



TORINO PROCESS 2016-17

TAJKISTAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Executive summary of the Torino Process 2016–17 Tajikistan report.

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Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
CPD	Continuing professional development
ETF	European Training Foundation
GDP	Gross domestic product
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (German Agency for International Cooperation)
IVET	Initial vocational education and training
MLME	Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population
NEDS	National Education Development Strategy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
VET	Vocational education and training

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1. Introduction

Tajikistan is situated in south-eastern Central Asia, with a territory covering 142 600 km², 93% of which consists of mountains. To the north-west, Tajikistan shares borders with Uzbekistan (910 km) and Kyrgyzstan (630 km); in the south with Afghanistan (1 030 km); and in the east with China (430 km). Tajikistan includes numerous rivers and lakes, and the country's rivers provide 60% of Central Asia's water resources. As of 1 January 2015 the total population was 8 352 000.

After going through a deep recession caused by economic transformation and civil war, Tajikistan's economy has continued to show gradual growth. During the period following 2013, the country's economy did not suffer greatly from the impact of external factors caused by the deepening world financial and economic crisis, particularly as experienced in Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkey, the country's principal trade counterparts. According to official reports, GDP growth declined only moderately, from 6.7% in 2014 to 6.0% in 2015, despite the reduced remittances from Russia, shrinking global demand, and a significant fall in prices for the country's key export items, such as aluminium and cotton.

In addition, Tajikistan has traditionally had, and still has, an over-supply of labour in the workforce, which is reflected in the limited capacity of the country to ensure employment for the working population. This situation has also led to the vocational education system having a limited organisational capacity to adapt labour resources to business needs.

A survey of the relevant State strategic documents shows that Tajikistan has been attempting to transform the country's vocational education and training (VET) system into a key tool for the development of human capital and a catalyst for lifelong learning. This strategy is aimed at boosting the country's sustainable development with a view to increasing competitiveness and social solidarity. Within this context, a process for improving the quality of VET has been initiated based on social and economic reforms, as well as the adopted '2020 National Education Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan' (2020 NEDS) and the newly edited Law of the Republic of Tajikistan 'On Education' in the sphere of vocational education.

This report aims to describe the main points of the VET development system in the Republic of Tajikistan as one of the key tools in the professional development of the workforce arising from the Torino Process 2014 report.

2. Main findings

Overview of VET and vision for VET

The analysed economic development factors indicate that in 2015 construction and industry were the main sources of the country's economic growth. The surprisingly high performance of construction, which had grown by 43% since the previous year, reflects the implementation of investment projects aimed at the creation of infrastructure, communications and electricity transmission, as well as housing and commercial construction projects. Sustainable growth in the volume of industrial output, which increased to a rate of 15.6% in 2015 (compared to 5.1% in 2014), was reached due to the impact of the mining industry (15.6%), the electric power industry (17.2%) and the processing industry (15.1%), particularly in the production of construction materials. The rate of capital investment during this period grew by 22.9%, with around 60% of target projects focused on increasing production capacities.

According to a report by the National Bank of Tajikistan, during 2015 the value of remittances received into the country from abroad (mostly sent by labour migrants) declined in dollar terms by 33% compared to 2014. Taking into consideration the fact that 95% of remittances coming into Tajikistan are sent from Russia, the sharp fall in remittances is mainly accounted for by the low exchange rate caused by the depreciation of the Russian rouble against the US dollar. It should be mentioned that a decline in the volume of remittances coming into the country adversely affected domestic spending power, resulting in a reduced service sector: the volume of paid services provided to the population in 2015 declined by 17.0% compared to 2014.

Set against the background of social and economic reforms, and based on the 2020 NEDS in the sphere of vocational education, a radical reform has been initiated to improve the quality of education in the country. In particular, in 2014 a Centre for providing methodology support and monitoring initial VET (IVET) quality was set up under the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Employment of Population (MLME). In addition, the process of developing the new generation of State Professional Standards for all IVET specialties has been started, with the involvement of employers' representatives. In 2015 the draft 'National Qualifications Framework Concept' and 'Methodological Guide for Developing the National Qualifications Framework' were prepared, and these are currently under the consideration of the Ministry of Education and Science.

