



# NEP 2020: EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PLAN FOR RAJASTHAN

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper outlines the newly proposed changes in Early childhood Care and Education in the New Education Policy 2020. Paper discussed the context of the state of states in India where there are multiple diversities and hurdles that the state governments would have to overcome for success of ECCE policy. With the low literacy rate in state and tribal and high language diversity the paper lays down the strategic options for the case of Rajasthan, the largest state in India.*

NEP, ECCE, Pre-school

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The New Education Policy launched by Government of India on 29<sup>th</sup> July 2020 outlines the vision of education in young India. The policy is a comprehensive framework of education starting from elementary to higher education, including vocational and other technical and skill based education.

The National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) has brought Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) into sharp focus. It has reiterated the importance of the early years and proposed a reorganization of the school system to include children aged three to eight years through a universal ECCE continuum. The long-term impact of quality ECCE on school completion and social mobility is well established. Researches shows that the major proportion of a young child's brain development occurs by the time they are 3 years old (Gilmore et.al., 2018) . This rapid development of the brain is highly sensitive to environmental factors, such as a child's experience in the home and community, and an age appropriate, quality pre-school experience creates the conditions for the development of essential skills across the domains of development. The NEP emphasizes on this stage of children's development is timely and important.

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The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act 2010<sup>2</sup> guarantees children their right to quality elementary education. ECE is not recognized as a compulsory provision by RTE, but RTE urges states to provide free pre-school education for children above three years. The Government of India approved the National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy in 2013<sup>3</sup>. The Policy framework also includes the National Curriculum Framework and Quality Standards for ECCE (UNICEF Evaluation report, 2016). The Policy caters to all children under 6 years of age and commits to universal access to quality early childhood education

## 2. ECCE IN NEP 2020

The NEP 2020 has proposed a 5 + 3 + 3 + 4 structure, in which the first five years (age 3 to 8) will include 3 years of pre-primary and 2 years of primary school, forming the foundational stage of education. From ages 3 to 6, children may attend one of four possible settings –

1. Anganwadis (i.e., standalone government preschool education)
2. Standalone private pre-school,
3. bal-vatika (pre-school section attached to government primary/ combined primary – secondary school)
4. preschool section in a private primary/ secondary school

The bal-vatika is proposed as a one (or two) year ‘preparatory class,’ for 4 - 5-year olds, attached to govt. primary schools. It is envisaged that by 2030, universally, children will have access to quality early childhood development, care and education, and will be school ready. Also, special attention will be given to those children who are socio-economically disadvantaged.

## 3. QUALITY OF ECCE

As per NEP 2020, early year’s pedagogy will be ‘flexible, multi-faceted, multi-level, play-based, activity-based, and inquiry-based learning’. It will comprise of ‘alphabets, languages, numbers, counting, colours, shapes, indoor and outdoor play, puzzles and logical thinking, problem-solving, drawing, painting and other visual art, craft, drama and puppetry, music and movement’. The aim in this regard is to strengthen Anganwadi centres by building better infrastructure, play equipment and learning environment. There will also be introduction of a ECCE qualification pathway for Anganwadi workers and integration of schools with Anganwadis. For Bal-Vatika, ECCE qualified teacher will be appointed and principles of play-based learning will be followed.

### 3.1 ECCE in Rajasthan

In Rajasthan, 971413- 3-6-year olds are enrolled in pre-school education through the ICDS service provision. A total of 61861 ICDS centres are operational across 34 districts of Rajasthan covering around 44981 villages. Around 32 per cent Anganwadi centres have toilet facilities, while 74 per cent Anganwadi centres have

<sup>2</sup><http://rajpsp.nic.in/PSP2/Home/Home.aspx>

<sup>3</sup>[https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/national\\_ecce\\_curr\\_framework\\_final\\_03022014%20%282%29.pdf](https://wcd.nic.in/sites/default/files/national_ecce_curr_framework_final_03022014%20%282%29.pdf)

drinking water facilities. Also, 58945 Anganwadi workers are in-position, with vacancies being disproportionately high in non-integrated Anganwadi centres.

