

ICE AIR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – APRIL 2023

- FIRST RETURN FLIGHT TO CUBA SINCE DEC 2020. COLOMBIA PUSHING BACK ON FLIGHTS POST T42 UNTIL “DEGRADING” TREATMENT IS CORRECTED. MEXICO OPERATES ONLY 1 DEPORTATION FLIGHT. (SEE COUNTRY SECTION BELOW FOR DETAILS)
- 21,690 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OPERATED IN 2020-APRIL 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 16,584 TOTAL FLIGHTS.
- 3,946 REMOVAL FLIGHTS OPERATED IN 2020-APRIL 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 2,879 REMOVAL FLIGHTS.
- 745 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OPERATED IN APRIL, DOWN 22 (3%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH. APRIL WAS 51 (7%) ABOVE THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 694.
 - IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT ON A DAY EQUIVALENT BASIS TO MARCH, APRIL WOULD HAVE REGISTERED AN INCREASE TO 857, WHICH WOULD HAVE BEEN THE HIGHEST MONTH RECORDED (STARTED JAN 2020). THERE WERE 3 FEWER WEEKDAYS IN APRIL THAN MARCH.
- TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OF 745 WERE UP 111 (18%) FROM APRIL 2022.
- LATERAL FLIGHTS ZOOMED UP BY 46 (87%) FROM 53 IN MARCH TO 99 IN APRIL DRIVEN BY AN INCREASE FROM EL PASO OF 41 (114%). LONGITUDINAL FLIGHTS CONTINUED WITH 3 FROM PLATTSBURGH, NY TO TEXAS.
- 117 REMOVAL FLIGHTS IN APRIL, DOWN 28 (19%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH AND UP 2 (2%) FROM APRIL 2022, AND UP 11 (10%) FROM THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 106. NOTE THAT ON A DAY EQUIVALENT BASIS AS MARCH REMOVALS WOULD HAVE BEEN 134.

MONITORING FOR AN INCREASE IN ICE AIR RESOURCES AND OPERATIONAL CHANGES

To implement fully the Administration’s objective of expediting, expedited removal directly from the border as contemplated in the changes announced I am watching for:

1. An increase in ICE Air available contract planes so that flights, particularly removal flights, can increase to home countries.

2. The use lateral of flights to move people to nationality-centric processing sites to stage full flights to home countries when there is not a concentration of encounter points and/or limited overall encounters for certain nationalities. This purpose for laterals would be in addition to laterals to “decompress” crowded CBP processing sites.
3. The staging of deportation flights from more airports on the southern border to lower the necessity for lateral flights/buses (#2) and provide greater frequency of flights. Over time, these sites may begin to correlate to easy access for the processing sites where CFI in CBP is instituted.

At this time, recognizing it is early in the changes, it appears to me that we may be seeing an early evolution to this approach, although the next weeks and months are most uncertain.

The 40-month per day trend graph of flight and unique planes flown each day on page 12 does show that there has been an increase in ICE Air resources the last two months, particularly relative to the level of encounters. In April, ICE Air contractor, Classic Air Charter, employed 7 different charter carriers utilizing 31 unique planes, the most I recall since the mass removal flights to Haiti. Some of the carriers operated only a few flights but it is a sign that historical capacity is flexing.

The bar graph on page 13 illustrates the beginnings of some concentration by some nationalities for long distance and less concentrated or lower-level encounter returns. For example, Laredo represented only 3% of encounters of Ecuadorians and 13% of Hondurans, yet it represented 90% of removal flights to Ecuador and 59% to Honduras. Harlingen represented only 3% of encounters of Peruvian and 4% of Colombian, yet it represented 38% of the removal flights to Peru and 33% to Colombia.

The bar graph on page 14 illustrates the shift and broadening in departure airports for return flights with perhaps the kernels of the beginning of a shift toward the expected CFI in CBP sites of Rio Grande Valley, El Paso, Laredo, Yuma, and San Diego. It is extremely early to confirm this move, but it bears watching closely as the volume of CFI in CBP grows. Alexandria, LA has traditionally been a major deportation staging location for detention centers.

LAST 12 MONTHS

Over the last 12 months, all under President Biden, there have been a likely 8,329 ICE Air flight legs as compared to 4,845 in 2020, a startling, unexpected, and disappointing increase of 3,484 (72%) over 2020 and up 2,205 (36%) over 2021.

Of these flights, 1,421 were removal flights, an increase of 412 (41%) over the 1,009 in 2020, and 372 (35%) over 2021.

Shuffle flights, including lateral flights and those just moving people in the US to and between detention/deportation centers were 4,990 over the last 12 months, a staggering increase of 2,765 (124%) over the 2,225 in 2020, and up 1,331 (36%) over 2021. (pages 23,34,37,40).