In 2016, the country's Parliament passed the Law of the Republic of Tajikistan 'On Secondary Vocational Education', which, in particular, identifies the top priorities of State policy in this area. In 2016 the Ministry of Education and Science working group developed a new edition of the draft Law of the Republic of Tajikistan 'On Primary Vocational Education and Training', establishing:

- sector-specific key terminology definitions;
- major principles and arrangements for ensuring the quality of primary VET (IVET);
- procedures for developing and approving State professional standards for IVET specialties;
- mechanisms for the certification and accreditation of IVET curricula and educational establishments.

In addition, in 2016, the new Law of the Republic of Tajikistan 'On Adult Education' was adopted to provide the foundation for continuing professional development (CPD) of human resources in the country.

Notwithstanding these achievements, the VET system has not yet become an efficient tool for the development of human capital, nor a catalyst for lifelong training and sustainable development.

To address this situation, the 'National Development Strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan for the Period up to 2030' has identified the following major challenges facing society:

- the low quality and inefficient use of human capacities;
- inadequate connections between the education system and the labour market.

It is further noted that while the population is increasingly covered by general secondary education, there are still shortages of qualified technical specialists, but an excessive supply of labour in, for example, the agricultural and public sectors, with a significant proportion of qualified workers forced to seek jobs abroad. In the long term, the main objectives for the country with regard to the labour market remain the development of employment in key sectors and the expansion of a workforce with the relevant competences. Employers in the labour market indicate that job seekers in general have low levels of education and insufficient qualifications and skills. As the economy grows and investment activity rises, the shortage of qualified workers for the leading industries of the economy and small businesses may become a greater problem, since the available pool of unemployed workers lack the required skills.

This outline has shown that after adopting State legislative and strategic documents, the VET vision has gained further importance as an important tool for developing human capital and becoming a catalyst for lifelong learning to promote the country's sustainable social and economic development. However, so far there is no targeted and comprehensive State strategic paper in place for the development of the country's VET system.

Effectiveness and efficiency in addressing economic and labour market demand

Exploration of the economic factors generating demand for VET shows that the State strategic documents provide for the creation of agro-industrial clusters and enterprises for the processing of cotton fibre, raw leather, cocoons, grapes, fruits and other types of agricultural products over the next 15 years. It is also envisaged that the construction and reconstruction of specified transport corridors will be completed in this period, helping Tajikistan to break the railway deadlock, facilitating access to the sea and generally widening its capabilities to ensure the efficient functioning of the country's transport system. In addition, the mining industry, energy generation sector, transport, telecommunications, the food industry, tourism and the financial sector are expected to undergo further development. These development plans for the country's economy can give shape to the demand for appropriate professional skills.

In addition, an analysis of capital investment in the industrial sector during the period 2009–2014 shows that an average of almost 69% of such investments have been channelled into the power generation sector. Moreover, the volume of capital investment in the production of construction materials and food products during this period has increased by more than a factor of 30, testifying to an expansion of the market in these industries, and potentially leading to a similar growth in the workforce.

At the same time, the formal labour market in Tajikistan has shown a steady decline, with the result that the share of salaried employees in the economy in 2014 had fallen to 46.2%. Consequently, the growth in jobs can mostly be attributed to the informal sector.

Informal employment, which dominates in all three main sectors of the economy (agriculture, industry and services), including public enterprises and the private and self-employed sectors, plays a key role in Tajikistan's economy. About 60% of all workers are employed in the informal economy, which is characterised by lower wages and poorer working conditions compared with the formal sector.

The service and agriculture sectors account for a major share of employment in the country. Thus, in 2014, 65.6% and 27.7% of the working population were engaged in the agriculture and service sectors respectively, although these figures include self-employed workers and entrepreneurs. In both urban and rural regions, self-employment is the most typical type of the employment: 41% of working citizens are self-employed. Furthermore, more than a quarter of the workforce are employed in State enterprises or the public management sector (28%). This figure substantially exceeds the number of citizens employed in private enterprises (17%).

Moreover, the lack of a fully developed information system in the labour market presents a major obstacle to the establishment of a qualification-based job-selection process. The difficulties associated with accessing information concerning vacancies or employees' skills impede the ability of jobseekers to find suitable work. Information gaps and the failure to flag the skills required prevent the efficient and fair distribution of jobs in the labour market.

