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The Barcelona Discrimination Observatory: figures, problems and challenges for the city

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For over twenty years, the Office for Non-Discrimination (OND) has been assisting people affected by discriminatory situations, and it spearheads Barcelona City Council's fight against this scourge, which manifests itself in many different ways and for multiple reasons. Since 2017, the City Council and social organisations specialising in this area have joined forces with the Discrimination Victims Assistance Service (SAVD in Catalan) in the Board of Organisations, which has grown every year, with the current participation of 22 city social organisations and the OND. The Barcelona Discrimination Observatory is the result of this joint work. It aims to compile data on discriminatory situations in the city, showcasing and denouncing the problems that are concealed behind each situation, which, far from being isolated cases, respond to structural causes, where discrimination is only the tip of the iceberg. This article analyses some of the main data compiled in the 2020 Barcelona Discrimination Observatory report, and focuses specifically on instances of racist and xenophobic discrimination, which are the main motives for discrimination in the cases compiled by the OND and the social organisations.

1. Combating discrimination in Barcelona

Discrimination is expressed in numerous ways. It can range from a look or a decision not to sit next to someone in public transport to a physical assault, and may also take the form of insults, threats, denying someone a job, not letting someone enter an establishment or putting a person or group at a disadvantage owing to one or more personal characteristic, such as skin colour, ethnic or national origin, gender, sexual orientation or gender expression, health, age, spoken language, ideas or beliefs, disability or socio-economic position, without any type of legitimate justification.

The concept of equality appears as one of the key elements in the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, proclaimed in 1948 by the newly created United Nations. In this context, the concept of equality is therefore closely linked to the universality of human rights, i.e. that everyone has the same rights, simply because they are human beings. Equality must therefore be interpreted as a cross-cutting principle that has to pervade the enjoyment of all human rights, thereby constituting not a right in itself but a behavioural obligation. Directly linked to the principle of equality is the right to non-discrimination. This is a strengthened guarantee of the principle of equality which, above all, is aimed at protecting individuals and groups that have historically been excluded from the protection of their rights and freedoms.

Barcelona has had an Office for Non-Discrimination (OND) for more than twenty years, as well as a wide variety of social organisations working to provide support for the most vulnerable groups. Since 2017, the City Council and many of those social organisations have joined forces with the Discrimination Victims Assistance Service (SAVD in Catalan) in the Board of Organisations, which has grown every year, with the current participation of 22 city social organisations and the OND (Table 1). This is a working space where methodologies and knowledge are shared and where collaboration is encouraged, with the ultimate objective of offering the best possible assistance to people affected by discrimination.

Table 1. Assistance and response from the SAVD Board of Organisations concerning situations of discrimination

Entidades	Support and assistance									Report	
	Psychological	Psychosocial	Socio-educational	Legal guidance	Advocacy	Intermediation	Reconciliation	Mediation	Referral to a specialist organisation	Administrative	Criminal
OND (Office for Non-Discrimination)	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
ACATHI	*	*	*		*				*		
ACDDH				*	*				*	*	*
BAYT-AL-THAQAFI	*	*		*	*	*		*	*		
CEPAIM			*	*	*			*	*	*	
BARCELONA YOUTH COUNCIL					*						
CREACIÓ POSITIVA					*						
DINCAT		*	*	*	*						
ECOM FEDERATION		*		*	*	*			*	*	
EXIL	*	*	*						*		
VEUS FEDERATION		*			*						
CATALAN MENTAL HEALTH FEDERATION		*		*	*				*		
FIL A L'AGULLA	*		*		*				*		
SECRETARIAT GITANO FOUNDATION		*	*	*	*		*		*		
GAIS POSITIUS	*	*		*					*	*	
IRÍDIA		*		*	*				*		*
CATALAN ISLAMOPHOBIA OBSERVATORY – ODIC - SAFI			*	*	*				*	*	
OBSERVATORY AGAINST HOMOPHOBIA	*	*		*	*	*			*	*	*
PLATFORM FOR THE LANGUAGE	*	*		*	*	*		*	*	*	*
UNION OF TENANTS		*	*	*	*				*		
SOS RACISME		*		*	*	*				*	*
UNIÓ ROMANÍ		*		*	*						
XAPSELL	*	*	*	*	*			*	*	*	*

