

► ILO Flagship Report

Social Dialogue Report 2024

Peak-level social dialogue for economic development and social progress

Executive summary

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This second edition of the ILO *Social Dialogue Report* focuses on peak-level social dialogue (PLSD) as a crucial tool for advancing decent work, ensuring a fair labour income distribution, addressing the challenges of the digital and green transitions and repairing the "frayed social contract".

PLSD involves processes that bring together representatives of governments, employers' and business membership organizations (EBMOs) and workers' organizations (the social partners) at the national and sectoral levels. These processes are designed to facilitate negotiation, consultation and information exchange on issues relating to labour, economic and social policy. PLSD includes bipartite processes – where only the social partners engage, notably for reaching collective agreements – as well as tripartite processes, which also involve government representatives.

By showcasing country examples and good practices from around the world, this report illustrates how PLSD can serve as a powerful catalyst for navigating complexity, identifying balanced and sustainable solutions, addressing social and economic injustice and promoting democracy in the world of work – and in society at large.

PLSD enables countries to pursue economic development together with social progress, aligning with the goals of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for a more inclusive and sustainable future.

The 2030 Agenda embraces a long-term and inclusive approach to economic development and social progress, which PLSD is well-suited to promote. This report argues that a country's approach to development can significantly affect how PLSD institutions operate. At the same time, the positive effects of PLSD can influence a country's economic and social development strategy, pushing it towards more long-term and inclusive practices. This creates a two-way relationship where each aspect impacts the other, as illustrated in Chapter 1.

Investing in PLSD is even more important in times of multiple and compounding crises and rapid and structural changes in the world of work.

Geopolitical instability, polarization and declining trust in governance institutions are hindering global progress towards the 2030 Agenda. Furthermore, rapid transformations in labour markets, driven by digital and green transitions, are compounding the challenges of the polycrisis, exacerbating inequalities and leaving groups in vulnerable situations behind. In this context, substantial investment in PLSD institutions, processes and actors is essential, building on examples that demonstrate the value of PLSD in promoting labour peace, social cohesion, good governance and democracy, key *foundational benefits* of PLSD. Leveraging these foundations, PLSD can yield *transformative benefits* that support economic development and social progress, notably, fostering decent work, including sustainable productivity growth (Chapter 2), addressing high labour income inequalities (Chapter 3) and enabling just digital and green transitions (Chapter 4). Together, these benefits can contribute to shaping a "renewed social contract" (Chapter 5).

► There is no "one-size-fits-all" model for PLSD, but some prerequisites must be in place for ensuring full ownership of social dialogue processes by all parties concerned and for their sustainability over time, notably:

Respect for fundamental principles and rights at work, particularly freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, in line with the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948 (No. 87), and the Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949 (No. 98). These are recognized both as fundamental rights and enabling conditions for the realization of the Decent Work Agenda and social justice.

Although these standards are the foundation for effective and inclusive social dialogue, roughly half of the global workforce remains uncovered by ILO Conventions Nos 87 and 98. Furthermore, ILO data show ongoing challenges in both law and practice regarding the respect and implementation of these rights. Between 2015 and 2022, the global average of national compliance with freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining (Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) indicator 8.8.2) has worsened by 7 per cent, driven by increased violations of the fundamental civil liberties of employers, workers and their representative organizations as well as bargaining rights.

A supportive state and an enabling legal and regulatory framework, including on dispute prevention and resolution. This entails allocation by the state of sufficient resources to enhance the capacity of social partners and labour administration systems. It also requires the integration of social dialogue across all policy areas, with the state acting as both a convenor of tripartite social dialogue and as an employer in the public sector.

Data on membership in EBMOs and workers' organizations, as well as collective bargaining coverage rates, serve as useful proxies for assessing this prerequisite. Available data from 36 countries suggest that the density of EBMOs ranges from 4 to 98 per cent. Trade union density varies from 25.8 per cent in high-income countries to 16.2 per cent in lower-middle-income countries, with a global unweighted average of 20 per cent (data available for 139 countries, territories and areas). Countries with multi-employer collective bargaining systems have a higher average coverage rate (71.7 per cent) compared to those with mixed or single-employer bargaining systems, at 32.1 per cent and 15.8 per cent, respectively (data available for 93 countries).