From secondary sources<sup>4</sup> we know that enrollment of pre-school age children remains a concern. The IECEI study (2017), which surveyed a sample of 103 villages across two districts (Alwar and Ajmer) found that 8 out of 10 sampled villages had 4 or more preschool facilities available. Every village had at least one government Anganwadi Centre (AWC) and over 90% villages also had at least one private preschool facility. However, despite the widespread availability of both government and private pre-school provisioning, about one third of all pre-school age children remain not-enrolled. This high proportion of never enrolled children in the preschool age group is also found in the ASER 2018 early years report.

#### 4. ECCE QUALITY IN RAJASTHAN

Early year's curriculum 'Balasvatha Pathaycharya' has been developed in alignment with National ECCE Policy 2013 and is based on play-based methodology. A total of 38,000 Anganwadi centres have been integrated with primary and secondary/ higher secondary schools and 38,000 ECCE trained mentor teachers have been appointed for better support and supervision of integrated Anganwadis. Of these, 19,049 Anganwadi centres are physically integrated with schools. This means that they are co-located, thus creating a single site education complex covering children from age three to eighteen – pre-school to higher secondary.

There is already precedence of School Education Department and Department of Women and Child Development converging to raise the quality of ECCE in the State. This will provide the foundation for quality improvements in alignment with NEP2020, as administrative structures for academic and supervisory oversight are already well established. The integration of Anganwadis has already been optimized to 38,000 centres. Half of these, being co-located, have readiness for establishing bal-vatika in the associated schools.

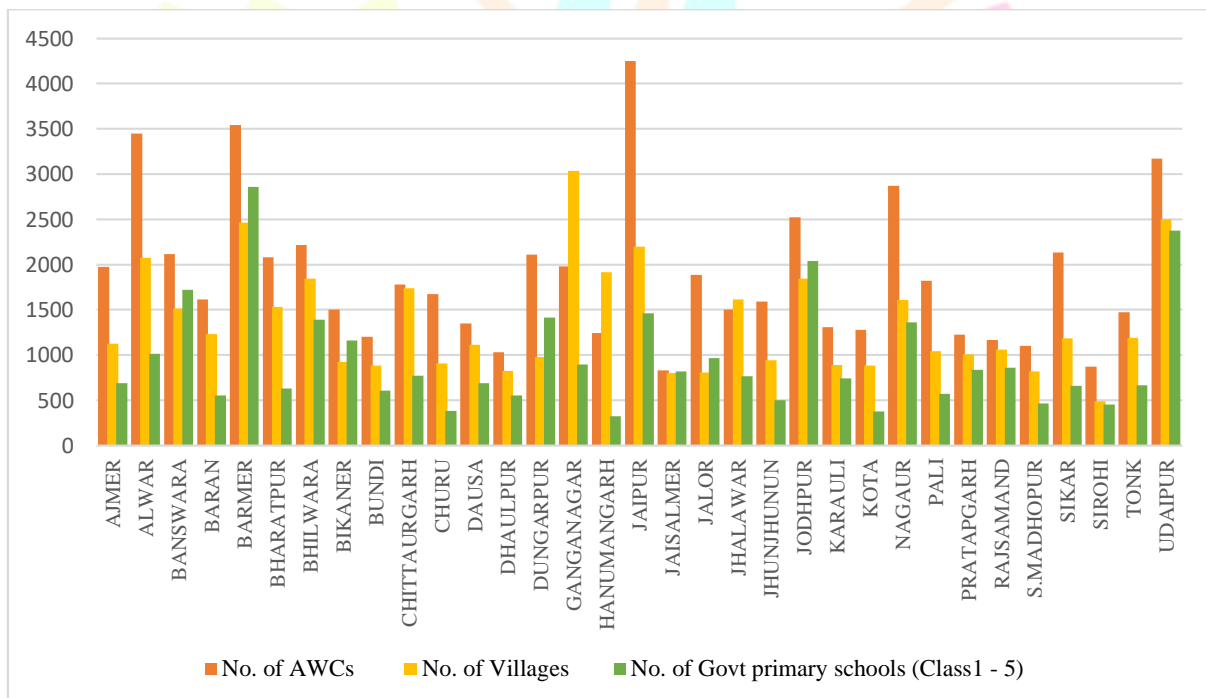
The IECEI study (2017) shows that quality of teaching and learning in the early years remains an area of concern. In both Anganwadi Centres as well as private preschools, teaching learning is generally not age and developmentally appropriate. In most of the private preschools children's experiences were observed to be largely limited to formal reading and writing activities, which are a downward extension of the primary school curriculum. For considerable periods, children were not engaged in any planned activities in either Anganwadi centres or private preschools, and in some Anganwadi centres, only a very small proportion of time was spent on play-based activities for cognitive, language and social development.

