



**TERTIARY REFUGEE  
STUDENT NETWORK**

# FOREWORD

The Tertiary Refugee Student Network (TRSN) is recognized by students, UNHCR, and other partners for its importance as an advocacy platform and to continually highlight the importance of educational opportunities for refugees. Working with refugee students, TRSN is engaged in amplifying the benefits of education in their communities.

TRSN is a crucially important mission by refugee students, with the support of UNHCR, to bring refugee voices to the center of discussions and decisions about their lives. Through this platform, refugee students and alumni create synergies to support each other in developing their communities and encouraging other refugees to play their roles in life-changing areas, such as higher education. Through the creation of the TRSN, students have been able to connect and also learn about the different opportunities for advocacy and activities happening around the world.

UNHCR has supported the TRSN to create structures that facilitate the autonomy of its members in how they want to engage in advocacy.

TRSN is characterized by its diverse membership, ensuring no one is left behind. It has created a safe platform where students can interact with each other, share experiences, and learn from each other. TRSN serves as a platform where refugee scholars continuously contribute and advocate to reach the goal of 15% enrolment of young refugee women and men in higher education by 2030.

Although the actions that need to be taken within the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) are quite clear, it still remains open how to translate it into a more practical and targeted framework for the youth, community NGOs, and governments to work on together.

#### Next steps and aims for the future:

- It is important for UNHCR, donors and other partners to continuously engage and involve refugees in the decisions and processes that affect them. Policies, projects and processes should include refugees in all aspects and can benefit from refugees' perspectives.
- People and organizations need to encourage refugee students to use and develop their capacities by supporting leadership opportunities for refugee youth, for example through camp or community management structures. Employment or volunteering opportunities enable refugees to develop their skills and serve their communities.
- COVID-19 has changed how services are delivered and many young people's access to education has been affected. COVID-19 continues to impact refugee education on a daily basis and it is important to consider the numerous challenges and how young people are adapting to the new reality.

As TRSN, we will continue to work with all members and others to expand the network and its impact and to reach a maximum number of refugee students. We will continue to explore ways in which we can contribute meaningfully to our communities, especially during this tough period. With the skills that we have been able to develop through the education we have received, we will guide the road into the future to ensure that the voice of refugee students is accessible and inclusive.

**TRSN IS CHARACTERIZED BY ITS DIVERSE MEMBERSHIP, ENSURING NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND. IT HAS CREATED A SAFE PLATFORM WHERE STUDENTS CAN INTERACT WITH EACH OTHER, SHARE EXPERIENCES, AND LEARN FROM EACH OTHER.**

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# INTRODUCTION: THE TERTIARY REFUGEE STUDENT NETWORK

Though every experience of displacement is unique, students' educational journeys up until higher education share similar challenges: The cost of secondary and tertiary education, language barriers, competing responsibilities such as dependent family members, cultural expectations, lack of certification of prior learning, lack of academic preparedness and lack of information about opportunities, scholarships, and so on.

Those who succeed in advancing to a higher education program often have to overcome several of the aforementioned challenges. But many of the 3% of refugee youth who enroll in higher education also desire to help their communities and empower fellow refugee youth to defy the odds and follow their path to higher education.

Refugee students in higher education often connect on a local or national level to volunteer within their communities. In many countries, DAFI<sup>1</sup> scholarship holders convene through DAFI clubs that create a space for joint activities and advocacy on the national level. The student founded and student led Tertiary Refugee Student Network (TRSN), building on existing networks and creating new ones, defies borders and elevates refugee student activism to the global level.

The TRSN is a global network of refugee students and graduates from a variety of higher education programmes. Members represent the DAFI scholarship programme, Southern New Hampshire University's Global Education Movement (SNHU GEM), Borderless Higher Education for Refugees (BHER), University of Geneva InZone, World University Service of Canada (WUSC), Student Refugee Program, Leadership for Syria and others . Refugee students volunteer their skills and time to help increase the number of refugee youth enrolled in higher education from 3% to 15% by 2030. TRSN students advocate for refugee education on global and national level, raise awareness about the significance of education among their communities, and empower fellow refugee youth through skills training, workshops, and peer support.

