



Communities of Practice for Accelerating Gender Equality and Institutional Change in Research and Innovation across Europe

[#ACTonGender](#)



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Short Evaluation Results

Condensed Results

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The ACT CoPs

In the evaluation report 7 CoPs from the ACT project were evaluated*:

- **LifeSciCoP** - *Gender Equality in Life Sciences*
- **GEinCEE** - *Gender Equality in Central and Eastern Europe*
- **GenBUDGET** - *Gender Budgeting in Research Organisations*
- **FORGEN** - *Funding Organisations for Gender*
- **GENERA** - *Gender Equality in Physics and beyond*
- **STRATEGIES** - *Strategies for Sustainable Gender Equality*
- **Alt+G** - *Alternative Infrastructure for Gender Equality*

For more information on the individual CoPs, click here:

<https://www.act-on-gender.eu/cops>

* During the runtime of ACT also a CoP in Latin America was founded by Flacso, a consortium partner of ACT. The LAC CoP is not part of this evaluation because the foundation of this CoP and therefore its evaluation was not planned in the proposal. A further difference concerns the fact that no funds for supporting activities of the LAC CoP were available, compared to all other 7 CoPs.



The evaluation methodology

This evaluation report builds on the following sources of evidence:

- Semi-structured online interviews with all CoP facilitators and a selection of CoP members (three members per CoP (n=21))
 - Interviews were conducted between the 20th of May and 7th of July 2020 and lasted between 30-90 minutes
 - Selected members differed regarding organisation size, region/country, number of attended CoP meetings
- Monitoring and progress reports written by the CoP facilitators
 - Progress reports were compiled based on the monitoring in month 24 of the ACT runtime
 - reports contain detailed information on the CoPs' objectives, composition, activities and progress so far.
- Wilder-Collaboration-Factors-Inventory Questionnaire filled out by the CoP members
 - This standardised questionnaire assesses the “health” and development level of CoPs (Mattessich et al., 2001).
 - It includes items regarding shared vision, trust and mutual respect among group members, leadership, distribution of roles, or appropriate pacing among others. The 40 items measure 20 factors of collaboration.

