

Building the future of media with migrants and refugees

Introduction

"Immigrants dying at sea, in boats which were vehicles of hope and became vehicles of death. That is how the headlines put it. When I first heard of this tragedy a few weeks ago, and realized that it happens all too frequently, it has constantly come back to me like a painful thorn in my heart."¹ These phrases, taken from Francis' homily in Lampedusa in 2013, moved millions of viewers. The media followed the Pope's behavior and gestures and quoted his moving declarations in various languages. Similar media coverage of the deaths of migrant travelers appears quite frequently in print, radio, television, and online. For the international community and the Church as a whole, each death of a person fleeing his or her homeland is perceived as a tragedy for the individual and the entire nation. Even from the Church's perspective, such events stimulate compassion, but also the adoption of concrete remedial actions, because "refugees and other forcibly displaced persons have been, are, and always will be in the heart of the Church."²

In early March 2023, several thousand Calabrian residents gathered to pray at the Stations of the Cross on the beach where 71 refugee bodies had been fished out a week earlier. Archbishop Angelo Raffaele Panzetta spoke heartbreaking words during the service. "As we walked together [in this Way of the Cross], we asked ourselves: 'Are we still Christians?' Sure, we have Christian roots, works of art, the crucifix on a chain around our necks, we do our novenas, we baptize our children. But how is it that after 2,000 years of walking behind Jesus, we have not really learned to welcome each other? There is something wrong in our lives. If we truly welcome Jesus, we must allow our hearts to be changed and not allow fear to make us cold-hearted."³

A strong impetus for writing this article came from reading the document *Building the Future with Migrants and Refugees*, published by the *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development*. The text was published on the Dicastery's website on October 27, 2022, and addresses the theme of building a future with migrants and refugees in the context of the church community's involvement in ongoing global processes. The document explicitly encourages putting these people at the center of the Church's future. "Building the future with migrants and refugees means to include them, by putting them at the centre of our future, unleashing their potential as migrants and refugees."⁴ Thinking about the future of

¹ Visita a Lampedusa, Omelia del santo padre francesco, Campo sportivo "Arena" in Località Salina, 8 luglio 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130708_omelia-lampedusa.html.

² Pontificio Consiglio della Pastorale Per i Migranti e gli Itineranti, *Accogliere Cristo nei rifugiati e nelle persone forzatamente sradicate, Orientamenti pastorali*, Vaticano 2013, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/corunum/corunum_it/pubblicazioni/Rifugiati-2013-ITA.pdf, 16.

³ Vaticannews, Abp Panzetta: Patrzac na morze, musimy bić się w piersi, <https://www.vaticannews.va/pl/swiat/news/2023-03/abp-panzetta-patrzac-na-morze-musimy-bic-sie-w-piersi.html>.

⁴ *Costruire il futuro con i migranti e i rifugiati*, Il Dicastero per il Servizio dello Sviluppo Umano Integrale, 27 ottobre 2022, <https://migrants-refugees.va/it/risorse/documenti/>.

the Church in the context of migration processes that sometimes change social structures becomes an urgent challenge for the Church itself.

In keeping with some of the statements in the document, the theme of migrants and refugees is taken up and rightly included in Catholic media, including the Salesian media. In many parts of the world, the Salesian Family assists people who have left the place where they were born and raised and moved to another part of the continent or the world to seek peace, freedom, justice, and a decent livelihood. Following social teaching, it must be acknowledged that the Church sees in the eyes and faces of migrants and refugees the face of the suffering Christ. Given the historical processes affecting the entire planet, building the future of the Church also means appreciating the contribution that migrants and refugees can make to building a better world.⁵ This must also be understood as a process of building media messages and communication strategies on this painful issue.

