

**By Invitation**

## **Wages of Unorganized Sector Workers in India: What NSS Survey Data Can Tell Us ?**

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*Had the recent high growth of the Indian economy benefitted the unorganized workers excluding the self employed? The present study attempts to examine this question using results from the two NSS surveys separated by 5 years (2004-05 and 2009-10). The paper examines the growth of real wages of wage-labor in the unorganized sector in India excluding agriculture. Two standard worker categories are studied here, namely, regular wage workers and casual workers. The real wage change overtime in the case of male and female workers within sectors is the subject of the analysis. The results are rather mixed but encouraging. Workers in urban areas have significantly gained but not necessarily in rural areas. It shows that high economic growth could benefit both regular and casual workers.*

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### **Introduction**

Unorganized sector is the source of work and livelihood for workers in almost every sub-sector of India's industrial economy. Their working conditions, earnings and social security issues have received much attention (NCEUS, 2008). The reasons are well known. Unorganized workers belong to the uncovered sector without access to employment security benefits and more likely to bear the brunt of negative economic shocks due either to global or domestic economic conditions. The NCEUS report argues that about 79 percent of the unorganized workers were living below Rs.20 per day. They constitute India's working poor. The impact of economic policy reforms on unorganized sector workers in particular is a much debated issue. There are few systematic studies. One study based on Non Directory Manufacturing Establishments (NDME) for the period 1985 to 2001 argues that real wage of informal sector workers has risen during the post trade liberalization period (Marjit & Kar, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. Similar result of positive growth

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<sup>1</sup> The NDME are defined as those enterprises with less than or equal to five workers. It excludes own-account enterprises (OAE) and those with more

rate of real annual earnings in directory manufacturing establishments (DME) and NDME in the 1990s was observed in another study (Ramaswamy, 2003). Their focus is on manufacturing. Manufacturing is a relatively small segment of non-agricultural (NAG) sector; the other segment is services including construction. It is important to note that NCEUS argument is using an absolute standard and studies of real wages are more concerned about the growth of real income of unorganized workers and in many cases with wage inequality relative to organized sector workers. Both the dimensions are important as long as one is clear about the reference in context.

### **Focus Question & Data**

How are workers in the unorganized sector in India doing? In this paper we are concerned with growth of real wages of wage-labor in the unorganized sector in India excluding agriculture. We attempt to examine two standard worker categories, namely, regular workers and casual workers. Within each of these two types of labor, the real wage change overtime in the case of male and female workers within sectors is the subject of our analysis. Our analysis is based on the results of two recent NSS surveys of informal sector and conditions of employment in India 61st round (2004-05) and 66th round (2009-10). We estimate real wages by deflating nominal wages by the consumer price index for industrial workers (CPII) with 1999-2000 as the base year.

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than six and less than 10 workers (DME) which together constitute a significant proportion of unorganized sector output and employment.

The selected period is one of greater trade integration and globalization of the Indian economy and of economic shocks including the global economic crisis as well as domestic economic growth (positive shocks). During this period Indian economy was growing at 8.7 percent per annum (real GDP at 2004-05 prices) and its real per capita income growth was 7 percent per annum (GOI, Economic Survey, 2011-12). Similarly growth rates of real output of three relevant sectors for our study are 9.4 percent (industry, this includes manufacturing and construction), 10.4 percent (trade, hotels, transport and communication) and 12 percent (finance, real estate and business services). Does this high growth period made a difference to the wages of unorganized sector workers in India particularly in the manufacturing and services sectors?

### **Unorganized Sector: Definition & Implications**

The NCEUS (2008:3) defines the unorganized sector as follows: “The unorganized sector consists of all unincorporated private enterprises owned by individuals or households engaged in the sale and production of goods and services operated on a proprietary or partnership basis and with less than ten total workers”. This definition closely conforms to the concept of informal enterprises in the NSS surveys (NSSO, 2012). The NSS surveys follow the framework given by the International Conference of Labor Statisticians (ICLS) in their 15<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> meetings (NSSO, 2012:20). Here informal sector is defined as unincorporated proprietary and partnership enterprises

including producers' cooperatives. However the actual survey coverage excluded those working in cooperative societies. Hence the survey data matches the definition of NCEUS mentioned above.

