

Mosaic of Minds



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Field Insights for Youth Work

The Real Do's and Don'ts of Reaching Marginalized Youth

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Mosaic of Minds

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Introduction

Why this pocketbook exists

Success stories

Challenging realities

Challenges

Language barrier

Lack of trust

Mental health

Communication

Advice

Building a safe space

Inclusion & integration

Equal to equal

Quick advice that acts fast

Reflections

How much do you share

Group vs individual

Meaning marginalized

Improvements

Thank you

Contributors



Visit the Mosaic of Minds website
for more information!



Introduction — Voices from the Field

Mosaic of Minds is a joint initiative by *Freedom to Discover* and *Orutindo*, focused on tackling discrimination and promoting inclusion across Europe. By empowering youth workers, the project champions diversity and challenges discrimination through innovative, collaborative efforts.

Rooted in the missions of both organizations, *Mosaic of Minds: Cultivating Understanding in a Multicultural World* fosters mutual understanding, social innovation, and international friendships through intercultural exchange.

Mosaic of Minds is about listening, about learning, and about choosing to look again.

It's about communication — especially when that's hard. It's about finding language for things that don't fit into checkboxes, and about building trust where it may have been broken before.

Across Europe, many young people feel like they don't belong. Some carry visible burdens: war, loss, racism, poverty. Others carry quieter ones: anxiety, identity struggles, being bullied, feeling too much or not enough.

At the same time, youth workers often feel unequipped to respond — not because they don't care, but because the tools they need aren't always there.

This booklet was made to help. Not by offering theories or policies — but by sharing honest words and small insights from youth workers and young people themselves. It's here to support connection. To offer a nudge. To remind us that how we speak, act, and listen — matters.

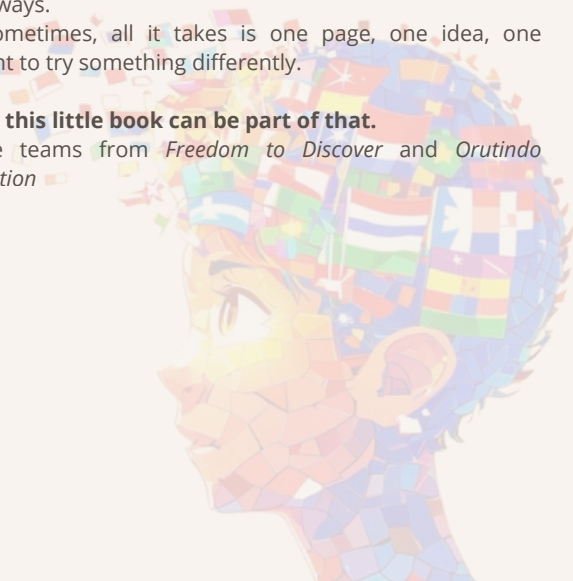
This pocketbook is part of a wider European project that aims to dismantle racism, challenge exclusion, and build a culture of empathy and diversity — one relationship at a time.

There's no one right way to do this work. But there are better ways.

And sometimes, all it takes is one page, one idea, one moment to try something differently.

Maybe this little book can be part of that.

— The teams from *Freedom to Discover* and *Orutindo Foundation*



Why this pocketbook exists and how to use it

Why

Some young people speak easily. Others don't.

Some show up with energy. Others barely make it through the door.

As youth workers, we meet kids and teenagers who carry different stories:

- Some are quiet or introverted.
- Some are bullied or excluded
- Some are dealing with anxiety, trauma, or mental health issues
- Some are figuring out who they are and where they belong
- Some are new to the country, culture, or language
- Some simply don't trust anyone yet — and maybe with good reason.

Working with marginalized youth isn't about having the right answers. It's about showing up, listening, and knowing when to step in — and when to just be there.

This booklet was made to support that process. It's based on real experiences, shared honestly by both youth and youth workers. It's not a theory — it's what people wish others knew.

Who it's for

- Youth workers, social workers, educators, mentors
 - Volunteers and trainers working with marginalized or newly arrived youth
 - Anyone who wants to improve how they communicate, support, and build trust with young people.
-

How to use it

This is not a manual — it's a companion.

