

LSEMUN HIGH SCHOOL STUDY GUIDE



UNITED NATIONS ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAMME

BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE LSEMUN HS SECRETARIAT AND CHAIRING STAFF

MEET YOUR CHAIRS

Jana Bazeed - *Head Chair*

Hi everyone! I'm Jana, and I'm honoured to be serving as your Head Chair for the United Nations Environmental Programme at this year's LSEMUN:HS! I'm a second-year BSc Physics and Philosophy student (yes, they let you do that) at King's College London. Despite my chosen course of study, I have had a long-held interest in political theory and international relations--with a particular focus on science policy--having read extensively on the topics, and been active in debate and MUN throughout high-school. After a long break, I'm excited to be active in the MUN sphere again. I look forward to seeing you all! In my free time, I can almost definitely be found geeking out over something, be it comic books or rock music. I am also quite passionate about journalism and media in general, acting as Science Correspondent for Roar News, King's College London's very own award-winning student publication.



Ali Zeead Jangeerkhan - *Vice Chair*

Hey all! I'm Ali, a second year BSc Environmental Science with Business Management student from Queen Mary University of London from Mauritius. I'm looking forward to chairing you all at this year's LSEMUN:HS UNEP Committee! I have a deep rooted interest in everything that surrounds sustainability both in an economic and ecological context and I hope to pursue my career in that very field - I started MUN in parallel with the start of my tertiary studies but I have thoroughly enjoyed every minute of it since then! I would like to remind you all that although MUN can be nerve wracking sometimes, we can assure you that this will be a fantastic experience for all of you and that the #1 most important aspect of MUN is that you have fun - and Jana, Hayley and I will ensure that that is the case :) See you all soon!



MEET YOUR CHAIRS



Hayley Kwok - *Vice Chair*

Hello everyone! I'm Hayley, a first year BA French with Management student at UCL, and I'm the Careers Director at UCL United Nations Association. Whilst my degree doesn't have a direct link to international affairs or politics, my interest in this field has grown since starting my MUN journey two years ago. From participating in internal training sessions in Sixth Form and organising our MUN conference as USG for Conference Services, to university conferences like delegating in ULMUN, OXiMUN, UCLMUN and chairing at QMUN, I'm looking forward to joining many more conferences to come and hope you share the same sentiment! Aside from MUN, I'm probably drinking coffee, taking photos of just about everything, baking or spending time outdoors - except when it's cold, which is all too often. I can't wait to meet you all at this year's LSEMUN:HS conference and for our UNEP committee sessions to begin!



James Nguyen - *Assistant Chair*

Hello, my name is James, a year 12 A level student studying maths, physics, chemistry and further maths. I took place in his first YouthMUN at the LSE in 2023 and having loved the experience, took the role of assistant chair for LSEMUN High School at UNEP 2024. I was born in Singapore and has been raised in Singapore and the UK. Outside of MUN and academics, I have an avid passion for travelling, hoping to tick off a bucketlist of destinations, football (although Man United typically lets me down), gym and guitar. I look forward to seeing you all at LSEMUN HS 24'!



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LETTER FROM THE CHAIRS

Dear delegates,

Welcome to the United Nations Environmental Programme at LSEMUN:HS 2024! We are Jana Bazeed, Ali Zeead Jangeerkhan, Hayley Kwok, and James Duy Minh Nguyen, and we are honoured to be serving as your secretariat for this conference.

The topic we chose for this committee is “Sustainable Resource use and Ethics in the Fashion Industry”. The fashion industry and its environmental impact are topics we are all intimately familiar with, growing up in an age of rapidly changing trends and the internet. We hope that through your research and fruitful debate throughout this conference, you will gain a wider appreciation of the importance of the issue at hand.

This study guide aims to act as an introduction to the topic you will be debating during this conference, giving you valuable starting points to guide your own research and preparation. Here, you will find a general background on the topic, key definitions, past international action, and some things to keep in mind when coming up with potential solutions. Good preparation is a key part of making the most of an MUN conference; we encourage you to take advantage of a vast range of resources when compiling your research. These include (but are not limited to): your assigned country’s government website, official UN sites and documents, and reputable news sites.

