

Social protection in the European Union, Iceland and Norway

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Statistics

in focus

POPULATION AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS

THEME 3 – 5/1999

POPULATION AND LIVING CONDITIONS

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Expenditure on social protection

- In 1996, expenditure on social protection in EU-15 represented 28.7% of GDP.
- Ireland spends 18.9% of its GDP on social protection; and Sweden 34.8%.
- Between 1990 and 1996, EU-15 expenditure on social protection rose by 17% in real terms. This increase occurred mainly during the period 1990-1993.

Social benefits

- The old-age function takes a predominant share of the total benefits of EU-15.
- Between 1990 and 1996 benefits associated with unemployment and the family increased as a proportion of total benefits.

Financing of social protection

- Social contributions are the main source of finance for social protection, representing 63.5% of all receipts in EU-15 (24.9% in Denmark and 77.9% in France).
- The share of social contributions borne by employers fell by 2.8% between 1990 and 1996. This fall was offset by a rise of 2.6% in the share of general government contributions.



Table 1:
Expenditure on social protection
(as % of GDP)

	1990	1993	1996
B	26.8	29.0	30.0
DK	30.3	33.5	33.6
D	25.4	29.1	30.5
EL	22.7	22.0	23.3
E	20.4	24.4	22.4
F	27.7	31.2	30.8
IRL	19.1	20.8	18.9
I	24.1	26.0	24.8
L	23.5	25.2	26.2
NL	32.5	33.7	30.9
A	26.7	29.0	29.5
P	15.5	21.0	21.6
FIN	25.5	35.4	32.1
S	32.9	38.6	34.8
UK	23.1	28.8	27.7
EU-15	25.4	29.0	28.7
EUR-11	25.5	28.8	28.6
IS	:	18.9	18.7
NO	26.4	28.8	26.1
EEA	:	29.0	28.6

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS

In 1996, expenditure linked to social protection totalled 28.7% of GDP in EU-15.

Ireland (18.9%), Portugal (21.6%) and Spain (22.4%) had the lowest percentages; Sweden (34.8%), Denmark (33.6%) and Finland (32.1%) the highest. In the European Economic Area, Iceland had the lowest percentage: 18.7% of GDP in 1996.

Between 1990 and 1996 expenditure on social protection as a share of GDP rose by more than 3 percentage points, from 25.4% in 1990 to 28.7% in 1996 in EU-15.

This rise was general throughout EU-15, with the exceptions of the Netherlands and Ireland, where the figure fell. It also fell in Norway between 1990 and 1996.

A significant rise, then stabilisation

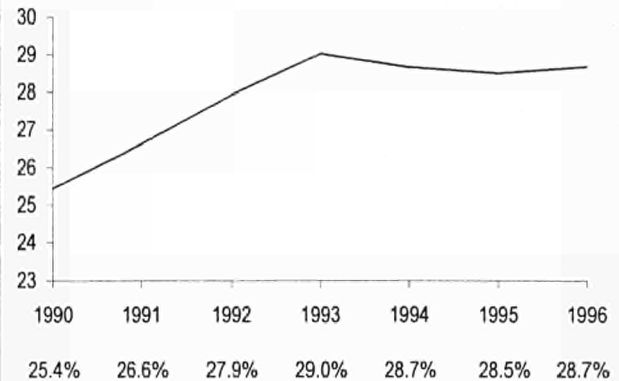
The increase in expenditure on social protection was not uniform throughout the period 1990-1996.

A significant increase was recorded between 1990 and 1993: the proportion rose to 29.0% in 1993, as a result mainly of the slowing rate of GDP growth and rising unemployment.

Between 1993 and 1995, expenditure on social protection declined slightly as a proportion of GDP (-0.5 percentage point). This was partly the result of a slight rebound in GDP, but also of a slowdown in the growth of expenditure on social protection.

During 1996, the total percentage for EU-15 rose slightly, from 28.5% to 28.7%, although it continued to fall in almost half the Member States.

Figure 1:
Trend in expenditure on social protection,
EU-15, as % of GDP



Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS

Between 1993 and 1996 the decline was particularly noticeable in Sweden (-3.8 percentage points), Finland (-3.3 points) and the Netherlands (-2.8 points), all countries where spending had been amongst the highest in 1993. The decline was also substantial in Norway (-2.7 points).