April 2023 (note: there were only 20 weekdays in April so to compare on a day weighted basis to March with 23 days, the numbers reported for April would have been higher by about 15%.)

Total Flights of 745 in April, utilizing 31 different planes operated by 7 different charter carriers (IAero aka Swift, World Atlantic, GlobalX, OMNI, Eastern, National Cargo, and Gryphon) were down by 22 (3%) from March, and were above the average of the prior 6 months (694) by 51 (7%).

It is important to note that on a weekday equivalent basis to March, April total flights would have been 857, the highest month since I started recording in January 2020.

The decrease of 22 total flights from March can be attributed primarily to the decrease in removal flights by 28 (19%) and their associated connection and return flights, down 73 (19%) in total, offset by an increase in domestic shuffle flights of 51 (13%) driven by lateral flights below. (page 15).

Lateral Flights surged from 53 in March to 99 in April, up 46 (87%), but still below the peak of 134 in December 2022 (page 15). The key driver of the increase were flights from El Paso that increased by 41 (114%) to decompress as the encounters there continued to increase. In December of 2022 encounters in El Paso were 58,637 and they dropped to 33,135 in January before rising to 42,528 in March. There was a total of 77 lateral flights from El Paso, or 2.6 per day.

The total per day level of encounters accelerated through the month with the 10-day daily average progression of 2.3, 3.5, and 4.1 following the acceleration in encounters we believe. At their peak in December, average daily laterals were 5.1.

At the end of the month, on the 27th, as encounters increased significantly in the Rio Grande Valley (RGV), the lateral flights to Harlingen for expulsion into Matamoros were paused and there were 4 lateral flights from Harlingen (3 to San Diego and 1 to Tucson) and we understand multiple buses a day to Del Rio/Laredo. Our current understanding is the RGV has overtaken El Paso for the sector with the most encounters. To put that flip in perspective, encounters in March, the latest official reporting month, were 42,528 in EL Paso compared to 17,958 in the RGV. It would not be surprising to see RGV encounters approach 60,000 in April.

It is hard to isolate a specific reason for the RGV increase but it is no doubt rooted in a migrant population growing through new arrivals and expulsions into Matamoros, in a place where there is no shelter capacity driving intense desperation and the challenge of securing a very limited CBP One appointment. Moreover, recently the organized crime violence accelerated in the already dangerous state of Tamaulipas, reportedly because of a turf war with the extremely violent CJNG cartel challenging the Golfo cartel for control.

In addition to the 77 laterals from EL Paso (up 41; 114%) and the 4 from Harlingen (up 4), there were 12 from Yuma (down 2; 14%) and 6 from Tucson (up 3; 100%). It still appears that laterals continue to be used not just for decompression but to stage certain nationalities in removal flight locations to fill planes. (page 15).

In April, San Diego and Tucson began to again receive lateral flights. The increased laterals all went to Laredo with 34, up 16 (89%), San Diego at 19, up 19, and Tucson at 14, up 14. Harlingen laterals decreased by 3 (9%) to 32 as they could no longer accept laterals because of capacity.

Longitudinal Flights continued between Plattsburgh, NY and Texas in April with 3 flights, bringing the total to 6 since they began 13 March. All the April flights arrived in El Paso as did 2 of the 3 in March with the remainder to Harlingen.

In addition to these lateral flights there are lateral buses as well into which there is no visibility. However, in the proposed asylum ban rule it was indicated that in October 2022 the number of lateral flights and buses were very close in number.

Removal Flights decreased from 145 in March to 117 in April, down 28 (19%). On a weekday equivalent basis to March, April would have been 134, down just slightly, primarily as the result of Santa Semana when Central American countries suspend their acceptance of removal flights (pages 24,25).

Despite the decrease in removal flights there were notable increases in flights to several countries reaching their highest levels in over 3 years. Peru was up 4 (4 to 8), The Dominican Republic increased 4 (3 to 7). Moreover, Cuba received their first removal flights since December 2020.

Of the removal flight decrease of 22 from March, Ecuador was down 11 (35%), Honduras down 10 (37%), Guatemala down 7 (18%), Colombia down 3 (24 to 21), El Salvador down 3 (7 to 4), Brazil down 2 (3 to 1), and Africa down 2 (3 to 1). These decreases were offset by the increases noted above as well as Nicaragua up 1 (1 to 2).

Please see Country Detail Section below for more details

Flights to the Northern Triangle Countries of Guatemala (33), Honduras (17), and El Salvador (4) comprised 46% of all removal flights, down from March 51% (Santa Semana). With Colombia (21) and Ecuador (20) they comprised 81% of removal flights, the same as March.

