

## ICE AIR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – FEBRUARY 2023

- **OVER 20,000 ICE AIR FLIGHTS DOCUMENTED SINCE JANUARY 2020** (see page 9).
- 20,178 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OPERATED IN 2020-FEB 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 15,072 TOTAL FLIGHTS.
- 3,684 REMOVAL FLIGHTS OPERATED IN 2020-FEB 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 2,617 REMOVAL FLIGHTS.
- 685 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OPERATED IN FEBRUARY, UP 141 (26%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH. FEBRUARY WAS 8 (1%) ABOVE THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 677.
- TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OF 685 WERE UP 166 (32%) FROM FEBRUARY 2022.
- LATERAL FLIGHTS INCREASED BY JUST 4 (9%) FROM 45 IN JANUARY 2022 TO 49 IN FEBRUARY, SIGNIFICANTLY BELOW 134 IN DECEMBER.
- 127 REMOVAL FLIGHTS IN JANUARY, JUMPED 44 (53%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH AND UP 15 (13%) FROM FEBRUARY 2022, AND UP 25 (25%) FROM THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 102.

**INCREASE IN ICE AIR RESOURCES** were outlined in the proposed asylum ban text in anticipation of the end of Title 42 and it seems to me that we may be seeing the deployment of some of these additional resources in February.

*“Already in FY 2022, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”) modified its ICE Air Operations’ air charter contract to increase the number of daily-use aircraft from 10 to 12 to meet the increasing air transportation demands, and CBP has executed a new contract that will provide for flight hours equivalent to approximately four to eight additional decompression flights per day.”*

### **LAST 12 MONTHS**

Over the last 12 months, all under President Biden, there have been a likely **8,079 ICE Air flight legs** as compared to 4,845 in 2020, a startling, unexpected, and disappointing increase of **3,234 (67%) over 2020** and up **1,955 (32%) over 2021**.

Of these flights, **1,402** were removal flights, an increase of **393 (39%) over the 1,009 in 2020**, and **353 (34%) over 2021**.

**Shuffle flights**, including lateral flights and those just moving people in the US to and between detention/deportation centers were **4,854 over the last 12 months, a staggering increase of 2,620 (118%) over the 2,225 in 2020, and up 1,186 (32%) over 2021.** (pages 18,29,32,35).

**FEBRUARY 2023** (note: there are only 28 days in February so to compare on a day weighted basis to months with 31 days, the numbers reported for February could be grossed up by about 10%.)

**Total Flights** of 685 in February, utilizing 32 different planes operated by 6 different charter carriers (IAero aka Swift, World Atlantic, GlobalX, OMNI, National Cargo, and Gryphon) were up meaningfully by 141 (26%) from January, and were above the average of the prior 6 months (677) by 8 (1%).

The increase of 141 total flights from January can be attributed primarily to the spike in removal flights by 44 and their associated connection and return flights, up 71. (page 18).

**Lateral Flights** increased just 4 in February to 49 from 45 in January and were substantially below the record 134 in December. The small increase possibly indicates a similar, but perhaps slightly higher level of encounters in February compared to January (page 10).

Interestingly, despite lateral flights from El Paso decreasing as described below, return flights from El Paso zoomed from a run rate of 1-2 per month to 22, of which 20 were to Guatemala which increased by 14 return flights. It appears there may have been a decision to return directly from El Paso to Guatemala rather than utilizing lateral flights to other processing centers.

It is worth noting that the daily trend in laterals has been increasing since the last 10 days in January when they fell to 1.0 per day. In February the 10-day period progression was 1.4, 1.5, and 2.5 per day, respectively. By way of comparison, in the 10-day period of December 11-20 laterals were 5.1 per day.

Lateral originations shifted a bit from EL Paso to Arizona, perhaps reflecting what we may see in February encounters and the direct flights to Guatemala as mentioned above. In February there were 21 lateral flights originating in El Paso, down 11 (32%), from 32 in January. Flights originating in Yuma were up from 12 to 16, and Tucson was up from 1 to 12.

Lateral flights arriving in Laredo were up 1 (3%) in January, from 30 to 31, while lateral flights arriving in Harlingen were up 4 (29%) from 14 to 18, and there were no lateral flights to San Diego, down from just 1 in January.

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 busses were very close in number.

**Removal Flights** in January leaped from 83 in January to 127 in February, up 44 (53%), and the highest level since August 2022 at 140. Note that had February had 31 days it most likely would have been close to 140. Removal flights were 15 (13%) more than in February 2022 (pages 18,29).

