



YOUNG MIGRANTS STANDING UP

WE BELONG

IMPACT REPORT

2020



A WORD

FROM WE BELONG'S CO-CEOs



We are energised by the belief that an empowered youth can contribute to solving the problems in society, and that their activism can change the status quo and contribute to a better, fairer and more just world. Holding on to this belief in 2019, we took a leap of faith and decided to move away from our origins at Let Us Learn to go it alone and become We Belong, an independent charity. In our first year we have worked with hundreds of young migrants, funders, individual donors and partners to provide a platform for young migrants to share their views, invest in innovative ideas and build narratives to influence change in the UK immigration and policy sector.

We are motivated by the promise of an alternative world, where the colour of one's passport and one's birthplace, race, ethnicity or class are not factors that dictate access to opportunity and a better life. Using our own lived experience as migrants, we want to ensure that no one is left behind.

To our donors: we thank you wholeheartedly for believing in our vision of a society where young migrants are treated equally and fairly. We are grateful for your investment in us as individual leaders. We have gained confidence and increased our skills due to the provision of support systems you have provided us with -

this has been crucial as we entered a new phase of our leadership.

Acknowledging that we do not have all the answers, we also appreciate our stakeholders in the migrant and children and young people sectors: you have provided diversity of thought. Your support, partnership and collaboration with our organisation has unlocked many opportunities for us to engage with those in power, and raise awareness of the UK's hostile immigration policy and its impact on ambitious young people.

In our first year, we have built the brand of We Belong as an organisation run by, and for, young people. We might be at the helm but our young activists have been with us every step of the way, positively challenging us and encouraging us that this work is having an impact. As the Covid-19 pandemic slowed down economies and left societies and communities in isolation, this network of young people provided a hub of support where young migrants could connect - albeit digitally - to share their concerns, and steer the strategic direction of the organisation. Relationships matter and, as an organisation, we will continue to invest in our people.

Chrisann Jarrett, founder and co-CEO
& **Dami Makinde**, founder and co-CEO

WHO WE ARE

OUR VISION

We fight for all young migrants in the UK to be treated equally and fairly by the society they call home. We fight to help end the hostile environment around immigration and ensure the barriers preventing full integration for migrants are removed.

OUR MISSION

We foster relationships with parliamentarians and we advocate for young migrants by calling for a shorter, more affordable route to settlement.

We raise awareness of the hostile immigration environment and the issues around equal access to higher education.

We champion leaders by providing a platform for voices to be heard so young migrants can become change agents.

OUR VALUES



BOLDNESS

We stand up and speak out for migrants' rights and we challenge the status quo.



INTEGRITY

We uphold virtuous and honest principles to create a stable and transparent environment for young migrants.



LIVED EXPERIENCE

We build connections through the power of shared experiences by utilising storytelling to create meaningful change.



EMPATHY

We listen, understand and show compassion, creating a safe space for young migrants to build community.



JUSTICE

We advocate for young migrants and collaborate with allies to create systemic change.

WHAT WE DO

ADVOCACY AND CAMPAIGNING

The problem

There are **332,000 children and young people growing up in the UK without any formal immigration status**. The current immigration system is complex and lengthy, and **the cost of securing Leave to Remain has increased 338% since 2014**. Young people who are socially integrated are exposed to the UK's hostile immigration environment and left suspended in a protracted legal limbo, limiting their progression in life.

