



ADVANCING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND EQUALITY FOR GIRLS

– our global approach to programme and influence

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OUR GLOBAL APPROACH

The world is changing – and so are we. In 2017 Plan International adopted a new organisational purpose, theory of change and strategy that stretch our global ambition to contribute to reaching the Sustainable Development Goals. We have put gender equality and the persistent development challenges that girls are facing right at the heart of our organisational purpose. We have grown from being child-centred and community-focused to recognising that we must also impact young people over 18 years of age, work at multiple levels and be active across humanitarian and development contexts. We know that we must partner with and influence a wide range of players to catalyse sustainable, transformative change at scale, from local to global levels.

This global approach is an **evolution** of our Child-Centred Community Development (CCCD) approach. It ensures that we are able to deliver our new purpose, and it reflects how we think change happens and how we can support this. The approach informs all of our work across the organisation and helps to deliver our global strategy. It combines the strengths of CCCD with significantly increased capability to influence decision makers at all levels.

To put our approach fully into practice, we must become more conscious of who we are as an organisation and of our role in the places where we work. We must become more effective enablers and supporters of others, starting with the communities where we work but going further to influence the processes and decisions that affect them. This, and our work to leverage broad-based change in local, national and global structures, will require considerable change in the way we work.

This document sets out the aspirations for our global approach to inspire our transformation and to guide all programme and influence work.

It describes:

- our primary impact groups – the people at the heart of our work
- the dimensions of change that we are seeking to address in every initiative
- the commitments at the core of our approach
- the programme and influence strategies that we can use to achieve change
- the organisational strategies that guide transformation within Plan International.

Other resources for implementation, such as standards, guidance and tools, will be made available to help staff to put these aspirations into practice.

OUR PRIMARY IMPACT GROUPS

We are committed to making a lasting impact on the lives of the most vulnerable and excluded children while creating greater equality for girls. Our purpose thus concerns two intersecting primary impact groups:

- vulnerable and excluded children, and
- girls in particular.

Children, just like adults, do not fall neatly into single social groups. Each individual has many identities that affect how they interact with and are viewed by society, and how their rights are realised.

Girls are a particularly important impact group for us. Gender inequality compounds all forms of exclusion, making the effects of exclusion different and often worse for girls and women.¹ We believe that by making measurable changes in the lives of vulnerable and excluded girls, we can best contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and our common ambition to leave no one behind. We ensure that sponsored children benefit equally from our work and we uphold particular commitments to their wellbeing and active participation in our programme and influence work.

Supporting children into adulthood

In international law, turning 18 years of age signals the end of childhood and a change in status to adulthood.² However, Plan International recognises that becoming an adult involves more than an overnight change. A significant transition occurs, during which some young people may require support to fully enjoy and exercise their rights as adults. We therefore work to support children to safely progress from birth into adulthood. This means that our work may directly impact young people up to 24 years old.³



DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE

Achieving lasting improvements in the lives of girls and boys depends on the environment in which they live and how this enables them to realise their rights. We can best contribute to more enabling environments by triggering change in three interdependent and interconnected dimensions:

- by influencing social norms – particularly harmful gender norms – and related attitudes and behaviours
- by strengthening people's personal, social and economic assets and safety nets
- by contributing to better policies, legislation, budgets and government services at various levels that affect children's and particularly girls' lives.

In every context and every project, these dimensions offer different entry points for triggering change. Understanding what these entry points are is essential for choosing the right set of strategies to effect change.



THE DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE – GLOBAL THEORY OF CHANGE

OUR COMMITMENTS

The commitments outlined in this section are central to our programme and influence approach and underscore all aspects of its implementation. They are interconnected and interrelated. Many of them share important features.



RIGHTS-BASED

All of our work is grounded in human rights principles.⁴ We adopt strong, clear positions on, and actively support, human rights. We stand with human rights defenders and work with others to contribute to child rights and gender equality monitoring and reporting. We bring to life the human rights principles of participation and inclusion, non-discrimination and equality in all our programme and influencing work. We seek to maximise the opportunities created by the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals⁵ (SDGs) in order to hold States to account for their obligations to the rights of children and particularly of girls.

