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Internal migration and the COVID-19 pandemic in the Philippines¹

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31 August 2021

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has created economic disruption in the Philippines, resulting in loss of income for many workers. Because of this, many internal migrants, particularly those who continued to have close ties to their place of origin, returned home. This report investigates internal migrants in the country using preliminary data from the 2020 Census of Population and Housing (CPH) by the Philippine Statistics Authority. While not completely exhaustive, the 2020 CPH may help identify areas where the population has increased or decreased compared to expectations or population projections. Higher-than-expected population is due to relocation of families from danger zones to resettlement areas. Lower-than-expected population, on the other hand, is seen in areas where natural calamities frequently strike and in urbanized areas usually populated by students and worker residents before the pandemic.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created economic disruption in the Philippines, resulting in loss of income for many workers. Because of this, many internal migrants, particularly those who continued to have close ties to their place of origin, returned home. While there is no available data yet on the mobility of internal migrants in the country during the pandemic, this report investigates internal migrants in the country using preliminary data from the 2020 Census of Population and Housing by the Philippine Statistics Authority. Changes in population were estimated by comparing the actual population in 2020 to the projected population from the previous census. A lower-than-expected population would mean individuals have moved away from that location. The area has fewer than expected internal migrants as these migrants have returned to their place of origin. However, it is essential to note that while this

¹ This paper is part of the United Nations Population Fund Philippines Country Office project on estimating excess deaths, births, and migration in the Philippines during the COVID-19 pandemic. The authors would like to thank the Philippine Statistics Authority and Dr. Claire Dennis S. Mapa for serving as technical advisor. All remaining errors are authors' own. Corresponding author: kjsbriones@gmail.com

procedure cannot precisely quantify the number of individuals who moved but this would be a helpful initial guide for policy and programs aimed to support dislocated individuals and workers in the country.

Data and results

In this report, the 2020 Census of Population and Housing data from the Philippine Statistics Authority is used together with the 2020 population projection from the previous census to estimate an indicator of internal migration in areas in the Philippines. The country's population in 2020 was 109.0 million, higher than the projected population by 0.2 million or 0.18%. While the difference in the national actual and projected numbers is small, gaps between actual and projected population are different when one looks at regional numbers. In Figure 1, Region VIII's actual to projected population gap is around -4%, which when translated to actual number of individuals equals 195 thousand fewer individuals than projected. The National Capital Region's (NCR) actual population, on the other hand, is 2.3% lower than projected, or 320 thousand fewer individuals than projected. This decrease in the population in the NCR supports anecdotal evidence that people in the region have moved out during the pandemic and relocated to neighboring CALABARZON and Central Luzon.

Figure 1. Difference of actual population from projected population, by region, count and percent