Since its establishment in June 2019, the TRSN has grown considerably and now has members in 15 countries around the world, united by their dedication to open up opportunities for more refugee students. The purpose of this report is to provide an orientation to TRSN. This report describes its origins, goals, and intended trajectory, how it functions, what members are doing, and how partners can work with the TRSN.

**FOOTNOTE 1:**  
 DAFI, the Albert Einstein German Academic Refugee Initiative, provides refugee students with a comprehensive scholarship grant to pursue an undergraduate degree in their first country of asylum.

**THE STUDENT  
FOUNDED AND  
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STUDENT ACTIVISM  
TO THE GLOBAL  
LEVEL.**

# THE TRSN AT A GLANCE



## The mission:

Connect refugee students worldwide and increase the percentage of refugee youth enrolled in higher education to 15% by 2030.



## Who we are:

TRSN has members in over 15 countries in Africa, Asia, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific and Europe.



## Where we work:

TRSN members network and cooperate on national level, but also across borders and regions.



## Who can join:

TRSN is open to all refugee students in higher education.



## How we work:

TRSN is entirely student-led and empowers refugee students to raise their voices locally and globally.

# A CLOSER LOOK



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“The conference and the workshop was a beacon of hope for refugee students worldwide.

Listening to every speaker’s narration, and interests on refugee education, motivated me to see my dream come true. I can now think of how to fulfil my dream of being a refugee scholar in encampment! And that means, I will make my voice and the voices of refugees heard, without going through outsiders—those who speak on our behalf, and yet, are not refugees.” - Mark Okelo, TRSN member in Kenya.

## HOW IT ALL STARTED: THE FOUNDING WORKSHOP IN BERLIN

The Tertiary Refugee Student Network was officially launched in June 2019 during a two-day student-led workshop in Berlin. Since then it has fostered connections and activism among refugee students in more than 15 different countries.

In June 2019, a delegation of 18 refugee students from 13 different countries of origin and eight different countries of asylum attended “The Other 1%—Refugee Students at Higher Education Worldwide” international expert conference<sup>2</sup>, an event focused on highlighting refugee students’ experiences, barriers and good practices in expanding access to higher education for refugees.

The delegates, many of whom ventured into global advocacy for the first time in Berlin, spoke on panels, shared their views in technical sessions, provided media interviews, and connected with other attendees.

Prior to the conference, the student delegation held a twoday student-led workshop that responded to the strong interest of refugee students to connect with other refugee students around the world. The workshop was designed and conducted by a five-member student leadership team based on an outreach and design process that took place during the three months that preceded the workshop. The workshop’s objective was to generate ideas and recommendations on the structure, needs, and scope of a new tertiary student network.

During the workshop, participants shared their experiences with one another, exchanged information on the higher education landscape, challenges and opportunities in their countries of asylum and brainstormed possible solutions to barriers facing refugee youth in search of higher education. They also explored different models for a student network, defined the Network’s mission, and identified concrete activities.

Emerging from the workshop was the newly conceptualized Tertiary Refugee Student Network. The TRSN aims to be an inclusive force, connecting diverse refugee students and creating a space for student activism on national and global levels.

Following the workshop, TRSN founding members agreed to serve as focal points who would share workshop outcomes with their peers in their countries of asylum through student-led workshops.

**FOOTNOTE 2:**  
The conference was jointly organized by the German Federal Foreign Office, the German Academic Exchange Service and UNHCR. It was opened by German Minister of Foreign Affairs Heiko Maas and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Filippo Grandi.



## TRSN WORKSHOPS



Interactive, student-led workshops remain a key element of the Tertiary Refugee Student Network. Following the founding workshop in Berlin, TRSN members have used the concept to introduce their peers to the TRSN through national workshops.

A second global workshop at the margins of the Global Refugee Forum expanded the reach of the TRSN further and recruited a number of new members.

## THE NETWORK’S MISSION AND ACTIVITIES

The TRSN’s mission is to increase access and retention of refugees in higher education, defined under four main objectives:

- Increase refugee self-reliance through connecting refugee learners and alumni at local, national, and global levels
- Advocate for greater access to higher education to achieve 15% enrollment by 2030
- Provide guidance to institutions and students to promote quality academic experiences
- Increase awareness of, and access to, opportunities such as internships, professional development, and employment.