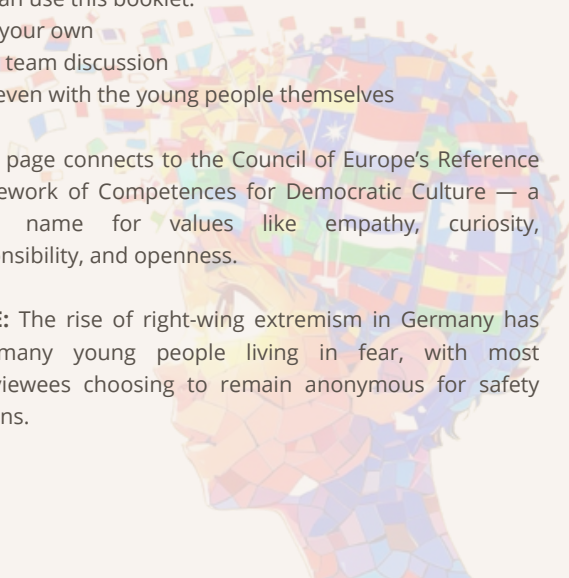
Open it when you feel stuck. Flip to a quote when you need perspective. Use a tip when you're trying to reach someone who's shutting down.

You can use this booklet:

- On your own
- In a team discussion
- Or even with the young people themselves

Every page connects to the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture — a fancy name for values like empathy, curiosity, responsibility, and openness.

NOTE: The rise of right-wing extremism in Germany has left many young people living in fear, with most interviewees choosing to remain anonymous for safety reasons.



Success Stories

"I had two blind students which became bandleaders at our school. One of the them wished to get to a university for studying classical piano and I supported him to manage to hit his goal. 1,5 yrs intense work with meeting different professors and experts, a exception for a CAS study in improvisation in Lugano/Swiss. He managed! What made it successful? Lots of conversations with him and his parents, traveling, writing letters aso always asking him if he still wants to go university even when he is separated from family, and has to learn how to manage live. It worked. Next year he will do his bachelor and move for a masterstudy to another city."

- Petra O.

"But there was one time with a mother who also taught at that school, I really showed genuine interest, and then I noticed that she appreciated that, and it also helped me to understand those children a bit better. Because everything you hear in the news, well, that's really different from a personal story."

- Davita

"One of the methods I work with, in trying to empower them and giving a voice is participatory method. So far it helped me better to understand their needs and co-work with them on creating opportunities which we together decide."

- Edisona

Challenging Realities

"They have problems like anybody else - addictions on smartphones, social networks, lack of sleep, smoking, drugs, alcohol, psychological problems, non functional families, lack of interest in anything except their phones.... I don't see them any different, just some have traumas from the war...."

- Marketa

"Loss of sight brings a lot new questions to the people: orientation, mobility, manage daily live, find friends, keep your mental health and much more."

- Petra O.

"I have experience only with Romani children and youth in the Czech Republic. Most often I have encountered mistrust, closed-mindedness, unwillingness to share, self-doubt, low self-esteem, a negative self-image, i.e., the adoption of prejudices and stereotypes towards oneself, a lack of pride in one's own identity, difficulties in identifying with being Roma, which is perceived negatively by the majority society. We also often face mistrust and concerns from parents who do not want to let their children go to educational events."

- Marie

"...establishing a stable connection ... is challenging, as many marginalised youth face instability in their personal lives, making it harder to keep them engaged over time. Another obstacle is encouraging openness toward other groups, which is sometimes limited due to social or cultural boundaries."

- Markus R.

Challenges

Language barrier



PHOTO BY: KATERINA PEJOSKA

Language Barrier

"I did have a problem because of the anxiety, I was able to write but I had problems with talking because I was scared to make mistakes." - Alexandra

"People just want to start their lives, and that includes participating - playing sports, going to school, building a social network."

- Marieke

"Creating languages, it's meant to focus more on the respect values or the important goal than just focusing on designing language based on the group backgrounds."

- Eddie

"I also had struggles with my language in general ... what you're taught in Ithaka is very formal. ... So half the time I understand most of my teachers, but I have more trouble understanding youngsters."