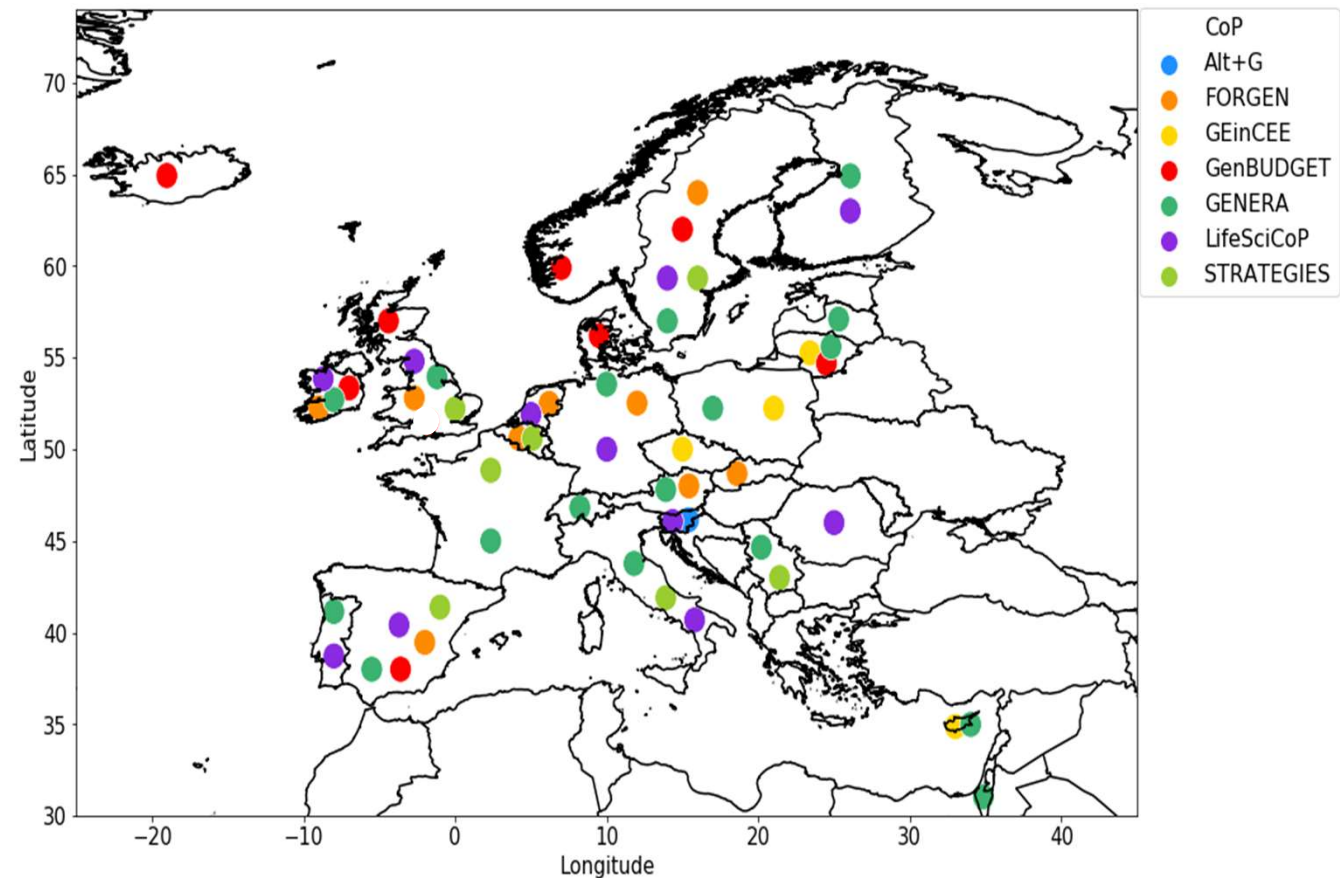
The CoP member organisations

In spring 2020, the CoPs had a total of **132** CoP members from **26 countries**, covering most of Europe with some exceptions in the Eastern South and North of Europe (e.g. Bulgaria, Greece, Estonia).

Types of organisations:

- Universities
- Research Performing Organisations
- Research Funding Organisations
- Networks
- Foundations

CoPs differ in size, they had 10-34 members



Source: SHP file from Eurostat Countries 2020 03/04/2020 1:1 million
EN: © EuroGeographics for the administrative boundaries



Findings from the Wilder Factors Inventory

Member Characteristics:

- Member characteristics like appropriate cross section of members; respect, understanding and trust and ability to compromise are rated most positively by the members

Communication:

- Members experience open and frequent communication in their CoP
- CoPs differ in establishing informal communication among members: first, it is a matter of time - CoPs that started early are the most advanced in this regard; second, regionality can be an advantage - regional CoPs have established informal communication more quickly.

Process and Structures:

- Flexibility of the CoPs is rated high
- Multiple layers of participation is rated rather low because from most organisations only one representative is engaged in the CoP. Members are so far often challenged with involving colleagues and the management in GE activities.
- In CoPs that are newly formed and/or whose members are less advanced in terms of gender equality, members feel less "ownership" of the work process and outcome.



Findings from the Wilder Factors Inventory

Resources:

- The CoP facilitators are perceived as very skilled to lead the CoP – this is definitely a strength!
- In most CoPs, members rate resources like funds, staff, material and time of the CoP as not sufficient.

Purpose:

- The purpose of the CoPs is rather clear for their members, especially in GENERA, GenBUDGET and Alt+G, other CoPs might still have some need for clarification in this regard.