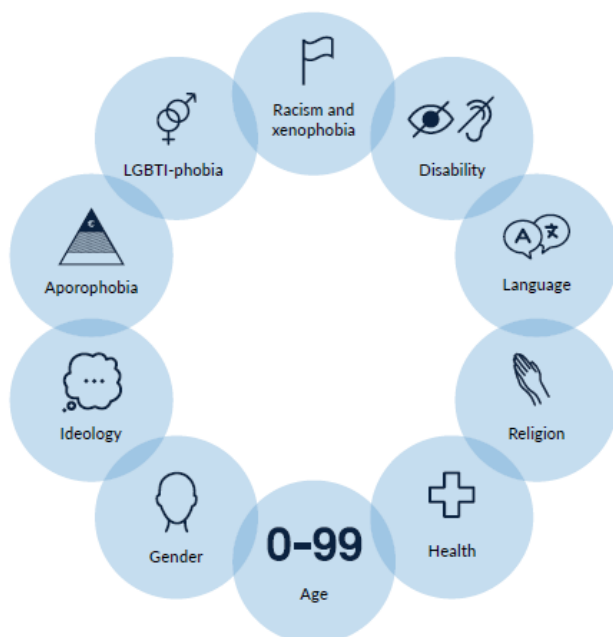
Source: 2020 Barcelona Discrimination Observatory Report.

Another essential goal is to raise awareness about the types of discrimination that occur in the city and to improve data gathering, in order to design strategies that go to the root of the problem. This is why the Barcelona Discrimination Observatory was created. It has been publishing an annual report since 2018, containing the work, data and reflections of the OND and the Board of Organisations¹.

1. You can view the Barcelona Discrimination Observatory's reports at the following link:
<https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/oficina-no-discriminacio/ca/observatori-discriminacions>

The report combines qualitative and quantitative analysis, organised around seven *questions*: 1) *Who is discriminated against?* 2) *Who does this?* 3) *Where does this* discrimination occur? 4) For what reason? 5) What rights are violated? 6) How is this discrimination expressed? 7) What is the response of the OND and the specialist organisations to discrimination, and what results are obtained through these actions. The answers that we obtain to these questions allow us to showcase and analyse the causes that are concealed behind cases of discrimination in the city, which are only the tip of the iceberg. In most cases, discrimination is linked to profound, structural problems, such as racism and xenophobia, LGBTI-phobia and gender discrimination.

Diagram 1. Areas of discrimination



Source: 2020 Barcelona Discrimination Observatory Report.

With regard to the question “What are the reasons for discrimination in Barcelona?”, the Observatory works around ten main discrimination types, which are based on categories that are especially protected in terms of discrimination, established in various international, regional, national and local legal instruments, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the European Human Rights Convention, the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City, the Spanish Constitution and Barcelona’s Municipal Charter, among others (Diagram 1).

2. Discrimination in figures

Sixteen per cent of Barcelona residents have experienced a discriminatory situation in their neighbourhood. That is the conclusion of the 2020 Barcelona Metropolitan Area Coexistence and Neighbourhood Relations Survey (ECAMB)², which shows the perceptions and experiences of discrimination in the city’s neighbourhoods, as a result of interviews with 5,437 people in the Barcelona Metropolitan Area, 4,043 of them in the city of Barcelona, carried out from 29 October to 23 December 2020.

However, if we look at the discrimination cases reported to the OND or to a member organisation of the SAVD Board, the figures are much lower: in 2020, there were 436 reported discriminatory situations, which is higher than the figure for 2019, when 411 cases were recorded, and much higher than in 2018, when 265 discriminatory situations were registered. This increase is largely due to the Board’s progressive expansion (formed by 13 organisations in 2018, 18 in 2019 and

