

In 2017, Thailand made a significant advancement in efforts to eliminate the worst forms of child labor. The government assigned 102 interpreters for non-Thai speaking migrants and ethnic minorities at Department of Labor Protection and Welfare offices and inspection centers at shipping ports, dedicated more police officers to investigate Internet-related crimes against children, and signed an information-sharing agreement with the U.S. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to combat the online commercial sexual exploitation of children. The government also adopted a ministerial regulation prohibiting certain types of work for home-based workers under age 15, partially addressing the lack of minimum age protections for children working outside of a formal employment situation. However, children in Thailand engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in seafood and shrimp processing, and in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. Enforcement of child labor laws remains challenging due to an insufficient number of inspectors, and the government has yet to conduct a nationally representative survey to measure the prevalence of child labor.



I. PREVALENCE AND SECTORAL DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD LABOR

Children in Thailand engage in the worst forms of child labor, including in seafood and shrimp processing, and in commercial sexual exploitation, sometimes as a result of human trafficking. (1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6) Children also perform dangerous tasks in street work and *muay thai* paid fighting (Thai kickboxing). (7; 8; 9; 10; 11) The government has yet to complete a national survey on the prevalence of children's work, which is needed to implement the National Policy and Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor Phase II (2015–2020). (12; 13) Table 1 provides key indicators on children's work and education in Thailand.

Table 1. Statistics on Children's Work and Education

Children	Age	Percent
Working (% and population)	5 to 14	13.0 (1,302,267)
Attending School (%)	5 to 14	96.3
Combining Work and School (%)	7 to 14	14.4
Primary Completion Rate (%)		90.6

Source for primary completion rate: Data from 2015, published by UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2018. (14)

Source for all other data: Understanding Children's Work Project's analysis of statistics from Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 3, 2005–2006. (15)

Based on a review of available information, Table 2 provides an overview of children's work by sector and activity.

Table 2. Overview of Children's Work by Sector and Activity

Sector/Industry	Activity
Agriculture	Processing shrimp and seafood† (16; 1; 17; 12; 18)
	Fishing, including work performed on sea vessels† (12; 16; 19)
	Planting and harvesting sugarcane (20)
	Production of rubber and pineapples (21; 12)
Industry	Manufacturing, including garment production (12; 22)
	Work in poultry factories and pig farms (23; 24)
	Construction, including transporting cement and bricks (25; 12)

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Table 2. Overview of Children’s Work by Sector and Activity (cont)

Sector/Industry	Activity
Services	Domestic work (26; 12; 4)
	<i>Muay thai</i> paid fighting (Thai kickboxing) (9; 27; 8; 7; 12)
	Work in restaurants, motorcycle repair shops, and gas stations (28; 12)
	Street work, including begging and vending (12; 11; 10; 29; 4; 30)
Categorical Worst Forms of Child Labor‡	Commercial sexual exploitation, including use in the production of pornography, sometimes as a result of human trafficking (31; 32; 33; 3; 12)
	Forced labor in vending, begging, and domestic work, each sometimes as a result of human trafficking (26; 12; 22)
	Forced labor in the production of garments, in agriculture, and in shrimp and seafood processing (1; 32; 34)
	Fishing as a result of human trafficking (2; 35; 36; 22; 19)
	Use in the production and trafficking of drugs, including amphetamines, kratom, and marijuana (32; 12)

† Determined by national law or regulation as hazardous and, as such, relevant to Article 3(d) of ILO C. 182.

‡ Child labor understood as the worst forms of child labor *per se* under Article 3(a)–(c) of ILO C. 182.