A slowdown in the growth of expenditure on social protection (in real terms)

Real-terms expenditure on social protection (i.e. in constant prices per head of population) grew by around 4% annually during the period 1990-1993 in EU-15 (table 2).

The rise was particularly marked in Portugal (13% annually).

Only Greece cut real-terms expenditure during this period.

On the other hand, the rate of increase during the three most recent years (1993-1996), has been around 1% annually for EU-15.

Only Greece and Germany have experienced an increase in their real-terms growth.

The slowdown in the growth rate has been particularly marked in the United Kingdom and Italy.

An actual fall in the real value of expenditure between 1993 and 1996 only occurred in the Netherlands, Spain and Sweden.

Table 2:
Expenditure on social protection per head of population
at constant prices
(Index 1990=100)

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
B	100	104	106	111	114	118	121
DK	100	105	108	113	122	122	122
D	100	96	103	104	106	110	114
EL	100	98	94	96	99	104	109
E	100	110	117	124	119	119	120
F	100	103	107	111	112	114	114
IRL	100	106	112	119	123	131	133
I	100	105	109	109	109	107	109
L	100	108	112	120	124	129	134
NL	100	101	103	104	102	101	100
A	100	104	107	110	115	117	118
P	100	112	128	143	148	151	162
FIN	100	108	115	116	119	119	122
S	100	100	105	104	105	104	103
UK	100	108	118	127	127	128	131
EU-15	100	103	109	113	114	115	117
EUR-11	100	103	108	111	112	113	116
IS	:	:	:	:	:	:	:
NO	100	106	110	113	114	115	119
EEA	:	:	:	:	:	:	:

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS.

Differences between countries are more marked when expenditure is expressed in PPS per head of population

Average expenditure on social protection within the Union masks wide disparities between one Member State and another.

If expenditure is expressed in PPS (Purchasing Power Standards) per head of population, the differences are even greater.

Luxembourg spends the most: 8 297 PPS per head of population.

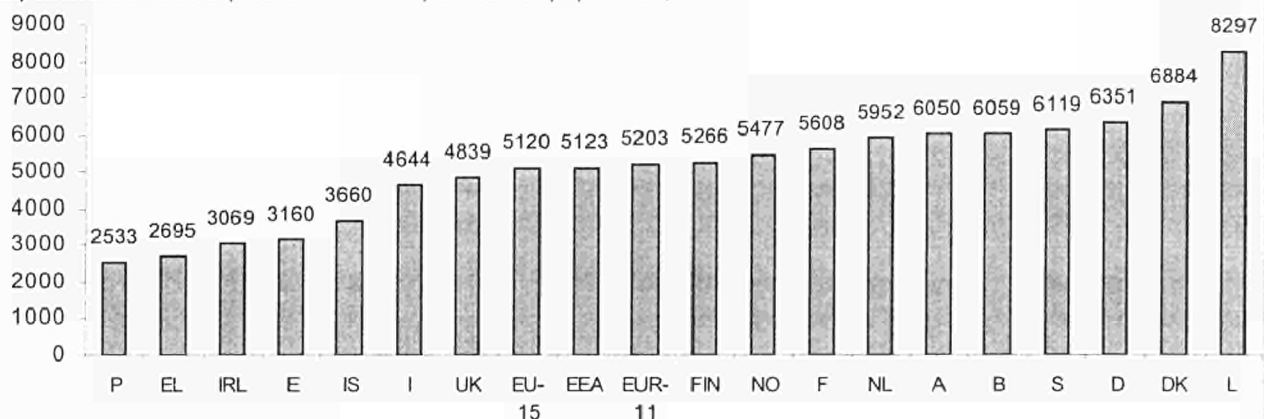
Expenditure in Italy, the United Kingdom, Finland, Norway and France is close to the average.

Portugal and Greece have the lowest rates: less than 3000 PPS per head of population.

The ratio of the highest-spending country to the lowest-spending was thus 3.3 to 1 in 1996 (3.7 to 1 in 1990).

The differences between countries reflect differences in the social protection systems, demographic change, unemployment rate and other social, institutional and economic factors.