Environment:

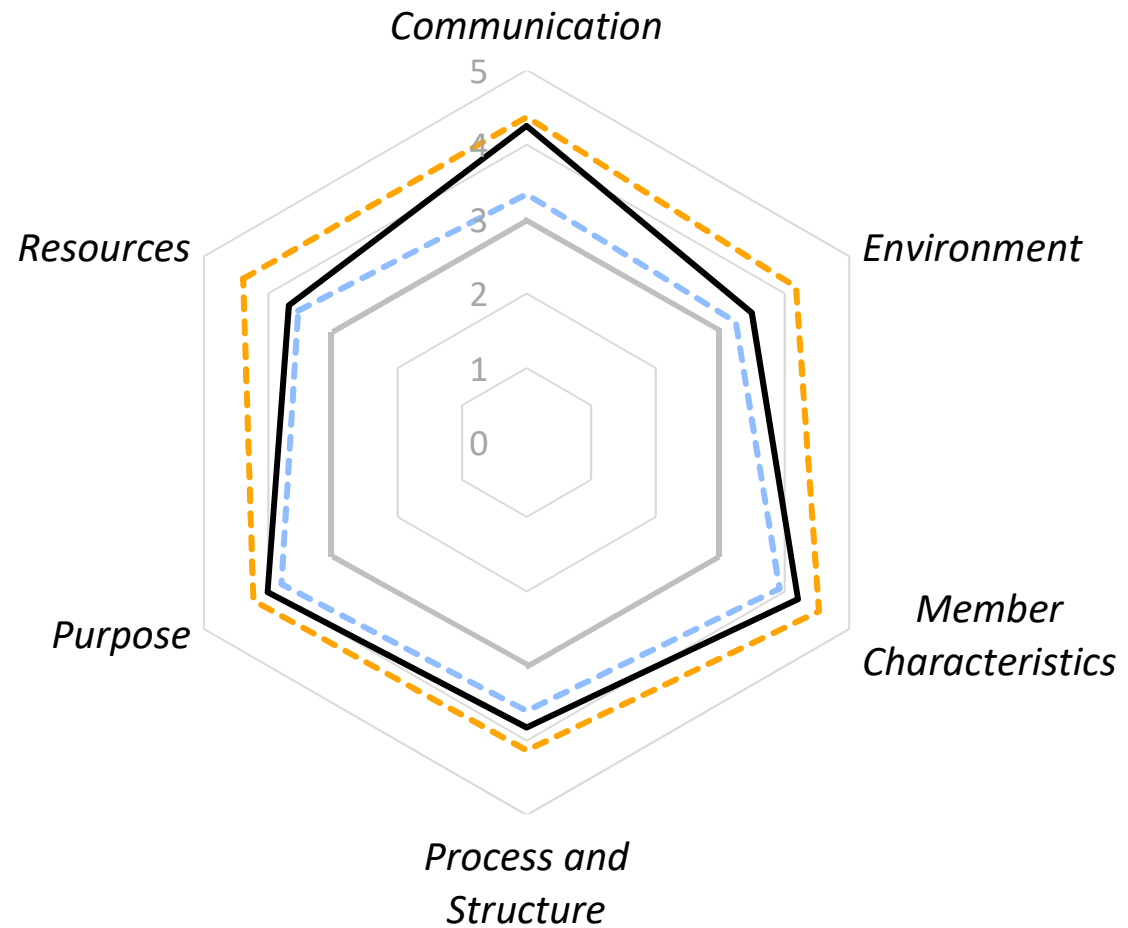
- Some CoP members don't think that their CoP is perceived within the community as reliable and competent – to achieve this, CoPs have not existed long enough.
- Several members also believe that there is no history of cooperation regarding Gender Equality in their ecosystem – only in GenBUDGET this is perceived differently, maybe because members of this CoP are more advanced regarding gender equality and therefore more used to collaborate in this regard.
- The political and social climate is rated comparatively positively. The regional CoPs, however, both located in Eastern Europe, are more sceptical.