- Raidan → Ithaka is the language school in The Netherlands



TIP

- Participating in the local area and learning the language go hand in hand.
- Language coaches who are of immigrant origins, often are more distinctive in their openness towards their pupils.
- Try to act as a mediator between the organisation they are trying to join and the (marginalised) person, so that they might still get a chance at joining the organisation.

Challenges

Lack of Trust



PHOTO BY: KATERINA PEJOSKA

Lack of Trust

Youth from underrepresented communities have had tough journeys which have made them likely to put on a front or a mask.

The youth workers also mentioned lack of trust on both sides. The marginalised youth often don't trust youth workers and often believe that they belong to the majority of the society that they believe stigmatises them. The youth workers also sometimes find themselves not believing in all the information the marginalised youth gives them and this makes working together difficult or even impossible. Parents of these youth also sometime mistrust to send their children for educational or social programs and this mistrust goes deep into the interaction in case it happens because these youth find themselves not trusting to give out information about themselves.



TIP

Look into people showing disinterest, ask them how they are and really have a conversation with them. Give them the possibility to speak.

- Marieke



PHOTO BY: RÜDIGER WELLER

Challenges

Mental Health



PHOTO BY: JOSELINE AMUTUHAIRE

Mental Health

"I think the greatest challenge is constantly feeling the need to prove yourself or having to work twice as hard as others to be accepted. And sometimes, especially in the beginning, feeling like you never truly belong."

- Youngster, DE

Most youth have psychological problems and need intervention like one youth worker mentioned. "They have psychological problems showed during seminar. Need a social worker to care them."

- Steve

"I think there needs to be more understanding for different cultural backgrounds so that young people like me feel better understood. In addition, many young people need emotional support or perhaps even psychological services. In my opinion, finding therapists who speak multiple languages—or even being able to secure a therapy spot—is still far too difficult."

- Youngster, DE



TIP

Have an open approach to mental health and make mental health care accessible: give young people the opportunity to take the first step

- Eddie



PHOTO BY: RÜDIGER WELLER

Challenges

Communication



PHOTO BY: RÜDIGER WELLER

Communication

"I hope to live somewhere where I can connect more easily. I want a community where I don't have to explain or justify myself — where I simply belong." - Youngster, DE

"Where can they go now? Nowhere, really. They just move from place A to B, and when they get kicked out, they go to C, then D, and then back to A. The problems just keep getting passed around without anyone actually listening to what these young people need or considering what's realistic and achievable from the municipality's perspective."

- Dirk

"We don't do it alone. You can't do anything by yourself in life. You need each other. You need organisations."

- Rachella

"Let's work together, instead of past each other."

- Marieke



TIP

- Promote communication between different organisations to ensure that the person is being helped adequately.
- Rely on others for help.



PHOTO BY: KATERINA PEJOSKA

"[...When working in a small group...] you can really see that a child can flourish with lots of compliments and positivity." - Davita

"But I think, not everyone has baggage. If you have a group, then someone will always fall through the cracks or someone is the loudest screamer and then you will pay more attention - or someone is the most quiet. If you get to know the group, then you end up knowing, like, who is dealing with what and there might be a few in between that just, merrily come along but because you have the group there, you can help that one with the little things and if I would find out 'oh wait, there are problems in multiple areas', then I would refer that person."

- Jeroen

"So what's really cool is finding those similarities -like, 'What do I enjoy, and what do they enjoy, for example?'"

- Adil

"I think talking about, like, um, you know, sometimes there are good stuff that we can learn with different programs, and they aren't a part of schools. And if you join it, it's maybe fun. So I think making the younger generation work on these projects would be a good thing."

- Mohammad



TIP

- Take into account that when working with a group, that not everyone has "baggage"
- Smaller groups work, because children are able to get individual attention whilst also being among their peers.
- Find common ground with the group you're trying to reach
- Encourage youngsters to join outside of school programs

"You need to have a lot of patience because those kids went through a lot more then other kids their age. So if you are someone who isn't patient and understanding I don't think you could work with someone like that." - Venny

"100% understanding is not possible, and it's very important to be aware of that."

- Marieke

"You must never make promises you can't keep. That's something you'll struggle with for literal years. 'So-and-so made me that promise' – they remember that intensely."

- Adil

"Proximity distance as in 'hey how do I keep them with me and how do I make sure to use my authority like 'listen to me because I am still a youth worker and I want to help you.'"

