

EBU

Annual Report

2020



The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe

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Dear EBU Members, Dear Friends,

Our activities in 2020 started under completely new conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic, exploded all over Europe from March onwards, has changed dramatically our personal and professional lives. In my speech at the EBU General Assembly in October 2019, I pointed out that our world was in a period of rapid and unpredictable changes and that, in order to implement the new strategic orientation plan adopted by the General Assembly, EBU needed to review its management, based on efficiency, innovation, inclusiveness and participation. On 19 December 2019, I wrote a letter to all EBU national organisations inviting them to collaborate to the growth and the success of our Union, being actively involved in projects and initiatives aimed at improving the living conditions of all blind and partially sighted people in the European continent. With the advent of COVID-19, persons with disabilities and their families were heavily hit, but the blindness movement reacted positively, calling on the political and

administrative policy-makers to ensure concrete and immediate protective measures in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Sustainable Development Goals.

The pandemic has caused significant problems to the operational management of EBU's secretariat, in particular the lock-down restrictions. From March onwards all the EBU staff was obliged to work from home and all meetings were held on-line. Moreover, a new President and a new Board were in office, a new Executive Director was hired, a new Chair and a new Cabinet of the Commission for Liaising with the Institutions of the EU were appointed.

Nonetheless, as you will see when reading this annual report, EBU has done an impressive amount of work. The project-based approach aiming to increase the engagement of the members in a more effective way continues to be implemented, in order to strengthen their engagement in the realisation of the Strategic Orientation Plan. We hope that there will be a positive response.

In March 2021 the European Commission adopted the new European Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2021-2030, which was an important campaigning activity in 2020 and will be an important working priority in the coming years. The time has come to engage ourselves in a new challenging fight and prepare for the “new normal” which will hopefully come soon. There are signs that in the coming months we will shift away from a purely emergency situation and it will be our duty to ensure that blind and partially sighted persons and their representative organisations are fully and actively included in the recovery measures, and receive concrete support during the expected economic downturn. We will certainly need to fight for the implementation and the respect of our rights that have been recognised only in recent years. We will not accept to be left behind when our society will be recovering from the crisis.

Your President

Rodolfo Cattani,
EBU President



EBU President Rodolfo Cattani

Introduction By The Executive Director

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It is my pleasure to write-up my first-ever introduction to the EBU Annual Report! This edition covers a year that none of us will forget so easily! When I took-up my position as Executive Director on March 16th 2020, I had just moved from Brussels to Paris. And on that very day, the lockdown was declared in France and, as a consequence, I spent exactly 1 day in the office; not to get to know the office team in great detail, but mostly to practically organise the period of lockdown. And this gave a flavour of what the whole year ahead would look like. It was all the time about constantly adapting to changing situations and rules at all levels, and I am sure all of you can relate to that story.

Nevertheless, I felt very much welcomed and supported by my office team and you, the EBU members! All of you made my induction a pleasant experience, despite the challenging context. And I learned so much about the realities of your organisations in different contexts across the continent, an experience I am very

much looking forward to deepen, soon also through face-to-face encounters!

As said by our President in his foreword, our community has definitely shown a great deal of flexibility and adaptability. For example, we collectively now know how to hold accessible and efficient online meetings! Thanks to that flexibility, we managed to accomplish many activities in 2020, and this report provides a good overview of those achievements covering a wide range of areas of life. No activities can ever be conducted without a sound financial basis. And on that front too, this report gives the key figures and trends from our financial year 2020.

Furthermore, we were also able to secure a new project named 'Promoting Awareness on the Rights of Visually Disabled People in an Inclusive Society', (PARVIS): While its implementation started in 2021, we successfully submitted our application to the European Commission for this ambitious project last year.

As a learning organisation, we conducted an external evaluation of our 2020 activities, which showed a good level of satisfaction by our members of our action, as well as giving us ideas on how to improve. And much much more was done and achieved, but I let you read by yourself.

In short, a year full of challenges and opportunities 2020. Enjoy reading more about it on the following pages.

