

Topic: An approach to Correcting Interpretation of Migrants and Migration in our Common Future together; SDG 2030 Agenda.

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Abstract

Owing to inherent normative dissensus among actors informed by their national identities and politicization of migration. Conceptual challenges of migration are obvious in the Sustainable Development Goals 2030 agenda. The coincidence that the drafting of the 2030 Agenda and the prevailing images and narrative about the *migrant tsunami* which took place in the same year did not help much. The destabilizations in the Middle East and Africa occasioned the migration surge. The agenda gave away development as a place-bound process, focusing on enabling people to achieve a better quality of life at home discountenancing the various opportunities that abound in migration both to origin, transit and receiving countries. Adopting a historical analytics methodology this research highlights the challenges with migration framing in the SDG 2030 agenda. Despite European response to its demographic challenges being the invitation of skilled migrants to its shores, to mitigate the vacancy issues on an aging workforce, the expansive contribution of migrants to the SDGs goals is not envisaged and may not be harnessed if proper definitions of the migrant groups are not recognized. The research highlights the need for understanding migrant groups through their definition by the overseeing agencies and grounds a normative sustainability-driven awareness campaign where migrants drive adaptations. The positive impact of this is that the indoctrination of more global citizens in sustainability-driven awareness and lifestyle adaptation can mean a better future for our world. The infantry on the move are advocates who promote sustainable development adaptations since migrants are either settling in host countries, returning home, or remigrating to new destinations.

Introduction

The UN's introductory pages on sustainable development explicitly acknowledge its recognized partners in its quest to achieve sustainable development goals as the various governments worldwide. This is so well said when viewed from the accentuation by scholars in the field of sustainability, they point to sustainable development as unattainable without *concrete* government commitment (Liang et al 2022). Governments worldwide have shown themselves as reliable partners for the realization of sustainable development goals with various conventions like the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) ratified by 197 parties, established in 1994 to combat desertification, the Kyoto Protocol adopted on December 11, 1997, which emerged from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Process that imposed binding limits on the emission of

greenhouse gases GHGs. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change was adopted by 196 parties at the Conference of Parties (COP 21) which took place in Paris in December 2015. Regardless of the many document ratification and climate action by nations, scholars have identified inherent challenges at National levels that slow down or hinder the planned implementation of sustainable development goals (Gao and Bryan 2017, Enayat et al 2020). These challenges make dependence on governments without strategic conceptualization of the factors and actors that can be instrumental to sustainable development tantamount to normative dissensus (Bachleitner and Betts 2024) leaving many behind as against the promised; *leave no one behind* in the SDGs goal. Conceptual challenges to the realization of SDG goals by partners are identified by scholars, “the dialogue of the deaf”, which references partners with the persuasion that trade and environment policies must not meet (Runnalls and Cosbey 1992, 11) “the co-benefit theory” (Schmittz 2017) poses the question; will these key actors (governments) give attention to climate change mitigation in the face of competing immediate benefits? The result is an unfortunate negative. Justifiably so since sustainable development advocates responsibly meeting the needs of today as well. Actions of climate mitigation activities are only good in themselves when they are helping to secure energy for populations, creating jobs and incomes, laying the foundation for increased public revenue fostering green industries, and making them competitive. This therefore validates the conclusion that climate change mitigation policies and action are only as relevant as co-benefits for the immediate priorities of the actors rather than a driver (Schmittz 2017). Finally, “greenwashing” is an identified challenge to the sustainability nexus, a phenomenon arising from companies’ need to “resolve” the trade-off between the increasing importance of environmental compliance and their real supportable efforts toward this objective (Bernini & LaRosa 2023). State actors are also known to engage in greenwashing to engage the interest of certain stakeholders. It is important to outline these challenges with the identified partners of the SDGs, results from this research conclude that the misconceptions about migration and migrants in the SDGs is as a result of framings by actors about migration. Paramount among the actors are the government agents; examples from the EU context, (Bachleitner and Betts 2024) explores the root of normative dissensus among the EU member states located in the Balkans with their diverse national identities and domestic politicization of the migrants crisis informed their narrative and response. and this they conceptualize as constraining normative dissensus; between member states and the European Union institutions and agencies. This no doubt informed the planned management of migration which highlights challenges with migrants and clouds their contribution to sustainable development goals.

