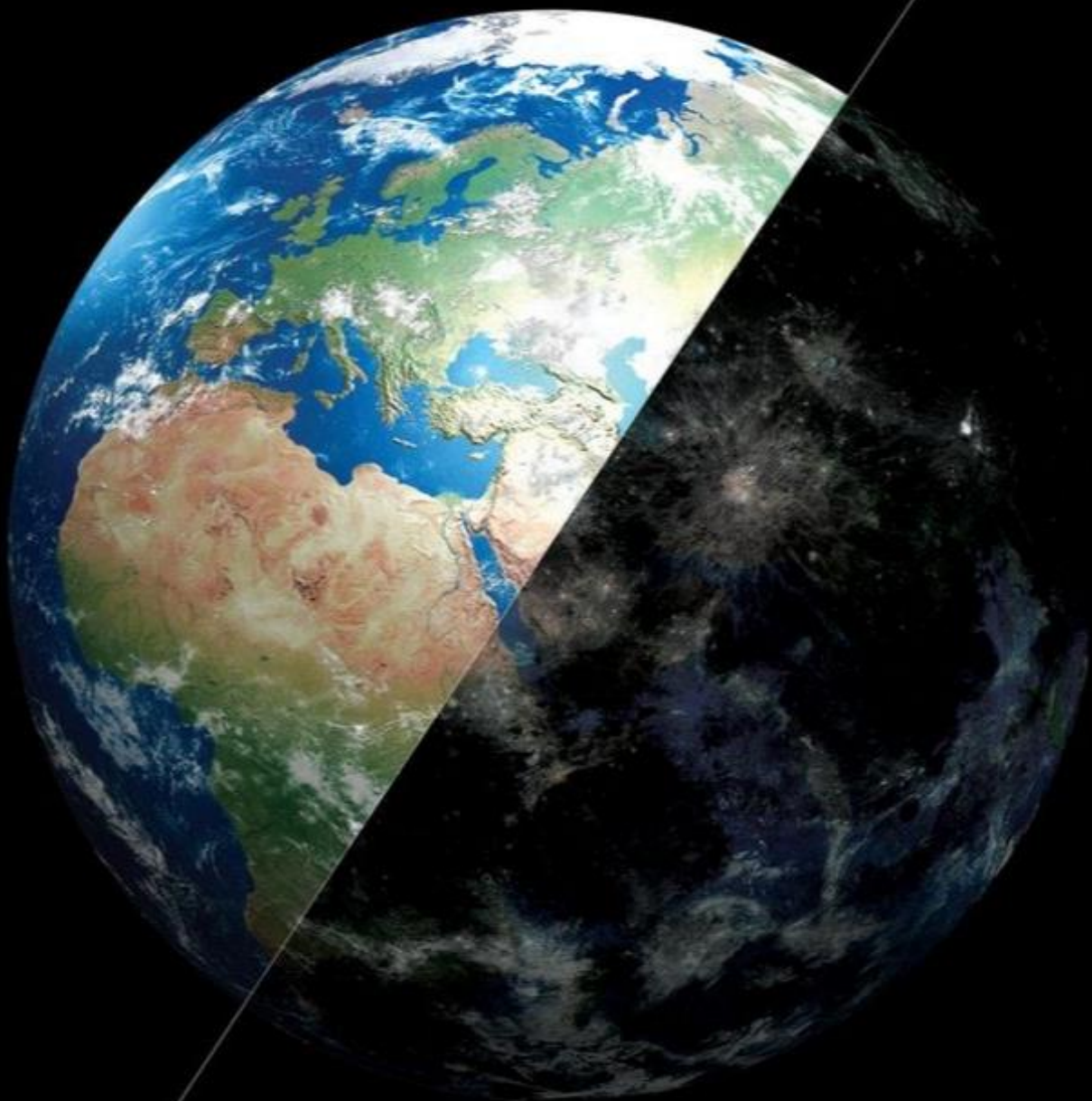


# THE URGENT CASE FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

A COMMUNITY WORK IRELAND BRIEFING  
PAPER



# The Urgent Case for Climate Justice

*A Community Work Ireland Briefing Paper*

## Introduction

*“Climate change is the defining issue of our time – and we are at a defining moment. We face a direct existential threat. Climate change is moving faster than we are – and its speed has provoked a sonic boom SOS across our world. If we do not change course by 2020, we risk missing the point where we can avoid runaway climate change, with disastrous consequences for people and all the natural systems that sustain us.”*