**Lars Bosselmann,
EBU Executive Director**



EBU Executive Director
Lars Bosselmann

The European Blind Union is a non-governmental organisation protecting and promoting the rights and interests of blind and partially-sighted people in Europe. The large number of member organisations we reunite provide us with a great deal of knowledge, expertise and experience related to visual impairment and its implications in the daily life of millions of persons with sight loss. Membership of the European Blind Union is globally stable. EBU currently has 41 members.

While the General Assembly of Members held every four years is our governing body, our work is directed by an Executive Board of up to 13 members. In 2020, the Board held 3 meetings. In addition the officers of the Board held meetings over Skype at regular intervals to address issues requiring urgent action. The officers' decisions were reported to and confirmed by the Board at their face to face or virtual meetings.

EBU's activities are also facilitated through Networks, established to address various work areas,

including ICTs, Road safety and access to transport, rights, as well as the needs of specific segments of the visually impaired population, including persons with low vision, women.

EBU also participates in campaigns and activities which have a broader scope than Europe itself, in particular as the European member of the World Blind Union, a global organisation representing the interests of 285 million blind and partially sighted people in 190 member countries worldwide.

The EBU Central Office supports the Board, national members, Commissions and Networks in their work. It is also the main contact point for information to the general public, members and partner organisations. Ever since it was established, the Central Office has been located in central Paris.

Headed by the Executive Director, EBU's central office team is composed of four other staff members. In 2020 the permanent EBU staff members were:

Executive Director

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As it was for each of us in 2020, the life of the European Blind Union was significantly disrupted by the COVID pandemic, which forced all employees to work from home, and from March onwards meant that all face-to-face meetings were replaced by virtual conferences, which were slightly less effective but much less expensive.

The lockdown is therefore the sole reason for the surplus of €62,891.75 we have recorded for 2020, with some trips possibly only deferred until the situation allows us to resume normal life and have regular meetings again, as we have in the past.

A Expenditure

We can note with a great deal of satisfaction that we remained within our budget estimates and that the few small variations were fully justified.

Additional expenses were as follows:

- the amount of fees that are 80% covered by the European

Commission grant of €50,600 exceeded the budget by €7,000 and related mainly to document translation costs, expert fees, audit costs and periodic publications, proving that working from home has not slowed the pace of our activities;

- salaries, which amounted to €268,600, only exceeded our budget estimates by €5,600; it should be noted that the change of Director resulted in additional costs, such as the previous director's retirement package and a period of training for his successor, during which the two directors worked together;
- for the same reason, social security contributions (€105,280) were in deficit by €4,200;
- some changes to the Director's office and the purchase of small items of equipment for staff working from home resulted in a twofold increase on the "small office equipment" account, which rose from €2,200 to €4,700;

- finally, charges for the previous year amounted to €16,200, broken down as follows: €7,700 for expenditure on the General Assembly at the end of 2019, which was recorded late; €5,000 for the grant given to the Louis Braille museum, which we omitted to pay last year; and €3,500 related to the Onkyo project for 2019.

The following savings were achieved:

- travel costs, which are paid in part from funds from the European Commission or covered by the European Blind Union, amounted to just €15,260 against a budget of €61,000;
- assistance granted from the Solidarity Fund was just €10,860 compared with an accepted budget of €25,000;
- we only spent €4,450 on the Pascal project compared with a grant received of €35,100, which we will no doubt need to use, at least in part, over the next few financial years, the cost recorded in our budget estimates being €9,100;

- awards and grants paid by us in relation to the Onkyo project were €1,200 lower than estimated;
- a total amount of €12,000 was not spent on various other accounts, such as services, conferences, accountancy fees, phone and internet costs.

Total expenditure was therefore €558,520.79 against an estimate of €601,400.

B Revenues

All revenue shown in our budget estimates was received and there was even a small surplus in some areas:

- €8,800 for the Pascal project,
- €5,800 for the Onkyo project,
- €4,400 for contributions from members, whom I would like to thank most warmly for their prompt payments,
- €1,600 in additional sponsorship,
- €700 in additional interest on our investments.

Total revenues therefore amounted to €621,412.54 compared with an estimate of €601,400.