The present of migrants and refugees

Explanation of terms and some data

At the outset, some basic concepts shall be explained. Migration refers to the movement of individuals or groups of people, both within their respective countries or across borders. A migrant is a person who moves from one place to another within a country or across an international border, to another country, primarily for political, economic, educational, or family reasons. A refugee is defined as a person who has been forced to leave his or her country because of persecution, war, or violence. Persecution is often related to ethnicity, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group. War and violence, instead, usually escalate along ethnic, tribal, and religious lines. In the case of refugees, the possibility of returning to their country is usually characterized by great fear, while the constriction to flee is dictated by the desire to save lives or preserve freedom. In addition, it should be noted that refugees are protected under international law.⁶

Mention should also be made of asylum seekers, that is, those who, upon arrival in a foreign country, present an appropriate application. IDPs, on the other hand, are people who have been forced to leave their homes due to armed conflict, human rights violations, or disasters. IDPs do not cross an internationally recognized national border.⁷ It is worth noting that the terms "refugee" and "migrant" are not interchangeable, although in the media and by some organizations, they are sometimes erroneously used as synonyms, blurring the boundaries between these realities. One may also encounter the term "international migration," the meaning of which includes asylum seekers. In contrast, "forced migration" is a very broad concept and, like "migration," has no universally accepted definition (unlike the concept of

⁵ Messaggio del Santo Padre Francesco per la 108ª Giornata Mondiale del Migrante e del Rifugiato, 25 settembre 2022, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/messages/migration/documents/20220509-world-migrants-day-2022.html>.

⁶ Convenzione sullo statuto dei rifugiati redatta a Ginevra nel 1951, https://www.unhcr.org/it/wp-content/uploads/sites/97/2016/01/Convenzione_Ginevra_1951.pdf.

⁷ Norwegian Refugee Council, Roald Høvring, 10 things you should know about migration and refugees, 2022, <https://www.nrc.no/news/2018/may/10-things-you-should-know-about-migration-and-refugees/>.

"refugee"). The *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (UNHCR) recommends using the term "refugees and migrants" to describe all people on the move.⁸

Statistics show that the absolute number of people living outside their country of birth is now higher than ever: it has increased from 173 million in 2000 to 258 million in 2017. As a result, the share of international migrants in the world population has increased from 2.8 percent in 2000 to 3.4 percent in 2017.⁹ *Caritas Italiana* and *Fondazione Migrantes*, in their 2022 report, affirm that the number of international migrants is already estimated at 281 million in 2021, representing 3.6 percent of the world population. The principal reason for the population movement is the prolonged crises recorded around the world. The world's largest migration crisis has become the war in Syria. After 12 years of conflict, more than half of Syrians have had to leave their homes. 6 million are internally displaced and the other 6 million are refugees in other countries, mainly in the Middle East and Europe.¹⁰

Selected Church Documents

The Church's first important document on migrants was Pius XII's 1952 apostolic constitution, *Exsul familia*, which addressed the wave of migration after World War II. In the document, the Pope emphasized the Church's concern for migrants and that every person had the right to migrate. A few years later, the Second Vatican Council, in its *Decree on the Pastoral Mission of Bishops in the Church (Christus Dominus)* highlighted a special pastoral concern for migrants, exiles, refugees, and travelers. In 1969, Paul VI issued the motu proprio *Pastoralis migratorum cura*, which revised the Church's previous teaching on migrants in the context of ongoing social change. The document underscored that the primary good was respect for the spiritual and cultural values of those who move. In addition, in 1969, the *Congregation for Bishops* published the instruction *De pastoralis migratorum cura*, which described the theological and legal aspects related to Paul VI's motu proprio. Another document appeared in 1970 as Paul VI's motu proprio, *Apostolicae caritatis*, which established the *Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People*.

In 2004, the *Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People* published the Instruction *Erga migrantes caritas Christi*, and in 2013 the document *Welcoming Christ in Refugees and Forcibly Displaced Persons*. The first text described the problem of migrants and pastoral care for them in biblical, theological, pastoral, and canonical aspects. It called attention to respecting the ethnic, linguistic, and cultural values of the newcomers and encouraged them to contribute to integration into the local Church. It mentioned the commingling of religion and culture on a global scale and the modern technologies that foster these processes. The 2013 document clarified the fundamental differences between migrants and refugees and emphasized the reasons why people leave countries, such as persecution, purely economic conditions, and other difficult situations that often directly threaten human life. The Instruction encourages the reception of migrants and refugees in a dignified manner,

⁸UNHCR, Uchodźca czy migrant? Tłumaczymy różnice i wyjaśniamy ich sens, <https://www.unhcr.org/pl/365-plwiadomosci2016uchodzca-czy-migrant-tlumaczymy-roznice-i-wyjasniamy-ich-sens-html.html>.

