

ICE AIR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – OCTOBER 2023

- IN OCTOBER, DEPORTATION FLIGHTS TO VENEZUELA RESUMED AFTER MANY YEARS WITH 3 FLIGHTS DEPARTING 362 PEOPLE. MEXICO RESUMED DEPORTATION FLIGHTS AFTER A PAUSE SINCE APRIL WITH 5 TO HONDURAS AND 4 TO CUBA. HAITI SUSPENDED FLIGHTS TO NICARAGUA AFTER A RECENT BULGE INCLUDING ABOUT 150 FLIGHTS IN RECENT 2 WEEKS.
- TOTAL FLIGHTS AVERAGED 30 PER WEEKDAY, BELOW THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 33, AND DOWN FROM 33 IN SEPTEMBER.
- 653 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OPERATED IN OCTOBER, DOWN 49 (7%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH AND 55 (8%) BELOW THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 708 AND DOWN 32 (5%) FROM OCTOBER 2022
- 135 REMOVAL FLIGHTS IN OCTOBER, UP 8 (6%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH AND 14 (12%) ABOVE THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 121 AND UP SIGNIFICANTLY BY 52 (63%) OVER OCTOBER 2022.
- REMOVAL FLIGHTS AVERAGED 6.1 PER WEEKDAY IN OCTOBER, 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 (TRANSITION TO TITLE 8 IN MAY) TO 6.7 IN AUGUST.
- 25,845 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OPERATED IN 2020-OCTOBER 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 20,739 TOTAL FLIGHTS.
- 4,688 REMOVAL FLIGHTS OPERATED IN 2020-OCTOBER 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 3,621 REMOVAL FLIGHTS.
- LATERAL FLIGHTS WERE DOWN TO 20 FROM 26 IN SEPTEMBER, 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. In September and October they 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. 11,13).

The monthly progression of total flights per weekday from March through September is 33, 37, 32, 31, 28, 37, 33, and 30, respectively. The low in July of 28 reflects the contract expiration issue one week lull.

Total flights per weekday were somewhat low the first 10 days of October at 25 compared to a relatively stable 32 per weekday the rest of the month. Almost all the intramonth differential can be accounted for by lower removal related flights the first 10 days of October.

It should be noted that between the 10th and 19th of October there were 12 deportation routes that combined 2 stops in each route, perhaps to fill planes as encounters slowed and flights were planned. It is also possible that there was a push to reduce the population in over-capacity holding facilities by removing people rather than have them wait for a unique plane to their home country. All these multi-stop routes included Guatemala with 10 combined with El Salvador and 2 with Nicaragua (see country detail section below).

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, 6.0, and 6.1, 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 11,13).

LAST 12 MONTHS

Over the last 12 months, all under President Biden, there have been a likely 8,379 ICE Air flight legs as compared to 4,845 in 2020, a startling, unexpected, and disappointing increase of 3,534 (73%) over 2020 and up 2,255 (37%) over 2021 (pages 24,35,38,41).

Of these flights, 1,410 were removal flights, an increase of 401 (40%) over the 1,009 in 2020, and 361 (34%) over 2021.

Shuffle flights, including lateral flights and those just moving people in the US to and between detention/deportation centers were 4,908 over the last 12 months, a staggering increase of 2,683 (121%) over the 2,225 in 2020, and up 1,249 (34%) over 2021.

Total Flights of 653 in October, utilizing 28 different planes operated by 4 different charter carriers (IAero aka Swift, World Atlantic, GlobalX, and Gryphon-ATS) were down 49 (7%) from September, and were below the prior 6 months (708) by 55 (8%) (pages 24-26).

In September Border Patrol encounters (between ports) at the southern border were up significantly (21%) from 181,054 in August to 218,763 in September and all indications point a to decrease in October.

Removal Flights increased by 8 (6%) from 127 to 135 which was 52 (63%) over October 2022, and up 14 (12%) from the prior 6-month average (pages 25,26).