The over and under-sights of migrants and migration in the SDG 2030 agenda is the focus of this research. Articles 23, 25, and 29 have been singled out as expressively problematic in the SDGs 2030. Adger et al. (2019) emphasize that Article 29 is an underrepresentation of migration in the SDGs 2030, they describe as inaccurate the planned management of migration as a problem. They aver that those social dynamics of migration should be addressed as the norm of social and demographic dynamics rather than as a discreet event. Odorige (2023) also argues against grouping migrants as vulnerable in articles 23 and 25, because of the several categories that the term refers to. Some migrant groups may be vulnerable at some point in their journey, or the nature of their travel itinerary may make them

vulnerable. Vulnerable undermines categories and discountenance the contribution to development that migrants make to both destination transit and origin countries. It also strenghtens the cynicism of immigrants as sponging on European welfare (Anderson 2017; Mazza 2019; Nadeau 2014; Odorige 2018; Ferwerda, Marbach, and Hangartner 2023). Anderson (2017) particularly discusses this as the politics of pests and highlights the linkage between media coverage, policy, and public opinion. Migration theorizing challenges have also borne the blame for these conceptual flaws (De Haas 2021; Baas and Schiller 2024). De Haas (2021) proposes the possibility of overcoming this impasse and advancing our understanding of migratory processes as an intrinsic part of broader processes of social change and development. The planned management of migration in the SDGs failed to acknowledge the various migrating categories, and ground migration as a function of people's capability and aspiration to migrate within given sets of geographical opportunity structures conceptual separation of migratory processes from broader processes of social change and development (De Haas 2021) of which migration is a constituent part of the needed social change for our future together. This is the case because of the simplistic thinking of migration as push/pull models of individual income maximization. Baas and Schiller (2024) call on migration scholars, activists, and policymakers to pay attention and challenge the dramatic transformation of migration regimes where it may become increasingly impossible for migrants to settle down at their destination country and obtain full rights and protection. On the basis that migration is a basic human right, capable of granting social and economic justice and dignity. Their mention of regimes filter of legal labor migration 'desirables' (i.e EU skilled labor migrant) and the new 'undesirables' (i.e Hungary's new migrant labor law Act XC 2023¹ tailored to the guest workers pattern adopted by Germany after the Second World War that admits unskilled workers from some countries via bilateral agreements.

Methodology

This study adopted historical analytics qualitative methodology; with an emphasis on diplomatics, the study of documents records, and archives, and ongoing discussion related to the discourse. The discourse in this case is the coincidental events of the migration Tsunami and the drafting of the 2030 SDGs in 2015. Where actor's framing of the migration nexus impacted the conceptualization of migration in the SDGs 2030. Historical research develops linkages to gather, verify, and analyze data from periods. Scholars linked donors in Western Europe's perception that the 2015 influx was a development issue and stressed the need to bring about development in the regions of migrant origins to halt the inflow of people into Europe (Nijenhuis and Leung 2017). This inspired the conceptualization of growth and development in the SDGs 2030 as a place-bound process that assumes people are most likely to achieve a better quality of life at home, implying migration as an indicator of development failure. *We underline the right of migrants to return to their country of citizenship* (SDGs, 29) this statement no doubt echoed the fears within on the implication of migration to Europe that range from unfair competition in the labor market, reduced access to social services in the host countries to the perceived fears posed by migrants to national identities ethnic

¹ <https://helsinki.hu/en/information-immigration-law-hungary/>

homogeneity and security (Boros et al 2019; 7). The study analysis, espoused the foreclosure of partners in the success of sustainability as linked to frames undermining the recognition of migrants as active partners recognizing their contribution only passively which the study by Odorige (2023) shows their migration patterns as active broadcasters and spreading of sustainability-conscious attitudes hitherto elusive from their countries of origin because of lack of governments (*SDGs 2030 partners*) actual commitment to sustainable development. The research also searched documents by the responsible organizations for migration and refugee support, IOM and the UNHCR the UN bodies outlined the need for clear definition of categories that avoids denying groups needing protection from accessing it. A historical poke into the usage of the term Polycrisis reveals it was first used by Morin and Kern (1999) in their book *Homeland Earth* to argue that the world faces no single vital problem but a series of vital problems like complex solidarity problems, antagonisms, crises, uncontrolled processes and the general crisis of the planet that constitute the primary vital problem. It is worth highlighting that every time there is a polycrisis, migration is mentioned as a consequence of the population's reaction to the polycrisis. For example, the speech by President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker in 2016 used the term to refer to Europe's governance challenges with the Greek debt Euro crisis, Russia's annexation of Crimea, the surge of Syrian refugees into Europe, and the pending Brexit vote².

