



PROSTITUTION AND TRAFFICKING IN WOMEN IN THE EASTERN SUBURBS OF BEIRUT

LEBANON

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Lebanon provides a refuge for many women and teenagers driven away from neighbouring countries by wars and conflicts, as well as some who have come from other countries seeking better economic conditions. Trafficking and prostitution are exacerbated in a context of unemployment and insecurity, where the State is often absent. This diagnosis has been carried out based on interviews with various Lebanese bodies and local associations. It analyses prostitution in the densely populated eastern suburbs of Beirut where many economic and social sectors are established. Measures to prevent trafficking in women are proposed.



The media rarely cover the subject of trafficking in women and the prevailing conspiracy of silence leads to almost absolute impunity for those responsible.
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- Advancing in the common fight for equal rights of women and men to participate in political, economic, civil and social life;
- Eradicating all forms of violence and discrimination against women and girls;
- Encouraging a change in attitude and behaviour for gender equality.

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Field diagnosis: For the inclusion of local actors in the promotion of female entrepreneurship

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March 2018

This field diagnosis is part of the Axis 1 "Strengthening the capacities of equality actors" of the Priority Solidarity Fund "Women for the future in the Mediterranean" funded by the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, in the framework of the project "Developing Women's Empowerment" labelled by the Union for the Mediterranean.

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Government of Catalonia
Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation
Barcelona City Council

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Local clusters of gender equality actors© mobilized since 2017



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| A Souss-Massa Region (Morocco) | D Luxor Governorate (Egypt) | F Zarqaa Governorate (Jordan) |
| B Wilaya of Algiers (Algeria) | E Ramallah and Al Bireh Governorate (Palestine) | G Eastern suburbs of Beirut (Lebanon) |
| C Douar Hicher Delegation (Tunisia) | | |

The Euro-Mediterranean Women's Foundation sets up local clusters of gender equality actors coordinated by associations every year, in the following countries: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia (1 per country).

Each local cluster of gender equality actors© chooses a target territory that can be a region or a province or a metropolitan area of a large city. Subsequently, the local cluster's members define a topic of interest related to gender equality that they consider a priority in this target territory.

Each local cluster is made up of 5 actors working in favour of gender equality in the target territory: associations; research or education institutions; local or regional authorities or ministerial departments in charge of advocating for women's rights; media; enterprises and trade unions. Their mission is to mobilize the gender equality actors through data collection, consultations and exchange of experiences. Thus, they analyse the situation related to the target topic and they follow-up the effectiveness of public policies in this area with a collective and participatory approach.

This bottom-up approach leads to produce a diagnosis of the situation that highlights the main obstacles to achieve gender equality, and to design a collaborative and replicable field project to address those obstacles. To date, local clusters were set in Algiers and Oran (Algeria); Giza and Luxor (Egypt); Irbid and Zarqaa (Jordan); the eastern suburbs of Beirut and Mount Lebanon (Lebanon); Marrakesh-Safi and Souss-Massa (Morocco); Ramallah-Al Bireh, Bethlehem and El Khalil/Hebron Governorates (Palestine); and Douar Hicher, Monastir and Sousse (Tunisia). These clusters focus on women's access to political decision-making and high-level positions, women's economic empowerment and professional inequalities and violence against women. This document presents the diagnosis with regard to the eastern suburbs of Beirut.

INTRODUCTION

This diagnosis concerns the battle against trafficking in women. It has been drawn up by the League for Lebanese Women's Rights (LLWR) in cooperation with the Equality Wardah Boutros association for women's rights, as well as other partner members of the local cluster of gender equality actors©: the Fédération nationale des ouvriers et employés au Liban – Fenasol (National Union of Labor and Employees Syndicates in Lebanon), the Organisation nationale pour les affaires de la femme libanaise (National Organisation for Lebanese Women's Affairs)¹, the Gender Committee of the Ministry of Education and Higher Education and the Télévision officielle – TL (State television service).

