Working to eliminate the worst forms of child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking worldwide
Global Problem of Child Labor and Modern Slavery

Global estimates from the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) indicate that 160 million children between 5 and 17 years old were engaged in child labor in 2020, of which about 79 million were in hazardous labor. While concerted efforts by governments, workers, and employers have resulted in a reduction of nearly 86 million children engaged in child labor since 2000, this positive trend has changed in recent years. Global estimates in 2020 showed an increase of 8.4 million children in child labor over the past 4 years and a 6.5 million increase in the number of children engaged in hazardous work.

As these figures suggest, there are still far too many children in exploitative work. Child laborers suffer many kinds of hardship: carrying heavy loads and wielding machetes on farms; scavenging in garbage dumps and being exposed to electronic waste; enduring physical, emotional, and verbal abuse as domestic servants; and fighting as child combatants in armed conflict. There are now nearly 87 million children in child labor in Sub-Saharan Africa—more than in the rest of the world combined. Meanwhile, absolute numbers and percentages of children in child labor have actually continued to decline in Asia and the Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean.

The ILO also estimates that 25 million people are trapped in forced labor, including more than 4 million children. Children and adults are forced to climb into mineshafts in search of diamonds and gold; they are coerced, deceived, and confined on fishing vessels by unscrupulous labor recruiters; and they are trapped in bonded labor while toiling in the extreme heat of brick kilns.
Definitions

**Child Labor** is defined by ILO Convention 138 on the Minimum Age for Admission to Employment and ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. It includes employment below the minimum age as established in national legislation, hazardous unpaid household services, and the worst forms of child labor: all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale or trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom, or forced or compulsory labor; the use, procuring or offering of a child for prostitution, for the production of pornography or for pornographic purposes; the use, procuring or offering of a child for illicit activities; and work which, by its nature or the circumstances in which it is carried out, is likely to harm the health, safety, or morals of children.

**Forced Labor** is defined by ILO Convention 29 as all work or service exacted from any person under the menace of any penalty and for which the said person has not offered himself voluntarily.

**Human Trafficking** is defined by the Palermo Protocol as the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of an individual by means of threat or use of force or other forms of coercion for the purpose of exploitation.

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**GLOBAL DATA ON CHILD LABOR, 5-17 YEARS**

- **233 million** Working Children
- **160 million** in Child Labor
- **79 million** in Hazardous Child Labor

**GLOBAL DATA ON CHILD LABOR, BY SECTOR**

- **Agriculture, 70%**
- **Services, 19.7%**
- **Industry, 10.3%**

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Our Impact

With over 25 years of experience, ILAB’s Office of Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking (OCFT) is a world leader in the fight to eradicate these labor abuses. ILAB’s toolbox includes international research, awareness, policy engagement, and technical cooperation.

Demonstrating commitment and leadership in the worldwide movement to end child labor, which has contributed to a global reduction of 86 million child laborers since 2000

Training more than 65,000 labor inspectors and law enforcement officials

Providing more than 69,000 teachers with training to work with children affected by child labor

Providing education and vocational training opportunities to nearly 2 million children

Improving livelihoods for nearly 200,000 vulnerable families

Increasing the capacity of more than 85 countries to address child labor and forced labor

Supporting the collection of information on child labor and forced labor through more than 300 surveys, including more than 90 national child labor surveys

International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor

The United Nations General Assembly designated 2021 as the International Year for the Elimination of Child Labor. In response to a call from Alliance 8.7, ILAB collaborated with fellow U.S. Government agencies to develop a whole of government pledge in support of the goals for this important year. Our work together could not be more important as we look for ways to build back better from the impact of COVID-19 and help ensure that vulnerable populations are better protected from such events in the future. Read our pledge at dol.gov/elimination-pledge.
Luz Myriam is one of thousands of women who live in mining communities in Colombia, where job opportunities seem exclusively destined for men. “I come from a mining family—my parents, my grandparents were always miners.” When she was a child, her brothers worked in a mine in the mornings, and then they would go to school. “My sister and I, we would make lunch, have their school uniforms ready, and do other chores.”

