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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

FOR A BETTER EDUCATION ON EUROPE IN THE YOUTH FIELD





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Abstract

The Erasmus+ project CitiGen'Z produced and explored new ways to foster a sense of belonging among European youth, with a focus on the GenZ. While you can discover new methods to raise awareness about the European Union on www.citigenz.eu, it is also time for us to share our conclusions on how to improve EU education as a whole!

The project indeed led both youth workers and young Europeans to reflect about education to Europe and the EU. Their conclusions are presented below in three complementary parts:

- 1. An overview of EU education in the EU with a closer look at the partner countries, highlighting gaps where formal systems fall short in educating youth to the European Union on its own, showing the need to support youth work as a complementary actor in EU education.
- 2. Youth professionals' concrete, field-tested recommendations, reflecting on successful approaches and good practices to improve EU education in the youth sector.
- **3. Young participants' own voice, presenting innovative project ideas** to improve EU education that were developed by young Europeans themselves during an "Ideathon", a participatory methodology helping them to come up with their own concrete solutions to societal challenges.





State of the art EU education in the European Union

Approaches to EU education differ across Europe, but one thing is clear: formal education alone cannot foster the deep, active sense of European citizenship that young Europeans want.

Our partner countries, presented on the next pages, illustrate perfectly how schools and curricula do address EU topics but through fragmented and often superficial efforts. Teachers often lack specialized EU training, curricula prioritize national themes, and too little class time is devoted to EU subjects. Government initiatives and special campaigns help raise awareness, but their overall impact is diluted by being bundled within broader "citizenship education" schemes. Civil society and media try to bridge gaps through workshops, debates and outreach, but face challenges like short-term funding, urban concentration, and a focus on the EU mainly during elections or crises.

And yet young Europeans' desire to learn about the EU remains stronger than ever! 74% of the EU population believe EU membership benefits their country (2025 Special Eurobarometer), but only 46% of European youth feel they really understand the EU (2024 EP Youth Survey) and 89% agree schools should improve education about EU rights and responsibilities! (2018 Flash Eurobarometer 455).

Since no quick fix can come from the formal education field alone in the short-term – school systems face their own challenges and education is only a supporting competence of the EU, limiting its influence on curricula for instance – an alternative solution must be explored: stepping up the youth sector's role in co-delivering EU education!

Check the next sections to discover our own recommendations to do so, with youth practitioners' solutions to better support the youth sector and foster synergies with formal education, and young Europeans presenting their ideal projects to improve EU education from the bottom-up!





Spotlight on Germany



In Germany, the European Union is only briefly covered within formal education. Typically, the subject is bundled into social studies or politics classes, with limited hours primarily in secondary schools, and is often entirely absent from VET. The quality of EU education relies largely on individual teachers' knowledge and enthusiasm, with no uniform or continuous structure across all grades, and many feeling unqualified to teach EU topics. As a result, students tend to complete their schooling with only a superficial understanding of the EU's institutions, their rights as EU citizens, and how EU democracy works.



Beyond schools, there are few government-led initiatives that focus specifically on EU education. Citizenship education programs, like those run by the *Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung*, mainly address German political systems, with EU issues treated as a secondary concern. Even the national voluntary service scheme ("Freiwilligendienste") lacks structured European civic content.



Civil society organizations work hard to bridge this gap. NGOs like Europe Direct Centres deliver school visits, workshops, and youth debates on European topics. However, these initiatives are often short-term, urban-centered, and underfunded, limiting their impact, especially in rural or disadvantaged areas. Media coverage of EU affairs also falls short, with EU issues tending to surface mainly during high-profile events only, such as the Ukraine war or EU elections.



This patchy and uneven landscape results in generally low EU knowledge and engagement among citizens despite a positive perception of the EU: even though 76% of the general population in Germany think EU membership benefits their country according to the 2025 Special Eurobarometer, the EP Youth Survey 2024 shows that 51% of German youth think they understand "not very much" or "nothing at all" about the EU, outnumbering those who understand "a great deal" or "a fair amount".



Spotlight on France



In France, education about the European Union is fragmented and uneven across the formal sector. While EU themes are present in history, geography, civics and language classes, the depth and approach vary by school and is often framed from a national perspective. Teachers frequently lack both initial and ongoing training on EU subjects, leaving them under-prepared to convey the EU's relevance.



