

SOCIO ECONOMIC EMPOWEREMENT PROGRAMME COMMUNITY MEETINGS' ASSESSMENT REPORT

COMMUNITY BASED MIGRATION PROGRAMME

TÜRKİYE, JUNE 2022

SOCIO ECONOMIC EMPOWEREMENT PROGRAMME COMMUNITY MEETINGS' ASSESSMENT REPORT ISSUE-1

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COMMUNITY BASED MIGRATION PROGRAMME COORDINATORSHIP

TÜRKİYE, JUNE 2022

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ABBREVIATIONS

CBMP Community Based Migration Programme Coordinatorship

CC Community Center

ESSN Emergency Social Safety Net

SEEP Socio-Economic Empowerment Programme

SEE Socio-Economic Empowerment

TRCS Turkish Red Crescent Society

1. Purpose

Community meetings were held in 16 Community Centers (CCs) of The Turkish Red Crescent Society (TRCS) in order to ensure that the activities carried out within the scope of socio-economic empowerment (SEE) became known by both refugee and local communities and to proactively collect and respond to community feedback, including answering questions, listening to concerns, suggestions for improvement. In this report, the questions raised by the communities during the meetings will be evaluated and directed to the communication, community engagement and accountability, SEE and relevant program team members. Additionally, the feedback and suggestions will be brought to the attention of the relevant program staff and decision-makers in order to shape the programs accordingly.

2. Methodology

The community meetings have been conducted face-to-face with refugees and local community members in 16 TRCS Community Center locations between 27 January and 30 April 2022. A total of 316 individuals attended to the meetings from different gender, nationality, and age range. These people were selected among the Community Center beneficiaries who voluntarily participated in the study..

During the meetings, SEE activities of TRCS was introduced, SEE sector market analysis report was presented, and a set of guiding questions directed to gather questions, feedback and suggestions of the communities. KoBo Toolbox - a free open-source tool for mobile data collection - has been used to collect data to record the answers. The questions used to guide the meetings are as follows:

- What are your questions about the activities carried out in the community center for SEE?
- What is your feedback on SEE activities carried out in the community center?
- Are SEE activities carried out at the community center oriented to your needs?
- What are your suggestions for the development of SEE activities?
- Would you like to provide any other feedback?

3. Key Findings

TRCS Community Based Migration Programme Coordinatorship (CBMP) with the support of IFRC and other donors provides livelihoods supports to vulnerable migrants and host community in Türkiye. Within Socio-Economic Empowerment Programme (SEEP) activities under CBMP, TRCS provide support to communities through profiling, job and vocational consultancy for employers and employees, Turkish language trainings, Business and vocational trainings, employment-oriented vocational trainings, production-oriented vocational trainings, soft skills trainings, work permit consultancy and payment of work permit fees, home-based production in-kind supports, digital marketing trainings, creation of product sales channels, entrepreneurship trainings and mentorship supports, entrepreneurship in-kind supports and agricultural and husbandry programs.

The findings of the community meetings are selected and will be presented based on the most frequent and relatable contents mentioned during the meetings. Accordingly, the categories are as below:

Access to legal rights and services

- Work permit process
- Social security and health insurance
- Emergency Social Safety Net (ESSN)
- Vocational high schools
- Access to higher education