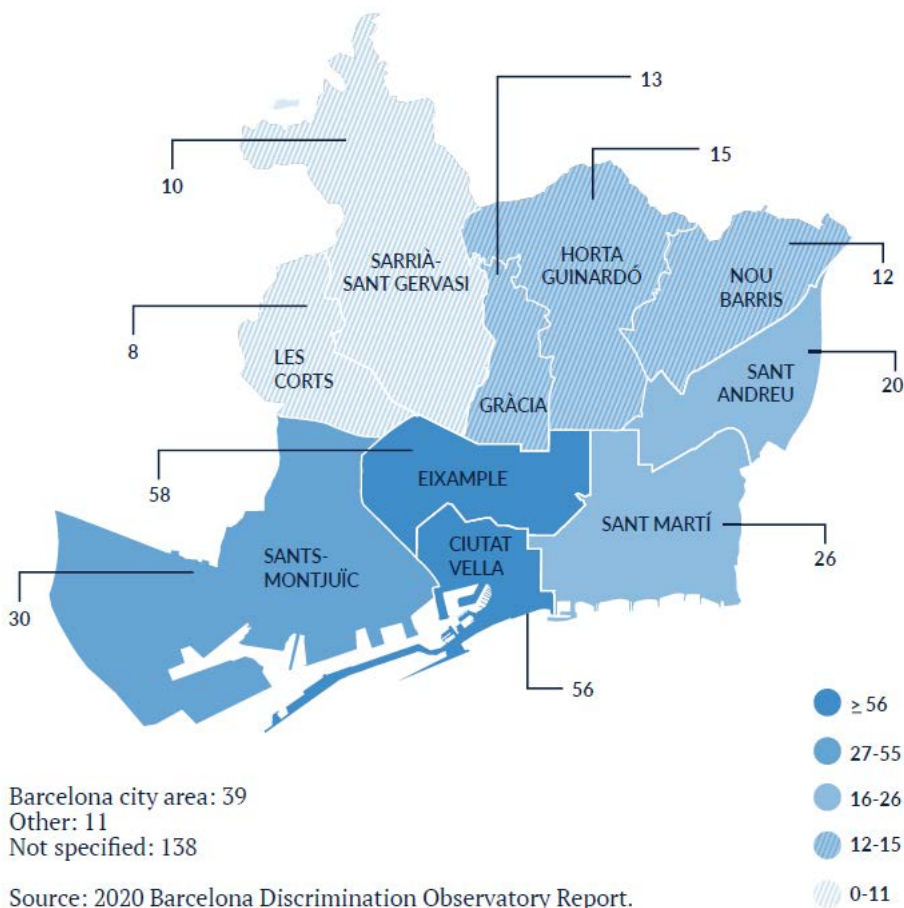
2. You can see the survey results at the following link:

https://iermb.uab.cat/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ECAMB-2020_Primeres-dades-AMB.pdf.

currently 22) and consequently to its expanded radius of action for recording discriminatory situations. In spite of the gradual increase in recorded situations, and as is made clear by the comparison with the indicator constructed from the survey data, we are clearly dealing with a phenomenon of under-reporting.

The situations compiled in 2020 by the Board of Organisations make it possible to extract some conclusions and analyse some trends. If we look at the location of the discrimination cases (Figure 1), we see that most discrimination was detected in the Eixample, with 58 cases, closely followed by Ciutat Vella, with 56, and then Sants-Montjuïc (30) and Sant Martí (26). These data not only show us where most discrimination cases may be occurring, but also in which districts we need to improve the detection and recording of cases.

Figure 1. Discrimination by district



If we analyse the area where most discrimination cases take place in more detail (Table 2), we see that in public areas they are predominantly in the city's streets, parks, squares or on the beaches, with 109 cases, followed by public transport, with 31.

In private areas, the spaces with most discrimination cases are flats and communities of neighbours, rising from 42 cases in 2019 to 70 in 2020, closely linked to the context of the pandemic and the mobility restrictions experienced throughout 2020; the opposite trend is observed in bars and restaurants, dropping from 34 to 13 cases last year.

Table 2. Where discrimination occurs

	Nº.
Public areas	197
Streets, parks, beaches, squares	109
Public facilities	84
Transport stations or means of transport	31
Hospitals	13
Citizen help and information offices and courts	12
Schools	9
Police premises	4
Hostels or shelters	3
Sport, cultural and social centres	1
Libraries, museums and exhibition venues	1
Other	10
Online and telephone services	3
Not specified	1
Private Spaces	211
Private facilities with public access	65
Shops	21
Restaurants and bars	13
Market	7
Assistance and service offices	6
Hotels, hostels and shelters	2
Transport stations	2
Other	14
Private facilities where access is subject to prerequisites	129
Houses, flats and other dwellings	70
Companies and organisations	29
Schools, hospitals and sports centres	12
The media	5
Other	3
Not specified	10
Online and telephone services	14
Not specified	3
Other	17
Not specified	11

Source: 2020 Barcelona Discrimination Observatory Report.

