

## MIGRATION WORKS

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Exploding the myths about migration and exploring the motivations which bring migrant workers to the UK



## What's it all about?

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### **Migrant Workers North West is an organisation which aims....**

to promote 'best practice' in the employment of migrant workers including fair conditions of employment and positive recruitment practices;

to provide a region-wide reference point for support services available to migrant workers and their communities;

to identify specific training needs amongst migrant workers and skills already within the migrant worker communities; and

to promote 'best practice' amongst policy makers towards legislation affecting migrant workers.

The organisation was established, with support from the North West Development Agency, through an alliance of employers and trade unions in the region, following a recognition that migrant workers (those migrants coming to the UK for the purpose of finding work) should be treated no less favourably than indigenous workers and, like all other workers, should certainly not be "exploited".

We also recognised that migration is not a new issue for the UK, and we have a rich history of encouraging foreign nationals to come here as students, and as workers in times of labour shortages (and we have experienced these frequently and recently). It is also the case that large numbers of UK nationals choose to live and work abroad. However, it soon became apparent that both migrants and their employers often needed help in accessing advice and support on a wide range of issues. Migrant Workers North West has responded to calls for help, by both workers and employers, over the past few years.

It is obvious that views about migrant workers have often been extremely polarised, and some of the problems stem from a lack of understanding and/or objective debate about the nature of migration, often fuelled by "sensational" tabloid headlines which are frequently not supported by the facts.

The organisation clearly favours the view that immigrant workers have brought positive benefits to the country but, more important, we recognise that migration is a “fact of life” in a modern global economy so that we need to deal rationally with any issues which arise from it. Above all else, however, it is unacceptable that migrants themselves should collectively be blamed for those issues.

We have previously commissioned and published research in 2007 through the Merseyside Social Inclusion Observatory, part of the University of Liverpool, which explored, beyond “the statistics”, more of the community and workplace issues around migration. During 2009, we commissioned further research, again through MSIO in conjunction with the Salford Housing & Urban Studies Unit (SHUSU) of Salford University, and available at [www.migrantworkersnorthwest.org](http://www.migrantworkersnorthwest.org). The Executive Summary of this work stated....

“The purpose was to provide a more in-depth understanding of what motivates people to come to the UK, what affects people’s decisions to stay or leave, and what migrants perceive their contribution to be to the UK.”

That understanding has been further strengthened through further collaborative research with SHUSU during 2011-12.

The researchers also worked in collaboration with a photographic project carried out by Matthew Davenport. These images captured by Matthew, combined with the comments from the research interviewees, inspired Migrant Workers North West to produce this booklet. This was partly to highlight the frequency with which the comments of interviewees helped to explode the tabloid myths about migration, and partly to illustrate the “human” face of migrant workers’ choices about coming to live and work in the UK. It also helped us to give a new focus on some of the priority “policy” issues which, in our own view, now need further development.

## INTRODUCTION

**Britain has been using successive waves of migrants to solve its labour shortages for the past two hundred years.**

Between 1830 and 1850, tens of thousands of Irish arrived here fleeing poverty and famine at home but also to meet the demand for workers on the canals and railways. In both World Wars the country desperately needed hundreds of thousands of servicemen from across the Empire and many remained here afterwards, once again, to take up unfilled jobs in the mines and elsewhere. After the Second World War there were particular labour shortages and the Government encouraged Poles and Italians to settle – but it wasn't enough to meet the country's needs. So the Government encouraged mass immigration of West Indians and Asians throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Migration slowed during the 1970s but new labour shortages from 2004 onwards attracted workers from new Eastern European countries joining the European Union and helped to fill job vacancies leading to increased migration over recent years.

**In 2008, the difference between immigration and emigration in the UK was 163,000.** An estimated 590,000 people arrived to live in the UK in 2008. This compares with 574,000 in 2007 and is a continuation of the level of immigration seen since 2004. Approximately 191,000 arrived from Commonwealth countries in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean and 92,000 arrived from Eastern Europe, of whom almost three-quarters (68,000) were Polish citizens. About a quarter of total immigration resulted from the 157,000 incoming international students. Emigration from the UK also reached a record high in 2008. According to the Office for National Statistics, an estimated 427,000 people emigrated from the UK in 2008, up from 341,000 in 2007. This rise was due to an increase in non-British citizens leaving, up from 169,000 in 2007 to 255,000 in 2008. Emigration of citizens of the A8 Accession Countries more than doubled from 25,000 to 69,000 between 2007 and 2008.