Employment creation

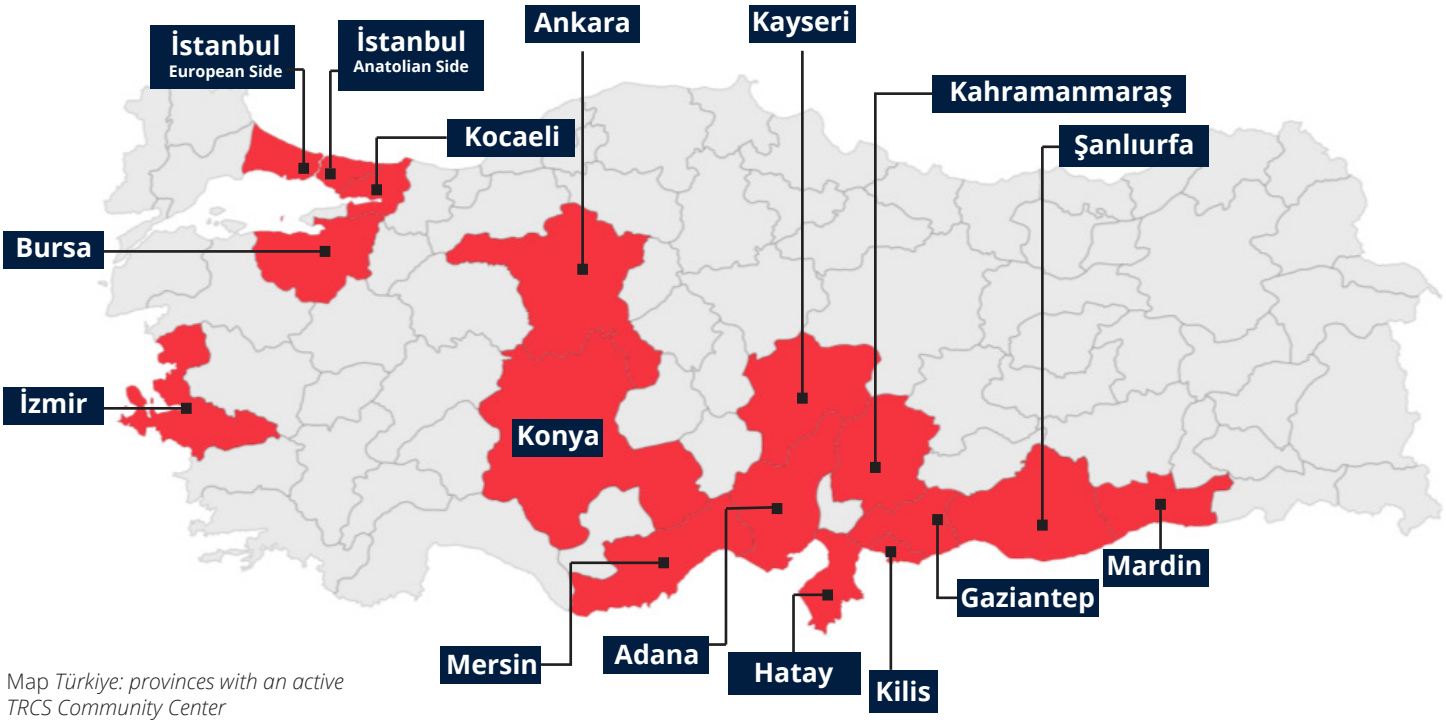
- Home-based production
- Entrepreneurship
- Product sales opportunities and sales channels
- Turkish language skill training
- Vocational skill training

Access to information on TRCS activities and information dissemination

Social cohesion

Other community center activities

Coordination and cooperation with stakeholders



Map *Türkiye: provinces with an active TRCS Community Center*



3.1. Access to Legal Rights and Services

During the meetings, **work permit process** was one of the most emphasized issues by the meeting participants. The participants in Adana, Gaziantep, Hatay, Istanbul (European side), Kahramanmaraş, Kayseri, Kocaeli, and Mersin raised their questions related to their information needs on work permit applications. Accordingly, one of the main inquires around obtaining work permits is the application procedures such as the documents required for application and information of institutions providing support for work permit applications including work permit fees. It is also important to note that some of the participants have less information about the validity period of work permits and how it effects their **ESSN** status. Some participants would like to have more information if they could apply for a work permit to work in a city other than their city of registration. The participants were also curious about cancellation procedures of issued work permits/work permit applications for foreign employees. While a few numbers of participants requested information related to their rights to work and benefits (such as social security rights) of obtaining a work permit, some of them asked whether they could work in Türkiye without obtaining the necessary work permit. A question came to the fore regarding job opportunities especially for the elderly in Kahramanmaraş.

> **"How do I apply for a work permit, which documents are required and which institutions are authorized to issue a work permit?"** – Community Meeting Participant, Hatay

Overall, the participants give positive feedback regarding the work permit application support including fees and guidance provided by TRCS community centers. Accordingly, some participants expressed the importance of the continuity of the support for processing work permits. Some of the applicants stated that there are companies providing consultancy on work permits and the consultancy costs are high, therefore getting this service from TRCS free of charge is very important to keep their limited income for themselves. The continuity of the work permit counselling service seems to be encouraging for migrant communities to be engaged in formal employment.