The State and the public sector have also identified an inadequate connection between the education system and the labour market. In order to address this, it is suggested that, in tandem with potential employers, new requirements for professional personnel be formulated, and that quality standards for all educational levels be established, with the development of programmes and mechanisms for evaluating specialist competences (a national competence mapping system).

Similarly, the country has no fully-fledged, reliable mechanism for the identification of the demand for professional skills. Surveys of employers are conducted to identify their needs in terms of qualified personnel, which results in lists of required professions; however, quality analyses of sought-after professional skills are lacking.

Currently one of the most accessible mechanisms for linking VET results with market needs is the development of the new generation of professional standards for VET specialties.

Tajikistan's legal framework seeks to ensure the quality of vocational education primarily through the establishment of the State Educational Standards for each specialty at all educational levels. Recently adopted legislation and strategic and methodological documents form the legislative, political and practical bases for the joint activity of educational providers and labour market representatives in developing the new generation of qualification standards and creating a National Qualifications Framework.

Unfortunately, an implementation mechanism for the Law 'On Training Specialists Based on Labour Market Needs' has not yet been developed to define the legal, financial and organisational framework for public and private partnerships in the VET system.

Employers are often accused of failing to show enough interest in cooperating with educational establishments. However, as the World Bank survey findings show, 34.2% of employers canvassed stated that their businesses suffer from a shortage of qualified personnel¹. This is a significant motivation for cooperation.

Tajikistan's National Development Strategy establishes that providing support for small and medium-sized business is an efficient way to increase the number of jobs available and address social problems. The need to develop a business component in the VET training programmes has been addressed in the 2020 NEDS and highlighted in the Torino Process 2014 country report.

Currently, however, the business component of the VET training programmes is weak, and the concept of VET trainees engaging with business has not been pursued by the VET State management

¹ World Bank, Tajikistan Jobs, Skills, and Migration Survey, 2014, p. 33.

body. It should be noted that under the GIZ project ‘Support for the VET Reform in Tajikistan’, an attempt had been made to introduce a component for training the personnel of the National Adult Training Centre to follow up the employment routes of vocational training courses graduates. However, this practice has not yet become fully operational.

At the same time, within the framework of developing new educational standards for VET specialties formatted as integrated training programmes, practical business skills are considered a key competence for VET trainees.

In addition, in 2016 under the ILO ‘Start and Improve Your Business’ programme, some seven employees of the MLME Labour and Employment Agency and IVET Department completed a Training of Trainers course and, as a result, a team of trainers was created to introduce this programme into retraining courses for the jobless and deported labour migrants.

Overall, a positive shift in the VET system’s efficiency and effectiveness in reacting to the labour market in terms of supply and demand is being observed. However, a lot of work still lies ahead in this area to turn VET into one of the key tools for the professional development of the workforce based on labour market requirements and the needs of the economy as a whole.

Effectiveness and efficiency in addressing demographic, social and inclusion demand

The over-supply of labour in Tajikistan, with the consequent growing unemployment in the domestic market and increasing external migration, alongside the demand for inclusion, means that providing professional support for the jobless and external labour migrants remains one of the key social challenges for VET. In this context the VET agenda includes such issues as the professional reorientation and/or professional development of the unemployed and labour migrants. Regarding the latter, cultural and legal training, as well as certification of professional skills obtained during work activity abroad, remain the key current issues.

Tajikistan’s VET system has gradually adapted to the demographic, social and inclusion demand of the country. In this vein, the professional and social development needs of the unemployed and labour migrants remain a priority, along with those of persons with limited physical abilities. In the period under review, the number of people graduating from the adult professional training system has more than doubled. Furthermore, a process has been initiated for the formal recognition (certification) of professional skills obtained by labour migrants during work activities. However, the legal and methodological framework for fully implementing these measures needs to be formulated and developed.

Measures are being taken under the development of new educational standards for VET specialties to link vocational education training programmes horizontally, providing a measure of mobility for trainees across educational routes at the same vocational education level.