As your dias, our job is to ensure this committee operates smoothly. Part of that is providing you with the necessary support to ensure your experience at this conference is a positive and engaging one. As this is a beginner committee, we know that for many of you this may be your first foray into the world of MUN--welcome! We’ve been in your shoes before, and know what it is like, so feel free to reach out with any questions or concerns you may have.

We look forward to seeing you all. Good luck!

Best wishes,

Jana, Ali, Hayley, and James



INTRODUCTION TO UNEP

Established in 1972, the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) is tasked with finding solutions to the triple planetary crisis comprising climate change, nature and biodiversity loss, and pollution and waste (United Nations Environmental Programme, n.d.). Originating at the Stockholm Conference on the Human Environment, the UNEP has since evolved into a leading authority on environmental issues, coordinating global efforts to promote sustainable development and safeguard the planet for present and future generations. (United Nations Environmental Programme, n.d.)

The UNEP's mandate encompasses a wide range of responsibilities aimed at fostering international collaboration on environmental protection and sustainable development. It serves as a platform for countries to come together, share knowledge, and formulate policies that address global environmental challenges. The organisation is instrumental in coordinating efforts to combat climate change, protect biodiversity, and mitigate pollution. Additionally, the UNEP also plays a crucial role in advocating for the integration of environmental considerations into national and international policymaking processes. (United Nations Environmental Programme, n.d.)

The structure of the UNEP reflects its commitment to inclusivity and collaboration. It operates as a United Nations agency with a Governing Council composed of member states that meets periodically to set policies and priorities. The UNEP Secretariat, headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya, implements these policies and manages day-to-day operations. Through its various programs, initiatives, and partnerships, the UNEP engages with governments, non-governmental organisations, businesses, and communities worldwide to fulfil its mission. (United Nations Environmental Programme, 2017)



TOPIC:

Sustainable Resource Use and Ethics in the Fashion Industry



INTRODUCTION

The captivating world of fashion, with its flashy runways and trendsetting ensembles, often casts a long shadow. Hidden behind the alluring façade lies an industry leaving a significant and unsustainable footprint on our planet and people. From polluting waterways with dyes and chemicals to generating mountains of textile waste and contributing to excessive carbon emissions, the fashion industry's environmental impact paints a concerning picture (WWF, 2023). Moreover, unethical labour practices, characterised by low wages, poor working conditions, and even forced labour, are not uncommon in the global supply chains of our favourite garments (Fashion Revolution, 2023). Sustainable fashion, a potent alternative, is forming a new narrative with a focus on environmental stewardship, ethical practices, and responsible consumption. It champions reducing the industry's reliance on virgin resources, minimising waste through circularity, and employing sustainable materials like organic cotton and recycled fibres (EMF, 2023). By prioritising ethical labour practices and fair trade initiatives, sustainable fashion aims to empower workers and ensure human rights are respected throughout the supply chain.

The urgency for change cannot be overstated. The fashion industry accounts for an alarming 20% of global wastewater and is responsible for 10% of humanity's carbon emissions (McKinsey & Company, 2016). This ecological burden threatens natural resources and contributes to the climate crisis we face. Embracing sustainable fashion allows us to mitigate these impacts, conserving precious water, reducing waste generation, and lowering carbon footprints. Beyond environmental benefits, sustainable fashion fosters a more just and equitable world. By promoting fair wages and safe working conditions, it empowers workers and contributes to ending exploitative practices.

The fashion industry is a global industry - hence, UNEP aims to foster trans-national consensus and collaboration to promote sustainable practices in both the environmental and social contexts throughout the supply chain through diplomacy and discussion.