Furthermore, even though the issue is related to the competent authority, it is worth to note that waiting period can be challenging as the issuance of work permits can take a long while. According to the participants, another barrier regarding formal employment and work permits is having ESSN receiving family members in the household.

A few numbers of participants recommended a support to be provided for small-scale businesses at the point of payment of **insurance** debts.

> **"Services on work permits a great need, employees and employers are unaware of this issue."** – Community Meeting Participant, Izmir

A Syrian teacher working in a **vocational high school** stated that students are not able to generate income through workplaces they do their internship and cannot find a job after graduation. Due to this, financial means are insufficient for most of the students who take care of their families. The participants also noted that more exploration should be done to support the vocational schools/industrial training institutes to promote the graduates for being hired as semi-skilled technical workers.

Although it is not directly related to access to the labour market, refugee participants in Kahramanmaraş raised their concerns on accessing **higher education**. They asked if TRCS would support for tuition fee, books, materials and other education related expenditures; any counselling services is provided regarding university preferences. Additionally, the applicants asked whether foreign students had to take any central exam in order to get involved in higher education.

3.2. Employment creation

Questions around employment creation mainly concentrated on **home-based production** support provided by TRCS community centers within different projects through the IFRC and other donors. While home-based production support is planned to be provided by TRCS through the IFRC funded Migration Project for this year, the participants asked how they can apply for home-based production support as well as the **entrepreneurship** support and requested more details about the selection criteria.

It is important to note that the participants requested additional financial and in-kind assistance to maintain profitable home-based production. From the statements of some participants, it is revealed that there may be a confusion regarding home-based production support. For example, participants who previously received home-based production support in Adana expect additional assistance to buy raw materials.

Ultimately, participants are quite interested in home-based production support and entrepreneurship support programs, and they find these programs to be need oriented. Participants emphasized that home-based production is more suitable for them as it enables them to contribute to household income while taking care of their children.

In Mardin, the meeting participants asked whether the number of households supported for home-based production could be increased. A participant from İzmir drew attention to the importance of home-based production support for people with disabilities. Several participants in Konya stated that tailoring vocational training is especially demanded regarding home-based production as Konya CC is the only institution providing both home-based production and equipment support for tailoring. As per the entrepreneurship program, several participants from Mardin community meeting suggested a set-up which would allow the vocational training attendees to be employed by the beneficiaries who already created their own business through the support of TRCS can be established.

> **"I have benefited from the entrepreneurship support provided by the Community Center, I am currently working actively in my business, the entrepreneurship support has been very useful for me, I want this service to continue and people like me who have projects in the field of entrepreneurship to be supported"** – Community Meeting Participant, Mersin

In relation to home-based production, the need for face-to-face sales opportunities stood out as one of the points addressed by the participants during the meetings. Accordingly, the questions, feedback and suggestions of the participants were concentrated on finding or creating face-to-face **sales channels** in addition to online sales. As per the statements of the meeting participants in Izmir, beneficiaries who are engaged in home-based production are facing difficulties to sale their products online even though they created accounts in respective online platforms. For this reason, they expressed their need for areas that would allow them to make hot sales such as sales stands, fairs and district markets (semt pazarı). Likewise, while there were participants who stated that the need of suitable places to sell their products in Hatay, there were those who wanted to get information about the procedureshould be followed in order to sell their products in the district markets in Istanbul (Anatolian side). Participants in Istanbul also suggested the creation of sales channels especially for women producers. According to the notes from the meeting in Kocaeli CC, some participants wonder if TRCS would support them to find sales channels for home-based products.

Home-based production support and entrepreneurship support are found essential by the communities in terms of promoting women's engagement in the labour market. Overall, participants recommended that home-based production support to be expanded into more areas in a way that allows the creation of new marketplaces. In Mardin, meeting participants suggested a marketplace to be established for women to sell their own products. Participants in Mardin also requested more entrepreneurship support to be provided specifically for women in line with their professions. Similarly, in Izmir, a few participants came up with forming collective production and sales spaces for women producers.