Migrant; The need to be specific about categories.

A note on the mention of migrants in articles 23, 25, and 29 of the SDGs tends to overlook the many categories of global citizens that the term migrant represents. As well as the perception of these groups in the minds of the public due to framing by the media, academia, policymakers, politicians; both of the left, and the right. The 2030 SDG makes a blanket use of the term that is too generic in the SDG. The IOM document on Migration and the 2030 Agenda seem to come to the rescue with an explanation of aspects of the SDG on migration addressing migrant issues, at origin and destination. The booklet addresses each of the 17 goals and a pictorial poster representation is shared below.

² https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_16_2293

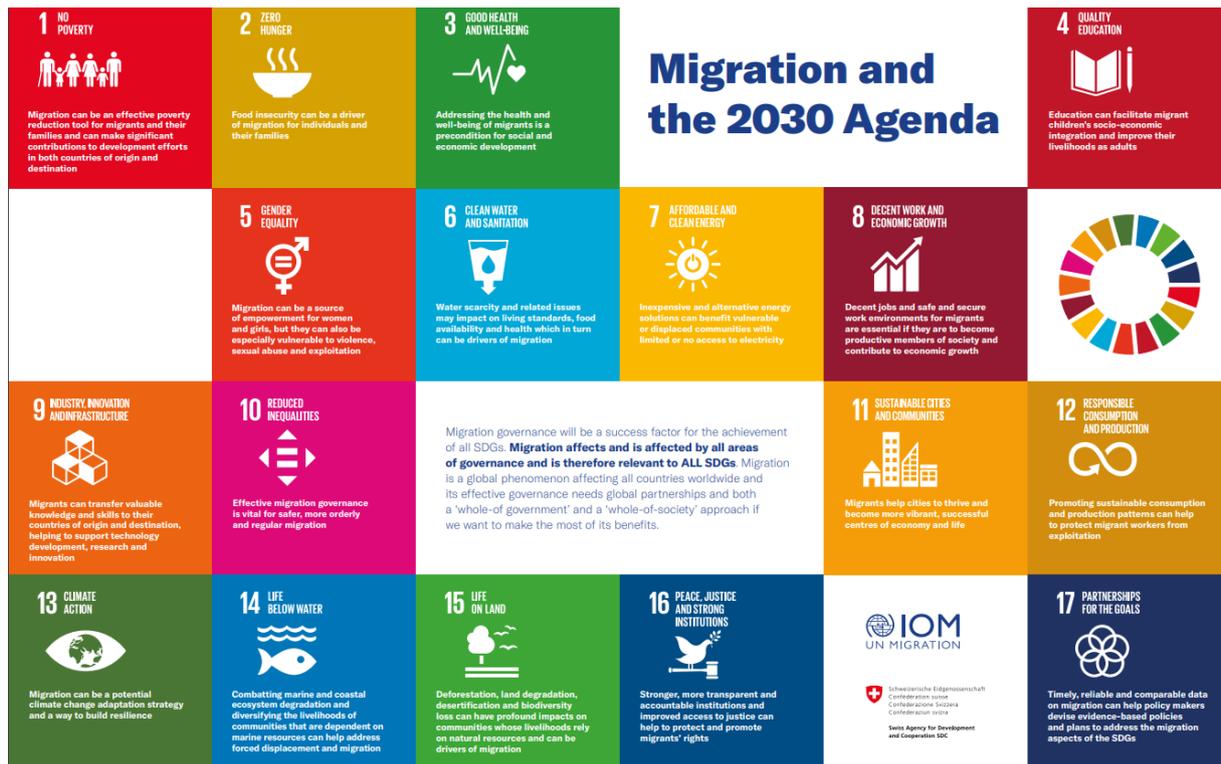


Figure 1. Source: IOM

Poster presentation by IOM that summarizes linkages with the SDGs to migration.