At that time, Luz Myriam dreamed of working and getting ahead as an adult. Her dream was to work in a mine; however, women were barred from working in mines and sometime faced abuse there. “In Boyacá, there is machismo. People believe that women need to be at home and men should go out and work.”

Despite these challenges, Luz Myriam was able to become an environmental engineer and obtain a license to operate a small coal mine near Sogamoso, Boyacá. She subsequently participated in activities carried out by the U.S. Department of Labor-funded Somos Tesoro (We Are Treasure) project to help improve mining practices and promote compliance with legal requirements for operating a mine. Luz Myriam has faced challenges as a mining leader; however, thanks to the Somos Tesoro project, she and other female miners received training and support to create the Association of Female Miner Entrepreneurs. Currently, the association has 65 members, and Luz Myriam is the president. Members include coal miners and brick makers, engineers, and occupational safety professionals.

“The purpose of the association is that we women empower ourselves in our roles as miners and become economically independent, because when the men are the only breadwinners, that brings dependency,” she said. “That is why we need to empower ourselves, study, and pursue an economic activity, so we are economically independent. That will make us think differently about our role.”

The Association continues to thrive and is currently being supported by USAID.
International Child Labor and Forced Labor Reporting

ILAB as a Knowledge Generator

ILAB’s research and reporting provide specific, actionable information to various stakeholders about how to combat labor abuses in countries around the world and are carried out under congressional mandates and Presidential directives.

- Worker and civil society organizations use the reports to inform advocacy efforts that promote fundamental principles and rights at work, as well as strategies to assist victims.

- Foreign governments use the reports to strengthen laws, enforcement, policies, and programs for vulnerable children and families in or at risk of child labor or forced labor.

- Companies and industry groups rely on these reports to inform risk assessments and conduct due diligence on their supply chains as part of strategies to address the problem.

- Consumers use our research to minimize the risk that their purchases inadvertently support exploitative labor practices around the world, and they demand change.

- U.S. Government agencies use the reports to safeguard federal procurement and guard against the importation of goods made with forced labor, including forced child labor, through responsible trade enforcement.

- Multilateral bodies such as the ILO, OECD, G20, and G7 rely on the reports to develop strategies to improve working conditions and respect for labor rights in global supply chains.

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Children work alongside adults at the Panique mining area about 10 kilometers outside the town of Aroroy on the Island of Masbate. Aroroy, Philippines. 2012.
FINDINGS ON THE WORST FORMS OF CHILD LABOR

Focusing on the efforts of certain U.S. trade beneficiary countries and territories to eliminate the worst forms of child labor through legislation, enforcement mechanisms, policies, and social programs.

LIST OF GOODS PRODUCED BY CHILD LABOR OR FORCED LABOR

Listing goods that ILAB has reason to believe are produced, in whole or in part, by child labor or forced labor.

LIST OF PRODUCTS PRODUCED BY FORCED OR INDENTURED CHILD LABOR

Containing goods and their source countries that ILAB, along with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of State, have reason to believe are made by forced or indentured child labor.

LEGISLATION & MANDATE

Trade and Development Act (TDA) of 2000

Produce the U.S. Department of Labor’s annual Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor with respect to each trade beneficiary country’s implementation of its international commitments to eliminate the worst forms of child labor.

Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act (TVPRA) of 2005 and Subsequent Reauthorizations

Develop a biannual list of goods from countries that are produced by child labor or forced labor, including, to the extent practicable, goods that are produced with inputs that are produced with forced labor or child labor.

Executive Order (EO) 13126 of 1999

Develop and maintain an ongoing list of products from countries that are produced by forced or indentured child labor. Federal contractors who supply products on the list must certify that they have made a good faith effort to determine whether forced or indentured child labor was used to produce the items supplied and that, on the basis of those efforts, the contractor is unaware of any such use of child labor.

Sweat & Toil, Child Labor, Forced Labor, and Human Trafficking Around the World

is a mobile application that contains more than 1,000 pages of research from ILAB’s three flagship reports.

