

Definitions:

- **Radicalisation**
 - Complex process where individuals who form part of a group adopt, support or engage in violence with the goal of achieving political, ideological, or religious goals.
- **Extremist groups**
 - Groups of individuals who engage in activities that are not in accordance with the norms accepted by the state, rejecting democracy, social order and fundamental principles and values. Instead, they embrace left or right wing political radicalism, condemn extreme acts of terrorism, and are firm believers in chauvinism. Major extremists groups include: ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Hamas, and al-Shabaab.
- **Terrorism**
 - Criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international.
- **Sunni Islam**
 - The largest branch of Islam, the definition meaning those who observe the sunnah, the practices of Mohammed. Many terrorist organisations are rooted in Sunni Islam extremist beliefs.
- **Jihad**
 - A struggle or fight against the enemies of Islam and for the protection of the Islamic community.
- **Jihadi**
 - The obligation incumbent on all Muslims, individuals and the community, to follow and realize God's will: to lead a virtuous life and to extend the Islamic community through preaching, education, example, writing, etc.
- **Boko Haram**
 - Boko Haram is a Sunni violent extremist group, primarily based in northeastern Nigeria, that seeks to overthrow the current secular Nigerian government and establish a state based on a strict interpretation of Islamic law (Sharia).
- **Da'esh**
 - An Arabic acronym for the terrorist organization's former full name: al-Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham, which translates to "the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham" (or the Levant/Syria).
- **ISIS**
 - Also defined as the "Islamic State of Iraq and Syria" is a radical sunni Muslim organization

Background of the Issue

Terrorism and radical groups have existed in various forms throughout history. Groups have repeatedly used violence as a tool for political and social change and protest for centuries. Radicalisation and recruitment of the youth as we understand it today began in the mid 20th century. Accelerating significantly with the influence of political conflicts and civil wars. Specifically, in the 1980s, Al Qaeda shifted focus on indoctrinating youth from religious schools and vulnerable communities in Pakistan and Afghanistan. During the 1990s noticeable youth recruitment was notable as extremist groups, including the IRA and Sri Lanka's Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), sought new members while avoiding police records and aimed to gain media attention by using child participants¹.

In order to ensure solutions prevent future youth involvement within extremist groups an understanding of the process of recruitment is fundamental. The United Nations 2019 *Tackling Terrorists' Exploitation of Youth* identified 6 main motivations for participation. These include; "A search for group identity, ideological appeal of the group, real or perceived exclusion, the potential for economic gain or long-term economic stability, prospects of fame, glory, or respect and personal connections, including family and friendship networks."

Once the youth is recruited, they are often subjected to a spectrum of coercive practices. This includes threats, violence, social isolation and indoctrination used to increase their dependence on and fear of the group, making it harder to resist orders or leave. Children born into areas controlled by extremist groups have a higher attachment to ideology and require more exhaustive efforts to avoid indoctrination.

Organisations target youth as it provides easy and bountiful access to workers. As described by the United Nations Office of Terrorism,

Individuals may become supporting roles, propagandists and fighters, where role is determined by gender and age. The presence of girls promotes other young women in terrorist organizations to join said organisation. For example, Zehra Duman was 19 years old when she left Australia to join ISIS where she offered to assist other women seeking to find jihadi husbands. The youth are specifically targeted as extremist groups can easily employ them in every sector. Including, but not limited to: supporting roles, recruiters, propagandists, and fighters.

Young women's presence in terrorist organisations presents major threats for their safety and protection. In 2015, about one in five Boko Haram suicide attacks in parts of Nigeria,

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https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/publications/MachelStudy-10YearStrategicReview_en.pdf

Cameroon, and Niger were carried out by children, and roughly three-quarters of those child bombers were girls. Documented cases even include girls as young as 7.² ISIS recruits youthful women to create a specialised unit using violence and intimidation to enforce shari'a law. In contradiction, young men may be treated as more expendable by terrorists and are therefore used as human shields to spare fully trained, adult fighters.³

Case study: the formation and eventual attack of the A-17 cell group in Barcelona.

