

The homelessness monitor: England 2013

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Executive Summary

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The homelessness monitor 2011-2015

The homelessness monitor is a five year study that will provide an independent analysis of the impact on homelessness of recent economic and policy developments in England. The key areas of interest are the homelessness consequences of the post-2007 economic recession and the housing market downturn. The other main thrust of inquiry is the likely impacts of the welfare, housing and other social policy reforms, including cutbacks in public expenditure, being pursued by the Coalition Government elected in 2010.

This year 3 report tracks the baseline account of homelessness established in 2011, and analyses key trends following that period. It also highlights emerging trends and forecasts some of the likely changes, identifying the developments likely to have the most significant impacts on homelessness.

We will continue to monitor the impact on homelessness of the economic downturn and effects of welfare and housing reform over the next two years in order to provide a substantive evidence base and will report on them in 2014-2015.

While this report focuses on England, parallel Homelessness Monitors are being published for other parts of the UK.

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Executive Summary

Key points

The Homelessness Monitor series is a five-year study that provides an independent analysis of the homelessness impacts of recent economic and policy developments in England and elsewhere in the UK.¹ This third annual report updates our account of how homelessness stands in England in 2013, or as close to 2013 as data availability allows. The research was commissioned in response to concerns about the impact of the recession and the Coalition Government's radical welfare and housing reform agenda on homelessness in the UK.

Key points to emerge from the 2013 update report for England are as follows:

- An upward trend has remained evident in 'visible' forms of homelessness – including rough sleeping and statutory homelessness – over the past year, but with a slowed rate of increase.
- Thus in 2012 rough sleeping in England rose 6%, as compared with 23% in 2011. In London, there was a rise of 13% in recorded rough sleeping in 2012/13, pushing the two year increase to over 60%. There are growing numbers of both UK and overseas nationals sleeping rough in the capital.
- After falling sharply for six years, the number of statutory homelessness acceptances has risen substantially (by 34%) over the past three years, but the increase in 2012/13 (at 6%) is lower than the previous year (14%). There is marked regional divergence, with the growth in statutory homelessness strongly concentrated in London and the South.
- There are sharply rising numbers being made homeless by the loss of private sector tenancies, accounting for 22% of all homelessness acceptances at national level in 2012/13. This is now the single largest cause of statutory homelessness in London.
- Temporary accommodation placements rose 10% during 2012/13, with B&B placements rising even faster (14%). 'Out of district' temporary accommodation placements have doubled since 2010. Use of both temporary accommodation and out of district placements remain overwhelmingly concentrated in London.
- 'Hidden' forms of homelessness – including concealed, sharing and overcrowded households – are also far more prevalent in London and the South than elsewhere. Census-based measures of overcrowding, for example, suggest a rate of 5% across England (a total of 1.06 million households), but 12% in London. Census overcrowding increased by 23% between 2001 and 2011, with a rise of 35% in Outer London.
- This regional disparities 'story', that strengthens with each year of the Monitor, strongly suggests that housing system factors are playing a critical underlying role. The continuing shortfall in levels of new house building relative to levels of household formation, in a context where there are already substantial numbers of concealed and sharing households, and severe levels of overcrowding in London, is a prime structural contributor to homelessness.
- In 2013 the UK economy has finally begun to show signs of recovery. However

¹ Parallel Homelessness Monitors are being published for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. All of the UK Homelessness Monitor reports are available from www.crisis.org.uk/policy-and-research.php

policy factors, particularly welfare cuts, provide a growing cause for concern. In this regard, two aspects of the Local Housing Allowance reforms are presenting particular difficulties. The first is the impact of the national caps in reducing access to the private rented sector for low income households in high value areas, particularly London. The second is the impact of the Shared Accommodation Rate, as now applied to single people aged up to 35, in reducing access to private rented housing. There has been a 14% reduction in the numbers of young single people in receipt of benefit in the sector since the Shared Accommodation Rate changes were introduced.