Check countries’ efforts to eliminate child labor

Review laws and ratifications

Browse goods produced with child labor or forced labor

Find child labor data

View ILAB’s projects

You can download the free app from Apple’s App Store or the Google Play Store and access the data on our website at dol.gov/AppSweat&Toil.

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Syrian refugees from Kobanê harvest cotton by hand for low wages for a Turkish farmer, Asmalı, near Adana, Turkey. October 17, 2014.
Policy Engagement: Achieving Meaningful and Sustained Action

Partnerships Among Governments, Workers, Civil Society, and Businesses

ILAB brings governments, trade unions, civil society, and businesses together to ensure that each plays a constructive role in combating child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking. Such partnerships are vital to achieving substantive and sustainable change.

Governments can lead and take action in several ways, including by adhering to international standards such as ILO Convention No. 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor and ILO Convention No. 29 on Forced Labor. In accordance with their commitments to adhere to international labor standards, governments can strengthen their legal frameworks and build the capacity of their enforcement bodies, in particular, their labor inspectorates. Likewise, governments’ collection and dissemination of child labor data demonstrate their commitment to addressing child labor. By doing so, they recognize that data is critical to the design and implementation of sound policies and programs, including social programs to reduce poverty, provide quality education, and address gender, ethnic, and racial inequity. ILAB supports government efforts to achieve change and convert their commitments to realities by conducting rigorous research and providing concrete recommendations for action, as well as supporting technical cooperation programs that build institutional capacity and policy coordination.

Worker Organizations and Trade Unions play a vital role in the fight against child labor and forced labor. As advocates for workers and promoters of fundamental principles and rights at work and basic social protections, these organizations support the sustainable eradication of these problems. ILAB supports workers’ freedom and the ability to raise concerns and highlight problems in the workplace. As part of ongoing engagements, ILAB seeks to promote input by workers in their operations and supply chains and encourage employers to engage with workers regarding workplace conditions and provide adequate training on rights, responsibilities, and grievance mechanisms for both employees and management.
Civil Society organizations play a critical role in monitoring and responding to cases of child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking. The often hidden and unlawful nature of these abuses makes it difficult to obtain accurate and objective information on the nature and magnitude of the problem in a particular country or sector. In addition, when information does exist, there is frequently a lack of independent verification and ways to disseminate the information, hold violators accountable, and monitor follow-up actions on behalf of victims. ILAB funding has made it possible for civil society organizations to:

- Carry out research on forced labor in high-risk industries, such as in electronics, to understand cases of labor exploitation and help spur industries' commitment to tackle the issue in their supply chains.
- Provide regular and ongoing monitoring and reporting of labor rights abuses, including child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking.
- Advocate for more effective action by governments and private sector actors to address child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking.
- Assist victims of child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking to access services.

Private sector leadership can ensure that efforts to combat labor abuse become a necessary and standard way of doing business. ILAB’s sustained, ongoing private sector engagement is helping companies confront persistent challenges in eliminating child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking in supply chains. Companies are increasingly looking to ILAB for assistance in pursuing risk mitigation strategies. ILAB gives these firms the tools they need to understand relevant laws, regulations, and policies and to model effective strategies for monitoring and remediation.

ILAB also provides a Comply Chain app designed to help mitigate the business risks of child labor and forced labor in global supply chains. The app provides practical best practice examples and resources for responsible companies and highlights workers’ voices as a key element of a robust social compliance system. Comply Chain contains many examples of specific good practices that companies, industry groups, and multi-stakeholder initiatives have put in place with a key focus on the issues of child labor and forced labor. The app is available in Spanish, French, and Malay.

You can download the free app from Apple’s App Store or the Google Play Store and access the data on our website at dol.gov/AppComplyChain.
Targeted Initiatives
Building Capacity to Assist Vulnerable Children and Families

As the world’s largest funder of programs to combat child labor and forced labor, ILAB adopts a holistic approach to promote sustainable efforts that address child labor and forced labor’s underlying causes. We believe in creating a foundation for resilient communities and decent work for the most vulnerable children and families. As a result of our work, millions more children have had a chance to go to school, more working-age youth have found opportunities to learn market-relevant skills, more people have escaped forced labor, and more vulnerable and impoverished families have improved their livelihoods so they are not dependent upon their children’s labor in order to survive.