On the other hand, participants are still willing to improve their digital marketing skills. In this sense, the participants in Şanlıurfa offered a comprehensive training to be carried out on digital marketing. Community meeting participants in Ankara provided feedback on the importance of digitalization and creating product sales channels. In addition, it has been suggested to create sales channels by contacting the municipalities, or by collaborating with companies through the establishment of a workshop in Ankara. As part of the discussions during the meeting held in Kayseri CC, the participants requested sales areas to sell agricultural products.

> **"In-kind aids given to beneficiaries should be auditable in order to support guidance to employment and efforts should be carried out to limit the aid received by the same beneficiaries from different institutions."** – Community Meeting Participant, Kayseri



Photo from:

İZMİR- Community Meetings

During the community meetings, a great number of questions, feedback and suggestions were received on **vocational trainings** from all 16 CCs, and it was the most mentioned issue during the meetings. The questions and feedback were primarily about the selection criteria, profile of the attendees, durations, stipends, course types, location, and hours of the vocational courses. The majority of the participants requested information about the profile of people who can apply to the courses. They asked whether migrants (Temporary Protection and International Protection holders) and residence permit holders could apply if there is an age limit and the details of the profiles. In addition to that, other details regarding the selection criteria for the courses were also asked. Moreover, course stipends given to the course attendees were asked by many participants mentioning that the stipends are very important to contribute making their living while attending the vocational trainins. Some participants said improvements in course stipends would increase their attendance at courses. Another factor affecting the course attendance appears to be the locations of vocational trainings. According to the participants, cultural beliefs and travel expenses may limit their commuting distance. Therefore, they believe there will be more people attending the courses if community center activities take place in the neighbourhoods where the majority of potential beneficiaries reside.

> **"What happens if I attend a course and drop out of it? Would you support me if I work in another job? Will you continue to support me about insurance and work permit?-"** – Community Meeting Participant, Kocaeli

Participants also requested flexible hours for courses so they would be able to attend the courses in the evening after work. Along with the evaluations regarding course hours, the participants emphasized that they would prefer the number of vocational trainings to be increased and designed for longer periods for different qualification levels. In addition to payments made to participants attending vocational trainings, the participants raised questions regarding the opportunities (such as certification, employment guarantee and guidance to employment) they would have after attending the trainings.

Some participants were interested in knowing more about the variety of courses given in the CCs of TRCS and specifically asked whether there would be food production (Kahramanmaraş), culinary (Ankara, Kahramanmaraş), hairdressing (Mersin, Kahramanmaraş), decoration, handcraft (Şanlıurfa) and hobby courses (Bursa) soon. Although the vocational trainings organized by TRCS community centers are opened according to the market analysis conducted at provincial level, it is important to note the areas of interests for vocational skills development pointed out by participants. In Ankara, the meeting participants requested vocational trainings on tailoring, ironing, and sewing to gain or improve skills. In Izmir, the participants asked for support provided related to agriculture and husbandry.

While some participants said vocational trainings are quite beneficial for providing employment opportunities, others recommended the number of courses to be increased. In addition, the participants suggested that more activities should be organized for women in CCs of TRCS. In this respect, considerable amount of feedback was collected regarding the impact of vocational trainings on women participant's daily life. Accordingly, the participants stated that courses help women to socialize, improve their psychosocial well-being and meet their household needs. In terms of course hours, the participants stressed that half-day courses enable them to plan their daily lives more effectively. Moreover, since they have family members to be taken care of, women are more likely to benefit from employment opportunities that offer the option of working part-time, home-based production or being paid on a piecework basis. In parallel with, participants also expect the courses to continue to be of a quality that will support women's employment and allow home-based production. For women who already participated in labour market or have the potential to, existence of safe spaces such as day care centers are essential needs according to the discussions made during the community meeting held in Mardin.

> **"It is an advantage for us that this is a reliable place in terms vocational trainings and product sales."** – Community Meeting Participant, Ankara



Photo from:

KİLİS- Community Meeting

Several participants had questions and suggestions that could help improve the course content during the community meetings. In Ankara, participants with higher education diplomas wanted to know if they could contribute to the courses voluntarily. On the other hand, participants in Şanlıurfa suggested inclusion of beneficiaries who have benefited and succeeded from prior vocational trainings within the scope of the socio-economic empowerment programme as role models in current or future courses.