**António Guterres, UN Secretary General (2018)<sup>1</sup>**

Take a moment to read the words of António Guterres. Allow yourself to feel their weight. ‘Defining issue’, ‘direct existential threat’, ‘disastrous consequences’. When Guterres spoke these words at the UN General Assembly in 2018, he was speaking based on globally agreed scientific consensus and he was not talking about far-away places or people. He was speaking to you – about your life and the lives of your family and those in the communities where you live and work. And while we all face this threat, the burden will fall first and worst on those who have done the least to cause the problem and who have the least resources to adapt to or to mitigate against the worst effects. This is the significant injustice at the heart of climate change.

A major challenge in addressing the climate crisis is our inability to connect the categorically catastrophic scientific data to our own lives and to translate the undisputed science to commensurate action.<sup>2</sup> Even now, after Dáil Éireann declared a ‘climate and biodiversity emergency’ in May 2019, many have been critical that the state is failing to act in ways that takes the ‘sonic boom SOS’ seriously. Ambitious, state-led action to address the climate crisis is needed urgently. The UN Paris Agreement establishes equity and justice as guiding principles for climate policy – these principles must guide domestic efforts in Ireland. Responding to the crisis requires a thorough, rapid, gender-fair, economically just transition to a sustainable and equitable economy.

In this stark and urgent context, the purpose of this Community Work Ireland briefing paper is to support community workers and members of CWI to act for climate justice. A community work approach to addressing the climate crisis will be essential in delivering rapid and equitable mitigation and adaptation efforts. Community work principles and values can support this societal transition while supporting the most marginalised and disadvantaged communities to act collectively to address inequality and protect human rights in this time of crisis.

## Current Irish and International Policy

### International context

The international response to the climate crisis centres on the 2015 UN Paris Agreement. The principle aim of the Paris Agreement is to keep global temperature rises to well below 2°C while pursuing 1.5°C, which is a red-line target for small island developing states, for whom any further increase will result in their disappearance and displacement of entire nations.<sup>3</sup> Global climate governance hinges on two principles: **ambition** (the strength of countries’ ‘Nationally Determined Contributions’ or NDCs) and **equity** (enshrined in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change as ‘common but differentiated responsibility’).<sup>4</sup>

Ireland’s NDC is agreed collectively with the European Union as part of the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework. This framework sets goals including greenhouse gas emissions cuts, ramping up renewable energy production and achieving greater energy efficiency. In the next year, the EU Commission plans to ratchet up ambition from 40% to 55% emissions reductions by 2030. Yet many believe that even this is not enough to ensure emissions reductions are in line with science and equity, which suggests that the EU needs to adopt a 2030 target of at least 65%.<sup>5</sup>

The increasingly serious consequences of the climate crisis for human rights has been clearly highlighted by numerous UN Human Rights Council resolutions<sup>6</sup>, the recent report of the UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights<sup>7</sup> and the joint statement on climate change and human rights by five UN treaty bodies.<sup>8</sup> The Special Rapporteur’s report notes that ‘Climate change threatens truly catastrophic consequences across much of the globe and the human rights of vast numbers of people will be among the casualties. By far the greatest burden will fall on those in poverty’ (p.3).

### National political and policy pathways

The complex and all-encompassing nature of the climate and biodiversity emergency requires significant collective effort and a multi-faceted all-of-government response. In recent years there has been significant growth in legislation, policy papers, scientific reports and plans produced by the state and its agencies (See figure 1).

