggler** – a person who transports (someone or something) from one country into another illegally and secretly

**trunk** – *n.* the enclosed space in the back of a car for carrying things

**quantity** – *n.* a large amount or number of something