Specifically, the participants in Mardin highlighted vocational courses on agriculture helped them to improve their skills as they used to live in rural areas and engaged in agriculture prior to their arrival at Türkiye. Participants from the community meeting in Ankara stated that CCs of TRCS are reliable places both in terms of vocational trainings and finding product sales opportunities.

Regarding the evaluations of the meeting participants, it is possible to say that vocational trainings generally have positive effects for the beneficiaries in terms of economic, social and psychological aspects.

Turkish language courses were another topic discussed throughout the community meetings in Adana, Ankara, Hatay, Istanbul (Anatolian and European Side), Izmir, Kahramanmaraş Kilis, Konya, and Mersin CCs of TRCS. Participants in Adana and Konya stated that they have been waiting Turkish language courses to be opened for a very long time. Participants in Konya raised specific questions about the hours of Turkish language courses and whether the courses can be scheduled in the evening or at the weekend. Especially in Konya, the participants prefer to attend Turkish language courses arranged by Konya CC due to positive approach of the trainers. Participants in different provinces such as Ankara, Kahramanmaraş, Konya, Mersin, Istanbul (both CCs) expressed their eagerness for the continuity of Turkish courses at frequent intervals and requested language courses in advanced levels.

3.3. Access to information on TRCS activities and information dissemination

Another issue raised at the community meetings was access to information on TRCS activities. The questions, feedback and suggestions of the participants revealed that they may need more guidance on where and how to get information about the activities of TRCS community centers. In this regard, a few participants asked how they could follow respective social media accounts of TRCS. Feedback and suggestions provided by the participants have common points in terms of information shared with the communities regarding activities carried out in community centers. The participants from Bursa, Hatay, Ankara and Kayseri stressed that information about the socio-economic empowerment program activities should be publicized more among the communities. On the other hand, they requested to receive comprehensive information not only about activities related to livelihoods but also about other program activities of community centers.

> **"We had some information, but we did not know the details of your work. We realized that very good and useful work has been done"**
> – Community Meeting Participant, Kayseri

Information regarding community center activities is disseminated through various channels such as social media (social media accounts of CCs, WhatsApp groups), print materials (posters, leaflets, etc.), stakeholder networks, existing social circles of beneficiaries, and the consultancy provided by the relevant community center staff or volunteers. Community meetings are also effective channels to engage with community members in terms of providing detailed information on the work of TRCS community centers. However, the point to be considered is whether the communities are aware of the active communication channels.

Based on the evaluations of the community meeting participants, few key points regarding the dissemination of information on community center activities can be mentioned. According to the questions, feedback, and suggestions received from the participants regarding the course announcements, beneficiaries do not know where to find information about vocational trainings opened in TRCS CCs. While a few participants suggested that information regarding vocational trainings could be announced through various communication channels, some offered sending bulk messages to beneficiaries about the recent vocational trainings. In addition, participants showed their interest in contributing information dissemination by requesting details on what to pay attention to while making announcements to their networks about course attendance.

According to a note from the community meeting in Izmir CC, most efficient communication channels used to reach out local community was asked. In this regard, options such as creating a WhatsApp group for the beneficiaries residing in the neighbourhood where Izmir CC is located in order to ensure the participation of the local people in the activities, effective use of the TRCS community centers' social media account in order to increase the recognition by the local people, making more clear announcements regarding the activities and hanging a billboard in the CC were discussed.

Lastly, an issue worth special mention was raised during the meeting held in Istanbul Anatolian side; a group of participants who applied for home-based production support in 2020 could not receive respective support even though they attended the vocational training. Both statements highlight the necessity to inform communities more clearly about home-based production supports to avoid false expectations and misunderstandings.



Photo from:

KOCAELİ- Community Meeting

3.4. Social Cohesion

The issue of social cohesion was discussed during community meetings in Kayseri, İzmir, İstanbul (Anatolian side) and Ankara. Even though the activities regarding social cohesion are arranged under different programs, there are few important points worth mentioning based on the participants' statements.