The NSS quinquennial surveys of unorganized sector enterprises follow the enterprise approach. Here data is gathered from a sample of enterprises (which do not hire workers on a regular basis) and establishments (which employ at least one worker on a fairly regular basis). Establishments is further divided into OAME, NDME and DME as we mentioned in the introduction. The surveys of unorganized enterprises sometimes cover trade, services along with manufacturing but exclude construction. They are known to suffer from statistical problems like changing sampling frame, recall or reference period and in some cases small sample size at disaggregated levels. They could still be useful to get information on change at the aggregate sector levels. However, we will not use them in this paper.

Another useful approach is the employment approach of NSS employment and unemployment surveys. Here the sampled workers report the type of enterprise in which they work. Data is gathered from workers working in all enterprise types including government, public and private enterprises. However workers who are reported to be employed in unincorporated proprietary and partnership enterprises are considered belonging to the informal sector. The NSS informal enterprises surveys make special effort to gather information on a wide

variety of aspects like the existence of contract, working conditions etc. The two NSS survey reports that we use in this study for the year 2004-05 and 2009-10 follow the same reference period. Information on wages is collected from regular wage workers and casual laborers in the current daily status (CDS). That is each day of the 7 days preceding the date of survey. This enables us to do a consistent comparison over time.

### **Trade & Globalization**

Major areas of reform included the removal of reduction of tariff levels and their dispersion, removal of licensing and other non-tariff barriers on all imports of intermediate and capital goods, elimination of trade monopolies of the state trading agencies and the simplification of trading regime. Import tariff rates which were above 100 percent on average in 1991 were brought down to 30 percent by 2001. Similarly, 95 percent of the tariff lines were freed from non-tariff barriers (NTB) in 2001. Majority foreign equity participation was made automatic up to 51 percent in 34 high priority industry groups spread over 160 industries. Equity participation greater than 51 percent is permitted on a case-by-case basis and the nature of production activity. This was later liberalized to enable setting up of 100 percent subsidiaries in manufacturing sector without any restriction on the number of such subsidiaries. FDI (Foreign Direct Investment) up to 100 percent under the automatic route in all manufacturing activities is allowed in SEZs (Special Economic Zones) except for a small negative list. Royalty payment

by all companies with foreign technology collaboration agreements is permitted without any restriction on the extent of foreign equity participation, royalty payments up to 5 percent of domestic sales and 8 percent of export sales is permitted without any restriction on the duration of royalty payment. In other words access to foreign technology was liberalized. Similarly, several industries in the services sector like hotels, tele-communications, motion pictures and IT and IT enabled services have been liberalized in terms FDI etc (Mehta & Hasan, 2011). A widely used measure of globalization is the ratio of trade in goods and services to GDP that rose from less than 18 percent in 1991 to more than 45 percent in 2010.

### Size & Importance of the Unorganized Sector

According to NCEUS estimates, 142 million were employed in the unorganized non-agricultural sector (NAG) in 2005. Of these 63 percent were in the category of self-employed, 20 percent in the casual worker category and the remaining 17 percent in the category regular worker. The contribution of unorganized sector to Net Domestic Product (NDP) is estimated to be 58 percent in 2004-05. Of this 19 percent is contributed by agriculture and the remaining 39 percent is the share of NAG. Within many sectors, the unorganized segment dominates, for example, it is more than 80 percent in trade and hotels and more than 60 percent in construction and transport and communication (Kolli, 2007). This gives us some idea of the relative size and im-

portance of the unorganized sector in the Indian economy. Measurement of unorganized sector in National Accounts Statistics is a subject of debate. Which are the dominant sectors in terms of employment *within* the unorganized sector? The NSS 66th (2009-10) round results reveal that construction, manufacturing and wholesale and retail trade together provided employment to 76 percent in rural areas and 72 percent in urban areas.