The booklet analysis document however gives away the migrants referred to in the SDGs as asylum seekers, refugees, undocumented migrants, internally displaced persons, trafficked persons, and unskilled migrant workers who may be exposed to exploitation.

The term “migrant” does not refer to refugees, asylum seekers or stateless persons, for whom specific protection regimes exist under international law, but it may refer to victims of trafficking in persons and smuggled migrants, who also benefit from specific protection regimes under international and national law. All these groups are addressed at specific places in the Handbook and are referred to as such. (IOM Handbook; Scope and purpose)

Other groups of migrants may include skilled migrants; international students, either on scholarship or self-funded with an after-study plan to remain in the host country, remigrate, or return home (Odorige 2023). Other categories of skilled migrants include already-established experts who move from their country of origin to a new country armed with a work contract and other potential benefits that reduce their exposure to vulnerable situations. Another set of categories may include second and third-generation migrants who may already be citizens in their host countries and have the protection of the law like other citizens, nonetheless physical features differences may expose them to discriminatory practices in the face public perception and actors framing. However, many member states in the EU avoid data collection practices that expose groups to discrimination. These later groups validate what de Haas (2017) described as an unrealistic depiction of migrants as victims desperately fleeing situations of destitution, oppression, and human misery as it would be to depict them as entirely rational and free actors who constantly make rational cost-benefit calculations. This has also been a challenge for Migration theorization and why neither functionalist nor historical-structural

theories provide realistic accounts of migratory agency (de Haas 2017). He recommends elaborating conceptual tools that improve our ability to simultaneously account for structure and agency in understanding processes and experiences of migration, without discarding the important insights that both functionalist and historical-structural paradigms offer and thus rejecting them.

Migrant Definitions and the Place of Vulnerable and Vulnerabilities

Article 23 states that people, who are vulnerable must be empowered. Those whose needs are reflected in the agenda include children, youth, persons with disability (of whom more than 80 percent live in poverty), people living with HIV and AIDS, older persons, indigenous people, refugees and internally displaced persons, and *migrants*. The way migrants is used here is a challenge for understanding categories of migrants that have special needs. We can borrow a leaf of how vulnerability or migration specificity is managed across other international and EU instruments. Under the Common European Asylum System CEAS it spells out *In the interest of clarity*, with regards to vulnerable asylum seekers, the EU Reception Directive indicates a list of vulnerable groups of asylum seekers (also referred to as “applicants with special reception needs”). This list includes minors, elderly, pregnant women, single parents with minor children, persons with disabilities, serious illnesses or mental disorders, others; are survivors of torture, rape, or other serious forms of violence, including human trafficking (art. 21) (Gazi 2021).

The migration observatory³ at the University of Oxford in trying to interpret the term insists that when counting migrants and analyzing the consequences of migration, who counts as a migrant is of crucial importance. De Haas (2017) submits that migration can be a very empowering experience but can, in other cases, take more exploitative forms. It is therefore necessary to understand categories to know which are prone to exploitation or inherently vulnerable. The International Organization for Migration IOM defines a migrant⁴ as an umbrella term, not defined under international law, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons. The term includes several well-defined legal categories of people, such as migrant workers; and international students. The EU defines a migrant both in the global context and the integrative context of the EU. In the *global context*, it refers to a person who is outside the territory of the State of which they are nationals or citizens and who has resided in a foreign country for more than one year irrespective of the causes, voluntary or involuntary, and the means, regular or irregular, used to migrate. In the *EU/EFTA context*, it means a person who either: (i) establish their usual residence in the territory of an EU/EFTA Member State for a period that is, or is expected to be, of at least 12 months, having previously been usually resident in

³ <https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/who-counts-as-a-migrant-definitions-and-their-consequences/>

