

## ICE AIR EXECUTIVE SUMMARY – May 2023

- AS ANTICIPATED, OBSERVED A LULL IN REMOVAL FLIGHTS WITH THE ABRUPT END OF T42 FLIGHTS AND BEFORE T8 EXPEDITED REMOVAL DEPORTATIONS RAMP UP. (SEE T42 TO T8 TRANSITION SECTION BELOW.) ALEXANDRIA, LA, A MAJOR DEPORTATION STAGING SITE REGAINING PROMINENCE.
- 22,399 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OPERATED IN 2020-MAY 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 17,293 TOTAL FLIGHTS.
- 4,052 REMOVAL FLIGHTS OPERATED IN 2020-MAY 2023. SINCE INAUGURATION: 2,985 REMOVAL FLIGHTS.
- 709 TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OPERATED IN MAY, DOWN 36 (5%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH. MAY WAS 5 (1%) BELOW THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 704.
  - IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT ON A WEEKDAY EQUIVALENT BASIS TO APRIL, MAY WOULD HAVE REGISTERED A DECREASE OF 128 (17%). THERE WERE 3 MORE WEEKDAYS IN MAY THAN APRIL.
- TOTAL ICE AIR FLIGHTS OF 709 WERE DOWN 103 (13%) FROM MAY 2022.
- LATERAL FLIGHTS PLUMMETED BY 55 (56%) FROM 99 IN APRIL TO 44 IN MAY DRIVEN BY A DECREASE OF LATERALS FROM EL PASO OF 60 (78%). THERE WERE NO LONGITUDINAL FLIGHTS FROM PLATTSBURGH, NY TO TEXAS.
- 106 REMOVAL FLIGHTS IN MAY, DOWN 11 (9%) FROM THE PRIOR MONTH AND DOWN 36 (25%) FROM MAY 2022. DOWN 5 (5%) FROM THE PRIOR 6-MONTH AVERAGE OF 111. NOTE THAT ON A WEEKDAY EQUIVALENT BASIS TO APRIL, MAY REMOVALS WOULD HAVE BEEN 92, DOWN 25 (21%) FROM APRIL. LIKE MAY, MARCH HAD 23 WEEKDAYS AND RECORDED 145 REMOVALS, 39 (37%) MORE THAN MAY.

### **TRANSITION FROM T42 TO T8**

**I am seeing the beginning of the transition from T42 expulsion flights to T8 deportation flights and expedited removals. As expected, there was a lull in removal flights at the abrupt ending of T42 and T42 flights and before T8 / expedited removal deportation flights ramp up.**

**In March and April there were an average of 6.3 and 5.9 removal flights per weekday, respectively, and these levels continued at 5.4 per day in May through the 11<sup>th</sup>. However, from the 11<sup>th</sup> through the 24<sup>th</sup> average removals per weekday dropped about 40% to just 3.6 per day, before increasing to 5.0 per weekday from the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> (please see the 3+year trend chart on pages 11,13; box 7).**

The full month of May removal per weekday of 4.6 was down 1.3 per weekday (22%) from April and below March by 1.7 per weekday 27%.

**Activity at Alexandria LA, traditionally a major deportation staging location, is regaining prominence.**

In February through April about 10%-12% of all ICE Air flights (domestic and removal) touched Alexandria in May and that increased to 17%, up about 50%. Moreover, outbound removal related flights (connect and removal) from Alexandria constituted around 30% of removal flights in February/March and in April 40% and up to 59% in May; 1 of every 1.7 removal flights touched Alexandria. **It will be interesting to see if some of this activity moves back to locations along the border as CFIs in CBP custody ramp up.**

**There were 2 routes toward the end of the month that bundled 2 Central American countries** so it will be interesting to see if bundling will become more prevalent to more quickly operate full planes, rather than wait for large numbers of unique nationalities, as was generally done under T42.

**Detention numbers and those in expedited removal will be interesting to monitor as well. In 2 months, from 12 March to 7 May, people in ICE detention declined steadily from 27,723 to 21,293 (down 6,430; 23%), before popping up to 27,330 on 21 May (up 6,037; 28%).** Moreover, the number in expedited removal in detention increased from 8,965 on 7 May to 14,430 on 21 May (up 5,465; 61%).