- The most problematic aspects of the welfare reforms introduced in 2013 include: the overall benefit caps; the 'spare room subsidy' limits for social sector tenants (widely referred to as the 'bedroom tax'); and localisation of the Social Fund. Of these it is the social sector bedroom limits² that is currently giving rise to the greatest concerns, particularly in the North and Midlands.
- Front line services available to homeless people continue to be reduced, with the prospect of more significant cuts to come in many areas. Some representatives felt that this weakening in support for the most vulnerable was undermining their ability to sustain accommodation, and may be contributing to a rise in rough sleeping.
- Single and youth homelessness service providers are most concerned about the ratcheting up of the sanctions regime for Jobseekers Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance claimants, which seems to be impacting disproportionately on their clients.

- Domestic violence service providers, who are included for the first time in this year's report, paint a worrying picture of cuts to legal aid, increased difficulties in accessing social housing, and cuts to specialist services, all having an adverse impact on women and children fleeing domestic violence.
- Across England 9% of adults say that they have experienced homelessness at some time, with 8% of under-25s saying this happened in the last five years. These new data imply that around 185,000 adults experience homelessness each year in England, and that the incidence has been increasing over time.

Defining homelessness

A wide definition of homelessness is adopted in this Homelessness Monitor series to enable a comprehensive analysis taking account of: people sleeping rough; single homeless people living in hostels, shelters and temporary supported accommodation; statutorily homeless households; and those aspects of 'hidden homelessness' amenable to statistical analysis using large-scale surveys, namely 'concealed', 'sharing' and 'overcrowded' households. Three main methods are being employed in each phase of the study: reviews of relevant literature, legal and policy documents; annual interviews with a sample of key informants from the statutory and voluntary sectors across England (22 such interviews were conducted in 2013); and detailed analysis of published and unpublished statistics, drawn from both administrative and survey-based sources.

Trends in homelessness

Our new social distribution analysis in this year's Monitor, based on the UK Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey 2012, confirms that

² The term 'bedroom limits' is used throughout this report as a less loaded and more straightforward description of the limits than either of the alternatives.

past experience of homelessness is heavily concentrated amongst young, poor, renters, who are lone parents or single, particularly those who are black and living in urban areas of the country. Nine percent of adults in England have experienced homelessness at some point in their lives, the highest rate amongst the UK countries, with 8% of under-25s reporting that this has happened to them in the last five years. These new data imply that around 185,000 adults experience homelessness each year in England, and that the incidence has been increasing over time.³

This year's Monitor also reports that homelessness in England, including rough sleeping, continued on an upward trajectory in 2012/13, albeit at a somewhat slower rate than in the previous two years. The sustained growth in rough sleeping numbers in London over the past year, with regard to both UK and overseas nationals, confirms this underlying upward trend. A particularly strong surge in recorded rough sleeping in London in the previous year (2011/12) was probably attributable in part to improved outreach under the No Second Night Out initiative.⁴

As regards statutory homelessness, there was again a continued but slowed increase in 2012/13 (see above). We have suggested that one possible contributory factor to this slowdown could be the disincentive effect of the new legal provisions allowing councils to discharge full homelessness duty through a fixed-term private tenancy placement.⁵ However, national statutory homelessness statistics conceal highly contrasting trends at regional level: while numbers have risen only 8% in the North over the past three

years, the comparable figures for the South of England and for London are 44% and 61%, respectively. Indeed, in 2012/13 acceptances actually fell slightly in both the North and Midlands.⁶ This reflects increased housing market pressures and affordability issues in London and the South East.

It is also worth noting that the volume of homelessness prevention activities continued to expand in 2012/13, but at a much slower rate than previously, and the nature of prevention work shifted markedly towards helping service users retain existing accommodation rather than obtain new housing. Indeed, while the overall number of 'prevention actions' increased by 2% in 2012/13, this masked a 4% reduction in applicants helped to find a new tenancy or other housing. This probably reflects both the state of the housing market and the Housing Benefit reforms (see below) which – by restricting entitlements – will have made it more difficult to secure new private tenancies for those on low incomes.