Of the removal flight increase of 44 from January, Guatemala was up 14 (22 to 36), Colombia was up 13 (9 to 22), Ecuador was up 8 (20 to 28), Honduras was up 6 (16 to 22), and Peru was up 3 (1 to 4). It is interesting to note that the collective encounters from these 5 countries dropped 27,988 (38%) from

**December to January (February encounters not yet known) perhaps signaling a step up in a deterrence-based approach.**

In addition to the removal flights above there were also flights to El Salvador (4), The Dominican Republic (2), Nicaragua (2), and 1 flight to each Haiti and Jamaica. There were also 2 small jet (15 passenger) flights stopping in Liberia, Cote 'D Ivoire, Mauritania, Ghana, and Nigeria.

**Flights to the Northern Triangle Countries** of Guatemala (36), Honduras (22), and El Salvador (4) **comprised 49% of all removal flights**, a bit lower than January at 53%, and **with Colombia (22) and Ecuador (28) they comprised 88% of removal flights, the same as January.** (pages 19,20).

**Direct T42 flight influence.** Based on a court declaration on 10 November by Blas Nuñez-Neto, countries now accepting T42 flights are Guatemala (36), Ecuador (28), Honduras (22), Colombia (22), Peru (4), Brazil (0), and Haiti (1), and they totaled 113 flights and made up 89% of all removal flights in February (pages 19,20).

This is not to say all the people returned on these flights were returned under T42. It is unknown how many were under T8, especially under the new asylum rule and expedited removal.

**The percent of Guatemalans and Hondurans returned by air as a percent of January encounters increased perhaps signaling an increased emphasis on deterrence by return to home country.** ICE Air returns to these 2 countries as a percent of prior month encounters typically ran in the 14% - 18% range in total, but in February it was around 28%. ICE Air returns as a percent of expulsions typically ran in the 25%-30% range, but in February it was about 45%. Honduras was at the high end of the typical range, but Guatemala far exceeded the typical range (see country details below).

*Please see Country Detail Section below for more details*

**Shuffle flights** of 366 increased by 26 (8%) as a result of the small increase of 5 in lateral flights and other domestic flights that move people to and around the interior (page 18). The detainee population grew 4,396 (19%) from 23 January at 23,030 to 27,426 on 27 February. Curious if this increase relates to a more aggressive use of expedited removal.

### **Country Detail**

**Guatemala** flights jumped up by 14 (64%) from 22 in January to 36 in February, the highest month since July 2022 at 46. The 36 removal flights in February compared to a prior 6-month average of only 24 (up 12, or 50%), even though encounters fell steadily over the last 6 months from 20,212 to 11,937 (41%). The 36 flights to Guatemala in February were 2(6%) above, February 2022 (page 19,21).

Although we do not know encounters for February, these returns by air represented an estimated 37% of January encounters of Guatemalans, and 59% of those processed under T42, around 2x the typical range.

Based on reports by Guatemala Migration the US returned 2,210 (99%) more people by air in February than January at 4,439, and 585 (15%) more than February 2022.

With the 12 Mexican Government deportation flights to Guatemala added to the ICE flights (pages 14,19), Guatemala received 48 flights returning 5,995 citizens by air from the US and Mexico.

Combined with the [1,829 Guatemalans returned by land by Mexico](#) at Tecún Únam 7,824 Guatemalans were returned by the US and Mexico, 3,199 (69%) more than in January, but still below the 10,863 that were returned in June 2022. Please see the section on Mexico's deportation flights below.

**Honduras** flights jumped by 6 (38%) in February from 16 to 22, more in line with the prior 6-month average of 24, and 12 (35%) below February of 2022.

Since June, encounters of Hondurans fell from 24,177 to 10,995 in February (down 55%) as flights decreased by 17 (44%) from 39 in June to 22 in February. We do not know February encounters (pages 11-13,18).

In February, estimated returns by ICE Air to Honduras of 1,980 represented 18% of December encounters and 31% of those subjected to T42, at the high end of the typical range and substantially below comparable return ratios of Guatemala.

Combined with the 12 Mexican Government deportation flights (pages 14,19) and Mexico section below) Honduras received 34 return flights in February, up from 18 in January, but in line with 30 in December. Air returns from Mexico and the US totaled an estimated 3,330 and combined with land returns from Mexico of 1,379 there were total returns to Honduras from Mexico and the US of 4,680, up from about 2,350 in January.

**Ecuador** flights increased significantly again from 20 to 28 (40%). This is the 4<sup>th</sup> month in a row of increases (monthly progression: 2,8,13,20,28) from only 1-3 flights per month from February 2022 to October 2022 (page 19).

The increase in flights no doubt reflects the steady increase in encounters from February 2022 of 683 to 16,204 in December 2022, before falling to 9,012 in January as the ramp up in flights most likely provided their deterrence intent. An estimated 22% of encounters were returned by air in January, compared to about 8% in November 2022.