C Balance Sheet

At 31 December 2020, we had €1,152,359.62 in our various bank accounts, compared with just €679,542 last year, because of two significant advances received in December for projects in 2021: €185,000 for Parvis and €252,000 from the European Commission.

The total reserves shown on the balance sheet before the income appropriation for the year was €627,696.04, with €166,826 remaining allocated to the Solidarity Fund and €22,740 to help African associations providing support for visually impaired people.

D Income Appropriation

In light of the balance sheet and the fact that the Development Commission, whose aim is to support African associations that provide support for visually impaired people is set to resume

its activities in 2021, we propose to appropriate the surplus recorded in 2020 as follows:

- €15,000 to the AFUB fund, increasing the amount shown on the balance sheet from €22,740 to €37,740 and creating more opportunities for activities in this field;
- €42,891.75 to our other reserves, which can still be used if certain activities that were deferred in 2020 are able to take place subsequently.

Conclusion

Given that our balance sheet is satisfactory and our annual financial statements are in a strong position, we could be tempted to further increase the activities of the European Blind Union by agreeing, among other things, to take part in new projects or increase the number of staff in our Paris office. We must, however, remain prudent and not forget:

- That 50% of our resources come from a grant from the European Commission, which is never a long-term certainty;

- That while new projects often bring in additional resources, we also need to finance part of them from our own funds, while they also create an additional workload for our employees, who are already very busy;
- That it remains very difficult to obtain new resources from sponsors, who are often approached by the association in their own country, which is an EBU member association that we cannot deprive of the revenue;
- That while our members are currently very prompt in paying their contributions, which is highly encouraging and a mark of trust in us, they do not appear ready to provide additional financing to support the Solidarity Fund, the Assistance for African Associations Fund or the Louis Braille museum.

We should implement the recommendations we have received on improving our operations, try to act effectively and publicise it and remain confident that together, within the European Union or across Europe more widely, we can go even further to improve the situation of people who are blind or have a severe visual impairment.

Philippe CHAZAL

Treasurer, European Blind Union

EBU And Its Members - Internal Communication

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As a European network, EBU wants to improve internal communication with its members through transparent and harmonised use of EBU technical terminology. Young European and national leaders attended a “Getting to know EBU” e-workshop, as has been the case in previous years.

Discussion Lists

In order to facilitate and boost in-depth exchange of information, experience and good practices among members between meetings, we have developed email “discussion lists” according to areas of interest.

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It is equally important to maintain and increase our visibility and to make the needs and aspirations of blind and partially sighted people known to decision-makers, partner organisations, industry and the general public. Communication tools we use to that effect include:

1 Internet

The EBU Website.

The website is regularly updated, and the homepage was improved with a live Twitter feed, reflecting our increased campaigning activity on Twitter. EBU continues to use Facebook as an additional and more varied communication to enable a wider audience to remain aware of EBU activities and issues related to the visually impaired community. In 2020 the average number of monthly visitors to the website was around 6500, though this was increasing steadily towards the end of the year

2 The EBU Newsletters

The Member's newsletter is made up of contributions from our members, general news and

information on issues relevant to our target group and a feature is the regular campaign updates provided by the Campaign Officer. The monthly EBU Member's newsletter is also one of the vehicles used to promote the EBU Access Cast technology podcast.

The three-monthly EBU [Focus newsletters](#) were also related to a mix of campaigning topics, ongoing activities and specific projects. The topics for the Focus newsletters in 2020 were:

- March - Air Travel
- June - Learning From the COVID Crisis
- October - Audiodescription

The Focus newsletter is an excellent means of involving and thus making the most of both experts from EBU member countries and staff members. As a reminder, the Focus newsletters are now produced in seven languages, the four original online versions, English French German and Spanish, and, as word documents only, in Polish, Serbian and Turkish.

3 EBU Responses to EU Consultations

In 2020 EBU published [Position Papers](#) or responses on 9 key topics including the development of the European Disability Rights Strategy and media funding to the European film industry.

As a complement to this work, we developed a third 'how-to memo' on campaigning strategy as a concrete and multilingual resource for our members when approaching and meeting decision makers and other key stakeholders.