Among other aims, the LLWR works to:

- Strengthen democracy and civil liberties;
- Establish a lay, non-sectarian society;
- Establish civil legislation ensuring individual rights over personal status;
- Get women into political decision-making posts;
- Implement the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and remove the reservations made by Lebanon;
- Implement the articles of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child.

This diagnosis has been drawn up in a participatory way based on the results of more than 15 meetings intended to mobilise the parties concerned working in this area, such as: the National Commission for Lebanese Women (NCLW), the Human Rights Committee of the Lawyers' Association, the Ministry of Social Affairs, the internal security forces, the parliamentary human rights committee, the General Directorate of General Security, journalists and NGOs.

The short-term aim of this diagnosis is to shed light on the phenomenon of prostitution in Lebanese social life based on monitoring in the field. However, the ultimate objective remains the suppression of all forms of discrimination and violence against Lebanese women and, in general, women living in Lebanon.

¹ This is an official organisation generally chaired by the first lady and including the spouses of the speaker of the chamber of deputies, the prime minister, etc., as well as experts. It prepares the report presented by Lebanon to the United Nations based on the campaigns of non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

The subject of the diagnosis is prostitution and trafficking in women. According to article 3 of the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (known as the “Palermo Protocol”, 2000), the expression “trafficking in persons” means “recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs.” Thus, trafficking in women is a crime, because it generates sexual slavery. There is therefore a need to fight this crime at international level in order to eradicate it.

It should be noted that trafficking is a very old scourge in Lebanon which has flared up again in the last six years due to the Syrian crisis and the arrival of around two million refugees throughout the Lebanese regions (particularly Beirut and its suburbs). The problem has been pinpointed in the area targeting for the diagnosis, the eastern suburbs of the Lebanese capital Beirut, and, more particularly, the town of Sin-El-Fil, where several associations are working on the problem so that strategies can be implemented to help both young and older women overcome the obstacles on their path to freedom.

The eastern suburbs of Beirut are inhabited by Lebanese people largely belonging to displaced families who arrived during the 1950s and ‘60s from poor rural regions looking for work. Over the years, other Lebanese families, this time displaced due to the civil war, have joined them, together with Syrians and Iraqis. It is an area where there are tangible social inequalities.

In order to outline the possible extent of trafficking in women, meetings were organised with bodies and associations using surveys prepared in advance including questions asked orally to collect as much information as possible. Sometimes the answers led on to other issues. Along similar lines, research was carried out on the laws concerning the fight against trafficking in women, and journalists and media executives were contacted to see whether they were focusing on the problem and to reflect on how to highlight it.

B. STATE OF PLAY

1. The current situation

It is important to specify that studies on the eastern suburbs of Beirut are very unusual, unlike those dealing with the southern suburbs forming part of the domain of Hezbollah. This rarity was one of the first obstacles to be overcome, particularly because a large part of the population (particularly Shiites and Palestinians) from the eastern suburbs were displaced to other Lebanese regions (West Beirut and the South) at the beginning of the civil war by a conflict with a religious element. These displaced people were replaced by others, this time Christians, themselves displaced from certain regions of Mount Lebanon. At the end of the civil war, in 1990, part of the old population returned to live in the abandoned housing. However, this part of Beirut has not entirely recovered its former social and economic appearance, especially as the land where the big Palestinian camp of Tal Zaatar and the smaller one at Jisr al Bacha used to be, and the upper Dékouaneh area, not far from the camps, have undergone great property speculation.

The eastern suburbs of Beirut include the four towns of Sin-El-Fil, Mokalles, Dekwaneh and Rawda, all forming part of the kaza (district) of Metn du nord (Northern Metn). In parliamentary elections the people living in these districts therefore vote for representatives of Metn du Nord. However, each of them is a separate municipality. The municipal council of Sin-El-Fil consists of 18 members and officials based in a huge building known as the “municipal palace”.