Thai Children, as well as children from Burma, Laos, and Cambodia are exploited for commercial sexual exploitation in Thai massage parlors, bars, karaoke lounges, hotels, and private residences. In addition, children are lured, including through the internet and social media, and coerced to produce pornography and perform sexual acts for live internet broadcasts. (12; 37; 38; 39; 4; 40; 3; 41; 42)




Children, particularly migrants from the Greater Mekong Sub-region, engage in hazardous work in shrimp and seafood processing. While incidents of child labor in shrimp and seafood processing have declined in recent years, children are still reported to work in the industry. (43; 16) Children who work in shrimp and seafood processing clean and lift heavy loads of seafood and work late hours. Many of these children also experience health problems, including injuries and chronic diseases. (6; 18; 1)

Although Order No. 28/2559 of the National Council for Peace and Order ensures 15 years of free education for all children in Thailand, some children, particularly migrants and ethnic minorities, struggle to access basic education due to a lack of awareness of migrant children’s right to public education, language barriers, and insufficient transportation to schools. (44; 16; 45; 46; 47; 32)

II. LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR CHILD LABOR

Thailand has ratified all key international conventions concerning child labor (Table 3).

Table 3. Ratification of International Conventions on Child Labor

Convention	Ratification
 ILO C. 138, Minimum Age	✓
ILO C. 182, Worst Forms of Child Labor	✓
 UN CRC	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on Armed Conflict	✓
UN CRC Optional Protocol on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography	✓
 Palermo Protocol on Trafficking in Persons	✓

The government has established laws and regulations related to child labor (Table 4). However, gaps exist in Thailand’s legal framework to adequately protect children from child labor, including military recruitment prohibitions.

Table 4. Laws and Regulations on Child Labor

Standard	Meets International Standards: Yes/No	Age	Legislation
Minimum Age for Work	No	15	Chapter 4, Section 44 of the Labor Protection Act; Section 148/1 of the Labor Protection Act (No. 5) (48; 49)
Minimum Age for Hazardous Work	Yes	18	Chapter 4, Sections 49–50 of the Labor Protection Act; Section 148/2 of the Labor Protection Act (No. 5) (48; 49)
Identification of Hazardous Occupations or Activities Prohibited for Children	Yes		Chapter 4, Sections 49–50 of the Labor Protection Act; Clause 4 of the Ministerial Regulation concerning Labor Protection in Sea Fishery Work; Clause 2 of the Ministerial Regulation Identifying Tasks that may be Hazardous to the Health and Safety of Pregnant Women or Children Under the Age of Fifteen Years (48; 50; 51)
Prohibition of Forced Labor	Yes		Sections 312, and 312 <i>bis</i> of the Penal Code; Sections 4 and 6 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (No. 3) (52; 53)
Prohibition of Child Trafficking	Yes		Sections 282–283 of the Penal Code; Section 6 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (No. 3) (52; 54)
Prohibition of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children	Yes		Section 8 of the Prevention and Suppression of Prostitution Act; Section 6 of the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act (No. 3); Sections 282 and 285–287 of the Penal Code; Article 26 of the Child Protection Act; Amendment to the Penal Code Act No. 24 (52; 55; 56; 57; 53)
Prohibition of Using Children in Illicit Activities	Yes		Article 26 of the Child Protection Act; Section 93 of the Narcotics Act; Section 84 of the Penal Code; Section 22 of the Beggar Control Act (56; 58; 59; 60)
Prohibition of Military Recruitment			
State Compulsory	Yes	21	Section 25 of the Military Service Act (61)
State Voluntary	Yes	18	Section 25 of the Military Service Act (61)
Non-state	No		
Compulsory Education Age	Yes	16	Section 17 of the National Education Act (62)
Free Public Education	Yes		Section 10 of the National Education Act (62)

In 2017, the government adopted a ministerial regulation specifying the types of work prohibited for home-based workers under age 15. (63; 47; 51) During the reporting period, an amendment to the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act went into effect, which imposes stricter penalties when the trafficking victim is a child under age 15. (53) In addition, an amendment to the Labor Protection Act on Child Labor went into effect during the reporting period, which increases the penalties for using child laborers under age 15 and employing children in hazardous work, including a financial penalty and imprisonment. (42; 49) The minimum age for work does not comply with international standards because the law does not grant protections to children working without a formal employment contract. (48)

III. ENFORCEMENT OF LAWS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established institutional mechanisms for the enforcement of laws and regulations on child labor (Table 5). However, gaps exist within the operations of the Ministry of Labor (MOL) and the criminal enforcement agencies, which may hinder adequate child labor enforcement.

Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement

Organization/Agency	Role
Department of Labor Protection and Welfare (DLPW) of the Ministry of Labor (MOL)	Enforce child labor laws through workplace inspections. (12) Operate Hotline 1546 and staff 86 labor protection and welfare offices in every province to answer questions about working conditions and receive complaints from the public about child labor. (63)
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division of the Royal Thai Police (RTP)	Enforce laws related to forced labor, human trafficking, child pornography, and commercial sexual exploitation of children. Operate Hotline 1191 to receive complaints on human trafficking and violence against children. (64)
Department of Special Investigations (DSI) in the Ministry of Justice	Investigate human trafficking crimes, including those related to government officials' complicity, and transnational or organized crime. (63)

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Table 5. Agencies Responsible for Child Labor Law Enforcement (cont)

Organization/Agency	Role
Anti-Human Trafficking Department under the Office of the Attorney General	Enforce criminal laws against human trafficking. (64) Investigate or co-investigate human trafficking offenses and monitor cases to improve the quality of prosecution of human trafficking cases, particularly sex trafficking. (65; 12)
Anti-Trafficking in Persons Division under the Criminal Court of Justice	Enforce the Anti-Human Trafficking Act. (64) Prosecute human trafficking cases, focusing specifically on sex trafficking, forced labor, slavery, and the illegal trade of human organs. (65)
Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children Taskforce	Investigate and enforce laws against the online sexual exploitation of children and child trafficking, including the distribution and production of child pornography. (12) Comprise of police officers and Department of Special investigation agents. (66)

Labor Law Enforcement

In 2017, labor law enforcement agencies in Thailand took actions to combat child labor (Table 6). However, gaps exist within the operations of the MOL that may hinder adequate labor law enforcement, including an insufficient number of labor inspectors.

Table 6. Labor Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Labor Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Labor Inspectorate Funding	\$1,001,168 (67)	\$614,251 (12)
Number of Labor Inspectors	880 (63)	1,506 (12)
Inspectorate Authorized to Assess Penalties	Yes (63)	Yes (12)
Training for Labor Inspectors		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (63)	Yes (12)
Training on New Laws Related to Child Labor	Yes (63)	Yes (12)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (63)	Yes (12)
Number of Labor Inspections Conducted	39,350 (63)	40,306 (12)
Number Conducted at Worksites	39,350 (63)	40,306 (12)
Number of Child Labor Violations Found	71 (63)	103 (12)
Number of Child Labor Violations for Which Penalties were Imposed	71 (63)	103 (47)
Number of Child Labor Penalties Imposed that were Collected	Unknown (67)	53 (12)
Routine Inspections Conducted	Yes (32)	Yes (12)
Routine Inspections Targeted	Yes (32)	Yes (12)
Unannounced Inspections Permitted	Yes (32)	Yes (12)
Unannounced Inspections Conducted	Yes (32)	Yes (12)
Complaint Mechanism Exists	Yes (32)	Yes (12)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Labor Authorities and Social Services	Yes (32)	Yes (12)

Labor inspection duties are carried out by 592 Department of Labor Protection and Welfare (DLPW) civil servants, 98 contract employees employed by the DLPW, 188 labor inspectors under the MOL Permanent Secretary Office, and 628 officials from other agencies, including the Royal Thai Police (RTP). More than 84 percent of unannounced child labor inspections targeted high-risk worksites that employ children working in shrimp and seafood processing, garment production, sugarcane planting and harvesting, construction, and working with poultry and pig livestock. (12) Inspectors who find a child labor violation must assess a penalty on the employer immediately and refer the case to the RTP. (47)

The number of labor inspectors is likely insufficient for the size of Thailand's workforce, which includes approximately 38.45 million workers. According to the ILO's technical advice of a ratio approaching 1 inspector for every 15,000 workers in developing economies, Thailand would employ 2,558 labor inspectors. (68; 69; 70)