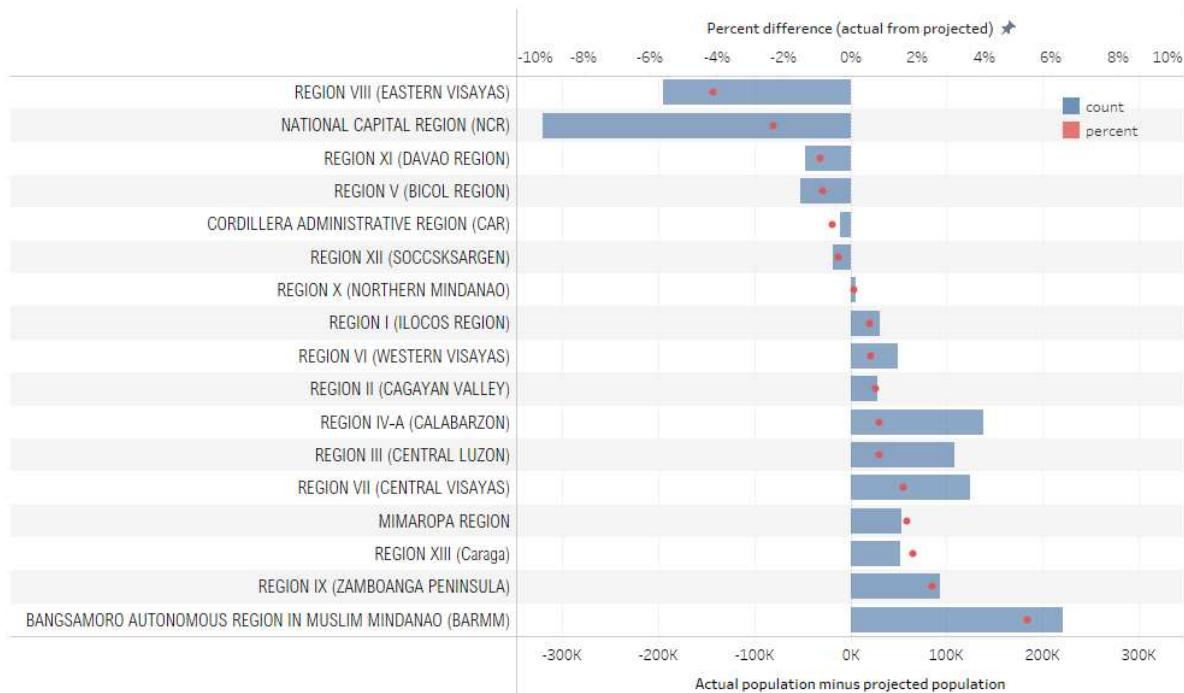
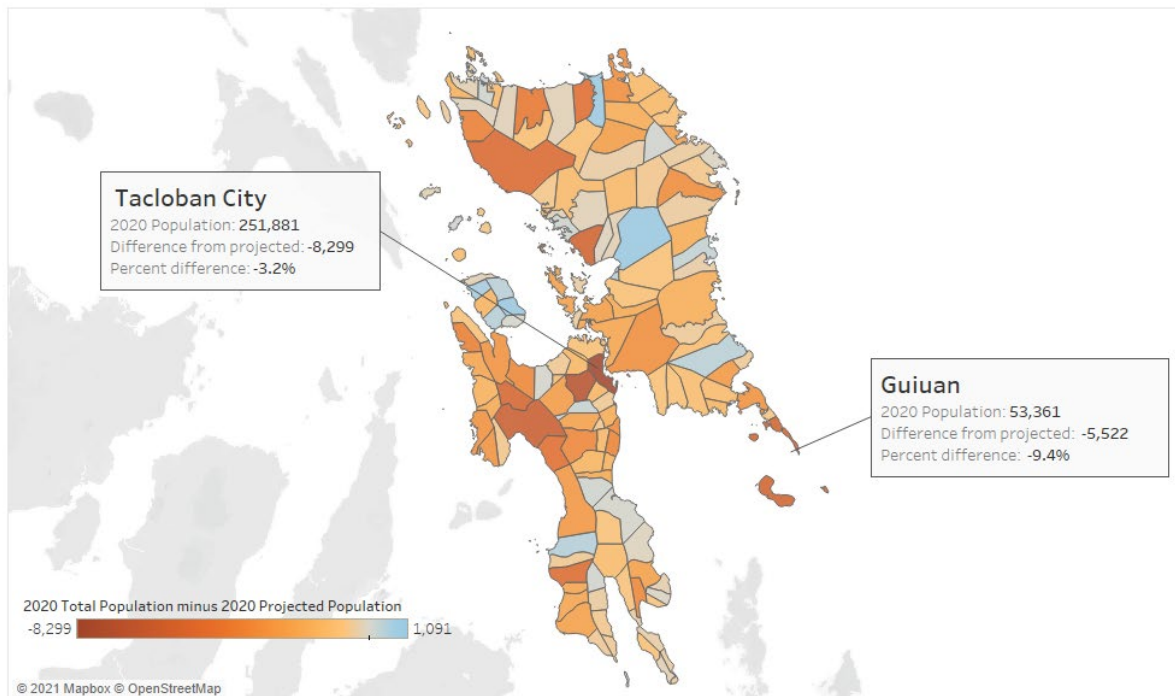


Figure 2. Difference of actual population from projected population, Eastern Samar Region



Natural calamities

The less-than-expected population seen in the Eastern Visayas is primarily due to natural calamities. Being located west of the Philippine Ocean, the region is frequently visited by typhoons. Figure 2 displays the municipalities and cities in the Eastern Visayas Region and the difference between each area's actual and projected populations. An orange color indicates that the actual value is less than the projected value, while blue means the actual population is higher. Almost all the municipalities and cities in the region have an actual population less than the projected population. Tacloban City, one of the hardest hit during typhoon Yolanda in November 2013, has 8 thousand less population than the projected. Another town, Guiuan, has a population 9% lower than the projected.