The town of Sin-El-Fil extends over an area of 230 hectares and is divided into four main districts: the village; Hay Jadid, or the new district; the Horj Tabet (woodland) district and Jisr Al Bacha (the Pasha's Bridge).

It has not been possible to find exact statistics for the population which, according to the sources, varies between 60,000 and 80,000 (before the war it was 50,000). However, no more than 10,000 are entered on the register. That means the inhabitants of the town come from other Lebanese regions and elsewhere. It should be noted that all Lebanon's religions are represented in this town.

The largest concentration of population is now in the new district, where the great mass of people live, together with many Syrian and Iraqi families displaced by the wars afflicting these two countries. By contrast, the Horj district is lived in by members of the rich bourgeoisie.

Working class families and others employed in industry are concentrated above all in Jisr Al Bacha, which has 24 industrial centres. Sin-El-Fil has food, shoe, electrical appliance, furniture, mechanical engineering and other industries. The importance of these industries and those in the municipalities of Mokalles, Dekwaneh and Rawda, as well as the adjoining municipality of Bouchrieh (with 256 industrial centres), and the many shopping centres, mean the main bodies governing these economic activities are also in Sin-El-Fil. So the Mount Lebanon Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the printing association, the chemical industry association, the paper industry association and the marble and granite manufacturers' association are in the eastern suburbs.

This suburb, which is both rich and working class and, above all, close to Beirut and accessible to people from various Lebanese regions, has attracted private and public education institutions (schools and colleges), as well as department 2 of the teacher training faculty of the Lebanese University and the university's doctoral school.

However, this image would be incomplete if the various problems the population has to face were not mentioned, notably unemployment particularly affecting young people and women, the high cost of living and the absence of the State. These problems contribute to increasing violence against women taking the form either of domestic violence or trafficking in women.

In the eastern suburbs of Beirut, particularly Sin-El-Fil, there are the headquarters of a number of social associations, including associations taking care of young orphans (SOS villages). Other associations provide aid and assistance to people with drug dependency or, like Dar Al Amal (the Home of Hope), to those who are forced to turn to prostitution, either because of their socio-economic situation or for other reasons. Not all these people are in the target area, but come in to receive the support they need.

In this context, how many associations deal with this problem of trafficking in women? How many women have been able to receive shelter and support from these associations?

In the absence of reliable figures, the fact is that there are few associations fighting trafficking in women and most of them are concerned with the problem of domestic violence against women. Moreover, the associations active against trafficking in women are not properly assisted either by State institutions or by the municipality, and they have to seek private funding, which restricts their capacity to act.



In Sin-EI-Fil, several associations are concerned with domestic violence, but there are very few combating trafficking in women.

2. Links between the target area and the situation at national level

The prevailing situation in Sin-EI-Fil is fairly similar to that in the Greater Beirut region – in other words the capital and its suburbs – and also at national level.

Trafficking in persons is considered a crime in Lebanon and in 2011 the Lebanese parliament voted for Law 164 concerning the penalisation of serious human trafficking crimes. Situations covered by this Law are specified as follows:

- A- Acts that are punishable by law.
 - B- Prostitution or exploitation of prostitution of others.
 - C- Sexual exploitation.
 - D- Begging.
 - E- Slavery or practices that resemble slavery.
 - F- Forced or compulsory work.⁹
 - G- This includes the forcible or mandatory recruitment of children to use them in armed conflicts. (...)
- Consideration shall not be given to the consent that is given by the victim to exploitation... nor... the consent to such exploitation that is given by one of the victim's

forefathers, legal guardian, or any other person who exercises legal or actual authority over the victim.

- Trafficking in persons is luring, transporting, receiving, detaining, or finding shelter for a person... for the purpose of exploiting said other person...". (Extract from article 1 of the new law, specifying: "the following will be added to chapter 2, article 586 of the criminal code").