Government-led programs outside compulsory schooling have grown, for instance with networks to assist schools in running European projects and exchanges such as the DRAREIC (Délégation régionale académique aux relations européennes et internationales et à la coopération). The Euroscol label especially has recognized over 1,100 schools for their EU engagement by mid-2023. National events like the "Joli Mois de l'Europe" aim to promote EU awareness and mobility opportunities, but questions remain about how deeply these initiatives foster a sense of EU citizenship.



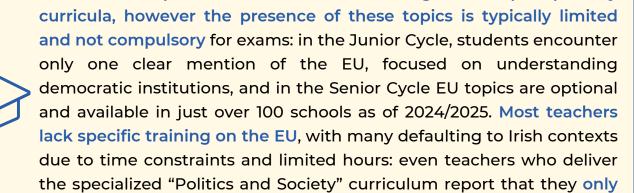
Civil society actors, from media to NGOs, complement formal and governmental efforts yet face constraints. While the TV series "Parlement" has drawn millions to light-hearted EU content and associations like Europe Direct Centres bring EU workshops to classrooms, such efforts depend on project-based funding and are often more active in cities.



Public knowledge and perception of the EU in France show both opportunities and challenges. A 2025 Special Eurobarometer found that 65% of French respondents think EU membership benefits their country, however according to the EP Youth Survey 2024 only 37% of French youth think they understand the EU "a great deal" or "a fair amount", showing a stark contrast between young French citizens' high interest in the EU but low knowledge about it.



Spotlight on Ireland



have 4 hours over the 2-years Senior Cycle to cover all EU topics.

In Ireland, Europe and the EU are woven through several post-primary



The Irish government funds the Communicating Europe Initiative, supporting EU simulations for students and similar events, but other related governmental funds lack any focus on EU themes. There is no dedicated institution for citizenship education in Ireland, and efforts remain piecemeal.



Civil society participation is led by groups like *European Movement Ireland*, which partners with the government to provide EU information at all education levels. While proactive, their approach is more about communicating the EU's achievements than encouraging debate. Europe Direct centres provide additional outreach, but otherwise both civil society and EU news coverage in Irish media remain limited. For example, Ireland's main TV channel has only one major TV correspondent based in Brussels, demonstrating the niche status of EU news outside significant crises or events.



As a result, even though 61% of Irish youth think they understand the EU "a great deal" or "a fair amount" according to the <u>EP Youth Survey 2024</u>, among the highest across all EU countries, this remains far from the 91% of the general population who think EU membership benefits their country according to the <u>2025 Special Eurobarometer</u>.



Spotlight on Portugal



In Portugal, Europe and the EU are formally addressed through the Citizenship and Development (CD) curriculum, as well as through history, geography, economics, and foreign languages to some extent. While there is a solid policy framework to make citizenship a pillar of education, implementation is however inconsistent, varying greatly depending on individual school priorities and teacher engagement. Teachers themselves often lack specialized training or confidence on EU topics, and few actively use interactive or digital EU teaching resources in the classroom.



Portugal has no dedicated public institution for citizenship education, and state initiatives rarely focus specifically on the EU. Rather, national efforts tend to emphasize general civic values, with EU-related content appearing mostly in mobility programs like Erasmus+ or European Solidarity Corps. However, participation rates in these programs remain relatively low for students under 18, and there is no national "Citizenship Day" or similar EU-focused civic activity outside school settings.



NGOs such as European Movement Portugal and the Associação Europeia de Professores are active in EU education, but they are mainly concentrated in Lisbon and Porto and depend on short-term grants. Rural outreach and sustainable national programs are limited. Portuguese media also cover EU topics mainly during major events like elections or crises, rather than consistently addressing citizenship or rights.



As a result, while an impressive 91% of the general population in Portugal think EU membership benefits their country according to the 2025 Special Eurobarometer, 33% of Portuguese youth still think they don't understand the EU (answering "not very much" or "not at all") according to the EP Youth Survey 2024.