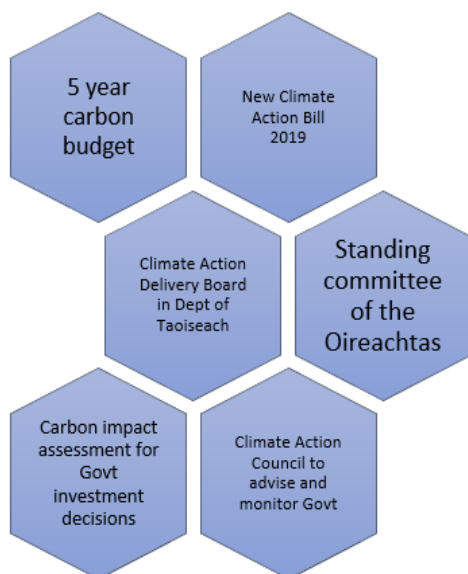


**Figure 1: Irish climate legislative and policy developments, 2015-2019**

The state has undertaken several deliberative and participatory initiatives addressing climate change, including the Citizens’ Assembly<sup>9</sup> and the National Dialogue for Climate Action<sup>10</sup>. These have been important initial steps in raising consciousness and building public and political consensus for the societal transformation required by the climate emergency. However, many believed that the recommendations of the Citizens’ Assembly were largely ignored by the Government’s 2019 Climate Action Plan (see below) and that the ‘National Dialogue’ is in reality a set of disjointed initiatives, the outcomes of which have failed to impact tangibly on substantive policy-making processes. Furthermore, the Dialogue has largely neglected to engage with community development and the wider community sector, youth work or the trade unions.

The **Climate Action Plan to Tackle Climate Breakdown** was published in July 2019. Following the declaration of a climate and biodiversity emergency, the government states that the Climate Action Plan sets out an ambitious course of action over the coming years to address the climate disruption that is already having diverse and wide ranging impacts on Ireland's environment, society, economic and natural resources. The plan admits that Ireland will miss the target set for the period 2013 to 2020 for renewables by about one eighth and for cumulative emissions by a little under 5%. However, more worrying is the expectation that recent growth in emissions, particularly from Industry, Agriculture, and Transport will put us on a trajectory to be over 25% off target for the next 2021-2030 accounting period (p. 9). However, the plan states, the all of Government Climate Action Plan places Ireland at the forefront of international efforts to achieve SDG 13, to ‘take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts’ (p. 13).

Assessment of the Climate Action Plan by the Environmental Pillar and Stop Climate Chaos coalition indicate that they consider it to be ‘a significant missed opportunity’ to build on the impetus of the Citizens Assembly and Joint Oireachtas Committee on Climate Action in order to drive forward the transition.<sup>11</sup> In general, it is argued that Ireland is far from doing its fair share of emissions reductions. The State’s 2020 target under the EU framework was for a 20% reduction, yet greenhouse gases have been reduced by less than 1%.<sup>12</sup> This failure will lead to fines of up to €600 million a year from 2020. Irish emissions continue to grow by 2 million tons per year across the energy, transportation, agriculture and industry sectors and the State remains well off-course to achieving its 2030 targets.<sup>13</sup> Reductions announced in the July 2019 Climate Action Plan envisage a 2% year on year reduction.



Where the plan does offer a substantial innovation is in its proposed climate governance reforms. These reforms require amended legislation and if these are enacted during the current Dáil they will deliver an enhanced accountability framework to drive climate action (see figure 2).

Figure 2: Climate governance reforms proposed by the 2019 Climate Action Plan

## Progress

Currently, Ireland is far off course in relation to achieving the existing targets for 2020 and 2030, and on both of the global climate governance principles, ambition and equity, Ireland is significantly failing, currently ranking second-worst in the EU.<sup>14</sup>

The continued burning of fossil fuels by semi-state power companies account for a significant proportion of Ireland’s emissions.<sup>15</sup> The state has delayed publishing plans to decarbonise the energy

system to the point where it risks an unjust transition and disorderly exit from coal and peat that puts workers and communities' livelihoods at risk.<sup>16</sup> Additionally, Irish energy policy assumes the continued extraction of offshore fossil gas reserves and the commitment of large amounts of public finance to the construction of new fossil fuel infrastructure to facilitate the importation of fracked gas from North America.<sup>17</sup>