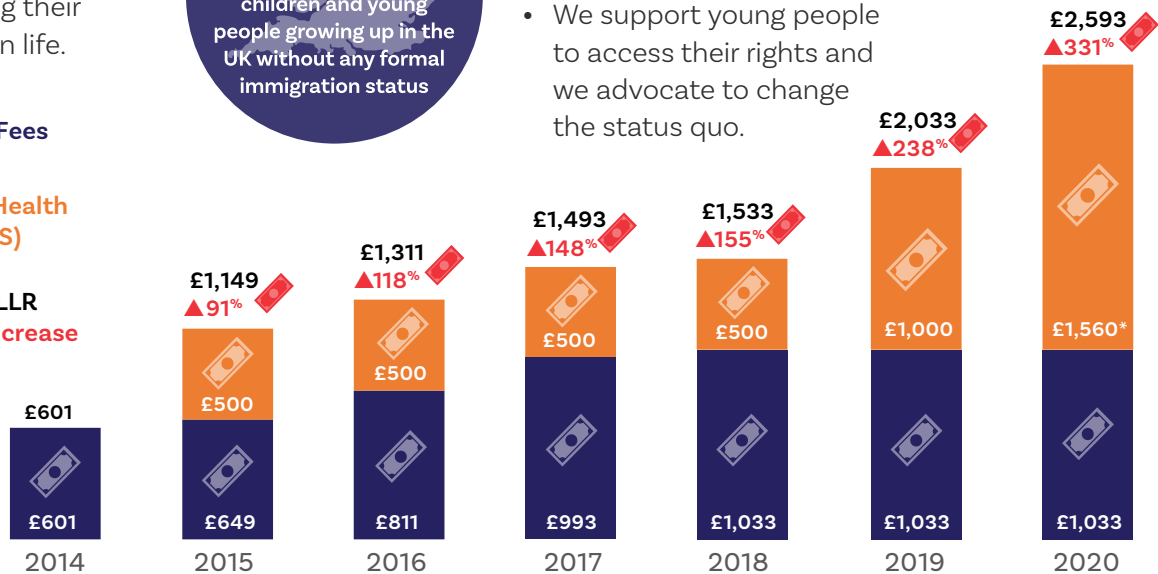


Our approach

- We raise awareness of how the current immigration system affects young people's life chances, as well as their ability to secure and maintain their status, and co-author recommendations for change
- We work with young people on a one-to-one basis and equip them with the tools necessary to initiate conversations with Members of Parliament, using their own stories to humanise the debate around immigration.
- We support young people to access their rights and we advocate to change the status quo.

- Home Office Fees
- Immigration Health Surcharge (IHS)
- Total cost of LLR
- Cumulative increase from 2014

*If the IHS increases in Oct 2020



Our outcomes so far include



Supported 23 young people to create an open dialogue with their MPs.



Working with 40 young people to co-sign a letter to Immigration Minister Priti Patel on the impact of the immigration system on young migrants.



Interviewed 5 young people and developed a case for support which contributed to the Home Office introducing an exemption to the NHS surcharge for dependents of NHS healthcare workers.



Engaging 75 young people to co-sign a letter to Prime Minister Boris Johnson on the rising Immigration Health Surcharge.



Empowering 10 young people to create campaign videos.



Created a short campaign video called Strong Ties, where 4 young people spoke about their lives in the UK and the impact of the immigration fees that's pricing them out of status in a country they call home. The video received over 6,300 views.



Submitted written and oral evidence to three parliamentary committees including the House Of Lords Select Committee on Covid-19.



Delivered our 'Strong Ties' Virtual Parliamentary event with 77 attendees, and our speakers included 2 Conservative MPs and members of the Home Affairs Select Committee

A GUIDING HAND

The immigration system remains a hurdle to many young people seeking a secure and stable future in the UK. With the added pressure brought about by Covid-19, many of our young people simply could not fund the pending renewal of their status. For example, one young person was left without a secure job, whilst trying to deal with their immigration application that would cost them thousands of pounds. We worked with them to secure a meeting with their MP and guided them through the process. We empowered them to share their concerns and experiences with policymakers and assisted them in writing a letter to the Home Secretary about their personal situation. With our support, this young person has developed an ongoing relationship with their MP, and feels confident about both initiating and leading meetings.



ENGAGEMENT WITH YOUNG PEOPLE

THE STRUGGLE TO ACCESS HIGHER EDUCATION

Faiqa's story

Originally from Pakistan, Faiqa migrated to the UK in 2012 at the age of 12 as her mother's dependant. After completing her secondary education she applied to study medicine and won a place at Lancaster Medical School. Unfortunately, having claimed asylum in the UK, Faiqa's immigration status made her ineligible for a student loan. She hoped to make arrangements for tuition fees during her gap year but lost her university place before she was granted Discretionary Leave to Remain by the Home Office in 2018. As Faiqa still did not meet the criteria required by Student Finance to be eligible for funding, she contacted We Belong for information on how she could appeal this decision.

We Belong informed her of the difficulties that young migrants face in accessing higher education – particularly in medicine, as there are no funding options available for non-settled applicants. On hearing this, Faiqa changed her course to pharmacy, applied for a scholarship with our guidance, and successfully obtained an interview.