Spotlight on Slovenia



Citizenship and civic education are embedded in Slovenia's curriculum from primary through upper secondary education. The subject "Active Citizenship" is now compulsory, however it is delivered mainly through cross-curricular formats, study visits and group work rather than as a standalone subject, and it lacks any explicit focus on EU citizenship, institutions or rights. Teachers often lack specific training or qualifications in this area, as most are specialists in other subjects like history or geography, and receive limited support for interactive or EU-focused teaching through their own classes.



Government and EU institutions in Slovenia focus public engagement efforts chiefly around communicating EU-funded projects and their positive impact. While this raises awareness about the benefits of the EU, no national institution is dedicated exclusively to citizenship education, and no regular national schemes or events specifically target the understanding of EU rights and institutions outside formal education.



Slovenia's NGOs are active in non-formal citizenship education, frequently running project-based initiatives on topics like human rights, democratic participation and volunteering, with varying reach across the country. However most NGOs rely on unstable, project-based funding and tend to concentrate in urban areas. Media coverage of EU and European issues remains event-driven and limited outside major crises or elections, giving citizens little everyday exposure to such topics.



As a result, even though the public opinion towards the EU in Slovenia is nowadays quite high, with 79% of the whole population thinking EU membership benefits the country according to the 2025 Special Eurobarometer, only 51% of Slovenian youth think they understand the EU "a great deal" or "a fair amount" according to the EP Youth Survey 2024.



Youth Workers' Recommendations for a better EU education

Building on the pilot initiatives carried out within the Erasmus+ CitiGen'Z project, it is evident that the youth sector and non-formal education offer powerful entry points to reconnect young Europeans with the European Union. These sectors provide spaces for dialogue, experimentation and democratic engagement that can efficiently support and complement broader efforts to raise awareness about the EU towards its younger citizens in synergy with the formal education sector.

Yet the youth sector especially and the non-formal education field in general remain under-structured and under-equipped when it comes to EU-related education – whether in terms of content, methodologies, or the professional development of youth workers.

In this context, and aligned with the principles of the 2023 Reykjavik Declaration ("United around our values") and the ongoing work of the EU–Council of Europe Youth Partnership, the following recommendations – developed and field-tested by the youth workers from the partners who experimented EU education methods through the CitiGen'Z project – aim to guide policy makers, at the European Union but also national levels, as well as youth and education professionals towards more impactful, accessible and engaging EU Citizenship education strategies.

To the EU Institutions and EACEA



Empower youth workers as EU educators

- Support the wide dissemination of step-by-step guidance and ready-to-use, visually appealing activities through approved "EU Education Toolkits" designed specifically for non-formal learning environments: our own CitiGen'Z "Toolbox for Youth Workers" shows the way! It is designed to be straightforward, concrete and action-centered rather than overly theoretical like the very little known "T-KIT 7 on European Citizenship in youth work" by the EU-CoE Youth Partnership.
- Support capacity-building initiatives, such as "trainings of trainers," to expand youth workers' own understanding of EU citizenship and enable local adaptation of resources. An equivalent to Erasmus+ "Participation of youth" actions can be created to allow local, regional and national trainings focused on EU Citizenship Education methods.
- Encourage reflection among youth workers on their own roles as European citizens and identification of relevant EU themes for their audiences.
- Develop recurring training sessions for youth workers on EU values and democracy through National Agencies not just at the EU and national levels, but also at the regional level to reach more youth practitioners.
- Establish a recurring Erasmus+ funding stream dedicated to the European Citizenship Education of youth workers, allowing for regular, high-quality trainings and local citizenship programs. This could fall under Key Action 3 as an equivalent of Jean Monnet actions in the field of youth work!



Ensure the sustainability and visibility of the most successful EU citizenship education initiatives

 Increase recurring, longer-term funding through Erasmus+ for highquality educational materials and tools, to limit redundant projects while supporting the ongoing promotion and continuous improvement of resources which have already proven the most impactful. Actively promote best-practice project outcomes such as videos, handbooks, and activity toolkits through official channels: link selected resources to the Erasmus+ Guide to reach the widest potential audience of youth NGOs involved in EU cooperation, and explicitly promote projects labeled as "Good practice" on the Erasmus+ Results Database through the National Agencies' newsletters to significantly multiply their impact.



