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THE PRIORITIES OF WOMEN-LED BUSINESSES IN THE ECONOMY OF KAZAKHSTAN: GENDER ASPECTS IN THE LABOR MARKET

In this article, the authors analyze the specifics of women's entrepreneurship as a separate phenomenon that is gaining momentum in the modern world. Women are increasingly striving for self-realization and economic independence, and entrepreneurship is becoming one of the strategies for achieving these goals.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the main characteristics of women's labor in Kazakhstan. The gender statistical data describing the representation of women in the Kazakhstani labor market, the level of income of women and men, the number of women managers and women entrepreneurs, and regional specifics of labor serve as a methodological tool for realizing the goal. As an additional method of analysis it is proposed to consider the results of questionnaire survey of female students of economic specialties of higher education institutions of Kazakhstan, which showed the level of girls' preparedness for entrepreneurship. The collected data demonstrate that Kazakhstani girls do not perceive the presence of gender inequality in both the labor market and business. They do not take into account the lack of equal starting opportunities, institutional restrictions on doing business, and gender stereotypes that limit the scale of female entrepreneurship in the country. It is especially important to note that the surveyed girls are ready to combine business activities and domestic labor. They believe that such a combination is quite

organic and obligatory for Kazakhstani women, and family should be a higher priority than business.

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Keywords: female entrepreneurs, pay inequality, female executives, second shift, income levels, motherhood.

Introduction

Women's entrepreneurship holds immense significance for the economy and society at large. Female entrepreneurs create new jobs, contribute to economic growth, and drive innovation. They also serve as crucial sources of inspiration and motivation for other women. Women's entrepreneurship has a positive impact on the economy. According to McKinsey research, equal participation of women in the economy alongside men would add \$28 trillion to the global GDP by 2025, accounting for 11 %–26 %. This would result in a 9 % GDP growth in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) reported that if the gender gap were eliminated in just 15 countries by 2020, per capita income could increase by an average of 12 % by 2030 [1]. Women entrepreneurs create new jobs, reducing unemployment and increasing overall income. They also stimulate economic growth by investing in new projects and fostering innovation.

In Kazakhstan, women actively participate in the development of various economic sectors and run successful businesses. However, women are underrepresented in industries such as heavy industry, oil and gas, construction, and automotive and aviation industries. These sectors typically have a predominantly male workforce, and women are less commonly found in these fields.

Materials and Methods

In July 2022, the World Economic Forum (WEF) released its annual Global Gender Gap Report. Kazakhstan ranked 65th with a score of 71.9 %, showing a 0.9 % improvement compared to the previous year [2]. The WEF Gender Gap Index measures the current state and progression of gender equality in four key categories: 1. Economic participation and opportunities - the difference in the participation of women and men in the workforce, the gender pay gap, and the ratio of women to men in legislative bodies, high-ranking executives, as well as technical and professional roles; 2. Access to education - analyzing the proportion of women and men receiving primary, secondary, and higher education, as well as the literacy rate among women and men; 3. Health and survival – the difference in the health levels of women and men (ratio of male to female births, and the gap in life expectancy between women and men); 4. Political empowerment - the

ratio and quantity of men and women in high political positions (in ministries and parliaments). Additionally, this category measures the number of years men and women have spent in power (as presidents or prime ministers) in the last 50 years [2].

If we delve deeper into the category of «Economic Participation and Opportunities», Kazakhstan ranks 29th with a score of 75.6 %, while Laos achieved the highest score at 88.3 %, and Afghanistan recorded the lowest at 17.6 %. Examining the trend over the past six years, in 2021 (ranked 47th with 72.8 %), Kazakhstan experienced a decline compared to the four previous years (between 2016 and 2020, Kazakhstan's score in this category ranged from 74.5 % to 74.1 %) [2].

Turning to gender data from the National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan for the fourth quarter of 2021, the total working-age population in Kazakhstan is just over 9 million, with women accounting for 4.3 million. Women play a significant role in Kazakhstan's labor market, constituting 48.5 % of the economically active population. Women also make up 48.1 % of all employed individuals and 48.9 % of all wage workers. According to official statistics, there are nearly 249 thousand unemployed women, accounting for 5.8 %. Among girls aged 15 to 28, the unemployment rate is 4.7 % [3].