In April, flights to South America (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil) totaled 50, or 43% of all removal flights, the same as March. That compared to April 2022 at 21 flights representing 18% of all removal flights. (pages 24,25).

The total number of people returned in April by air to Guatemala and Honduras is estimated at 6,045, or 21% of March encounters from those countries, down from 32% in March (Santa Semana). The number of people returned in April to South America is estimated at 5,750, or 17% of March encounters from those countries, down from 26%.

Shuffle flights of 440 jumped by 51 (13%) as a result of the increase of 46 lateral flights, primarily from El Paso (page 23).

Country Detail

Guatemala flights decreased by 7 (18%) from 40 to 33, as a result of fewer weekdays in the month and the Santa Semana pause (page 24). The 33 return flights were above April 2022 at 27 by 6 (22%), and above the prior 6-month average of 28 by 5 (18%).

Although we do not know encounters for April, these returns by air represented an estimated 26% of March encounters of Guatemalans, and 45% of those processed under T42, lower than March at 32% and 55%, respectively.

Based on reports by Guatemala Migration the US returned 751 (16%) fewer people by air in April (4,005) than March (4,756), but 1,092 (37%) more than April 2022.

With an unusually low the 1 Mexican Government deportation flight to Guatemala added to the ICE flights (pages 19,24), Guatemala received 34 flights returning 4,140 citizens by air from the US and Mexico. Combined with the [1,325 Guatemalans returned by land by Mexico](#) at Tecún Únam, 5,465 Guatemalans were returned by the US and Mexico, 4,695 (47%) less than in March, a significant drop. In April 2022 total returns were 7,206. Please see the section on Mexico's deportation flights below.

Honduras flights decreased by 10 (37%) from 27 in March to 17 in April, about double the decrease we might have expected based on the difference in days in the two months, but still 1 higher than in January 2023, the low month of the last 12. The 17 flights in April were 14 (45%) below April 2022 and 5 (23%) below the prior 6-month average (pages 23,35).

Encounters of Hondurans increased in March from 10,935 to 13,332 (22%) after a steady decline from 24,177 in June 2021. It will be interesting to see if May reverts to a higher level again.

In April, estimated returns by ICE Air to Honduras of 2,040 represented just 15% of March encounters and 28% of those subjected to T42, meaningfully down from 30% and 48%, respectively, in March and somewhat lower than return ratios for Guatemala.

Unusually, there were no removal flights from Mexico, and land returns from Mexico plummeted in April to 388 from 1,389 in March. In April the total air returns from the US and Mexico and land returns from Mexico totaled only 2,428, about ½ of the 5,946 returns in March.

Ecuador flights decreased meaningfully by 11 (35%) from 31 to 20, the same level as January 2020, and substantially above the 1 in April 2022 (pages 23,35). The monthly average flights April 2022 through November 2022 was 2 per month compared to the average from December 2022 through April 2023 of 22).

The increase in flights no doubt reflects the steady increase in encounters from February 2022 of 683 to 16,205 in December 2022, before falling to 9,047 in January and to 6,912 in March as the ramp up in flights most likely provided their deterrence intent. An estimated 32% of March encounters were returned by air in April, compared to about 8% in December 2022 and 44% in March (encounters on 1-month lag).

Colombia flights decreased slightly by 3 (13%) as might be expected based on an equivalent day basis with March (pages 23,35). The 21 in April was 3 (17%) over April 2022 at 18 and the prior 6-month average, also 18. Despite the relatively high and consistent level of flights, encounters continue to steadily increase after halving between December 2022 and January 2023. In January 2023 encounters dropped from 17,446 to 9,328 before jumping back to 16,875 in March.

Estimated returns of encounters increased from 6% in January to 24% in February and down to 12% in April (encounters on 1-month lag).

Colombia is pushing back on accepting additional flights post T42 based on concerns over how those returned are treated before and during their return. My understanding is that talks continue between

US and Colombian officials to resolve the issue. On May 4, this following was [published by the Colombian Migration Ministry](#).

"The use of restrictive elements such as hand and foot handcuffs, even for women mothers, has been one of the central aspects of the negotiations with the agencies, to dignify the treatment of Colombians," explained García Manosalva . "there are recurring complaints about the poor conditions in detention centers and mistreatment during flights, which represented a determining factor in the decisions adopted in the last few hours."

A day later the situation [seems to be resolved](#) as "two work groups were created with a human rights perspective that will develop two protocols that seek to guarantee the integrity of returned travelers," confirmed Carlos Fernando García, director of the Migration Colombia.

El Salvador flights decreased from 7 in March to 4 in April, compared to 8 in April 2022 and to the prior 6-month average also at 8 (page 23,35).