⁹ Global Trends to 2030: The Future of Migration and Integration, European Political Strategy Centre (EPSC), 2018.

¹⁰ Rzeczpospolita, Wojna domowa gorsza od kataklizmu. Syryjski reżim stara się zadbać przede wszystkim o swoich, <https://www.rp.pl/kleski-zywiolowe/art37934751-wojna-domowa-gorsza-od-kataklizmu-syryjski-rezim-stara-sie-zadbac-przede-wszystkim-o-swoich>.

with a sound pastoral approach.¹¹ Mention should also be made of Pope Francis' 2020 encyclical *Fratelli tutti*, which refers to, among other things, the lack of human dignity at the borders and the reception, protection, promotion, and integration.

During his pontificate, Pope Francis has undertaken a special mission to care for migrants and refugees who, by migrating to other countries, become part of a new society and offer new opportunities. Looking at history, it is fair to say that the Church has always been consistent in its social teaching on migration, while Francis' sensitivity has become a hallmark of his pontificate. Some might affirm that it is a central theme of his pontificate, wherein shines the concern to open the doors of homes, parishes, convents, and religious communities to those facing difficulties.¹² "Migrants present a particular challenge for me, since I am the pastor of a Church without frontiers, a Church which considers herself mother to all. For this reason, I exhort all countries to a generous openness which, rather than fearing the loss of local identity, will prove capable of creating new forms of cultural synthesis."¹³

Building a future of migrants and refugees

The rhetoric of the menace

Messages regarding migrants and refugees, in many cases, dominate agenda-setting, priming and framing¹⁴ in the media. Undoubtedly, accidents in which people die or find themselves in often inhumane circumstances generate the most interest. Boats capsized in the Mediterranean, Ukrainians fleeing across borders, women and children dying of exhaustion, corpses dumped on the beaches of southern Italy, the tragic destiny of refugees crossing the Sahara. In similar cases, the media often highlight the cause of these events: the inhumane conditions due to which people seek dignity in other countries. In reporting the events, the media sometimes create a negative image of migrants and refugees, which leads to fear, xenophobia, intolerance, and increased racism. "In this regard, the media has an important role in shaping public opinion and a responsibility to use correct terminology pertaining to refugees, asylum seekers and other forms of migration, given the existence of mixed flows of migration."¹⁵ Statistically, journalists pay too little attention to the positive contribution of migrants to society; they are often described as a burden on the country and a drain on social resources. The positive effects of their presence in individual countries do not receive the same attention.¹⁶

¹¹ Michał Mraczek, Troska o migrantów w dokumentach Kościoła i w kontekście aktualnej sytuacji migracyjnej w Polsce związanej z konfliktem zbrojnym na Ukrainie, *Społeczeństwo, Studia, prace badawcze i dokumenty z zakresu nauki społecznej Kościoła*, Rok XXXII 2022 nr 2 (158), p. 63-64.

¹² Greg Erlandson & Gretchen R. Crowe (2016) Church communication highlights 2015, *Church, Communication and Culture*, 1:1, 7-25, DOI: 10.1080/23753234.2016.1181309, s. 11; Paulina Guzik (2018) Communicating migration – Pope Francis' strategy of reframing refugee issues, *Church, Communication and Culture*, 3:2, 106-135, DOI: 10.1080/23753234.2018.1478230, p. 111.

¹³ *Esortazione Apostolica Evangelii Gaudium*, Francesco, Vaticano 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html, 210.

¹⁴ Patricia Moy, David Tewksbury, Eike Mark Rinke, *Agenda-Setting, Priming, and Framing*, 2016, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect266>.

¹⁵ Pontificio Consiglio della Pastorale Per i Migranti e gli Itineranti..., 42.