Boost the visibility & appeal of the EU among young Europeans

- Communicate on platforms and in formats popular with GenZ (Instagram, TikTok, short videos, memes), using engaging content on current, relatable topics.
- Address EU issues transparently, including both positive and challenging aspects, to build authenticity and trust.
- Maintain consistent engagement with youth through regular posts, interactive challenges, and trend-driven features.
- Promote Europe Day meaningfully and uniformly across Member States, for example through EU flags on public transport or school competitions.



Level up EU education with hybrid and gamified platforms

- Create EU-wide digital HUBs blending informative resources with interactive tools such as quizzes, gamified learning paths, and video challenges.
- Champion a fun and approachable image of the EU by utilizing youth-centered, accessible learning methods.
- Launch more EU-themed contests on a regular basis, in addition to DiscoverEU, to reach a broader range of young people and offer more casual ways to engage with the EU in a playful way (not everybody can actually enjoy a free Interrail pass on their 18th year unfortunately!).
- Leverage networks like Eurodesk, Europe Direct centres, Erasmus+ National Agencies and the European Youth Forum for maximum outreach and participation.

To Youth and Non-formal Organizations



Scale up peer-to-peer and youth-led approaches in EU citizenship education

- Embed structured peer-to-peer components in EU civic education projects, allowing young participants to act as co-creators and facilitators of content and activities.
- Foster learning-by-doing through youth-designed materials (e.g. videos, infographics, campaigns), increasing the relevance of outcomes by involving their target group.
- Create supportive environments (e.g. university cafes, youth-friendly venues) that foster trust, mutual support, and open expression among young people.



Prioritize flexible, youth-centered formats

- Design adaptable, interest-based activities such as open discussions, creative workshops and hands-on projects building bridges between national and local contexts and the EU level.
- Replace rigid curricula with participatory formats that connect democratic topics to young people's daily life and interests.



Develop structured EU citizenship journeys linked to mobility

- Build progressive learning pathways that culminate in real mobility opportunities (e.g. youth exchanges, volunteering), making EU concepts more tangible and therefore relatable.
- Focus programs on collective learning like group work, real-life testimonies and dialogues.
- Integrate critical reflection and proposal-making as part of the learning experience, encouraging young people to actively shape their civic journey.



Implement innovative EU civic engagement formats

- Organize EU-themed Ideathons where young people reflect about and cocreate actionable solutions to tackle authentic societal challenges.
- Use experiential learning tools, including simulations, role-plays and moving debates for instance to foster deeper, practical understanding.



Strengthen cross-sectoral local partnerships

- Encourage cooperation between schools, municipalities and youth NGOs to build an ecosystem of support for civic education, creating synergies between formal and non-formal education..
- Use these networks to reach young people who may not otherwise seek out EU-related learning opportunities, increasing impact and sustainability.



Integrate EU education into European mobility preparation

- Provide pre-departure learning paths for participants in formal and nonformal mobility programs (Erasmus+ and ESC), covering not just intercultural skills but also EU institutions, rights and values.
- Ensure that young people travel with a solid foundation in European citizenship, enhancing both their personal experiences and EU awareness.

To the Member States and Erasmus+ National Agencies



Integrate EU citizenship education into teachers' training and school curricula

- Fully embed EU Citizenship Education into the training of future teachers at both primary and post-primary levels, requiring curricular reform in teacher education programs.
- Ensure that EU topics are systematically integrated into the civic and citizenship curricula for students at all school levels, bridging the current gap between community, national and global themes by making the European level explicit and coherent.
- Task national curriculum authorities with reassessing and elevating the significance of EU Citizenship Education across all relevant subject areas.
- Foster collaboration and synergy between formal education and the youth sector to leverage their complementary strengths, ensuring neither sector is left to address EU education needs on its own.



Integrate EU citizenship education into youth workers' training

- Introduce dedicated EU-citizenship modules into the initial and continuous professional training of youth workers at the national level.
- Create clear pathways for youth workers to access updated, practical training on EU topics, enabling them to contribute effectively to non-formal EU citizenship education alongside schools.



Young Europeans' Project ideas to connect the EU to youth

In CitiGenZ, young people contributed to shape the future of EU education throughout the project not just by testing, enjoying and improving the content and activities developed by partners, but also by bringing in their own creativity and proposing new ways to make the EU relevant and accessible for their peers.