In 2017, the DLPW and the MOL provided trainings to approximately 532 labor inspectors and government employees on various topics, including laws related to child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking. In addition, the government assigned 102 foreign

language interpreters to work in the DLPW offices and at inspection centers in Thailand's shipping ports where fishing vessels are inspected for illegal activities. The interpreters at the DLPW provide translation assistance to Burmese, Cambodian, Indonesian, and Vietnamese men and boys who are removed from forced labor on Thai and foreign-owned fishing boats. (42; 12) The DLPW also established mobile inspection teams that consist of labor inspectors, a legal affairs officer, interpreters, and occasionally employees from the departments of Special Investigation, Employment, and Fisheries. These teams, which draw on information shared by NGOs and child protection networks, conduct targeted monthly child labor inspections and are authorized to file criminal lawsuits immediately when child labor violations are found. (47; 12)

In 2017, DLPW labor inspectors developed a labor inspector handbook to guide their inspections of home-based work, which includes domestic work. In addition, the DLPW conducted two training workshops for labor inspectors to adequately enforce the Home Workers Protection Act, which gives the DLPW the authority to inspect home-based workplaces.

Criminal Law Enforcement

In 2017, criminal law enforcement agencies in Thailand took actions to combat of child labor (Table 7). However, gaps exist within the operations of the criminal enforcement agencies that may hinder adequate criminal law enforcement, including child labor data.

Table 7. Criminal Law Enforcement Efforts Related to Child Labor

Overview of Criminal Law Enforcement	2016	2017
Training for Investigators		
Initial Training for New Employees	Yes (32)	Yes (12)
Training on New Laws Related to the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Yes (66)	Yes (12)
Refresher Courses Provided	Yes (63)	Yes (12)
Number of Investigations	3,040 [†] (63)	2,891 [‡] (12)
Number of Violations Found	3,252 [†] (32; 63)	31 (12)
Number of Prosecutions Initiated	Unknown (43)	Unknown (12)
Number of Convictions	Unknown (63)	730 (12)
Reciprocal Referral Mechanism Exists Between Criminal Authorities and Social Services	Yes (63)	Yes (12)

[†] Data are from October 1, 2015 to September 30, 2016.

[‡] Data are from October 1, 2016 to September 30, 2017.

The government collects and reports administrative data on the worst forms of child labor to the Cabinet. Data for the number of investigations, violations found, and prosecutions initiated in 2016 include child drug trafficking and child pornography cases. (63) However, 2017 data for the number of violations only includes child pornography cases, as child drug trafficking cases data is unavailable. (12) Further, the data for the number of convictions in 2017 do not differentiate between cases related to the worst forms of child labor. (12; 47)

In 2017, the government provided trainings on trafficking in persons, including child trafficking and child protection, to approximately 1,940 enforcement officials, including criminal investigators. In addition, the government investigated 209 Internet-related crimes against children, and prosecutors filed 31 cases for possession and distribution of child pornography. (12) During the reporting period, the RTP provided the Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children (TICAC) Taskforce with its own budget and administrative personnel and assigned more RTP officers to the TICAC to investigate Internet-related crimes against children involving chat rooms, file-sharing platforms, and social media. (42) The government also prosecuted three cases involving children working in seafood processing factories in the provinces of Rayong and Samut Songkhram. (71)

During the reporting period, a Bangkok criminal court convicted 62 people, which included a senior military general among 22 government officials, in the largest human trafficking trial involving adults and children from Burma and Bangladesh. (72; 42; 73) In addition, the government established an interagency working committee, chaired by the Ministry of Justice's Permanent Secretary, to monitor the progress of cases involving government officials suspected of complicity in human trafficking crimes, including the commercial sexual exploitation of children. (42; 47)

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IV. COORDINATION OF GOVERNMENT EFFORTS ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established mechanisms to coordinate its efforts to address child labor (Table 8).