As TRSN members are spread across the globe and face different circumstances and resources, priorities for action will vary and will be generated by students and student groups themselves. Nevertheless, Network members adhere to the below guidelines when identifying local, national, and global areas of priority and impactful interventions:

<b>Local Level</b>	Activities include convening students to discuss and solve specific challenges, liaising with local authorities and universities, engaging the private sector, reaching out to secondary students, and participating in community volunteer activities.
<b>National Level</b>	The Network is uniquely placed to bring together students from around the country and advocate with ministries, UN agencies, and tertiary governing bodies.
<b>Regional Level</b>	The Network is represented by regional leaders who link the local and national Network activities to the global level, expand the Network’s reach in the region, and engage in regional partnerships with UNHCR and other organizations.
<b>Global Level</b>	The Network is represented by a student leadership team that works to illuminate the urgent need for greater access to higher education and uses their platform to communicate learnings from tertiary refugee students around the world.



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# TRSN ACTIVITIES AROUND THE WORLD



## AFRICA

### Entrepreneurship Training and English Classes in Chad

TRSN members Faida and Bello, based in Chad, help refugee youth succeed during their studies and after graduation through entrepreneurship training and English classes.

#### Entrepreneurship Training

Taking place in Chad's first Innovation hub in the capital N'Djamena, and supported by UNHCR, 25 refugee youth participated in a two-day long entrepreneurship training.

Attendees learned how to start and sustain a business and shared ideas for projects. Following the training, several attendees are working on business projects such as an online platform for sales, a restaurant and a hairdressing shop.

#### English Classes

What started as a simple English class with few participants in August 2019 has grown in a community of language learners including refugees in Chad and Chadian nationals. With the support of volunteer teachers, TRSN members organized three groups of in-person classes and maintained online groups for language exchange. The success of the program is apparent: Refugee youth, Chadian youth as well as learners from other countries were able to improve their English level significantly through the initiative. Given its success, Faida and Bello now seek to expand the program to further languages such as Chinese, German, Spanish, and French.

### Urwego initiative and RCGC Workshop in Rwanda

#### Urwego Initiative

In Rwanda, IT expert, Kepler graduate and TRSN member Jackson is empowering refugee youth through the Urwego Program.

The program is free of charge and provides programming skills to Kiziba high school graduates, university students, and university alumni who are passionate about IT. The programming classes span seven and a half months, during which time the beneficiaries learn different programming languages such as HTML, CSS, JavaScript, Databases, Node.js, and React.

Urwego Program is made up of seven volunteers who ensure that the program is running effectively: one CEO, managing director, and communication officer, and four academic instructors. Its first students were selected based on a survey carried out among Kepler Kiziba students. Urwego Program staff chose 20 students who



The young community of refugees from Chad is very committed to helping each other and moving forward. Many take steps to find opportunities and share them with others. Unfortunately, despite our good will those in the camps are still cut off from our initiatives due to the lack of means of communication to raise awareness -Bello, TRSN member in Chad



## LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

The TRSN is open to refugee students of all ages and backgrounds. It thrives because of the dedication, ideas, and skill sets of its diverse members. It is student-driven on global and national levels and stands out through its accessibility and flat organizational hierarchy.

On the global level, the Network is steered and represented by a team of five refugee students and graduates: Ella Ininahazwe, Sadiki Bamperineza, Safia Ibrahimkhel, Ehab Badwi and Foni Joyce.<sup>3</sup>

The leadership team organized the first student workshop, which led to the establishment of the TRSN, and were confirmed in their roles as global leaders by the Network members. The leadership team steers the Network on a global level, defines priorities for structural consolidation and expansion, keeps an overview of TRSN activities worldwide, and engages in global advocacy, partnerships, and reporting.

The leadership team is supported by the newly elected regional leaders who, following a member-wide call for applications, were selected through a transparent election process that included interviews.