The Northern Triangle countries of Guatemala (47), Honduras (34), and El Salvador (20) continued at an elevated proportion of removal flights with 75% of all removal flights in October, down slightly from 78% in September, but compared to only 57% in May. Conversely, the proportion of removal flights to South America remained low post-T42 at 14%, approximately half of May at 32%.

We don't know October encounters, but based on September, encounters of people from Northern Triangle countries were only 67% those of people from South America, while removal flights to Northern Triangle Countries were 5.3x those from South America.

Of the increase in removal flights of 8, El Salvador accounted for 10 (10 to 20), Venezuela up 3 (0 to 3), Asia up 3 (0 to 3), Nicaragua up 3 (1 to 4) and Guatemala up 2 (45 to 47). These increases were offset by decreases in flights to Honduras, down by 10 (44 to 34) and Ecuador down 3 (9 to 6) (page 25). It is

important to note relative to the increase in El Salvador that 10 of the 20 flights were coupled on the same route with Guatemala (see country detail).

Please see Country Detail Section below for more details

Lateral Flights decreased from 26 in September to 20 in October (page 16). It does appear that, even though we understand encounters fell around the second week of October that lateral flights are less used post T42. It could be because the end of “laterals for expulsions,” or it could be more rapid deportations directly from the border, especially to Northern Triangle countries, or a recent drop in encounters, but probably a combination.

It was interesting that there were no laterals between the 20th and 29th, following what we understand to be a reasonably large drop in encounters.

Over the last 5 months, from June to October, laterals have averaged 25 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 5-month periods since laterals began in March 2021.

El Paso received the most laterals at 12 followed by Laredo and McAllen, both at 4. The most laterals originated in Tucson with 7, followed by Yuma and McAllen both with 4. San Diego originated 3 and at the end of the month Del Rio originated 2 for the first time in a long time.

It is important to note lateral flights to San Diego ended 10 September at the same time street releases began, and this month it appeared 3 laterals originated in San Diego.

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 361 decreased by 36 (9%) (page 24). It is difficult to identify the reason for the decrease from September, 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.

The last report of the detention center population was on 24 September, and it was 35,289. Normally the statistics are updated every two weeks so perhaps it is a fiscal year-end delay.

Country Detail

Venezuela – removal flights resumed after at least 3 years with 3 flights (through 4 November) removing a total of 326 people based on reports from the Venezuelan Government (page 25). The flights operated on October 18, 23, and 30. Initial indications from DHS were that there would several a week with Maduro indicating “weekly.” So far flights have been about 1 per week so we’ll watch to see if they increase.

Although 326 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.

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. The Venezuelan Government reports tout the safe return and careful integration of those returned. We do not know.

Encounters of Venezuelans, between SW border ports, rocketed in September from 11,427 in July to 22,090 in August to 54,833 in September. One must question if encounters of Venezuelans will fall significantly in the long term even with several flights per week. How many of the 55,000 people will believe that the less than 1% risk of being sent to Venezuela is a bad trade in the long run. To be sure, Mexican enforcement, especially the almost elimination of the “La Bestia” train option, and the DHS surround sound of the flights have dampened encounters, but for how long?

Each of the 3 flights departed from Harlingen, TX and stopped in Miami which may just have been a fuel stop before arriving in Caracas. There appeared to be a flight planned for October 25 which was cancelled, but that is not confirmed.

Guatemala flights increased modestly by 2 from 45 to 47 in October which is the second highest month in at least 46 months behind 52 in August 2023 (pages 25,36,39,42). October was 11 (31%) above the prior 6-month average and 27 (135%) over October 2022.

However, it is important to note that 12 flights were coupled with flights to other countries, 10 to El Salvador and 2 to Nicaragua, so even though flights increased by 2 over September the number of people returned fell from 5,464 in September to 5,156 in October. As a result, returnees per plane fell from around 120 per plane to 111 on average.

Encounters of Guatemalans in September decreased only slightly from their recent elevated level as they fell from 37,937 in August to 34,537 in September, contrasted with an average in 1Q2023 and 2Q2023 in the range of 13,500. Based on September encounters ICE Air returned just 15% of encounters compared to the 20% - 25% range before encounters elevated.