**The flow of migrant workers into the UK has boosted economic growth and helped control inflation without undermining the jobs of British-born workers according to recent studies.** A detailed report in 2007 by accountancy firm Pricewaterhouse Coopers showed that new arrivals from Eastern Europe had helped to keep inflation and interest rates lower by increasing the supply of labour relative to demand. The report also showed that public finances have not suffered as a result of the influx of migrant workers. A more recent report in 2009 by the Migration Policy Institute highlights research (for example, by University College London and the Institute of Public Policy Research) proving that migrants have very little negative impact on wage levels and do not displace UK-born workers in any demographic sub-group. Cambridge University's Robert Rowtham has estimated that the fiscal effect of immigration is "close to zero" demonstrating that immigrants represent no on-cost to the tax-payer. In fact, each

year foreign students contribute £3.5 billion to the UK economy in tuition fees climbing to £8.5 billion when all other spending is taken into consideration.

**Migration in a global labour market is a two-way process for Britain.** According to the Office for National Statistics, the number of UK Nationals working in other EU countries is approximately 286,000. The main destinations are Germany (65,000); Ireland (52,000); Spain (42,000); France (36,000); and the Netherlands (28,000). Whilst the number of EU workers in Britain is therefore three or four times the number of British workers in the EU, the global picture is somewhat different. The ONS figures show that, in 2006 alone, the total number of Britons leaving the UK was more than 200,000 whilst the total number of Britons who live and/or work abroad is around 5.5 million, either in the EU or, typically, in Canada, New Zealand, Singapore and the United Arab Emirates. This trend has been going on over several decades with British workers, quite legitimately in the current global market, exercising their right to work abroad in the same way that foreign migrants exercise **their** right to work in the UK.

**Many of the country's "household names" are part of this two-way process and, as migrant workers themselves, are governed by the same rules as everybody else within the global labour market.** However, the public rarely thinks to apply the term "migrant worker" to people who are footballers working in another country (David Beckham, Fernando Torres or Dimitar Berbatov), music and film celebrities (like Dannii Minogue or Kevin Spacey), chefs and restaurateurs (like Raymond Blanc or Gino d'Acampo), and football managers (like Arsène Wenger or Rafael Benitez). Similarly, whilst they might not see them as celebrities, the public rarely thinks about the holders of other "high value" jobs as being migrant workers either. All the same, the UK still needs to employ large numbers of professional managers, doctors, other health care professionals, entrepreneurs and investors, IT specialists, etc, from the USA, Australia, Egypt, Jordan, the Philippines, Japan and many other places.

**Migration is an essential and inevitable component for a successful country in the global economy.** This is one of the conclusions reached following research by the International Organisation for Migration, an inter-governmental body with 127 member states, all of which consider that migration is one of the defining global issues of the early 21st century. About 3% of the world's population (around 192 million people) live and/or work outside their country of birth.

**The public has many misconceptions about inward migration and, indeed, some groups of migrants also have misconceptions about the UK.** This booklet aims to explore some of the many myths about migrant workers. It is common to read that Migrant Workers have taken British jobs and caused high levels of unemployment, or that Migrant Workers are only interested in integrating within their own communities and don't even speak English. Many think that Migrant Workers come here with no

qualifications and have only got a short-term commitment to the UK, or that Migrant Workers are a drain on hard-pressed public services and claim all sorts of benefits to which they're not entitled. Employees can also get the impression that Migrant Workers help employers to drive down pay, terms and conditions. On the other hand, according to research by the Audit Commission, migrants arriving here are often misled by simple differences between the UK and the rest of the European Union. Examples of this include, for example, insurance arrangements and vehicle standards, the use of GPs rather than hospitals as the way of accessing primary care, or the school starting age and academic expectations for young children.