Findings from the Wilder Factors Inventory: Overview on the 6 Dimensions

Interpretation guide:

- This chart presents the results of the 6 collaboration dimensions from Wilder Factors Inventory.
- The higher the value, the stronger the agreement of the participants regarding the manifestation of a dimension.
 - > 4,0 represents a strength
 - 3,0-3,9 borderline and should be discussed
 - <2,9 represents a concern and should be addressed



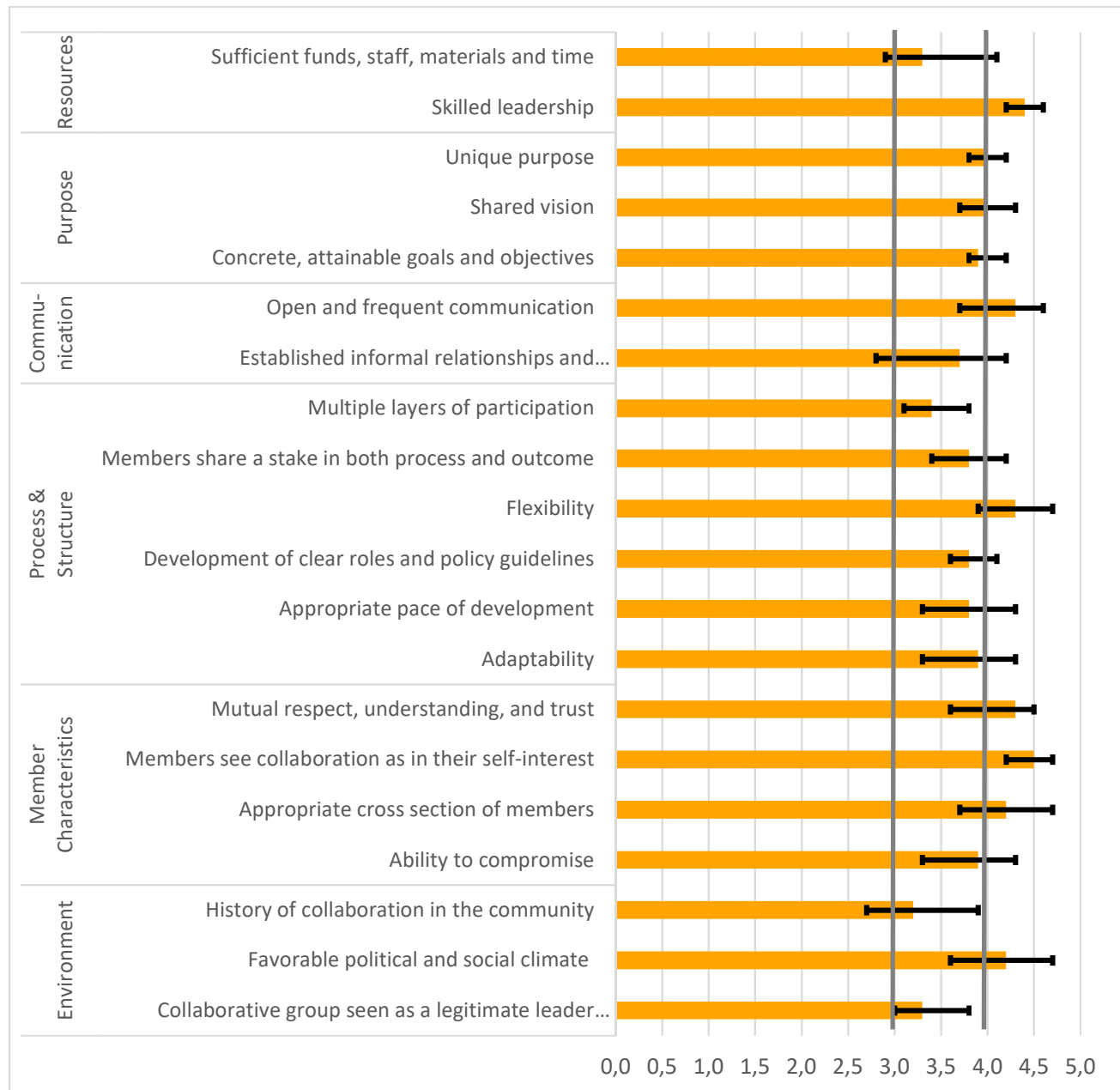
— Mean total (n=77) — Top range (Highest value) - - Bottom Range (Lowest value)