The normative framework for our work in all contexts is provided by:

- the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)
- the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)

- international humanitarian law and the standards and principles enshrined therein.

In spite of this framework, we know that girls are often invisible in core conventions. Girls' rights are often subsumed into either the ageless category of "women", or the gender-neutral category of "children", "adolescents", or "youth". We draw attention to this by using the term "girls' rights". Because girls are so invisible, more must be done to address discrimination against them and to redress the inequalities they endure.

Child and youth participation

All our work involves children and young people as active participants. Such participation must be: transparent and informative, voluntary, respectful, relevant, child-friendly, gender equitable and inclusive, sensitive to risk, supported by training and accountable.

AN OVERVIEW: OUR COMMITMENTS

1. Rights-based
2. Gender transformative
3. Open and accountable
4. Working with other actors, organisations and institutions
5. Working in all contexts
6. Working at all levels



GENDER TRANSFORMATIVE

There are many forms of inequality and exclusion and they vary from place to place. But everywhere we work there exists some form of gender-based discrimination, gender stereotyping and an unequal distribution of power between women and men, girls and boys and other genders. Gender inequality intensifies all other forms of exclusion and makes them different and often worse for girls and women.

Robust evidence demonstrates that gender equality is beneficial for girls and boys, women and men, and for society as a whole.⁶ Adopting a gender transformative approach ensures that our work results in positive changes and sustainable outcomes for girls and young women, and for society more broadly.

Plan International contributes to gender equality in all our programme and influence work by using a gender transformative approach.

Working proactively with boys and young men to champion gender equality is part of this approach. We understand that changing

harmful gender norms requires working collaboratively with girls, boys, women and men and people of other sexual identities to develop new, positive norms and more equitable ways of living together.

To close longstanding gender gaps and inequalities, we know that it may be necessary and useful in some situations to promote and apply affirmative action for girls and women.⁷ We use a gender, age and intersectional lens⁸ in our analysis of policies, budgets and services, in our advocacy work and in partnerships with others.

A gender transformative approach goes beyond addressing “symptoms” to explicitly tackle the root causes of gender inequality, particularly unequal gender power relations, discriminatory social norms and systems, structures, policies and practices.

It improves the daily condition of girls while advancing their position and value in society.



Photo: Plan International / Johanna Speitz



OPEN AND ACCOUNTABLE

Being open and accountable is one of our core values. We ensure that we report openly and transparently about what we do – on both our successes and failures – and about how we use the resources entrusted to us. We commit to using these resources responsibly in order to generate the greatest sustainable outcomes.

Wherever we work, we consider carefully whether and how we can add value to local development efforts. We listen to children and communities, and ensure that we apply the highest standards for keeping children, other

people and the environment safe whenever we, or our associates, interact with them.⁹ To ensure that our work is useful, relevant for and respectful of those with whom we work, we design our programmes and influencing based on the views of children – particularly girls – and communities. We undertake ongoing engagement with all stakeholders – children (both sponsored and non-sponsored) and young people, communities, volunteers, partners and government – to ensure that we reflect and explore together how to improve and be responsive to changing circumstances.

By continuously establishing dialogue and feedback opportunities, we ensure that our decision-making and practices respond to what we hear.

We learn from our work and that of others and build on good practice both internally and externally, to avoid duplication of efforts and to deliver the best possible outcomes. For all our projects and on a global scale, we monitor and evaluate progress towards transformative and sustainable change, demonstrating the results of our work in the lives of vulnerable and excluded children and girls in particular.