### **LAST 12 MONTHS**

**Over the last 12 months, all under President Biden, there have been a likely 8,226 ICE Air flight legs as compared to 4,845 in 2020, a startling, unexpected, and disappointing increase of 3,381 (70%) over 2020 and up 2,102 (34%) over 2021.**

Of these flights, **1,385 were removal flights, an increase of 376 (37%) over the 1,009 in 2020, and 336 (32%) over 2021.**

**Shuffle flights, including lateral flights and those just moving people in the US to and between detention/deportation centers were 4,971 over the last 12 months, a staggering increase of 2,746 (123%) over the 2,225 in 2020, and up 1,312 (36%) over 2021.** (pages 24,35,37,39).

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

**Total Flights of 709 in May, utilizing 30 different planes operated by 5 different charter carriers (IAero aka Swift, World Atlantic, GlobalX, Eastern, and Gryphon) were down by 36 (5%) from April, and were below the average of the prior 6 months (704) by 5 (1%).**

***It is important to note that on a weekday equivalent basis to April, May total flights would have been 617, down 128 (17%).***

**The decrease of 36 total flights from April can be attributed to the decrease in removal flights and their associated connection and return flights, down 32 (10%) (page 24).**

**Lateral Flights plummeted by 55 (56%) to 44, more in line with the January to March average of 49. The key driver of the decrease was a decrease in flights from El Paso of 60 (78%) from 77 (2.6 per day) in April to 17 in May (.6 per day) as encounters dropped considerably after 11 May. It was**

reported that encounters dropped from a peak before 11 May of 10,000 per day to around 3,000 per day.

**In addition to the 17 laterals from EL Paso (down 60; 78%), there were 11 from Harlingen (up 7; 175%), 6 from Yuma (down 6; 50%) and 6 from San Diego (up 6), and 4 from Tucson (down 2; 33%).** 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.

The Rio Grande Valley saw a continued elevated level of encounters, especially with a pre-T8 spike, so Harlingen received just 1 lateral flight (down 31; 97%), a significant reversal. Laredo received 28 lateral flights (down 6; 18%), San Diego received 11 (down 8; 42%), Tucson 4 (down 10; 71%) (page 16).

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.

**Longitudinal Flights** paused between Plattsburgh, NY and Texas in April with no flights, leaving the total at 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.

**Removal Flights** decreased from 117 in April to 106 in May, down 11 (9%). On a weekday equivalent basis to April, May would have been 92, down 25 (21%) as a result of the transition to T8 lull mentioned earlier (pages 25,26).

**The only countries with meaningful increases in removal flights were Honduras, up 9 (53%) from an abnormally low 17 to a more normal 26 (perhaps April Semana Santa impact), and El Salvador up 4 (100%) to 8.** It should be noted that several of the flights to El Salvador were bundled with removals to other Central American countries in May.

**Ecuador saw a significant decrease of 10 (50%) from 20 to 10, perhaps impacted by the end of T42 flights and possibly lower detention levels for deportation flights. Removal flights to Guatemala dropped by 7 (21%) from 33 to 26, and Colombia removals fell 4 (19%) from 21 to 17. Removals to Peru dropped 2 (25%) from 8 to 6, and The Dominican fell 2 (29%) from 7 to 5.** There were also 2 small jet (15 passenger max) removal flights, 1 to Israel and 1 to Angola.

**There were no removal flights to Cuba since the one in April, and before that December 2020.** It's not clear if Cuba is restricting, or it is a DHS decision pending removals to Mexico.

***Please see Country Detail Section below for more details***

Flights to the Northern Triangle Countries of Guatemala (26), Honduras (26), and El Salvador (8) comprised 57% of all removal flights, up from April 46% (Santa Semana). With Colombia (17) and Ecuador (10) they comprised 82% of removal flights, about the same as April.

In May, flights to South America (Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Brazil) totaled 34 (down from 50 in April), or 32% of all removal flights, down from 43% in April. That compared to May 2022 at 23 flights representing 16% of all removal flights. (pages 25, 26).

The total number of people returned in May by air to Guatemala and Honduras is estimated at 6,080, or 22% of April encounters from those countries, about the same as April. The number of people returned in May to South America is estimated at 4,100, or 11% of April encounters from those countries, down from 17%, perhaps the result of the transition to T8 deportations from T42 expulsions.

**Shuffle flights** of 436 were little changed from April at 440 with shuffle flights to and between detention centers offsetting the decrease in lateral flights of 55 (page 16, 24).

### **Country Detail**

**Guatemala** flights decreased by 7 (21%) from 33 to 26, which is down 14 (35%) from March. The decrease can be attributed to a pause in flights from 12 May to 17 May. Half of the flights, 13, were through 11 May and half were after 17 May.