- Jeroen

"I always tell young people to be careful about who they share things with. Don't just suddenly open up to someone, because they can use it against you and bring you down. You don't want that."

- Dirk



TIP

- Never make promises you can't keep.
- Stay patient
- Make youth aware about who they share things with



PHOTO BY: KATERINA PEJOSKA

"The only method that has ever worked for me is a partnership approach, building trust, creating a safe environment, being open, showing interest, sometimes humour. And in tense situations, standing up for children / young people and defending them."

- Marie

"Practicing patience with the target group is essential, as building rapport and achieving positive outcomes often takes time. Keeping the topics and activities low-threshold — meaning accessible and relatable to the youths' experiences — also improves engagement. Additionally, remaining open to different outcomes of activities allows flexibility, ensuring that the program adapts to the youths' needs rather than imposing rigid expectations."

- Markus R.

"...But no positive discrimination, no special advantages because it can worsen their position in the collectives. Show them respect for their culture, mentality We treat them (marginalized youth) equally like others. We try to understand their stories, family background etc."

- Marketa



TIP FROM ISAAC

- Establishing a safe, nonjudgmental environment and taking the time to listen and understand their stories.
- Utilizing mobile apps, videos, and online tools makes learning more accessible and engaging.
- Connecting youth with mentors or fostering peer networks builds community and mutual encouragement.

"They should invest more time in really listening, rather than just seeing us as cases to manage or process. Sometimes I was just passed from one person to another instead of someone taking a few minutes to have a personal conversation."

- Julian, Youngster, DE

"That is difficult, most of these ethnical or national groups don't want to make any deep friendships with the majority. They have their own groups. They prefer to stay with their people. Often they feel very proud of their nationality and they disrespect the majority. Often they are very aggressive and don't respect common rules, they want something special."

- Marketa

"Extremely important to me was the course on the sociocultural specifics of Romani people for educators and teachers, which was taught by Romani people. In addition, discussions and meetings with experts, both from minority and majority societies, who shared their knowledge and experience. It is also important to know what I can possibly cause among children/young people and to avoid it. And to know in advance the individuals I will be working with (to communicate with schools, NGO's."

- Marie

"More qualified project management support, more staff and more data base of social workers, organizations working with marginalized groups."

- Steve

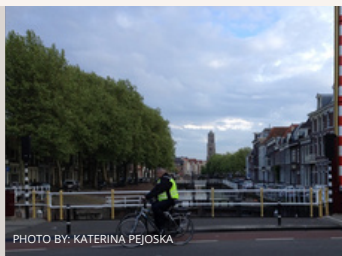


PHOTO BY: KATERINA PEJOSKA

Advice

Building a Safe Space



PHOTO BY: KATERINA PEJOSKA

Building a Safe Space

"You must ensure that control always remains with the people themselves and that we don't start taking things out of their hands just to arrange it well without involving them."

- Marieke

"The first thing you have to do is this: 'Are you coming along?'"

- Dirk

"Holding their hand. Like, 'Hey, we're here if you need us.'"

- Jeroen

"Safety lies precisely in providing structure and clear boundaries, and then also in building that connection and showing your softer side."

- Davita

"They should think more openly and actually see us. If they don't know what we need, they should ask us instead of deciding for us."

- Youngster, DE

Create an accessible, safe space:

"That you can just walk in. That it's accessible to everyone. Doesn't matter who."

-Adil



Advice

Inclusion & Integration



PHOTO BY: KATERINA PEJOSKA

Inclusion & Integration

"I'm on your side. We're a team. We belong together. We work together. I need you. I like you."

- Marie

"I wish that schools and youth clubs would do more projects that show that people from other countries can contribute something positive and that we are accepted just as we are, even if we might not share the same rituals or sometimes have different opinions. It can actually be exciting when you meet new people."

- Youngster, DE

"Listen to the wishes of students and if they don't have wishes for their future, try to build their future them with them."

- Petra O.

"Customize workshop activities to align with their unique needs, abilities, and cultural backgrounds ensures relevance and inclusivity."

- Isaac



Advice

Equal to Equal



PHOTO BY ANDIGER WELLER

Equal to Equal

"Just try to switch over the image and put ourselves in their shoes. I think how somebody can (really) talk about us and how it (is) and the same way, how we talk about them."