Unemployment

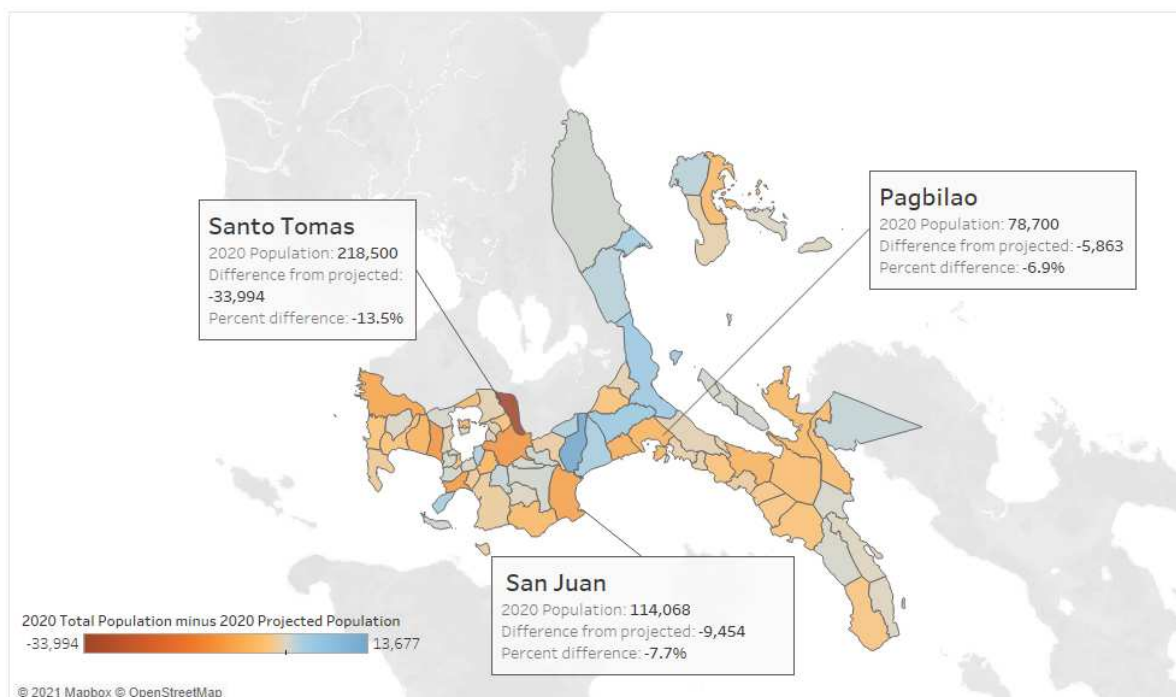
In April 2020, as the government imposed lockdowns and mobility restrictions due to the pandemic, the PSA estimated 7.3 million unemployed Filipinos. Unemployment during the month was 17.7%, higher than the previous year's unemployment rate of 5.3%. Furthermore, 13 million employed persons were with a job but were not reporting to work.² NCR reported an unemployment rate of

² <https://psa.gov.ph/content/employment-situation-april-2020>

12%, while other regions reported unemployment rates as high as 29.8% in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao and 27.3% in Central Luzon. The number of employed individuals went down from 41.8 million in April 2019 to 33.8 in April 2020. There was a decrease across all sectors, with the services sector taking the worst hit.

Employment is the primary driver of internal migration in the Philippines.³ With the tourism industry being badly hit during the pandemic, it is not surprising that high-tourist areas would have a lower-than-expected population in 2020 as people seek employment elsewhere or go back to their place of origin. San Juan in Batangas and Pagbilao in Quezon, both known for their beaches, recorded 9 thousand and 6 thousand lower-than-projected populations, respectively (see figure 3). In the Visayas, Tagbilaran City in Bohol has a 2020 population 6 thousand lower than projected (see figure 4). Similarly, Cebu City and its neighboring municipalities and city experienced a lower-than-projected population in 2020.