The 26 flights in May compares to the prior 6-month average of 30 and to May 2022 at 32.

Although we do not know encounters for May, these returns by air represented an estimated 22% of April encounters, lower than April at 26%.

Based on reports by Guatemala Migration the US returned an estimated 785 (20%) fewer people by air in May (3,220) than April (4,005), and 504 (14%) less than May 2022.

With an unusually low 1 Mexican Government deportation flight to Guatemala (second month in a row) added to the ICE flights (pages 25,26), Guatemala received 27 flights returning about 3,340 citizens by air from the US and Mexico. Combined with the estimated [660 Guatemalans returned by land by Mexico](#) at Tecún Únam, 4,000 Guatemalans were returned by the US and Mexico, 6,016 (60%) less than in March, a significant drop, and 1,465 less than April. In May 2022 total returns were 9,544, higher than May 2023 by 5,544 (139%). Please see the section on Mexico's deportation flights below.

**Honduras** flights increase by 9 (53%) to 26 from the abnormally low level in April of 17, most likely impacted by Semana Santa. Unlike Guatemala, there was no pause in flights post-T42. In fact, 16 of the 26 flights were after 12 May (pages 25,26).

The 26 flights in May were higher than the prior 6-month average of 21 by 5 (24%), but below May 2022 at 30 by 4 (13%).

In May, estimated returns by ICE Air to Honduras of 2,860 represented 22% of April encounters, up from 15% in April.

Unusually, for the second month in a row, there were no removal flights from Mexico, and land returns from Mexico remained very low at an estimated 614, up from 388 in April but below March at 1,389. In May the total estimated returns to Honduras from the US and Mexico were 3,474, up 1,046 (43%) from 2,428 in April, but significantly below the 5,946 returns in March by 2,472 (42%).

**Ecuador** flights decreased meaningfully again by 10 (50%) from 20 to 10, which was down 21 (68%) from only 2 months ago in March. The 10 flights were down 10 (50%) from the prior 6-month average, but above May 2022 at 1 (pages 25,26).

It appears removal flights to Ecuador were impacted by the transition to T8 as 8 of the 10 flights were before 12 May, which could indicate fewer Ecuadorans were staged in detention centers for deportations than Guatemalans and Hondurans whose flights were not as impacted by the change from expulsions to deportations.

After a peak in encounters of Ecuadorians in December 2022 of 16,195, each of the subsequent months have been between 6,381 (April) and 9,026 (January). **The ramp up in removal flights to Ecuador quickly followed the peak encounters as flights increased from 1 -3 per month to 20 and 28 in January and February 2023, respectively.**

***Colombia*** flights decreased by 4 (19%) from 21 to 17, but were within 1 of the prior 6-month average of 18 and 4 (19%) below May 2022 (pages 25,26). **The frequency of flights to Colombia did seem to be impacted by the transition to T8 since there were 10 return flights through the 11<sup>th</sup>, but only 7 the remaining 20 days of the month, something to watch as expedited removals ramp up.**

Encounters of Colombians continued to increase in April for the 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive month doubling from 9,302 in January to 18,116 in April, following a drop from 17,444 to 9,302 in January, despite an increase in removal flights from 9 in January to 22 in February.

Estimated returns of encounters (one month lag) were 11%, down slightly from 12% in April.

**Colombia's push back on accepting additional flights post T42 based on concerns over how those returned are treated before and during their return was short lived and in fact it was difficult to observe any real change. On May 4, the 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.**

My understanding is there was no real change of ICE Air processes with regard to family returns and shackles, and that appeared to be the case in photos from an ICE press event to tout deportation flights in Harlingen this week.

***El Salvador*** flights increased by 4 (100%) to 8 in May, however that was only 1 over the prior 6-month average of 7 and below 12 in May 2022 (pages 25, 26). **Since El Salvador did not generally accept T42 flights their frequency was not impacted by the transition to T8, however right at the end of the month I observed a few routes bundled with other Central American counties, perhaps to operate full planes of multi-nationalities for more frequent removals. This could be related to the use of CFIs in CBP custody as these flights originated in Texas not Alexandria LA. Perhaps this bundling will be more frequent at the CFI in CBP program expands and is something to watch.**

Based on IOM statistics, there were 404 **returns of Salvadorans in April and that would represent only 9% of April encounters**, much less than that of other Northern Triangle countries that did accept T42 returns.

