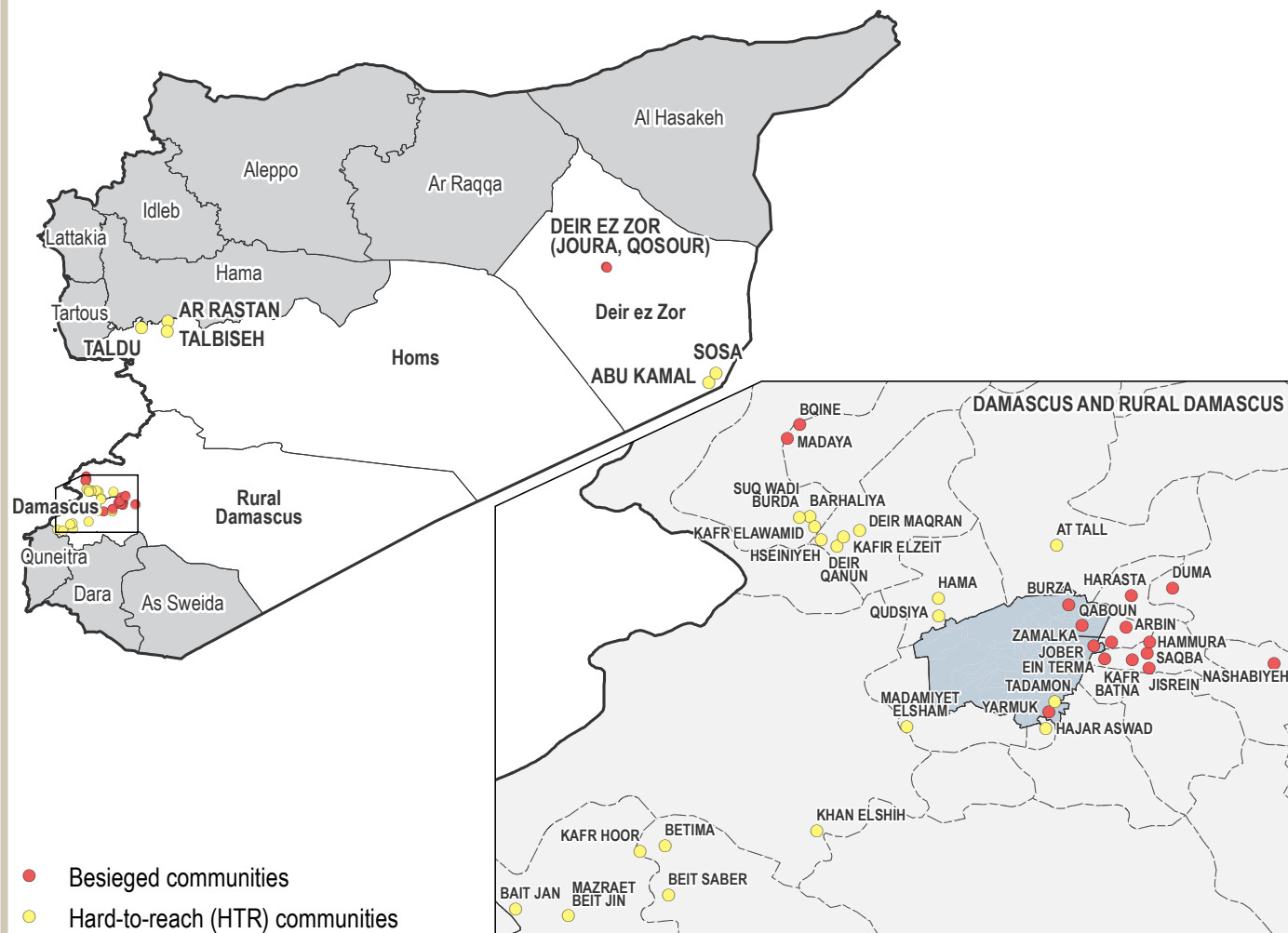




COMMUNITY PROFILES UPDATE: Besieged and Hard-to-Reach Community Profiles

SYRIA

SITUATION OVERVIEW

JUNE 2017

Executive Summary

Between 29 June and 10 July 2017, REACH, in collaboration with Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF), assessed the humanitarian situation in 41 communities in Syria currently facing movement and access restrictions, 17 of which are classified as besieged by the UN, and 24 as hard-to-reach.¹ The data gathered refers to the humanitarian situation in June. All profiled communities were located in Damascus, Deir ez Zor, Homs and Rural Damascus governorates, and information was collected through a total of 162 community representatives (CRs). In June, the neighbourhood of Al Waer in Homs city, assessed by REACH since June 2016, was no longer covered due to access limitations following substantial population displacements in recent months. There were no further changes in coverage compared to May.

In June:

- **Ceasefires reached in Burza and Qaboun in May had significantly different impacts on the humanitarian situations in each of these neighbourhoods this month.** In Burza, access restrictions were lifted, allowing unrestricted civilian movement, as well as commercial access (for the first time since assessments of the community began in August 2016). This resulted in improved food security, as availability of items increased while prices decreased. Further, repairs to the electrical and water networks restored access to basic services in June. Conversely, in Qaboun, access restrictions remained in place, negatively affecting remaining residents. As was the case in May, there were no medical facilities or personnel in the community. The provision of food items through informal channels to Qaboun in June represented a relative improvement from May; however, the overall situation in the neighbourhood remained critical.
- **Intensified hostilities negatively affected the humanitarian situation in Jobar,** as increased risks related to travel and movement led to a decrease in the amounts of food and non-food items entering the neighbourhood in June.
- **Escalation in conflict in Deir ez Zor governorate continued to affect Abu Kamal and Sosa; while increased civilian movement was reported, further casualties were also observed in June.** Additionally, an increase in the relative price of the United States Dollar (USD) in relation to the Syrian Pound (SYP) negatively affected prices of all items available in the communities, as goods were brought by traders from Iraq (and paid for in USD).