Figure 3. Difference of actual population from projected population, Batangas and Quezon provinces



³ <https://www.uppi.upd.edu.ph/sites/default/files/pdf/COVID-19-Research-Brief-06.pdf>

Figure 4. Difference of actual population from projected population, Cebu and Bohol provinces

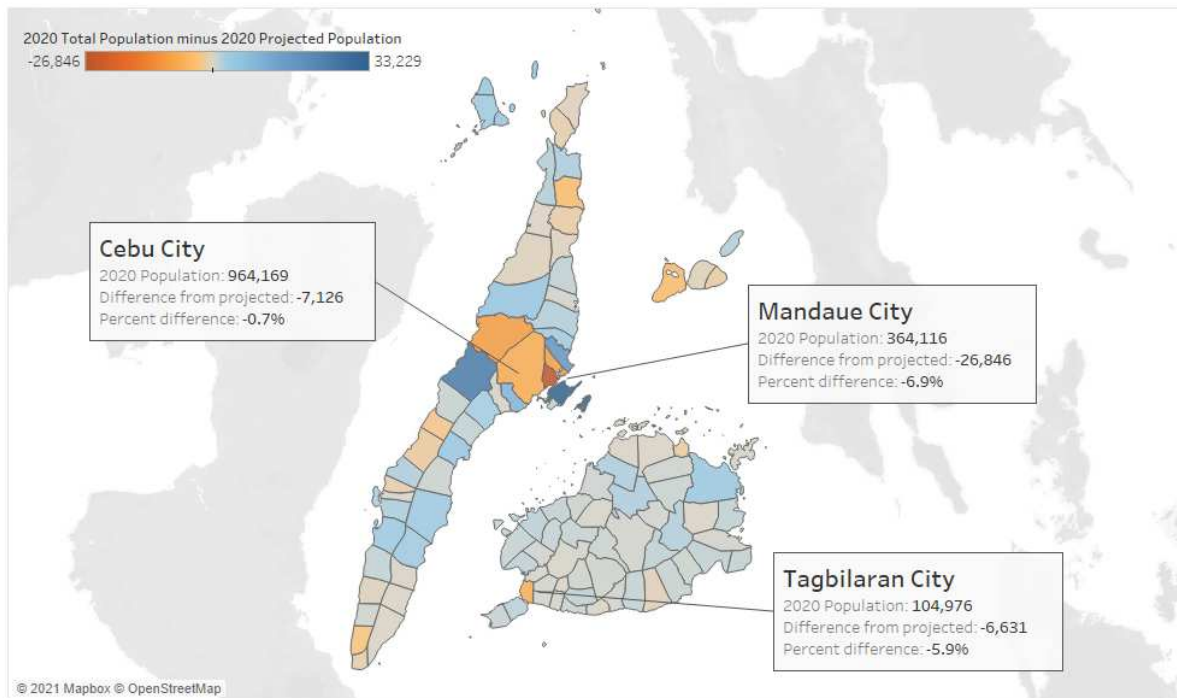


Figure 5. 2015 and 2020 population of selected barangays, Quezon City near University of the Philippines, Diliman