**Dominican Republic flights dropped by 2 (29%) from the over 3-year high of 7 to 5 which was 2 over the prior 6-month average and 3 over May 2023. There was no discernable impact of the transition to T8 indicating flights were most likely always deportation flights** (pages xx,xx).

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 500 returns relate to total encounters.

**Peru flights dropped by 2 (25%) from an over 3-year high of 8 to 6, still almost 2x the prior 6-month average and 6 higher than 0 in May 2022. It does appear the timing of flights to Peru was impacted by the transition to T8, although in a reverse way from Ecuador and Colombia. There were 2 flights before 5 May, then a pause until 23 May after which there were 4 flights the 23<sup>rd</sup>-26<sup>th</sup>, all of which originated in Alexandria LA. In April, 5 of the 8 flights originated on the border and 3 in Alexandria while the last 5 of the 6 flights in May originated in Alexandria, again underscoring the resumption of deportation staging there post T8.**

Encounters of Peruvians increased modestly after falling from 11,365 in December 2022 to 3,924 in January and then gradually back up to 8,495 in April. Based on April encounters estimated returns in May represented about 9% of encounters, down from an estimated 12% in April.

**Brazil flights remained at 1 in May, just a little below the prior 6-month average of 1.3, and equal to May 2022** (pages 25, 26). The flight this month was on a large Eastern Air plane, so assuming 200 people, returns would be only 6 % of April encounters of Brazilians. Curious if deportation flights will increase in the future.

**Cuba experienced the first return flights since December 2020 on 24 April** (pages 25, 26). **But, there were no return flights in May despite that flights were [widely reported](#) to be approved by Cuba now, although there was little specific information.**

**Haiti experienced 1 flight of 86 people in what now seems to be a monthly flight pattern, at least over the last 6 months** (pages 21, 25), all departing from Alexandria, LA. It should be noted that in May 2022 there were a massive 36 removal flights to Haiti, the last month of double-digit return flights. Conditions in Haiti seems to be stunningly dangerous and [spiraling down by the day into deeper gang warfare and vigilante action](#).

**Over the last months, [only 655 Haitians have been encountered between southern ports](#). The vast majority (estimating around 80%+) of encounters at ports have been related to T42 exemptions.**

Meanwhile, [interdiction of Haitians at sea continues](#) with 4,458 interdicted in the first 7 months of the fiscal year (Oct) for an annual pace of 7,650, slightly above the prior year of 7,175

Since inauguration 283 flights have removed 26,978 Haitians, 1 in every 425 people in Haiti (page 21).



**Small Jet Removals** observed included 2 flights on Gryphon Air Gulfstreams that carry 12-15 passengers as a maximum, one to Israel and 1 to Angola (page 25, 26).

**Other Removal Destinations** were Nicaragua (2), and Jamaica (1), both within generally normal patterns (page 25, 26).

**Mexico Operated Removal** flights surprisingly remained at only 1 again in May with a flight to Guatemala (page 20). The 6-month average prior to April was 24, and there were 37 deportations in May 2022.

Moreover, land returns of Hondurans at El Carmen dropped from 1,389 in March to 388 in April and an estimated 644 in May. Returns of Guatemalans at Tecún Úman dropped from 3,261 in March to 1,325 in April and 660 in May.

Importantly, land returns of Guatemalans and Hondurans by Mexico fell by 6,632 (84%) from May 22 (7,936) to May 2023 (1,304).

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.

### **MAY FLIGHT SUMMARY**

In May, there were 709 likely ICE Air flights, down 36 (5%) from April, and down 103 (13%) from the same month of 2022. Removal flights of 106 were down 11 (9%) from April while domestic shuffle flights decreased by 4 (1%).

- - 106 removal flights, with 102 return flights, to 13 different countries in Latin America, Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean.
- - 65 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 436 domestic shuffle flights between deportation locations.
- - 501 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - **Since President Biden's inauguration there have been 17,293 likely ICE Air flights** including 2,985 removal flights. Including just the 264 lateral flights before October 2021 and 50 for October - December 2022 as expulsion flights would yield 3,299 removal flights.

### **Last 12 Months – 8,226 likely total flights**

- - 1,385 removal flights, with 1,287 return flights, to at least 24 countries in Latin America, Europe, the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia.
- - 583 domestic flights connecting directly to removal flights.
- - 4,971 domestic shuffle flights between removal locations.
- - 5,554 domestic flights (connections and shuffle flights).
- - 40% of flights were return related (removal, return and connections) and 60% were domestic shuffle flights.