¹⁶ I mass media di fronte a migrazioni e minoranze. Strategie e linee guida, *RespectWords*, 2017, <https://www.respectwords.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/I-mass-media-di-fronte-a-Migrazione-e-Minoranze.pdf>.

Carol, a Syrian refugee and victim of a fierce conflict, addressed the following words to Pope Francis in 2013: "The only hope is to arrive alive in Europe. A Europe we dreamed of that is welcoming and open. Unfortunately, our sufferings do not find peace here either. Our human rights and dignity are too often trampled upon by the indifference and superficiality with which we happen to be treated. (...) Syrians in Europe feel a great responsibility not to be a burden, we want to feel an active part of a new society. We want to offer our help, our wealth of skills and knowledge, our culture in building more just and welcoming societies towards those who, like us, are fleeing wars and persecution."¹⁷

During the same meeting, at the Centro Astalli, Pope Francis delivered an important message related to migrants: "Each one of you, dear friends, has a life story that speaks to us of the tragedies of war, of conflicts that are all too often linked to international politics. Yet, above all, every one of you bears a wealth of humanity and a religious sense, treasures to welcome rather than to fear."¹⁸ And in his *Message for World Peace Day 2018*, Francis mentioned the rhetoric of menace, or threat. "Many destination countries have seen the spread of rhetoric decrying the risks posed to national security or the high cost of welcoming new arrivals, and thus demeaning the human dignity due to all as sons and daughters of God."¹⁹ Naturally, it is true that some of the migrants and refugees are controversial with their actions and, sometimes, even illegal; however, this should not be a determining factor in the construction of media messages that generalize and project onto the entire community of newcomers.

Changing the narrative

Changing the narrative about migrants and refugees is becoming a pressing challenge for public, private, and Catholic media. Media associated with the Salesian Family also have a huge role to play, as they are shared and broadcast virtually all over the world. Some are small social media accounts or local newspapers; others are television stations reaching millions. That said, each media outlet can contribute to changing the narrative of this urgent issue, while also giving a voice to those in need. "This implies providing a safe place for people to tell their stories (...). This must be done also by using social and mass media."²⁰

Prejudice in every area of life leads to a culture of rejection. In the case of migration, it leads to suspicion, hostility, resentment, fear, groping, criticism, social closure, fear of increased crime and security risks, and loss of identity and culture. "The communications media have a role of great responsibility in this regard: it is up to them, in fact, to break down stereotypes and to offer correct information in reporting the errors of a few as well as the honesty, rectitude, and goodness of the majority. [...] The communications media are themselves

¹⁷ Saluto di Carol, rifugiata siriana a Papa Francesco, Incontro con Papa Francesco, Roma 10 settembre 2013, https://www.jsn.it/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Discorso_Carol.pdf.

¹⁸ Visita al "Centro Astalli" di Roma per il servizio ai rifugiati, Discorso del Santo Padre Francesco, 10 settembre 2013, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/speeches/2013/september/documents/papa-francesco_20130910_centro-astalli.html.

¹⁹ Messaggio del Santo Padre Francesco per la celebrazione della LI Giornata mondiale della pace, 1° gennaio 2018, Migranti e rifugiati: uomini e donne in cerca di pace, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/messages/peace/documents/papa-francesco_20171113_messaggio-51giornatamondiale-pace2018.pdf.

²⁰ Costruire il futuro con i migranti e i rifugiati...

called to embrace this 'conversion of attitudes' and to promote this change in the way migrants and refugees are treated."²¹

The Handbook on Integration for Policymakers and Practitioners has already addressed media and integration in the context of migration in 2010. Some 600 experts developed ideas on fair and honest communication about the situation of migrants and refugees, influencing public attitudes.²² *The Pontifical Council for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People*, on the other hand, stresses that to report on migration events correctly, the media should have access to refugees and especially to the camps where they are housed.²³