⁴ <https://www.iom.int/who-migrant-0#:~:text=IOM%20Definition%20of%20%22Migrant%22,for%20a%20variety%20of%20reasons.>

another EU/EFTA Member State.⁵ The background to the IOM handbook on protection and assistance to migrants vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and abuse gives the nature of migrants referred to as vulnerable here as trafficked persons and other victims of cross-border crimes. The OHCHR avers that *Migrants are not inherently vulnerable, nor do they lack resilience and agency. Rather, vulnerability to human rights violations is the result of multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination, inequality, and structural and societal dynamics that lead to diminished and unequal levels of power and enjoyment of rights. As a matter of principle, and to ensure that every migrant is able to access appropriate protection of their rights, the situation of each person must be assessed individually.* As long as the country (sending or receiving) is a party to the international human rights treaties measures should be in place on the part of the states to ensure that all rights are protected including that of migrants. (emigrants and immigrants).

The UN refugee agency has also responded to this blanket use of the term *migrant*. Highlighting the consequences of erroneously using the term interchangeably with a refugee. The SDGs document is not specific about which categories are vulnerable, but in the plan that promises to *leave no one behind* this should be made clear or else this can give assumptions that the contribution of one category is irrelevant in the sustainability pursuit. The UNHCR explains conditions that tend to give credence to this kind of usage. Described as mixed movements that can characterize, asylum seekers, refugees who are forced to flee (openly or discreetly), and other migrants traveling for purposes other than to seek international protection. Also, migrants and refugees employ the same routes, modes of transport, and networks as other migrants which can make for easy grouping as if they are all the same. Or mixed migration, which Carling, Gallagher and Horwood (2015) describe as a long-standing reality, where people of different statuses and motivations will often migrate in similar directions, using the same migration infrastructure. Regardless of this common migration infrastructure adopted by mixed travelers, UNHCR kicks against the use of the term 'migrant' as a catchall for all categories because using this term to refer to refugees or to people who are likely to need international protection as asylum-seekers or refugees can risk undermining access to the specific legal protections that states are obliged to provide to refugees. Distinguishing appropriately between different categories of persons in mixed movements is not an aim in itself, but should assist in bringing to bear the appropriate framework of rights, responsibilities, and protection.⁶

⁵ https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/european-migration-network-emn/emn-asylum-and-migration-glossary/glossary/migrant_en