When considering the employment status of Kazakhstani women, 3.2 million work as employees or under service contracts, 700 thousand are individual entrepreneurs, 3.6 thousand are founders or members of economic partnerships, founders or shareholders of joint-stock companies, and members of production cooperatives. 237 thousand women in Kazakhstan identify as independent workers, and more than 16 thousand work remotely [3].

An analysis by the Center for Labor Resource Development in Kazakhstan of 4.3 million electronic labor contracts reveals that women constitute the majority of highly qualified professionals in the country. However, there are significantly more men in leadership positions. The proportion of male leaders nationwide is 14 % higher than female leaders. Women hold 43 % of managerial positions, while men hold 57 %. The average salary of male managers is also 12.4 % higher than that of female managers. In the category of «specialists-professionals», men earn 29 % more on average than women in the same group. Overall, in almost all categories of the National Classifier of Occupations, the average salary of men is substantially higher than that of women. The average nominal salary for male managers is 618 thousand tenge per month, while female managers earn an average of 397 thousand tenge.

The gender pay gap in Kazakhstan at the end of 2021 was 22 %, but deviations from the average can be quite noticeable across different economic sectors. However, in 2022, the gap has increased again to 25.2 %, indicating that

more efforts need to be made to address this issue. For example, in financial and insurance activities, as well as in the arts, entertainment, and recreation sector, men earn 35–37 % more than women. Male scientists and industrial workers earn a third more than their female counterparts. There is a small income gap for doctors, social workers (7 %), and officials (8 %). However, female teachers earn a slightly higher salary than male teachers, with a difference of only 2 thousand tenge or 1.6 % [3].

In general, the wage fund for different gender groups differs by 1.5 times. By the end of 2021, employers paid men 6.8 trillion tenge for their work, while women received 4.6 trillion tenge. The number of male and female workers differs only slightly: 4.5 million men compared to 4.2 million women [3].

Another trend in the Kazakhstani market is that the lower the qualification, the smaller the gender pay gap. The greatest difference is observed in the salaries of managers and civil servants – 30 %. The averaged data shows that in 2020, men in this group had an income of 449.6 thousand tenge, while women earned just over 312 thousand tenge. A similar gap is found when comparing the nominal salaries of men and women in industrial, construction, and transport workers (31 %) and professional specialists (27 %) [4].

With lower wages, the income growth dynamics for Kazakhstani women are higher. Comparative data over a five-year period show that the physical volume indexes of nominal wages for women for 2019–2020 were several units higher than for men (116–121 compared to 113–109) [4].

The majority of women in Kazakhstan work in «pink-collar» jobs – a term denoting positions predominantly held by women, often in the service industry or other low-paying sectors. For example, 70 % of workers in the education and healthcare sectors are women [4].

Unfortunately, the «coronavirus crisis» has set back all achievements in gender equality for years. According to a study by the UN and the World Bank, women entrepreneurs suffered more severe damage from the pandemic and were more affected than men: 64 % compared to 52 % [5].

The role of women in entrepreneurship is also significant. The number of registered individual entrepreneurs led by women increased by 9.1 % to 625.1 thousand by the end of 2021. Their share of the total number of individual entrepreneurs also increased from 47.4 % to 49 % in a year. Young women are active in entrepreneurship as well. The number of active individual entrepreneurs led by women under 29 years old increased by 37.2 % to 88.7 thousand in a year. The share of such entrepreneurs in the total number of active young entrepreneurs increased from 43.4 % to 46.4 % [6].

Statistics confirms the growth of the share of SMEs in the economy, the number of employed persons, the number of operating and newly registered SMEs. Thus, according to the data of the Ministry of National Economy of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the growth of SME share in the GDP of the Republic over 10 years amounted to 16 percentage points and reached 33.5 % in 2022. The number of employed persons increased by 35 % and amounted to 3.5 million people, of which 31 % or 1 million are women. The number of operating SMEs has increased by 44 % since 2012 and amounts to more than 1.4 million. 43.5 % of SMEs are headed by women [7].