4 The EBU Access Cast

The [EBU Access Cast](#) continues to develop. 11 podcasts were produced in 2020 (with a summer break in August) by a team of experts in the field of assistive devices for blind and partially sighted persons.

The average number of unique listeners rose steadily from 133 in 2019 to 220 in 2020.

5 Twitter

Central to our external communication in campaigning, the EBU Twitter account, managed by our Head of Campaigning, has consistently and steadily increased its number of followers over the months in 2020, to reach 5000 followers, proving its value as a campaign tool in a difficult period.

As usual, the **annual meeting of our Commission for Liaising with the EU** was a key moment to organise our campaigning jointly with our 25 national members in the EU. This year's edition, on 20 November, was online due to the Covid-19 context. The downside compared to normal years was a shorter format and the loss of the human contacts that characterise networking in an organisation such as ours; the upside, paradoxically, was more active participation in the debates, and an agenda more driven toward decision-making. In fact, the effectiveness of the online format turned out to be a rather pleasant surprise and it was decided to develop the habit of holding some ad hoc thematic meetings of the commission in the future.

Our 2020 campaigning and advocacy work continued to contribute to the EU policy-making process. This mainly focused on four topics:

1 EU funding to the film industry

EBU produced a [position paper](#) looking in particular at the sub-

programme MEDIA. The aim of this document is to make recommendations on how to promote equal access to culture for persons with visual impairments in the EU through EU funding to the film industry. We also produced a dedicated edition of our quarterly [Focus Newsletter](#) in October on this subject. On 16 December, in a [press release](#), we welcomed the reaching of a political agreement between the European Parliament and EU Member States on the new Creative Europe programme for 2021-2027, after over a year of interinstitutional discussions on the Commission's proposal – delayed partly due to the Covid-19 pandemic. We expressed satisfaction that the agreement largely responds to our demands. The new Creative Europe Regulation provides a good basis for our continued campaign from 2021 onward, where we will be looking at how the Regulation is concretely implemented as far as our demands are concerned.

2 The WIPO Marrakesh Treaty

On the occasion of World Book Day, we issued a statement highlighting the importance at this critical time, of access to books, and the importance of the Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled. Our activity in this area was essentially outside the EU, to push for more countries in wider Europe to join the Treaty. In May we organised an e-workshop on promoting the Marrakesh Treaty for our members in the Western Balkans, building on a good dynamic there. Closer to the EU and in liaison with our members in these countries, we called on the UK to confirm its participation in the Treaty after the Brexit – which it did in October – and started to build pressure on non-EU EEA member states to transpose without delay the EU Marrakesh Treaty Directive in their legal orders.

3 The Equal Treatment Directive

We used every opportunity of advocacy and communication, and in particular the consultations and other events around the future Disability Rights Strategy, to voice our concern that the proposed horizontal anti-discrimination directive remains blocked at the EU Council. Against discouraging responses in this respect, we started to flag an alternative: a disability-specific horizontal anti-discrimination instrument. We continued to argue that the current approach of discrimination faced by persons with disabilities, very much employment-centred, is unsatisfactory.

4 The EU Disability Card

On this again, and with more success, we particularly used the consultations on the Disability Rights Strategy post-2020 to push for an expansion of the current pilot project, so as to make it what concerned citizens expect it to be: an EU-wide initiative with the same effects in all Member States, at the service of the free movement of persons with disabilities.

5 The EP Employment report

From June to September, we participated in a series of brainstorming meetings with MEP Katrin Langensiepen, to inform her report to the European Parliament's Employment and Social Affairs committee (EMPL) on "Implementation of the Employment Equality Directive in light of the UNCRPD. In that context we used and submitted the [EBU-ONCE report](#) on the situation of visually impaired persons regarding employment in Europe; and the publication "[Making the future of work inclusive of persons with disabilities](#)", developed by Fundación ONCE and the ILO Global Business and Disability Network (ILO GBDN), which analyses the megatrends of the future of work from the perspective of disability and identifies 5 five key objectives and specific actions for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in employment. The contribution of EBU was acknowledged in the report to EMPL. In the fall, ahead of the EMPL vote scheduled in January, we took an active part

in communication to support its recommendations, namely: we intervened in a [video](#) produced by Ms Langensiepen's team; on 19 November, we participated as programmed speakers in a webinar gathering representatives of the three main EU bodies; we also promoted the content of this report in the context of European Commission consultations for the future European Disability Rights Strategy. By the end of 2021, the Womens' Rights and Gender Equality Committee and the Petitions' Committee had already delivered their opinions, favourable to the report, and the perspectives were good toward the adoption of a European Parliament resolution in early 2021.