Figure 2:
Expenditure on social protection in PPS per head of population, 1996



Source Eurostat-ESSPROS.

PURCHASING POWER STANDARDS (PPS)

To compare expenditure on social protection between countries, we must first express that expenditure in the same currency.

It would seem obvious to use the ecu. This gives, for example, a 1996 figure of social protection expenditure of 4127 ecus per head of population in Italy and 6905 ecus per head of population in Germany (67% more than Italy).

But this difference is "nominal", since it takes no account of the general level of prices (of goods and services), which in 1996 was 22% higher in Germany than in Italy.

The difference in real terms (i.e. in terms of purchasing power) was thus only +37% ($167/122 = 1.37$).

To allow the user to make direct, real-terms comparisons between countries, statisticians show expenditure in "purchasing power standards" (PPS):

Italy: 4644 PPS per head of population in 1996.

Germany: 6351 PPS per head of population in 1996 (+37% vis-à-vis Italy).

The old-age and survivors' functions account for the major part of benefits

In 1996, in most Member States, old-age and survivors' benefits made up the largest item of social protection expenditure: 44.8% of the total in EU-15 as a whole, or 12.3% of GDP.

This was especially true of Italy, where these two functions accounted for over 65% of all benefits.

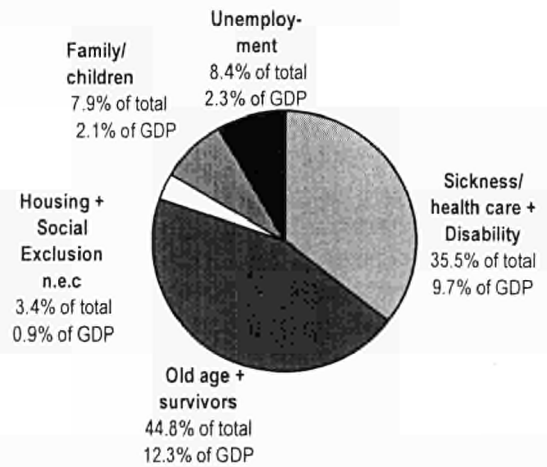
In Ireland, on the other hand, the old age and survivors' functions together accounted for only 26.1%.

Ireland is in fact the "youngest" country in Europe, with 33% of the population aged under 20 in 1996 (EU average 24%) and only 11% aged over 65 (EU-15 average 16%). It is therefore to be expected that in Ireland expenditure on old age and survivors is low, whilst family and child benefits are amongst the highest in EU-15, at 12.8%. Iceland's situation is similar.

In Portugal, the Netherlands, Ireland and Finland the group of functions sickness/health care and disability take the largest share of benefits paid. This is also true of Iceland (just under 50%) and Norway.

There are major differences between the Member States when it comes to the relative importance of unemployment-related benefits. These account for over 14% of the total benefits in Ireland, Belgium, and Spain, but less than 2% in Italy. It should be noted that the total amount of "unemployment" benefits is not always explained by the level of unemployment in the countries concerned. There are, in fact, still substantial differences in the coverage and level of unemployment benefits.

Figure 3:
Social benefits by groups of functions in EU-15 (1),
1996. (as % of total benefits and as % of GDP)



(¹) Data for Sweden not included

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS

The family/children function represents 7.9% of all benefits in EU-15 in 1996, or 2.1% of GDP.

This function represents more than 12% of all benefits in Luxembourg, Ireland, Finland and Denmark, and less than 5% in Spain, Italy and the Netherlands.

In the European Economic Area, Norway has the highest expenditure in family-related benefits, at 13.8% of the total.

