

# RIVNE LOCATION PROFILE

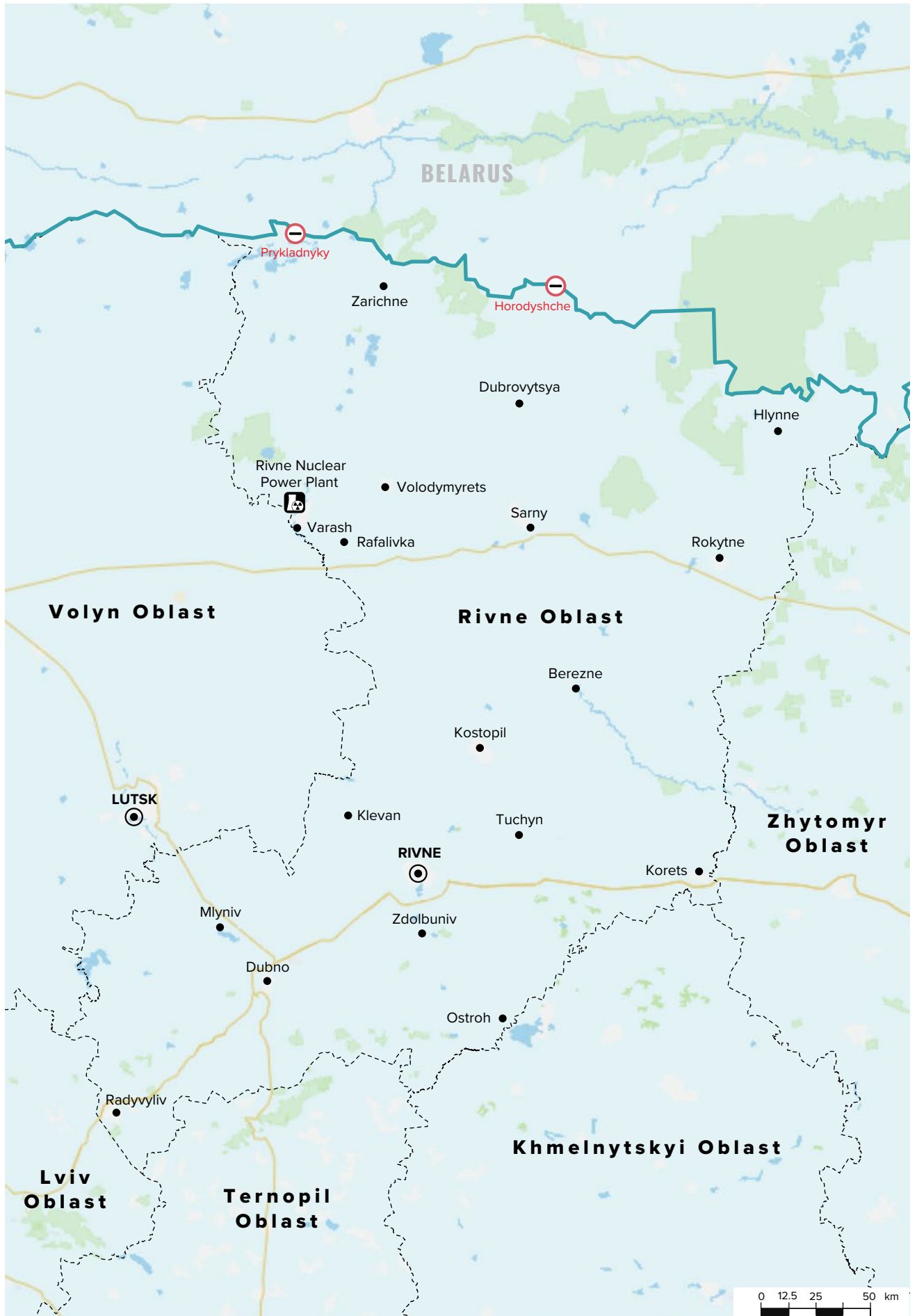
20 DECEMBER 2022



*Rivne, Swan Lake Park in spring, Anna Pavlushenko*

# Rivne Oblast

-  OBLAST CAPITAL
-  NOTABLE SETTLEMENT
-  BORDER CROSSING
-  INTERNATIONAL BORDER
-  OBLAST BORDER



RIVNE LOCATION PROFILE 20 DECEMBER 2022

Sources: <https://maps.google.com/>; [data.humdata.org](https://data.humdata.org)