- Fostering representative participation to ensure that PLSD actors and institutions address the needs and aspirations of different categories of workers and employers across all segments of labour markets, the economy and society. This is called for by SDG Target 16.7 on responsive, inclusive, participatory and representative decision-making at all levels. Yet, procedures for establishing or enhancing the "representativeness" of the social partners, in accordance with best international practices and ILO supervisory bodies' recommendations, remain underdeveloped and need significant improvement.
- An institutional commitment to pluralism, a key democratic principle that ensures space for diverse views and safeguards the rights of individuals and groups to express themselves and influence decision-making through legitimate processes. A pluralist approach to socio-economic governance recognizes the different interests of employers, workers and governments, as well as the need to balance various political and economic trade-offs through PLSD, which in turn strengthens and complements institutions of representative democracy.

There are many examples of fruitful interaction between PLSD and broader democratic institutions. Social pacts, for instance, typically signed by governments and the social partners at the national level, have been important in reinforcing trust in institutions of representative democracy, particularly during crises and political transitions. Between 2019 to 2024, around 80 tripartite social pacts were signed, many of which aimed at facilitating consensus on labour, tax and pension reforms, and more recently, at addressing the impact of the cost-of-living crisis.

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The current state of peak-level social dialogue: Assessing the effectiveness and inclusiveness of national social dialogue institutions

National social dialogue institutions (NSDIs) play a vital role in promoting the involvement of the social partners in social and economic policymaking. Most of the ILO's 187 Member States have established permanent NSDIs with general competence, while approximately half also have additional NSDIs focused on specific issues such as employment, social security and wage setting. Examples from around the world illustrate how NSDIs have delivered both *foundational* and *transformative* benefits that support the design and implementation of long-term and inclusive socio-economic development, even during times of crisis. However, significant gaps in the effectiveness and inclusiveness of NSDIs persist globally. Urgent action is needed to strengthen these institutions and to enhance the capacities of EBMOs and workers' organizations to engage effectively in PLSD.

NSDIs operate in 87 per cent of ILO Member States, though their mandate, composition, functioning, technical capacities and influence vary considerably.

The widespread prevalence of NSDIs is often linked to the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144). Ratified by 158 ILO Member States, this instrument calls upon governments to conduct effective consultations with the social partners on international labour standards. Africa, and Europe and Central Asia have the highest percentages of permanent NSDIs, at 90 and 92 per cent, respectively. Most NSDIs have a tripartite composition, while some also include civil society organizations. Nearly all NSDIs have a secretariat, usually provided by the ministry of labour, and most are chaired by government representatives, including heads of government, ministers or department directors.

The social partners hold a positive view of the effectiveness of NSDI, but express concerns about the government's ability to appropriately follow-up on NSDI outcomes.

A perception survey conducted for this report reveals that approximately three quarters of worker respondents and around two thirds of employer respondents view their NSDIs as fully or largely effective, though opinions vary across the five dimensions of effectiveness explored. For instance, 80 per cent of employers and 71 per cent of workers believe that NSDIs have clear decision-making rules that facilitate consensus-building. The survey indicates generally positive perceptions regarding the capacity of NSDIs to deliver outcomes, such as social pacts, recommendations and advisory opinions. However, 56 per cent of worker respondents and 45 per cent of employer respondents express concern that governments and public authorities do not constructively act on NSDI outcomes or sufficiently translate them into policy and regulatory action.

The social partners have a less favourable view of the inclusiveness of NSDIs, as large gaps remain in the participation of women, young people and workers and economic units in the informal economy.

Survey findings highlight significant disparities in women's involvement in NSDIs, particularly in leadership roles: three in five worker respondents and half of employer respondents believe that women have limited or no participation in NSDI decision-making bodies. Moreover, the findings highlight the need for NSDIs to enhance representation of marginalized groups, including in the informal economy, and address their specific concerns. While respondents agree on the benefits of involving actors beyond the social partners in NSDIs, many employers and workers feel that their organizations offer limited or no representation for workers and economic units in the informal economy. An ILO survey of economic and social councils and similar institutions show that youth too are under-represented in NSDIs, with their concerns largely overlooked. The same survey points to a decline in youth-sensitive and youth-inclusive PLSD, especially since the pandemic.