Building Governments’ Capacity: ILAB works with governments to make them more effective in combating labor abuses through efforts in areas such as data collection, monitoring, and enforcement. As a direct result of ILAB initiatives:
- More than 85 countries have strengthened their monitoring and enforcement of laws, regulations, policies, and programs to combat child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking.
- More than 65,000 labor inspectors and law enforcement officials have been trained to more effectively enforce child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking laws and regulations.
- Governments have adopted best practices to assist victims of child labor and forced labor. For example, ILAB worked in partnership with the Government of Paraguay to develop and pilot an electronic system that registers adolescent workers to ensure that they are protected under the law and to assist with the enforcement of labor laws.

Focus on Modern Slavery: ILAB is a recognized global leader in combating the trafficking of children and adults for labor exploitation. For example:
- In 1995, ILAB became the first U.S. Government agency to fund a project specifically aimed at tackling the commercial sexual exploitation of children in Thailand.
- Since then, ILAB programming to combat trafficking and forced labor has expanded to some of the most challenging environments and sectors in the world – from deep sea fishing in Thailand and brick kilns in Nepal to cocoa farming in Côte d’Ivoire and Ghana.
- Today, ILAB is continuing to combat hereditary slavery in countries such as Mauritania and Niger.

Supporting Global Partnerships to Eliminate Child Labor and Forced Labor

ILAB supports Alliance 8.7, a global partnership committed to achieving Target 8.7 of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, which calls on the global community to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking, secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, and by 2025, end child labor in all its forms.

Alliance 8.7’s strategic objectives are to accelerate action, conduct research and share knowledge, and drive innovation and leverage resources through an approach that promotes collaboration. This is accomplished through collaborative and groundbreaking research, facilitated dialogue among governments, workers’ and employers’ organizations and civil society, and through the Pathfinders initiative (a commitment that a country can make to undertake greater action to address child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking).
IN FOCUS: From Forced Labor to Freedom
From Protocol to Practice: A Bridge to Global Action on Forced Labor (The Bridge Project)

ILAB’s Bridge Project aims to assist countries with efforts to address forced labor using the ILO’s Protocol and Recommendation to Convention No. 29 on Forced Labor as a basis for concrete and sustained action. These instruments aim to advance forced labor prevention, protection, and compensation measures around the world. Through activities supported by the Bridge Project, more than 50 countries have ratified the protocol. The Bridge Project also is supporting efforts to collect reliable data and share knowledge across institutions at the global and national levels. In particular, it is engaging with several governments, including Malaysia, Nepal, Niger, Peru, and Uzbekistan to carry out research, including nationally representative statistics on child labor and forced labor. In Nepal, the Bridge Project supported the incorporation of a forced labor module into the National Labor Force survey for the first time. The results of these studies will provide vital information for countries to develop more targeted policies, programs, and enforcement efforts related to forced labor. In addition, the Bridge Project has provided job skills and employment training to more than 600 former bonded laborers in Nepal and is expanding training opportunities for current and new participants in Nepal and Niger. The Bridge Project also supported the establishment of the Global Business Network on Forced Labor and a range of informative tools, including Guidance on Developing National Action Plans on Forced Labor and a Media Toolkit on Forced Labor and Fair Recruitment for journalists.
Funding Innovative Research

ILAB funds research projects that deepen our knowledge and understanding of child labor and forced labor, including their root causes. ILAB programming has supported:

- The collection and analysis of credible data on the prevalence, characteristics, and potential determinants of child labor, forced labor, and human trafficking through the implementation of more than 90 national child labor surveys; 10 surveys focused on forced labor; and a number of other qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies.