**Misconceptions about migrants in general may be preventing us attracting entrepreneurs from abroad who can make a positive impact on the economy.** Countries like Canada and many of the European states are going out of their way to attract the best and brightest entrepreneurs but, even though we know that entrepreneurs can drive dynamism in the economy, negative attitudes and misconceptions about migrants in the UK can act as a real deterrent to those wishing to come here for the purpose of setting up their own business. A few years ago, the charity Sustainability Northwest (SNW) completed a comparative study of the financial and social contribution of "assimilated entrepreneurs" - people with origins outside the UK. Their Wealth Bringers report not only found that businesses run by assimilated entrepreneurs in the North West have higher turnovers than those run by their counterparts across the UK, but showed that their profits are 13% higher than those generated by an equivalent sample drawn from the region's wider business community.

**Migrant Workers North West was established to help the region deal with some of these issues.** The organisation aims... to promote 'best practice' in the employment of migrant workers including fair conditions of employment and positive recruitment practices; to provide a region-wide reference point for support services available to migrant workers and their communities; to identify specific training needs amongst migrant workers and skills already within the migrant worker communities; and to promote 'best practice' amongst policy makers towards legislation affecting migrant workers.

**New research helps us to better understand some of the motivations for migration as well as the contributions made by migrant workers to the UK.** Migrant Workers North West, in conjunction with the North West Development Agency, commissioned the research by the Universities of Salford and Liverpool to capture the experiences of migrant workers through direct interviews. Extracts from those interviews form the basis of this booklet, providing a "human face" to issues which, for many in the UK, are normally only seen through impersonal and sensationalised news headlines. At the same time, local photographer Matthew Davenport took some stunning images of interviewees and their families, some of which appear on the following pages.



## MYTHS

This section highlights five of the standard “myths” about migration, often promoted by the tabloid media. It also highlights the reality behind some of the media headlines and includes comments from the Interviewees engaged by the research.

The five “myths” are....

### 1. **East Europe Migrants Help Take Jobless To Six-Year High (Daily Mail, 17.8.06)**

The Myth: “Migrant Workers have taken British jobs and caused high levels of unemployment”

The Reality: While unemployment certainly rose sharply in mid-2006, the number of people in work actually grew during the previous twelve months by 240,000, to reach 28.84 million – the highest number of people in work since records began in 1971. Despite the effects and unemployment, the growing population has meant that the number of people in work at November 2009 was, in fact, 28.92 million. Similarly, OECD research for March 1997 to March 2007 shows that there were an additional 2 million jobs created in the UK economy. Whilst there was an obvious increase in migrant workers during this period, the indigenous working-age population also grew significantly by half a million. Office of National Statistics figures show that 3 million more people were in work at the start of 2008, compared with 1998, suggesting that around 50% of “new” jobs have gone to migrants with a similar number going to indigenous workers.

The Comment: “In our factory we all had to work so hard, in this cold. An English person would not be able to bear this. Once, an English worker came to our shift, but he disappeared after a week...” (Interviewee 10, Czech female, aged 45)

### 2. **Denmark to pay immigrants £12,000 to go home if they 'can't or won't' assimilate (Mail Online, 10.11.09)**

The Myth: “Migrant Workers are only interested in integrating within their own communities and don’t even speak English”

The Reality: According to the CLG Citizenship Survey in December 2007, 82% of people nationally agree with the statement that “people of different backgrounds get on well in their local area.” The almost daily deluge of anti-immigration tabloid headlines could be taken as a reflection of terrible divisions within our communities. In practise, however, and despite the

genuine concerns of many about some aspects of migration, the vast majority of our communities seem take the reality of the situation in their stride.

The Comment: “At the moment I work at a place with many English people and I learn a lot from them. I learn the language and their way of life. It’s just now that I am getting to know their mentality, their way of humour...I like the way they behave here” (Interviewee 12, Slovak male, aged 33)

“You learn new things, for example, how the law works here, language, you learn it, sometimes you learn ‘scouse’ words. And it’s good fun with the English, they know how to make fun in their life” (Interviewee 14, Polish female, aged 27)

“I hope to learn more English and get a more interesting job, something where you have to use your brain more...But I am realistic at the same time, I have to deserve such a job by learning the language” (Interviewee 9, Czech male, aged 30)

“It’s hardly relevant for me [moving to other EU countries] because I speak only English and no other language...you have to know at least the basics of the language of the country where you want to live. The UK is the only country available to me” (Interviewee 6, Polish female, aged 53)