Table 8. Key Mechanisms to Coordinate Government Efforts on Child Labor

Coordinating Body	Role and Description
National Committee to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor	Coordinate the implementation of child labor policies, facilitate cooperation among relevant ministries, and report annually to the Thai Cabinet on child labor issues. (64) Chaired by the MOL, with representation from other government agencies, employer and worker associations, and civil society groups. (74) Oversee a subcommittee responsible for monitoring the National Policy and Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor. (32; 13)
National Policy Committee on Anti-Trafficking in Persons and Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated Fishing	Coordinate anti-trafficking in persons policies and activities. Oversee five subcommittees, including the Subcommittee on Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Migrant Workers. Chaired by the MOL. (32; 75)
National Operation Center for the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking	Coordinate anti-human trafficking activities, including those involving forced child labor, child trafficking, and commercial sexual exploitation. Monitor 76 Provincial Operation Centers for the Prevention and Suppression of Human Trafficking. (32; 64; 76) Operates under the Ministry of Social Development and Human Security (MSDHS). (32)
Provincial Coordination Center for Sea Fishery Workers (Operated jointly by DLPW, Marine Police, Provincial Administration, and Fishers' Association)	Compile registration records and work permit information for migrants working on fishing vessels and work with vessel owners to ensure that undocumented migrant workers are registered. Monitor and coordinate inspections of working conditions on fishing vessels. (64) Provide trainings on labor protection, receive human trafficking complaints, and coordinate with other agencies to provide assistance, remedy, and rehabilitation services for victims. (64)
Command Center for Combating Illegal Fishing	Coordinate government efforts to resolve cases of human trafficking and illegal fishing. Operate 32 Port In–Port Out Centers and 19 Forward Inspection Centers in every coastal province. (64) Carry out inspections in the fishing and seafood industry at port, at sea, and on land. (77) Agencies involved include the Royal Thai Navy; the ministries of Agriculture and Cooperatives, Transport, Interior, and Labor; and the RTP. (77)

V. GOVERNMENT POLICIES ON CHILD LABOR

The government has established policies that are consistent with relevant international standards on child labor (Table 9).

Table 9. Key Policies Related to Child Labor[‡]

Policy	Description
National Policy and Plan to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor Phase II (2015–2020)	Seeks to eliminate the worst forms of child labor in Thailand in accordance with international labor standards. Focuses on (a) preventing the worst forms of child labor, (b) rescuing and protecting children from the worst forms of child labor, (c) developing and enforcing relevant laws, (d) enhancing interagency cooperation, and (e) developing management and monitoring systems. (13) In 2017, provided 22,159 migrant children and adults with education access support, including Thai language classes. (47)
Cyber Tipline Remote Access Policy [†]	Seeks to combat the online sexual exploitation of children in Thailand by partnering with the U.S. National Center for Missing and Exploited Children. Enhances the role of the Thailand Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force by which the RTP can request warrants to search the residences and electronic equipment of individuals in Thailand for child pornography and initiate criminal prosecution. (78; 79; 80; 81)

[†] Policy was approved during the reporting period.

[‡] The government has other policies that may have addressed child labor issues or had an impact on child labor. (63; 82; 83; 12)

VI. SOCIAL PROGRAMS TO ADDRESS CHILD LABOR

In 2017, the government funded and participated in programs that include the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor (Table 10). However, gaps exist in these social programs, including the adequacy of programs to address child labor in high-risk sectors.