There are sharply rising numbers being made homeless by the loss of private sector tenancies, and the latest published statistics show that this is a continuing trend, with the proportion of total acceptances resulting from loss of private tenancies rising to 27% of all cases by quarter one 2013/14.⁷ Exactly what underlies this pattern is difficult to state with certainty but a probable contributory factor is the increasingly restrictive Local Housing Allowance rules (see below) and their coincidence with sharply rising market rents. While homelessness arising from ending of private tenancies has risen substantially in all

³ This estimate is derived by multiplying the proportion who report having been homeless over the past 5 years (PSE) x adult population (Census) / 5. This assumes even temporal spacing of homelessness, and only one episode per person.

⁴ DCLG (2011) *Vision to End Rough Sleeping: No Second Night Out Nationwide*. London: DCLG. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/6261/1939099.pdf

⁵ Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Order 2012 (SI. 2601) <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/2601/article/3/made>; DCLG (2012) *Supplementary Guidance on the homelessness changes in the Localism Act 2011 and on the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) Order 2012*. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/9323/121026_Stat_guidancewith_front_page_and_ISBN_to_convert_to_pdf.pdf

⁶ DCLG (2013) *Statutory Homelessness: April to June Quarter 2013, England*. London: DCLG. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236899/PROTECT_-_Statutory_Homelessness_2nd_Quarter_Apr_-_Jun_2013_England.pdf and analysis of unpublished data supplied by DCLG.

⁷ DCLG (2013) *Statutory Homelessness: April to June Quarter 2013, England*. London: DCLG. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236899/PROTECT_-_Statutory_Homelessness_2nd_Quarter_Apr_-_Jun_2013_England.pdf

regions over the past three years, the scale of this change has varied markedly: the North saw a 73% increase in homes lost due to private tenancy terminations in the period 2009/10-2012/13, but the comparable figures for the South of England and London were 128% and 316%, respectively.

Since bottoming out in 2010/11, homeless placements in temporary accommodation have been on the increase, with use of B&B hotels rising most quickly. Moreover, B&B placements involving children were up by 19% during 2012/13 – having almost doubled over two years. There is also increasing concern over ‘out of district’ temporary accommodation placements which have doubled since 2010: of the 56,210 households in temporary accommodation on 30 June 2013, 11,160 were in another local authority district, an increase of 38% from the same date last year.⁸ Most of these cases arise in London, and London Councils say that they relate mainly to moves within London, although recent reports have suggested that the number of these households placed outside of the capital is now increasing.⁹

The importance of regional patterns and housing market factors is reinforced by our hidden homelessness analysis, which as noted above demonstrates that concealed households,¹⁰ sharing households¹¹ and overcrowding¹² are all heavily concentrated in London and the South. We estimate that

there were 2.31 million households containing concealed single persons seeking their own housing in England in late 2012, in addition to 245,000 concealed couples and lone parents, equivalent overall to 12% of all households in England. The most recent data suggest a fall in sharing, which to some extent may reflect changes in the way interview surveys classify groups of people into households, but it may also be the case that some of the 25-34 year olds affected by the extension of the much lower Shared Accommodation Rate within Local Housing Allowance are unable to secure independent accommodation and are becoming concealed rather than sharing households.¹³

Particularly striking with respect to recent trends in hidden homelessness is the newly available Census 2011-based analysis of overcrowding that suggests a rate of 5% across England (a total of 1.06 million households), rising to 12% in London, but with rates of 16-25% in certain London boroughs (25% in Newham, 18% in Brent, 17% in Tower Hamlets, and 16% in Haringey, Hackney, Waltham Forest and Southwark). Hotspots outside London include Slough, Luton and Leicester (10-12%). These peaks of overcrowding are associated with areas with large ethnic minority and recent migrant populations. Nationally, Census overcrowding increased by 23% between 2001 and 2011, but the rise was much higher (35%) in Outer London.¹⁴

8 DCLG (2013) *Statutory Homelessness: April to June Quarter 2013, England*. London: DCLG. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/236899/PROTECT_-_Statutory_Homelessness_2nd_Quarter_Apr_-_Jun_2013_England.pdf

9 Duxbury, N. (2013) ‘Londoners housed outside capital doubles’, *Inside Housing*, 1st November: <http://www.insidehousing.co.uk/tenancies/londoners-housed-outside-capital-doubles/6529299.article>

10 ‘Concealed households’ are family units or single adults living within other households, who may be regarded as potential separate households that may wish to form given appropriate opportunity.