**Colombia** flights leaped by 13 (144%) from 9 to 22 after 5 consecutive months of decreases from the 3-year high of 23 in August 2022 to 9 in January (page 18). It will be interesting to see encounters in February since there had been a steady downward trend from May 2022 at 19,320 to 9,310 in January. In January the return rate of Colombians by air was an estimated 24% of encounters.

Migration Colombia indicated to me that nothing has changed in their agreement with the US so any change in the pace of flights is the decision of the US.

**El Salvador** flights decreased 2 (33%) from 6 to 4 (page 19). Because there were a few flights that stopped in El Salvador on the way to Ecuador and I received information that these are most likely just fuel stops, I am not including them to be conservative. That information seems to be corroborated by IOM statistics citing the return of 420 Salvadorans from the US in December.

Special Note: There has always been uncertainty as to whether El Salvador accepted returns of those subject to T42. According to a court declaration in November, El Salvador DOES NOT accept T42 flights, which means these are all T8 returns, some of which could be expedited.

Although we don't know January returns from IOM statistics, **420 returns in December would represent only 9% of December encounters**, lower than other Northern Triangle countries (around 12%-15%) that do accept T42 returns.

**Peru** flights returned to 4 per month, 1 flight per week, from 1 flight in each of December and January. The decreased levels in those 2 months seems related to the recent unrest in Peru. From September through November there were weekly flights before the pause, and they have again resumed at that pace (page 19).

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. Peru does accept T42 flights based on a 10 November court declaration.

**Haiti** experienced 1 flight in what now seems to be a monthly flight pattern. There was a flight of reportedly 26 deportees on 13 December and another flight 31 January. On 28 February there was a flight with reportedly 22 people deported. (pages 15,19). Conditions in Haiti seems to be stunningly dangerous and [spiraling down by the day into deeper gang warfare](#).

For the 6<sup>th</sup> month in a row, in December CBP encounters of Haitians between southern ports was [below 200, with 3,127 at ports of entry](#), many through exceptions to T42.

Meanwhile, [interdiction of Haitians at sea continues](#) with 3,367 interdicted in the first 5 months of the fiscal year for an annual pace of 8,080, slightly above the prior year of 7,175

We are now 15 months past Del Rio and since 19 September 2021 there have been 243 flights to Haiti removing about 24,700 Haitians, and since inauguration 280 flights removing 26,800 Haitians, 1 in every 425 people in Haiti (pages 19).

**Small Jet Removals** observed included 2 flights on Gryphon Air Gulfstreams that carry 12-15 passengers as a maximum. Deportations on these route included Ghana, Nigeria, Liberia, Mauritania, and Cote D'Ivoire (pages 19,20).

**Other Removal Destinations** were The Dominican Republic (2), Nicaragua (2), and Jamaica (1), all within generally normal patterns (page 19,20).

**Mexico Operated Removal** flights jumped back to more normal levels following a 3 week pause in January as Mexico transitioned back to their old air carrier Magnicharters after 3 months with Viva Aerobus. In February I observed 35 removal flights operated by Mexico, up from only 10 in January. Excluding the contactor transition months, the prior 6-month average was 30 (page 14).

Flights to almost all countries increased with Honduras up 10 (2 to 12), Guatemala up 9 (3 to 12), Ecuador up 2 (1 to 3), El Salvador up 3 (1 to 4), Nicaragua up 1 (1 to 2), with Cuba unchanged at 2 (page 14). Departure cities in Mexico include primarily Mexico City, Tapachula, Saltillo, Reynosa, Hermosillo, and San Luis Potosi.

**Cuba** deportation 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. **To date I have not observed any likely deportation flights to Cuba.**

### **FEBRUARY FLIGHT SUMMARY**

**In February, there were 685 likely ICE Air flights, up 141 (26%) from January, and up 166 (32%) from the same month of 2022.** Removal flights of 127 were up 44 (53%) from January while domestic shuffle flights decreased by 26 (8%).

- - 127 removal flights, with 122 return flights, to 15 different countries in Latin America, Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean.
- - 70 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 366 domestic shuffle flights between deportation locations.
- - 436 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - **Since President Biden's inauguration there have been 15,072 likely ICE Air flights** including 2,617 removal flights. Including just the 264 lateral flights before October 2021 and 50 for October - December 2022 as expulsion flights would yield 2,931 removal flights.

### **Last 12 Months – 8,079 likely total flights**

- - 1,402 removal flights, with 1,295 return flights, to at least 30 countries in Latin America, Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia.
- - 528 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 4,854 domestic shuffle flights between removal locations.
- - 5,382 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - 40% of flights were return related (removal, return and connections) and 60% were domestic shuffle flights.