- **Fluctuations in access to basic services were reported across assessed communities in June.** Due to higher seasonal demand, drinking water was reported as insufficient in Tadamon and Yarmuk. Conversely, following repairs to the water and electrical networks, access was fully or partially reinstated in Burza and Qaboun. A decrease in the rationing of electricity also improved access in Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor.
- **A seasonal increase in the supply of certain core food items resulted in lower food prices in a majority of assessed locations in June;** in particular, sharp declines in the prices of tomato and cucumber were reported.

Of the 41 communities assessed:

- Humanitarian aid reached Ar Rastan and Talbiseh, Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour), Hama and Qudsiya, and Harasta (Eastern Ghouta), while no aid was delivered to the remaining 34 assessed locations.
- Three communities reported no civilian movement (Joura and Qosour, Qaboun), while in 12 communities only 1-10% of populations could leave or enter the relevant areas. Across all assessed locations, eight communities reported unrestricted civilian movement (subject to identification requirements).

Based on data regarding the humanitarian situation in June, populations indicated critical levels of vulnerability in the communities of Joura, Qosour, and Qaboun. Conversely, the communities of Ar Rastan, Burza, Beit Saber, Betima, Kafr Hoor and Talbiseh experienced relative improvements, although ongoing monitoring will be required to assess further developments in these locations.

Assessed communities in June 2017, by classification¹

Besieged	Madaya, Bqine, ² Damascus (Burza, Jobar, Qaboun, Yarmuk), Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour) Eastern Ghouta (Arbin, Duma, Ein Terma, Hammura, Harasta, Jisrein, Kafr Batna, Nashabiyeh, Saqba, Zamalka).
Hard-to-reach	At Tall, Damascus (Tadamon), Bait Jan region (Bait Jan, Beit Saber, Betima, Kafr Hoor, Mazraet Beit Jin), Abu Kamal, Sosa, Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu, Hajar Aswad, Hama, Qudsiya, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham, Wadi Burda (Barhaliya, Deir Maqran, Deir Qanun, Hseiniyeh, Kafr Elawamid, Kafir Elzeit, Suq Wadi Burda).