However, in the streets of Beirut and its suburbs, even at night, young beggars aged no more than 15 can be seen stretching out their hands near traffic police officers. In some districts along the sea front, girls and young woman can be seen trying to hook "customers" without a word from the forces of order. From time to time, however, raids on hotels or apartments find young women being held to provide pleasure to those willing to pay and money for their kidnappers.

The statistics on this issue are not very reliable either, as they do not give a full picture of the problem. After several requests to the courts, some statistics concerning trafficking in women have been obtained but everything points to them being well below the true situation:

Statistics on victims of trafficking in women (according to the courts)

Nationality	Victims of trafficking (2015)	Nationality	Victims of trafficking (2016)
Lebanese	2	Lebanese	2
Syrian	12	Syrian	82
Palestinian	2	Palestinian	2
Jordanian	1	Birthplace not stated	1
Moroccan	2		
Total	19	Total	87

The very succinct previous table has been supplemented by some statistics provided by the FSI on what these forces call "crimes committed by women". We can see that a total of 63 women from all nations solicited customers in 2016, including 11 Lebanese and 17 Syrians, and the total of those practising prostitution amounted to 304, including 30 Lebanese and 153 Syrians. Meanwhile, the number of women who have suffered trafficking has fallen in the statistics provided by the FSI to just four that year.

Statistics on crimes committed by women in 2016 (FSI)

Nationality	Soliciting customers	Prostitution	Trafficking
Lebanese	11	30	1
Syrian	17	153	1
Palestinian	5	8-	
Kenyan	5	21	-
Ethiopian	-	47-	
Others(Iraq, Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, Philippines)	25	45	2
Total	63	304	4

From these few examples it can be concluded that the figures are rather unreliable, as they do not shed all the necessary light on the seriousness of the problem. This affliction is more serious than the figures collected show, partly because young women from former Soviet countries and Romania are hardly mentioned in the statistics when in fact hundreds of them are brought to Lebanon on false contracts when their real work is in nightclubs and what goes on there. Meanwhile, trafficking has become increasingly serious following the arrival of a large number of displaced Syrians and, since then, because of false “marriages” contracted with Syrian teenage girls aged under 15. This new phenomenon also affects teenage Lebanese girls in the poor country areas. After a few months of “marriage”, some of them join the ranks of the forced prostitutes.

So, the Lebanese authorities are in the hot seat because they are responsible for all those living on their territory and because they have made commitments to international bodies.

3. Links between the situation in the eastern suburbs of Beirut and the Lebanese State’s international commitments

As a founding member of the United Nations, Lebanon took part in drafting the Charter or Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). It has also signed the essential international conventions concerning human rights and women’s role in society, including the CEDAW. However, it insisted on two restrictions on articles 9 and 16 concerning the right to nationality and personal civil status, as well as the international Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989).

The United Nations Charter declares faith in fundamental human rights, the dignity and value of the human person and the equal rights of men and women.

These are also the strengths of the CEDAW which recalls, in its preamble, “that discrimination against women violates the principles of equality of rights and respect for human dignity, is an obstacle to the participation of women, on equal terms with men, in the political, social, economic and cultural life of their countries, hampers the growth of the prosperity of society and the family and makes more difficult the full development of the potentialities of women in the service of their countries and of humanity”.

As for the guidelines of the Declaration on the Rights of the Child on which the international convention concerning children is based, in its preamble it stipulates that “the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth”.

It is true that Lebanon has changed some of its laws in accordance with international agreements that take precedence over its Constitution and specific laws. It has also amended certain articles of the Criminal Code, including the ones already mentioned as well as others. In the “Law on the Protection of Women and Family Members against Family Violence” (a title which says a great deal about the ambiguity of its content), it also established three-year prison sentences for anyone who helps or forces a woman from their own family into prostitution.

However, the results have not yet lived up to expectations by a long way, particularly concerning control over young female “foreign nationals” coming to Lebanon with employment contracts in bars or nightclubs. Evidence for this comes from interviews with the Director General of General Safety for the region and even the General Directorate of the FSI, and, finally, the Director of the FSI’s own office for combating human trafficking.