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### Globalization & Unorganized Sector Wages<sup>2</sup>

How does globalization affect unorganized sector employment and wages? Globalization implies removal of barriers to international trade and investment. The traditional theories of trade predict resource re-allocation between sectors. The Ricardian comparative advantage predicts resource movement towards sectors with comparative advantage. Resources move from relatively less productive to relatively more productive industries. This brings about changes in employment in different industries. The alternative approach (Heckscher-Ohlin approach or H-O theory) is based on relative factor endowments. The H-O theory,

<sup>2</sup> An extensive review of literature is available in WTO-ILO (2009). We highlight only the main analytical insights relevant in the present context.

assuming competitive product and factor markets, argues that trade liberalization generates demand for the abundant factor (unskilled in developing countries) because of expansion of export sectors, raising both employment and the relative price (wages) of unskilled labour. Reduction of trade barriers (tariffs and quotas) could reduce demand for import competing products and create widespread job losses in those industries. Workers laid off in the formal segment of import substituting industries may seek employment in the informal sector. This could cause wages to decline in the unorganized sectors in a developing country. In other words the conventional view point would predict declining wages due to trade liberalization. An alternative model is suggested by Marjit and Kar (2009) that emphasizes the importance of assumption of capital mobility in driving employment and wage outcomes in an H-O general equilibrium model. In their model as the tariff-protected organized sector (formal) declines due to tariff reduction, return to capital declines in the organized sector and capital moves to unorganized sector (labour-intensive sector) absorbing workers and raising unorganized sector wages. Note that this will not happen if there is no capital mobility between organized and unorganized sectors. Another key mechanism works through production linkages between organized and unorganized sectors. If unorganized sector functions mainly as a

supplier of intermediate inputs to the organized sector then unorganized wage will decline as organized sector contracts due to trade liberalization. On other hand, if the organized sector engaged in greater product or labor outsourcing to combat declining competitiveness then unorganized employment and wages will rise. If this is true then contract-intensive industries should experience positive employment and wage growth. Some evidence exists in support of this proposition (Ramaswamy, 2003). The final aggregate outcome in the case of production linkages is ambiguous as it depends on relative strengths of input and product outsourcing linkages. Unorganized sector employment is often found to predominate in non-tradable sectors like construction, real estate, transport, retail and wholesale trade and hotels. In such industries, unorganized sector wages could be pro-cyclical, that is, it could rise during booms and economic upturns. In other words, increases in relative demand in non-tradables, for example, due to fiscal stimulus could raise unorganized sector wages and employment. Using time series data for Argentina, Colombia, Brazil and Mexico, Fies, Fugazza and Maloney (2008) found increasing informal employment defined as own-account enterprises and firms with fewer than five workers and a raise in their earnings during the recovery phase of these economies. This is consistent with the hypothesis of pro-cyclical expansion of informal or unorganized sector. They found during many periods significant co-movement of salaried and informal sector earnings. This suggests greater linkage between organized and

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unorganized sectors than that is normally presumed. Our brief review reveals that theoretical literature has identified number of mechanisms through which globalization can affect unorganized sector wages. The corresponding empirical evidence on different mechanisms has been equivocal. A detailed review of available empirical studies by WTO/ILO (2009) came to the conclusion that the impact of globalization on unorganized wages is ambiguous and largely depends on country circumstances and specificities.

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**Wages of Unorganized Sector Workers:**

We look at changes in wages per day in different sectors and by gender between two survey years, namely, 2004-05 and 2009-10. First we consider the manufacturing sector and then take up four service sectors. Let us first look at the distribution of workers within manufacturing between factory (registered) and non-factory (unregistered) sectors within manufacturing. The relevant data is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1 Distribution of Workers: Manufacturing Sector**

	1999-2000		2009-10	
	Million	Share(%)	Million	Share (%)
Factory	6.3	14.3	9.1	17.5
Non-factory	37.5	85.7	43.1	82.5
Total	43.8	100.0	52.2	100

Source: Author’s Estimates based on NSS Employment and Unemployment Survey 66th round and ASI 2009-10 results

The good news is that the share of non-factory sector has not increased over the decade 1999-2009. This is in contrast to that observed for the decade 1981-91 (Ramaswamy, 1994). Estimate for the period 1991-1999 is not available. Notice, however, that the absolute number of non-factory workers has not declined in the recent decade.