Some progress has been made in the transition to renewable energies and in supporting energy efficiency. The state has made a strong policy commitment to energy democracy and citizenship.<sup>18</sup> However, community-based energy generation and efficiency projects remain significantly stymied by various regulatory, technical and bureaucratic issues which the state has been extremely slow to address.<sup>19</sup> In addition, community-based renewable energy schemes have been hampered by a focus on technical capacity building without embedding community development principles and methods that build capacity and embed projects in local communities.<sup>20</sup>

Several key policy successes have resulted from civil society pressure on the state, including the 2017 ban on fracking and the 2018 divestment of state finances from fossil fuels. In 2019, the school strikes for climate movement<sup>21</sup> and Extinction Rebellion have demonstrated increased public anger at state inaction and driven the public conversation on climate. With increased calls for urgent climate action, it is essential to ensure that the principles of justice and equity remain central to state responses to the crisis. Government needs to take leadership and drive the societal-change required, rather than continuing to adopt a 'nudging' approach to encouraging and incentivising individual behaviour change and green consumer choice.<sup>22</sup> This approach fails to address the scale of the crisis as well as raising significant justice and equity concerns as the burden to act will fall hardest on marginalised communities who will be most impacted by climate change.

## **A just and equitable transition – key issues for community development**

The realisation of environmental justice is a key concern for Community Work Ireland in addressing the climate crisis. Environmental justice can be defined as 'no less than a decent environment for all, with no more than our fair share of the earth's resources'<sup>23</sup> Environmental justice considers the social and political drivers and implications of pollution and calls attention to the ways in which different groups and communities experience environmental burdens (such as pollution or fuel poverty) or enjoy environmental benefits (such as access to green space and fresh, local food). Environmental justice principles have been widely advanced by marginalised communities, particularly in the global South.<sup>24</sup>

Guided by environmental justice and the principles and values of community development, Community Work Ireland calls for the development of policies and programmes that support and promote community work and human rights approaches to climate action, specifically to support community development to engage with climate change adaptation and mitigation strategies, as set out in objective 11 of the *Sustainable, Inclusive and Empowered Communities: five-year strategy to support the community and voluntary sector* (2019). As members of the Cross Sectoral Group that developed the strategy, CWI will be advocating for this objective to be a priority for the implementation plan.

We invite community workers, the community sector and wider civil society to join us in forming alliances and advancing an agenda of climate justice in Ireland and globally.

## Why should community workers be engaged & what can they do?

Inherent in the climate crisis and our societal responses is the issue of social justice and equity. Marginalised communities and groups in Ireland and globally will bear the brunt of the impacts of climate change and have the least resources to adapt and make the necessary transition to a zero-carbon society. This is a collective challenge requiring structural change across Irish society and globally.

Yet the dominant conceptualisation of environmental issues in policy tends to focus on individual actions and consumer choices such as buying organic products or electric vehicles and making our homes more energy efficient. As well as unfairly burdening marginalised communities and groups, this individualising of environmental action can feel disempowering and futile given the scale of the challenge. Community work principles and methods offer an important means of responding to the climate crisis in a collective way which is commensurate with the challenge and which places social justice and human rights at the centre of climate action.

### Consciousness raising and education

Community workers can play an important role by opening up space for dialogue about the climate crisis. **Practitioners do not need to be experts in climate science but instead facilitators of a participatory consciousness raising process guided by community work values and methods, such as popular education.** The ‘heart/head/hand’ model offers a simple framework to guide climate conversations in communities (figure 3).