Regional leaders bridge the gap between the global level and national levels of the TRSN, including facilitating communication between members in their region and the global leadership team, as well as supporting members in their region to organize activities and events. The regional leaders may represent members from their region in their work with external partners. Jointly with the global leadership team, the regional leaders will develop and implement an expansion strategy targeting refugee youth and youth networks in their region.

**FOOTNOTE 3:**  
Ella and Sadiki are refugee graduates now working as Refugee College Guidance Counselors (RCGCs) with Kepler in Rwanda. Safia is an Afghan refugee student based in Pakistan, member of UNHCR's Global Youth Advisory Council and community activist. Ehab, a Syrian refugee based in Germany, is founder and president of the Syrian Youth Assembly, student of political science and peace activist. Foni is a refugee from South Sudan living in Kenya. She is a DAFI graduate in mass communication, the founder of a local NGO and a youth activist.

**THE LEADERSHIP TEAM ORGANIZED THE FIRST STUDENT WORKSHOP, WHICH LED TO THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE TRSN, AND WERE CONFIRMED IN THEIR ROLES AS GLOBAL LEADERS BY THE NETWORK MEMBERS.**

expressed a high level of interest in learning programming skills. Their programming classes used Kepler infrastructure.

The students interacted with the leadership and instructions team by utilizing online tools such as Google Hangouts, Slack, WhatsApp, and Trello. Zoom was the main channel to deliver the classes, since all instructors are based in Kigali.

**Who are the Refugee College Guidance Counselors?**  
The Refugee College Guidance Counselors (RCGCs) are based at Kepler through its partnership with Southern New Hampshire University and the College Board. The main goal of the RCGC is to support refugee students to access higher education, to empower students who are already in programs to academically excel and to provide career guidance.

The program faced difficulties with securing funds to run all operational and academic costs and was further limited because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Jackson worked together with volunteers trying to solve these issues. As Jackson is working full-time, he sometimes can not dedicate as much time to the Urwego Program as he would like to. Covid-19 led to the closure of Kepler Campus, making it difficult for the beneficiaries to proceed with their studies. Studying from home, limited internet connectivity is a major challenge many refugee students are facing.

**TRSN at Refugee College Guidance Counselor Workshop**

In November 2019, in Kigali, Rwanda, TRSN leaders and Refugee College Guidance Counselors Ella and Sadiki organized a week-long workshop hosting refugee students and alumni from seven countries (South Africa, Malawi, Lebanon, Kenya, Uganda, Germany, and Rwanda). The event provided an opportunity for participants to connect and learn from each other's experiences with higher education and displacement, discuss activism in different contexts, and learn about the refugee college guidance counseling resources created by Ella and Sadiki in their capacity as Refugee College Guidance Counselors. The workshop also included an introduction to the Tertiary Refugee Student Network, presented by TRSN leader Safia from Pakistan.



**ASIA**

**Workshops in Pakistan**

DAFI student Hina and TRSN global leader Safia represent the Tertiary Refugee Student Network in Pakistan.

Following the establishment of the Network, both Hina and Safia invited fellow refugee youth to learn more about the Network and join. Through presentations and group discussions, attendees connected with each other, discussed common experiences, and were empowered through mutual support and inspiration from TRSN members' activism around the world.



**MENA**

**TRSN in the United Arab Emirates**

In February 2020, TRSN members attended the Symposium "Improving Higher Education Access for Refugees" at New York University's Abu Dhabi campus. The Symposium was co-hosted by the College Board, Southern New Hampshire University Global Education Movement, Kepler and UNHCR.

The event raised awareness of the unique barriers that refugee students face in accessing higher education. It also provided a platform for sharing effective practices from higher education institutions and counselors who have been beneficial in expanding access for refugee students. During the Symposium, the Refugee College Guidance Counselor Universal Resource and other initiatives developed to support refugee students were introduced, and attendees brainstormed additional opportunities to identify, recruit, admit, and support the success of refugees students in higher education. The event further provided a networking opportunity for leaders in admissions, college guidance counseling, and refugee students, as well as others working to connect refugees to universities.