A reading of estimates of real wage in manufacturing in Table 2 reveals the following:

- Real wages have increased for all the 4 categories of regular wage workers
- Growth rate of wages of both regular and casual rural female workers are significantly higher at 4.7 and 5.7 percent respectively
- Casual urban female workers have suffered a decline in real wages. Their wages have declined even if we consider all enterprise types together

Our estimates of real wages for the sector wholesale and retail trade are presented in Table 3. We may note the following:

- Urban workers both regular and casual are the significant gainers. Urban females in particular with real wage growth rate of 9 percent (regular) and 6 percent (casual) have benefited from growth of retail industry in recent years

**Table 2 Real Wages in Unorganized Manufacturing**

Category	2004-05		2009-10		Growth Rate*	
	Real Wages per day (Rs)		Real Wages per day (Rs)			
	Enterprise Type P&P	All	Enterprise Type P&P	All	P&P	All
<b>Regular</b>						
Rural Male	64.4	99.7	70.6	90.1	1.9	-2.0
Rural Female	32.7	34.1	41.1	45.9	4.7	6.1
Urban Male	84.3	124.3	108.6	167.5	5.2	6.1
Urban Female	49.6	68.7	59.6	109.4	3.7	9.8
<b>Casual</b>						
Rural Male	55.2	54.4	63.3	62.9	2.8	3.0
Rural Female	33.1	31.9	43.5	43.4	5.6	6.4
Urban Male	56.6	56.6	62.0	65.7	1.8	3.0
Urban Female	33.5	35.0	29.3	33.2	-2.7	-1.1

Note: P&P (proprietary and partnership enterprises)

\*Average Annual Compound Growth Rate (%)

Source: NSS Survey of Informal Sector Enterprises (see text)

**Table 3 Real Wages in Wholesale & Retail Trade\***

Category	2004-05		2009-10		Growth Rate**	
	Real Wages per day (Rs)		Real Wages per day (Rs)			
	Enterprise Type P&P	All	Enterprise Type P&P	All	P&P	All
<b>Regular</b>						
Rural Male	56.7	59.0	59.6	66.7	1.0	2.5
Rural Female	44.9	48.2	40.8	39.4	-1.9	-3.9
Urban Male	72.6	82.6	91.6	101.2	4.8	4.1
Urban Female	56.3	71.2	87.1	104.7	9.1	8.0
<b>Casual</b>						
Rural Male	49.8	49.4	54.7	55.4	1.9	2.3
Rural Female	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE	NE
Urban Male	49.3	49.3	61.5	61.2	4.5	4.4
Urban Female	27.4	28.7	36.7	41.7	6.0	7.8

\*This includes Repair of Motor Vehicles and Household Goods; NE (Not Estimated)

Note: : P&P (proprietary and partnership enterprises)

\*\*Average Annual Compound Growth Rate (%)

Source: NSS Survey of Informal Sector Enterprises (see text)

- Real wages of unorganized rural workers are stagnating relative to all enterprise workers. We have presented estimates for the sector hotels and restaurants in Table 4.

- In this industry again real wages of urban workers has improved particularly that of female workers both regular and casual getting an increase of 10 percent during the period.
- Rural workers both male and female have experienced very low growth rate or declining wages

**An important relatively high growth sector has been the transport and communications with a GDP growth rate of more than 10 percent during the last decade of 2000-10.**

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**Table 4 Real Wages in Hotels and Restaurants**

Category	2004-05 Real Wages per day (Rs)		2009-10 Real Wages per day (Rs)		Growth Rate*	
	Enterprise Type		Enterprise Type			
	P&P	All	P&P	All	P&P	All
<b>Regular</b>						
Rural Male	63.6	72.1	69.1	64.2	1.7	-2.3
Rural Female	40.8	41.2	32.3	24.6	-4.6	-9.8
Urban Male	81.3	94.0	100.1	109.5	4.2	3.1
Urban Female	61.3	118.0	99.2	83.5	10.1	-6.7
<b>Casual</b>						
Rural Male	54.6	53.1	52.9	53.7	-0.6	0.2
Rural Female	NE	NE	NE	24.9	NE	NE
Urban Male	52.8	52.2	64.6	62.4	4.1	3.7
Urban Female	38.2	39.2	64.0	58.9	10.8	8.5

Note: P&P (proprietary and partnership enterprises)

\*Average Annual Compound Growth Rate (%)

Source: NSS Survey of Informal Sector Enterprises (see text)

munications with a GDP growth rate of more than 10 percent during the last decade of 2000-10.