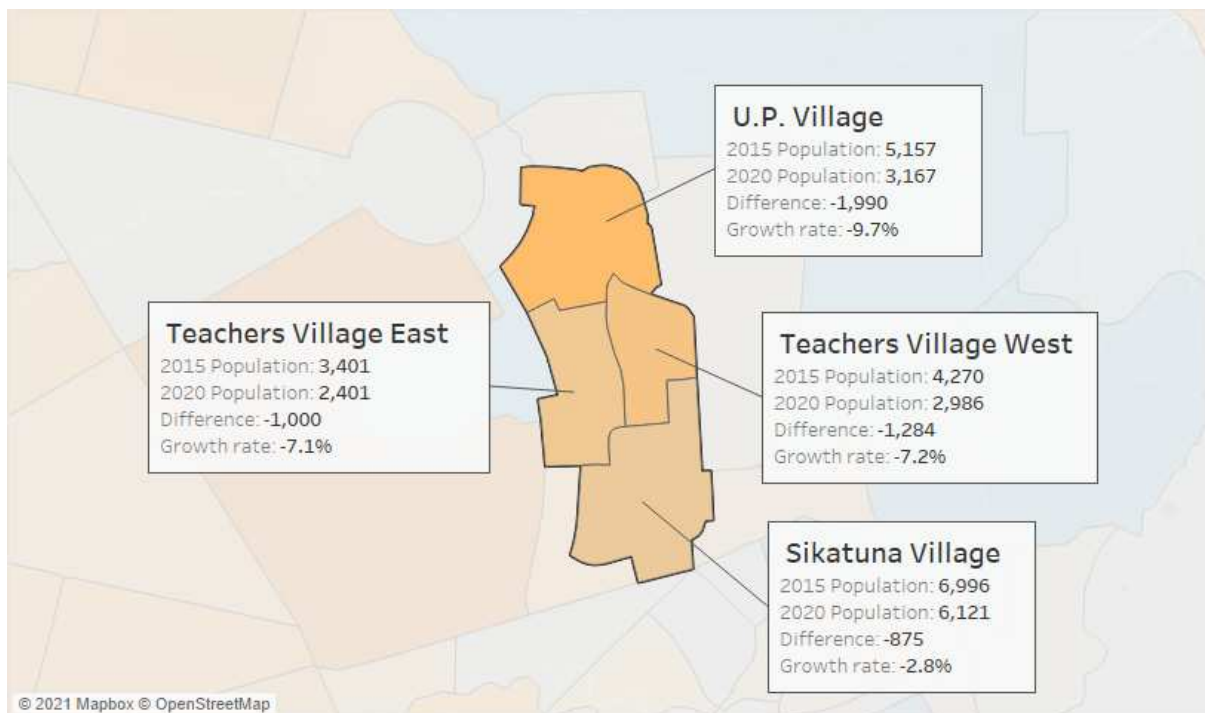
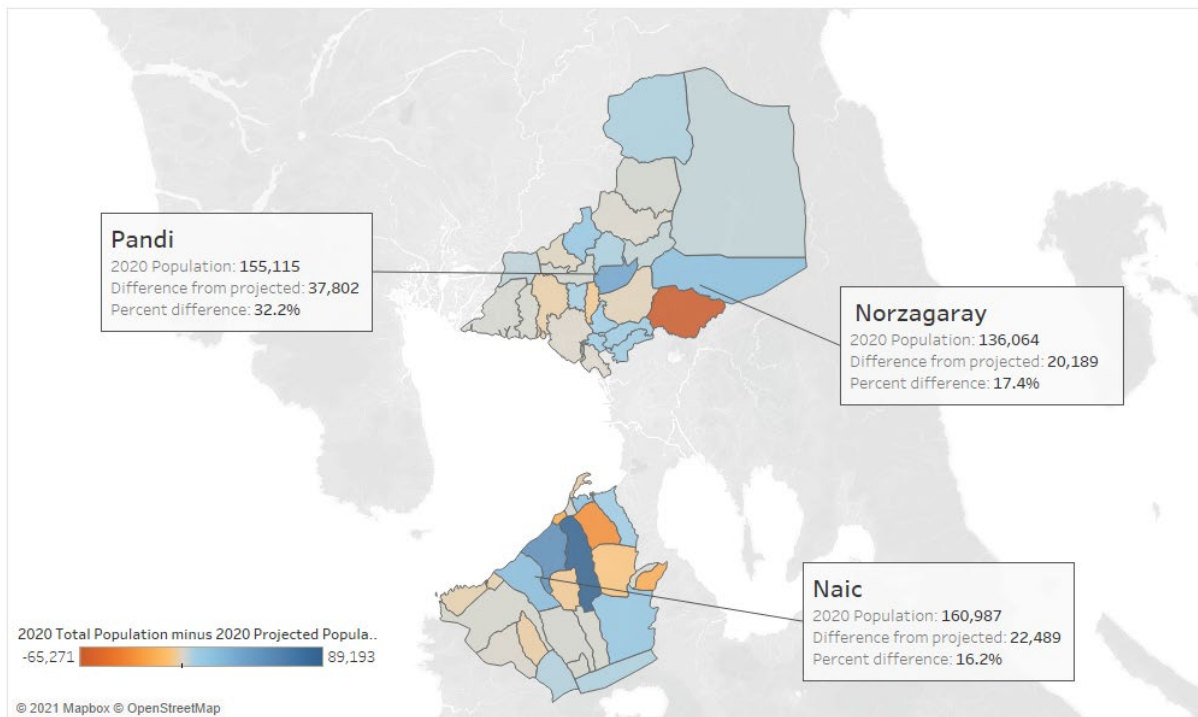