⁶ <https://emergency.unhcr.org/protection/legal-framework/migrant-definition>

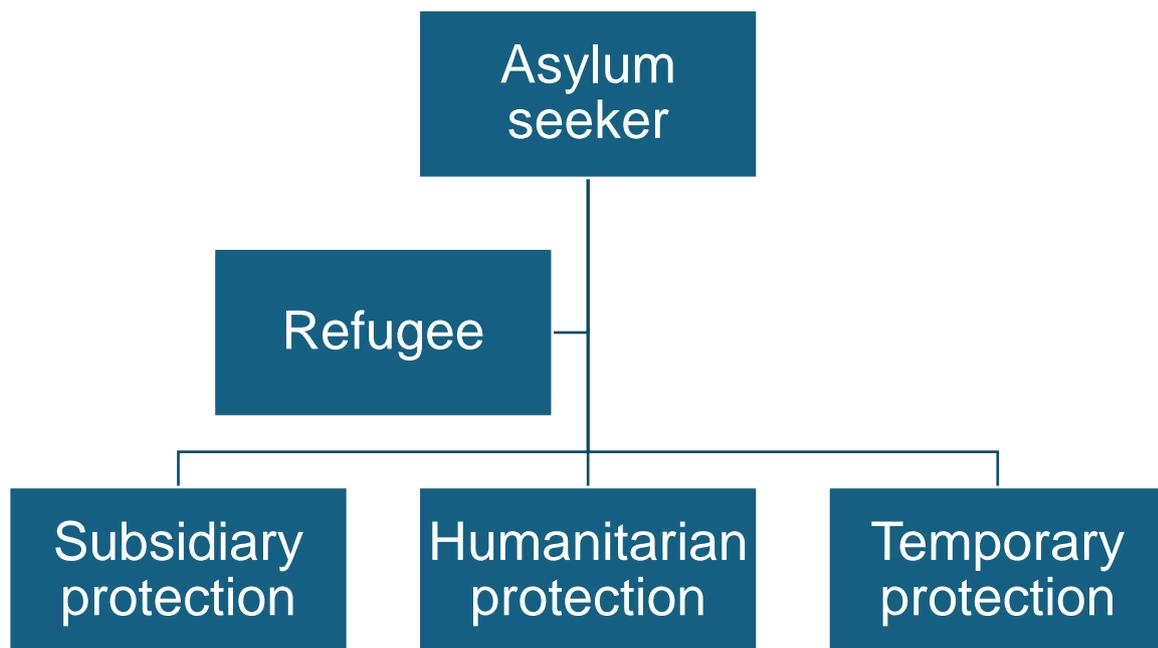


Figure 2: Source: Own design

Statuses of those seeking international protection

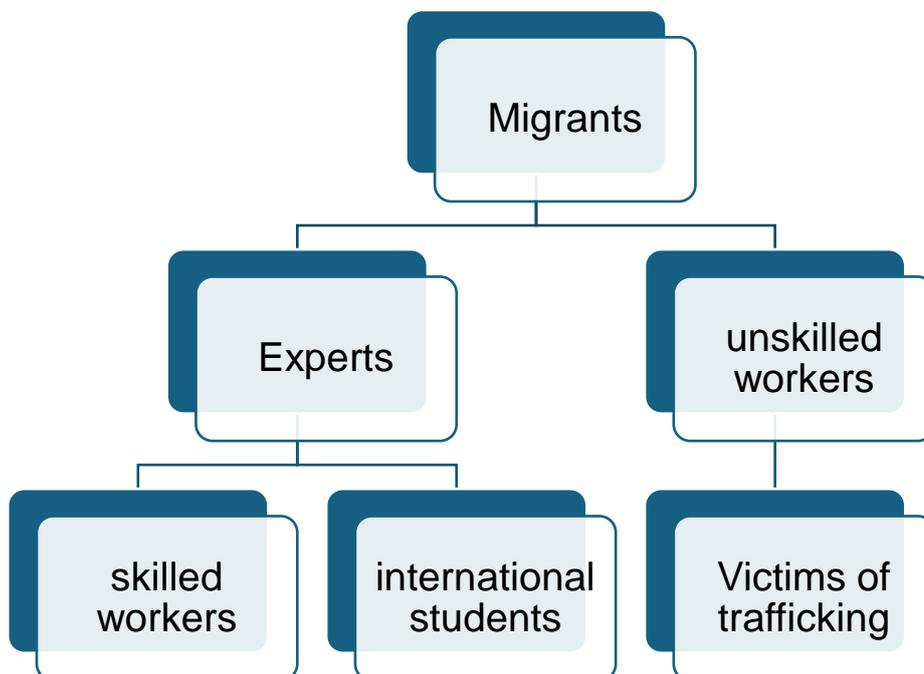


Figure 3. Source: Own Design.

Statuses of Migrants

Dissensus in Partner Framing. The need for Recognized levels of Partners The Era of Polycrisis and Its Impact on the SDGs

Conclusion and Recommendation

Sustainable Development Goals Agenda 2030 represents global action that steers the degradation of the earth in all respects away from a downward slope to an upward ascent where we can reclaim the earth from its present stage of the Holocene (Rockström et al 2009) and make room for generations after to have a decent environment. This cannot be wholly achievable when actors are neither understood nor presented in their true strengths or weaknesses. The UN experts must be sensitive to the divergent national narratives, especially with a sensitive topic like migration, and how this can impact its framing and how frames can overlook contributions. The place of consultations with international agencies responsible for categories should be prioritized as the bigger picture of their impact in the socio-economic and political sphere is made clearer as we have seen the IOM and UNHCR and OHCHR documents explain. The UN must think through the clutter and develop categories of partners that are likely to drive sustainable development. Achieving a sustainable future together should mean seeking out partners and creating partner categories. Not all partners may be as clearly defined as the governments, some partners by their natural disposition or modus operandi are agents for exporting sustainable thinking and lifestyle and migrants are in this category. The comments of the supposedly crowned father of Migration Ravenstein (1885) over a century ago are still relevant, who describes migration as life and progress. A sedentary population is the true definition of stagnation. Though we live in the age of internet migrants are needed as missionaries for spreading the gospel of sustainability.

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