Overview

In order to inform a more evidence-based response to address the needs of vulnerable communities across Syria, REACH, in support of the Syria INGO Regional Forum (SIRF) and other humanitarian actors, regularly monitors the humanitarian situation within communities facing restrictions on civilian movement and humanitarian access. The Syria Community Profiles, which commenced in June 2016, intend to provide aid actors with an understanding of the humanitarian situation within these communities, by assessing availability and access to food, healthcare, water, education and humanitarian assistance, price data, as well as the specific conditions associated with limited freedom of movement. The list of assessed communities is not intended to be exhaustive of all the areas in Syria facing limited freedom of movement and access. With greater partner input and collaboration, the list of profiled locations will be expanded. This overview presents a summary of the overarching observations identified across communities assessed.

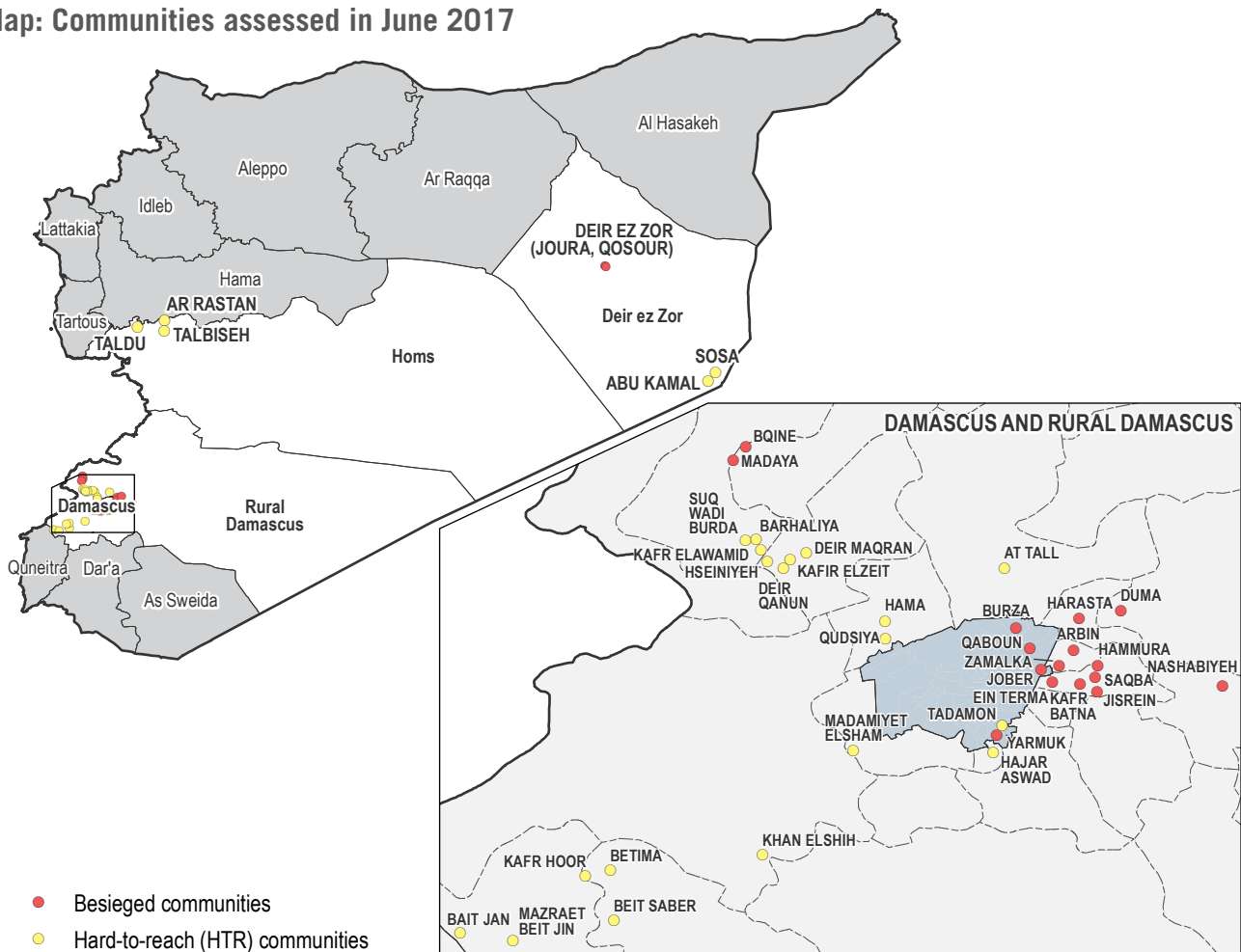
Methodology and Limitations

Data presented in the Community Profiles is collected through contact with community representatives (CRs) residing within assessed locations, who are responsible for gathering sector-specific data from their areas of expertise (e.g. health, education and so forth). Data for this round was gathered during the end of June and early July 2017, and refers to the situation in June 2017. Each community has a minimum of three CRs, with up to six depending on the location. The network continues to expand with ongoing collaboration with SIRF and other partners.

During analysis, data is triangulated through secondary information, including humanitarian reports, news and social media monitoring, and partner verification. Comparisons are made to findings from previous assessments (where possible) and follow up is conducted with CRs to build a thorough understanding of situational developments within locations. In the case of some profiles, multiple communities are presented together; decisions to do so are based on their geographical proximity to one another or similarities in the access restrictions faced by populations.

Due to the challenges of data collection inside Syria, representative sampling, entailing larger-scale data collection, remains a challenge. Consequently, information is to be considered indicative rather than generalisable across the population of each assessed community. Further, an improvement or deterioration of the situation between months may not necessarily indicate a trend, but rather a distinct development specific to the month assessed. The exclusion or inclusion of assessed communities is influenced by the availability of CRs within locations and, therefore, should not be considered representative of all areas within Syria facing acute vulnerability. Finally, the level of information presented in each profile varies due to difficulties in obtaining data from certain locations.