There are several reasons explaining the uneven distribution of women and men across economic sectors. Many women choose more flexible types of work to balance work and family responsibilities. Gender stereotypes also influence professional self-determination and career development. Typically, only a small percentage of women have technical education and corresponding qualifications.

Looking at wage data regionally, in 2021, according to data from «Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan.», the median salary in Kazakhstan was 157,863 tenge. The net amount received by the employee is 129,277 tenge. However, in 12 regions of the country, average monthly salaries do not reach the national average level.

The highest salaries are traditionally received by residents of the oil-rich Atyrau region – 477.9 thousand tenge. This exceeds the national average by 89.2 %. The second-highest region in terms of salary is the city of Nur-Sultan, where residents earn an average of 391.4 thousand tenge, which is 61.2 % higher than the national average. The Mangystau region completes the top three leading regions in terms of salary, with 297.3 thousand tenge. Here, the average monthly salary exceeds the national average by 55.5 %. The top 5 regions in this indicator also include Almaty and the West Kazakhstan region: 222 thousand and 191.3 thousand tenge, respectively. The deviation from the national average in Almaty was 16.2 %, and in the West Kazakhstan region, it was 0.1 %. The lowest salaries are received by residents of the Turkestan (122.8 thousand tenge – 35.8 % below the national average), Zhambyl (127.8 thousand tenge – 33.1 % below), and Almaty (137.1 thousand tenge - 28.3 % below the national average) regions, as well as the North Kazakhstan region (137.6 thousand tenge) [3].

According to official statistics and independent sources, the highest-paying industry in Kazakhstan is the extractive industry. In 2019, there were 227.1 thousand men and 52.8 thousand women employed in this sector. The average salary in the mining industry is 482,252 tenge, in crude oil and gas extraction - 805,984 tenge, and in coal mining – 281,153 tenge [3].

It is essential to understand that Kazakhstani women also work a «second shift» when they take on the responsibility of performing unpaid domestic work. For example, the results of the modular survey «Time Use by the Population» conducted by the Committee on Statistics of the Ministry of National Economy, show that women spend an average of 4 hours and 20 minutes on unpaid (domestic) work – almost three hours more than men. Over the week, the difference amounts to 21 hours [8]. According to research by the International non-governmental organization ActionAid, analyzing 217 developed and developing countries, it was found that globally, women spend an average of 23 working years on unpaid work, assuming a life expectancy of 69 years [9].

Men in Kazakhstan are measurably more successful in building their careers than women. One contributing factor may be their potentially faster career growth. While indirect, the explanation is relatively straightforward. A greater number of men start working at an earlier age. Referring to domestic statistics, for example, the employment rate for young men aged 15-24 is 73 %, while the employment rate for young women of the same age is 61.2 % [3].

The combination of these factors indicates that women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan has its peculiarities, linked to cultural, economic, and political reasons. Kazakhstani women work intensively, earning less than men on average. They are more likely to work as employees and in the service sector. Kazakhstani women are less likely to become leaders and take on the primary responsibility for household chores. It is crucial to understand that there is also differentiation in the pay of Kazakhstani women themselves because the Kazakhstani economy has clear regional specificity. Currently, there is intensive growth in the representation of Kazakhstani female entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized businesses.

The data presented in this article are based on the analysis of secondary data, particularly on statistical information from the National Statistics Bureau of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan. These statistics are published in the form of statistical compilations, notes, and bulletins. Additionally, the article includes the results of a survey conducted from March to May 2023 among female students majoring in economic disciplines in ten universities in Kazakhstan.

Results and Discussion

In March 2023, a sociological survey was conducted to explore the willingness of Kazakhstani women to engage in entrepreneurship and the characteristics considered essential for women entrepreneurs. The survey targeted female students majoring in economics across ten universities in Kazakhstan. A total of 1,000 respondents, aged 18 to 25, were surveyed, representing 20 regions of Kazakhstan.

The survey results indicate that the majority of respondents expressed a desire to pursue entrepreneurship, with 55 % stating they plan to start their own businesses. Approximately 29.3 % of the students had not contemplated this prospect, while 15.7 % expressed no intention of engaging in business.