[LINK](#)

In August 2017, Spain faced one of its most significant extremist incidents when a group of young men from the small Catalan town of Ripoll carried out coordinated attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils, a neighbouring town, which killed 16 people and injured over 100. This group was later identified as A-17. It was composed of almost entirely second-generation Moroccan immigrant youth, many of whom were born or raised in Spain and integrated into local schools, sports teams and community life. Over a two year period, Abdelbaki Es Satti, a recently arrived imam, meaning that he has the role of spiritual guide, teacher and community leader, gradually radicalised a small circle of young men. He had ties to The CNI (Centro Nacional de Inteligencia) which allowed him to stay under the radar for some time. The events of August 2017 serve as an example of how youth radicalisation can occur quietly within small, overlooked communities.

The economic downturn following 2008 limited job prospects for the second generation immigrant youth in Catalonia. Young individuals in towns such as Ripoll experienced identity fragmentation as a disconnect from both Catalan societies and their families' country of origin grew. Some families faced social isolation, low-economic conditions, and limited civic participation. Consequentially weakening community cohesion. There was a sudden shift as the recently arriving Abdelbaki Es Satti, an individual with a criminal record and suspected extremist ties, integrated himself into the local mosque. He gained community trust by appearing calm, educated, and helpful; helping mask terrorist intentions.

Satti had a major influence upon most members of the youth in the community as he positioned himself as a religious mentor offering guidance and emotional support. He targeted individuals with existing friendships, allowing group radicalisation through peer enforcement. He provided these men with individual lessons that subtly introduced extremist ideology framed as "true" islam. He used incremental desensitisation, a gradual process used by extremist groups that slowly normalised ideas and behaviours that would originally seem extreme or violent. He first critiqued Western society, then framed Muslims as globally oppressed, and lastly glorified martyrdom and jihad. Building a worldview that convinced

² <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36023444>

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https://www.unodc.org/documents/justice-and-prison-reform/Child-Victims/Handbook_on_Children_Recruited_and_Exploited_by_Terrorist_and_Violent_Extremist_Groups_the_Role_of_the_Justice_System.E.pdf

the youth that violence was justified and heroic. Eventually forming the terrorist 17-A cell. There was a final encouragement to view themselves as soldiers rather than civilians once individuals were physically isolated from families by travelling together to Alcanar. Providing a constant moral justification of violence that exploits guilt, honour and loyalty. The formation of the A-17 demonstrates how recruitment thrives where there is social isolation, unchecked religious authority, and youth identity insecurity.

Key Actors and Stakeholders

Main organisations

- **ISIS / ISIL**
 - *Western bloc, Middle East and Arab World*
 - ISIS uses children in a systematic and organized manner, pursuing long-term goals⁴. Young recruits are referred to as “Clubs of Chalifate” and are trained extensively.
 - Western bloc. In recent years, there has been an increase in online recruitment, especially through social media platforms. Online propaganda is focused on personal benefits to the recruits and conceals the violent nature of the organization⁵.
 - Middle East and Arab World. Children are recruited systematically with a focus on long-term participation. They undergo ideological training, are exposed to acts of violence and are isolated from non-Islamic values.¹ Young recruits become soldiers, logisticians, and brides.
- **Boko Haram**
 - *West Africa: Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, Mali*
 - Boko Haram uses torture and violence to forcefully recruit the youth. The organization's substantial control of vast territories facilitates recruitment through fear and intimidation.
 - Boko Haram targets poor alienated communities and marginalized groups. Financial benefits, monthly salaries, and employment are offered to attract young members, for whom it is often the only opportunity⁶.
- **Al-Shabaab**
 - *Somalia, Kenya*
 - Al-Shabaab uses youth unemployment, poverty, and marginalization to mobilize its members⁷. It is known for its use of child fighters, with over a thousand children taking part in military training.
 - Uses propaganda messages to conceal forced recruitment.