- The development of methodological tools, including standardized questionnaires and technical manuals on sample size calculations to assist researchers and national statistical offices with designing child labor and forced labor surveys. These tools also have included the *Guidelines Concerning the Measurement of Forced Labor*, endorsed by the labor statistics standards-setting body of the ILO, and an update to a core resource on forced labor identification, *Hard to See, Harder to Count*.

- Efforts to make research more accessible to policymakers and support the adoption of evidence-based interventions to address child labor and forced labor.

- The production, every 4 years, of global estimates on child labor and forced labor, which serve as the standard for measuring worldwide progress on these issues.

- The creation of new supply chain tracing methodologies and tools to enhance transparency and traceability in global supply chains and increase downstream tracing of goods made by child labor and forced labor.

**Highlights include:**

- With ILAB support, Serbia is conducting its first ever National Child Labor Survey and is integrating best practices from the development of the child labor survey instrument into the development of survey instruments for other studies being conducted by its National Statistical Office.

- ILAB’s Research to Action project is developing a searchable bibliography and evidence gap map showing where research has been done and where it is lacking with regard to child labor and forced labor. The project is also developing an interactive tool that will enable policymakers to search for interventions that evidence has shown can work to reduce child labor and forced labor.

- Through investigating the prevalence and causes of forced labor within the garment and associated textile sectors of Argentina and Mauritius, ILAB’s Evidence to Action project aims to develop robust and replicable approaches to collecting and analyzing data on forced labor to inform evidence-based interventions.

ILAB’s new Better Trade Tool matches its essential reporting with U.S. import trade data to help policymakers, corporate compliance officers, procurement officials, labor inspectorates, and others better target the enforcement of child labor and forced labor in the production of key goods and products. This tool’s dynamic dashboards and custom queries allow users to view potential labor exploitation risks in global supply chains and conduct U.S. import trade data analysis. You can access the Better Trade Tool on our website at [dol.gov/BetterTradeTool](http://dol.gov/BetterTradeTool).
ILAB at the Forefront of Evaluation Research

ILAB continues to invest in impact evaluations of innovative interventions to broaden the global knowledge base on effective strategies for combating child labor and forced labor. ILAB’s randomized controlled trials—the gold standard for impact evaluations—allow governments and policymakers to make evidence-informed decisions about programs to address these abusive labor practices. For example:

- Academicians working with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) and the Philippines Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) used the results of their ILAB-funded impact evaluation to make important policy decisions about improvements to a DOLE livelihoods program to assist the families of child laborers.

- Based on the results of an ILAB-funded impact evaluation in Peru, IPA was able to provide evidence on reductions in school dropout rates and child labor that led the Peruvian Ministry of Education to expand a telenovela-style information campaign to all secondary schools in Peru.

- The University of California, Berkeley used ILAB funding to shed light on effective and ineffective strategies to build law enforcement officers’ capacity and understanding of forced labor and human trafficking in Nepal.

- UNICEF Research Innocenti is using evidence from its ILAB-funded impact evaluations to advocate for improvements in national cash transfer programs that provide support to millions of children and their families in Sub-Saharan Africa.

ILAB’s Robust Monitoring and Evaluation of Technical Assistance Projects

- ILAB has built robust monitoring, evaluation, and learning practices into our technical assistance projects through comprehensive monitoring and evaluation systems that measure project achievements against outcome-oriented indicators, including monitoring individual participant outcomes.

- Since 2001, ILAB has conducted more than 450 independent performance evaluations of technical assistance projects to assess project design, relevance, cohesion with other programs, effectiveness, efficiency, management, outcomes, and sustainability. ILAB has used findings from these performance evaluations to improve the implementation of our technical assistance projects.

- ILAB conducts synthesis and thematic evaluations to identify trends across evaluations on various topics and themes, such as the cocoa and fishing/seafood sectors, income-generation alternatives, and trafficking of children for the purposes of labor exploitation. In 2019, ILAB published a synthesis review covering 31 ILAB-funded final evaluations from 2013 to 2018, which highlights a number of emerging good practices, lessons learned, and considerations for future programming.