Social cohesion issues have been one of the topics that participants were mentioning in İzmir meeting. Correspondingly, the participants expressed their discomfort regarding the local communities' approach to migrants. As per their statements, the local community calls the neighbourhood where Izmir CC and Migrant Health Center is located "the Syrian part" of the region. In addition, the participants believe that the migrant community is seen unorganised within their own community by some part of the society. These eventually cause social dissolution rather than a conflict. Participants also pointed out high unemployment rates as a factor causing social tension. According to this, the participants indicated that as qualified unemployed population is increased, community can be biased against foreigners and because of this; their family could be at risk of being more vulnerable. As was mentioned above, to be known by the local community appeared as an essential point during the discussions in İzmir CC. In parallel with, the participants addressed that local communities tend to perceive community centers as places where, only migrants can benefit from services. Participants also added that written materials in Arabic used for informational purposes reinforces this misperception of the local community about the community centers.

In the meeting held in Istanbul and Ankara, it was suggested to introduce role models that will set an example in overcoming the misconceptions and attitudes towards Syrians in society. It has also been emphasized that the existence of the migrant community in different areas of the cities instead of residing in certain regions can also be an important factor in terms of social cohesion. In Kayseri, the participants suggested sport events to be arranged by the community center.

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3.5. Other Community Center Activities

In addition to contents mentioned above, the participants asked questions on other activities carried out by CCs of TRCS. In Istanbul Anatolian side and Ankara, the participants asked questions on soft skills trainings (attendance criteria and opening dates). In Ankara, the participants requested training for budgeting and home economics. In Konya, the participants asked if there are sign language and first aid courses arranged by the community center. The meeting participants from Istanbul European side emphasized that they need core relief items and food parcels the most.

The participants in Kayseri underlined the importance of access to activity locations. They stated that some beneficiaries face difficulties accessing services provided under socio-economic empowerment programme as activity locations may be far from the city center.

As per the statements of the meeting participants in Kilis, existing financial problems prevents protection, psychosocial support and social cohesion activities to be effective.

> **"The activities are very favourable and sufficient. We also want to participate in these activities. At the same time, we will direct the people around us to these activities."** – Community Meeting Participant, Şanlıurfa

3.6. Coordination and cooperation with stakeholders

Relationships with stakeholders have an important place within the scope of socio-economic empowerment programme activities. Therefore, contributions of the community regarding this issue are also considered in this report based on their questions, feedback, and suggestions during the meetings. The questions raised by the participants about sales channels in the above sections are also closely related to TRCS' existing cooperation with municipalities and other actors. For instance, Istanbul European side CC is in contact with municipality and other institutions to establish sales channels. In this aspect, cooperation with Tuzla Municipality *Gönül Elleri Carsisi* and *Pembe Tezgahlar* project to engage women in labour market are attempts that have been already made by TRCS Istanbul European side CC. Participants attended the meeting in European side CC also asked the advantages of building such collaborations and suggested that some activities such as vocational courses could be carried out jointly with other institutions, NGOs, and foundations.

Among other meetings in different community centers, participants in Izmir expressed their expectations regarding closer cooperation with mukhtar of the neighbourhood where Izmir CC is located (Kahramanlar Mahallesi). Cooperation and collaboration need with local stakeholders were also discussed based on the feedback of meeting participants in Izmir and Hatay. Finally, in Kayseri, participants suggested reaching more people and raising awareness. Accordingly, it was agreed that more beneficiaries could be reached through community meetings and advisory committees where coordination among NGOs could be ensured.

4. Recommendations

Based on the outcome received from above mentioned community meetings, several recommendations can be listed as follows:

- Considering the interest of the participants regarding home-based production support, continue sharing the details of the respective activity with the identified beneficiaries.
- Continuing promoting access of women to economic resources through self-sufficient mechanisms and specific socio economic empowerment activities.
- Analysing the local opportunities to create sales channels or to discover different areas to focus on for vocational trainings on a regular basis.
- Considering making rearrangements regarding course types, contents, stipends, durations, frequencies and locations in order to ensure that the vocational trainings are tailored to the needs of more beneficiaries.
- Planning Turkish language courses in line with the structure of ongoing projects.
- Ensuring that the beneficiaries are aware of where to find information related to socio-economic programme activities.
- Disseminating accurate information regarding socio-economic empowerment programme activities with beneficiaries at regular intervals and using appropriate communication channels/methods.
- Initiating and maintaining efforts to encourage social cohesion.
- Building and maintaining closer relationship with the local stakeholders to provide employment/business opportunities for the beneficiaries.

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