- A remarkable change in transport and communications industry (Table 5) is the substantial real wage gains realized by female workers. Real wages of regular female workers both in rural and urban areas have risen by more than 10 percentage points. Urban females have received real wage growth of nearly 13 percent. It has

some spillover effects on the wages of urban female casual workers who have registered a growth of more than 15 percentage points. This is consistent with the double digit growth of urban female casual workers in all types of enterprises.

- Urban male workers have managed real wage growth of more than 6 percent but the male workers in rural areas both regular and casual have not gained at all.

- In the financial intermediation industry (Table 6), regular urban female workers have registered substantial gains in real wages (16 percent growth).
- Male workers in rural as well as urban areas have done well for themselves with 10 percent growth in real wages.

**Table 5 Real Wages in Transport & Communication\***

Category	2004-05 Real Wages per day (Rs)		2009-10 Real Wages per day (Rs)		Growth Rate**	
	Enterprise Type		Enterprise Type		P&P	All
	P&P	All	P&P	All		
<b>Regular</b>						
Rural Male	74.7	106.0	81.7	108.4	1.8	0.4
Rural Female	34.2	117.1	57.7	117.0	11.0	0.0
Urban Male	92.2	172.2	124.7	204.2	6.2	3.5
Urban Female	76.9	225.7	141.3	265.6	12.9	3.3
<b>Casual</b>						
Rural Male	60.2	59.2	67.1	66.4	2.2	2.3
Rural Female	48.8	48.5	53.3	52.2	1.8	1.5
Urban Male	69.5	67.8	69.2	69.3	-0.1	0.4
Urban Female	32.4	32.1	66.4	54.6	15.5	11.2

\*This includes Storage

Note:\*\*Average Annual Compound Growth Rate (%)

Source: NSS Survey of Informal Sector Enterprises (see text)

**Table 6 Real Wages in Financial Intermediation**

Category	2004-05 Real Wages per day (Rs)		2009-10 Real Wages per day (Rs)		Growth Rate*	
	Enterprise Type		Enterprise Type		P&P	All
	P&P	All	P&P	All		
<b>Regular</b>						
Rural Male	102.2	216.2	176.4	271.8	11.6	4.7
Rural Female	49.9	115.9	64.7	123.1	5.3	1.2
Urban Male	125.7	351.7	215.9	327.3	11.4	-1.4
Urban Female	71.3	277.6	149.6	346.4	16.0	4.5
<b>Casual</b>						
Rural Male	0.0	0.0	32.0	60.4	NE	NE
Rural Female	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	NE	NE
Urban Male	0.0	55.0	68.1	79.3	NE	7.6
Urban Female	32.4	32.1	0.0	0.0	NE	NE

Note: NE: Not Estimated

\* Average Annual Compound Growth Rate (%)

Source: NSS Survey of Informal Sector Enterprises (see text)

- Nothing could be said about casual workers in this industry due to non-availability of data

Let us consider the case of real estate and other business services including IT and IT enabled services presented in Table 7. Surprisingly urban casual workers both male (9 percent) and female (19 percent) have received substantial increase in real wages. This is surprising because they have done better than regular workers in this industry dur-

ing this period. Perhaps in these industries nominal wages of regular workers has been high to start with (in the base period) which is constraining further enhancement. It is important to note that real estate and business services growth are largely an urban phenomenon in India.