As for the Office of the Minister of State for Women’s Affairs, a ministry set up by the government in 2017 and presided over by a man, it is not able to provide much information and the minister has confirmed that he had no files. Meanwhile, the chairman of the parliamentary committee on human rights, confirmed that after the passing of Law 164, trafficking is now considered a crime. However, there are still no measures to prevent these crimes, and the penalties are not very effective, as, according to the (very incomplete) statistics from the courts, crimes involving trafficking in women increased by 500% between 2015 and 2016.

C. OBSTACLES AND INCENTIVES FOR CHANGE

1. Obstacles to improving the current situation

There are many factors preventing an improvement to the current situation.

- First there is the government of the country and the parliament. They content themselves with proposing or passing laws without, however, implementing the measures necessary for them to operate properly or providing the bodies that apply them – primarily the security forces – with the powers they need. It should also not be forgotten that the different ministries responsible for dealing with trafficking in persons, notably women, have never cooperated together or, rather, have never prepared common plans for pursuing the criminals.

Nor has the Lebanese Ministry of Education established anything in its programmes on trafficking in persons in general, and women in particular. It has no campaigns for preventing paedophilia, even though certain cases have been revealed in private and State schools.

- It is the same for the municipal councils, which feel detached from the problem: no committee has been set up to fight prostitution in the municipality of Sin-EI-Fil. On the other hand it has not been possible to arrange a meeting with the Mayor of the town of Jounieh². The person responsible for social relations in this municipality informed us that the municipal council has not targeted the issue, as the municipal police do not have powers over the matter. In addition, she stated that the task was the responsibility of the FSI and the Directorate General of Territorial Surveillance (DGST).
- Then there is the socio-economic situation in the country, which can be summarised with the following keywords: poverty, unemployment, religious divisions. This is particularly the case in certain rural regions from where displaced persons arrive in the capital, accumulating in shanty towns like Hay Jadid in Sin-EI-Fil or other districts of the eastern and western suburbs of Beirut. These shanty towns, destroyed by the civil war, were quickly rebuilt, constituting what was known as the “poverty belt” in the darkness beneath the brightly lit skyscrapers where the rich minority have their homes. It should be added that the periods following the great disturbances, such as the civil war and the Israeli aggression, are transitional periods of moral and social instability in people’s lives.

² The initial plan was to analyse trafficking in women in two risk areas of the Beirut suburbs of Sin-EI-Fil and Jounieh, which has many nightclubs and where there is a considerable presence of young women from eastern European countries. In the end, however, the diagnosis focused on Sin-EI-Fil.

- On top of this instability there are the Palestinian, Iraqi and, above all, Syrian crises of the past six years, resulting in a flow of refugees who have aggravated the problems faced by the Lebanese population, particularly the poor. Prostitution and trafficking in women, whether they are Lebanese, Syrian or of other nationalities forced to flee their respective countries due to wars, poverty and dramatic political changes, are among the most serious problems.
- Moreover, the media, particularly television, have only marginally studied this problem. At the interviews with certain executives over the obscurity surrounding this important issue, the answers were not very convincing. They ranged between saying that it was a “minor problem in Lebanon”, bemoaning a “lack of information” and describing it as a “taboo subject”, due to traditions concerning virginity. Others referred to fears that families would be ostracised in the closed societies they form part of if people know their daughter has been raped and/or encouraged to work as a prostitute.
- Finally, the limited number of NGOs concerning themselves with the issue of prostitution and trafficking in women has been highlighted, compared to the women’s NGOs aimed at improving the situation for female victims of domestic violence, legal (personal status, equal rights) or socio-economic (wages, benefits, equality, education). Few NGOs concern themselves with the factors constituting the basis for prostitution and trafficking, and those that do are not helped as they should be by the government departments, particularly the Ministry of Social Affairs, which should, in principle, ensure that they receive financial and social aid and assistance.