“You know, without good English you can’t get a better job than a factory” (Interviewee 19, Polish female, aged 19)

### 3. **How Saying The Word ‘Family’ Got Four Iraqis Into Eldorado Britain (Daily Express, 13.2.09)**

The Myth: “Migrant Workers come here with no qualifications and have only got a short-term commitment to the UK”

The Reality: The Labour Force Survey data from 2000 onwards shows that the percentage of migrant workers with a degree, as a ratio of those with no qualifications, is higher than amongst the general population. The UK has one of the most highly qualified migrant populations – ahead of the United States, Sweden, France and Germany. Migrant Workers from outside the EU are subject to the Points-Based System - which means that people from outside the EU can only come and work in the UK if they are considered to be highly skilled **and** in a skills shortage occupation with a sponsored company.

The Comment: “...my contribution is my five children who will work and live in this country in [the] future” (Interviewee 12, Slovak male, aged 33)

“I think my contribution is my seven children...seven future citizens and workers to this state. Children try to integrate in society, they participate in many activities...one of my daughters, who is at college now will start youth work course in a few weeks, as a volunteer. She will take the small kids on holidays. She would like to become a social worker in future” (Interviewee 8, Czech female, aged 39)

“I have got a family and I don't want to drag them with me all over Europe. I don't want to change the country...we already know it here, they [our children] go to British schools” (Interviewee 9, Czech male, aged 30)

#### 4. **NHS And Schools ‘At Risk From Surge in EU Immigrants’ (The Times, 31.7.06)**

The Myth: “Migrant Workers are a drain on hard-pressed public services and claim all sorts of benefits to which they're not entitled”

The Reality: Immigrants make up 8% of the workforce but contribute 10% of the UK's GDP. Ernst & Young reported that migrants are net tax payers and therefore not a burden to the public purse. They ease the pensions bill by paying tax and keeping interest rates at least 0,5% lower – equivalent to £500 a year on the average mortgage. In 2008-09, arrivals from the new EU Member States (A8) – Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – paid 37% more in taxes than they took in welfare payments and from public services, according to research by University College London. This means that migrants often bring more to the country than they receive back in public services. The fact that, amongst recent migrants, many tend to be young and in good health, means that they are generally a lower strain on public services than the population as a whole.

The Comment: “One thing is taxes of course. I work and pay all my taxes...” (Interviewee 12, Slovak male, aged 33)

#### 5. **Migrants Get Brits' Pay Slashed by 50% (The Sun, 18.8.06)**

The Myth: “Migrant Workers help employers to drive down pay, terms and conditions”

The Reality: The annual growth rate in average earnings excluding bonuses was 3.9% in June 2006, up 0.1% on the previous month. Including bonuses, wages grew by 4.3%, up 0.2% on the previous month. Average earnings in the UK have

continued to increase ever since, quarter after quarter, with the annual rate rising by 1.6% in the three months to November 2009. Most skilled migrants from outside the EU work in highly skilled areas where they generally earn higher than average wages. For all occupations – even the more elementary ones where many A8 nationals work – the key motivation for employing migrant workers was skills, according to research by Employment Consultant SQW in August 2008. 61% of employers stated that migrant workers had skills not readily available in the indigenous population as the main reason for recruitment. Many recent A8 migrants have tended to take elementary jobs (about 47%). These are, however, occupations which tend to have low levels of employment amongst indigenous workers (12%). The ability to employ migrant workers in many of these industries, say employers, has actually meant that many businesses have been able to maintain production – something which, they believe, may not have been possible otherwise and thus providing a boost to the economy.

The Comment: “When I arrived in the UK, my first wage was £5.10 an hour. Now I get minimum wage again and it is £5.73. So the difference after four years of work is only 60p, so how many percent increase is that? And now compare the increase of prices, I think the prices went up almost 50% for example for food and local transport. So I rather expect shrinking savings” (Interviewee 6, Polish female, aged 53)

“The employers get profits from people like me...migrants like me take even jobs which English people would never take because they are badly paid. I don't think this is changing and it will never change. These jobs must be done by some people, cleaning streets or toilets” (Interviewee 1, Czech male, aged 38)