We Belong supported her throughout the process by helping her prepare for mock interviews and providing feedback on them. Faiqa was successful in receiving one of the very few scholarships from her chosen university, enabling her to pursue her higher education dreams. She will be attending university with a scholarship in September 2020, and has written a blog detailing her experience.

Faiqa says

“I just wanted to say a MASSIVE thank you for your help. I truly mean that – this would never have been possible without you.”



Mahmoud's story:

Mahmoud is originally from Iraq, and migrated to the UK in 2008 aged 11. He contacted We Belong for support in providing documents and understanding Student Finance rules for his university application, which previously had been rejected and delayed.

As a talented secondary school student, Mahmoud gained an offer to study civil engineering at the University of Liverpool. He received his first Limited Leave to Remain in 2017, meaning he now meets eligibility criteria to finally begin his studies in September 2020. However, Student Finance refused to grant his application for funds, citing missing documents - even though these bore no relevance to his eligibility.

Further communications between Mahmoud and Student Finance advisers did not go according to plan, and he felt he was having to fight alone to access higher education. We Belong recommended he ask his solicitor to write to Student Finance, explaining his immigration status and his eligibility for funding. Mahmoud still faces a long wait before he hears back from Student Finance, but he will be pursuing his civil engineering ambitions in September 2020, and We Belong will continue to support him throughout the process.

Our involvement with Mahmoud also extends to his younger sister, who required support regarding her immigration status. On her behalf, We Belong contacted Kids in Need of Defence (KIND), which works specifically with young migrants under the age of 18 and helps them establish permanent residence by registering as British citizens, due to the length of time they have lived in the UK.

Quotes

"I'm grateful, because if my teacher didn't tell me about We Belong, I would not have known where to go or what to do. I would have felt alone." Young person

"The work you're all doing is very important, and we have benefited from it and are all grateful." Young person

"It was lovely to have you guys here. Both workshops were great and informative. You are amazing at what you do; I'm sure your energy and enthusiasm will benefit the cause." Teacher, Lewisham College

"You don't know me, but I want to thank you for creating a platform for future students and families going through what mine have gone through in accessing student finance and the immigration system. With your organisation, they can have help navigating a system that sometimes can seem it's trying its hardest not to help."

Member of the public



LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

Emerging Young Leaders

We Belong aims to be a hub for resources, information and upskilling, so that young people who join our programmes and networks gain the competencies and the confidence to make a difference in their own lives and contribute to social change. This year, our Emerging Young Leaders course engaged 15 young migrants who were keen to explore their own authentic styles of leadership. Over a 6-week period, these young people attended sessions on developing their personal narrative, leadership theories and styles, as well as engaging with senior leaders from diverse fields.

Feedback from participants



What they said

“It gave me a sense of community with other young people that have similar backgrounds to me, which is something I never had access to before.”

“I’m now able to pick out certain qualities about myself, which will eventually strengthen my leadership, and I know enough about different leadership styles that I can allow myself to structure my own version of leadership.”

“I have learnt that I have power, and I could do a lot to help others.”

“The course provided me with some clarity regarding my direction of travel in life.”





WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED

HIGHLIGHTS OF OUR FIRST YEAR INCLUDE...

Our official launch

On July 10, 2019 and after months of planning, We Belong became an independent stand-alone charity. We Belong was built on a project called Let Us Learn, and for 5 years was incubated within the infrastructure of Just For Kids Law. A project that started with students who wanted to attend university but were blocked because of their immigration status went on to organise, create and build a legacy that will have an impact on many lives for many years to come.

We began operating as an official charity on September 1, 2019 and launched We Belong in October that year, with more than 80 supporters, allies, family and friends joining us in celebrating the start of a dynamic and effective organisation. We seized the opportunity to fundraise for our biannual weekend away, raising more than £1,000 in just two hours. Since then, the organisation has gone from strength to strength.

Growth and development

At the outset, co-founders Chrisann Jarrett and Dami Makinde were solely responsible for the day-to-day running of the organisation. In October 2019, we employed Kimberly Garande as our outreach officer and the initial contact for all young migrants who get in touch with the organisation. Kimberly also looks after our volunteers and ensures everyone stays informed on Student Finance regulations.