For the fifth month in a row there were no returns from deportation flights from Mexico to Guatemala in October. However, flights did resume 3 November with a flight from Villahermosa to Guatemala. Mexico did return 1,061 Guatemalans by land at Tecún Úman, down 1,113 (51%) from September (2,174), and down a significant 2,066 (66%) from October 2022.

Combined with the ICE Air returns, total returns by the US and Mexico in October were 6,217, down 1,847 (23%) from September and up 212 (4%) from October 2022.

Honduras flights fell for the second month in a row from a record high in August of 51 to 44 in September and down 10 (23%) to 34 in October, which was just 2 (6%) below the prior 6-month average, but 12 (55%) above October 2022 (pages 25).

Encounters of Hondurans has been somewhat erratic with June – September of 15,093, 26,023, 35,168, and 27,310, respectively.

In the face of the elevated level of encounters the last 3 months, returnees per plane has almost halved. It could be that the flights are scheduled and operated to decompress the holding facilities quickly regardless of the plane capacity, or restrictions by Honduras, but it was a curious change noticed last month with only 66 per plane in September and up to 76 per plane in October based on Government of Honduras return statistics. In contrast, per plane numbers were 111 and 92, for July and August, respectively.

In October ICE Air returned 2,573 Hondurans, down 334 (11%) from September and 272 (10%) from October 2022. These returns accounted for only about 9% of total encounters of Hondurans compared to the range of 20% - 25% when encounters were lower, begging the question even more of why per-plane passenger levels are so low.

After a six month pause Mexico began deportation flights to Honduras with 5 flights in October returning 401 people (see Mexico section below). Land returns to El Carmen, Mexico have only been reported through October 15 and then just 1 bus with 59 returnees. Often when there is a gap in one statistic reported by Guatemala when others are updated it means there has been no activity. That could mean that land returns of Hondurans at El Carmen ended when flights resumed on 12 October.

From April through October 2022 Mexico returned 29,767 Hondurans compared to only 5,491 in the same period in 2023, a dramatic decrease of 24,276 (82%). For the same 7-month period the US returned 23,655 Hondurans in 2023 compared to 28,332 in 2022, a far more modest decrease of 4,677 (17%).

El Salvador flights increased significantly by 10 (100%) from 10 to 20, up 10 (100%) from the prior 6-month average and 10 (100%) over October 2022 (page 25).

It is important to note that 10 of these flights were coupled with routes to Guatemala and, based on reporting by Guatemala I estimate there were 40 people, on average, to El Salvador on each of these 10 flights. If so, that would mean an estimated 1,400 returns in October compared to 1,000 in September, up 40%.

Encounters of Salvadorans increased 1,470 (24%) in September after increasing by 2,127 (54%) from 3,953 in July to 6,080 in August. Estimated returns of September encounters would be 19%, about the same as the prior month.

Ecuador flights decreased by 3 (33%) from 9 to 6 which was 4 below the prior 6-month average and 4 above October 2022 (page 25). 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 13,631 in August followed by another increase to 15,545 in September. Unless October encounters decreased rapidly it is not clear why flights decreased.

Estimated returns in October represented only 4% of encounters in September, down from the already low prior month at 7%.

Peru flights remained steady at 4 in October, 2 (33%) below the prior 6-month average and 1 (33%) over October 2022 (page 25). Encounters of Peruvians have increased from a relatively low level the last 2 months from 2,473 in July to 3,145 in August and 4,333 in September. Returns in October are estimated at 9% of September encounters, down significantly from August at an estimated 35% with an abnormally high 11 flights.

Colombia flights remained steady at 5 after falling for 6 consecutive months from 24 in March 2023. October was 7 (58%) below the prior-month average and 15 (75%) below October 2022 (page 25). 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 following 13,643 encounters in September.

It is estimated that returns in October represented only about 4% of September encounters, down from 6% in September and around 19% in July.

Dominican Republic flights remained steady at 2 which is 2 below the prior 6-month average and the same as October 2022 (page 25). Flights to the Dominican have been somewhat variable at low level over the last 6 months ranging between 2 and 7 (record high).