- Eddie

"I always try to work a bit like a sort of friend, because I work at a lot of school and then there's of course the teacher and that is a hierarchical person, at school or in class or the concierge in the assembly hall and then I try to keep the rules to a minimum, like 'hey, I'm here for you, I'm here for all of you, not for the school, so more out of a friendly manner.'"

- Jeroen

"I like that you guys are two young people talking, just find more young people around your age. That- that's great. I think you guys are doing good in that. I don't know. I think I'd be less open if it was an older guy. I'll try to impress them a bit, you know."

- Raidan

"What I ultimately want to say is: be genuine, be sincere, be heartfelt. Don't just see it as a task — work with your heart. Because the heart speaks to the heart."

- Rachella



Quick Advice

that acts fast



Quick Advice

Be where the youth is

"We are also everywhere where young people go. That is our starting point. So on the street, online, (at) football clubs, schools, youth centres..." - Adil

Be sincere

"Because teenagers are so busy shaping their identity, they are also very focused on the identity of their mentors. So, if you as a mentor are very authentic — who you are and what your norms and values are — that works very well for teenagers." - Davita

"Use a personal approach. Go the extra mile. Adapt: get to their level, talk on their level. Stay genuine, as they can sense it if you are not." - Rachella

Listen

"Also let people sometimes talk to someone who (is) just listening more than judging them and giving them a solution, just listening to them. This is very important. Just listening." - Eddie

Start out slowly

"Gain their trust by starting slowly." - Mohammad

*"Give them time, take time."
- Rachella*



PHOTO BY: RÜDIGER WELLER

Reflections

How Much Do You Share?



PHOTO BY: ROMI STRAKOVÁ

How Much Do You Share?

"You know, I make myself vulnerable and I talk about my experiences precisely in the hope that young people might recognize themselves in certain things and think, hey, then I'll come to you sooner. But, I have to say: it could also work against you."

- Dirk

"As a youth worker, you want to listen, you want to pull the whole story out of someone and if you start telling all sorts of things yourself, then that can clash a bit as well."

- Jeroen

"They feel they are less worth and think that all around them thinks so" said one of the anonymous youth workers. In group works is often that they fully participate or communicate their opinion believing that their opinions are not worth discussing.

"You must never make promises you can't keep. That's something you'll struggle with for literal years. 'So-and-so made me that promise' - they remember that intensely."

- Adil



PHOTO BY: RÜDIGER WELLER

Reflections

Group vs Individual



PHOTO BY: KATERINA PEJOSKA

Group vs Individual

"I also notice that safety within a group is very important, and that it is also very important for children to learn from each other and to be able to work together. That is also something important for later in life. But I do think that if you have given a child individual attention, sometimes it can be easier for that child to keep up with the group."

- Davita

"You know with the groups, you are not pushing people to do something they don't want. So I think that when someone feel(s) lonely and they try to be with a group, they can freely choose to (be) participate or not, because you can take a space and in the end, you are not exposed by the people who say, who look at you, like, you are away of the group."

- E

"Then I was, for example playing Call of Duty with a few guys, with two or three boys. But I had very valuable conversations with those guys. And then it's only 2 or 3 people, but I prefer being able to have a proper conversation with 2 or 3 people and go a bit deeper in terms of content, rather than having 10 or 20 people just watching, for example, and not saying anything."

- Dirk

Reflections

Meaning of 'Marginalized'



PHOTO BY: KATERINA PEJOSKA

Meaning of 'Marginalized'

Marginalizing:
To treat someone or
something as if they
are not important.
- Cambridge Dictionary

"The biggest challenge is that many people — even my teachers — don't understand or won't accept what 'diverse' means. I've explained it a thousand times and they still look at me like I'm an alien."

- Youngster, DE

"Marginalized groups are, I think, youngsters that have to deal with a lot of biases, and youngsters that move in two worlds: so a very different world at home than at school. This could cause them to feel misunderstood, and could give them identity struggles, which could be very negative for their development."

- Davita

"For me marginalized group is every individual that has different barriers regardless of background, race, ethnicity and nationality. And does not have equal rights."