11 ‘Sharing households’ are those households who live together in the same dwelling but who do not share either a living room or regular meals together. This is the standard Government and ONS definition of sharing households which is applied in the Census and in household surveys. In practice, the distinction between ‘sharing’ households and ‘concealed’ households is a very fluid one.

12 ‘Overcrowding’ is defined here according to the most widely used official standard - the ‘bedroom standard’. Essentially, this allocates one bedroom to each couple or lone parent, one to each pair of children under 10, one to each pair of children of the same sex over 10, with additional bedrooms for individual children over 10 of different sex and for additional adult household members.

13 Sanders, B. & Teixeira, L. (2012) *No Room Available: Study of the Availability of Shared Accommodation*. London: Crisis. <http://www.crisis.org.uk/data/files/publications/1212%20No%20room%20available.pdf>

14 Source: Censuses 2001 and 2011.

Economic and policy impacts on homelessness

The continuing shortfall in levels of new house building relative to levels of household formation is a prime structural contributor to homelessness and other forms of acute housing need. The latest household projections for England suggest that household numbers will grow at an average rate of 220,000 a year over the decade to 2021. Even allowing for the contribution from dwellings created through conversions and changes of use, the rate of new house building would need to almost double from 2012/13 levels just to keep pace with the rate of new household formation, let alone to reduce existing housing market pressures which have accumulated over time.¹⁵

Throughout the Monitor series we argue that welfare benefit cuts, as well as constraints on housing access and supply, are critical to overall levels of homelessness. The disproportionate impacts of welfare reform in London are therefore also likely to be driving sharply contrasting regional trends in homelessness. In particular, national caps on Local Housing Allowance are resulting in a reduction in the number of claimants able to secure private rented accommodation in inner London; with declines of some 25% since March 2011 recorded in Kensington and Chelsea and in Westminster.¹⁶ The overall benefit cap for working age out-of-work households impacts most severely on larger families in London and other higher rent areas, with an average estimated benefit reduction of £62 per week.¹⁷ The official

impact assessment estimated that 52,000 households in England would have their benefit cut as a result of the cap, with 25,000 of them in London. A particular concern is its effect on homeless families who have temporarily secured accommodation in the private rented sector.

The bedroom limits¹⁸ on the levels of eligible rent for households claiming Housing Benefit in the social rented sector introduced in April 2013 potentially affect a much larger number of households, up to 660,000 across Great Britain as a whole, and this time with a disproportionate impact in the northern regions of England.¹⁹

The size criteria is far too restrictive, and fails to make allowances for households where health and other factors mean it is unreasonable to expect household members to share a room. There are particular issues involving households with disabilities and other groups with support needs, where either they require additional space-consuming equipment and/or their dwelling has been specifically adapted to meet their special needs.

Most fundamentally, in many parts of the country social landlords simply do not have sufficient stock available to transfer tenants willing to move to smaller accommodation, and in some cases have estimated that it would take from five to thirteen years to transfer all the tenants affected.²⁰ While Discretionary Housing Payments have – in a limited and uneven way – managed to mitigate some of the effects of this change,

¹⁵ Wilcox, S. & Perry, J. (2013) *UK Housing Review 2013 Briefing Paper (section 4 & 5)*. Coventry: CIH.

¹⁶ DWP (2013) 'Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit Summary Statistics', *National Statistics*, 1st April: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/housing-benefit-and-council-tax-benefit-summary-statistics-january-2013> (and earlier additions). May data extracted from DWP Stat-Xplore. Note that figures for Westminster should be treated with caution due to large numbers of cases with unattributed tenure.