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<https://www.drake.edu/media/departmentsoffices/international/nelson/2016%20paper.%20Children%20in%20ISIS.%20K.%20Anderson.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/abs/10.1086/716281>

⁶ <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1460&context=pcs>

⁷ <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1460&context=pcs>

- Online recruitment has resulted in recruitment of hundreds of fighters from Western bloc countries. Campaigns are targeted at children and youth, promoting Al-Shabaab's ideals. Foreign recruits mainly spread propaganda, yet some take part in the violence directly.
- **Right-wing and white supremacist extremist groups**
 - *Western bloc*
 - There has been a rise in the number of extremist groups promoting white nationalism, white supremacy, neo-fascism, neo-nazism, anti-semitism and other radical ideas. Groups like *The Base* or *Patriot Front* engage in racially motivated violence, hate speech, and propaganda.
 - The main means of recruitment and propaganda lie in online platforms, in particular anonymous forums and social media. Gaming platforms and meme-based campaigns are especially popular due to lower moderation and their appeal to younger audiences.
 - It has become difficult for governments to regulate such extremist groups due to their decentralised structure and heavy use of encrypted communication channels and anonymous platforms.
- **Local ethno-nationalist groups**
 - *All countries*
 - Local ethno-nationalist groups use radicalisation for political violence, often speculating on ideas of inequality and unfairness. Such groups often promote extreme xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and far-right ideas, leading to discrimination, racism, and violence⁸.
 - These groups particularly appeal to the younger population, using the ideas of identity and belonging to spread hate speech and supremacist ideas. Moderation of such groups is difficult due to the variety and spread of ethno-nationalist ideas.

Key member states

- **United States of America**
 - *Strong partnerships with the EU, NATO, tech companies.*
 - National.

The United States has put significant effort into limiting youth radicalisation by moderating social media, taking down or limiting web forums spreading extremist ideas, and conducting federal investigations. However, far-right and white supremacist ideas are gaining popularity, especially in light of the immigration debate.
 - International.

The United States has combated the global spread of terrorism and extremism through its foreign policies, for example the 'War of Terror' which aimed to

⁸ <https://www.counterextremism.com/content/european-ethno-nationalist-and-white-supremacy-groups>

curb terrorist organizations in the Middle East. The effectiveness of such policies is debated, as radical ideas still prevail and grow in the region.

- **European Union**

- *Cooperation with the US, Interpol, NATO, tech platforms*
- The EU, as a bloc, has made efforts to prevent domestic radicalisation, especially after rise in youth cases. Cooperation within the union greatly facilitates the monitoring of international groups.
- Policies such as chat control and private message monitoring are being considered in order to moderate the spread of radical ideas. However, multiple governments have voiced concerns that such a policy would impede freedom of speech.
- There are rising issues concerning migrant integration, with an ongoing debate concerning deradicalisation v.s. a security-first approach⁹. In particular, ethno-nationalist and far-right ideas are gaining popularity amongst the younger generation.

- **United Kingdom**

- *Cooperation with Western bloc, international organizations*
- The UK mainly faces the threat of extreme right-wing and Islamist radicalization and terrorism¹⁰.
- The UK has addressed the radicalization problem on a governmental level via the Prevent program, which provides alternatives for individuals who are at risk of becoming involved with radical organizations.
- However, the effectiveness of the program has been questioned because of its voluntary nature. Some experts have therefore suggested that a stricter policy be implemented. Additionally, there have been concerns of profiling and civil rights risk related to Prevent.

- **Middle Eastern states**

- *Cooperation with UN agencies on deradicalisation camps*
- Gulf states. Similar position to the Western bloc – as radical ideas are predominantly spread online, moderation measures are being established.
- Other countries. These countries tend to have tense if not hostile relationships with the Western bloc, which often results in formation of anti-Western radical groups.
- The main interest of these countries is to limit recruitment of children by ISIS and other groups by providing alternatives such as education or employment. Extremist groups tend to thrive in marginalised regions and communities, as they offer financial support to recruits, many of whom are children.
- However, Middle Eastern states often are faced with a scarcity of resources and are limited in their ability to counteract radical extremist ideas.