KEY TERMS

Fast fashion	Can be defined as high volumes of lower quality garments being produced at low price levels (EU, 2023)
Circular economy	The circular economy model is built on the ideology of minimising waste to the greatest possible degree. This involves reusing and recycling resources for as long as they remain viable - as well as extending product life cycle.
Sustainable materials	These materials are alternatives to historically common fibres used in textile production and allow for a more socially and environmentally sustainable production process and supply-chain, they are as follows:
Plant-based fibres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycled cotton • Organic hemp • linen • OrganicTENCEL™ lyocell (made from controlled and certified sourced natural raw material wood. (TENCEL™, 2023)
Animal-derived fibres	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recycled wool
Other alternatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ECONYL® (Produced entirely from natural and landfill waste such as plastic, old fabric scraps and more. (ECONYL®, 2023)) • Bananatex® (Made entirely from banana plants) • CIRCULOSE® (Made from recycled natural fibres)



KEY TERMS

Ethical labour practices	Fair working conditions for all workers involved in the fashion supply chain, including fair wages, safe workplaces, freedom of association, and respect for human rights. This also means avoiding child labour, forced labour, and discrimination based on factors like gender, race, or religion. (i.e. Fair Labour Standards Act (FLSA), The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), International Labour Organisation (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work)
Transparency and Traceability	The ability to track the origin and production process of a garment, from the raw materials to the finished product. This allows consumers to make informed choices about the clothes they buy and helps hold brands accountable for their practices.
Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)	This is the process of determining the impact of a given product on the environment with the intention of maximising resource efficiency and reducing environmental impact (EEA, 2023)



KEY ISSUES

ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS

The fashion industry casts a long shadow on the environment, leaving a trail of pollution, resource depletion, and waste in its wake. It is a major contributor to water pollution, with textile dyeing and finishing processes unleashing chemical cocktails into waterways. A single cotton t-shirt guzzles a staggering 2,700 litres of water to reach your closet (WWF, 2023). That is enough to fill fourteen bathtubs, highlighting the industry's thirst for precious freshwater resources. Moreover, the industry accounts for a staggering 20% of global wastewater, a number that paints a grim picture of its environmental footprint (WWF, 2023).

The environmental impacts extend to other areas too -; synthetic fibres like polyester, mainstays of fast fashion, contribute significantly to air pollution through the release of nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas with a potency 310 times that of carbon dioxide (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2020).

The environmental toll goes beyond pollution--the industry is a voracious consumer of natural resources, particularly the cotton plant. Cotton's thirsty nature demands vast amounts of water and land, leading to soil erosion and deforestation (World Wildlife Fund, 2023). Imagine fertile plains turning into barren landscapes, all to fulfil our demand for trendy cotton tees.

The final piece of this environmental puzzle is the mountain of textile waste generated on an annual basis. An estimated 2.1 billion tons of discarded clothes pile up globally, filling landfills and polluting oceans with microplastics (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2020). Each discarded garment represents a lost resource and a silent testament to our unsustainable consumption habits.

SOCIAL AND ETHICAL ISSUES

Beyond the environmental devastation, the fashion industry stands accused of a litany of unethical labour practices. Workers in developing countries, often women and children, are subjected to extremely poor working conditions, characterised by low wages, long hours, and unsafe environments (Fashion Revolution, 2023). The use of forced labour is also prominent in the seemingly glamorous world of high fashion.



KEY ISSUES

Opacity pervades the fashion industry, shrouded in a culture lacking transparency and traceability. Complex supply chains, often spanning continents, make it virtually impossible for consumers to track the journey of their clothes, from raw materials to finished products. This lack of transparency hinders accountability and empowers brands to engage in unethical practices while maintaining a polished public image.

Moreover, discrimination and inequality weave themselves into the fabric of the fashion industry. Diversity and inclusion remain elusive goals, with women and minorities underrepresented in leadership positions and facing systemic biases based on race, gender, and body size (Fashion Revolution, 2023).

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

The rise of fast fashion has fueled a culture of overconsumption. We buy more clothes than ever before, driven by cheap prices and trends, only to discard them quickly, creating a relentless cycle of consumption and waste. This demand feeds the environmental and social issues mentioned earlier, perpetuating a system that thrives on short-term gain at the expense of long-term well-being. Lack of awareness about the environmental and social impacts hinders informed choices and perpetuates unsustainable practices. We often wear our ignorance like a comfortable garment, oblivious to the true cost of our clothing choices.

