

ICE AIR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – NOVEMBER 2023

- IN NOVEMBER, DEPORTATION FLIGHTS TO VENEZUELA CONTINUED WITH 3 ADDING TO THE 3 IN OCTOBER FOR A TOTAL OF 6 RETURNING AN ESTIMATED 720 PEOPLE ON THE 6 FLIGHTS (ALSO 1 ON DEC 1 TO BE REPORTED ON DEC REPORT). MEXICO CONTINUED DEPORTATION FLIGHTS WITH 10 FOLLOWING 9 IN OCTOBER WHICH FOLLOWED A PAUSE SINCE APRIL. CHARTER FLIGHTS FROM HAITI TO NICARAGUA CONTINUED TO BE SUSPENDED AND SOME CHARTER CARRIERS ALSO SUSPENDED FLIGHTS FROM CUBA TO NICARAGUA. IRREGULAR ENTRIES OF HAITIANS INTO HONDURAS PLUMMET. SEE COUNTRY DETAIL SECTION FOR MUCH MORE.
- TOTAL FLIGHTS AVERAGED 28 PER WEEKDAY (EX THANKSGIVING), BELOW THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 32, AND DOWN FROM 30 IN OCTOBER.
- 594 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS IN NOVEMBER, DOWN 59 (9%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH AND 99 (14%) BELOW THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 693 AND DOWN 160 (21%) FROM NOVEMBER 2022.
- 140 REMOVAL FLIGHTS IN NOVEMBER, UP 5 (4%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH AND 16 (13%) ABOVE THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 124 AND UP SIGNIFICANTLY BY 39 (39%) OVER NOVEMBER 2022. GUATEMALA AT 6-YEAR HIGH AT 57 REMOVAL FLIGHTS.
- REMOVAL FLIGHTS AVERAGED 6.7 PER WEEKDAY IN NOVEMBER, ABOVE THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 5.7, AND THE SAME AS AUGUST, THE PRIOR HIGHEST MONTH SINCE T42 ENDED.
- 26,439 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS IN 2020-NOVEMBER 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 21,333 TOTAL FLIGHTS.
- 4,828 REMOVAL FLIGHTS IN 2020-NOVEMBER 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 3,761 REMOVAL FLIGHTS.
- LATERAL FLIGHTS WERE UP SLIGHTLY TO 23 FROM 20 IN OCTOBER, CONTINUING THE LOWER RELIANCE ON LATERALS POST T42.

TRANSITION FROM T42 TO T8

Both total flights and removal flights, on a per weekday basis, were at peak levels in August and now November has matched August for removal flights, about 1 per weekday over the prior 6-month

average. Total flights per weekday were slightly below the prior 6-month average. In both cases they are not unlike late-2021 and most of 2022 (pages 12,14).

The monthly progression of total flights per weekday from March through November is 33, 37, 32, 31, 28, 37, 33, 30, and 29, respectively. The low in July of 28 reflects the contract expiration issue one week lull. Total flights per weekday were paced similarly throughout the month.

In November no deportation routes were combined. In October, 12 deportation routes combined 2 stops which had not been done for many months.

Removal flights seems to have settled in between an average of 6-7 flights per weekday. The monthly progression of removal flights per weekday from March through November is 6.3, 5.9, 4.8, 5.5, 5.0, 6.7, 6.0, 6.1, and 6.7, 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 (pages 12,14).

LAST 12 MONTHS

Over the last 12 months, all under President Biden, there have been a likely 8,219 ICE Air flight legs as compared to 4,845 in 2020, a startling, unexpected, and disappointing increase of 3,374 (70%) over 2020 and up 2,095 (34%) over 2021 (pages 25,36,39,42).

Of these flights, 1,449 were removal flights, an increase of 440 (44%) over the 1,009 in 2020, and 400 (38%) over 2021.

Shuffle flights, including lateral flights and those just moving people in the US to and between detention/deportation centers, were 4,668 over the last 12 months, a staggering increase of 2,443 (110%) over the 2,225 in 2020, and up 1,009 (28%) over 2021.

Total Flights of 594 in November, utilizing 31 different planes operated by 5 different charter carriers (IAero aka Swift, World Atlantic, OMNI, GlobalX, and Gryphon-ATS) were down 59 (9%) from October, and were below the prior 6 months (693) by 99 (14%) (pages 25-27).