Map: Communities assessed in June 2017



Key Findings

Movement of Civilians

In June, following shifting conflict dynamics and the coming into force of additional ceasefire agreements, five communities reported increased civilian movement. However, in a majority of assessed locations (34), restrictions remained unchanged from previous months.

- Across assessed locations, Abu Kamal and Sosa, Burza, Hama and Qudsiya, and Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor were the only communities where residents could move unrestricted upon presenting identification.
- Only 1-10% of the populations in Bait Jan, Mazraet Beit Jin and Duma (Eastern Ghouta) were able to use formal access points in June, as had also been reported in May.
- **In June, increases in civilian movement were predominantly reported in relation to conflict-related displacements, including in Abu Kamal and Sosa, as well as Tadamon and Yarmuk. In Burza, restrictions on movement were lifted following the implementation of the truce agreement.**

Negative developments since May

Jobet (intensification of hostilities, increased security-related risks)

No civilian movement allowed

Joura, Qosour (June 2016)

Qaboun* (since assessments began - April 2017)

Movement of Commercial Vehicles

There was a slight increase in the number of communities reporting commercial access in June, as compared to May.

- Commercial vehicles remained unable to enter 10 of the assessed communities during June.
- A limited number of commercial vehicles were allowed to enter Abu Kamal and Sosa, At Tall, Bait Jan and Mazraet Beit Jin, Bqine and Madaya, Khan Elshih, Hama and Qudsiya, Madamiyet Elsham, the Eastern Ghouta communities and the Wadi Burda area. The most common restrictions on commercial traffic included searches, fees, documentation requirements and partial confiscation of loads.
- **Burza and Bait Jan communities which had signed a truce agreement (Beitema, Beit Saber, Kafr Hoor) were the only communities to report unrestricted commercial access in June.**

No commercial vehicles allowed

Ar Rastan, Talbiseh, Taldu (since June 2016)

Jobet, Tadamon (since June 2016)

Hajar Aswad (since June 2016)

Joura, Qosour (since June 2016)

Qaboun (since assessments began - April 2017)

Yarmuk (since June 2016)

Movement of Humanitarian Vehicles

There was a decrease in the number of reported aid deliveries in June, with 7 of the assessed communities receiving aid, compared to 23 in May.