Peak-level social dialogue: Aligning economic and social goals to ensure decent work for all

PLSD can strengthen policy coherence across government actors by balancing economic growth and social progress, ultimately advancing the goal of decent work for all. It can promote full employment, rights at work and equitable access to social protection, and can foster an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises and productivity growth. Research evidence points to the role of PLSD in coordinating cross-cutting policy initiatives through a "whole-of-government" approach within each pillar of the Decent Work Agenda. The report highlights several examples of peak-level actors bridging gaps between government departments dealing with economic and social issues, thus promoting policy coherence in efforts towards achieving SDG 8.

PLSD can improve the design and implementation of full and productive employment policies, including national employment policies and the effective functioning of public employment services.

ILO data on 40 national employment policies adopted between 2005 and 2020 find that PLSD has been used in the design, implementation and evaluation of employment policies in roughly 80 per cent of the policies analysed. Furthermore, findings of a survey of public employment services management boards indicate that the social partners are involved in the governance of public employment services in over 30 per cent of surveyed countries. They also participate in evaluating programmes for labour market information, job matching or training and upskilling. Overall, evidence suggests that PLSD in employment policymaking is more likely to foster connections between ministries of the economy and finance, sectoral ministries and central banks, compared to top-down, unilateral policymaking. At the same time, further attention is required in relation to workforce groups who are disadvantaged in the labour market, particularly women, youth, and informal workers and economic units, to ensure that employment policies address their concerns.

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PLSD plays a key role in shaping and implementing norms that promote rights at work...

The consultative nature of PLSD provides a conducive environment to explore and adopt regulatory frameworks that adapt to changes in the world of work while advancing workers' rights. This approach helps reconcile diverse interests and ensures the commitment of labour market actors to labour law reform. Evidence suggests that many revisions to labour laws have involved tripartite consultations, with the final legislation reflecting the proposals of the social partners to varying degrees. For example, an agreement within Portugal's tripartite Standing Social Dialogue Committee led to an amendment of the Labour Code aimed at reducing precarious work and enhancing collective bargaining.

… including occupational safety and health (OSH).

Data indicate that approximately four fifths of ILO Member States have established national tripartite OSH bodies that contribute to policy design and foster a culture of accident, illness and fatality prevention in the workplace. A notable example is Namibia's National Tripartite Technical Taskforce, which shaped guidelines for ensuring a safe return to work during the COVID-19 pandemic and agreed on key elements of an OSH bill that promotes the establishment of OSH committees at the enterprise level. Additionally, PLSD at the sectoral level is vital to foster better OSH outcomes by designing and implementing policies tailored to address the specificities of different sectors such as construction and ready-made garments.

PLSD can contribute to developing effective, high quality and resource-efficient social protection systems.

Its consensus-building function allows diverse needs to be expressed and addressed, helping to improve the quality and coverage of social protection strategies. The social partners have significantly influenced policies on social insurance and tax-financed social protection benefits, including in times of crisis, often within the framework of NSDIs. ILO data from 2014 to 2023 show that the social partners were involved in 158 legal reforms related to social protection systems in 65 countries, leading to the expansion of pension, health coverage and employee benefits. Furthermore, the social partners contribute to monitoring social protection systems and managing social protection programmes through their representation on the boards of social security schemes.

PLSD support for coordination across various policy areas is essential for creating an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises.

Sustainable entrepreneurship requires a balance among economic, social and environmental goals, often involving trade-offs. By fostering collaboration between the different government departments and stakeholders, PLSD facilitates the identification of ways to reduce or overcome these trade-offs and contributes to breaking administrative silos that hinder coherent policymaking. This approach is vital since sustainable enterprise development calls for action in policy areas beyond labour matters. This is evident, for example, through the involvement of the social partners on the management boards of technical and vocational education and training bodies coordinated by different government ministries and agencies, as well as on the boards of sectoral skills bodies such as Chile-Valora, the Commission of the National System for the Certification of Labour Competences in Chile.