Further complicating this issue is the practice of greenwashing - defined as when an organisation uses the “eco-friendly” narrative to deceptively market itself as perpetrators of sustainable practices, when the reality of things is very different. Some brands engage in this deceptive marketing tactic, painting themselves as champions of sustainability while masking their actual practices.

These key issues, interconnected and complex, paint a stark picture of the fashion industry's impact on our planet and its people. Addressing them requires a multifaceted approach, involving industry transformation, consumer education, and policy interventions.



CASE STUDIES

Learning about and reflecting on previous cases can inform us on the consequences and guide subsequent action. The first case study is the Rana Plaza Disaster which happened in 2013 in Bangladesh. It was one of the worst accidents in the fashion sector, leading to action between companies and the creation of an Accord. The second case study is the Green Claims Code scheme, used by businesses here in the UK. Both cases should help you better understand the current situation of the fashion industry and sustainable resource use across the world.

THE RANA PLAZA DISASTER: BANGLADESH

The Rana Plaza Disaster in Bangladesh was the most detrimental industrial incident in the garment industry. Various shops, garment factories and a bank inside the eight-story commercial building perished when it collapsed on the 24th April 2013. The accident killed 1,134 people, with thousands more injured. As the media began to report the event, the reality of human toll was brought to light, with survivors left with no choice but to amputate their limbs as a last resort to escape the ruins. Despite warnings to avoid using the Rana Plaza building the day prior following the discovery of large structural cracks, garment workers were pressured by higher management to return to work. Hours later, the building gave way, injuring or killing the majority of the workers.

The accident led to the creation of the Accord on Fire and Building Safety in May 2013, which over 200 companies signed on. Consequently, the Rana Plaza Arrangement was created in order to coordinate compensation for affected families. Effort was made to convince brands that source from Rana Plaza, including Primark, Mango, Bonmarche and more, to take responsibility and contribute financially, in accordance with ability. In particular, over 1 million signatures were collected in support of Italian company Benetton to pay an appropriate amount, owing to irrefutable evidence demonstrating their link to Rana Plaza, such as images of Benetton labels in the building rubble. Brands like Benetton that kept stalling only furthered the suffering of workers and their families impacted by the incident. Only afterwards could the compensation process begin, which was a stepping stone to providing aid to affected individuals.

The Rana Plaza collapse led to more political pressure than ever seen before to implement change, leading to instrumental ground-breaking approaches to prevention and remedy.



CASE STUDIES

GREEN CLAIMS CODE: UK

Green claims, also called ‘environmental claims’ or ‘eco-friendly claims’ show how a product, service, brand or business provides a benefit to or is less harmful to the environment (Green Claims Campaign UK). Many businesses use these to help market their products or services, such as through statements, symbols, logos, graphics and colours.

For example, wrapping on a chocolate bar may indicate that it is made from fairtrade cocoa, a cafe may advertise that the coffee they serve is brewed with ethically sourced coffee beans, a crisp packet may have a green ribbon around it showing the new packaging uses 30% less plastic than before, the packaging on meat alternatives may have a sticker to say that it travelled fewer air miles than meat products therefore releasing fewer carbon dioxide emissions, or the label on a pair of jeans advertising the fabric composition with 40% recycled cotton.

Yet, such claims can sometimes be misleading, exaggerated or not representative of the way customers use the product. 53% of green claims are vague and misleading, and 40% lack supporting evidence, as the European Commission finds.

The Green Claims Code was developed by the UK Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), which details 6 key points to ensure environmental claims are solid. This helps consumers and businesses alike, by ensuring claims are genuine and not misleading, making it clear to customers and protecting a business’ reputation.

The Green Claims Code means any green claims that businesses make about their products must:

1. Be truthful and accurate.
2. Clear and unambiguous.
3. Not omit or hide important information.
4. Only make fair and meaningful comparisons.
5. Consider the product’s full life cycle.
6. Be substantiated and evidence-backed.

Businesses should be able to agree to all the statements on a checklist from the CMA, which ensures compliance to the consumer protection law. Awareness should be raised about the CMA’s Green Claims Code campaign so that customers and businesses alike are informed on how sustainability and environmental claims about different products, both within and outside of the fashion industry, are made.



INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

CONSUMERS

There is no doubt that the sustainability of resources used in the fashion industry is a pressing current issue. 67 percent of respondents in a 2020 McKinsey survey consider sustainable material use to be an important purchasing factor in the fashion industry, showing high demand for sustainability within the realms of fashion and textiles.

COUNTRIES

With around 80 percent of cotton used in clothing, there are approximately 32 million cotton farmers across the world. The top five cotton producing countries are China, India, the United States of America, Brazil and Pakistan, altogether accounting for over three-quarters of global cotton production.

As for textile exports, including clothing production materials and finished garments, making up around 41% of the total export market worldwide is China, leading with an export value of 148 billion US dollars, followed by the European Union at 71 billion US dollars.

According to IFDAQ Global Cities Consumer IPX (Index), based on general economy, fashion economic performance, market capitalisation and industry influence, the top cities globally in the fashion industry as of 2022 are Paris, New York, Milan and London.

Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali are the leading cotton producers and exporters in Africa, referred to as the Cotton-4, who account for 3 percent in total of world cotton production.

INITIATIVES

Consequently, the UN General Assembly initiated World Cotton Day on 7 October. This aims to raise visibility of the cotton sector and awareness of the crucial role of cotton production for economic development, international trade and poverty alleviation, helping over 100 million families worldwide according to WTO. As such, sustainable cotton production should be considered since conventional practice uses pesticides and has high water consumption.



INTERNATIONAL INVOLVEMENT

Cotton is the only commodity discussed separately at the World Trade Organisation, after an initiative launched in 2003 by the Cotton-4 aiming to make international trade of cotton fairer, and to expose links between trade, cotton and development. The WTO's discussions focus on reforms to address trade-distorting subsidies, to provide improved market access for cotton and similar products from LDCs, and development assistance to the cotton sector for developing countries through cooperation projects.

INTERNATIONAL BODIES

Various Geneva actors such as the World Trade Organisation, International Trade Centre, UN Conference on Trade and Development, Better Cotton Initiative, and more participated in Vienna during World Cotton Day 2023. In particular, the latter organisation is the largest cotton sustainability programme in the world, aiming to improve the production of cotton.

In addition, the United Nations Alliance on Sustainable Fashion launched in 2019 at the UN Environment Assembly. Hosting their secretariat is the Ethical Fashion Initiative. This International Trade Centre flagship programme connects marginalised creators from the developing world to international fashion houses, to benefit both parties.

The Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Change was also launched in 2021 at COP24, aiming to achieve in the textile, clothing and fashion industries by 2050. Nonetheless, further action should be carried out in the fashion industry to ensure the sustainable use of resources.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

There are many approaches that one can take when finding solutions to the issue of ethical resource use and the promotion of sustainable practices in the fashion industry. Below are some possible routes to consider, with some examples for each.

INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND CERTIFICATION

By adhering to globally recognized standards, companies can ensure transparency in their supply chains, fostering responsible sourcing and production. Certification programs, such as those for organic textiles or fair trade practices, serve as benchmarks which encourage businesses to meet ethical standards while providing consumers with reliable information about the environmental and social impact of their purchases.

Examples:

- *Global Organic Textile Standard (GOTS):* ensures organic status of textiles by setting strict criteria for ecological and social sustainability throughout the entire supply chain. (Global Organic Textile Standard, 2019).
- *Fair Trade Certification:* ensures fair prices, fair labour conditions, and community development for farmers and workers in developing countries..(Fairtrade International, 2023).

GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS AND ENFORCEMENT

Stringent policies regarding waste disposal, chemical usage, and fair labour practices can be instrumental in curbing environmentally harmful practices and unethical treatment of workers. Regulatory bodies can impose fines and penalties for non-compliance, creating a powerful incentive for fashion companies to adopt more sustainable and ethical business practices.

Examples:

- *European Union REACH Regulation:* regulates the production and use of chemicals to protect human health and the environment (European Chemicals Agency, 2018).
- *California Transparency in Supply Chains Act (SB 657) (USA):* requires companies to disclose efforts to eradicate slavery and human trafficking from their supply chains. (State of California Department of Justice, 2015).