“I have been on two [table] football tournaments in the city...I am active in Liverpool social centre, which is an alternative social club in the city centre...I went to vote in the recent local elections because I was concerned about the rise of the BNP. In the end my vote did not help much, but my conscience is clear at least...I am a member of the University student guild...” (Interviewee 5, Polish male, aged 25)

“My most frequent contact point is the school where I talk to the parents of Czech, Slovak and Polish kids. It includes things such as filling in various benefit claim forms, translating official letters...A couple of times I took the kids and their parents to youth clubs and helped them get to know these places” (Interviewee 3, Polish female, aged 47)



## MOTIVATIONS

In this section, we explore the five most frequently quoted “motives” which bring migrants to the UK.

The five “motives” (and associated “contributions/benefits”) are....

### 1. Motive - Migrant Workers come seeking better paid and better skilled jobs.

Contribution – The UK still has skill and job shortages in some key sectors (health and care), so contribute to **Regional Skills Pool**, whilst students make a major economic contribution.

Comment: “Then my friend found a job for me on the internet - care work in an elderly home in the Wirral.” (Interviewee 6, Polish female, aged 53)

### 2. Motive – Older as well as younger migrants come seeking “new experiences” and are often committed to staying in the medium-longer term.

Contribution – Longer-stay migrants make a net contribution to the national economy through their taxes and their day-to-day spending, easily compensating for any public services or benefits to which they are entitled and draw down while they are in the country.

Comment: “The people who save their money are the ones who want to return back home. But we live like [we are] at home here” (Interviewee 12, Slovak male, aged 33)

### 3. Motive – Migrant Workers take other issues (housing, learning and language opportunities) into account when deciding whether to remain in the UK.

Contribution - Contrary to popular belief, most migrants have a strong local spend rather than “sending money home” (give details to show benefit for **North West economy**).

Comment: “The reason is that I wanted to learn better English. I was not happy with my teachers of English at home” (Interviewee 3, Polish female, aged 47)

**4. Motive – Migrant Workers are still motivated more by economic factors than any others and their circumstances therefore still drive them into lower-paid job vacancies.**

Contribution – The **Labour Market** has become more competitive as the demand for previously “unwanted” jobs (which caused the need for this wave of migration in the first place) at national minimum wage increases (and maybe also a bit here about “work ethic”).

Comment: “...we Poles are used to work[ing] hard. In Poland we [are] used to car[ing] about our jobs, to value the job because there was a lack of them. So if you had a job, you got hold of it. Then we came here and we worked hard and fast for the employers...The English workers, most of them, don’t care about their work...When we take a break, we take ten minutes and then hurry back to the line. They take twenty minutes and aren’t bothered that someone must do the work instead of them” (Interviewee 14, Polish female, aged 27)

“I think it’s us, the foreigners, to blame for the increased norms. [We] broke the norms because you are afraid of losing your job and this fear was misused by managers...Because there [are] a lot of foreigners here. So if you don’t work like crazy, you lose your job and someone else will replace you and WILL work like crazy” (Interviewee 15, Czech male, aged 33)

“...young English workers who came to work right from their schools and didn’t bother at all about [the] quality of their work...now with the crisis...the same young people are afraid of losing their jobs and now they care about how they work and work harder” (Interviewee 6, Polish female, aged 53)

**5. Motive – Migrant Workers still come here to escape discrimination and unfairness in their home country, seeking better community cohesion in the UK.**

Contribution – Migrant Workers contribute to **Community** activities despite a range of barriers (including often a lack of activities in existing communities) and often through kids etc.

Comment: “The racism is even worse now in the Czech Republic.....the violence from skinheads gets worse. So it's clear for us more than ever that we would be unwelcome if we went back to the Czech Republic” (Interviewee 8, Czech female, aged 39)

“My gym matters a lot for me. I do body building. I feel that this is a kind of culture, community. We are a very diverse group of people; doctors, posh people, ‘scallies’, teenagers...But when we are inside, you don't see any differences, doesn't matter whether you are black or white. No prejudice. A kilogram is the same for each. I get to know people from another point of view” (Interviewee 15, Czech male, aged 33)

“I went with my wife and my neighbours to the Food Festival in Kensington...people from different countries brought their national meals to the venue and we were free to taste everything...I baked and brought some poppy seed rolls and the people liked it a lot” (Interviewee 11, Slovak male, aged 21)