Figure 6. Difference of actual population from projected population, Bulacan and Cavite provinces



Education

Education, particularly tertiary education, is another driver of internal migration in the country. Teenagers and young adults usually seek higher education in nearby cities where colleges and universities are located. NCR is a recipient of an immense number of these student migrants. There are 281 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in NCR, excluding local universities and colleges, attended by students from all over the country.⁴ Quarantine measures and stay-at-home policies because of COVID-19 have forced these HEIs to implement alternative learning forms to continue education despite the pandemic. With classes now held online, these students have opted to return to their home provinces and continue online education while being with their families. Figure 5 is an example of how the migration of students back to their original residences affected the population of barangays near HEIs. The 2020 population in barangays U.P. Village, Teachers Village East and West, and Sikatuna Village in Quezon City near the University of the Philippines in Diliman is less than their 2015 population. This drop in the population sums to more than 5 thousand individuals.

⁴ <https://ched.gov.ph/list-of-higher-education-institutions-2/>

Relocation

From 2016 to 2019, the National Housing Authority has made available at least 2 thousand housing units in Pandi, Bulacan, 5 thousand housing units in Norzagaray, Bulacan, and more than 4 thousand housing units in Naic, Cavite.⁵ These units were distributed to informal settler families in danger areas, and families affected by government construction sites. Figure 6 shows that these three areas have more-than-expected populations: 38 thousand more individuals in Pandi, 20 thousand in Norzagaray, and 22 thousand in Naic. These are just a few relocation sites intended to house families in and out of NCR. Other relocation sites within NCR include Batasan Hills and Pasong Tamo in Quezon City, Bignay in Valenzuela, Tanza in Navotas City, Manggahan in Pasig City, Tondo in Manila, Camarin in Caloocan and Fabella road in Mandaluyong. Outside NCR resettlement areas include San Ildefonso, San Jose Del Monte and San Miguel in Bulacan, Mariveles in Bataan, Masantol in Pampanga, Calamba in Laguna, and Antipolo City, Baras, Morong, and Tanay in Rizal.

Discussion and policy implications

Knowing the number and demographics of a locality's population is essential in policymaking. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic estimating the number of individuals in the municipalities and cities has become challenging as internal migrants return to their home residences. Using the initial results of the 2020 Census of Population and Housing of the Philippine Statistics Authority, this report helps identify areas where the population has increased or decreased compared to expectations or population projections.

In the Philippines, several factors are seen as a reason for a higher-than-expected population. Even before the pandemic, the government has relocated families from danger areas, particularly in NCR, to safer areas either within their same city or outside NCR. Because of this, there are visible increases in population in resettlement areas, particularly in Pandi and Norzagaray in Bulacan and Naic in Laguna. A lower-than-expected population, on the other hand, is seen in areas where natural

⁵ <https://nha.gov.ph/annual-reports/>

calamities frequently strike, such as the typhoon-prone areas of Eastern Visayas. Furthermore, highly urbanized areas usually populated due to many student and worker residences are now less populated than expected. This event is not only felt in NCR but other cities throughout the country as well.

It is of importance that local government units (LGUs) are updated on the number of citizens living in their jurisdiction. Their Internal Revenue Allotment (IRA) is partly based on their population. Thus, a significant decrease in their population would impact their share of revenues from the national government. Conversely, it is crucial that LGUs that experienced an increase in their population be supported by the national government to ensure that health and economic services, among others, are given to dislocated individuals and workers.

This report aimed to provide a glimpse of the movement of internal migrants in the country as of 2020. It is recommended that a more detailed look at internal migrants be investigated once demographic data from the 2020 Census becomes available. Furthermore, the issue of back migration or cases when migrants go back to their place of work should be investigated as well. In this case, the Community-Based Monitoring System (CBMS) currently being developed and updated would be of great help. The possibility of another census round after the pandemic should also be explored.

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