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 had been around 2,500 Dominicans returned by the US this year which would be a little over 90 per plane. Encounters of Dominicans are not disclosed individually.

Brazil flights remained steady at 1, the same as the prior 6-month average and October 2022 (page 25). Encounters of Brazilians have been relatively consistent over the last 6 months ranging from 2,826 in September to 3,816 in May. Returns in October are estimated at about 5% of September encounters.

Cuba on April 24, 2023, experienced the first return flights since December 2020, followed by 1 in each of the following 7 months including October (page 25). 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 349 people have been returned on the 7 flights this year, an average of only 50 people per flight. Only 27 people were on the flight in October.** It should be noted that only 877 Cubans crossed between SW border ports in September.

Mexico resumed deportation flights with 4 to Cuba following the air deportation pause since April.

Haiti received 1 flight in October, the same as the prior 6-month average and 1 over October 2022 (pages 21,25). 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 11 months, based on the best information we have, there have been an average of about 44 people per flight, or 481 people returned since December 2022. Over the last 12 months, only 1,112 Haitians have been encountered between southern ports. The vast majority (estimating around 85%+) of encounters at ports of Haitians of 75,018 over the last 12 months have been related to T42 exemptions or CBP One appointments.

Since inauguration 288 flights have removed 27,201 Haitians, 1 in every 420 people in Haiti. Since the mass return beginning 19 September 2021, 25,102 Haitians have been returned on 251 flights. I observed over 150 flights in just the two weeks between 11 and 25 October.

Haiti to Nicaragua Flights Paused 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. As of today (5 Nov) flights have not resumed although the Director of Aviation in Haiti reported that they would resume following a series of actions related to safety.

Just for perspective, if each plane carried just 80 passengers the last two weeks of operation would have carried 12,000 people from Haiti to Nicaragua.

Africa and Other Long Range Countries received 6 deportations on 3 small jet (14-16 passenger) routes. One to the African countries of Kenya, DC Congo, and Angola. Another to Georgia and Uzbekistan, and 1 to South Korea (pages 25,26).

Other Removal Destinations were Nicaragua (4), and Jamaica (1), both within generally normal patterns (page 26). Two of the Nicaraguan flights were coupled with flights to Guatemala pushing it 2 over the prior 6-month average.

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 October there were 5 removal flights to Honduras returning 401 people and 4 return flights to Cuba. Cuba confirmed flights on 3 days, and I observed 2 on 1 day, one from Tapachula and 1 from Villahermosa. 5 of the return flights originated in Villahermosa where we see regular internal INM movement flights from Mexican border locations landing. 3 departed from Tapachula, heavily populated with migrants and 1 from Mexico City.

Noting as well that I observed a removal flight to Guatemala 3 November removing 128 people. It has [been reported](#) that there would be “intensified” returns to Cuba and Northern Triangle Countries.

OCTOBER FLIGHT SUMMARY

In October, there were 653 likely ICE Air flights, down 49 (7%) from September, and down 32 (5%) from the same month of 2022. Removal flights of 135 were up 8 (6%) from September while domestic shuffle flights decreased by 36 (9%).

- - 135 removal flights, with 120 return flights, to 19 different countries in Latin America, Africa, the Caribbean, Asia, and the Caucasus.
- - 37 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 361 domestic shuffle flights between deportation locations.
- - 398 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - **Since President Biden’s inauguration there have been 20,739 likely ICE Air flights** including 3,621 removal flights. Including just the 264 lateral flights before October 2021 and 50 for October - December 2022 as expulsion flights would yield 3,890 removal flights.

Last 12 Months – 8,379 likely total flights

- - 1,410 removal flights, with 1,356 return flights, to at least 35 countries in Latin America, Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, Southeast Asia, Asia and the Caucasus.
- - 705 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 4,908 domestic shuffle flights between removal locations.
- - 5,613 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - 40% of flights were return related (removal, return and connections) and 60% were domestic shuffle flights.