“...on Mondays when we don't work we go out to a pub with people from work, some English people come too. I mix with them normally” (Interviewee 14, Polish female, aged 27)

“I find these communities based on race or origin not interesting. I prefer a mixed community where you can meet different people and local people too. You can integrate easier than if you only hang around with Poles or Slovaks or other foreigners” (Interviewee 19, Polish female, aged 28)

“I have a good relationship with my English neighbours. Sometimes at night they knock on our window and say ‘good night, you forgot to close your window’” (Interviewee 9, Czech male, aged 30)

“I want that everybody will know about us here, so that we will not hide here anymore. I want to show the people what our people achieved, what they are able to do. So that they can say ‘ah look at them, they seem alright, lets go to that gig’. I very much want to change how English people think about us” (Interviewee 4, Czech female, aged 33)

“The more we talk to each other, the stronger relationship we build. In the beginning there was a kind of tension between us...Step by step we built a kind of tolerant relationship, we spoke with them, introduced ourselves, we told them why we were here...” (Interviewee 7, Slovak male, aged 49)



## CONCLUSIONS

Migrant Workers North West takes five important points from the research it has commissioned and calls on the Government to re-think policy in a number of crucial areas. These include....

1. The need for **Migration Evidence-Based Data** – so that there can be more aggressive myth-busting at all levels.

Gathering sound information about the movement people in and out of the country is notoriously difficult. Nevertheless, a formal audit, on an annual basis, of migrant worker experiences would help local and national government to respond to both inaccurate accusations from those that oppose inward migration, and calls for more support resources which may be pooled or focused as a result of better intelligence.

2. A better focus within **Migration Support Services** to maximise migrants' contribution, and to help agencies deal with specialist needs, such as debt counselling, family reunion, language training, etc.

There is always a balance to be judged between a wide but broad support service, and a narrow and specialist one. The former avoids the cost of niche advisors but will fail a number of people with particular needs. The latter will help everyone, but may suffer from criticism over value for money. What is needed is a general service that can call on niche advisors in a referral system that will only draw down resources when they are being used.

3. The need for a wider application of the **Minimum Standards** approach to combat exploitation of the workforce by employers in Britain and to recognise the problems caused by intra-migrant tensions.

The Charter that has been promoted by MWNW has been considered by many employers to date. A common early problem is that every employer has different procedures leading to a variety of challenges when they try to comply with the Charter. A minimum standard laid down by government would overcome these procedural issues and allow willing employers to follow their principled acceptance and adopt the Charter.

4. Revision of **Entry Qualification Systems** to combat the UK's skill shortage in certain areas. There is also a need for the UK to deal with continuing "qualification" issues, including the need to ensure that Highly-Skilled and Graduate Eastern European migrants are not disadvantaged compared to those from outside the European Union.

The current systems are not addressing the skill shortage occupations of the Northwest. Where employers identify specific skills shortage, such as in the residential care sector, migrant workers should be able to fill these vacancies to support the economy. Currently jobs which are not considered to be highly skilled enough or those that do not pay a high enough salary are not open to migrants from outside the EU despite a willingness on the part of many foreign nationals to undertake this work.

The acceptability of the skills of migrant workers is also a significant issue. Many migrant workers particularly from inside the EU are doing jobs below their skills and educational standard. The process of employers recognising these skills is difficult, especially as many migrants cannot afford to pay to have their qualification validated against comparable UK qualifications.

Significantly more benefit can be gained from migrant workers if their skills can be properly utilised and if a wider pool of migrants can help to address the labour market shortages which still exist.

5. **Regional Economic Strategies** need to recognise the importance of migrant workers and be more explicit in their support for this important economic stimulant. This should include attention to community and social cohesion events where there is currently little activity, and to examine any worklessness issues including entrepreneurial and social enterprise opportunities

The focus on improving economic productivity and job creation has meant that many Regional Development Agencies have concentrated on easy-to-reach elements of the population. However, there are sections of the workless population (such as disabled people and older people, and others that are under-employed (including many migrant workers) who could be more productive given the appropriate investment in their needs. Future economic strategies should recognise the potential of these groups and put in the extra effort to reap larger rewards.

## CREDITS

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