TRSN leaders Ella and Sadiki from Rwanda, part of the organizing team in their capacity as RCGCs with Kepler, arranged for the participation of a student delegation with the support of UNHCR. Among the refugee students in attendance were TRSN members Hina from Pakistan, Natalia from Ecuador, Omar from Malaysia and Dalia, Hala and Badr, who are based in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

The students shared their experiences as panel speakers and moderators and led roundtable discussions on topics such as financial barriers to higher education, education for girls and young women, and the TRSN as a way for refugee students to systematically connect with each other and other stakeholders, locally and globally.



The students' participation enabled Symposium participants, many of whom worked in student admission and counseling, to further understand the circumstances shaping refugee youth's experience with higher education as well as to identify ways in which their work may help alleviate those burdens.

In their capacity as TRSN representatives, Hina and Natalia introduced the refugee students from the United Arab Emirates to the TRSN through a presentation prior to the Symposium. All student attendees joined the TRSN, thus establishing the Network in the United Arab Emirates and Malaysia.

## AMERICAS

### TRSN Workshop in Ecuador

In Ecuador, TRSN members and DAFI graduates Natalia and Oscar joined the annual meeting of all DAFI scholarship holders with UNHCR and implementing partner HIAS in December 2019.

Natalia and Oscar used the opportunity to discuss with attendees their challenges and ideas for solutions in pursuing higher education. They also reported back about their engagement in "The Other 1%" conference in Berlin in June 2019 and introduced their fellow DAFI scholars to the TRSN and its vision and mission. By highlighting what TRSN members around the world are doing to advance higher education for refugees, the workshop inspired attendees to become active.



Following the success of their first intervention, Natalia and Oscar are already planning future outreach activities with refugee youth and other stakeholders, facilitating discussions about refugees' right to education and economic inclusion, and serving as role models for fellow refugee youth who hope to obtain a university degree or professional training.

## EUROPE

### TRSN at the Global Refugee Forum in Switzerland

Following the affirmation of the Global Compact on Refugees in December 2019, the first-ever Global Refugee Forum garnered over 1,300 pledges from a variety of stakeholders to generate more predictable and sustainable support to:

- ease pressures on countries hosting refugees;
- enhance opportunities for refugees to become self-reliant;
- expand refugees' access to third-country solutions, such as resettlement and other pathways; and
- support conditions in refugees' countries of origin so that they may be able to return in safety and with dignity.

As one of six themes<sup>4</sup> at the GRF, Education took center stage. Engaging panel discussions, presentations, speeches, and two exhibitions allowed the more than 3,000 attendees to discuss inclusive quality education for refugee youth along the education continuum with a view to expand good practices and innovative approaches. As of May 2020, 204 pledges towards education had been received.

Several TRSN founding members attended the Forum to advocate for higher education for refugees on a global stage, participate in discussions with fellow experts, leaders, and other stakeholders and connect with attendees.

By announcing the TRSN pledge during the High-Level Dialogue on Education, TRSN leader Sadiki officially introduced the Network to the public and high-level stakeholders at the GRF. Network members committed to further expand the TRSN to five more countries and continue efforts towards increased access of refugee youth to higher education through volunteerism and advocacy.

TRSN member Wenasa, based in Canada, delivered a closing statement in the assembly hall on behalf of refugee youth and students. The statement highlighted the significance of education, especially higher education, for refugees' resilience and development of host and home communities.

On the margins of the GRF, the TRSN global leadership team prepared and conducted a day-long workshop for a delegation of refugee students in higher education attending the GRF.

FOOTNOTE 4:  
Other areas of focus were Burden and Responsibility Sharing, Protection Capacity, Energy and Infrastructure, Jobs and Livelihoods and Solutions.



**Adhieu, Kenya**  
"Being at the GRF meant a lot to me. I was able to meet with different refugee students and stakeholders from different parts of the world, which means to me that the world is having a common understanding of recognizing the refugees and refugees voices and trying to involve refugees in decision making."





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**ANNOUNCING THE TRSN PLEDGE DURING THE HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON EDUCATION, TRSN LEADER SADIKI OFFICIALLY INTRODUCED THE NETWORK TO THE PUBLIC AND HIGH-LEVEL STAKEHOLDERS AT THE GRF.**

Workshop participants were also introduced to the TRSN and collaborated to further develop the mission statement, and future activities of the Network at local, national, and global levels.