The data also provides information about who is discriminating in Barcelona (Table 3).

In most cases these are private individuals, with 185 cases in 2020, closely followed by discrimination committed in private organisations or companies, with a total of 130.

A specially relevant datum in this area is the one referring to discrimination exercised by public stakeholders, with a total of 128 cases, including those committed by staff from the various public administrations (77) and police forces (51) present in Barcelona.

Table 3. Discriminators

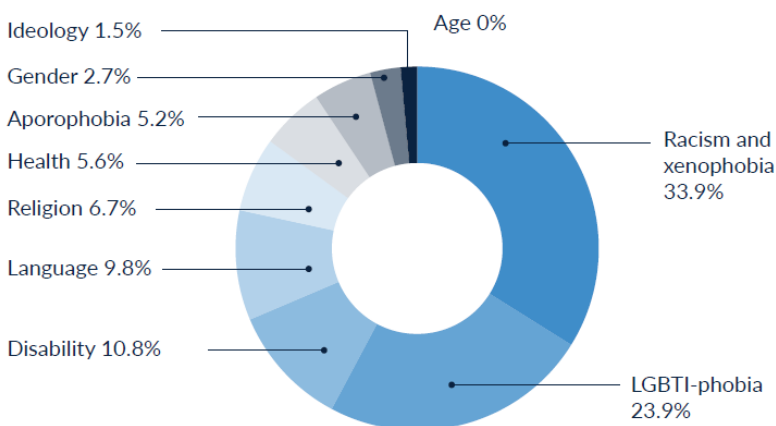
Discriminators	Nº.	%
Individuals	185	41.6
Private organisations/companies	150	29.2
Employee	49	37.7
Private security	19	14.6
Organisations/associations	16	12.3
Management staff	13	10
Organised group	5	3.9
Not specified	28	21.5
Public administration	77	17.3
Local	38	49.4
Regional	21	27.3
National	9	11.7
Not specified	9	11.7
Police forces	51	11.5
Local	25	49
Regional	21	41.2
National	3	5.9
Not specified	2	3.9
Not specified	2	0.5
Total	445¹	100.0

Source: 2020 Barcelona Discrimination Observatory Report.

1. In this case, the total number of discriminators does not coincide with the total number of discriminatory situations reported in 2020 (436), because in some cases there could be more than one discriminator.

One of the main objectives for the Observatory's data collection is to analyse the structural causes behind the cases of discrimination, and in this regard, it is vital to understand the motives for this discrimination (Graph 1).

Graph 1. Motives for discrimination



Source: 2020 Barcelona Discrimination Observatory Report.

The data collected in 2020 show that racism and xenophobia continue to be the main causes of discrimination among the cases recorded by the OND and the SAVD Board of Organisations, with 34%; as in 2018 and 2019, the second cause is LGBTI-phobia, which accounts for 24% of the total, followed by discrimination motivated by disabilities, which represents 11% of the cases, and linguistic causes, at 10%.

Last year, the number of cases of discrimination for religious motives accounted for nearly 7%, followed by discrimination for motives of health, which once again accounted for 6% of all cases, as in 2019. In 2020, there were fewer recorded cases of aporophobia (5%), but as with other groups, the reason has more to do with under-reporting and the impacts associated with the pandemic than with a decrease in discrimination.

In most situations, discrimination was expressed through differential treatment, accounting for 52.3% of all the cases recorded in 2020 (Table 4). Some type of assault occurred in 38.7% (160 cases), of which 24.9% were verbal and 13.8% physical. Despite being lower in percentage, there were also discriminatory situations involving hate speech, in 5.6% of cases, and acts of vandalism, in 1.2% of cases.

Table 4. Types of direct discrimination

Discriminatory action	Nº.	%
Differential treatment	216	52.3
Verbal assaults	103	24.9
Physical assaults	57	13.8
Discriminatory and hate speech	23	5.6
Vandalism	5	1.2
Not specified	9	2.2
Total	413	100.0

Source: 2020 Barcelona Discrimination Observatory Report.