¹⁷ DWP (2012) *Benefit Cap (Housing Benefit) Regulations 2012: Impact Assessment for the Benefit Cap*. <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/hb-benefit-cap-draft-regs-2012-memorandum.pdf>

¹⁸ Officially these bedroom limits have been designated as the 'spare room subsidy' limits, but they have been more widely referred to as the 'bedroom tax'. The term 'bedroom limits' is used throughout the report as a less loaded and more straightforward description of the limits than either of the alternatives.

¹⁹ DWP (2012) *Housing Benefit Size Criteria for People Renting in the Social Rented Sector Impact Assessment Updated June 2012*. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/220154/eia-social-sector-housing-under-occupation-wr2011.pdf

²⁰ National Federation of ALMOs (2013) *Welfare Reform Survey Summary of Responses October 2013*. Coventry: National Federation of ALMOs.

the issues raised are more deep-seated than can be adequately dealt with by a declining discretionary top-up budget that assumes that these problems are very short-term.

These bedroom limits were viewed by most of our local authority interviewees as the most “overwhelming” of all of the welfare reform issues, and they have already – even within the first six months of the new regime – led to a sharp rise in social sector rent arrears, in many cases involving households that have not previously been in arrears.²¹

For single and youth homelessness service providers, on the other hand, the tightening of benefit sanctions for recipients of Jobseeker’s Allowance/Employment and Support Allowance, and thereafter under Universal Credit, is the major ongoing worry.²² Also particularly relevant here is the continuing impact of Supporting People ring fence abolition, as well as national budget cuts, which have diminished the front-line services available to homeless people, with the prospect of more significant cuts to come in many areas. Some commentators felt that this weakening in support for the most vulnerable was undermining their ability to sustain accommodation, and may be contributing to the rise in rough sleeping noted above.

The localisation of the Social Fund, and growing resort to ‘food banks’ and other purely in-kind support, is also indicative of a severe weakening in the support available to

individuals and families in the sort of crisis situations that can lead to homelessness.²³

Going forward, there is enormous trepidation about the national roll out of the Universal Credit regime, and in particular the shift towards single monthly payments and away from direct payment of rent to landlords. Those concerns have been reinforced by the experiences of the social landlords involved in the Department of Work and Pensions’ direct payment demonstration projects; after nine months in operation, average rent arrears across the projects stood at 6% of rents due – far above the standard benchmark figure for social housing.²⁴

At the same time, the move towards fixed-term ‘flexible’ tenancies in social housing ushered in by the Localism Act 2011 will gradually weaken the sector’s safety net function,²⁵ and there are pressing concerns about the interaction between the ‘Affordable Rent’ regime, which allows social landlords to charge up to 80% of market rent levels, and benefit restrictions which may operate to price low-income households out of social housing in high cost areas, particularly inner London.²⁶ There is also anxiety that the increased emphasis on local connection in social housing eligibility risks excluding some marginalised groups from the sector. Certainly, international reviews sound a cautionary note about the potential implications for exclusion of the poorest and most vulnerable households from mainstream social housing if strong national frameworks

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- 21 Housing Futures Network (2013) *The Impact of Cutting Housing Benefit on Underoccupiers in Social Housing*. <http://www.affinitysutton.com/media/410135/Housing%20Futures%20report%20-%20final.pdf>; National Housing Federation (2013) ‘More than half of families hit by bedroom tax pushed into debt’, *NHF Press Release*, 18th September: <http://www.housing.org.uk/media/press-releases/more-than-half-of-families-hit-by-bedroom-tax-pushed-into-debt>
- 22 Homeless Link (2013) *A High Cost to Pay: The Impact of Benefit Sanctions on Homeless People*. <http://homeless.org.uk/news/benefit-sanctions-hitting-homeless-people-hardest#.UkyEixaR--8>
- 23 Royston, S. & Rodrigues, L. (2013) *Nowhere to Turn? Changes to Emergency Support*. London: The Children’s Society. <http://www.childrensociety.org.uk/sites/default/files/tcs/nowhere-to-turn-final.pdf>
- 24 DWP (2013) *Direct Payment Demonstration Project: Learning and Payment figures – May 2013*. https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/228925/direct-payment-demo-figures-may-2013.pdf
- 25 Fitzpatrick, S. & Pawson, H. (2011) *Security of Tenure in Social Housing: An International Review*. http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/documents/Fitzpatrick_Pawson_2011_Security_of_Tenure.pdf; Fitzpatrick, S. & Pawson, H. (2013) ‘Ending security of tenure for social renters: transitioning to ‘ambulance service’ social housing?’, *Housing Studies*, DOI:10.1080/02673037.2013.803043
- 26 BBC News (2013) ‘Councils seeks judicial review of mayor’s rent plan’, *BBC News*, 8th September: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-24002244>