Findings from the Wilder Factors Inventory: 20 success factors for collaboration

Interpretation guide:

- This chart presents the results of the individual factors of the 6 collaboration dimensions from the previous chart.
- The orange bars show the mean across members of all the CoPs (n=77).
- The black lines show the range of the CoP results; meaning the respective lowest and highest value.
- The vertical grey lines give some orientation:
 - > 4,0 represents a strength
 - 3,0-3,9 borderline and should be discussed
 - <2,9 represents a concern and should be addressed





Learning Outcomes and Effects

- Members appreciate the **exchange of experiences** and **brainstorming on strategies**. Members get inspiration for their GE work or feel motivated to start change processes in their organization.
- Members gained more (content and methodological) **knowledge and awareness on gender**; especially gender newcomers. Also access to organisational data, new tools, literature etc.
- Members appreciate the collaborative aspect of the CoP, especially the **interdisciplinary cooperation** which opens new perspectives and strategies.
- A central benefit of CoPs for members is **access to new people**. When trust is established, they **know where to turn to** for help. The CoP becomes a **safe space**; members feel less isolated.
- With being part of a CoP, members acquired a **new voice**. CoPs increase the **visibility** of its members, give them more weight – also due to the H2020 funding.
- Some members **disseminate the experience and knowledge** gained in the CoP within their organization and recruit colleagues to participate, form implementation teams, carry out internal projects, discuss internal activities with management, plan articles, etc.
- In some CoPs members conduct **status quo assessments** using the GEAM tool.



Enabling Factors and Challenges

- All CoPs are successfully working on establishing an **open communication culture** which builds the groundwork for further cooperation. Some are already very advanced.
- CoPs who managed to **meet in person** before the pandemic see this as an advantage; those who only met online see this as a challenge in building a sense of community.
- **Building up knowledge** is highlighted by many members and some even see it as the main and “most rewarding” part of a CoP, which can also increase the will of members to engage in different activities in the CoP.
- Dealing with the **heterogeneity** of members is challenging. Setting up **working groups** turned out to be an adequate way to deal with a diverse group and to encourage communication and joint action.
- Collaboration necessarily began in a relatively centralized manner across all CoPs - it can be seen as an indicator of a **sense of community** when it becomes more independent of facilitators - fostering this development is quite a challenge!
- Throughout all CoPs members are **highly satisfied with the facilitators**, their work and their competences!
- The **COVID-19 pandemic** is a huge challenge for the CoPs, facilitators showed great flexibility in coping with the new situation! Unfortunately, the challenge continues...



Limitations of the CoP approach

- The central limitation of the CoP approach is **time and money!** CoPs need resources for at least a basic facilitation and members need resources to engage. The more the CoP is made up of members who can only participate on their free time, the more difficult it is for the CoP to achieve its goals.
- **“A CoP hopefully is a support structure for being activist – but the CoP alone is not enough!” Funding for structural change is needed!**
- CoPs founded in ACT are limited by the **runtime of the project** – to keep up established networks and pursue the goals of the CoPs also resources are needed
- To widen the network new CoPs are needed because CoPs are **limited by their size:** In order to remain operational, CoPs cannot be enlarged by any size!



Learnings for the Implementation and Improvement of CoPs

- Establish a **common goal** that is clear to everyone within the CoP
- Implement a **structure and working processes** that were developed in a participatory way
- **Involve all members equally**, otherwise members that are not involved in all communication or don't receive all information may feel disconnected
- **Focus on problems, but also on solutions** to unite different types and approaches of members
- Work on how to **approach stakeholders within the organisation and finding allies** in order to initiate Gender Equality action and build an internal network of gender agents
- Discuss a strategy of how to **expand the CoP** in order to meet the different needs of the members (e.g. regional focus, types of organisations) as the composition of member organisations can affect the Cop's direction
- **Deal with heterogeneity** e.g. through discussing expectations, collaborative methods or working groups
- Create a **common set of knowledge**, which might decrease differences in expertise
- **Foster integration, independent communication and community building** e.g. by actively connecting members with same interests or establish an open discussion culture
- **Enable informal communication** in order to strengthen the cooperation and commitment of members, e.g. via informal get-togethers after CoP meetings
- Establish an **onboarding process** for new members, e.g. welcome them with one-on-one meetings, set the stage for them in meetings through taking time for introductions and actively invite their perspectives, address everyone by first names or conduct interactive formats