- Edisona

"I find it hard to be accepted as I am. Often people see only my appearance and jump to conclusions. I also had a lot of trouble finding an internship — unlike my German classmates."

- Youngster, DE



PHOTO BY: KATERINA PEJOSKA

"Marginalized youth are young individuals who face systemic barriers and social exclusion due to factors such as poverty, discrimination, lack of education, unemployment, gender inequality, disability, or minority status. These barriers limit their access to opportunities and resources, hindering their ability to participate fully in society and reach their potential. For me, they represent a group that requires tailored support and advocacy to help them navigate challenges and achieve equity."

- Isaac

"For me most of my experience is here from my town people endangered by social like financial issues, drug problems whatever. I think we have alot like. Usually there is a very bad family background. You have families like where they are divorced and usually there is mum or dad looking after these kids and these kids they dont have enough attention simply. It can also go with the money, that their mum does not have alot of money so they dont have alot of things at school so they are on the edge of society at school, then they dont go for non formal education because they cannot afford it, so again they belong to the edge of society. That is what is for me here in my town."

- Petra J.

"We have about 100 pupils with different individual visual sights, living in our boarding school, learning to manage their live and studies. Most of them differ a lot from their peers facing so difficult problems resulting from their visual impairment."

- Petra O.

Improvement

What Youth Workers Need



PHOTO BY: ELEANOR JOZAK

"Training in cultural competences and participatory designing programs."

- Edisona

"Specialized Training: Workshops on trauma-informed care, cultural competence, and inclusive facilitation strategies. Resource Development: Access to toolkits, teaching aids, and digital resources tailored for engaging marginalized youth. Improved Facilities: Safe, accessible, and well-equipped spaces for conducting workshops. Community Partnerships: Collaborating with local organizations to provide comprehensive support services. Funding: Financial support to cover transportation, materials, and incentives for participants. Feedback Mechanisms: Tools to evaluate the impact of workshops and gather input from youth for continuous improvement."

- Isaac

"To improve work with marginalised youth, long-term projects with sustained funding would be crucial. Stable financial support would allow for continuity and the development of meaningful, lasting relationships with the youth. Furthermore, building networks and direct contacts with youth welfare institutions would facilitate greater collaboration and resource sharing. Additional staff would also be essential, providing support for social workers involved in projects or initiatives that require close and consistent engagement with marginalised youth. With these resources, it would be possible to enhance the depth and reach of programs tailored to meet the unique needs of these young people."

- Markus R.

Thank you

To every youth worker who took time to reflect, share, and speak honestly —

To every young person who trusted us with their voice, their story, or even just a moment —

Thank you.

This booklet exists because of you.

Your insights, frustrations, humor, and hope are what make it real.

We're also deeply grateful to Erasmus+ for trusting us with such an important task — and for making this work possible.

We also want to thank everyone who helped bring Mosaic of Minds to life — from interviewers and designers to translators, testers, and quiet supporters behind the scenes.

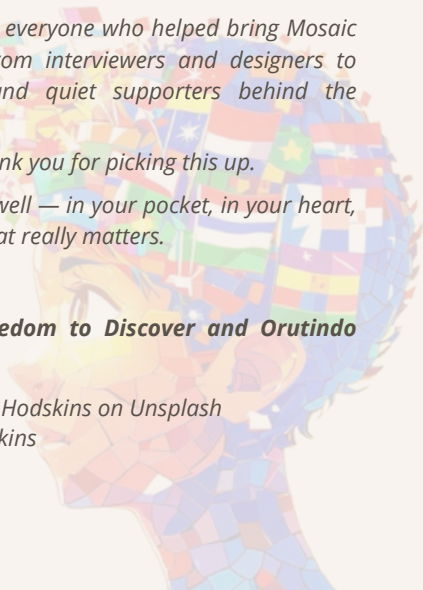
And to the readers: thank you for picking this up.

We hope it serves you well — in your pocket, in your heart, or in a conversation that really matters.

With gratitude,

The teams from Freedom to Discover and Orutindo Foundation

Cover photo by Patrick Hodskins on Unsplash
unsplash.com/@phodskins



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"How difficult is it, when you're standing in the circle, to turn around and reach out a hand to someone to help them into the circle?" - Marieke

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