- **African states**

⁹ <https://www.migpolgroup.com/index.php/2025/09/25/mipex-2025-eu-update-launch/>

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/get-help-if-youre-worried-about-someone-being-radicalised>

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- *Cooperation within African Union, UN peacekeeping missions, and UNICEF*
- Interests include combating recruitment by radical groups such as Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and ISCAP.
- Due to a lack of financial resources and established governmental systems, controlling radicalization and recruitment of youth poses a significant challenge. The child-protection systems often lack enforcement and strict regulations, and their security-focused approaches to domestic policy can violate child rights.
- Additionally, extremist groups tend to speculate on issues of poverty and inequality, making themselves more appealing to younger generations. Many such organizations pose themselves as opposition to the government, hiding their violent and radical ideas.
- In some cases, extremist groups can control whole regions, rendering the government virtually powerless to prevent radicalisation. For example, the Boko Haram group established control over northern parts of Niger, and was able to forcefully conscript hundreds of children without consequences .

Current Situation

As of 2024, Europol's European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2025 (TE-SAT) records a total of 58 terrorist attacks reported by 14 EU member states. Of these, 34 were completed, 5 failed, and 19 were foiled, or were prevented from succeeding. 449 individuals were arrested for terrorism-related offenses across 20 member states. Almost 1 in 3 suspects were a minor or a young adult. The youngest offender was 12 years old, arrested for planning to commit an attack. As said by Catherine De Bolle, Europol's Executive Director, "These threats are becoming increasingly complex, reminding us that the threat of terrorism within the EU is neither static nor distant."

Current geopolitical conflicts, such as in the Middle East, the Sahel and North Africa, have become a direct contributing factor considering the rise of terrorist threats within EU countries as there have been large numbers of attacks and calls to violence across the entire ideological spectrum. Since October 7th, 2023, online antisemitism has surged across mainstream and fringe platforms, and terrorist and violent extremist networks have actively used that surge to spread propaganda, glorify violence, and incite attacks.¹¹ In addition, the Russia-Ukraine war has driven the spread of violent extremist narratives, radicalization, and mobilization, as seen in far-right fighters travelling to Ukraine, jihadist endorsements of anti-Russian violence, and heightened online extremist chatter.¹² The collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime in Syria circa early December in 2024 lead to the formation of a

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<https://english.aivd.nl/latest/news/2025/04/18/aivd-sees-increase-in-threat-of-online-radicalisation-minors>

¹²

https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/2023-03/terrorism-violent-extremism-and-war-in-ukraine_may-2022.pdf

government led by the leader of Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham, a Sunni Islamic terrorist organisation who play a major role in the now ended Syrian civil war. Marking a significant shift with potential regional geopolitical implication as there are growing concerns about the new leadership's ability to fight terrorists, increased reports of radicalised violent extremists expressing willingness to travel within the region, and uncertain futures for the thousands of captives held in prisons and camps now controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). These factors create a growing cause for concern about future threats to EU security.

In addition, there has been growing concern about the use of generative AI reaching unprecedented levels as individuals, especially in the right wing scene, create and disseminate propaganda and hate speech. End-to-end encrypted communication apps, including messaging apps like WhatsApp and iMessage, provide secure channels for communication, coordination, recruitment, dissemination of propaganda and incitement for violence.

Mechanism of recruitment

As of October 2025, the United Nations Security Council Counter Terrorism Committee Executive Order published an article titled "*Growing Alarm as Terrorist Exploitation of Children Rapidly Evolved, Outpacing Member State Responses*" in which they identified three main recruitment strategies targeted against the youth.