The CitiGenZ Ideathon provided them the perfect framework and support to unleash their creativity. Hosted by PiNA in Koper, Slovenia, from June 22 to 27, 2025, the event gathered more than 20 young people from France, Slovenia, Ireland, Germany, and Portugal.

An Ideathon, what's that?

Like a youth worker's version of a "hackaton", it is a participatory method enabling youth organizations to provide young people with resources, space, opportunity and support for active involvement in public affairs.

How? A group of young people is split in teams and given a challenge: to develop their ideas tackling specific societal issues. Through adapted and progressive sessions, they are guided to come up with their own solutions.

The benefits? It increases youth engagement and their impact on their local communities, encourages their active involvement as citizens, develops their collaborative skills, and even improves the relevance of projects by giving a say to their target group!



SCAN ME



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Over four intense, collaborative days, participants worked in teams to tackle one central challenge: How can we bring the European Union closer to young people and make EU education more engaging and meaningful?



The result? Six concrete project ideas with real grassroots potential:

- A school competition during Europe Month to spark youth engagement,
- A website giving teachers creative tools to teach about the EU,
- An awareness campaign to amplify youth voices within EU institutions,
- An artistic project to create connections and a sense of belonging to the EU through creative and collaborative expression,
- An initiative supporting freedom of expression by encouraging and facilitating young people's contribution to citizens' consultations,
- International internships expanding opportunities for young graduates.

CitiGenZ partners will now support these participants in implementing their project ideas ... but because they can also inspire others with similar projects, below are more details on CitiGenZ young participants' own plans!



EU Month

A school competition to spark interest

Why is it needed?



EU Month addresses the widespread lack of understanding among young Europeans about how the EU operates and its impact, as well as their wish to learn more about it during their school curriculum. The idea is therefore to support secondary school students (ages 12–15) in learning about EU institutions, history, and culture in an engaging, creative way—fostering both interest and informed participation in EU democracy.

What's the plan?





Schools get involved by encouraging and accompanying, with the support of local youth NGOs, their students to create a media/artistic work addressing the chosen EU theme. Later on both the participants and the broader public get to vote for their favorite creation, and the winning class gets wins a trip to Brussels!

What results?



EU Month hopes to fuel participants' competitive spirit to boost EU knowledge and motivation among young teens by combining fun, creativity, teamwork and learning in an engaging competition. It expects to nurture creative skills, inspire interest in the EU and create a ripple effect where young people are empowered to engage with Europe's democratic life on their own.



EdUcate

A platform to guide teachers and students

Why is it needed?



EdUcate tackles the low level of EU knowledge and engagement among young people aged 15–18, and one of its main causes: the lack of structured, unbiased education on the EU, government and law leaving both students and teachers struggling with political understanding, dampening youth participation and alienating future EU voters. EdUcate aims to reverse this trend by empowering both students and teachers to learn about EU foundations in an accessible, non-biased manner, ultimately increasing youth voter turnout and a sense of European identity.

What's the plan?



Over 2 to 3 years, EdUcate would engage hundreds of students and dozens of teachers from several secondary schools in a broad set of activities including online resources, info booklets, interactive games, lesson plans, and a mobile-friendly website.

The idea is to centralize, make more accessible and user-friendly, and complement existing EU teaching resources with workshops, focus groups, and model-EU simulations to help both students and teachers to handle available material and implement concrete learning activities about the EU.

What results?



EdUcate expects improved EU knowledge and attitudes among secondary school students, as well as to equip teachers with ready-to-use tools and empower students to be active, informed European citizens, helping bridge the gap between youth and EU institutions and boosting youth participation in civic life.



EUth Power

Raising awareness to amplify youth voices

Why is it needed?



EUth Power addresses the chronic under-representation of young people in the European Parliament, where only 6% of MEPs are below 35, despite youth making up a fifth of the EU population. Meanwhile, many young Europeans feel disconnected from EU institutions and lack understanding of their impact, and a majority say they don't understand much about the EU. The project therefore aims to educate, engage and empower youth to boost their political representation and connection to European democracy.

What's the plan?

Over two years, EUth Power would lead a mix of learning, debating and communication activities as part of a broad advocacy campaign promoting better youth representation in the EP.