Table 3:
Social benefits by group of functions (as % of total social benefits)

	Old-age + survivors		Sickness/Health care + Disability		Unemployment		Family/Children		Housing + Social exclusion n.e.c	
	1990	1996	1990	1996	1990	1996	1990	1996	1990	1996
B	40.4	43.2	34.1	32.1	13.8	14.5	9.4	8.0	2.4	2.3
DK	36.7	38.9	30.1	28.5	15.4	13.8	11.9	12.4	6.0	6.5
D	45.8	41.1	38.0	37.1	5.9	9.6	7.6	9.4	2.7	2.9
EL	50.9	49.0	34.7	34.9	4.2	4.3	7.2	8.3	3.0	3.5
E	42.9	45.3	36.6	36.9	18.0	14.5	1.7	2.0	0.9	1.3
F	42.7	43.5	35.6	35.0	8.3	8.1	9.3	8.7	4.1	4.8
IRL	30.5	26.1	38.4	39.1	14.6	16.7	11.4	12.8	5.2	5.3
I	59.6	65.9	33.7	28.5	1.7	1.9	4.9	3.6	0.0	0.0
L	45.8	43.4	39.1	38.5	2.6	3.5	10.8	13.2	1.7	1.4
NL	37.4	38.5	44.7	43.6	8.3	12.0	5.6	4.4	3.9	1.6
A	50.0	48.5	33.2	33.3	4.6	5.7	10.5	11.0	1.8	1.5
P	43.1	43.3	46.9	44.6	2.5	5.8	7.1	5.6	0.4	0.6
FIN	33.8	33.9	44.0	36.0	6.1	13.9	13.5	12.5	2.6	3.6
S	:	38.9	:	33.9	:	10.3	:	10.5	:	6.3
UK	42.5	40.1	36.1	37.5	5.7	5.8	9.0	8.7	6.7	7.8
EU-15 ¹	45.7	44.8	36.5	35.5	7.1	8.4	7.6	7.9	3.1	3.4
EUR-11	46.5	45.7	36.8	35.4	7.1	8.7	7.2	7.6	2.4	2.6
IS	:	30.7	:	49.6	:	3.7	:	12.9	:	3.2
NO	34.4	33.7	43.7	43.1	6.9	5.7	10.8	13.8	4.1	3.7
EEA ²	:	44.6	:	35.7	:	8.3	:	8.0	3.1	3.4

¹ Data for Sweden not included

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS

² Data for Sweden and Iceland not included

The structure of expenditure on social benefits changed between 1990 and 1996

Between 1990 and 1996 the structure of social benefits showed different rates of growth for the various functions. The variations result from evolving needs, and changes in the legislation on social protection.

The total of benefits rose by 18% in real terms during the period 1990-1996 (Table 4).

Table 4:
Social benefits per head of population,
at constant prices, EU-15 (Index 1990=100)

EU-15 ¹	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
Old-age + Survivors	100	101	107	109	112	114	117
Sickness/Health-care + Disability	100	103	109	110	111	113	115
Unemployment	100	121	136	151	143	134	138
Family/Children	100	103	110	113	111	112	121
Housing + Social exclusion n.e.c	100	99	110	121	126	130	130
Total benefits	100	104	110	113	114	115	118

¹ Data for Sweden not included

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS

Benefits paid under the old-age and survivors' functions rose by 17% in real terms between 1990 and 1996 in EU-15. Their weight in the total of benefits slipped from 45.7% in 1990 to 44.8% in 1996. The fall was particularly steep in Germany and Ireland (Table 3). In Italy this expenditure, which was already high in 1990, grew faster than elsewhere, and the two

functions' share in the total of benefits rose by around 6 points between 1990 and 1996.

Several countries, faced by the ageing of the population, are in the process of reforming their retirement systems. The effects of this will appear gradually.

EU-15 expenditure on the sickness/health-care and disability group of functions took a smaller share of benefits in 1996 than in 1990. In practice, the share fell in almost all Member States as a result of the efforts made to control costs in these areas.

Between 1990 and 1996, expenditure on the unemployment function took a larger share of total benefits in almost all Member States.

1993 was a turning-point in real-terms expenditure on unemployment benefits in EU-15.

Unemployment benefits have shadowed the trend in unemployment.

Nevertheless, the slight decline recorded since 1993 also reflects the reforms in the benefits system implemented in certain countries, e.g. Denmark, France and Spain.

During 1996 the benefits of the unemployment function increased in real terms again, partly as a result of new labour market policies being implemented.

Expenditure on the family as a proportion of total benefits, rose in EU-15 from 7.6% in 1990 to 7.9% in 1996.

This increase (+21% in real terms between 1990 and 1996) was particularly marked in 1996, when Germany implemented reforms and extended the family benefits system.