Media Coverage on Migration: Promoting a Balanced Reporting provides the following suggestions for talking about migrants in the media: stereotypical and negative wording that refers to ethnicity should be avoided; media coverage during prime time should not only cover border crossings and stranded dinghies, but also migrants' housing, religious, or labor issues; coverage should include diverse sources and, most importantly, migrants themselves; recruitment of migrant journalists should be prioritized through appropriate internship programs.²⁴ The 2022 report by *Caritas Italiana* and *Fondazione Migrantes* underscores that there is a need to change the narrative in the Italian media, to overcome the unfavorable news situation that presents migration often as a purely crisis phenomenon.²⁵ The document *Building the Future with Migrants and Refugees* also provides clear proposals, talking about preparing society by using the media for information and educational activities.²⁶

Migrants and refugees bring enormous human and cultural potential with them, as well as a range of skills that can enrich the local community. The Church is called to carefully invite these people to collaborate in various fields. The expertise of migrants and refugees in the past has often been crucial to positive social and economic transformation. Even today, their enthusiasm and skills should be much more appreciated.²⁷ The presence of migrants and refugees, and the relationships and commitment to the cooperation they create, also pose an enormous challenge to the cultural and spiritual development of society. In the context of integration with newcomers, it is extremely important to esteem migrants' digital skills. The document *Building the Future with Migrants and Refugees* recommends "Fostering the digital skills of migrants and refugees and use of digital tools in daily and social life so as to foster their integration into the host society, while avoiding socioeconomic inequalities."²⁸

²¹ Messaggio del Santo Padre Francesco per la 100^a Giornata Mondiale del Migrante e del Rifugiato 2014, https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/it/messages/migration/documents/papa-francesco_20130805_world-migrants-day.html.

²² Komisja Europejska, Podręcznik integracji dla osób odpowiedzialnych za kształtowanie i wdrażanie polityki – Wydanie trzecie, Urząd Publikacji Unii Europejskiej, Luksemburg, 2010, https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/sites/default/files/2010-04/doc1_12892_53982377.pdf, p. 26-27.

²³ Pontificio Consiglio della Pastorale Per i Migranti e gli Itineranti..., 62.

²⁴ Triandafyllidou, A. (2017) 'Media Coverage on Migration: Promoting a Balanced Reporting', in McAuliffe, M. and M. Klein Solomon (Conveners) (2017) *Ideas to Inform International Cooperation on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration*, IOM: Geneva.

²⁵ Caritas e migrantes, XXXI Rapporto Immigrazione 2022, Caritas Italiana e Fondazione Migrantes, <https://www.migrantes.it/wp-content/uploads/sites/50/2022/10/Sintesi-XXXI-Rapporto-Immigrazione-2022.pdf>.

²⁶ Costruire il futuro con i migranti e i rifugiati...

²⁷ Messaggio del Santo Padre Francesco per la 108^a Giornata Mondiale del Migrante e del Rifugiato...

²⁸ Costruire il futuro con i migranti e i rifugiati...

Communication Strategy

The handbook published by the European Commission provides examples of strategies to ensure effective messaging in relation to the situation of migrants and refugees. It talks, among other things, about training specialized spokespersons, using the local press, maintaining positive relationships with journalists, monitoring media information, and educating the public. The same document calls attention to the development of cross-cultural competencies of media organizations and journalists in order to work effectively in a given environment. Above all, it talks about a sound knowledge of society, skills, and experience to integrate intercultural communication skills, and an open and curious attitude. Skills should be developed already at the school level, while key players or prominent figures can assist journalism and media training institutions with courses on migration and cultural differences. *The Rome Charter – Code of Conduct regarding asylum seekers and refugees*, instead, draws attention to the responsibilities of journalists in applying a media strategy on migrants and refugees. It encourages the use of appropriate terminology, control of information, protection of those who choose to speak to journalists, and collaboration with experts and organizations specializing in these issues.²⁹

Also from the Church, there are specific indications of a media strategy. *Guidelines on Intercultural Migratory Pastoral Care of 2022* speak of the distorted image of migrants that hinders the dignified reception of newcomers. They emphasize that the Catholic Church is called to help local communities truly understand the phenomenon of migration through the following concrete actions:

- "Involve mass media in spreading the good practices of welcome and hospitality, as well as the stories of migrants and refugees who successfully contribute to the integral human development of host communities.
- The social communication media, in this field, have a role of great responsibility: it is up to them, in fact, to unmask stereotypes and offer correct information, where they may happen to denounce the error of some, but also to describe the honesty, rectitude, and greatness of spirit of most. [...] The media are also called to enter into this conversion of attitudes and to foster this change of behavior toward migrants and refugees.
- Use positive language when speaking publicly about migrants and refugees and spread solid research-based arguments against their misrepresentation.