The 160 situations where discrimination was expressed through verbal assault or physical violence are especially worrying. As in 2019, the group most affected by physical assaults was the LGBTI group, with 27 reported assaults, followed by assaults motivated by racism and xenophobia, with 19. If we crosscheck the data from the cases of violations of physical integrity with that of the discriminator (Graph 2), we can see that most assaults were perpetrated by individuals, accounting for 79% of the cases (compared to 60% in the situations recorded in 2019).

3. Racism and xenophobia, the main motive for discrimination in Barcelona

By racism-motivated discrimination, we mean any discrimination based on a belief or attitude that one group is naturally superior to another, either individually or institutionally. In this case, the group is identified by skin colour or a fictitious attribution to a supposed race. In regard to discrimination expressed through the phenomenon of xenophobia, we would describe it as discrimination that occurs due to an irrational fear or rejection of people from other countries or ethnicities. Racism and xenophobia are usually closely connected to socio-economic factors, as those who are rejected are usually people with a low level of financial resources.

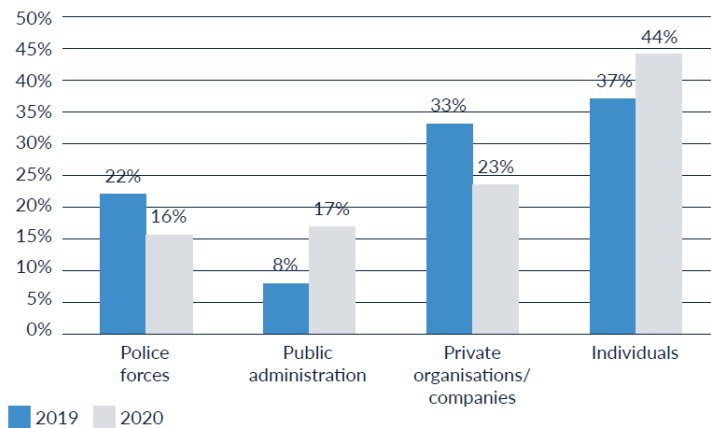
In this regard, the Observatory analyses discrimination caused by racism and xenophobia in a broad sense, which affects people of diverse national origins, but also people who were born in Barcelona, who are discriminated against due to being racialised, or belonging to, or being associated with, a certain ethnicity or religion. For example, this includes the phenomena of anti-Roma and anti-Islamic racism.

Despite the state of emergency, the mobility restrictions and the lockdown periods imposed in 2020, along with the associated difficulties for reporting discrimination, the number of racism and xenophobia cases recorded by the OND and organisations working in this area rose in 2020 (163), compared to numbers registered in the previous year (148).

If we look at the comparison between who discriminated because of racist or xenophobic motives in 2019 and 2020, as shown in Graph 2, we see a 7% rise in the number of individual cases and a 10% drop in the number of private organisations and companies, the same as for the overall figures for discriminators. Even so, we find the most pronounced trend in cases committed by

public administrations, which accounted for 18% in 2018, dropped to 8% in 2019 and went back up to 17% in 2020. These cases of discrimination were predominantly committed by public-transport employees. With regard to the places where these situations occur, the figures show a drop in the number of discrimination cases in public places, from 26% to 20%, although the city's streets, parks, squares and beaches are still one of the key areas for this type of discrimination, with 32 cases. There is a slight increase in the situations occurring in flats and communities of neighbours, rising from 20 in 2019 to 27 in 2020.

Graph 2. Who discriminated due to racist or xenophobic motives. Evolution 2019-2020



Source: 2020 Barcelona Discrimination Observatory Report.

4. The key factor could be a name: discrimination in access to housing

Year after year, housing is one of the main focal points for discrimination, affecting most of the discrimination areas. In 2020, in the context of the pandemic, mobility restrictions and lockdowns, this area acquired special relevance. In addition to the cases of discrimination occurring in flats and communities of neighbours, there were also discriminatory situations relating to the process of renting or purchasing a dwelling. Aware of the lack of visibility associated with these situations, in 2020 Barcelona City Council carried out an experiment on discrimination in access to housing, with the aim of determining the scope of discrimination due to racist or xenophobic motives.