# Rivne City

-  EDUCATIONAL FACILITY
-  GOVERNMENT BUILDING
-  MILITARY FACILITY
-  UTILITY COMPANY
-  HROMADAS (MUNICIPALITIES)
-  HIGHWAY



Though normally a relatively quiet region, critical infrastructure points in Rivne oblast have come under fire **since mid-Oct**, with **power, heat and water provision affected across the region**. Economic issues, such as sharp inflation and widespread unemployment, contribute to hardship for locals and the region's large IDP population as well. Rumors of **possible ground incursions** from Belarus, as well as recent raids on Ukrainian Orthodox **churches from the Moscow patriarchy**, have locals on edge regarding internal and external threats. Aid providers should prioritize **energy-related support (providing generators, repairing damaged buildings and infrastructure, etc), economic assistance, and supporting the region's IDPs**.

## Geography and Background

**Rivne oblast** lies in Ukraine's northwest, with a pre-invasion population of **1,141,784**. It shares a border with Ukraine's **Zhytomyr oblast** to the east, **Khmelnyskyi oblast** to the southeast, **Ternopil oblast** to the south, **Lviv oblast** to the southwest, **Volyn oblast** to the west and Belarus' **Brest** and **Gomel oblasts** to the north. The oblast capital is **Rivne**, (pre-invasion pop. **243,873**), located on the Ustya river just north of Basiv Kut lake. The Horyn river, which flows from north to south, is the region's main tributary. Other major urban centers include **Varash**, **Dubno**, **Kostopil**, **Sarny**, **Zdolbuniv** and **Ostroh**. Rivne is a major stop on the Kyiv-Lviv highway, and the Kyiv-Warsaw railway line passes through Sarny. Rivne oblast's border with Belarus makes the region's northern districts particularly vulnerable to air strikes, though much of the area is heavily forested and may prove an obstacle to potential ground incursions from the north. Most of the population lives in rural areas, and agriculture provides for a large portion of the economy. A major employer in Rivne is the **Rivne-Azot** chemical plant, and the region is rich in resources like amber and basalt, the former of which sometimes fuels **criminal activity**.

### Status of conflict and related damage

Rivne oblast, like other western Ukrainian regions, has suffered significantly less damage from the invasion than oblasts in the south and east. The region was struck on the first day of the invasion, with two Russian missiles **damaging** the oblast center's military airports. Irregular attacks destroyed a regional military facility on **21 March** and an oil depot on **28 March**. The deadliest attack in the spring occurred on 14 March, where Russian missiles **struck** a TV tower in **Antopil**, a village 10km outside Rivne, claiming 20 lives in one of the deadliest attacks on western Ukraine at that time. The region came under regular fire once more starting in October, when regular Russian strikes targeted energy-related infrastructure nation-wide. The most significant attack was on **22 Oct**, where electrical infrastructure was **severely damaged** along with **nine homes**, though **no casualties** were reported. The strike **led** to **frequent power outages across the region, depowering the oblast capital's trolleybus network, halting both in-person and online schooling for a week and forcing a partial shutdown at the Rivne Azot chemical plant**. The physical network was **repaired** on 23 Oct, but regular power was only restored in **medical facilities**, with rolling outages continuing across the oblast. Strain on the network led to a **25 Oct** accident at a Rivne substation, leaving much of the city without power entirely, though most users were reconnected to the grid by **26 Oct** and the network was stabilized by **29 Oct**. Further strikes on **15 Nov** left parts of the city without power, but **no total outages have occurred since 22 Oct**. Key informants report that local authorities are swift and effective when repairing damage caused by strikes – for example, residents of the nine homes damaged on 22 Oct had their windows and doors repaired in short order. A local source says that power after the mid-Nov strikes remained erratic until 20 Nov, when shutoffs began to coincide with announced schedules. By early December, some residents said that lights sometimes stayed on even during times scheduled for power outages. **Rivne's Pivnichnyi neighborhood suffers the most energy interruptions**; energy officials **state** that this is due to the area's lack of critical infrastructure facilities. None of the respondents interviewed for this location profile reported issues with gas supply, but some stated that water supply is sometimes curtailed during power outages, and that heat provision is especially chaotic. One respondent in Sarny district said that outages in their area are not nearly as long or unpredictable as in the oblast capital. The region's first Invincibility Point **opened** in Rivne city on 7 Dec, though a key informant says that some of these sites are under-equipped: "I've personally visited about 4-5 points in Rivne, **some don't have enough power sockets, others don't have the internet they advertise**. The best Invincibility Points are attached to some infrastructure facility, are indoors, have heat and water access and are rarely disconnected from the grid." Strikes continued harassing the region into mid-December.

