

ICE AIR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – SEPTEMBER 2023

- SEPTEMBER TOTAL FLIGHTS OF 702 REVERTED TO A MORE TYPICAL RANGE FOLLOWING THE 45-MONTH RECORD IN AUGUST OF 856. REMOVAL FLIGHTS ALSO REVERTED TO A MORE TYPICAL 127 FLIGHTS.
- TOTAL FLIGHTS AVERAGED 33.4 PER WEEKDAY, BASICALLY EQUAL TO THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE, AND DOWN FROM 37.2 IN AUGUST.
- 702 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OPERATED IN SEPTEMBER, DOWN 154 (18%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH AND JUST 17 (2%) BELOW THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 719 AND UP 38 (6%) FROM SEPTEMBER 2022
- 127 REMOVAL FLIGHTS IN SEPTEMBER, DOWN 26 (17%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH AND JUST 3 (2%) ABOVE THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 124 AND 20 (19%) OVER SEPTEMBER 2022.
- REMOVAL FLIGHTS AVERAGED 6.0 PER WEEKDAY IN SEPTEMBER, JUST SLIGHTLY OVER THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 5.7. OVER THE PAST 6 MONTHS, AVERAGE REMOVAL FLIGHTS PER WEEKDAY RANGED FROM 4.8 (CONTRACT INTERRUPTION IN MAY) TO 6.7 IN AUGUST.
- 25,192 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OPERATED IN 2020-SEPTEMBER 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 20,086 TOTAL FLIGHTS.
- 4,553 REMOVAL FLIGHTS OPERATED IN 2020-SEPTEMBER 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 3,486 REMOVAL FLIGHTS.
- LATERAL FLIGHTS WERE DOWN TO 26 FROM 32 IN AUGUST, CONTINUING THE LOWER RELIANCE ON LATERALS POST T42.
- **TRANSITION FROM T42 TO T8**

After both total flights and removal flights, on a per weekday basis, in August reached and slightly exceeded prior levels, in September they have reverted to more normalized levels with total flights similar to late-2021 and 2022 and removal flights similar to late 2021 and most of 2022 (pp. 9,11).

The monthly progression of total flights per weekday from March through September is 33, 37, 32, 31, 28, 37 and 33, respectively. The low in July of 28 reflects the contract expiration issue one week lull. Total flights per weekday trended down within the month with 42 for days 1-10 followed by 29 and 31 for days 11-20 and 21-30, respectively. Almost all the change can be accounted for by shuffle flights moving people to and between detention and processing sites.

The monthly progression of removal flights per weekday from March through September is 6.3, 5.9, 4.8, 5.5, 5.0, 6.7, and 6.0, respectively. The May low of 4.8 reflects the transition from T42 to T8 and the low level of 5.0 in July reflects the contract expiration one week pause.

LAST 12 MONTHS

Over the last 12 months, all under President Biden, there have been a likely **8,411 ICE Air flight legs** as compared to **4,845 in 2020**, a **startling, unexpected, and disappointing increase of 3,566 (74%) over 2020** and **up 2,287 (37%) over 2021** (pages 22,33,36,39).

Of these flights, **1,358 were removal flights**, an increase of **349 (35%) over the 1,009 in 2020**, and **309 (29%) over 2021**.

Shuffle flights, including lateral flights and those just moving people in the US to and between detention/deportation centers were **5,039 over the last 12 months**, a **staggering increase of 2,814 (126%) over the 2,225 in 2020**, and **up 1,380 (38%) over 2021**.

Total Flights of **702 in August**, utilizing **27 different planes operated by 5 different charter carriers** (IAero aka Swift, World Atlantic, GlobalX, Gryphon, and OMNI) **were down 154 (18%) from August**, and were below the prior 6 months (**719**) by **17 (2%)** (page 10,22).