PLSD is essential for fostering productivity-enhancing and inclusive structural change, thereby ensuring sustainable productivity growth.

Effective interaction between PLSD and social dialogue at the enterprise level helps EBMOs and workers' organizations in maintaining and coordinating productivity gains. Research shows that effective social dialogue practices at the company level boost performance, innovation and workplace well-being. Beyond firm level gains, broader labour productivity growth requires structural economic change and shifting economic activity from lower to higher productivity sectors. Overall, sustained productivity growth, when accompanied by PLSD processes that expedite the equitable sharing of efficiency gains, significantly contributes to wage improvements. Additionally, international policy frameworks, including certain trade agreements, provide opportunities for PLSD to shape national policies concerning foreign direct investment and the operations of multinational enterprises.

Strengthening PLSD institutions for fair labour income distribution

In recent decades, labour income inequality has become a pressing issue, worsened by the COVID-19 crisis. High income and wage disparities undermine poverty reduction efforts, limit social mobility and increase the risk of social unrest. Drawing on global research and country examples, the report demonstrates how PLSD can promote fair labour income distribution by fostering inclusive policy frameworks prioritizing income equality and sustainable economic development, in line with the 2030 Agenda. It highlights the role of tripartite social dialogue, minimum wage setting involving the social partners, and sectoral collective bargaining in addressing the cost-of-living crisis and tackling gender pay gaps. The report urges countries to strengthen these PLSD institutions to restore income fairness for workers worldwide.

There is a renewed interest in minimum wage policies, but major gaps in compliance and coverage remain.

Over 90 per cent of ILO Member States have established minimum wage systems, highlighting their importance in advancing social justice. However, many systems fail to adequately protect all workers due to gaps in compliance and legal coverage. Irregular adjustments of minimum wage rates erode workers' purchasing power, especially during economic crises. The report emphasizes the need for more frequent adjustments during inflationary periods and calls for full social partner involvement, as outlined in the Minimum Wage Fixing Recommendation, 1970 (No. 135).

► The direct participation, on an equal basis, of the social partners in establishing, setting and adjusting statutory minimum wages is crucial for enhancing their effectiveness in reducing poverty and income inequality.

Most countries engage EBMOs and workers' organizations, often through tripartite bodies, before setting wage floors. However, the quality and impact of such consultations vary widely. The report shows minimum wage-setting mechanisms that actively involve the social partners are more effective in protecting low-wage workers and reducing wage inequality, as they balance workers' needs and economic considerations. For instance, in South Africa, the social partners play a significant role in wage setting through their participation in the National Minimum Wage Commission.

Combining minimum wage setting with sectoral collective bargaining maximizes the impact of PLSD on fair labour income distribution.

As a key form of multi-employer bargaining, sectoral collective bargaining is one of the most effective PLSD instruments for addressing high labour income inequality. Together, these PLSD mechanisms are essential for protecting low-paid workers, promoting real wage growth and advancing wage justice. In contrast, countries lacking effective PLSD institutions are less well-equipped to establish the frameworks needed to achieve fair labour income distribution.

► Tripartite social dialogue, minimum wages and sectoral collective bargaining help distribute inflationary costs more equitably between employers and workers, protecting real wages and incomes.

Countries have adopted various measures, such as automatic and discretionary wage adjustments, often in consultation with the social partners. In Morocco, for instance, tripartite social pacts in 2022 and 2024 raised minimum wages and offered non-wage benefits, such as tax reductions and exemptions, targeting low- and middle-income households. Other countries, such as France, update wage floors based on cost-of-living indicators, after consulting with the social partners. Lastly, countries with strong industrial relations traditions, particularly in Nordic European countries, have used sectoral collective agreements to protect workers' purchasing power. This includes automatic indexation mechanisms and frequent renegotiations of collectively agreed wages to ensure real wage increases during periods of high inflation.

► Through PLSD, the social partners can also help close gender pay gaps.