²⁹ La Carta di Roma — Protocollo deontologico concernente richiedenti asilo, rifugiati, vittime della tratta e migranti, <https://www.cartadiroma.org/cosa-e-la-carta-di-roma/codice-deontologico/>; Notizie ai margini, IX rapporto Carta di Roma 2021, Associazione Carta di Roma, <https://www.cartadiroma.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Notizie-ai-margini.pdf>; Notizie dal fronte, X rapporto Carta di Roma 2022, Associazione Carta di Roma, https://www.osservatorio.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Notizie_dal_Fronte_XRapporto-CdR.pdf.

- In this regard, the media has an important role in shaping public opinion and a responsibility to use correct terminology regarding refugees, asylum seekers, and other forms of migration [...].
- See the authentic multiplicity of cultural and religious expression within local Catholic communities as an opportunity to learn from different traditions and to promote intercultural appreciation through creative communication."³⁰

Building an appropriate media strategy, both locally and globally, is becoming a pressing challenge for those involved in Salesian media around the world. If migrant- and refugee-related processes are read as signs of the times, Salesian Family media can indeed become a *leading* voice in public discourse. The potential of the Salesian Family's communication efforts often exceeds that of other organizations, even those with international reach. Properly prepared guidelines offer the hope of acting in accordance with the Church's social teaching, which aims to put human dignity and well-being at the center. And those directly involved in building media messages and strategies, if properly trained, can make an important contribution to understanding the processes and building a future related to migrants and refugees.

Conclusion

Building the future with migrants and refugees is a process of building the present. The phenomena that have been taking place in the world for years are having a significant impact on economic and political processes and church-related spaces. New areas of understanding and relationships are emerging, as well as new levels of communication in the media. The facts indicate that the Church is very sensitive to the issue of migrants and refugees and all developments related to this phenomenon. One of Francis' concrete proposals is to unite efforts in the Church, especially by religious congregations, to create an increasingly synodal Church, open to the signs of the times and the action of the Holy Spirit.³¹

Pope Francis, in his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, encourages us to be open to new possibilities in an age of unprecedented development of communication tools. "Greater possibilities for communication thus turn into greater possibilities for encounter and solidarity for everyone. If we were able to take this route, it would be so good, so soothing, so liberating and hope-filled! To go out of ourselves and to join others is healthy for us. To be self-enclosed is to taste the bitter poison of immanence, and humanity will be worse for every selfish choice we make."³²

Building a future of media, including Salesian media, with migrants and refugees in the Church means creating a space where they can access the information they need to integrate into their new environment. The media can increasingly become a platform for self-expression, as well as for shaping a positive image of migrants and refugees that counters stereotypes,

³⁰ Orientamenti sulla Pastorale Migratoria Interculturale, Sezione Migranti e Rifugiati del Dicastero per il Servizio dello Sviluppo Umano Integrale, 24.03.2022, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2022/03/24/0209/00443.html>.

³¹ Costruire il futuro con i migranti e i rifugiati...

³² Esortazione Apostolica *Evangelii Gaudium*..., 87.

discrimination, and human rights violations. Finally, they can contribute to an increasingly widespread cultural exchange as well as to an evangelizing proposal by the Church.

In all likelihood, it can be affirmed that global migration phenomena must be read in the context of faith as so-called signs of the times, which help to find areas of understanding between the Church and local communities. Seen not only from a sociological perspective, but from the perspective of faith, they are beginning to reshape the Church community. In the processes of reading the signs of the times, the media are the appropriate tool to initiate and continue intercultural exchanges and other wide-ranging processes. The Salesian Family, with its enormous opinion-forming potential, has a remarkable task ahead of it, which in many parts of the world it is already successfully carrying out, in the form of concrete actions and the formation of public opinion following the social teaching of the Church.

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