In August **Border Patrol encounters (between ports) at the southern border were up significantly from 183,000 in July to 233,000 in August** and all indications point to another meaningful increase in September, perhaps by 30,000 between ports as indicated [in this CBS piece](#). (pages 15-17).

Removal Flights decreased by 26 (17%) from 153 to 127 which was 20 (19%) over September 2022, and up 3 (2%) from the prior 6-month average (pages 22,33).

The Northern Triangle countries of Honduras (44), Guatemala (45), and El Salvador (10) continued at an elevated proportion of removal flights with **78% of all removal flights in September**, up slightly from **73% in August**, but compared to **only 57% in May**. Conversely, the proportion of removal flights to South America remained low post-T42 at 15%, approximately half of May at 32%.

We don't know September encounters, but based on August, **encounters of people from Northern Triangle countries were 2.7x those of people from South America**, while **removal flights to Northern Triangle Countries were 5.2x those from South America**.

Of the decrease in removal flights of 26, Guatemala accounted for a decrease of 7 (52 to 45), Honduras down 7 (51 to 44), Peru down 7 (11 to 4), and Colombia (5), Dominican (2) and Nicaragua (1) were each down 2 and Haiti (1) was down 1. El Salvador (10), Ecuador (9), and Brazil (1) were each up by 1.

The total number of **people ICE returned by air in September to Guatemala decreased from 6,198 to 5,464**, both representing around 120 people per plane. But returns by ICE in September only represented 14% of encounters of Guatemalans in August, significantly below the recent 25% range.

I am suspect of the US return figures that have been reported all month by the Honduran Government which only indicates only **2,820 returns by ICE**, or 64 per plane. In August, and prior months, it has been in the **110 range**. Moreover, IOM reports returns for Northern Central American countries and Honduras is the only country outstanding for August which leads me to believe IOM may also question.

Please see Country Detail Section below for more details

Lateral Flights decreased from 32 in August to 26 in September (page 14). It does appear that, even in the face of escalating encounters, lateral flights are less used post T42. It could be because the end of “laterals for expulsions,” or it could be that recently many sectors have been over capacity and so “decompression” efforts to less busy sectors are not possible, or some combination.

Over the last 4 months, from June to September, laterals have averaged 26 per month and that compares to 61 per month and 106 per month for the prior two 4-month periods. It is in fact one of the lowest 4-month periods since laterals began in March 2021.

Laredo received the most lateral flights at 11 followed by El Paso at 6, and McAllen, Harlingen, and San Diego each with 3. It is important to note lateral flights to San Diego ended 10 September at the same time street releases began.

The most flights originated in Tucson with 12, followed by Yuma with 6 and Del Rio and El Paso with 4 each. With encounter dynamics and CBP capacity shifting quickly it appears some sectors are both receivers and originators within the same month now and it is becoming more difficult to assign those definitions.

In addition to these lateral flights there are lateral buses as well into which there is no visibility, however we understand many buses were used for “decompression” as well.

Shuffle flights of 397 decreased by 79 (17%) of which only 12 could be attributed to lateral flight decreases (page 22). It is difficult to identify the reason for the decrease from August, the second highest month of the year, although it could be related to the lower level of removal flights or that CBP may be releasing a higher percentage of people encountered rather than moving them to detention centers because of over-capacity issues in CBP and perhaps ICE where levels have now reached 35,289 as of 23 September. But honestly this is a guess at best.

Country Detail

Honduras flights dropped from 51, a 45-month high, by 7 (14%) to 44 in September, still the second highest month in 45 months (page 23). September was 11 (33%) over the prior 6-month average and 16 (57%) over September 2022.

This decrease is in the face of encounters increasing 9,148 (35%) from July to August. As I mentioned above, I am not comfortable with the return number of 2,820 being currently reported by the Government of Honduras which would represent only 64 people per plane and only 8% of August encounters. Even if the per plane number is a more typical 110, that would represent only 14% of August encounters, down from a more typical return rate of 20%-25%.