Table 10. Key Social Programs to Address Child Labor‡

Program	Description
National and Provincial Operation Centers for Providing Assistance to Women and Child Laborers†	DLPW program that provides assistance to women and child laborers, and collects and disseminates information on the worst forms of child labor. Reports to the National Committee to Eliminate the Worst Forms of Child Labor. (84)
From Protocol to Practice: A Bridge to Global Action on Forced Labor (2015–2019)	USDOL-funded global project implemented by ILO to support global and national efforts to combat the forced labor of adults and children under the 2014 ILO Protocol and supporting Recommendation to C.29 on Forced Labor. (85) In Thailand, provided technical support for the planning of a National Working Child Survey. (32; 86) Additional information is available on the USDOL website. (86)
Government Shelters for Trafficking Victims†	MSDHS program that operates 76 temporary shelters to provide emergency assistance and protection to human trafficking victims, including children. (77) Operates nine long-term shelters that offer medical care, psychosocial services, education, and life skills education. (77; 87)
Asia-Australia Program to Combat Trafficking in Persons (2013–2018)	5-year, \$45 million, Australian Aid-funded, Association of Southeast Asian Nations regional- and national-level project to build capacity and strengthen access to criminal justice for trafficking victims. (88) In Thailand, focuses on creating specialized investigative units; increasing interagency cooperation among public prosecutors, police, and the DSI; and developing training curriculum for law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges. (88)
Combatting Unacceptable Forms of Work in the Thai Fishing and Seafood Industry (2016–2019)	3.5 year, EU and ILO-funded project implemented by the ILO, the government of Thailand, and other stakeholders to prevent and reduce forced labor and child labor in the Thai fishing and seafood processing sectors, including by withdrawing children engaged in the worst forms of child labor and enhancing their access to support services. (89; 90)
Migrant Learning Centers†	NGO and government-operated centers that provide basic education to children in migrant communities along Thailand's borders. Ministerial regulations under the National Education Act specify that these centers are permitted to operate and are eligible to receive government subsidies and accreditation. (64) However, many Migrant Learning Centers rely on declining donor funding, and migrant students face difficulties acquiring a certification of education because many centers lack qualified teachers and accreditation. (63)
Welfare Cards for the Poor*†	Government program that provides low-income parents or caretakers with a monthly stipend of approximately \$54 to \$57 (1,700 to 1,800 baht) to be spent on transportation, farming supplies, educational utensils, and other essentials. Beginning in October 2017, the government issued welfare cards to 11.4 million registered people. (12)

* Program was launched during the reporting period.

† Program is funded by the Government of Thailand.

‡ The government had other social programs that may have included the goal of eliminating or preventing child labor. (13; 91; 42)

The lack of available research and data on the prevalence of child labor in high-risk sectors such as agriculture, garment manufacturing, domestic work, and construction, cause difficulty for the Thai government to design appropriate programs to address the issue. (43) While the government has some social programs targeted to assist children at high risk of exploitation in the worst forms of child labor, such as migrant and ethnic minority children, these programs are not sufficient to address the extent of the problem. (12)

VII. SUGGESTED GOVERNMENT ACTIONS TO ELIMINATE CHILD LABOR

Based on the reporting above, suggested actions are identified that would advance the elimination of child labor in Thailand (Table 11).

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Legal Framework	Ensure that the law criminally prohibits the recruitment of children under age 18 by non-state armed groups.	2016 – 2017
	Ensure that the minimum age for work applies to children without a formal employment contract.	2017
Enforcement	Increase the number of labor inspectors responsible for enforcing laws related to child labor.	2015 – 2017
	Collect and publish comprehensive data on the number of prosecutions for all crimes related to child labor.	2015 – 2017

Table 11. Suggested Government Actions to Eliminate Child Labor (cont)

Area	Suggested Action	Year(s) Suggested
Social Programs	Improve access to education, especially for ethnic minority and migrant children, including raising awareness of migrant children's right to education, improving access to school transportation, and addressing language barriers for non-Thai speaking students.	2012 – 2017
	Conduct and publish a survey on working children in Thailand using research methodology in line with internationally recognized resolutions and guidelines on child labor statistics.	2009 – 2017
	Ensure that there are sufficient social programs to assist children at risk of or engaged in child labor and their parents or guardians, in the relevant sectors of agriculture, garment manufacturing, domestic work, and construction.	2016 – 2017
	Ensure that there are sufficient social programs targeted to assist children from vulnerable groups, such as migrants and ethnic minorities, who are at high risk of the worst forms of child labor.	2016 – 2017

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