# Needs and Challenges

## Key challenges

Major challenges facing Rivne residents include: a) **unstable electricity supply**, especially following Russian strikes on the region, b) **sporadic heating and/or water outages**, particularly in the oblast capital and c) **rising inflation and unemployment**, both of which impact locals' ability to meet their basic needs. Key informants also note a dip in public morale, especially with regards to **potential ground incursions from Belarus**.

## Security

Rivne oblast has suffered few civilian casualties compared to other Ukrainian regions, though ongoing strikes on critical infrastructure continues to endanger the local population, and at least one resident has been **arrested** for allegedly serving as a Russian spotter. Recent **troop movements and military inspections in Belarus continue to fuel anxieties about a possible invasion** from the north. Ukraine has begun **placing mines** and building a **concrete wall** along the border, with the former leading to the **destruction** of a tractor (used for illegal timber logging) in the region's north. Other recent, high-profile threats to public safety include bomb warnings at a **railway station** and a **shopping mall**, as well as an **incident** in November when a man threw a grenade at a playground, which injured four civilians, including one child. A key informant suggests that the latter case may indicate **problems stemming from weapons proliferation throughout the country**. The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) began raiding Ukrainian Orthodox churches connected to the **Moscow Patriarchate**, with two notable instances on **22 Nov** and **2 Dec**. Security personnel claim that **some** Moscow Patriarchate-aligned priests justify the Russian annexation of Crimea, question Ukrainian statehood and distribute propaganda promoting "**Russian World**" ideology. Russian passports, pro-Kremlin literature and large amounts of cash (millions of hryvnia) have been **found** in these churches, though SBU press releases have leaned into the sensational with **descriptions** of "satanist" and "fascist" materials discovered on-site. Ukrainian authorities have announced that priests can be **exchanged** for Ukrainian POWs. Public statements framing Ukrainian Orthodox institutions from the Moscow Patriarch as possible security threats **are likely to create grievances among the faith community** and may generate barriers to eventual social cohesion.

## Commodity availability

Though inflation may make it harder for residents to meet their basic needs, there are no shortages of food, medication and hygiene products in Rivne oblast. What's more, local farmers receive **support** from international partners. Gasoline is also easy to procure except in the first day or two following major strikes; locals are apt to stock up immediately, leading to long queues and shortages. A key informant reports that generators and boilers are often too expensive to purchase for many locals, who then instead buy used or home-made heaters, often made in rural areas. Items like **power banks, solar panels, flashlights, gas burners, candles and tents** (which local sources say are used in some homes to offset the cold) have all risen in price and can be hard to find in stores; aid providers should prioritize the delivery of such items during the winter months.

## Livelihoods and personal funds

Local sources say that residents have no issues accessing cash in the city except during blackouts, when most banking infrastructure is offline and working ATMs often have long lines. A major employer in the city is the **Rivne Azot** chemical factory, which experienced a **partial shutdown** last month due to power outages. Per key informants, other war-affected sectors include illegal logging operations in the region's forests, which can turn **destructive** when desperate locals work in the mined woodlands in the oblast north near Belarus, and long-distance trucking, which was a key source of income for many Rivne men who are now unable to leave the country due to exit restrictions on the border. International companies continue to open **new branches** in the region, likely due to its reputation as a relatively safe haven. One local source claims that **IDPs are prioritized at regional employment centers**, though open vacancies are limited to a few professions such as seamstresses, electricians, cargo loaders and

salespersons. That said, the same source says that **a relative with IDP status was denied a job from a private employer** on the grounds that they would “be trained for everything, but then go home in a month.” Key informants say that unemployed residents survive with the help of relatives/friends, register for social aid and employment assistance, go deep into debt to meet their basic needs or, for women, move abroad for work.