WORKING WITH OTHER ACTORS, ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS

Plan International is outward-looking. We recognise that we cannot achieve sustainable development outcomes by working alone. Key to this is building relationships with a variety of organisations, institutions, corporates and other actors that influence the changes we are seeking. We pay particular

attention to partnerships with organisations of children and young people. Based on an understanding of other stakeholders and on the knowledge of our own strengths and limitations, we develop strategic relationships to enhance our reach, influence and capability at all levels. This entails

forming different types of relationships, for different purposes. Some might be informal collaborative relationships, for example with movements or networks. Some might be formal relationships, for example partnerships established with shared objectives, responsibilities and risks.¹⁰



WORKING IN ALL CONTEXTS

In development, fragile and conflict-affected settings, we help to realise the rights of children and young people, and aim to add value to their lives through targeted responses. Following core humanitarian principles and standards¹¹, our emergency interventions deliver immediate life-saving assistance and protection to children and their communities affected by natural

disasters or conflict. Our overall response or protracted crises programme plans have a gender transformative ambition. Even in the most acute emergencies all our projects will endeavour to identify and respond to the specific vulnerabilities and needs of girls and young women.

Our development work focuses on empowering children and their communities to tackle the underlying causes of poverty and to create lasting positive change. Our work increases the resilience of children, young people and particularly girls. Using an integrated development and humanitarian approach, we help them to overcome the multiple risks that they face.



WORKING AT ALL LEVELS

Our experience has taught us that working at and across all levels – locally, nationally, regionally and globally – is key to bringing the changes that we are seeking. We recognise that the situations of children and girls in particular depend on many factors that transcend local borders. This can be a force for good – for instance, new media can

help to trigger change at scale rapidly and across continents and cultures, magnifying the reach and power of individuals. Building on our experience at local levels, we use our presence at multiple levels to forge long-term relationships that help us to further our programme and influence goals.

PROGRAMME AND INFLUENCE STRATEGIES

While our programme and influence commitments underscore all of our work in all contexts, our programme and influence strategies will vary depending on the specific context. Our choice of strategies, how they are implemented and how they reinforce each other should be based on relevant evidence and analysis, with coherent theories of change for each initiative.

Promoting positive attitudes, behaviours and practices

We carefully analyse the dynamics of social norms in each context. Using tested approaches and methodologies, we help people to develop positive and alternative behaviours that are consistent with gender equality and children's rights. We facilitate dialogue and support people at all levels to explore, question and challenge harmful social norms – particularly discriminatory gender norms – that undermine the realisation of children's rights and equality for girls. We respect diversity and are sensitive to cultural differences. However, we do not

tolerate practices that result in gender-based discrimination, prejudice or inequality.

Strengthening and mobilising civil society

We know that when girls and boys, young people and adults come together to take collective action as civil society, they are better able to demand and influence change, find innovative and practical solutions, hold duty bearers accountable, and defend children's, in particular girls', rights.

As an INGO, Plan International is part of global civil society. Understanding the role that we play in each context – from local to global – and how we are perceived is critical for building effective strategies to strengthen and mobilise civil society.

- We strengthen
 - by building capacity and
 - by contributing to the different dimensions of civil society – its self-organisation, impact, values, external environment and its civic engagement.

AN OVERVIEW: PROGRAMME AND INFLUENCE STRATEGIES

1. Promoting positive attitudes, behaviours and practices
2. Strengthening and mobilising civil society
3. Developing stakeholder capabilities
4. Influencing power holders
5. Providing direct support in emergencies and fragile settings

- We mobilise
 - through our global campaigns;
 - by inspiring and catalysing the wider movement for girls' rights;
 - by convening and enlarging the space for activism;
 - by amplifying civil society voices;
 - where relevant, by acting as a member of local civil society ourselves

Movement building

By leveraging large numbers of individuals, coalitions and influential actors, fuelled by access to information and a commitment to girls' rights, we can be part of, and help to drive, collective actions that influence those in power. In the long term this work with social movements can shift norms and behaviours to create positive, large-scale and sustainable change far beyond what we could achieve alone.

Developing stakeholder capabilities

Our work with stakeholders concerns children, young people, parents, caregivers and leaders in societies' various institutions. We aim to strengthen their capabilities to develop their self-reliance, resilience and empowerment. This work might take

many different forms such as developing knowledge, skills and practices. We support these stakeholders' individual and collective capabilities to claim their rights, to exercise skills needed to succeed in life, to influence decisions that affect them, and to withstand shocks and crises.

We also work with duty bearers in governmental institutions to strengthen their capability to protect and fulfil children's rights; to promote gender equality and inclusion; and to improve the quality and reach of services for the most vulnerable and excluded people.