6 Other Campaigning Activities

We followed and contributed – even through direct participation upon invitation to meetings, on one occasion – to the work of WG 7 of CEN/TC 10 on the revision of the **Accessibility to Lifts** standard EN 81-70, this in close coordination with ANEC and the European Disability Forum (EDF).

As far as the **European Accessibility Act** is concerned, we continued to liaise with the Federation of European Publishers to accompany their efforts to define technical specifications for the implementation of the **European Accessibility Act** for e-books; and we relayed to our national member organisations the recommendations contained in the EDF Toolkit for the implementation of the EAA. We participated in a seminar on the European Accessibility Act organised by the Federation of European Publishers and the International Publishing Association at the Frankfurt Book Fair (16 October), to highlight the opportunities for all of the EAA as regards e-books.

Together with our national member organisations and jointly with EDF, we lobbied the EU law-makers around the recast revision of the **Rail Passenger Rights** Regulation – with the partial satisfaction that the pre-notification delay for persons with disabilities to require assistance was substantially reduced.

Our member in Austria (BSVÖ) had agreed to host our annual conference on the subject of Acoustic Systems for Information and Navigation. However, COVID 19 travel restrictions and measures obliged us to rethink this as a series of [3 online webinars](#). In spite of these limits the webinars were a success, attracting 47 participants from 24 countries, and as a result, a Focus newsletter on the topic was planned for early 2021.

1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities

The [EBU UNCRPD database](#) has existed since 2008 and, since then, our members have regularly contributed despite very limited resources and the particular difficulty to identify English-speaking legal experts.

In 2020 EBU supported its members in the promotion, and effective use of the UNCRPD by publishing [UNCRPD alternative reporting guidelines](#) a. guidance document which sets out to provide practical information to support civil society in participating in the review process by submitting an Alternative Report in relation to the UNCRPD.

The existing publication “The UNCRPD - A new look at our human rights” was translated into Estonian and French, bringing the total number of linguistic versions available to 12.

2 Accessible Voting Awareness Raising (AVA)



A vote being cast at the EBU
General Assembly

This multi-annual activity was led by EBU's member in Germany. [The video and the brochure](#) already available in Bulgarian, English, Greek, Polish and Slovak, were translated into Albanian and Hungarian, thus enabling our members in these countries approach policy-makers and election commissions with supporting material.

Awareness raising workshops were also held throughout the year in Greece, Montenegro, Poland and Slovakia.

3 Blind and Partially Sighted Women

EBU continued to work on its Gender Equality Awareness Raising (GEAR) activity. 10 empowerment and need assessment activities were held in 3 countries (Austria, Denmark, and Slovenia) with 64 visually impaired female participants, resulting in 4 country reports and 1 activity report.

Our [gender equality toolkit](#) was translated in two additional languages, bringing the total to 6.

This multi-annual activity is lead by EBU's member in Sweden.

4 Low Vision



Low vision aids in use at the EBU General Assembly

As a continuation to the EBU 2018 Low Vision conference, a focus group was held in Finland.

Online focus group discussions continued, and a report on activities was produced.

5 Collection of Best Practices on Accessibility

A call for best practices on Web-accessibility (focusing on public sector websites) was launched amongst the EBU membership in early May. Unfortunately, a high number of EBU members could not participate as they were still coping internally with the Covid-19 situation. The jury's experts (Austria, Estonia and Poland) received only 3 national contributions and the decision was made not to draft any deriving publication, although initially planned.

The most rated contribution, from Czech Republic, highlighted the importance of awareness-raising towards increase web-accessibility. Website developers and owners must think of accessibility upstream of the process (proactively) and not make their website accessible downstream of the same process (reactively).