**Real estate and business services growth are largely an urban phenomenon in India.**

**Table 7 Real Estate and Business Services like IT etc**

Category	2004-05 Real Wages per day (Rs)		2009-10 Real Wages per day (Rs)		Growth Rate*	
	Enterprise P&P	Type All	Enterprise P&P	Type All	P&P	All
<b>Regular</b>						
Rural Male	68.1	84.8	88.9	119.1	5.5	7.0
Rural Female	36.3	122.6	48.4	86.3	5.9	-6.8
Urban Male	132.3	232.5	186.5	301.9	7.1	5.4
Urban Female	148.3	234.2	180.3	266.8	4.0	2.6
<b>Casual</b>						
Rural Male	63.2	62.4	70.6	70.6	2.2	2.5
Rural Female	115.5	115.5	0.0	0.0	NE	NE
Urban Male	72.1	75.8	112.1	87.2	9.2	2.8
Urban Female	25.6	25.6	62.1	60.9	19.4	18.9

Note: NE: Not Estimated

\*Average Annual Compound Growth Rate (%)

Source: NSS Survey of Informal Sector Enterprises (see text)

Last but not the least is the construction industry (Table 8) with a significant share of total employment (nearly 10 percent in 2009-10). In construction industry the category rural female regular workers have achieved substantial real wage growth (12 percent). Rural female casual workers have got modest gains of 3.7 percent. One important factor behind this real wage increase could be the growth of agricultural

wages due to Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee (MGNREG) scheme. It is clearly shown in a study using monthly agricultural wages data for the period 2000-2011 that MGNREG program has caused agricultural wages to increase by 5.3 percent (Berg et al, 2012). One should note that nominal wages of rural regular male workers have risen by 8 percent though the real wage growth has

turned out to be zero. In other words inflation has eaten away all the gains in this case. MGNREG would have contributed to some tightening of the labor market in the case of construction industry as it draws labor from rural areas.

**MGNREG would have contributed to some tightening of the labor market in the case of construction industry as it draws labor from rural areas.**

**Table 8 Real Wages in Construction**

Category	2004-05 Real Wages per day (Rs)		2009-10 Real Wages per day (Rs)		Growth Rate*	
	Enterprise Type		Enterprise Type		P&P	All
	P&P	All	P&P	All		
<b>Regular</b>						
Rural Male	74.1	89.1	74.2	126.4	0.0	7.3
Rural Female	49.8	81.5	88.1	119.9	12.1	8.0
Urban Male	110.6	143.0	116.9	190.3	1.1	5.9
Urban Female	91.6	129.4	92.3	277.8	0.1	16.5
<b>Casual</b>						
Rural Male	59.6	59.2	68.1	65.8	2.7	2.2
Rural Female	41.9	41.3	50.3	49.4	3.7	3.6
Urban Male	69.9	70.3	76.4	75.7	1.8	1.5
Urban Female	47.9	47.8	54.3	54.7	2.5	2.7

Note:\*Average Annual Compound Growth Rate (%)

Source: NSS Survey of Informal Sector Enterprises (see text)

### Concluding Remarks

Did the recent relatively high growth of the Indian economy benefit the unorganized workers excluding the self employed? We attempted to examine this question using results from two NSS surveys separated by 5 years (2004-05 and 2009-10). Our results suggest that the outcome is rather mixed. Urban workers have clear real wage gains. Urban female workers in particular seem to have improved their real wages significantly. This is particularly true in the case regular female workers in wholesale and retail trade, transport and communications; and including casual female work-

ers in business services. Similarly real wage of urban male workers across sectors have improved with two exceptions namely, urban casual worker in transport and communications and rural male casual worker in hotel industry. However the gains to rural male workers have not been significant. The situation in the case of rural female workers is unclear partly because we could not estimate real wage changes in many cases. Three exceptional cases of real wage improvement are observed. They are regular female workers in transport and communications (11 percent), in construction (12 percent) and in wholesale and retail trade (9 percent). Our results are different and in-

interesting because it shows that relatively high economic growth could benefit both regular and casual workers. Two familiar questions could be posed here: first, whether it suggests an improvement in employment conditions in the unorganized sector? Second, whether it is sustainable in the future? Answer to the first question is unconditionally a no. Simply because NSS survey data reveals (not discussed here, see Ramaswamy & Tushar, 2012) that unorganized sector workers have no access to social security benefits and no written work-contracts. The second is more difficult to answer but one could say it depends on how labor demanding the economic growth turns out to be.

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