THE FUNCTIONS OF SOCIAL PROTECTION

Sickness/health care: includes inter alia paid sick leave, medical care and the supply of pharmaceutical products.

Disability: includes inter alia disability pensions, and the provision of goods and services (other than medical care) to the disabled.

Old age: includes inter alia old-age pensions, and the provision of goods and services (other than medical care) to the elderly.

Survivors: income support and support in connection with the death of a family member (e.g. survivors' pensions).

Family/children: includes support (other than medical care) in connection with pregnancy, childbirth, maternity and caring for children and other dependent family members.

Unemployment: includes inter alia unemployment benefits and vocational training financed by public agencies.

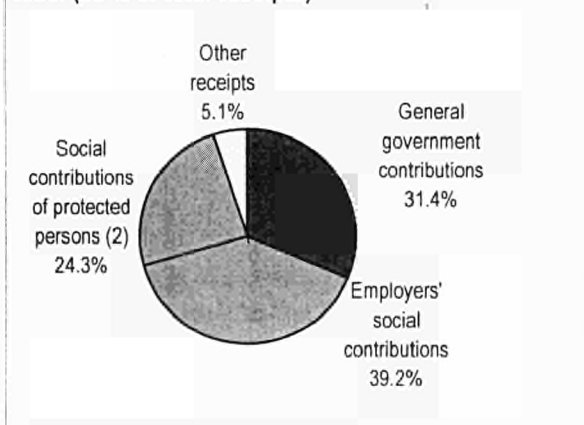
Housing: includes interventions by public authorities aimed at helping households meet the cost of housing.

Social exclusion not elsewhere classified (n.e.c.): includes income support benefits, rehabilitation of alcoholics and drug addicts, and miscellaneous benefits (other than medical care).

Social contributions are the largest source of finance for social protection in almost all the Member States

In 1995 for EU-15 as a whole, the main sources of funding for the social protection system were social contributions, which accounted for 63.5% of total receipts (69.1% in EUR-11 — the euro-zone), followed by tax-funded general government contributions (31.4% in EU-15; 27.2% in EUR-11).

Figure 4:
Receipts of social protection in EU-15 (1), 1996. (as % of total receipts)



(¹) Data for Sweden not included

(²) Employees, self-employed, pensioners and others

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS

The European average conceals considerable differences between the Member States in the structure of social protection funding (Table 5).

Social contributions are particularly high in France, Belgium, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy, where this type of finance accounts for over 65% of total receipts.

At the other end of the scale, Denmark, Ireland and Norway finance their social protection systems mainly through taxes, whose relative share of total receipts is in excess of 60%.

The United Kingdom and Iceland are also heavily dependent upon general government contributions (48.5% and 59.6% respectively).

The dwindling share of employers' contributions is offset by the rise in general government contributions

The proportion of general government contributions in total funding in EU-15 rose by 2.6% between 1990 and 1996 (Table 5).

In the United Kingdom and Portugal in particular, general government contributions rose faster than elsewhere.

In contrast, the share of general government contributions in the total fell significantly in Denmark and the Netherlands. In 1996 only 16.4% of the Netherlands' social protection was financed from general government contributions.

For EU-15 as a whole, the share of social contributions in the total of receipts fell slightly between 1990 and 1996, from 65.0% to 63.5%.

In Portugal, in 1996 the volume of social contributions was almost the same as general government contributions — in 1990 it had been almost double.

But employers' contributions fell everywhere except Belgium, the Netherlands and Denmark.

The reduction was particularly significant in Portugal and Finland.

On the other hand, the part of social contributions borne by the protected persons rose in EU-15 as a whole.

In Denmark, in particular, a new contribution known as the "labour market contribution" was introduced in 1994 to finance unemployment, sickness insurance and vocational training.

In contrast, the part of social contributions borne by the protected persons fell in Portugal, the United Kingdom, Ireland and France.