The VET system is gradually becoming more attractive to young people. The improved quality of education offered by some establishments in terms of the most popular specialisms in the labour market has led to an increased number of those wishing to join such training programmes. However, a great deal of work remains to be done to increase the efficient and effective vocational orientation of young people, taking into account the current and future needs of the country’s economy.

In recent years measures have been taken, in particular, to establish the horizontal and vertical linkages of VET programmes that will ensure and develop trainees’ access to the formal VET system. Such measures are reflected in the development of unified educational standards for VET specialties, which will enable trainees to move horizontally across various educational routes at the same level. The development of trainee mobility is seen at the secondary and higher levels of vocational education, particularly in the process of including vocational colleges within the structure of higher

vocational training establishments. However, measures to link training programmes between primary and secondary VET are so far not in place.

The oversupply of labour in the country is one of the factors creating problems for the employment of young people. The excessive amount of job seekers leads to an imbalance between the working-age population's growth rate and the number of jobs created. This reflects the country's limited economic capacity to create the number of jobs required for 'absorbing' the available labour pool.

Studies show that in 2010 the workforce in the domestic market numbered 475 000 people. During the first decade of the new millennium, this indicator had increased at an average annual growth rate of 26%, and this trend remains persistent. Therefore, due to the annually rising and abundant workforce, set against the current trend in the rate of new jobs created, the probability of there being employment for the 'fresh' workforce of young people will annually diminish.

Education is one of the main resources available for young people entering the labour market to help them secure employment and achieve their professional aspirations. Studies show that young people with limited educational resources have almost no chance of finding formal employment. Thus, 46% of young people with a basic or lower level of education were still jobless a year after completing their studies, and only 6% were registered as employed. A similar situation can be seen in the case of young people with general secondary education: 35% were unemployed and 13% registered as employed. When looking at the overall employment structure, it can be seen that the employment situation for young people with vocational or higher education is different from that of less well educated job seekers. The higher the level of education young people achieve, the greater their chances of finding (registered) employment.

Promoting young people's vocational orientation is one of the major factors affecting youth employment, and job seekers should be directed to select an appropriate profession, taking into consideration the country's labour market requirements. Currently a National Centre for Professional Orientation, with a number of regional offices, operates under the MLME. However, in practice, it can be seen that this agency's organisational, financial and personnel capacities and resources are failing to meet modern challenges.

Lack of motivation to take part in the labour market is another important factor affecting youth unemployment in Tajikistan, pushing young people into the 'inactive' category. The share of people who give up looking for jobs is particularly high among young people: approximately every sixth man (17.2%) and every tenth woman (11.9%) between the ages of 20 and 24 are too disheartened to look for work. For the purpose of comparison, it should be noted that in OECD countries in 2012 the share of people (aged 15–24) who had given up looking for work averaged 0.5%. Unfortunately, Tajikistan's labour market is not able to 'absorb' those reaching working age, which limits the country's capacity to use the abundance of young people as a 'demographic dividend'.

Young people's lack of motivation to participate in the labour market could have serious consequences for Tajikistan in terms of the quantity and quality of the workforce; recent studies show the source of this problem to be the failure of potential employees' skills to match the needs of the workplace. As the findings of a qualitative analysis has shown, young men face particular difficulties when seeking work in that their job skills and expertise do not correspond to employers' requirements. A recent labour market study also confirmed this conclusion and indicated that the reason behind young people losing motivation to participate in the labour market is their lack of work experience and professional skills. Taking into consideration that as a result of this loss of motivation, a significant proportion of young people of working age are not involved in the labour market, addressing this problem must be a top priority.

Internal effectiveness of the VET system

Studies conducted in recent years bear witness to the fact that the ineffectiveness of the VET system in Tajikistan is strongly connected with the low quality of VET school managers, instructors and teachers, both in terms of the quality of their initial education and CPD over the course of their careers. In this context, the 2020 NEDS spells out that the acute shortage of highly qualified personnel, instructors and masters for industrial training, as well as insufficient levels of engineering and pedagogical staff qualifications in the vocational education system appropriate to modern requirements of qualified workers' training, hold back the effective development of primary and secondary VET. Thus, low staff capacities in the VET system hinder both the adoption of appropriate measures to respond more flexibly to the requirements of the labour market (as well as those of society and individuals), and the improvement of internal and external processes in VET schools.