## Energy provision and winter preparation

The **Rivne Nuclear Power Plant** (RNPP) is western Ukraine’s largest power plant, **located** near Varash along the region’s northwestern border with Volyn oblast. As the plant is seen as a relatively safe work environment, its staff has been **reinforced** by relocated workers from the Zaporizhzhia NPP. That said, attacks on regional energy infrastructure have nevertheless impacted the site; it lost connection to one of its power lines following the **15 November** strikes, resulting in the shutdown of one of its four units. All four units were **powered down after the 22 Nov strikes to help stabilize the national grid**. Efforts by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to **promote** a demilitarized zone around the ZNPP led to an **agreement** to send international teams on week-long missions to three other nuclear plants, including the RNPP. On 4 Dec, it was **announced** that the RNPP mission would take place in mid-Dec. Other significant power stations in the oblast are the **Mlynivska** and **Khrinnytska hydroelectric power stations** and the Rivne combined heat and power station.

Repairs and improvements to heating infrastructure continues well after the onset of **subzero temperatures**. Local informants say that the newly-opened Invincibility Points provide relief to city residents, and city officials replaced many heating mains in the fall in hopes of reducing potential accidents in the winter. They also mention that owners of apartment buildings have been invited to coordination meetings with municipal officials to plan for potential emergencies. Key informants say that residents in rural areas have an easier time heating their homes with firewood, while **those in apartments continue stocking up on portable heaters, thermal underwear and even tents to stay warm, though stores have occasional shortages of these products**. Many Rivne oblast schools **opted** to cancel the fall break and combine them with the winter holidays; the reasons given include weather and power conditions, with educational professionals likely wanting to fit in as much school time as soon as possible.

## Mobility and evacuation

Key informants note that mobility around the capital and region are unrestricted except for in **northern communities** like **Loknytsya, Zarichne, Vysotsk, Mylyach, Staro Selo** or **Berezove**. Numerous checkpoints exist on regional highways; document checks are reportedly less frequent now, but these checkpoints may reduce the number of available lanes and thus cause traffic congestion at peak hours. A local source says these checkpoints are mostly concentrated at the entrances to district hubs and large towns. Highway connections to surrounding Ukrainian regions remain open, though suburban rail routes may be **cancelled** due to power outages. Key informants say that perhaps up to half of the women with children who fled the country in the spring and summer returned to the region in the fall, though there are many conversations about whether to leave again for the winter. Per one source: **“Most of those who have returned from abroad have no desire to leave again until a more serious threat emerges.”**

## IDP reception

As of **early December**, Rivne oblast has received more than 83,000 IDPs, though only 37,256 are officially registered. Most are from Kyiv and Kyiv oblast, though many hail from eastern and southern Ukraine. Local authorities and independent initiatives offer IDPs assistance to find housing, but many of them choose to search on their own. IDPs interviewed for this piece said that **many stayed in temporary shelters or with relatives until they found jobs and earned enough to afford private apartments**. Those who are unable to find work live in student dormitories or converted shelters, though local authorities are building **modular homes** in **Radyvyliv** to increase affordable housing – 12 are to be **completed** before the new year. The region has also **received** 500 mobile homes for IDPs from partners in Sweden.

# Area Response

## Key aid and civil society actors

International aid actors in Rivne oblast include **UNHCR** (mattresses, household goods), **Caritas** (winter clothing, food/hygiene kits), **FAO** (farm equipment and supplies), the **Free Ukraine Foundation** (medical vehicles) and **Rotary** (generators). National organizations include the **Ukrainian Women's Fund** (livelihood workshops), **Metamorphosis** (food/clothes for IDP children), **Stabilization Support Services** (food/hygiene kits) and **Building Ukraine Together** (housing repair). Local organizations include the **Ruevit Foundation** (warm clothes, IDP assistance) and **Rivne Together** (food/hygiene kits, military supplies). A local source says that, while both local authorities and independent organizations consistently deliver aid, there isn't always coordination between the two, creating an impression of chaos or unpredictability for some.