#### 5. CONTEXT SPECIFIC FACTORS IN RAJASTHAN (Issues and Challenges)

<sup>4</sup> IECEI, 2017, and ASER 2018

### 5.1 LOW POPULATION DENSITY LEADING TO SMALL SCHOOLS, SINGLE TEACHER SCHOOLS

Rajasthan is characterized by low population density and scattered habitations. The population density of Rajasthan is 200 people per square km which is about half of the national average, which means habitations are smaller and further apart. As Anganwadi centres are mandated to be placed close to habitations, there are almost twice as many Anganwadis as number of villages, with deep penetration of services within communities. In contrast, the number of primary schools is about half the number of villages, although most children have access within the mandated one-kilometre radius. However, due to low population density, school size remains small and 94.6 percent of primary schools are single teacher schools. Along with that, 90 percent of all primary schools are single teacher schools, and about 80 per cent schools have a total enrollment of less than 50 students (with a higher concentration in rural districts). Thus, teachers in these schools have to practice multigrade and multilevel teaching. In addition, various administrative/ non-teaching responsibilities have to be fulfilled by the same teacher. Under these conditions, setting up of bal-vatika (preparatory class), or integrating nearby Anganwadis may not be feasible.



**Figure 1: District-wise distribution of AWCs, Villages and Govt. Primary Schools**

(Source: <https://rajshaladarpan.nic.in/SD1/Home/Public2/Default.aspx>)



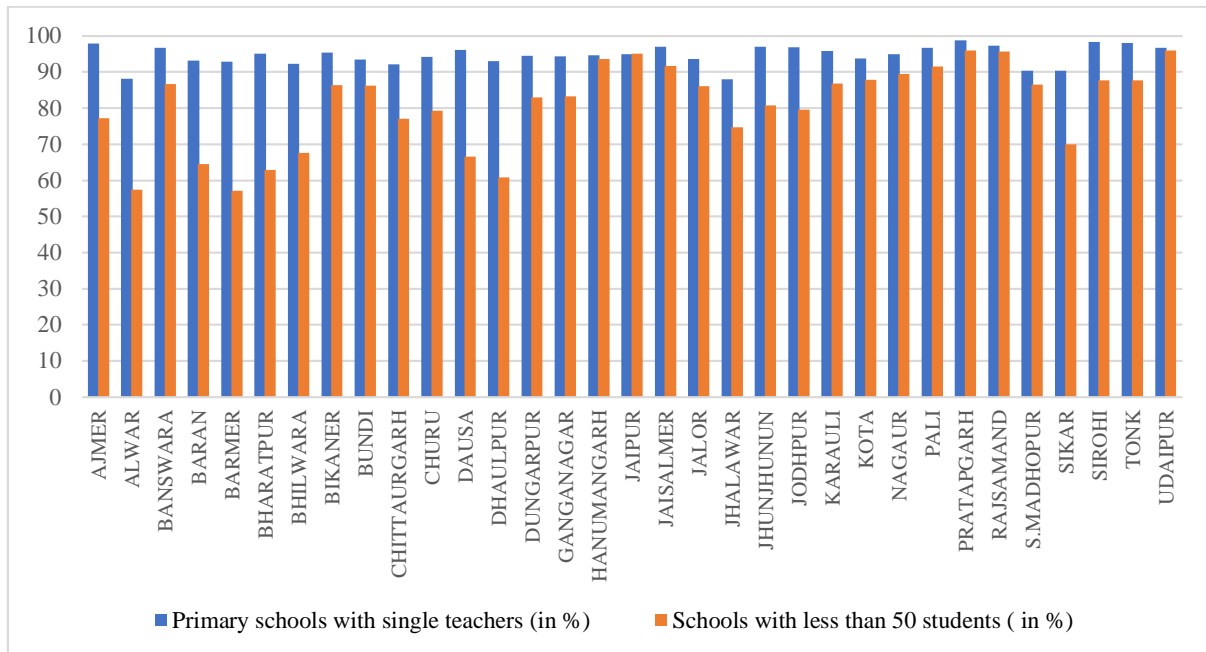


Figure 2: District-wise distribution of schools with single teachers and less than 50 students