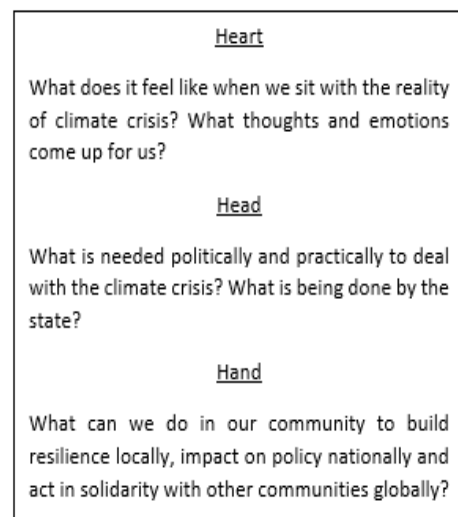
Fostering connections of solidarity and exchange with communities on the frontlines of climate change and fossil fuel extraction (such as those impacted by fracking in the US) can also support consciousness raising by helping to make the issues real and link communities to the realities of climate injustice

### Resources/suggestions for practitioners

- Watch Kathy Jetñil-Kijiner and Aka Niviãna perform their poem ‘Rise’ and use it to open a discussion on climate justice.<sup>25</sup>
- Use some activities from *The Work that Reconnects*, such as the ‘open sentences’ exercise, to help groups connect to and explore feelings about climate change.<sup>26</sup>
- Screen a documentary such as David Attenborough’s *Climate Change- The Facts*<sup>27</sup> and host a facilitated conversation afterwards.
- Watch the presentation by Jim Ife at the World Community Development Conference 2018<sup>28</sup> and use this as a basis for a discussion.
- Watch *The Intercept – A message from the Future*<sup>29</sup> with Alexandria Ocasio Cortez and use it as a basis for a discussion.

### Collective action addressing systemic pollution

The climate crisis requires an immediate end to the exploration and extraction of fossil fuels and the swift decarbonisation of the economy. This is a necessary task which states have been extremely slow to undertake despite pledges and commitments under the Paris Agreement. Groups such as the



**Figure 3: Thinking about climate crisis with heart, head and hand**

school strikers and Extinction Rebellion illustrate the power and importance of collective action in holding states to account and creating a mandate for action. In Ireland, the successful community-based campaign to secure a ban on fracking illustrates the power of local action rooted in a community development approach. Community workers can play an essential role in supporting those they work with to engage as appropriate with mobilisations for climate justice and ensure that the concerns and perspectives of marginalised communities and groups are central to campaign demands.

#### *Resources/suggestions for practitioners*

- Learn about Love Leitrim's success in mobilising their community to ban fracking.<sup>30</sup>
- Join the Friends of the Earth mailing list and keep up to date on climate campaigns you can support.<sup>31</sup>
- Learn about the school strikers<sup>32</sup> and watch the powerful Extinction Rebellion Ireland short film<sup>33</sup> and think about how your organisations might engage with them.

#### Supporting sustainable alternatives

Many of the positive solutions to the climate crisis involve building sustainable and resilient local economies, energy systems and food systems. Joining the SEAI Sustainable Energy Communities programme or establishing allotments or a community supported agriculture (CSA) scheme have significant potential to address energy and food poverty, reduce inequalities and support participation and inclusion. Community workers can also play an essential role in supporting such efforts by bringing equality and inclusion focus and skills such as group work and organisational development.

#### *Resources/suggestions for practitioners*

- Find your local SEAI Sustainable Energy Community or explore how your organisation could benefit from SEAI supports for local renewables and energy efficiency programmes.<sup>34</sup>
- Read up on energy poverty and consider how it impacts on those with whom you work.<sup>35</sup>
- Learn about the Cork Food Policy Council (FPC) working to support access to local, healthy, sustainable food for all and consider how the FPC model could work for you.<sup>36</sup>
- Apply for a small grant under the local authority Community Environmental Action fund.<sup>37</sup>

## Suggested areas for consideration by CWI

Call for the establishment of robust, inclusive governance and policy-making, structures and processes, including calling for:

- The enactment of climate governance reforms proposed in the Climate Action Plan before the end of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Dáil.
- The redesign of the National Dialogue for Climate Action to ensure a clear, coherent and accountable relationship between the dialogue and climate policy design, implementation and review.
- The proactive engagement with community work practitioners and organisations to embed community work principles and methods in the National Dialogue for Climate Action, including pathways for ensuring the concerns of marginalised communities and groups are incorporated into climate policy making.
- The provision of information on guidance on the human rights dimension of climate change to Government, local authorities and state agencies leading mitigation and adaptation efforts by the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission (IHREC).
- The identification of the human rights and equality duties relating to climate change and call on IHREC to step up compliance with these in its Public Sector Duty role.