## Local authorities

The head of Rivne Oblast's military administration (**Facebook, Telegram**) is Governor **Vitaliy Koval** (**Facebook, Telegram**), and Rivne's mayor is Oleksandr Tretiak (**Facebook, Telegram**), who at 36 is one of Ukraine's youngest **major elected officials** and represents former president Petro Poroshenko's European Solidarity party. Tretiak has been at the center of a number of recent scandals, including alleged **extortion**, the **misuse** of municipal funds, and **bonuses** to city employees. A local source says that many residents are especially angry with such behavior in a time of war and shortages, and that this leads to a decline in credibility, which allows for theories to circulate concerning alleged uneven distribution of energy throughout Rivne city. Another major figure is **Viktor Shakirzyan** (**Facebook**), a local businessman who **ran for mayor** against Tretiak and currently serves as the Rivne city council chairperson. He heads local NGO **Rivne Together**, which shares a name with his **political party**.

# Information Environment

## Connectivity

Local sources note that mobile internet in the oblast capital deteriorates during power outages, though informants across the region only note minor interruptions.

## Traditional Media

Local television channels include **Suspilne Rivne** (**Facebook, Telegram, YouTube, Instagram**), **Rivne 1** (**Facebook, Telegram, YouTube, Instagram**) and **Sfera TV** (**Facebook, YouTube**). Radio stations include **Ukraine Radio Rivne** (**YouTube, RadioBox**), Rivne FM (**RadioUA**), **Radio Halychyna** (**Facebook, Instagram**) and **Our Radio Rivne** (**RadioBox**). Popular newspapers and online portals include **Rivne Evening** (**Facebook, YouTube**), **Rivne News** (**Facebook, Instagram**), **Rivne Neighborhood** (**Facebook**) and **Rivne Herald**.

## Social Media

- › Rivne Main (**Telegram**) – 134k subscribers
- › Rivne, Your Town (**Facebook**) – 116k subscribers
- › Rivne 1283 (**Telegram, Facebook**) – 62k/9k subscribers
- › Your Rivne (**Facebook, Telegram**) – 53k/21k subscribers
- › Our Rivne (**Facebook**) – 49k subscribers
- › Typical Rivne (**Telegram, Facebook**) – 37k/5k subscribers
- › Rivne-INFO (**Facebook, Telegram**) – 11k/6k subscribers

# Public Attitudes, Perceptions and Rumors

While the general public in Rivne oblast still believes in eventual Ukrainian victory, local sources say that fatigue is setting in especially in the volunteer sector: “I visit different organizations in the city and everyone says they don’t have enough hands to go around anymore.” While the liberation of Kherson provided a brief morale boost, residents are getting used to stabilization of the front line and a lack of good news from the stalled counteroffensive. Per one local source: “the shelling and infrastructural terror hardens people from wanting to negotiate with Russia – there’s more anger and a stronger desire to win, no matter how long it takes.”

As with Volyn oblast (see Volyn Location Profile), a worrying new development in Rivne is the possibility of an incursion from neighboring Belarus. Key informants say that **opinions on the likelihood of a Belarusian invasion are divided**: some believe that the new wall, heavy mining and natural barriers like lakes, swamps and dense forests are enough to deter an invasion, while others feel major anxiety:

*If there’s an offensive from Belarus, we’ll be in greater danger than the southern regions. I try to prepare for everything: I repack my emergency bag almost every week, switch out clothes with the changing weather...I know the authorities say everything is okay, but I can’t help thinking about people from Bucha at times like this. No one told them to get out, no one knew the threat. They were killed, tortured. I’m afraid people will tell us everything is fine until it’s too late.*

Locals are also reportedly divided over authorities’ response to power outages. Key informants say that residents under 30-35 are likelier to give the authorities the benefit of the doubt, while pensioners and parents of school-age children are “likelier to complain about inadequate conditions in schools and kindergartens.” **Many of these complaints are directed at the mayor, especially in the face of recent fiscal scandals** (see section on Local authorities). Like in Volyn, theories are circulating on social media that regional authorities sell energy generated at the RNPP to Europe for a profit while locals suffer from outages – it may be that **energy-related stress on the general public is contributing to tension and grievances which are then directed against local authorities**. Restoring credibility may be an essential priority into the winter months as colder temperatures, and continuing Russian strikes, continue to batter at local spirits.



# RIVNE

## LOCATION PROFILE

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20 DECEMBER 2022

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