(Source: <https://rajshaladarpan.nic.in/SD1/Home/Public2/Default.aspx>)

## 5.2 LANGUAGE DIVERSITY:

In the early years, instruction in the child's spoken language is imperative. While Anganwadis typically use the local/community language for instruction, most schools use Hindi as language of instruction. This will pose a challenge while setting up bal-vatika (preparatory class in primary schools), and primary teachers, or nursery trained teachers recruited through the centralized state system may not know the local/ community language spoken by children.

## 5.3 MALNUTRITION IN RAJASTHAN

In malnutrition, Rajasthan ranks 22nd among 30 states for children under 5 years of age. Of all children under 5 years, 31.5 percent are underweight, while 9.4 per cent are severely underweight. There are significant differences in malnutrition between rural and urban populations, with rural populations being much worse off. The Comprehensive National Nutrition survey also reveals that more than 40 per cent of the children in Rajasthan are anemic and underweight.

Nutrition forms an essential aspect of brain development in the early years (85% of brain development occurs by the time a child is 3 years old), and malnutrition limits and impedes early childhood education. Growth monitoring and health check-ups are essential, and shifting 4-to-6-year olds from Anganwadi (where convergence with ASHA workers, and growth monitoring processes, are well established) may make their nutrition status even worse.

## 5.4 WIDE VARIATION ACROSS TYPES OF INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED BY YOUNG CHILDREN

As per UDISE 2019-20 (Shaladarpan)<sup>5</sup>, data from Rajasthan shows that of the children admitted to Std. 1 in state government schools 36.2 % were 5 years old; 45.8 % were 6-year old; 10.8 % were 7 year old and 4.5 % were 8-year old. Of the total enrolment in class 1 only 23 % children came from anganwadi centres.

This creates two opportunities:

1. A widespread enrolment drive in the short run, for 3 to 6 year olds. This will ensure that children start their learning in the critical early years, maximizing the potential for future learning. This will also encourage participation in the government system (Anganwadis, as well as government primary), optimizing PTR and per child expenditure.
2. A regulatory structure that will allow the state to ensure uniform quality of ECCE provision across types of institutions. NEP has already provided the basis for this identifying the 4 types of pre-school provision settings that will come under its purview.

## 6. OPERATIONAL STRATEGY

The present issues and challenges in Rajasthan are as follows

- In Rajasthan, there is high variance in types of institutions attended by pre-school age children.
- There is great language diversity, which will require the availability of teachers/ AWWs who speak children's language. This is more viable in Anganwadis that are already situated in the community and recruit workers from the same community.
- Although there is a high proportion of underage children who are already enrolled in primary schools, the high percentage of single teacher schools, and the number of schools with low total enrolment will create limiting factors for adding Bal-Vatika classes in all primary schools in a uniform manner.
- Extending/ bifurcating the primary schools in this manner will further drive up the per child cost of primary schooling, adding to wastage in a situation where experience shows us supply may become mismatched with demand (i.e. Distance from primary school to residential habitations may be too great for pre-school children)

Keeping the above mentioned factors in mind, the operational strategy for implementing NEP in the ECCE sector may be as follows:

## 7. SHORT TERM STRATEGY

<sup>5</sup> <https://rajshaladarpan.nic.in/SD1/Home/Public2/Default.aspx>

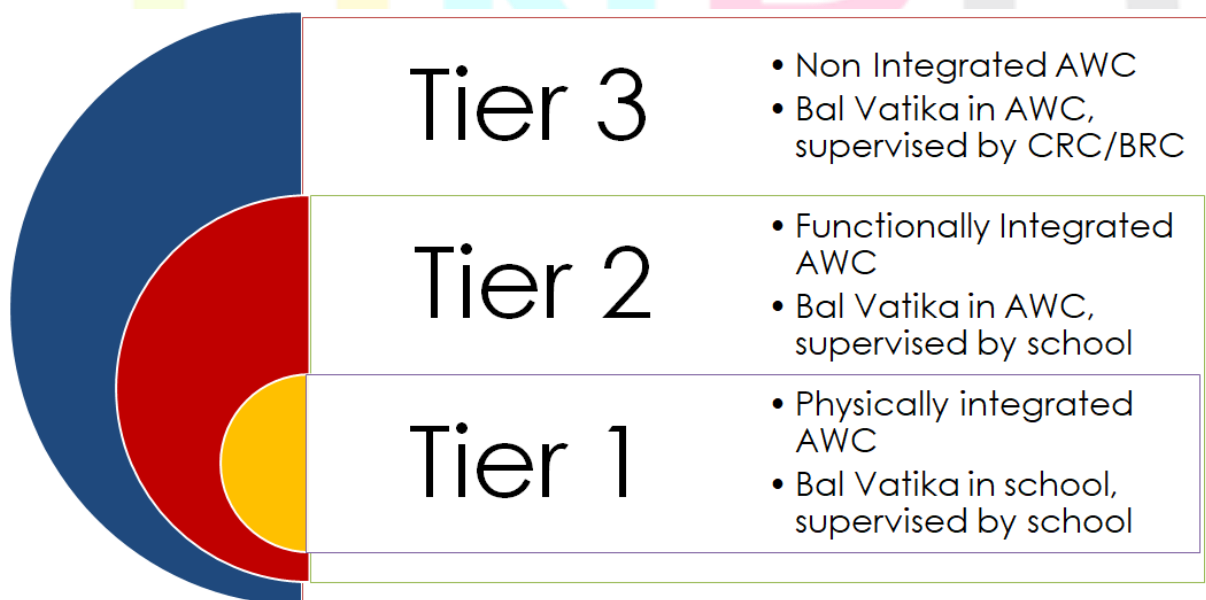
For the short term (transition period), the following strategies may be adopted:

1. A widespread enrolment drive in the short run, for 3 to 6 year olds. This will ensure that children start their learning in the critical early years, maximizing the potential for future learning. This will also encourage participation in the government system (anganwadis, as well as government primary), optimizing PTR and per child expenditure.
2. A regulatory structure that will allow the state to ensure uniform quality of ECCE provision across types of institutions. NEP has already provided the basis for this identifying the 4 types of pre-school provision settings that will come under its purview.
3. An extensive survey, leading on from the ASER 2018 data, to identify where the 5 - 6-year olds are right now (AWC or primary school). Long term strategy may be finalized based on the findings of this survey. For instance, if it is found that there is a district wise variation in enrollment of five year olds in schools, and anganwadis, then a one-size fits all approach may not work. The final strategy will depend on optimal utilization of available man-power, as well the creation of a new cadre of early years educators/ Nursery Trained Teachers.
4. A three-month school readiness package for 5-6-year olds for implementation wherever they are, in the short run. This will ensure that children can start experiencing developmentally appropriate methods of learning, while the state finalizes its long-term strategy.

These short-term strategies do not require any additional classroom or teacher.

## 8. LONG TERM STRATEGY

Keeping in mind the history of integrating anganwadi centres with primary and secondary schools in the state, and the precedence of the strategy of creating school complexes, the following three tier strategy is being proposed. This strategy accounts for progress that has already been made, and leverages successful interventions to build on them in an offer to create compliance with NEP provisions.



### Figure 3: 3 Tier system of Bal-Vatika Provision for 5 to 6 year old children

#### *Tier I Integration:*

- About one third of all Anganwadi centres are already co-located within schools, where the Headteacher along with the mentor teacher are responsible for Academic monitoring, supportive supervision and smooth transfer of children to primary.
- In these schools, an additional classroom, with suitable learning environment, along with an additional, dedicated ECCE trained teacher to be provided to operationalise Bal-Vatika.
- This new class, with a focus on school readiness, to serve 5-to-6-year olds, with the possibility of extending to 4-year olds.
- The Anganwadi will continue to serve children up to 4/5 years, with a strengthened curriculum, suitable learning environment and better trained personnel.
- The administrative monitoring of the Anganwadi will remain with the DWCD (Supervisor/ CDPO)
- The administrative monitoring of the Bal-Vatika to be with the BRC/ CRC, under the department of Education