In October Border Patrol encounters (between ports) at the southern border were down 14% from 218,763 in September to 188,785 in October. It is unclear if the November increase in the Tucson and Del Rio sectors will be offset by decreases in other sectors.

Removal Flights increased by 5 (4%) from 135 to 140 which was 39 (39%) over November 2022, and up 16 (13%) from the prior 6-month average (pages 25-27). November was the 3rd highest month of the last 12 following August and March at 153 and 145, respectively.

The Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala (57), Honduras (40), and El Salvador (14) continued at an elevated proportion of removal flights with 79% of all removal flights in November, up slightly from 75% in October, but compared to only 57% in May. Conversely, the proportion of removal flights to South America remained low post-T42 at only 11%, approximately a third of May at 32%.

We don't know November encounters, but based on October, encounters of people from Northern Triangle countries were only 72% those of people from South America, while removal flights to Northern Triangle Countries were 7x those from South America.

Strikingly, in November, the estimated number of people returned to Northern Triangle countries represented 23% of October encounters from those countries. To return the same percentage (currently estimated at 2.5%) of October encounters from South American countries would require

about 135 (2x) more deportation flights, 82 more to Venezuela alone. Moreover, it would require those countries to accept around 15,000 more people.

Of the increase in removal flights of 5, Guatemala was up 10 (47 to 57) and Honduras was up 6 (34 to 40). Offsetting these increases El Salvador was down 6 (20 to 14), Nicaragua was down 2 (4 to 2), Ecuador was down 2 (6 to 4), and Peru was down 1 (4 to 3). It is important to note relative to the decrease in El Salvador that 10 of the 20 flights in October were coupled on the same route with Guatemala making the large increase in Guatemala even more striking.

Please see Country Detail Section below for more details

Lateral Flights increased slightly from 20 in October to 23 in November (page 17). It does appear that laterals are operated much less post T42. In November of 2022 laterals were extremely high at 128. It could be because of the end of “laterals for expulsions,” or it could be more rapid deportations directly from the border, especially to Northern Triangle countries, perhaps supported by the fact that in November 66% of removal flights departed from Texas border cities compared to 42% in November 2022 (page 16).

Over the last 6 months, from June to November, laterals have averaged 22 per month and that compares to 61 per month and 106 per month for the two prior 4-month periods. It is in fact one of the lowest 6-month periods since laterals began in March 2021.

Tucson, not surprisingly, originated the most laterals with 15 to McAllen (7), Laredo (6) and El Paso (2). To be honest, given the reporting of encounters in that sector I was surprised at only 15 and moreover, at a complete pause the 3rd week of November. 7 Laterals originated in San Diego to McAllen (3) and El Paso (4). On 1 November there was 1 lateral from Del Rio to El Paso.

McAllen received 10 laterals, Laredo 6 and El Paso 7.

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. Perhaps buses are being used in a significant way in Tucson and Del Rio.

Shuffle flights of 283 decreased by 78 (22%) and were 107 (27%) below the prior 6-month average (page 25). It is difficult to identify the reason for the decrease, although it could be related to the earlier removal directly from the border to Northern Triangle countries reducing the need to jockey between ICE detention center locations, as well as a small impact from lower lateral flights.

A possible contributing factor to less movement to detention centers is that the detention population was 39,013 on 24 November, almost 2x in last May, however it is too soon to declare a new level of shuffle flights.

Country Detail

Venezuela – removal [flights resumed](#) after at least 3 years with 3 flights in October and another 3 in November (plus 1 on December 1) removing an estimated total 720 Venezuelans (on the first 6 flights (page 26). We know that 327 people were deported on the first 3 flights because the Government of Venezuela (GoV) publicized heavily the first 3 flights ending on October 30 in all forms of media as part of their [“Vuelta a la Patria”](#) (Return to the Homeland) program, touting their welcome

back of those who they say were forced to leave by US policies against Venezuela. But curiously, since the 3rd flight there has been not a word mentioned by the GoV or in any State media about the flights, and it is not a stretch to assume that it is connected in some way to additional negotiations as the silence followed a 2 week pause in flights between 30 October and 16 November.

Here is a brief timeline for context to the flight timing and how it may relate to important negotiation events:

18 October: some sanctions to be lifted in consideration for release of prisoners and open elections including the opposition party, with a deadline of 30 November for compliance.