The social partners can drive progress by adjusting minimum wage policies and expanding legal protections to narrow the gender pay gap, as women are disproportionately represented among low-wage earners and in sectors where coverage is limited, such as domestic work. For instance, in Italy, PLSD in the form of sectoral collective bargaining helps regulate pay and working conditions for domestic workers, promoting decent work and formalization in the sector. Additionally, EBMOs and workers' organizations can advance "equal pay for work of equal value" for women and men through sectoral collective bargaining, addressing disparities in the middle of the wage distribution. The 2022 agreements on the United States' women's and men's national soccer teams illustrate well the power of sectoral social dialogue in advancing equal pay for women and men in similar roles. Finally, the social partners can ensure that wage growth in female-dominated sectors, including the public sector, remains aligned with that in male-dominated industries.

Peak-level social dialogue for an effective and inclusive digital and green transition

The shift towards digitalized and environmentally sustainable economies is reshaping the world of work. While these transformations offer opportunities for economic growth, innovation and job creation, they also pose risks of major labour market disruption. The report highlights the crucial role of PLSD in leveraging these opportunities and addressing challenges through effective and inclusive strategies that protect both workers and enterprises. PLSD fosters societal consensus on digital transformation and decarbonization policies, driving transitions that equip the workforce with relevant skills and prioritize the inclusion of disadvantaged groups. However, the use of PLSD to manage the "twin transition" remains underdeveloped, particularly in countries with less well-established social dialogue institutions. The report shows that only a quarter of the over 100 PLSD processes and outcomes between January 2022 and September 2023 addressed twin transition themes – the majority of which in European countries. Moreover, survey results confirm that digital transformation and climate change are not high on the agendas of NSDIs. Renewed focus on industrial policies aimed at economic diversification and structural transformation, now involving greater collaboration between public and private actors, including the social partners, presents a timely opportunity to advance the role of PLSD in steering the twin transition. Overall, the digital and green transitions are emerging as key areas for PLSD, but primarily in highincome countries. To prevent widening inequalities, it is crucial to address the disparities in the capacity of developing economies to adapt to these transitions through PLSD.

In a number of countries, PLSD is playing an important role in improving the pay and working conditions of platform economy workers, as well as clarifying their employment relationship; evidence suggests a positive interaction between peak-level and enterprise-level social dialogue on these topics.

The active involvement of the social partners in shaping legislation and practices in the platform economy has facilitated balanced solutions that address the needs of workers and enterprises, ensuring labour protections and fair competition. A notable example is Spain's "Rider's Act", which emerged from a tripartite agreement and led to the recognition of food delivery riders working for digital platforms as employees. Sectoral collective bargaining, especially in transport and logistics, is also used extensively by the social partners to regulate pay, working time, social protection and safety and health for platform workers. The report shows that PLSD, at both the national and sectoral levels, has created the conditions to improve the rights of platform workers through enterprise-level social dialogue, including by promoting the organization of workers in a sector often characterized by worker dispersion.

PLSD is also emerging as an effective tool for facilitating the digital transformation of traditional firms and addressing the potential risks associated with algorithmic management and artificial intelligence (AI) large language models.

Since the COVID-19 crisis, the social partners have played a growing role in designing remote work legislation, paving the way for expanding collective bargaining and workplace cooperation on digitalization in traditional firms. Recent agreements in Europe and the United States of America, at both the sectoral level and in major high-tech firms, are also opening new ground for AI governance. For example, a 2023 agreement by a major IT company and a trade union in the United States commits management to informing workers about AI trends and incorporating their perspectives in AI development. Given the rapid evolution of AI, the capacity of PLSD to devise timely, tailored and balanced solutions is seen by many stakeholders as a credible alternative to prescriptive and rigid top-down legislation.

PLSD institutions focused on skills development are essential for equipping workers with the skills needed to navigate the future of work.

These institutions can play a crucial role in recognizing digital skills and mapping those acquired through technical and vocational education and training programmes, addressing the growing demand for training and retraining prompted by digital technologies. For instance, the Canadian Future Skills Council, an ad hoc PLSD body with representatives from government, labour, business and civil society, proposed a digital skills recognition platform to help close the digital divide and bridge gaps in employment participation and access to skills development.

PLSD is vital for ensuring that the green transition is fair for both workers and enterprises, aligning environmental and social goals with economic growth.