Building capabilities requires humility to understand and address our own limitations and to learn from others.

Influencing power holders

To achieve children's rights and equality for girls, we must secure significant changes in the attitudes, behaviours and practices of power holders such as local leaders, faith leaders, donors and those who decide policies and make laws. We must help to change the way that they control resources and change the systems that they shape.

To do this, we influence and challenge power holders and decision makers strategically and systematically at local, national, regional and global levels. Our aim is to secure

positive change in laws, policies and budgets and in how they are implemented. We work to facilitate safe mechanisms that enable children and young people to participate meaningfully in advocacy and accountability processes.

Our influencing work is based on our purpose and values, on robust and ongoing situational, political and policy analysis, on research and evidence from our programmes and other sources, and on the perspectives of the children and young people with whom we work. The work is responsive and adaptive to changes and emerging opportunities. It uses the full range of techniques, from discreet advocacy to public campaigning and strategic communications. It is founded on clear positions, principles and change goals.

Providing direct support in emergencies and fragile settings

In times of major crisis, when social structures, support networks and services break down, communities and States may not be in a position to protect and care for children. In contexts where government is unable or unwilling to protect and care for children, particularly in humanitarian or fragile settings, Plan International will provide support for services and protection where we can add value – either through partnerships or, if

necessary, directly. In such settings, our work will always be informed by a thorough analysis and in collaboration with established coordination mechanisms where they exist.

In protracted crisis or conflict contexts, we aim to achieve lasting change and to ensure that primary duty bearers can meet their obligations to respect, protect and fulfil human rights.

In these extraordinary circumstances, social norms and power imbalances are often in flux and so are more susceptible to change. This can provide good opportunities for transformational change in gender norms, power relations or policy. We will use our analysis to identify and seize such opportunities.



ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT OUR PROGRAMME AND INFLUENCE APPROACH

These strategies set out what we need to improve *within* Plan International in order to achieve our purpose and goals. They concern how we continuously improve the way we deliver our programme and influence work. They are essential to our success.

Strengthening context analysis to tackle root causes

This type of analysis is not a one-off process. It should be dynamic, ongoing and help us to be responsive to changing circumstances. It looks at the external context as much as at our internal history, strengths and weaknesses.

Generating and learning from evidence

We analyse, learn from, use and make decisions based on robust evidence collected through monitoring, evaluation and research. In both development and humanitarian contexts, we:

- generate credible, robust, age and gender disaggregated data, both quantitative and

qualitative, and use such data ethically and responsibly;

- undertake original research to address particular knowledge gaps;
- draw on the particular knowledge and experience gained through monitoring and evaluation, to effect change, scale up success and continuously improve;
- ensure regular and reflective learning and sharing of knowledge to drive innovation and adaptive programmes and influencing;
- strategically use the data collected from sponsorship to inform our programme and influence work.

Mobilising and leveraging resources

We mobilise and leverage resources in ethical ways for use in work that supports our global strategy. Our work with donors helps to influence the decisions they make over where and how to support development. It makes optimal use of opportunities and synergies with the wider global development agenda.

AN OVERVIEW: ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES

1. Strengthening context analysis to tackle root causes
2. Generating and learning from evidence to achieve impact
3. Mobilising and leveraging resources
4. Developing internal capability and transforming ways of working
5. Utilising media and digital as critical enablers of change

The support from our sponsors allows us to make long-term commitments to the children and communities we work for. As well as revitalising child sponsorship, which forms the backbone of our global finances, we maintain a healthy and responsible growth in grants. We are also developing flexible yet scalable 'third' fundraising products – for example, focusing more on philanthropy and corporates.

We seek to optimise opportunities to fund our programme and influence work. This includes working as an effective network with the aim of making the best use of our own resources. We seek strategic partnerships to achieve common goals, where each partner (whether public, private or NGO) brings complementary resources, skills and expertise to the table.

Developing internal capability and transforming ways of working

We develop our internal capability to ensure that our staff and those associated with us adopt ways of working that reflect our programme and influence commitments and organisational values.