**TRSN PLEDGE AT THE GLOBAL REFUGEE FORUM**



“The Tertiary Refugee Student Network, an international refugee-led network of refugee youth in higher education, pledges to work more and harder to connect refugee students across the world to make them stronger students and role models.

The Network will expand into five more countries in South East Asia, Middle East, Africa, and South America. The network will encourage refugee students to support each other by sharing expertise, best practices, and opportunities worldwide.

In addition, the network will work on the regional levels to foster the connection between refugee students by encouraging peer to peer support and mentoring programs among refugee students.”

# WORKING WITH THE TRSN

While the TRSN is led and driven by committed and engaged members around the world, the Network is actively seeking partnerships with national and global stakeholders in higher education, refugee policy, and youth engagement.

The TRSN is eager to become a known institution among all stakeholders and increase the level of refugee student participation in organizations’ programming and policy making.

## UNHCR SUPPORT

In its phase of structural consolidation, TRSN is supported by the UNHCR Education Section. During regular calls between the global leadership team and the UNHCR TRSN focal person, stocktaking and next steps are discussed as the global leadership team works on strengthening the Network’s structure, establishing global partnerships, and expanding the Network to more countries and regions to represent a wide array of refugee student experiences.

The TRSN also cooperates with UNHCR on global advocacy, for example through representation at the Global Refugee Forum, and, recently, through the #ForYou Social Media Campaign. This campaign, highlighting refugee youths’ positive contributions during the Covid-19 pandemic, was developed and executed jointly by the TRSN leadership team, TRSN members working in the medical field, and members of UNHCR’s Global Youth Advisory Council.

It is envisioned that TRSN regional leaders will develop a working relationship with UNHCR Education Section focal persons on the regional level to ensure TRSN cooperation with regional stakeholders on higher education for refugees.

The TRSN also serves as a resource and contact point for coordination with technical teams in UNHCR as well as other committees representing refugee youth.

While the TRSN is supported by UNHCR, it remains an independent member-led institution. The TRSN is well positioned to partner with other organizations on activities such as providing refugee student perspective and advising on programming, joint advocacy and campaigns and other actions. The TRSN can be supported with workshop locations, technical advice, invitation to events, networking opportunities and other activities aiming at enhancing refugees’ voices in higher education.



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## MOVING FORWARD

At the first Global Refugee Forum in December 2019, the TRSN pledged to remain a committed actor in refugee higher education. As the Network grows, its members establish partnerships and implement more activities. TRSN members continue to meet regularly to coordinate and plan long and short term activities such as workshops, campaigns and joint advocacy. In 2020, TRSN members participated in more than three international virtual events on the World Refugee Day and will further engage in making TRSN known to a variety of organizations and stakeholders. The newly elected regional leaders will play a crucial role in further expanding TRSN to more members and countries. TRSN is eager to explore links with other organizations such as the Global Youth Advisory Council, refugee student organizations at national levels and more actors involved in refugees' higher education. Together with others, TRSN is committed to increase the number of enrolled refugees in higher education to 15% by 2030. Who else could better advocate for this goal than refugee students themselves.

### Marie, Ghana

“Tertiary education must become a priority and should be ranked first in proposals for sustainable solutions for refugee learners and should no longer be seen as a luxury reserved for the lucky refugee students. I think to achieve 15% enrollment of refugee students in tertiary education by 2030 seems to be a reasonable target that can be achieved together through concrete actions. In Ghana, it started by bringing together DAFI alumni, and actions such as student mentorship have been initiated.”

### ADHIEU, KENYA

“IT GIVES ME STRENGTH AND SENSE OF BELONGING KNOWING THAT THERE IS SOMEONE OUT THERE WHO IS WORKING HARD DAY AND NIGHT TO MAKE A BETTER WORLD AND BRIGHT FUTURE FOR THE NEXT GENERATIONS. IT CHALLENGES ME TO KEEP ON WORKING HARD, KNOWING I AM THE VOICE OF MY COMMUNITY, AND IT'S MY DUTY TO HELP MY COMMUNITY AND TRY TO BRING A POSITIVE CHANGE”

# CONNECT WITH THE TRSN

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