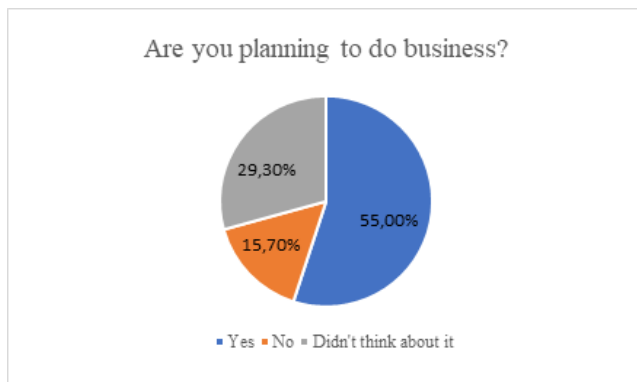


Figure 1 – Plans to do business

The overall distribution of opinions revealed that the majority of surveyed female students believe that Kazakhstani society approves of women engaging in business (62.9 %). Approximately 14.1 % chose the response «more yes» 12.4 % of respondents had not contemplated this question, while 6.7 % chose the response «more no» Only 4 % of respondents think that women engaging in business is disapproved in Kazakhstan.

Surveyed girls believe that both men and women in the Republic have equal conditions for conducting business (51.7 %). Approximately 13.2 % chose the response «more yes» 10.3 % selected «more no» and 10.3 % had not contemplated this question. The percentage of those who believe that there is gender inequality in the business sector in Kazakhstan is 10.2 %.

Regarding combining business and motherhood, the majority indicated that many businesswomen are also mothers, and it is possible to balance motherhood and business (21.1 %). Additionally, 20.3 % believe that motherhood and business are compatible with proper organization. Those who do not plan to get married make up 15 % of respondents. 11 % are hopeful for their husband's assistance. Those who do not plan to have a child in the near future constitute 10 % of respondents. Those who expect help from their mothers or mothers-in-law make up 6.9 %. Only 3.4 % plan to hire a nanny.

When asked about what attracts women to business, the ranking is as follows:

Independence – 48.1 %

Desire for success – 47.4 %

Ability to financially support loved ones – 46.9 %

High income – 37.8 %

Autonomy – 33.5 %

Interest in Business Sectors:

The top five economic sectors that interest women in business are:

Arts, entertainment, leisure – 57.9 %

Wholesale and retail trade – 53.7 %

Public administration and defense – 41.7 %

Educational services – 37.5 %

Cosmetology services – 34.8 %

Desired Monthly Business Income:

Responses to the question about the desired monthly income from business showed that the majority (30.8 %) would like to earn between 500,000 and 1 million tenge. Those who want to earn between 2 million and 5 million tenge make up 20.4 %. Respondents choosing «10 million tenge and above» constitute 16.8 %. Those aiming for an income between 4 million and 5 million tenge are 9.3 %. Earning less than 500,000 tenge would be satisfactory for 6.5 % of respondents. Those aspiring to earn between 6 million and 7 million tenge are 4.8 %. Respondents choosing «8 million to 9 million tenge» make up 3.2 %.

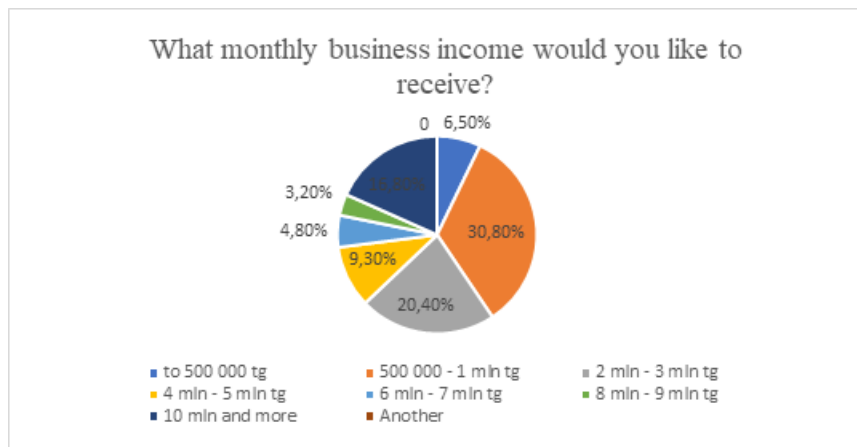


Figure 2 – Plans for receiving monthly income

When asked what qualities a woman entrepreneur should have, the top five included the following characteristics:

- 1 Strong character – 79.3 %,
- 2 Determination – 75 %,
- 3 Ability to find a common language – 48.8 %,
- 4 Activity – 46.2 %,
- 5 Persistence – 44.4 %.

Thus, the Kazakh girls surveyed see female entrepreneurs as independent, wanting to succeed, able to financially provide for loved ones who will create a business in such areas as art, entertainment, recreation, wholesale and retail trade, public administration, educational services or cosmetology services. At the same time, the monthly income of such a female entrepreneur will vary from 500,000 tenge. and up to 10 million tenge. and higher. To achieve these goals, she must have such characteristics as strong character, determination, the ability to find a common language, activity and perseverance. But the survey participants do not recognize the existence of gender inequality in doing business and entrepreneurship and believe that they will be able to successfully combine motherhood and entrepreneurship.

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Findings

It is important to note that every woman entrepreneur is unique and may have her own characteristics and characteristics. However, there are certain common properties that are characteristic of Kazakhstani women entrepreneurs.

Studies of women's entrepreneurship indicate that there is a double burden for women entrepreneurs: work and family [10]. At the same time, one of the advantages of entrepreneurial activity in comparison with women's wage labor is the possibility of using non-standard work schedules that reduce the problem of caring for children and elderly family members. Flexible hours and increased opportunities for housework provide a good balance between work, family life and financial needs [11].

Women's entrepreneurship in Kazakhstan is developing intensively. But Kazakh women, working intensively, earn less than men. Women more often organize businesses in traditionally «female» sectors of the economy - services,

sales, education. Kazakhstani entrepreneurs combine business and domestic work, believing that family, husband, children are more important than business. At this point in time, there is an intensive growth in the representation of Kazakhstani entrepreneurs in small and medium-sized businesses, which creates a double burden on women entrepreneurs.

During a questionnaire survey conducted as part of the project, we received data that Kazakh girls do not easily identify the presence of frameworks and restrictions related to gender. They do not believe that men and women in business are not equal, that they do not have equal starting opportunities, that there are both institutional restrictions on doing business (differences in income levels between men and women, low representation of women in leadership positions) and gender stereotypes that limit the scope of women's entrepreneurship. The majority of the study participants responded that they themselves decided to do business and that any economic niche was available to them. Future Kazakh entrepreneurs are ready to combine business activities and motherhood. They believe that such a combination is quite organic, mandatory for a woman, and family is a higher priority than business. Most of the respondents we surveyed plan to do business, but there are also at least a third of girls who have not yet thought about the prospects of business activity. What girls are most attracted to in business is independence, the desire to succeed, the ability to financially provide for loved ones, high incomes and independence. This indicates an orientation toward typical masculine qualities in business.

The businesses that are most interesting to girls are art, entertainment, recreation, wholesale and retail trade, public administration and defense, educational services, and cosmetology services. But the business niches chosen by girls are traditional and, as a rule, not highly profitable.

The results of the survey showed that respondents are focused on receiving monthly income from business in the amount of 500,000 to 10 million tenge. When asked what qualities a woman entrepreneur should have, respondents indicated the following: strong character, determination, ability to find a common language, activity and perseverance. The business qualities indicated by the survey participants in the questionnaire are also close to traditional male ones.

In general, structuring the features of the development of women's entrepreneurial activity, allows us to form a socio-economic portrait of women entrepreneurs, which in turn will contribute to the strengthening of competitive advantages in the creation of business structures, which will solve a number of regional problems to reduce unemployment and increase socio-economic protection and use of resource potential of women.