It would engage university students focusing on political and social sciences, through EU debates, simulations, policy discussions, and practical workshops. Key activities include national events (debates, trainings), an international summit in Brussels to discuss youth quotas and visit the European Parliament, and a cross-border communication campaign to encourage young candidates in future EU elections.

What results?



The project expects to strengthen youth knowledge of EU policies and confidence in participation, to open a debate about and collecting youth opinions on quotas, produce a policy paper on the benefits of increasing youth representation, and actively disseminate recommendations.



Symploke

Inclusion and EU connections through art

Why is it needed?



Συμπλοκή (Symploke, or "entangled") focuses on the growing loneliness and lack of belonging experienced by young Europeans, especially after the Covid pandemic: nearly half of EU youth reported emotional or psychosocial issues in 2023, while only 54% of youth aged 15-24 identified as European (2020 Eurobarometer). Many youth feel excluded both from their local and the broader European community at the same time, impacting mental health and engagement.

What's the plan?



Over 3 years, Symploke builds a community-run network creating creative spaces for youth (15–30) in several European countries. Local NGOs and municipalities provide venues while an art psychologist supports young participants in creating their own collaborative art.

Through workshops, art sessions and mental health capacity building, young people shape the content themselves and manage their creative spaces. Their collaborative art moves from country to country through youth exchanges, is enriched through each encounter, and becomes an itinerary art exhibition connecting youth internationally.

What results?



Symploke aims to reduce youth isolation and foster a feeling of belonging to the EU, while allowing young participants to develop creative, social and organizational skills, and fueling their voices and creativity to create art exhibits helping to include the broader audience in a dialogue about EU identity.



Speak Up

Better youth turnout in EU consultations

Why is it needed?



Youth participation in democratic life across Europe is alarmingly low: only 23% of young Europeans feel heard at the EU level according to the EP Youth Survey 2024, with widespread confusion about their rights and available platforms for civic engagement. Fragmented online resources, complicated institutional language and mistrust further discourage political engagement among youth. There is a clear need for a unified, accessible and youth-friendly digital space that centralizes reliable information and fosters open expression on freedom of speech and democratic rights.

What's the plan?



Over 2 years, SpeakUp plans to develop an interactive, multilingual and centralized website tailored to young people aged 16-30, especially those disengaged from existing democratic processes.

Core activities would include: designing a single, central platform to facilitate accessing and contributing to EU public consultations for youth, and training university students and NGO staff as facilitators to support other young people in using the platform. This would first be tested through a pilot phase in four countries, before being expanded to the whole EU.

What results?



The project aims to increase youth awareness and understanding of freedom of expression and the tools making it real in the EU, and more concretely to allow the contribution of more young Europeans in online consultations organized by EU institutions.



Degree2Career

International internships for social science students

Why is it needed?



Degree2Career addresses the persistent gap between social science education and relevant employment in Europe. Despite high youth employment in some sectors, many graduates work outside their field due to a mismatch between academic pathways and job market needs. The project targets this disconnect by fostering closer ties between universities, NGOs and the workplace, enhancing job prospects for social science graduates.

What's the plan?

Over two years, Degree2Career plans to foster cross-sectoral collaboration between universities and NGOs to develop a tailor-made international internship scheme for social sciences students.



Each country selects students aged 18-25 for social science-related international internships in the partner NGOs and their networks. After a structured recruitment and matching process, including mentor assignment, orientation, and guidelines for fair internships, participants engage in practical internships supported by trained mentors, and their integration to the job market after their internship is compared to non-participants to analyze the impact.

What results?



Degree2Career expects increased field-relevant employment among social science graduates, improved confidence and practical skills, and stronger links between the involved social sciences universities and NGOs. After demonstrating the impact of the implemented framework, the plan would be to expand it to more countries, until covering the whole EU.



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aimed at fostering a sense of belonging to the EU among the young people of Generation Z. To achieve that goal, the partners created EU awareness-raising content aimed at young "Zoomers" through online campaigns, an online platform compiling "Learning boxes" on 50 EU topics, a handbook dedicated at youth workers wishing to raise awareness about the EU with their participants, and trained both youth workers and young people directly. More information on www.citigenz.eu

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