1. Online recruitment

The first of these recruitment strategies is the effective use of online forums, encrypted messaging apps and gaming platforms by terrorist organisations. Coded algorithms on social media platforms reinforce certain ideologies by creating echo chambers normalising extremist views. Extremist groups begin their recruitment on easily accessible platforms, such as TikTok, Facebook or Instagram exploiting these algorithms. They then gradually move individuals towards encrypted messaging apps like Telegram, Signal and Wire. Da'esh is an example of one of many terrorist organisations with views built upon xenophobia, racism and forms of intolerance that exploit social media applications. Youth is further targeted within gaming environments as groups design extremist themed first person shooting games, modify existing games to insert violent messages, or use in-game chat functions for recruitment. Methods are most effective when it follows a youth on youth recruitment model as adolescent conscripts actively recruit their peers, exploiting adolescent social dynamics.

2. Traditional recruitment methods

The second current strategy employed by terrorist organizations to employ the youth consists of traditional recruitment methods. Abduction is a common tactic used by organisations to quickly force large numbers of individuals to join an extremist group. The Boko Haram organisation, for example, kidnapped schoolchildren in Nigeria. Youth abductment is targeted by groups such as the Da'esh and Al-Qaeda in regions marked by weak governance, conflict and socioeconomic instability as organisations capitalize on the absence of strong institutions and social safety nets. Further exploiting governance gaps by providing alternative essential healthcares that include healthcare, education, financial assistance and conflict resolution. Creating a dependency that facilitates recruitment particularly among the youth whose

families benefit from these essential services. Thus creating environments where joining the organisation appears as both a rational choice and a social obligation rather than coercion.

3. Recruitment through human trafficking

Lastly, there has been a significant increase in human trafficking within terrorist organisations. Becoming central to groups such as the Da'esh, Boko Haram and the Al-Shabaab. The cross section between human trafficking and terrorist recruitment presents an increasingly growing concerning trend which exploits the existing vulnerabilities in child protection systems. The youth used for sexual exploitation and forced labour. The trafficking methods developed by extremist groups serve multiple factors. These include generating revenue through the exploitation of trafficked personnel, developing a dependent relationship with local populations, and the establishment of recruitment pipelines that target individuals in vulnerable situations. This creates situations where children experience victimization from both trafficking and terrorist recruitment processes. Previous counter terrorism approaches fail to recognise trafficked children as victims, while anti-trafficking efforts inadequately address security implications of children coerced into terrorist activities. Solutions must address the prevention of trafficking and terrorist recruitment while prioritising child protection and rehabilitation.

Major Challenges

1. Scale of youth violence and recruitment exploitation

Exploitation of youth by terrorist and violent extremist groups has expanded significantly over the last decade. Children have become primary recruitment targets both online and offline. As of 2024, the UN verified 41,370 “grave violations” against children in armed conflict. These include abduction, recruitment, sexual violence and killing. Half of these violations were committed by non-state armed groups. Children as young as 8 were documented as having been recruited or used by extremist groups. In Europe and North America, children account for 42% of terrorist related investigations, a threefold increase since 2021. Recruitment is no longer confined to conflict zones. Early prevention is essential as recruitment is beginning to target much younger children. Youth are exposed to extremist content over multiple platforms, making monitoring difficult. This first major challenge underscores the growing magnitude and urgency of preventing youth radicalisation. Explaining why traditional counterterrorism strategies are insufficient. The growing range of scale and age highlight the growing necessity of child-specific policies.

2. Extremist adaptation outpacing state response

Terrorist organisations are rapidly innovating new recruitment strategies while Member States slowly adjust countermeasures. Extremist groups can adapt methods within weeks, especially within digital spaces. Exploiting new platforms, new communication tools, and new youth trends as soon as they emerge. While member states can take years to adopt new policies, update legislation, regulate platforms, or reform juvenile justice systems. This creates a “gap” that allows extremists to establish substantial influence over the youth before authorities recognize the threat. Recruitment has shifted to gaming platforms including

Discord, Steam, Roblox, Fornite and Xbox Live. Extremists create modded games with embedded extremist symbols or narrative, private in-game chats for grooming and gamified recruitment sequences which turn ideology into missions, challenges or role play. The challenge presented underscores the need for preventive policies to become much faster, more flexible, and more technologically informed.