Findings on Communication and Collaboration Tools

- **Mailing lists** are the preferred way of communication as there is no additional effort.
- The **website**, in general, with additional ways of communication (e.g. discussion forum) is used less and only if the members see the benefit (e.g. written communication which allowed members to discuss flexible at suitable times during the first COVID19 lockdown in spring 2020).
- The **ACT Co-Creation toolkit** is a valuable resource: well designed and structured, customer-friendly, thought-through and theory-based. Most facilitators used it in meetings or workshops and had positive experiences.
- The CoP's **blogs** are perceived as a “nice way of exchanging” with visual aids, to keep track of achievements, developments, meetings and activities. However, to increase the external visibility, it needs to be promoted e.g. in connection with Twitter.
- The **GEAM tool** (a questionnaire to conduct a status quo assessment on gender equality in an organization) is described as an useful tool. From the seven CoPs, two conduct the GEAM survey with several or even most of their members.
- **Tools less used:** The files, polls, resources and video meetings functions at the ACT-website, as well as GenPORT are not used as much as users don't see the benefit (e.g. sending documents via mail, not uploading them), already have alternatives (see further tools) or encountered technical difficulties (e.g. no notifications).
- **Further tools:** Apart from the tools provided by the ACT project, the CoPs reported that they also use video tools (e.g. zoom), survey tools to decide on meeting dates, clouds to store minutes etc.



CoP Facilitators' Needs and Recommendations for how to support them

- **Further training** on group building, leadership skills, moderation, conflict management, working with diverse teams, and tools on how to activate rather than passive members, how to get people to communicate independently. Moreover, members suggest cooperating with the GE Academy and involving a train-the-trainer approach in the CoPs.
- **External intervision and support:** Intervision for CoP facilitators would be helpful to support them in finding their role and to deal with challenges. The role of the seed partner in this regard should be defined more clearly.
- **Further training on technical tools:** more support in the use of the technical tools and in running the CoP website.
- **Participative development of technical tools:** more structured and centralised mechanisms to provide feedback on tools and their use (e.g. more regular meetings) could help to further develop them according to users' needs.
- **Further support on online-tools and techniques:** more support for the transition from physical to online facilitation due to COVID-19 and more online techniques/methods and/or a webinar on how to facilitate online in general.
- **Support and communication structures between facilitators and ACT consortium** so that all facilitators receive expert inputs and help if needed. Overall, facilitators would wish for a stronger link to the ACT consortium and support that matches the practical reality of the CoPs.



Suggestions for how to found and fund future CoPs

- When founding a CoP, the possibility of a **CoP facilitator team** should be considered to cover the multitude of requested skills.
- **Design of the MoU** should be reconsidered: depending on the potential member organisations, it might be beneficial to design a more binding document to support members in fostering institutional change or to create a document of symbolic value to find members more easily. There seems to be no ‘one-size-fits-all’-solution.
- **Technical support** for CoPs should be **developed earlier** and in a **participatory** way to meet the CoP facilitators needs.
- **A European facilitator group** for future CoP facilitators would help to grow into the complex, demanding role of a facilitator which unites communication and leadership skills with the knowledge on gender/equal opportunities and the European research landscape.
- **Representatives of the Commission should attend CoP meetings** to get an impression of the work of the CoP, to learn about (un)realistic expectations and about supporting measures needed.
- **CoPs should be supported on a long-term basis**, if possible not on a project basis: It takes longer than 3 years to build a group identity and communication basis and to enable structural change in member organisations. Due to the project character, members get the impression that the membership is limited.



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