19 October: *{first deportation flight to Venezuela in at least 3 years}.*

22 October: Opposition party primary election won by leading candidate Ms. Machado.

30 October: Venezuela High Court suspends the election and GoV Attorney General launches a criminal investigation into the primary and organizers.

1 November: *{flights pause for 2 weeks}.*

7 November: US restates the 30 November deadline and indicates some sanctions could be reinstated for non-compliance.

16 November: *{Flights resume with flights 16, 22, 27 November and 1 December and complete silence by GoV about the flights}.*

30 November: On this day of the deadline to rescind public office bans, the [GoV agreed with a faction of the opposition](#) party to a process through which presidential candidates, including Ms. Machado, could attempt to get the High Court ban decision reversed. The challenge must happen before 15 December, but importantly, there is no deadline for the judges to act on the challenge.

1 December: *{deportation flight #7}.*

We can only assume that sanction relief will not be reversed pending a decision by the judges (who are loyal to Maduro) and that deportation flights will continue during this time. What will happen if the judges do not act with some haste is not clear. Originally DHS indicated “several” flights per week and at this point there have been 7 flights (counting 1 December) since 19 October, about 1 per week on average. Initially, Maduro indicated “weekly.”

Although 720 is a low number so far, to put it in perspective, ICE returns to Venezuela in 2018-2022 were 336, 326, 193, 176, 176, respectively, most if not all through commercial flights.

However, even assuming 12 flights per month (several per week), the monthly returns would still only represent 3% of the average monthly encounters over the last 3 months, only 1/8th the return rate of Northern Triangle countries. Venezuelan encounters did fall from September to October from 66,584 to 40,863 and entries to the Darién also fell from 67,358 to 40,841. Additionally, irregular Venezuelan entries recorded by Honduras dropped from September at 42,550 to 34,547 in October and about 26,600 in November.

The important question is, if the return rate remains as low as 3% and conditions in Venezuela remain desperate, will this just be a temporary lull.

It is concerning that there are no independent press or international humanitarian groups allowed to observe and follow-up with those deported for transparency because of the risk involved in returning

people who fled Maduro's dictatorship to his dictatorship. Initially the [Venezuelan Government reports tout](#) the safe return and [careful integration](#) of those returned with photos and now we see nothing. We do not know.

The first 3 flights departed from Harlingen, TX, but since then all flights have originated in Alexandria, LA.

Guatemala flights increased significantly to a 35-month record 57 eclipsing the prior record of 52 in August 2023. Flights were up 10 (21%) over October, up 18 (47%) over the prior 6-month average and up 31 (119%) over November 2022 (pages 26,37,40,43). It is possible that this significant increase is in anticipation of the typical week to 10-day pause Guatemala usually enforces over Christmas.

ICE returned 6,814 Guatemalans by air in November which is the highest number in any month in at least the past 6 years. The prior 6-year high was 6,198 in August 2023.

Encounters of Guatemalans in October fell meaningfully by 10,692 (31%) from 34,537 to 23,845, similar to July 2023 before a jump in August and September. Based on October encounters, returns in November represented 29% of encounters, and based on the average encounters of September and October, 24%, still a bit high but closer to a more typical level.

Mexico resumed deportations to Guatemala after a 5-month pause with 3 flights departing from Villahermosa and returning 350 Guatemalans in addition to the 1,009 returned by Mexico by land at Tecún Úman. The combination of these 3 return pathways was 8,173 (17% by Mexico), compared to 7,302 (57% by Mexico) in November 2022.

Honduras flights increased by 6 (18%) from 34 to 40, still below the 35-month high of 51 in August 2023, close to the prior 6-month average of 38, but significantly higher by 17 (74%) than November 2022 at 26 (pages 26,37,40,43).

Encounters of Hondurans fell by 5,491 (20%) in October to 21,819, the lowest level since July at 15,093. ICE returned 3,908 Hondurans by air in November, up 1,225 (52%) from October. The increase is the result of both more flights and of an increase in passengers per plane from around 75 in October to close to 100 in November. Based on October encounters, returns in November represented 18% of encounters, and based on the average encounters of September and October, 16%, up from the tiny 9% in October, but a bit below the early-2023 range.