At the same time, a relevant study showed that engineering and pedagogical staff in VET schools encounter increasing demands to improve their knowledge and skills in order to raise the efficiency and effectiveness of VET provision, ensure its quality, and support trainees in gaining abilities and expertise in various areas. This situation testifies to the inefficient functioning of existing mechanisms for CPD among VET system employees.

The existing legislation on the education system in Tajikistan (the Laws 'On Education' and 'On Primary Vocational Education') establishes the rights and obligations of VET employees to improve their qualifications. The State guarantees that each employee will attend qualification elevation courses once every five years, while staff members are obliged to improve their levels of knowledge, outlook and professional skills. However, as a survey of VET employees on CPD has shown, with regard to the existing mechanism for organising qualification improvement courses, the State guarantee has not been fully realised, and not all the VET system staff undergo such courses once every five years. In addition, the same study has revealed that the quality of such courses requires improvement in itself. It was further established that, apart from this State-run programme, no other mechanism was available that would allow VET staff to undertake professional development independently and arrange their own professional development whenever necessary.

For the purposes of improving this situation and modernising the system of teachers' professional development, the 2020 NEDS envisages:

- a. creating competitive mechanisms to provide modern high-quality educational services for improving professional qualifications;
- b. establishing a three-tier system for raising professional standards (at regional, local and institutional levels);
- c. introducing a credit-module system for the development of professional skills; and
- d. improving the flexibility of the qualification improvement system to respond to emerging skills shortages.

Acting within the contexts of the country's national education strategy and foreign policy in terms of its relations with the European Union, the European Training Foundation (ETF) seeks to support VET school development, using CPD with school principals, trainers and instructors as one of the key tools to develop human capital. The ETF supports CPD and the promotion of stakeholders and other entities in Tajikistan by providing consultations, analyses of policy development and exchange of knowledge and expertise.

Increasing the internal effectiveness of the VET system remains one of the key priorities in the sphere of VET quality improvement. The 2020 NEDS places a special focus on enhancing the

professionalism of engineering and pedagogical staff, and the development of teaching methods and module training technology, as well as improving the physical infrastructure of buildings and facilities, the quality of training materials and the technical basis of VET institutions.

Comparatively significant results have been achieved concerning CPD for VET system employees: the country's capacity to provide CPD and the key needs of engineering teaching staff for CPD have been highlighted for the first time; the first CPD trainer teams (multipliers) have been established; and new CPD programmes for VET system employees have been developed and implemented. For the purposes of disseminating advanced expertise, six regional Communities of Practice have been created, as well as institute trainer Communities of Practice providing CPD to IVET school employees. Also, an improvement in teaching materials and technical training has been observed in educational establishments in the IVET system. Within the framework of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) project to support the IVET reform process in Tajikistan, a plan has been developed and is being carried out to conduct major repairs on buildings and facilities.

However, alongside these gains, a comprehensive approach is lacking in the development of the professionalism of engineering teaching staff, while newly created modern laboratories and workshops are used relatively inefficiently. There is also a shortage of training materials in the national language and engineering teaching staff have limited access to internet resources for CPD. Moreover, the training performance evaluation mechanism mainly relies on theoretical knowledge and does not fully cover practical skills.

There is a perception of the importance of organising practical on-the-job training; however, there is a lack of organisational expertise. Furthermore, an appropriate industrial base for a large-scale implementation of such an approach is so far absent. For the time being, the issue of transition to on-the-job training is not being considered at the political level.

Currently none of the tools for qualification development, updating and evaluation requires the full involvement of the main stakeholder – employers. Nevertheless, recently there has been positive progress in involving employers in describing and evaluating qualifications as a result of implementing the project initiatives of international organisations.

VET system management and policies

The VET system in Tajikistan is managed solely by central government; in practical terms, local authorities do not participate in this process. The VET system therefore bears the hallmarks of State control.

In early 2014, taking into consideration the priority for giving professional support to the unemployed and labour migrants, the responsibility for the primary VET system was again transferred to the MLME as part of the regular restructuring of State executive bodies. Secondary VET remains under the authority of the Ministry of Education and Science. A reduction in the number of educational establishments at the level of primary VET is now being seen.