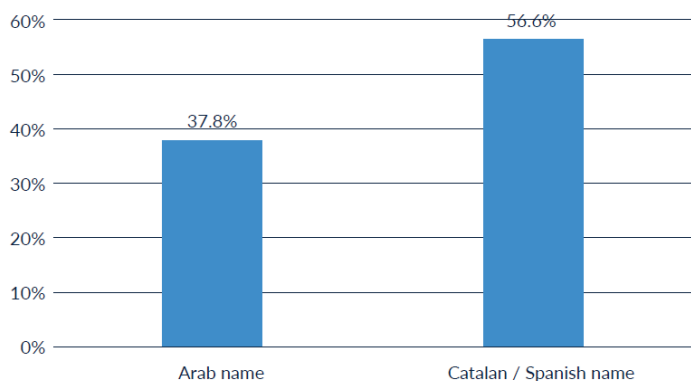
“The key factor could be a name. Detecting proof of discrimination in access to the rental-housing market in Barcelona”³ contains the results of the study, which were obtained from 1,000 adverts in Barcelona's real estate portals, 500 to check if there was discrimination due to origin and 500 concerning the sexual orientation of the people applying to rent a flat. The adverts contained two practically identical messages, where the main difference was the names of the people (in some cases combining names identified with foreigners and local people, and in others with heterosexual and homosexual couples).

While the results obtained in the discrimination cases towards homosexual couples are not significant, the data do confirm the existence of discrimination towards people who are perceived as foreigners and who are trying to gain access to a rental flat in Barcelona. The report confirms that out of every 10 applications, those sent by couples with typical Catalan or Spanish names received 6 responses, whereas those with Arab names received 4, which is 18.8% fewer. Couples with Arab names were also offered fewer visits to properties and, in such cases, discrimination was at 7.6%, given that 17.4% of couples with local names received an immediate invitation to view a property, whereas only 9.8% of couples with Arab names were invited.

3. You can view the complete study at the following link:

https://ajuntament.barcelona.cat/dretdiversitat/sites/default/files/LA_CLAU_POT_SER_UN_NOM.pdf.

Graph 3. Response rate according to origins



Source: Consultoria Social Broll.

Another key factor shown in the study is the difference in rental prices which people with names perceived as foreign have access to. The average monthly rental price quoted in responses obtained by local couples was €1,276, compared to €1,348 for couples with Arab names, a monthly difference of €108.30. In other words, the more expensive the rental price, the more possibilities couples perceived as foreigners have in obtaining an initial response.

5. Evaluation and future challenges

Despite the efforts being made by the Observatory to improve the collection of data on discriminatory situations in the city, it is clear that under-reporting is still a cross-cutting problem that makes the phenomenon of discrimination in Barcelona less visible. There are various causes: the normalisation of certain discriminatory behaviour towards certain people or groups, people not knowing what to do when they suffer discrimination, the difficulty in proving discrimination when it is one person's word against another's, or fear of the consequences that reporting some discriminatory situations may bring, such as those that are expressed with higher levels of violence.

In the context of the current pandemic, there are also other causes. Some cases of discrimination were experienced as normal within the prevailing situation of uncertainty and widespread fear, being accepted as normal and necessary measures. In some cases, restrictions to mobility, the provision of services and difficulties in accessing digital tools, in the context of the global virtualisation of many assistance services, have made it difficult for victims to contact municipal or social services to report a discriminatory situation they experienced, while also undermining their confidence and making it difficult to offer victims a safe space where they can explain the situation they experienced.

However, 2020 also brought some major advances in the fight against discrimination. A key factor was the approval of Act 19/2020, of 30 December, on equal treatment and non-discrimination, which includes a series of improvements in key areas, such as the rights of victims in disciplinary procedures, the disciplinary jurisdiction of local bodies and the inclusion of aporophobia as a motive for discrimination. It also creates various instruments for protecting and promoting equal treatment and non-discrimination. In that regard, one key challenge for 2021 will be the implementation and regulation of the above-mentioned Act and its application in Barcelona, maintaining the joint work among administrations and social organisations, which have been fighting against discrimination in the city for over two decades.

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