Tashi Tahir started at We Belong in February 2020 and has since done a superb job in campaigning for an exemption in the Immigration Health Surcharge for young migrants who grew up in the UK. Tashi fosters relationships with parliamentarians, opening up a dialogue around the Home Office's treatment of young migrants in a place we all call home.

Our newest member of staff is Ciara Redmond and from October 2020, she will be responsible for our digital communications: engaging and mobilising young migrants, developing the organisation's communications strategy and working on online storytelling.

This progress, however, would not have been possible without the tenacity of our 14 core volunteers, who support us every week and to whom we attribute the success of the organisation.

The Charity Times Award

We are proud to announce that We Belong was shortlisted in the prestigious Charity Times Award in the category of Charity of the Year with an income of less than £1m. We didn't win but were given the honour of 'Highly Commended', for our commitment to organisational growth, the development of future leaders and the achievement of systemic change. Our determination to lead national change – including our 'Young, Gifted and Blocked' and 'Freeze the Fees' campaigns – feeds into our fight to bring about justice.



DOING OUR RESEARCH

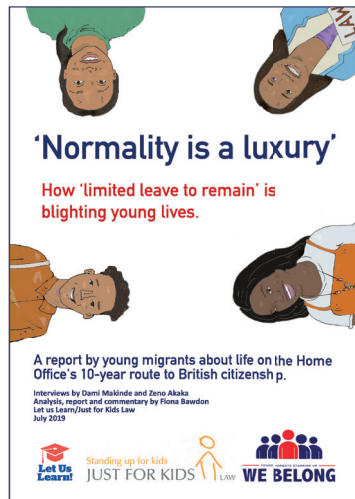
Visit: www.webelorg.org.uk



In the past year, We Belong has researched and produced three reports: Normality is a Luxury, It's Our Time and Mental Health Research.

Normality is a Luxury (August 2019)

The report Normality is a Luxury focuses on 14 young migrants, all of whom arrived in the UK between the ages of 2 and 11 and are now in their early to mid 20s. They speak candidly about the effects of being on the 10-year route to Settlement, and the findings from the interviews describe the impact these have on family, finances, education and mental health. Comparisons were also made with the treatment received by the Windrush generation, as “many felt they would never be free from the Home Office or fully recognised as British citizens”.



NCVO Evaluation: It's Our Time (September 2019)

It's Our Time is based on lessons from We Belong's journey to becoming an independent organisation. Interviewed by NCVO's Amirah Tharani, the report documents the rationale for becoming independent, the support gained and the challenges faced along the way. It also provides key learning for projects within organisations that are looking to become independent, and the role of host organisations and funders.

Mental Health Research (October 2020)

For We Belong's 2020 report, we decided to focus specifically on mental health, and researched this through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The report highlights 15 participants, all bar one of whom struggled with their mental health during their 10-year route to Settlement in the UK. Participants touched on the meaning of identity – especially what it means to be British – and spoke highly of the support and help they received from We Belong during the process.

FUNDRAISING

“We Belong is such an outward-looking organisation, which is keen to develop young leaders, generate more evidence about the impact of the hostile environment on young lives, and advocate for positive solutions. There is a compelling case for why there needs to be urgent change to the system, and their strategy to support young people to be at the forefront of the advocacy campaign has given it real credibility and reach. The Trust is really pleased to be supporting such an organisation, driven by young people with direct experience of that issues, and who are keen to learn and develop their work so that they can achieve real and lasting change for their peers.”

Sioned Churchill, Trust for London

2019/20 has been an encouraging year for fundraising, and We Belong is on the way to building a sustainable organisation. Our supporters are primarily trusts and foundations from the UK and the USA, as well as members of the public who have generously donated, having witnessed We Belong’s campaigning and advocacy activities, and our pledge to share power with young people.

Our small team raised £274,000, which exceeded our expectations and enabled us to employ additional staff and deliver ambitious programmes across our projects, while empowering more young people along the way. We appreciate all our supporters, who were bold enough to fund a start-up and believe in the vision and mission of We Belong.



WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

Governance

Over the past year, our governance structure has gone through some changes with the resignation of trustees Gbenga Ajewole and Jennie Fleming, who both moved on due to new commitments. Their stepping down created an opportunity for the board to review its composition and led to the recruitment of an additional trustee, Sufina Ahmad, who has extensive governance and strategic development experience. As an organisation, we believe that youth voice should be included in all levels of decision-making - and governance is no exception; we have three young people with lived experience actively engaged and committed to developing the strategic direction of the organisation. We are working closely with trustees to ensure young board members gain the requisite skills, and to refresh the board where necessary to include more expertise and insight around external affairs and policy.

Covid-19 and digital strategy

The pandemic raised particular concerns for our outreach work, delivery of project outcomes and, in particular, the organisation and mobilisation of young migrants. The safety of staff and beneficiaries are of utmost importance, and so in response to the pandemic we implemented remote working and flexibility on working hours, and digitised all our services.

Our external campaigning was put on hold as we prioritised information gathering, working with civil society organisations to get clarity on changes to Home Office services and policy impacts that affect young people with precarious status, such as the closure of biometric centres and the amendments to the No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) conditions. Our engagement with beneficiaries increased due to the need to support them from a distance and supply accurate information. Funders have responded positively and authorised flexibility in grant outcomes and delivery, and the pandemic has opened up new funding opportunities for us to build our digital capacity for the future. Creating a strong digital infrastructure will enable us to reach more vulnerable young migrants in



the UK who are unable to access our on-the-ground services due to geographical limitations. Investing in our digital footprint will create the necessary momentum for We Belong to become a 'national hub' for all young migrants. In response to the pandemic, we launched our

Covid-19 Emergency Funds with the help of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, providing (x number of young people) with (x amount) of assistance to alleviate the financial hardship that has become even worse as a result of the ongoing pandemic.

WHERE WE'RE GOING

OUR THREE-YEAR PLAN

We Belong recognises the importance of forward planning in order to ensure our sustainability. Our vision to build a robust organisation and be a central hub for all young migrants in the UK continues with ambitions to expand our reach beyond London. Covid-19 was a catalyst for making online connections, enabling us to gather with young migrants from across the country. This is, however, only the beginning – and increasing our capacity in terms of volunteers and staff members will help us reach our goal.

Within three years, We Belong is focused on achieving the following:



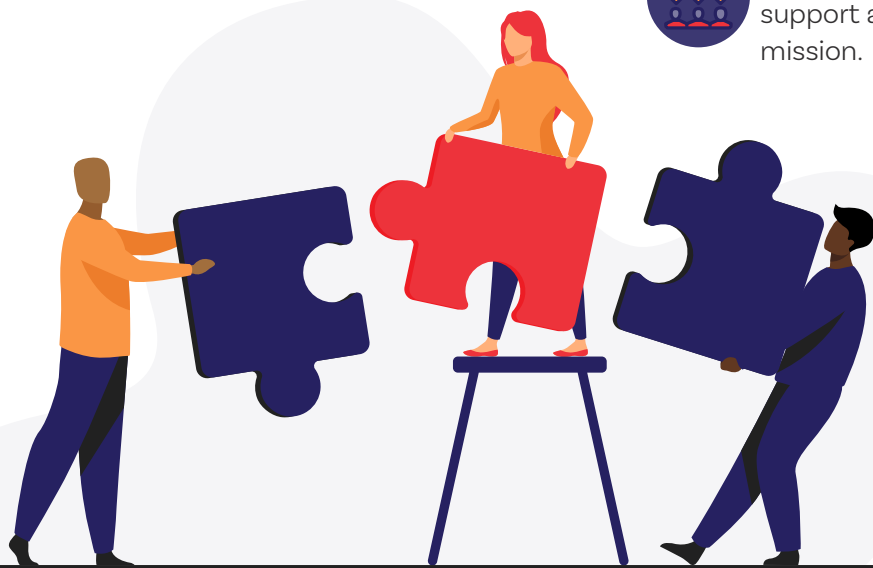
1 member of staff with a remit to build relationships with young migrants outside of London, allowing us to reach a wider community.



2 additional We Belong chapters where young migrants can physically gather, while still maintaining a strong online presence.



40 committed core group volunteers based in and out of London, who will support and help drive the organisation's mission.