3. Weak youth justice, reintegration, and trauma-supported structures

Many Member States lack robust frameworks for handling children associated with terrorist activities. Solutions must emphasise that children involved in extremist networks are typically victims of exploitation, not perpetrators, yet most systems do not treat them as such. Major weaknesses include an inadequate juvenile justice system. States often lack specialised courts or legal procedures for children recruited by terrorist groups. Many countries are still processing the youth in adult criminal systems, which increases trauma and the likelihood of re-radicalisation. Furthermore, there is an insufficient therapeutic and mental health capacity as there are elevated PTSD, depression and psychiatric disorders among radicalised youth. However, most countries lack child psychologists trained in trauma, long-term rehabilitation programs, family reintegration support, and community reintegration plans. Without reintegration, children remain highly vulnerable to repeat recruitment, especially in fragile communities. Underscoring how resolutions require more than security measures as they must build systems that rehabilitate and reintegrate children effectively, or recruitment cycles will continue.

4. Increasingly sophisticated, gender differentiated recruitment tactics

Extremist organisation, instead of using a single recruitment strategy, tailor messaging by age, gender, social background, and platform. Making it far more difficult for authorities to counter their narratives. For boys specifically, they frame violence as a path to masculinity, strength or belonging. Positioning extremist ideology as a form of heroism, rebellion or escape from social frustration. They make heavy use of first-person shooter gaming environments and combat-themed online role-play. On the other hand, for girls, they promote roles tied to family duty, religious responsibility, community service, and traditional social expectations. Exploiting narratives of belonging, security, or marriage especially in conflict zones. Making general use of social media, messaging apps, gaming platforms, and online school communities or fan spaces. While recruitment in online spaces has increased, offline recruitment still persists. In some African and Middle Eastern regions, recruitment includes abductions, forced consumption, and coercive family pressures. Prevention strategies must be diverse. Addressing different psychological, social and gender-based vulnerabilities used by terrorists.

Blocs

1. Western bloc (NATO member states, EU states, and Western democracies)
 - a. General stance includes a strong pro-multilateral counter-terrorism, emphasizing human rights, online monitoring and deradicalisation programs.

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Country list: Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom, and United States.

2. Eastern bloc (Anti-west spheres)
 - a. These countries dedicate their focus on sovereignty, internal security, strong counter-terrorism measures, and a rejection of Western intervention.

Country list: China, Iran, Afghanistan, Syria, Myanmar and Yemen

3. Non-aligned bloc
 - a. These states seek financial aid, youth empowerment programs and regional cooperation. Highlighting poverty, unemployment, and local radicalisation risks.

Country list: Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Nepal, Niger, Pakistan, Somalia, Sri Lanka

Possible resolution points

1. How can refugee-hosting states strengthen protection systems in camps and urban displacement settings to prevent extremist groups from recruiting vulnerable children and adolescents, especially in areas with limited security oversight?
2. What mechanisms should be implemented to ensure that children formerly associated with extremist groups are treated primarily as victims of exploitation, with guaranteed access to rehabilitation, psychological support, and child-sensitive asylum procedures?
3. How can host countries and humanitarian actors reduce the risk of online radicalisation among displaced youth, who often face isolation, lack of education, and limited parental supervision, conditions that extremists organisations actively exploit?
4. What systems should be strengthened to identify and protect displaced children vulnerable to trafficking, given that the trafficking networks increasingly overlap with extremist recruitment pipelines in conflict-affected regions?
5. How can communities, schools and local authorities in host regions address social isolation, identity fragmentation, and economic marginalisation among refugee youth?

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<https://www.csis.org/analysis/jihadist-terrorism-united-states#:~:text=This%20brief%20examines%20the%20threat,an%20act%20of%20jihadist%20terrorism>

<https://www.europol.europa.eu/media-press/newsroom/news/europol-and-partner-countries-combat-online-radicalisation-gaming-platforms>

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