6 Employment and Working for Younger People

6.1 EByouth

This multi-annual activity is led by EBU's member in Italy.

As planned, the national and European young leaders with a visual impairment identified in 2018 participated in the four following trainings:

- e-workshop 3 “Effective leadership and networking” on 24 March – 13 participants. Topics covered were: where and how to network, the meeting cycle, Dos and Don'ts. The 8 evaluation respondents reported they will implement what they learnt in their professional life (5 completely, 3 partially).
- e-workshop 4 “Innovative and long-lasting collaboration” on 11 May – 12 participants. Topics covered were: effective collaboration, how to recruit and engage with volunteers, youth umbrella organisations, and online collaboration tools. The 8 evaluation respondents reported they will implement what they learnt in their professional life (4 completely, 4 partially).
- e-workshop 5 “The basics of collaborative project management” on 22 October – 8 participants (the 4 European leaders were invited not to attend – see below). The project life cycle's stages were presented (initiation, planning, execution, closure) together with concrete tips based on the EBU Project Officer's 12 years-experience within EBU. The 5 evaluation respondents reported they will implement what they learnt in their professional life (4 completely, 1 partially).
- online training course 2 “Implementing successful projects” on 17 December – 4 participants (European leaders). This 2.5 hour-session covered the same topics as in e-workshop 5 with 4 additional hands-on exercises on the concept note, the application timeframe, the non-collaborative partner case, and the final event. The 3 evaluation respondents reported they will completely implement what they learnt in their professional life.

Young leaders will receive further training in 2020 and 2021, along the lines set out in the training outline devised in 2018.

6.2 ADVISE (Aiding Young Visually Impaired Seeking Employment)

This multi-annual activity is led by EBU's member in Spain.

New ADVISE sessions helped empower 21 young visually impaired job-seekers in Montenegro and Spain, and support materials were fine-tuned and translated into 3 additional languages. After a successful exchange, EBU members in Croatia and Montenegro formalised their mentoring process through a collaboration agreement.

In late 2020, new ADVISE countries were finally identified with EBU members in Denmark, Lithuania and Serbia committing to accompanying young job-seekers there. Additional ADVISE trainers received a specific training (online) in January 2021 and the ADVISE resources were translated into their languages.

In order to share our specific experiences and expertise, promote exchange within networks and combine our voices on common dossiers, we regularly work with partners and friends. These fruitful and friendly collaborations take the form of exchanging expertise to prepare joint position papers, articles or press releases, or responding together to consultations.

Our wide range of activities also allow us to collaborate with third-party organisations (universities, industrial partners, other NGOs).

The collaboration with EDF, the European Disability Forum, is ongoing as we were one of the founder members, together with other disability organisations. EBU is represented in a number of EDF working bodies so that the visual impairment dimension is fully considered. EBU continues to collaborate closely with EDF on a number of important campaigns, and this has proved to be an effective collaboration.

1 International Council for Education of People With Visual Impairment (ICEVI Europe)

In addition to collaborating with EBU on the above-mentioned report on the accessibility of student exchange programs, ICEVI Europe continued to work closely with us, and the two organisations regularly share information through their respective newsletters.

2 Beyond Europe - Solidarity with Our Friends Worldwide

As one of the six regional members of the World Blind Union (WBU), we have been actively supporting each other in 2020. That ongoing exchange had a strong emphasis on experience by blind and partially sighted people in the various phases of the COVID-19 pandemic. In another area of work, we reached out to our members, in order to gauge interest in revitalising an EBU Commission for Development, focusing on African countries. This Commission will be set-up in 2021.

3 The Onkyo Braille Competition:



Reading Braille

In 2020 the First Prize was awarded to **María Jesús Cañamares Muñoz**, from Spain, who wrote a timely topical essay entitled '**Braille and Lockdown**'.

EBU runs the European strand of the [Onkyo World Braille Essay Contest](#), an international initiative to promote Braille literacy and to encourage the sharing of social and cultural information among visually impaired people. The contest is sponsored by Onkyo Corporation, a Japanese consumer electronics manufacturer. It was created in 2003 and has been a great success ever since.

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The voice of blind and partially sighted people in Europe



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