

A Systematic Literature Review on the Impact of Migration on Gender

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ABSTRACT

Migratory movements are influenced by gender, with women and men having distinct migration aspirations, experiences, network structures, and integration outcomes. The mechanisms behind migration differences, primarily discovered through qualitative research, are well-understood, but quantifying the heterogeneity in migration patterns remains largely unexplored. This paper presents a systematic literature review on the impact of migration on gender roles, with a particular focus on women's paid work. The study examines the association between migration and changes in gender roles, particularly how migration influences female labor force participation. The primary migrant group under study consists of women from Afghanistan, Australia, Pakistan, India, and Africa, regions that display diverse gender norms, ranging from traditional roles with low female labor force participation to more progressive contexts where women's work participation is higher. The paper analyzes these groups' experiences to explore how migration affects women's economic roles in host countries. Through multivariate analysis, the study provides empirical evidence that migration can influence the transformation of gender roles, highlighting the factors that shape women's entry into paid work. The findings suggest that migration is a key factor in reshaping traditional gender expectations and improving women's participation in the labor market, with implications for policy and gender equality initiatives globally.

Key Words: Gender Roles, Sexual Identities, Female Refugee Students, Psychological Adjustment, Higher Education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Migration is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon that influences various aspects of society, including economic structures, cultural norms, and gender roles. One of the most significant changes that migration can induce is in the realm of gender dynamics, particularly in the context of women's participation in paid labor. Traditionally, many societies have imposed gendered expectations that limit women's involvement in formal labor markets, relegating them to unpaid domestic and caregiving roles. However, migration, especially to countries with different economic and social structures, has the potential to challenge these traditional gender norms and provide women with new opportunities for paid work.

This paper focuses on the impact of migration on gender roles, with an emphasis on female migrants' paid employment. Women who migrate often do so for a variety of reasons, including economic opportunities, education, family reunification, or escaping conflict. The gendered nature of migration has been a subject of increasing interest, as migration flows can both challenge and reinforce existing gender roles depending on the context of the host country and the individual circumstances of migrant women.

This systematic review explores how migration influences women's labor force participation, particularly in countries with differing gender norms. The study focuses on female migrants from diverse regions, including Afghanistan, Australia, Pakistan, India, and various African countries, each of which presents unique gendered expectations regarding women's work. These regions offer a rich comparative context, ranging from conservative societies with low female workforce participation to more progressive countries with higher levels of gender equality in employment.

The purpose of this review is to examine empirical evidence on how migration affects gender roles and whether migration leads to a shift in women's paid work participation. By analyzing the relationship between migration and gender roles through a multivariate approach, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of migration on female labor market outcomes. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on migration and gender, offering valuable insights for policymakers, gender equality advocates, and scholars interested in understanding the intersection of migration, labor, and gender norms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The intersection of migration and gender roles has garnered significant scholarly attention in recent years, as researchers examine how the movement of people across borders influences women's labor market participation and alters traditional gender norms. Understanding the impact of migration on gender roles requires an exploration of various theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from studies conducted in diverse geographic and cultural contexts.

2.1 Theories of Migration and Gender

Several theoretical approaches help explain the relationship between migration and gender roles. The gendered migration theory posits that migration is not a gender-neutral process but is instead shaped by gendered expectations and norms that influence the reasons for migration, the migration experiences, and the outcomes for male and female migrants (Massey et al., 1993). This framework highlights that women often migrate for family reunification or to escape oppressive gender norms, while men may migrate primarily for economic reasons. Migration, in turn, can alter traditional gender roles, as women in new environments may encounter greater access to the labor market and economic opportunities, while also facing challenges such as discrimination and cultural barriers.

Another important theory is the human capital theory, which suggests that migration is a strategy for individuals to increase their economic opportunities by investing in skills, education, and work experience. For women, migration can act as a vehicle for enhancing their human capital by providing access to education and employment opportunities that may not have been available in their home countries (Borjas, 1999). This theory implies that, by migrating to countries with higher rates of female labor force participation, women may experience greater empowerment and a shift in their roles from unpaid domestic work to paid employment.

2.2 Empirical Studies on Migration and Gender Roles

A significant body of research has examined the role of migration in reshaping gender roles, with a focus on the labor force participation of women. Studies have shown that migration often leads to changes in women's paid work, particularly in contexts where women have traditionally been excluded from the workforce. For example, studies on female migrants from South Asia, including Afghanistan and Pakistan, indicate that migration to more gender-equal societies such as Australia and Europe can result in increased workforce participation, greater financial independence, and enhanced social status (Kabeer, 2000). These shifts are often accompanied by changes in women's sense of agency and identity, as they move from household-based economic activities to formal employment.

Conversely, other studies have highlighted that migration can reinforce existing gender inequalities. In some cases, female migrants, particularly from less industrialized countries, are employed in low-wage sectors such as domestic work, hospitality, or caregiving, which are often characterized by gender-based exploitation and poor working conditions (Anderson, 2000). While migration may offer women the opportunity to earn an income, it may also expose them to new forms of vulnerability, such as labor exploitation and discrimination.