#### *Tier II Integration:*

- Another third of Anganwadi centres are functionally integrated, and while the designated school remains responsible for academic monitoring, supportive supervision and smooth transfer of children to primary, specific geographic/ social/ infrastructure conditions make it impossible to locate these centres within schools.
- In these cases, it may be best to provide an additional classroom, along with an additional, dedicated ECCE trained teacher to operationalise Bal-Vatika in the Anganwadi itself.
- This presupposes that the Anganwadi will now be a two-room environment with a functional toilet and drinking water facilities.
- This new class, with a focus on school readiness, will serve 5-to-6-year olds, with the possibility of extending to 4-year olds.
  - Here two options are available- (a) either keep all 5-6-year-old children in the Anganwadi with functional integration as it is or, (b) offer school readiness curriculum in both AWC as well as primary school, with continuation of functional integration. This will have to be decided on a school-by-school basis depending on proximity of habitation with school, and proportion of 5 year olds already enrolled in school.
- The Anganwadi will continue to serve children up to 4/5 years, with a strengthened curriculum, suitable learning environment and better trained personnel.
- The administrative monitoring of the Anganwadi will remain with the DWCD (Supervisor/ CDPO)

#### *Tier III Integration:*



A final third of Anganwadi centres remain non-integrated, due to specific geographic/ social/ infrastructure conditions that make it impossible to even functionally integrate these centres with schools. They will each have to be strengthened in the long term to offer a school readiness curriculum with additional teachers/NTT in the school, and a segregated timetable in the Anganwadi.

- In these cases, it may be best to provide an additional classroom, along with an additional, dedicated ECCE trained teacher to operationalise Bal-Vatika in the Anganwadi itself.
- This presupposes that the Anganwadi will now be a two-room environment with a functional toilet and drinking water facilities.
- This new class, with a focus on school readiness, will serve 5-to-6-year olds, with the possibility of extending to 4-year olds.
- The Anganwadi will continue to serve children up to 4/5 years, with a strengthened curriculum, suitable learning environment and better trained personnel.
- The designated BRC and CRC will become responsible for academic monitoring, supportive supervision and smooth transfer of children to primary.
- The administrative monitoring of the Anganwadi will remain with the DWCD (Supervisor/ CDPO)
- Eventually, in the long term, in all primary schools, there should be a Bal-Vatika section with a dedicated teacher/ mentor teacher/ para teacher/ NTT, where due to multigrade teaching constraints, this teacher will handle all 5-to-8-year olds.
- In the long term, there will also be adequate number of AWC that will not be integrated with school due to geographical constraints and will have to be equipped to deliver a pre-school curriculum (for 3-5-year olds) and a school readiness curriculum (for 5-6 year, olds)

## 9. QUALITY STRATEGY FOR ECCE IN RAJASTHAN

In order to achieve the policy directives, set out in the NEP 2020, it will be essential to maintain a high quality of ECCE provision. As shown in research, poor quality ECCE will fail to translate into long term gains for children, and may in fact become a barrier to conceptual learning in the future. Quality has to be built on a foundation of non-negotiable resources which are provisions of dedicated room and practitioner, toilet, drinking water facilities and taking care of their nutritional requirements. If children are malnourished and unhealthy, they will be unable to learn.

A developmentally appropriate curriculum, based on Early Learning Development Standards, and prioritizing learning through play, will form the overarching framework for quality. With this in mind, the following 4 pillars of quality may be proposed

- a. Stimulating early learning environment with learning corners
- b. Cadre of ECCE professionals with continued professional development

- c. Providing strong and supportive supervision both academic and administrative
- d. Parental awareness, engagement and involvement

Govt. of India has devised an extensive tracking tool for identifying and monitoring tasks that need to be completed both by the central government, as well as state governments, in order to meet the provisions of the NEP. The tasks have been mapped to particular chapters, and paragraphs of the NEP, and provide a clear framework to identify strategic priorities at the state level. Further, the task tracker will allow states to identify prior achievements that are already aligned with NEP expectations, and build on these achievements to ensure fulfilment of state's obligations towards children.

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