- The provision of a role for local authorities and participatory local governance structures such as Local Community Development Committees and Public Participation Networks in driving local climate dialogues which drive local mitigation and adaptation efforts, guided by human rights and the Public Sector Duty.
- The mandating of local authorities, energy agencies and other relevant bodies to facilitate and support local autonomous community engagement with climate issues and be open and responsive to the critiques such responses generate.

Do our fair share of mitigation and remove fossil fuels from the Irish energy systems, including calling for:

- Ambitious, equitable and legally binding mitigation targets that ensure Ireland does its fair share of climate action under EU 2030 Framework and the Paris Agreement and in line with the IPCC 1.5 report
- The repeal of the Petroleum Act and replace it with a ban on all fossil fuel exploration and extraction both onshore and off the coast of Ireland - including fossil gas.
- The halting of the importation of coal to Moneypoint from the Cerrejón coal mine in Columbia on human rights grounds, and work through the multilateral institutions of the UN to protect human rights and remedy human rights abuses suffered by local communities around the mine.

End energy poverty and ramp up renewables through reinvigorated energy citizenship, including calling for:

- The review of the Strategy to Combat Energy Poverty including a thorough assessment of current levels and projections of energy poverty based on the current transition pathway to 2030 and beyond.
- The immediate introduction of a fair price for electricity generated by private individuals and communities which is transferred to the national grid.
- The establishment of an Energy Citizenship Taskforce which urgently addresses the regulatory and technical issues inhibiting community renewable energy generation and to bring together key stakeholders in the community sector, unions, renewables industry to drive forward community-based transition efforts.
- The building of a strategic partnership between the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland, CWI and other relevant community sector organisations to embed community development capacity building into the Sustainable Energy Communities programme and other

Lead the just transition of our industrial and agricultural systems, including calling for:

- The establishment of a Just Transition Commission to support workers, farmers and communities who will be affected by job losses in the transition – prioritising the workers engaged in electricity generation by coal and peat as well as farmers reliant on beef and dairy farming.
- The development of a fair and sustainable forestry policy with an enhanced commitment to local species, distributes the burden of planting across the country and focus on forestry awareness and use of forests for green recreation purposes.
- The establishment of a Green New Deal style plan to drive the decarbonisation of the economy that creates a circular economy while supporting job creation, accelerating public and affordable house building and growing the use public transportation.



- The ending of food poverty and ensuring greater resilience in the food system, including by subsidising and supporting the growth of Community Supported Agriculture schemes and supporting the establishment of food policy councils similar to the Cork Food Policy Council.
- Work with farmers, communities, conservation organisations, local authorities and relevant agencies to ensure sustainable land-use and accelerate the development of nature-based solutions to climate change.

### Networking communities and building alliances

Building collective resilience locally will be essential for supporting communities and groups to adapt to the changing climate. However, given the scale of the crisis, local actions must be networked and co-ordinated with others in order to drive the systemic change required. Community workers can make a significant contribution to climate justice by engaging with regional, national and global initiatives and alliances.

### *Resources/suggestions for practitioners*

- **Join the new CWI Climate Action Working Group**
- Explore the Atlas of Environmental Justice and learn about community-based environmental conflicts and campaigns around the world.<sup>38</sup>
- Screen a film about community-based campaigns such as *The Pipe*<sup>39</sup> or *Awake – A Dream from Standing Rock*<sup>40</sup> and consider how your organisation can act in solidarity with communities facing environmental injustice.
- Join Stop Climate Chaos coalition of groups campaigning for climate justice – it’s free and gives you access to resources and opportunities to influence climate policy.<sup>41</sup>
- Join the next Climate Connects gathering, a regular event for anyone working on or interested in climate justice to learn, network and grow collaboration.<sup>42</sup>

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Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

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## NOTES

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# NOTES