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

TAX INCENTIVES

Governments could offer tax breaks or deductions for businesses that implement eco-friendly production methods, invest in renewable energy, or prioritise ethical labour practices. This approach not only benefits the environment and workers but also stimulates economic growth by rewarding socially responsible businesses.

Examples:

- Sustainable Investment Tax Credit (France): incentivizes investments in environmentally friendly projects. (Strauss, 2023).
- Green Energy Tax Credits (USA): works by incentivizing the use of renewable energy sources. (White-King, 2022).

EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY

The concept of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) requires fashion brands to take responsibility for the entire life cycle of their products, including post-consumer waste management (Gov.UK, 2023). Manufacturers are held accountable for the disposal and recycling of their products, fostering a more sustainable approach to resource use and waste reduction.

Examples:

- *EPEAT Certification for Electronics*: ensures that electronic products meet certain environmental criteria (OCSP US EPA, 2014).
- *H&M's Garment Collecting Initiative*: encourages consumers to recycle their old clothes to reduce waste (H&M, 2022).

EXTENDED PRODUCER RESPONSIBILITY

By allocating resources to innovative technologies and materials that have a lower environmental impact, companies can reduce their reliance on finite resources and minimise pollution. R&D efforts also contribute to the development of more sustainable practices, pushing the industry towards long-term solutions that benefit both the planet and future generations.



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Examples:

- *Mistra Future Fashion (Sweden)*: focuses on research and innovation to promote sustainability in the fashion industry (Mowbray, 2017).
- *Sustainable Clothing Action Plan (SCAP) (UK)*: aims to reduce the environmental footprint of clothing throughout its lifecycle (Wrap, 2020).



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: BLOC POSITIONS

CHINA

China's sustainable fashion scene is rapidly blossoming, fueled by a growing eco-conscious consumer base and significant advancements in textile recycling and innovative materials (China Daily, 2023). They're leading the charge in circular economy policies, evidenced by the ambitious "Textile Waste Utilisation Action Plan" (Ministry of Commerce of the PRC, 2023). However, concerns linger around supply chain transparency, labour practices in the garment industry (Fashion Revolution, 2023), and the environmental footprint of their colossal domestic production (World Wildlife Fund, 2023).

INDIA

India faces a unique challenge balancing the imperative for affordable clothing for its vast population with the need for sustainable practices in the textile industry. While they actively support initiatives like fair trade and organic cotton production (Ministry of Textiles, Government of India, 2023), affordability and livelihood concerns for millions of textile workers might influence their stance (World Bank, 2023).

UNITED KINGDOM

The UK boasts a long history in fashion and has emerged as a frontrunner in sustainable practices. They actively promote transparency and traceability initiatives like the Fashion Transparency Index (Fashion Revolution, 2023) and implement ambitious environmental regulations within their domestic textile industry. However, concerns remain about their historical role in fast fashion and the environmental footprint of their overseas production chains (WWF, 2023).



FOOD FOR THOUGHT: QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What specific measures can be implemented to ensure that fashion brands are transparent about their environmental impact?
- How can we enable consumers to make informed choices that align with conservation efforts?
- Can education and awareness programs empower consumers to actively participate in promoting sustainability in the fashion industry? Are they a viable solution?
- What mechanisms can be put in place to ensure effective Extended Producer Responsibility programs, especially in developing economies?
- What role should governments play in incentivizing private sector R&D investment for sustainable materials and production techniques in the fashion industry?
- If establishing international standards and certification for sustainable and ethical fashion, how can the interests of both developed and developing countries be balanced to ensure fair representation and adherence?



RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

Interesting Articles and Videos

- [The environmental costs of fast fashion](#)
- [UNSTITCHED: How the Fashion Industry is Destroying the Planet](#)

Key Documents to Consider

- [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#) (With special focus on SDG 12)
- [The Paris Agreement on Climate Change](#)
- [Fashion Industry Charter for Climate Action](#)



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