In addition to this, We Belong aims to support young migrants holistically, and currently we lack an immigration case worker to further support our cause. We have seen over the years the numerous young people in need of immigration advice, and we often have to work with other organisations when referring, who may not have the capacity to take on new clients. We hope, therefore, to employ an in-house OISC-registered immigration caseworker to offer our cohort of young people legal support.

Education

Every year we raise awareness of Student Finance rules in around 10 to 15 schools, gatherings, conferences and meetings and other relevant spaces. Despite this, many young migrants find themselves unaware of the financial repercussions of attending university without meeting the criteria, and we are inundated with phone calls from students who find themselves in difficulties. To reduce these numbers, we are committed to achieving the following within the next 3 years:



Reaching 60 sixth forms and colleges in London, working side-by-side with teachers and parents to ensure every migrant student understands the system.



Reaching 30 sixth form and colleges in regions outside London that have a large migrant population.



Working alongside UK universities to create an additional 15 scholarships for young migrants who cannot access student finance.



Working and fostering relationships with 10 faith institutions where young migrants can be found, to help spread our message.

Political and legal

We understand that changing the lives of young migrants for the better without having to jump through additional hoops in life ultimately means changing the law. Therefore, our relationship building with parliamentarians – particularly those in government – is of the utmost importance. We want to:



Engage 15 young migrants to develop relationships with their MPs.



Launch listening campaigns with young migrants and develop advocacy strategies based on their recommendations for policy change.



Develop relationships with 15 Conservative MPs in order to get cross-party support.



Develop an ongoing dialogue with civil servants at the Home Office.



Engage with the Mayor of London's Social Integration Team, to influence policy at a London level.

Developing leaders

To have maximum effect as an organisation, it's crucial to learn, evolve and adapt, which is exactly what we have been doing. Our Emerging Young Leaders Programme started with developing young migrants and recognising them as leaders. Our model, based on Harvard University's Kennedy School, has been modified and tailored each year to suit the needs of our cohort and to be the best version possible. In 2019, we partnered with Impact and Oxford University to pilot an 8-week leadership programme for second- and third-year students, which was positively received by students and teachers. We aim to capitalise on this pilot by rolling out the Leadership model to various universities in the coming years. We are committing to:



Graduating 60 young migrants from our Emerging Young Leaders programme



Partnering with 3 different higher education institutions and graduating 60+ students

Monitoring & Evaluation

To enhance learning and make better decisions about the programmes we run, we value monitoring and evaluation. Our focus on improving the collection of information and the analysis of the impact and outcomes makes us well placed to increase our results and communicate effectively to stakeholders in an evidence-based manner. But we know there is more we can do, and we want to remain deliberate in developing a meaningful monitoring system that helps clarify the logic behind our programmes.

We recognise our work would not be of the same standard without the collaboration of the external organisations and individuals who align with our mission and offer their support, guidance, and co-working opportunities. We have always welcomed partnerships that are of benefit and will continue to do so moving forward, focusing on relationships that can support our weaker areas as an organisation.



APPRECIATION & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are grateful for the following funders, organisations, trustees, schools and colleges, individuals and our core group members who make our work possible.

FUNDERS

AB Charitable Trust
Unbound Philanthropy
Barrow Cadbury Trust
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
Lush Charity Pot
Nelson Family Foundation
Ben & Jerry's UK Fund
Paul Hamlyn Foundation
The Rayne Foundation
Hollick Family Foundation
Bernard Lewis Family Charitable Trust

ORGANISATIONS

The Conduit
Coram
Impact
Just for Kids Law
JCWI
RAMP
Praxis /Brighter Futures
Islington Law Centre
RMCC
PILC
STAR
Sheila McKechnie Foundation
The Forward Institute
Global Dialogue Exchange

TRUSTEES & YOUNG ADVISORS

Sufina Ahmad
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David Wolfe
Andrew Noel
Joel Carter
Arkam Barber
Claud Williams
Jennie Fleming
Gbenga Ajewole

SCHOOLS + UNIVERSITIES

Oxford University Mansfield College
Lewisham College
Chase Community
Saint Francis Xavier School
Brampton Manor Academy
Lampton School
Barnhill Community High School
Notre Dame Girls School
Waltham Forest College
Ark All Saints Academy

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Lanre Sodeinde
Marvellous Arabambi
Precious Arabamibi
Emmanuel Adepoju
Tosin Lawal