As environmental policies become more stringent, public support for governments can wane. In this context, PLSD plays a key role in generating consensus among governments, the social partners and society on the need for decarbonization. Through PLSD, stakeholders can agree on road maps to translate national and international climate policies into concrete measures, such as reducing emissions and promoting green workplaces, such as in Poland and the Republic of Korea, or on national recovery plans placing environmental sustainability at their core, such as in Barbados. Additionally, sectoral agreements, particularly in industries such as mining and energy, include provisions for wage adjustments, expanded social protection and skills development, ensuring that workers affected by the green transition are protected.

► The increasing frequency of heatwaves is pushing governments and the social partners to address heat stress through OSH-focused social dialogue.

Tripartite consultations play a key role in shaping legislation by providing technical guidance and tools to mitigate the impact of heat stress on workers and productivity, especially in high-risk sectors, notably agriculture, forestry, fishing and construction. For example, Costa Rica's tripartite Occupational Health Commission developed legislation on heat stress prevention and workers' protection, along with campaigns, guidelines and training to support its implementation. Sectoral collective bargaining is also emerging, with a current focus on managing working time to mitigate heat-related risks, as seen in Germany's construction sector, and providing compensation to affected workers, as in Italy's forestry and furniture industry.

Despite the significant impacts of climate and environmental changes on women, informal economy actors, and indigenous and tribal peoples, there is limited PLSD targeting these groups.

Gender-sensitive PLSD is rare despite the strong gender dimension of environmental challenges. Workers and economic units in the informal economy, who are also disproportionately affected by climate change, see few efforts focused on both formalization and the green transition, with some examples in Africa, such as Kenya. Indigenous and tribal peoples face major risks from the green transition, including threats to their livelihoods and forced migration due to resource extraction for sustainable energy production. However, they also play an important role in environmental sustainability, using traditional knowledge to inform impact assessments and promoting practices of "regenerative agriculture". In Latin America, dedicated PLSD institutions are incorporating their voices during consultations on environmental legislation and on projects that affect their communities. In Peru, indigenous peoples, including indigenous women's organizations, were formally consulted during the formulation of the Framework Law on Climate Change, underscoring the importance of indigenous participation in shaping environmental policies.

Harnessing the opportunities of peaklevel social dialogue for social justice

Short-term and non-inclusive approaches to economic development and social progress are hindering global efforts to achieve the objectives of the 2030 Agenda. They can also undermine the effectiveness of PLSD in advancing decent work and social justice. Nevertheless, PLSD actors and institutions have the potential to foster collaboration within societies, identifying shared solutions to complex challenges in the world of work and beyond, especially when societal interests diverge. PLSD can play a crucial role in shaping a "renewed social contract". This involves redefining the relationship between governments and their citizens, as well as within societies, which is essential for addressing contemporary challenges. It also provides a pathway to harness the opportunities presented by digital and green transitions for an equitable and sustainable future for all. By fostering trust between people and institutions, PLSD can ensure inclusion, protection and participation, while valuing what matters to people and the planet and acknowledging the needs and constraints of employers. It advances democratic participation in the world of work, acting as necessary complement to institutions of representative democracy. To fully unlock the enabling power of PLSD, this report calls for stronger action to enhance the inclusiveness and effectiveness of PLSD institutions, processes and actors. This requires above all:

- Respecting, promoting and realizing the fundamental principles and rights at work of freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining for all workers as well as the other prerequisites.
- Enhancing the capacity of PLSD institutions and actors for meaningful engagement. This entails equipping the social partners and labour administrations with the necessary resources and skills. Social dialogue should be mainstreamed across relevant policy areas through a "whole-of-government" approach.
- Expanding the membership base of the social partners and extending their outreach to underrepresented groups, particularly workers and economic units in the informal economy, workers in emerging work arrangements, migrants, youth, and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises.
- Encouraging regular evidence-based evaluations of the role, influence and outcomes of PLSD institutions in socio-economic decision-making. This includes assessments and diagnostics of NSDIs with ILO support and exploring the possible establishment of a global indicator to measure PLSD effectiveness and inclusiveness.

Advancing social justice, promoting decent work

The International Labour Organization is the United Nations agency for the world of work. We bring together governments, employers and workers to drive a humancentred approach to the future of work through employment creation, rights at work, social protection and social dialogue.

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