- For the first time since October 2016, humanitarian vehicles entered Harasta (Eastern Ghouta), delivering food, NFIs and medical items. However, aid was reportedly insufficient to meet population needs, and was not distributed across other assessed locations in Eastern Ghouta.
- Food, NFIs and medicine were also delivered to Ar Rastan and Talbiseh, for the first time since March 2017. No restrictions on the entry of aid were reported in these communities in June.
- Air drops to Joura and Qosour in June reportedly delivered some food and non-food items, but only reached limited segments of the civilian population. In Hama and Qudsiya, aid deliveries were only distributed among economically disadvantaged families.
- **No humanitarian deliveries were reported in 34 of the assessed communities in June.**

No aid entering

Abu Kamal, Sosa (since assessments began - April 2017)

At Tall (since January 2017)

Bait Jan area (since assessments began - November 2016)

Hajar Aswad (since assessments began - June 2016)

Jobet, Tadamon (since assessments began - June 2016)

Khan Elshih (since February 2017)

Madamiyet Elsham (since January 2017)

Madaya (since March 2017)

Qaboun (since May 2017)

Taldu (since April 2017)

Yarmuk (since April 2017)

Health Situation

In June, the health situation remained critical in communities facing the tightest access restrictions, while it improved in some locations where restrictions were eased.

- The health situation deteriorated in Jobar in June, following an intensification of conflict affecting the neighbourhood. Depleting medical stocks also led to a further deterioration in Joura and Qosour.
- While no significant changes were observed between May and June, the health situation remained critical in Nashabiyeh and Qaboun due to the tight access restrictions faced by those locations, with little or no access to medical facilities and services.
- **The overall health situation improved in Yarmuk, following the opening of a new primary healthcare facility and an increased number of nurses reported in the community. The population in Burza reported an improvement in access to medical services, as following the truce agreement, they could seek medical assistance in nearby communities.**

Negative developments since May

Jobar (increased caseload due to intensification in conflict)

Critical health situation

Joura, Qosour (depleting stocks of medical items)

Nashabiyeh (depleting stocks of medical items, limited access to facilities and services)

Qaboun (no remaining medical stocks, facilities or personnel)

Food Security

Price drops related to increased seasonal availability of some food items were reported across various communities in June. Conversely, ongoing hostilities and tight access restrictions continued to negatively affect availability and prices in other locations.

- Following the lifting of access restrictions in Burza, food security improved significantly in June, as items could enter via commercial vehicles and civilians traveling to nearby communities, resulting in price decreases.
- In contrast to May, some food items entered Qaboun informally in June, improving the food situation which had previously been reported as critical.
- **Due to extreme access restrictions and depleting food stocks, food security remained critical in Joura and Qosour. Further, an increase in the relative price of the USD in relation to the SYP resulted in significant price increases in Abu Kamal and Sosa, where traders procure most goods from Iraq in USD.**

Negative developments since May

Abu Kamal, Sosa (price increases across all food items)

Jobar (decreased availability of core food items, rising prices)

Joura, Qosour* (decreased availability of core food items)

*These communities experienced critical food insecurity this month.

Access to Services

While some communities reported better access to water and electricity in June, following structural repairs, increased seasonal demand resulted in water reported as insufficient in others. As was the case in May, it was reported that children were on summer break in most assessed communities.