After a six month pause Mexico began deportation flights to Honduras with 5 flights in October and another 4 in November with 3 departing Villahermosa and 1 from Tapachula, returning 358 people, down from the 1,069 Mexico returned by air in November 2022. Noting here that there seems to be a disconnect now in how Honduras and Mexico report returns of Hondurans by land, so I will not include those statistics other than to say Mexico reported returning 3,453 Hondurans, excluding air returns, in October while Honduras reported receiving none. Perhaps there was a change with Mexico reporting returns of Hondurans to Guatemala by land and Honduras excluding those returns now. Honduras reports only 35 returns by land in November by Mexico.

El Salvador flights decreased by 6 (30%) from 20 to 14, but still 3 (24%) over both the prior 6-month average and November 2022 (page 26). It is important to note that in October 10 of the 20 flights were coupled with flights to Guatemala so estimated returns of Salvadorans would be close for both months at around 1,400.

My understanding is El Salvador does restrict the number of returns and it is difficult to find reporting on returns to El Salvador, but reviewing the IOM data **it appears to me that there was an increase in the monthly range from a range of 700-1,000 to a range of 1,100 to 1,400 per month over the last half of 2023.**

Encounters of Salvadorans decreased modestly in October by 300 (4%) from 7,550 in October to 7,250. **Estimated returns of October encounters would be about 19%, about the same as the prior month, and consistent with Honduras.**

Ecuador flights decreased by 2 (4%) which was below the prior 6-month average by 3 (44%) and below November 2022 by 4 (50%) (page 26). **This is a dramatic change from 1Q 2023 with an average of 26 flights per month even though average encounters of Ecuadorians was quite similar the prior two months of each period around an average of 14,000 per month.** It is very unclear to me why flights have decreased so much in light of similar encounter levels unless either Ecuador is now more restrictive with returns or ICE is facing capacity/cost issues.

Encounters in October did decrease by 3,391 (22%) from 15,545 in September to 12,154 in October. **Estimated returns in November represented only 4% of encounters in October, the same as the already low level in October.**

Peru flights decreased by 1 (25%) from 4 to 3, which is 3 (45%) under the prior 6-month average which is skewed by an outlier of 11 in the month of August (page 26). There were 4 flights in November 2022.

Encounters of Peruvians have been relatively consistent the last 4 months between a range of 2,473 to 4,333, with little change in October at 4,132. Returns in November are estimated at 8% of October encounters.

Colombia flights remained steady at 5 for the last 3 months, which is 4 (44%) below the prior 6-month average and 12 (71%) below November 2022 at 17 (page 26).

It is interesting to note that in **March with 24 flights there were 17,055 encounters** of Colombians while there were only **5 flights in October and November when encounters were 13,643 and 13,773,** respectively.

It is estimated that returns in November represented only about 4% of October encounters, down from 6% in September and around 19% in July. Like for Ecuador, these declines in return flights are difficult to explain.

Dominican Republic flights remained steady at 2 for the last 3 months which is 1 below the prior 6-month average and the same as November 2022 (page 26). **For the 18 months prior to March 2023 there were 2 flights per month and then flights were somewhat variable over the last 6 months ranging between 2 and 7 (record high) before returning to the historic 2 per month.**

Brazil flights remained steady at 1 over the last 3 months, the same as the prior 6-month average and 1 below November 2022. (page 26). Encounters of Brazilians have been relatively consistent over the last 6 months ranging from 2,473 in October to 3,816 in May. Returns in November are estimated at about 5% of October encounters.

Cuba on April 24, 2023, experienced the first return flights since December 2020, followed by 1 in each of the following 8 months including November (page 26). It seems that the pattern now is for 1 flight per month, generally toward the last weeks of the month.

There have often been fewer than 50 people on a flight and in fact the **Government of Cuba announced that only 376 people have been returned on the 8 flights this year, an average of only 47 people per flight. Only 37 people were on the flight in November.** It should be noted that only 1,212 Cubans crossed between SW border ports in October, up from 877 in October.

Mexico operated 3 deportation flights to Cuba in November, down 1 from 4 in October following the air deportation pause since April (page 21).

Haiti received 1 flight in November, the same as every month since December 2022 except for the cancelled flight in July (0) and the make-up flight in August (2) (pages 13,26). It was reported there were 17 people returned on the November flight.