The only reasons I can posit for the low return numbers being reported is an error, or a restriction by Honduras, perhaps – admit wild speculation with no facts - the reason for President Xiomara Castro’s visit to the border to observe treatment of migrants? I watch the numbers daily for a correction or reversal.

For the sixth month in a row, I observed no charter removal flights from Mexico, and land returns from El Carmen, Mexico remained relatively low at an estimated 630, down from 749 in August, and well below 1,389 in March and the 2,696 returned in September 2022.

From April through September 2022 Mexico returned 27,578 Hondurans compared to only an estimated 5,000 in the same period in 2023, a dramatic decrease of 22,578 (82%). For the same 6-

month period the US returned an estimated 20,800 Hondurans (caveat above on Honduran September accuracy) in 2023 compared to 25,487 in 2022, a far more modest decrease of 4,687 (18%).

Guatemala flights fell by 7 (13%) from the 45-month high 52 in August to 45 in September, still the 3rd highest month in 45 months (page 23). September was 9 (25%) over the prior 6-month average and a significant 20 (80%) above September of 2022.

The decrease is in the face of an increase in encounters of Guatemalans of 15,809 (71%) from July at 22,128 to August at 37,937. Returns to Guatemala of 5,464 represented only 14% of August encounters, almost half of recent return rates.

For the fourth month in a row there were no returns from deportation flights from Mexico to Guatemala. Mexico did return an estimated 2,140 Guatemalans by land at Tecún Úman, down 460 (18%) from August, and down 586 (21%) from September 2022.

Combined with the ICE Air returns, total returns by the US and Mexico in September were 7,604, down 1,194 (14%) from August and up 857 (13%) from September 2022.

El Salvador flights increased slightly from 9 to 10 (11%), which is 2 (25%) over the prior 6-month average and 3 (23%) below September of 2022 (page 23). Encounters of Salvadorans increased by 2,127 (54%) from 3,953 in July to 6,080 in August, so returns in September are estimated to be 18% of August encounters, down from 23% in August and a bit higher than Guatemala and Honduras.

Ecuador flights increased slightly in September by 1 (13%) from 8 to 9, below the prior 6-month average by 4 (31%), but 6 (200%) above September 2022 (page 23). It should be noted this is a dramatic change from 1Q 2023 with an average of 26 flights per month. That large volume of flights seemed to impact encounters which fell steadily from 16,206 in December 2022 to 6,396 in April before reversing course and increasing to 13,630 in August.

Estimated returns in September represented only 7% of encounters in August, down slightly from the prior month.

Peru flights dropped significantly by 7 (64%) to 4 from the 45-month record of 11 in August. September was a more normalized month just 2 (33%) below the prior 6-month average and 1 (20%) below September 2022 (page 23). It is unclear why August removals were so high since encounters between June and August ranged only between 2,473 and 3,146. Perhaps there was an expedited removal bulge.

Estimated returns in September represented around 14% of encounters in August, down significantly from the estimated 50% in August.

Colombia flights fell for the 6th consecutive month in September by 2 (29%) from 7 to 5 as encounters in August increased gradually from 4,706 in June to 8,944 in August, after plummeting from 18,121 in May to 4,706 in June (page 23). September flights continued the dramatic drop as flights in February through March averaged 22 per month. Flight patterns for both Columbia and Ecuador above are somewhat similar and it seems they may be related to the transition from T42 to T8 in addition to encounter levels.

September was the 6th straight month of decline from 24 to 21, to 17, to 11, to 9, to 7, to 5 for the months of March – September.

It is estimated that returns in September represent only about 6% of August encounters, down from 11% in August and around 19% in July.

Dominican Republic flights decreased by 2 (50%) from 4 to 2 in September which was 2 (50%) below the prior 6-month average and equal to September 2022 (page 23). There is no visibility into encounters of Dominicans, so it is hard to relate the removal flight variations to encounters.