Our organisational values

- We work well together
- We strive for lasting impact
- We are open and accountable
- We are inclusive and empowering

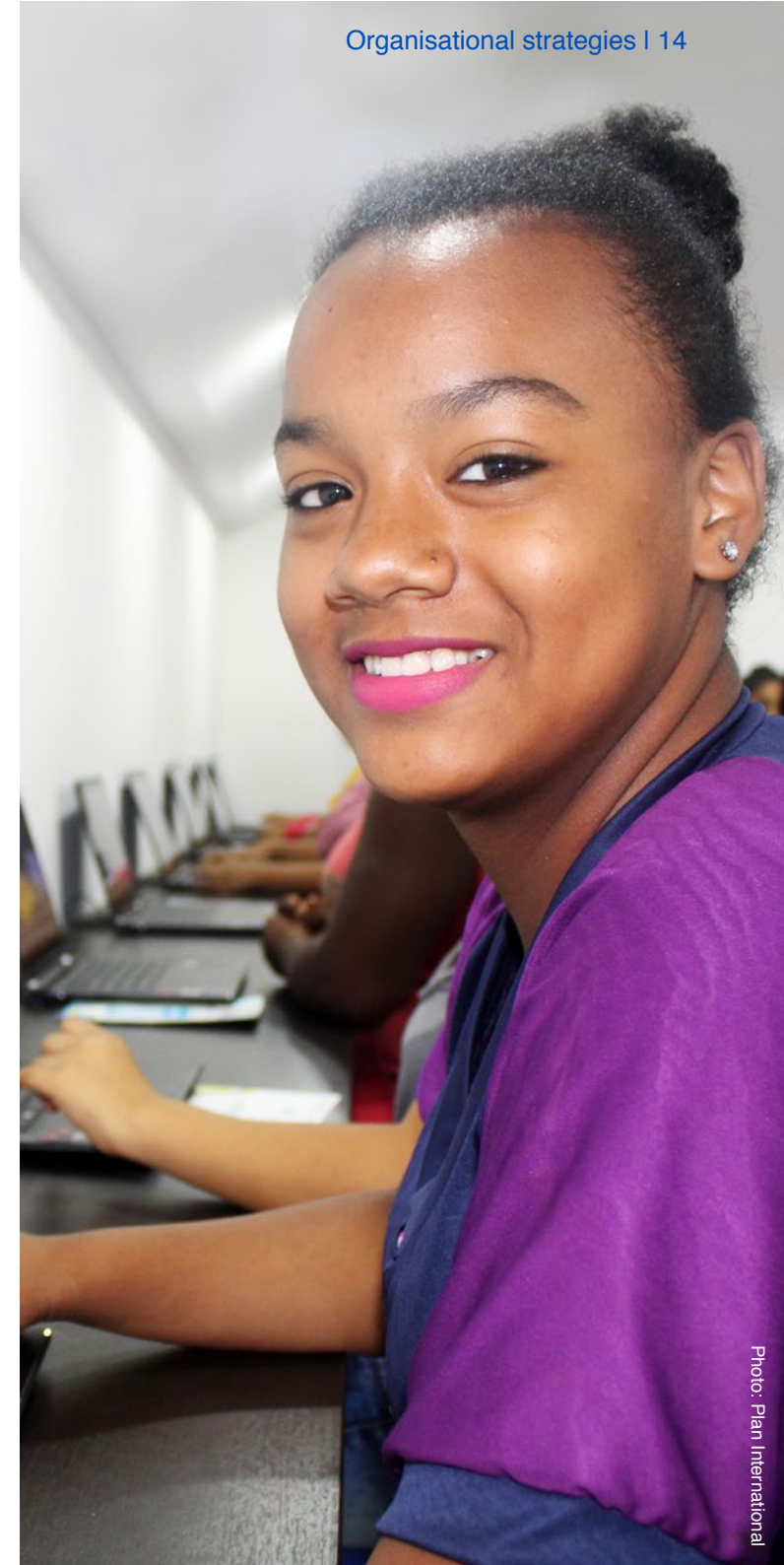
The various ways that we improve our own effectiveness are by:

- focusing on what is most important
- breaking down silos and building internal trust
- working in networked ways
- promoting reflective practice and learning from our mistakes
- reducing bureaucracy
- promoting dialogue
- being cost-efficient and results-oriented.