Although we don't know March returns from IOM statistics, an estimated **400 returns in April would represent only 7% of March encounters**, much less than that of other Northern Triangle countries that do accept T42 returns.

Dominican Republic flights accelerated from 3 in March to 7 in April, a very discontinuous change to the very regular 2 per month pattern indicating a new agreement for more flights may have been reached for the end of T42 (pages 23,35). Unfortunately, there is no visibility into encounters of people from the Dominican Republic, so it is difficult to understand if it related to a new trend, or how an estimated 700 returns relates to total encounters.

Peru flights jumped from a more normal level of 4 per month to 8 in April, compared to 0 in April 2022 and the prior 6-month average of 3 (pages 23,35). 5 of the 8 flights were in the last ½ of the month and it looks like the pattern may be 2 per week now. It's likely that similar negotiations as with Colombia noted above were held with Peru and they have agreed to accept more flights as T42 ends!

The initiation of flights no doubt started with discussions after encounters steadily increased from 860 in January 2022 to 9,744 in May, and ultimately the high of 11,366 in December, before falling precipitously to 3,931 in January, before increasing to 8,303 in March. Peru does accept T42 flights based on a 10 November court declaration (this could have changed), and estimated returns in April of 960 represent only 12% of February encounters.

Brazil flights dropped from 3 in March to 1 in April, compared to 2 in April 2022 and the prior 6-month average of 1.5 (pages 23,35).

Based on a court declaration in November 2022, Brazil does accept T42 flights. Based on CBP encounter data only 200 Brazilians that crossed the southern border have been subjected to T42 in the last 6 months, but 189 of those were in March, representing just 7% of March encounters of 2,670. I'm curious if flights will accelerate somewhat post T42.

Cuba experienced the first return flights since December 2020 on 24 April (pages 23,42). Flights were [widely reported](#) to be approved by Cuba now, although there was little specific information. However,

it does seem, based on the November court declaration and comments from others, that T42 flights are not approved. **It remains to be seen how many flights Cuba will accept post T42.**

Haiti experienced 1 flight in what now seems to be a monthly flight pattern, at least over the last 5 months (pages 20,24). At least 4 of the last 5 flights have reportedly deported between 22 to 43 people on each flight, and all departed from Alexandria, LA. Conditions in Haiti seems to be stunningly dangerous and [spiraling down by the day into deeper gang warfare](#).

Over the last 6 months, [only 428 Haitians have been encountered between southern ports](#). The vast majority (estimating around 80%+) of encounters at ports are related to T42 exemptions.

Meanwhile, [interdiction of Haitians at sea continues](#) with 4,458 interdicted in the first 6 months of the fiscal year (Oct) for an annual pace of 8,900, slightly above the prior year of 7,175

We are now 18 months past Del Rio and since 19 September 2021 there have been 245 flights to Haiti removing about 24,793 Haitians, and since inauguration 282 flights removing 26,893 Haitians, 1 in every 425 people in Haiti (page 20).

Small Jet Removals observed included 1 flight on Gryphon Air Gulfstreams that carry 12-15 passengers as a maximum to Algeria. (page 25).

Other Removal Destinations were Nicaragua (1), and Jamaica (1), both within generally normal patterns (page 24).

Mexico Operated Removal flights surprisingly plummeted to only 1, and that one to Guatemala on 3 April (page 19). The month following quarter end usually is low, but generally in the 10-15 range so this is highly unusual. Moreover, land returns of Hondurans at El Carmen dropped from 1,389 in March to 388 in April and land returns of Guatemalans at Tecún Úman dropped from 3,261 in March to 1,325 in April.

We hear detention numbers in Mexico are much lower following the horrific fire in Juarez and these declines in deportations could be a result of changes in INAMI enforcement, but that is only a pure guess at this point.

APRIL FLIGHT SUMMARY

In April, there were 745 likely ICE Air flights, down 22 (3%) from March, and up 111 (18%) from the same month of 2022. Removal flights of 117 were down 28 (19%) from March while domestic shuffle flights increased by 51 (13%).

- - 117 removal flights, with 116 return flights, to 12 different countries in Latin America, Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean.
- - 72 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 440 domestic shuffle flights between deportation locations.
- - 512 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).

- - **Since President Biden's inauguration there have been 16,584 likely ICE Air flights** including 2,879 removal flights. Including just the 264 lateral flights before October 2021 and 50 for October - December 2022 as expulsion flights would yield 3,193 removal flights.

Last 12 Months – 8,329 likely total flights

- - 1,421 removal flights, with 1,323 return flights, to at least 22 countries in Latin America, Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia.
- - 595 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 4,990 domestic shuffle flights between removal locations.
- - 5,585 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - 40% of flights were return related (removal, return and connections) and 60% were domestic shuffle flights.