The November flights included a very controversial and potentially destabilizing return of Guy Phillippe who in 2004 led the overthrow of President Aristide and who then spent over a decade evading the US DEA as a drug trafficker before being convicted.

Over the last 12 months, based on the best information we have, there have been an average of about 41 people per flight, or 497 people returned since December 2022. **Over the last 12 months, only 1,017 Haitians have been encountered between southern ports. The vast majority (estimating around 85%+) of encounters at ports of Haitians of 73,080 over the last 12 months have been related to T42 exemptions or CBP One appointments.**

Since inauguration 289 flights have removed 27,218 Haitians, 1 in every 420 people in Haiti. Since the mass return beginning 19 September 2021, 25,119 Haitians have been returned on 252 flights.

Haiti to Nicaragua Flights Paused – Cuba to Nicaragua Curtailed It was reported that since August there were over 260 flights from Haiti to Nicaragua with seats priced in the \$3,000 - \$5,000 range. Nicaragua has no visa restrictions and is reported to help these passengers transit to the border of Honduras for a northbound journey.

I observed over 150 flights in just the two weeks between 11 and 25 October, with about 10 each of the last two weekend days. On 30 October the Miami Herald reported that all these flights would be halted, which they were except for 2 trailing flights. There were a smaller number of flights per day from Cuba to Nicaragua, perhaps 2-4.

On 21 November, the US State Department announced new visa restrictions “against owners, executives, and/or senior officials of companies providing charter flights into Nicaragua designed for use primarily by irregular migrants to the United States.” No flights from Haiti to Nicaragua have resumed and there appears to be only around 1 flight per day from Cuba to Nicaragua, most on the Venezuelan state airline Conviasa.

The restriction of flights appears to have made a dramatic difference in Haitian irregular entries into Honduras, reportedly facilitated by Nicaragua and Nicaraguan actors. In September and October Honduras reported irregular entries by Haitians of 14,898 and 35,529, respectively, and that compared to only 1,558 in July, 4,051 in August, and 5,475 in November.

Irregular entries into Honduras by Cubans followed a similar, but more muted pattern with a trend of July through November of 6,721, 11,343, 19,288, 17,513, and 11,830, respectively.

Africa and Other Long Range Countries received 6 deportations on 3 small jet (14-16 passenger) routes. Two routes to the African countries of Mauritania, Ghana, Liberia, Cape Verde, and Senegal, and 1 to India (pages 26,27).

Other Removal Destinations were Nicaragua (2), and Jamaica (1), both within generally normal patterns (page 26).

Mexico Operated Removal flights resumed 12 October after they surprisingly stopped altogether in June through September following just 1 flight in each of April and May to Guatemala (page 20). The 6-month average prior to April was 24, and there were 36 deportations in March 2023. All removal flights have been on charter carrier Viva Aerobus.

In November there were 10 deportation flights by Mexico to Honduras (4), Guatemala (3), and Cuba (3) (page 27). Flights generally departed from Villahermosa, Mexico City, and Tapachula. It was [reported](#) that flights to Cuba were paused on 16 November and there has been no flights to Cuba since 15 November.

I have been a little surprised that there have not been more deportation flights by Mexico and to more countries as it was [reported](#) that there would be “intensified” returns to Cuba and Northern Triangle countries and other countries like Ecuador and Venezuela have been mentioned in the press.

NOVEMBER FLIGHT SUMMARY

In November, there were 594 likely ICE Air flights, down 59 (9%) from October, and down 160 (21%) from the same month of 2022. Removal flights of 140 were up 5 (4%) from October while domestic shuffle flights decreased by 78 (22%).

- - 140 removal flights, with 137 return flights, to 19 different countries in Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, and India.
- - 34 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 283 domestic shuffle flights between deportation locations.
- - 317 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - **Since President Biden’s inauguration there have been 21,333 likely ICE Air flights** including 3,761 removal flights. Including just the 264 lateral flights before October 2021 and 50 for October - December 2022 as expulsion flights would yield 4,075 removal flights.

Last 12 Months – 8,219 likely total flights

- - 1,449 removal flights, with 1,400 return flights, to at least 35 countries in Latin America, Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, Southeast Asia, Asia, India, and the Caucasus.
- - 702 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 4,668 domestic shuffle flights between removal locations.
- - 5,370 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - 44% of flights were return related (removal, return and connections) and 56% were domestic shuffle flights.