Transforming our ways of working means that we must make gender equality and inclusion a reality internally, and bridge the language and cultural gaps that might separate us. We build into our programme and influencing initiatives measures to strengthen the capability of our staff and associates, building on knowledge and experience that they bring to our work and organisation.

Using media and digital as critical enablers of change

Digital transformation is a critical driver of change worldwide. We will increasingly use and influence through media to support change and through the use of "ICT for Development". We will develop a digital culture to become an effective, user-focused organisation, and use digital opportunities to collect and analyse data to help our own decision-making and to enhance transparent accountability to stakeholders.



APPENDIX

OUR GLOBAL APPROACH TO PROGRAMME AND INFLUENCE AT A GLANCE

COMMITMENTS

- Gender transformative
- Rights-based (incl. participation)
- Open and accountable
- Working with other actors, organisations and institutions
- Working in all contexts
- Working at all levels

PROGRAMME AND INFLUENCE STRATEGIES

- 1 Promoting positive attitudes, behaviours and practices
- 2 Strengthening and mobilising civil society
- 3 Developing stakeholder capabilities
- 4 Influencing power holders
- 5 Providing direct support in emergencies and fragility

ORGANISATIONAL STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT OUR PROGRAMME AND INFLUENCE APPROACH

- 1 Strengthening context analysis to tackle root causes
- 2 Generating and learning from evidence to achieve impact
- 3 Mobilising and leveraging resources
- 4 Developing internal capability and transforming ways of working
- 5 Utilising media and digital as critical enablers of change

**IMPACT GROUP:
CHILDREN AND GIRLS
IN PARTICULAR,
0–24 YEARS**

DIMENSIONS OF CHANGE:

1. Norms, attitudes, behaviours
2. Social and economic assets and safety nets
3. Policy frameworks and budgets

END NOTES

1. Plan International (2015) *Getting it right for all girls and all boys* (October 2015)
2. In line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), children in most countries are legally defined as human beings under the age of 18.
3. The UN, for statistical consistency across regions, defines “youth” as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years. Plan uses the terms “youth” and “young people” interchangeably.
4. [Human rights principles](#) are universality, inalienability, interdependence and interrelation, participation and inclusion, accountability and rule of law. [CRC principles](#) are: non-discrimination, right to life, survival and development, respect for the views of the child, best interest of the child. [CEDAW principles](#) are: equality, non-discrimination and state obligation.
5. See: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>
6. We recognise that many individuals identify as male or as female. We also recognise that gender is not binary, and includes a continuum of possibilities. To facilitate ease of reading within this policy, we refer to women, men, girls and boys throughout. This does not in any way diminish our commitment to and work with individuals with other gender identities.
7. For instance, girls’ political empowerment; girls’ freedom from violence and girls’ bodily integrity; girls’ sexual and reproductive choice; gender transformative education; equal opportunities for decent and fairly paid work, etc.
8. Intersectional lens: recognising and unpacking the interconnected nature of social categorisations such as race, class and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.
9. Plan International ensures that it adheres to its [Child Protection Policy and Child Protection Implementation Standards](#)
10. Plan International has guidance in relation to working with others – ‘[Building Better Partnerships](#)’
11. The humanitarian principles are humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. The Core Humanitarian Standards can be found here: <https://corehumanitarianstandard.org/the-standard>

Plan International is an independent development and humanitarian organization that advances children's rights and equality for girls.

We believe in the power and potential of every child. But this is often suppressed by poverty, violence, exclusion and discrimination. And it's girls who are most affected. Working together with children, young people, our supporters and partners, we strive for a just world, tackling the root causes of the challenges facing girls and all vulnerable children.

We support children's rights from birth until they reach adulthood. And we enable children to prepare for – and respond to – crises and adversity. We drive changes in practice and policy at local, national and global levels using our reach, experience and knowledge.

We have been building powerful partnerships for children for over 80 years, and are now active in more than 71 countries.



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To learn more about our actions for children, visit
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