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ҚАЗАҚСТАН ЭКОНОМИКАСЫНДАҒЫ ӘЙЕЛДЕР БИЗНЕСІНІҢ БАСЫМДЫҚТАРЫ: ЕҢБЕК НАРЫҒЫНДАҒЫ ГЕНДЕРЛІК АСПЕКТІЛЕР

Бұл мақалада авторлар әйелдер кәсіпкерлігінің ерекшеліктерін қазіргі әлемде қарқын алып келе жатқан жеке құбылыс ретінде талдайды. Әйелдер өзін-өзі жүзеге асыруға және экономикалық тәуелсіздікке ұмтылуда, ал кәсіпкерлік осы мақсаттарға жетудің стратегияларының біріне айналууда.

Мақаланың мақсаты Қазақстандағы әйелдер еңбегінің негізгі сипаттамаларын талдау болып табылады. Мақсатты іске асырудың әдістемелік құралы қазақстандық еңбек нарығындағы әйелдердің өкілдігін, әйелдер мен ерлер табыс деңгейін, басымы әйелдер мен кәсіпкер әйелдердің санын, еңбектің өңірлік ерекшелігін сипаттайтын гендерлік статистикалық деректер болып табылады. Талдаудың қосымша әдісі ретінде Қазақстанның жоғары оқу орындарының

экономикалық мамандықтары студенттерінің сауалнамалық нәтижелерін қарастыру ұсынылды, және қыздардың кәсіпкерлікке дайындық деңгейін көрсетті.

Сонымен, сауалнама барысында қазақстандық қыздар еңбек нарығында да, бизнесте де гендерлік теңсіздіктің бар екенін түсінбейтін деректер алынды. Олар тең бастапқы мүмкіндіктердің жоқтығын, бизнесті жүргізуге институционалдық шектеулердің, республикадағы әйелдер кәсіпкерлігінің ауқымын шектейтін гендерлік стереотиптердің болуын ескермейді. Сауалнамаға қатысқан қыздар бизнес-қызмет пен үй еңбегін біріктіруге дайын екенін атап өткен жөн. Олар мұндай үйлесімділік өте органикалық және қазақстандық әйел үшін міндетті деп санайды және отбасы бизнеске қарағанда басымдыққа ие болуы керек.

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Кілтті сөздер: кәсіпкер әйелдер, жалақы теңсіздігі, басшы әйел, екінші ауысым, табыс деңгейі, ана болу.

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ПРИОРИТЕТЫ ЖЕНСКОГО БИЗНЕСА В ЭКОНОМИКЕ КАЗАХСТАНА: ГЕНДЕРНЫЕ АСПЕКТЫ НА РЫНКЕ ТРУДА

В данной статье авторы анализируют специфику женского предпринимательства как отдельного феномена, который набирает обороты в современном мире. Женщины всё больше стремятся к самореализации и экономической независимости, и предпринимательство становится одной из стратегий достижения этих целей.

Целью данной статьи является анализ основных характеристик женского труда в Казахстане. Методическим инструментом реализации цели выступают гендерные статистические данные, описывающие представленность женщин на казахстанском рынке труда, уровень доходов женщин и мужчин, количество женщин-руководительниц и женщин-предпринимательниц, региональную специфику труда. В качестве дополнительного метода анализа предложено рассмотреть результаты анкетного опроса студенток экономических специальностей вузов Казахстана, которые показали уровень подготовленности девушек к предпринимательству. Так, в ходе опроса были получены данные, которые демонстрируют то, что казахстанские девушки не осознают наличие гендерного неравенства как на рынке труда, так и в бизнесе. Они не учитывают отсутствие равных стартовых возможностей, наличие институциональных ограничений на ведение бизнеса, гендерных стереотипов, которые ограничивают масштабы женского предпринимательства в республике. Особо важно отметить, что опрошенные девушки готовы совмещать бизнес-деятельность и домашний труд. Они считают, что такое совмещение вполне органично и обязательно для казахстанской женщины и семья должна находиться в большем приоритете, чем бизнес.

**Статья выполнена в рамках проекта: Гранта № AP14871920.*

Ключевые слова: женщины-предпринимательницы, неравенство в оплате труда, женщину-руководительницу, вторая смена, уровень доходов, материнство.

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