governing eligibility as well as allocations are not retained.²⁷ This was a key issue for domestic violence services, especially in London, where 'local connection' and other eligibility criteria disadvantaged a client group who had often had to move area to escape a violent situation.

While a range of other areas of Government policy have implications for homelessness, this year the most important additional area of concern appeared to relate to the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012. This took effect on 1st April 2013,²⁸ and imposed significant cuts on legal aid funding. Though legal aid is still available for those on low incomes at immediate risk of losing their homes,²⁹ early intervention to deal with housing debts before court is out of scope, which seems strongly counter to the prevailing preventative ethos. In many areas advice services are under threat because of local authority as well as legal aid funding cuts.

Conclusion

In 2013 the UK economy finally began to show signs of recovery, but as we have argued in previous Monitors, policy factors have a more direct bearing on levels of homelessness than the recession in and of itself. Most key informants interviewed in 2013 expect a new surge in homelessness associated with the ramping up of welfare reform, particularly the social sector bedroom limits and the introduction of Universal Credit. At the same time, housing market pressures seem unlikely to ease, particularly in London and the South. A range of specialist homelessness funding programmes intended to ameliorate the impact of these negative structural trends on particularly vulnerable

groups are also due to end in 2014. It therefore seems that, as in 2010, we may soon be facing another critical juncture in homelessness trends in England.

As well as tracking the headline trends in both visible and hidden forms of homelessness until 2015, our ongoing study will continue to monitor the profile of those affected, and highlight any significant changes in this as the impacts of recession and welfare reform are played out over the next couple of years. Likewise, regional patterns will be closely monitored.

The evidence provided by this Homelessness Monitor over the next two years will provide a powerful platform for assessing the impact of economic and policy change on some of the most vulnerable people in England.

27 Fitzpatrick, S. & Stephens, M. (2007) *An International Review of Homelessness and Social Housing Policy*. London: CLG. <http://www.york.ac.uk/media/chp/documents/2007/intreviewhomelessness.pdf>; Fitzpatrick, S. & Pawson, H. (2011) *Security of Tenure in Social Housing: An International Review*. Edinburgh: Heriot-Watt University. http://www.sbe.hw.ac.uk/documents/Fitzpatrick_Pawson_2011_Security_of_Tenure.pdf

28 Law Society (2013) 'Legal aid changes: key information and advice', *Law Society Article*, 13th March: <http://www.lawsociety.org.uk/advice/articles/legal-aid-changes-key-information-and-advice/>

29 Bowcott, O. (2013) 'Cash-strapped law centres turn clients away as legal aid cuts bite', *Guardian*, 18th September: <http://www.theguardian.com/law/2013/sep/18/law-centres-clients-legal-aid>; Citizens Advice (2012) *Out of Scope, Out of Mind: Who Really Loses from Legal Aid Reform*. London: Citizens Advice. http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/index/policy/policy_publications/er_legal/out_of_scope.htm

About Crisis

Crisis is the national charity for single homeless people. We are dedicated to ending homelessness by delivering life-changing services and campaigning for change.

Our innovative education, employment, housing and well-being services address individual needs and help homeless people to transform their lives. We measure our success and can demonstrate tangible results and value for money.

We are determined campaigners, working to prevent people from becoming homeless and advocating solutions informed by research and our direct experience.

We have ambitious plans for the future and are committed to help more people in more places across the UK. We know we won't end homelessness overnight or on our own. But we take a lead, collaborate with others and together make change happen.

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