- For the first time since assessments of Yarmuk began in June 2016, populations reported insufficient access to water, due to higher seasonal demands.
- Across assessed locations, the number of communities, reporting insufficient access to drinking water increased from 10 in May to 11 in June, partly due to increased seasonal demand.
- **Following repairs to the water and electricity networks, access to both was reinstated in Burza and Qaboun. Access to electricity also increased in Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor as a result of decreases in electricity rationing. In Abu Kamal, drinking water was no longer reported as insufficient, after the completion of repairs to the water network.**

Negative developments since May

Tadamon, Yarmuk (increased seasonal demand, drinking water reported as insufficient)

Critically poor access to services

Joura, Qosour (insufficient water, less than one hour access to electricity, schools closed)

Communities that signed truce agreements

Since September 2016, 19 of the communities assessed by REACH have signed truce agreements. These include Al Waer³, At Tall, Burza, Hama, Qudsiya, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham, Madaya, Qaboun, Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor, and the seven Wadi Burda communities. In June, the humanitarian situation continued to improve in some of these communities, while it remained largely unchanged in others.

Improved humanitarian situation: Burza, Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor

- Following the lifting of access restrictions in **Burza**, which had signed a truce agreement on 22 May, the situation improved significantly in the community in June. Residents could enter and leave freely, and commercial access was allowed for the first time since assessments began (August 2016). This had a positive impact on food security and availability of all assessed goods. While only emergency care services remained available inside the community, residents could seek medical assistance in nearby communities without restrictions. Access to water and electricity was fully restored following reparations to both networks. Despite these positive developments, security-related concerns were reported in June, including detention, conscription and reprisals.
- While the overall humanitarian situation in **Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor** remained largely unchanged, access to electricity increased in June, as rationing by local authorities decreased.

Unchanged humanitarian situation: At Tall, Hama and Qudsiya, Khan Elshih, Madamiyet Elsham, Madaya, Wadi Burda

- There were no substantive changes reported in May in **Hama and Qudsiya**, and **Madamiyet Elsham**, which signed truce agreements in October and September 2016, respectively. While a majority of residents in all three locations could move freely, documentation requirements remained in place and certain restrictions on the entry of commercial vehicles persisted. As has been the case in previous months, humanitarian aid targeting the most vulnerable families entered Hama and Qudsiya in June.
- The situation also remained largely unchanged in **At Tall** and **Khan Elshih**, where agreements were implemented in November and December 2016, respectively. While no humanitarian aid was delivered to either community in June, food, fuels, NFIs and medicine continued to enter via commercial vehicles and civilians traveling to nearby locations. Risks of detention and conscription were reported in both communities, as has been the case since the truces came into force.
- In **Madaya** and the **Wadi Burda** area, which had experienced notable improvements in the humanitarian situations following truce agreements (in April and January, respectively), the situations stabilised in June, with no significant changes reported. Goods continued to enter both locations via commercial vehicles and civilians traveling to nearby communities, and no coping strategies related to a lack of food were reported. Access to basic services, including medical care, which had improved following the truce agreements, remained stable in June. While a majority of the populations were allowed to use formal access points for travel, men in both Madaya and Wadi Burda reportedly remained hesitant to do so, due to perceived risks of detention and conscription.

Critical humanitarian situation: Qaboun

- The humanitarian situation remained critical in **Qaboun**, despite some relative improvements from May. While some food and non-food items reached the community informally in June, and access to water and electricity was partially restored, no civilian or commercial movement was permitted, and no humanitarian aid delivered. Due to extreme access restrictions, no medical facilities remained open in the neighbourhood, medical stocks were depleted and all medical personnel had left.

Conclusion

- Restrictions on civilian and vehicle movement continued to negatively affect populations across assessed communities in June. The implementation of truce agreements and the subsequent lifting of access restrictions resulted in the overall improvement to the humanitarian situations in Burza, Beit Saber, Betima and Kafr Hoor, while ongoing hostilities and/or extreme access restrictions continued to negatively affect Abu Kamal, Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour), Qaboun and Sosa.
- Based on data regarding the humanitarian situation in June, populations in Deir ez Zor city (Joura, Qosour) and Qaboun indicated critical levels of vulnerability. Conversely, the communities of Ar Rastan, Burza and Talbiseh experienced relative improvements, although ongoing monitoring will be required to assess further developments in these locations.

About REACH

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. All REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, you can write to our global office (geneva@reach-initiative.org) or to our Syria Assessment Officer (laurel.mcdonald@reach-initiative.org).

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