2. Positive experiences

These obstacles have not prevented some public and private experiments. There is the example of the central management of the FSI and the DGST attempting to translate Act 164 concerning human trafficking crimes into action and to make their various civil servants and members responsible for this issue. This is also the example of Caritas-Lebanon and, above all, Dar Al Amal.

The meeting with the staff and the director of Dar Al Amal allowed us to see that dozens of young women go there to find care (medical and other appointments) and support. Some of them have asked to be supported financially so they can come off “the game” and pay for their needs. Others come with their children. It should be noted that this association takes



The different ministers in charge of applying Law 164, concerning trafficking in people, do not work in a sufficiently coordinated way.
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care of women prisoners, and has a social worker operating on the ground. However, the association has found difficulties in obtaining the funds it needs to carry out its activities properly. In particular, the Ministry for Social Affairs delays paying it the sums established, and budget cuts are also made at source. For this reason, the Dar Al Amal association has resorted to fundraising activities so it can carry out its established aid activities: sales of craft products made by prisoners, appeals to donors, an annual lunch with a tombola, charity auctions, etc.

D. RECOMMENDATIONS

The few experiments that have been identified could be taken as a starting point for other more general ones. This, of course, will depend on organised joint action between ministries, the official bodies responsible, the municipalities and the NGOs. This action involves the application of Act 164 and amendments that must be made to the Criminal Code, particular concerning the established penalties, in order to reduce and eradicate crimes concerning prostitution and trafficking in women, as well as children.

To this must be added specific actions and measures, including:

- Carrying out a field study on Greater Beirut, not only the eastern suburbs or part of these suburbs, to measure the extent of the phenomenon combining prostitution and trafficking in women so remedial action can be taken.
- Dealing with the subject of “human trafficking” in school curriculums and handbooks.
- Establishing explanation and prevention campaigns in local media, including specialists.
- Encouraging NGOs to work on the phenomenon with the help of the municipalities.
- Ensuring coordination between the networks and NGOs combating the same phenomenon at international level.

E. CONCLUSION

Due to the limited implementation time and budget and specific objectives, this diagnosis constitutes only an initial approach to a very dangerous and insidious problem. Trafficking in women and prostitution are, in fact, largely enveloped in a conspiracy of silence that prevents adequate solutions being found.

This conspiracy of silence, based on customs and traditions that make the problem a taboo subject, is aggravated by an almost total absence of institutions responsible either for the application of the law or for taking effective measures to be implemented by the security forces and other bodies. The municipal councils do not feel involved and NGOs are more concerned with combating domestic, legal, economic and cultural violence against women than with combating human trafficking. The result of all this is a degree of indifference in the media: an important tool whose role is to clarify public opinion and involve it in a campaign aimed at eradicating the problem.

For this reason, it would be useful to carry out a long-term work based on a project taking into consideration a State-NGO partnership and cooperation between international associations championing human rights. Such a project is crucial in Lebanon where, as well as Lebanese women, there are thousands of teenage Syrian, Palestinian and Iraqi women forced to flee their respective countries by wars and internal and international conflicts, together with tens of thousands of women and young people who have come from underdeveloped countries to work there.

Such a project, benefiting several million women, could also be extended to the entire Mediterranean, where women have been suffering from wars and other conflicts for a long time.

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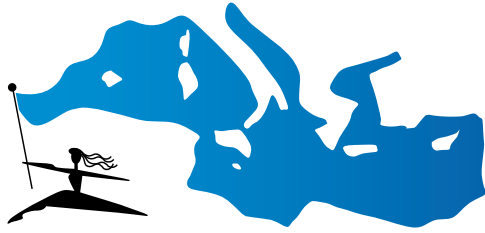
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Each local cluster of gender equality actors© is coordinated by an association as the Foundation recognises that civil society is the real motor of change in our societies to improve women's conditions.

The local clusters' approach is an innovative and participatory process, which supports networking and sharing of good practices in favour of gender equality at a decentralized level and promotes the emergence of projects rooted in the territory.

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