For the 18 months prior to March 2023 there were 2 flights per month and then flights increased as well as the variability suggesting a new repatriation agreement was reached between the US and the Dominican.

In August, it was reported by press in the Dominican that there have been around 2,500 Dominicans returned by the US this year which would be a little over 90 per plane.

Brazil flights increased by 1 from 0 in September, the same level in 4 of the last 6 months with the other 2 months at 0 (page 23).

Encounters of Brazilians have been relatively consistent over the last 6 months ranging from 2,686 – 3,816, ending in August at 3,463.

Cuba on April 24, 2023, experienced the first return flights since December 2020, followed by 1 in each of the following 6 months including September (page 23). It seems that the pattern now is for 1 flight per month, although there seems to be no pattern to the day or date of the month.

There have often been fewer than 50 people on a flight and in fact the **Government of Cuba announced that only 324 people have been returned on the 6 flights this year, an average of only 54 people per flight. Only 35 people were on the flight in September.**

Haiti received 1 flight in September down from 2 in August, one of which was a make-up for a cancelled flight in July (pages 19,23). Since December 2022 there has been a single flight each month to Haiti except for the cancelled flight in July (0) and the make-up flight in August (2).

Over the last 10 months, based on the best information we have, there have been an average of about 44 people per flight, or 440 people returned since December 2022.

Over the last 10 months, only 1,095 Haitians have been encountered between southern ports. The vast majority (estimating around 85%+) of encounters at ports of Haitians of 61,751 over the last 10 months have been related to T42 exemptions or CBP One appointments.

Meanwhile, interdiction of Haitians at sea continues with 5,089 interdicted in the first 10 1/2 months of the fiscal year (Oct) for an annual pace of 5,816, below the prior year of 7,175 by 1,359 (19%).

Since inauguration 287 flights have removed 27,163 Haitians, 1 in every 420 people in Haiti. Since the mass return beginning 19 September 2021, 25,064 Haitians have been returned on 250 flights.

Africa received 3 deportations in September on 2 flights. OMNI Air operated the first large jet to Africa in almost 3 years (pages 23,24). This flight arrived in Senegal, and it is unclear if some deportees were transferred to commercial flights to other countries. Gryphon also operated 1 small jet (12 – 14 passengers) with stops in Nigeria and Guinea.

Other Removal Destinations were Nicaragua (1), and Jamaica (1), both within generally normal patterns (page 23).

Mexico Operated Removal flights surprisingly stopped altogether in June, July, August, and September following just 1 flight in each of April and May to Guatemala. I do not think I am wrong because the reporting of the Governments of Guatemala and Honduras support this observation. There has been no explanation given for the lower returns from Mexico of Hondurans and Guatemalans, however the change was concurrent with the tragic fire in Juarez.

The 6-month average prior to April was 24, and there were 37 deportations in May 2022.

SEPTEMBER FLIGHT SUMMARY

In September, there were 702 likely ICE Air flights, down 154 (18%) from August, and down 38 (6%) from the same month of 2022. Removal flights of 127 were down 26 (17%) from August while domestic shuffle flights decreased by 79 (17%).

- - 127 removal flights, with 127 return flights, to 15 different countries in Latin America, Africa, and the Caribbean.
- - 51 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 397 domestic shuffle flights between deportation locations.
- - 448 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - **Since President Biden's inauguration there have been 20,086 likely ICE Air flights** including 3,486 removal flights. Including just the 264 lateral flights before October 2021 and 50 for October - December 2022 as expulsion flights would yield 3,800 removal flights.

Last 12 Months – 8,411 likely total flights

- - 1,358 removal flights, with 1,318 return flights, to at least 29 countries in Latin America, Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia.
- - 696 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 5,039 domestic shuffle flights between removal locations.
- - 5,735 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - 40% of flights were return related (removal, return and connections) and 60% were domestic shuffle flights.