Table 5:
Receipts of social protection by type (as % of total receipts)

	General government contributions		Social contributions						Other receipts	
			total		employers		protected persons ¹			
	1990	1996	1990	1996	1990	1996	1990	1996	1990	1996
B	24.7	20.4	66.0	70.4	40.9	44.5	25.2	25.9	9.3	9.2
DK	80.1	68.9	13.1	24.9	7.8	9.6	5.3	15.3	6.8	6.2
D	25.2	30.0	72.0	67.6	43.6	39.1	28.4	28.5	2.8	2.4
EL	33.4	30.3	58.8	61.4	38.8	38.0	20.0	23.4	7.8	8.3
E	26.2	27.8	71.3	69.6	54.4	52.0	16.9	17.6	2.5	2.6
F	16.7	20.2	80.8	77.9	52.0	49.9	28.8	27.9	2.5	1.9
IRL	59.0	63.0	39.9	36.1	24.3	21.9	15.6	14.2	1.0	0.9
I	29.0	29.6	67.9	67.3	52.9	49.3	15.0	18.0	3.1	3.1
L	40.6	46.7	51.5	48.7	28.9	25.8	22.6	22.9	7.9	4.6
NL	25.0	16.4	29.0	67.6	20.0	23.2	39.1	44.4	15.9	16.0
A	35.9	35.7	63.1	63.8	38.1	37.4	25.1	26.4	0.9	0.6
P	33.8	42.2	57.1	42.8	37.1	26.0	20.0	16.8	9.2	15.0
FIN	40.6	44.6	52.1	48.3	44.1	34.9	8.0	13.3	7.3	7.2
S	:	45.3	:	46.8	:	40.0	:	6.8	:	7.9
UK	39.9	48.5	43.5	39.1	27.2	24.7	16.3	14.5	16.6	12.3
EU-15²	28.8	31.4	65.0	63.5	42.0	39.2	23.0	24.3	6.2	5.1
EUR-11	25.0	27.2	70.8	69.1	46.0	42.7	24.8	26.3	4.2	3.8
IS	:	59.6	:	40.4	:	31.8	:	8.6	:	0.0
NO	63.0	61.2	36.4	37.8	24.0	23.5	12.4	14.3	0.5	1.0
EEA³	29.4	31.9	64.5	63.1	41.7	38.9	22.8	24.2	6.1	5.1

¹ Employees, self-employed, pensioners and others

Source: Eurostat-ESSPROS

² Data for Sweden not included

³ Data for Sweden and Iceland not included

METHODS AND CONCEPTS

The data on social protection expenditure and receipts have been calculated in accordance with the revised methodology for the European System of integrated Social PROtection Statistics (ESSPROS), the "ESSPROS Manual 1996".

Social benefits are classified in the ESSPROS Manual 1996 in the following eight functions: Sickness/health care, Disability, Old age, Survivors, Family/children, Unemployment, Housing, Social exclusion not elsewhere classified (n.e.c).

Social benefits are recorded without any deduction of taxes or other compulsory levies payable on them by beneficiaries.

ABBREVIATIONS

The euro-zone (EUR-11) comprises Belgium (B), Germany (D), Spain (E), France (F), Ireland (IRL), Italy (I), Luxembourg (L), Netherlands (NL), Austria (A), Portugal (P) and Finland (FIN).

The European Union (EU-15) comprises the euro zone countries plus Denmark (DK), Greece (EL), Sweden (S) and the United Kingdom (UK).

The European Economic Area (EEA) comprises the Member States of the European Union plus Iceland (IS), Norway (NO) and Liechtenstein. No data are available for Liechtenstein.

NOTES ON THE DATA

Data for Greece are provisional. The 1996 data are provisional for Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Finland and the United Kingdom.

Data on benefits and receipts are not available for Sweden for the period 1990-1992. Iceland data are not available for 1990. Values for EU-15 and for the EEA have when necessary been computed without Sweden and Iceland, in order to permit comparison of results over time.

REFERENCE EUROSTAT PUBLICATION

Methodology: "ESSPROS Manual 1996", 1996.

Data: "Social protection expenditure and receipts 1980-1996", 1999.

EUROSTAT REFERENCE DATABASE

"New Cronos" database, domain "SESPROS".

Please contact one of the Eurostat Data Shops (see last page).

Further information:

➤ Reference publications

Title ESSPROS Manual 1996
 Catalogue No CA-99-96-641-EN-C Price EUR 7.50

➤ Databases

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