How ILAB Uses Evaluations

Develop new programs

Improve existing programs

Engage with stakeholders

Identify new areas of research

Share reports with the public
IN FOCUS: Addressing Forced Labor in the Fishing Sector

A number of high-profile pieces of investigative journalism have raised public awareness of forced labor in the global fishing industry, particularly in Asia. ILAB has been working to address this issue for more than 20 years.

- In 1999, ILAB awarded funding to address child labor in the fishing sector in Indonesia and the Philippines, which included withdrawing children or preventing them from engaging in hazardous work and developing monitoring teams with the government and the ILO.
- In 2009, ILAB added six seafood-related goods from eight economies to its initial List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor pursuant to the TVPRA. As of 2021, the TVPRA List contains seven seafood-related goods from 20 economies.
- Today, ILAB projects are helping build the capacity of the governments of Indonesia and the Philippines to counter forced labor and human trafficking on fishing vessels; work with small- and medium-size seafood processing enterprises in Thailand to develop and document pilot models of responsible recruitment; and conduct research, develop tools, and build the capacity of global stakeholders to identify victims of forced labor in the fishing industry.

As a result of efforts by ILAB and many others, more governments are extending protections and ramping up inspections of vessels. Civil society groups and the private sector are creating tools to help the sector combat labor abuses, several of which incorporate the TVPRA and EO Lists into their methodology or resource lists. The TVPRA List is used as a key source of data in several toolkits in the industry, including:

- ResponsibleSourcingTool.org, which provides guidance to companies on how to develop compliance plans to address and prevent human trafficking in their supply chains.
- The Seafood Slavery Risk Tool, which assesses the risk of forced labor, human trafficking, and hazardous child labor in the seafood industry.
- The Labor Safe Screen, which helps clients trace seafood supply chains and focus resources on the riskiest fisheries.
The Iqbal Masih Award reflects the spirit of Iqbal Masih, a Pakistani child sold into bonded labor as a carpet weaver at age 4. He escaped his servitude at age 10 and became an outspoken advocate of children’s rights, drawing international attention in his fight against child labor. He was tragically killed at the age of 12 in his native Pakistan.

The purpose of the award is to recognize exceptional efforts to reduce the worst forms of child labor and inspire and motivate others working toward this end. The award’s two major goals are:

- To honor and give public recognition to a recipient that has made extraordinary efforts to combat the worst forms of child labor internationally, and who shares qualities demonstrated by Iqbal Masih, including leadership, courage, integrity, and a search to end the labor exploitation of children.

- To raise awareness about the worst forms of child labor internationally.

The United States Congress established the Iqbal Masih Award for the Elimination of Child Labor in 2008 to recognize exceptional efforts by an individual, company, organization, or national government to end the worst forms of child labor.

For more information about the award and a list of recipients, please visit: dol.gov/Iqbal.
WHAT CAN YOU DO TO HELP ADDRESS CHILD LABOR AND FORCED LABOR?

ASK QUESTIONS
- Could some of the goods I buy be made by child labor or forced labor?
- Do workers have a voice to speak out against labor abuses?
- What are companies doing to end child labor and forced labor in global supply chains?
- What are governments doing to combat child labor and forced labor?

TAKE ACTION
- Empower yourself with knowledge by downloading USDOL's Sweat & Toil and Comply Chain apps and accessing our Better Trade Tool.
- Make your voice heard by spreading the word among friends, family, and the companies you buy from and invest in.
- Show your support for organizations that are working to end these abuses.

DEMAND CHANGE
ADVOCATE FOR A WORLD IN WHICH:
- Workers everywhere can raise their voices against child labor, forced labor, and other abuses.
- Companies make serious commitments to ensure that global supply chains are free of products made by child labor and forced labor, especially those on USDOL’s List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor.
- Your investments have a positive social impact by promoting responsible labor practices.
- Governments work vigorously to adopt the country-specific suggested actions in USDOL’s Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor.

Learn more: dol.gov/EndChildLabor
Email us: GlobalKids@dol.gov
Follow us: @ILAB_DOL

delete

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