The degree of autonomy that VET providers have in the decision-taking process has not changed. VET establishments are independent in terms of issues related to personnel (except for management). Training establishments have the right to develop training programmes for certain (probably new) specialties; however these can only be implemented after their approval by the authorised body of the ministry, which oversees their conformity with the norms of State standards and their similarity to other training programmes. When it comes to the distribution of budgetary funds, VET schools' degree of autonomy is quite low. However, educational establishments do have a certain degree of independence in terms of raising funds from industrial activities.

The process of formulating and implementing VET policies traditionally involves the MLME (as the State body managing the VET system), the Ministry of Education and Science (as the State body overseeing the system's activities), the Ministry of Finance (as a body financing the system's activities) and the Ministry of Economy (as the body dealing with State orders for staff training). The line ministries take part in this process only when placing an order for staff training through the Ministry of Economy. The MLME as the VET system managing body has the right to create interdepartmental (inter-ministerial) working groups to address specific issues. Currently, the degree of coordination between these bodies' activities does not correspond to the strategic objectives of the VET system reform. Nevertheless, in the period since 2014, under the implementation of the GIZ 'Support for the VET Reform in Tajikistan' project, a proposal has been worked out for the Government to set up a VET Coordination Council. Currently, discussions are underway to support such a Council's activities under the implementation of the ADB Tajikistan IVET Reform Process Support Project, initiated in 2016.

The existing mechanisms for involving stakeholders in the process of managing the provision of VET do not provide social partners with an incentive to participate. The Law 'On Training Specialists Based on Labour Market Needs', adopted in 2012, was intended to give shape to the public-private management of the VET system through staff training; however, the required implementation mechanism has not yet been developed. Nevertheless, proposal documents for creating the VET Coordination Council under the Government have been developed, and positive steps towards involving community representatives, jamoats (local self-government communities) and employers in the process of VET school management can be observed.

3. Recommendations for action

Overview of VET and vision for VET

In view of VET's social and economic importance for the country's sustainable development, as acknowledged by the State in adopted strategic documents, it is imperative that the National Action Plan for the development of the IVET system reform for the period up to 2030, be developed and implemented as soon as possible to provide a comprehensive State target-oriented interdepartmental strategy for remodelling IVET provision. However, such a proposal, for the time being, is not in place. To address this key objective, the MLME can, at the behest of the Government and within the procedures established, initiate the creation of an interdepartmental and multi-level working group made up of representatives from concerned ministries and employer associations.

Effectiveness and efficiency in addressing economic and labour market demand

To meet the objectives of increasing VET efficiency and effectiveness in reacting to labour market demand, it is necessary to:

- create a mechanism to encourage employers to participate in public-private partnerships in the VET system based on the Law 'On Training Specialists Based on Labour Market Needs';
- develop methodological frameworks for the development of professional standards in VET specialties;
- establish a mechanism for the systemisation and industry structuring of professional standards in adopted VET specialties.

Effectiveness and efficiency in addressing demographic, social and inclusion demand

In the context of increased VET efficiency and effectiveness in reacting to demographic, social and inclusion demand, the priorities in the current period include the development of:

- normative, legal and methodological frameworks for the formal recognition of skills obtained in informal education;
- a national programme for orientating young people towards appropriate professional skills.

Internal efficiency of the VET system

For the purposes of increasing the internal efficiency of the VET system, it would be practical to:

- develop a long-term programme for the CPD of engineering teaching staff;
- establish a long-term programme for developing and issuing VET system training and methodological materials;
- design new State Regulations for the final accreditation of VET system graduates, focusing on professional skills;
- support and strengthen the activities of the Dushanbe Centre for Developing Module Training in terms of VET programmes.

VET system management

Taking into account the situation related to the management of the VET system, it is proposed in the medium term to:

- ensure the efficient delivery of the activities of the VET Coordination Council, under the Government's oversight;
- develop an implementation mechanism for the Law 'On Training Specialists Based on Labour Market Needs' and a public-private VET system management structure;
- create a package of normative and legal documents ensuring the autonomy of VET educational establishments in terms of fundraising and utilising their resources.

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