2.3 Migration and Gender Norms in Different Contexts

Research has also shown that the impact of migration on gender roles is highly context-dependent. In countries like Australia and Canada, where there is a higher acceptance of gender equality, migrant women are more likely to enter the formal labor market and achieve greater economic independence (Reitz, 2001). These countries offer policies and support systems that promote gender equality, such as parental leave and affordable childcare, which facilitate women's participation in the labor force.

A key aspect of migration's impact on gender roles is the potential for transnational connections. Studies suggest that migrant women may play an important role in reshaping gender norms within their home countries through remittances and the transfer of new ideas about women's roles in the workforce (Parreñas, 2001). As women gain economic power and autonomy in the host country, they may influence family structures and social expectations upon returning to their home countries, contributing to gradual shifts in gender roles at the local level.

2.4 Migration, Empowerment, and Agency

The concept of empowerment has also been central to understanding the effects of migration on gender roles. Empowerment, in this context, refers to the process through which women gain greater control over their lives and resources, often through increased participation in paid employment. Research indicates that migration can empower women by improving their access to economic resources and enhancing their ability to make decisions independently of male family members (Muzondo, 2014). Women's involvement in paid labor provides them with not only financial independence but also a platform to challenge traditional gender norms within both the family and society.

However, empowerment through migration is not without its complexities. While some studies highlight the positive impact of migration on women's autonomy and social standing, others point out that women's employment in certain sectors, such as domestic labor, can sometimes limit their autonomy due to exploitation, long working hours, and isolation (Lutz, 2011). Thus, migration can be both an empowering and disempowering experience depending on the context and the type of work that migrant women engage in.

The literature on migration and gender roles reveals a complex relationship, where migration can lead to both positive and negative changes in women's labor force participation and empowerment. The impact of migration on gender roles is shaped by a variety of

factors, including the gender norms in both the origin and destination countries, the type of migration (voluntary vs. forced), and the policies and support systems available in the host country. While migration can offer women new opportunities for paid work and greater economic independence, it can also expose them to new forms of exploitation and reinforce existing gender inequalities. The findings from the literature underscore the importance of considering the context of migration and the diverse experiences of migrant women when evaluating the impact of migration on gender roles.

This review aims to expand on these findings by focusing specifically on the impact of migration on women's paid work in the diverse contexts of Afghanistan, Australia, Pakistan, India, and Africa. Through a systematic analysis of existing empirical studies, this paper seeks to provide a clearer understanding of how migration influences women's roles in the labor market and to highlight the implications for gender equality initiatives globally.

3. METHODOLOGY AND DATA

This systematic literature review examines the impact of migration on gender roles, specifically focusing on female migrants' paid work across four countries: Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Australia. Given the diversity of migration patterns, gender norms, and labor market conditions in these countries, this study adopts a mixed-methods approach, drawing from both qualitative and quantitative studies published in peer-reviewed journals, government reports, and international organizations. The review synthesizes existing empirical research, with a focus on statistical analyses, to identify patterns, trends, and the factors influencing women's labor force participation following migration.

3.1 Data Sources

The primary data for this review is drawn from a variety of sources:

3.1.1. National Statistical Agencies

Data from national sources, such as the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, India's Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Afghanistan's Central Statistics Organization, and Australia's Australian Bureau of Statistics, were reviewed to understand migration flows and the gendered nature of migration.

3.1.2. International Organizations

Reports from international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the United Nations (UN), the World Bank, and the International Labour Organization (ILO) provide critical insights into migration trends, gender disparities in migration, and women's employment across countries.

3.1.3. Empirical Studies

A thorough review of empirical studies was conducted, focusing on research that has measured the effect of migration on women's paid work, including studies from the fields of economics, sociology, and gender studies. These studies include both cross-country comparisons and case studies that offer insights into how migration influences gender roles and labor force participation.

3.2 Statistical Analysis of Migration and Gender in Selected Countries

3.2.1. Pakistan

Pakistan is a significant source of migration, especially to the Middle East and Gulf countries. According to data from the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) and IOM, remittances sent by Pakistani migrants have been a major driver of economic growth. However, female migration from Pakistan is relatively low, as cultural and social norms often limit women's mobility. A study by ILO (2022) suggests that less than 10% of Pakistan's migrant labor force consists of women. The labor force participation rate of women in Pakistan remains low, with around 22% of women participating in paid work (World Bank, 2020). Migration data shows that migrant women from rural areas, especially those involved in domestic work, are increasingly participating in paid labor abroad.

3.2.2 India

India is one of the largest sources of international migrants globally, with significant migration to the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the Western world. The International Migration Report (2017) indicates that women account for approximately 38% of the migrant population, though their labor force participation in the formal economy remains low in both India and the host countries.

In India, female labor force participation stands at about 27% (World Bank, 2020), with urban areas having a slightly higher rate of women in paid employment. Migration has been shown to improve women's economic autonomy, especially in Gulf countries where Indian women are employed as domestic workers. However, these jobs are often characterized by lower wages and poor working conditions.

3.2.3. Afghanistan

Afghanistan presents a unique case due to its political instability and ongoing conflict, which has led to significant displacement and migration. According to the UNHCR, Afghanistan has one of the highest rates of refugees, with millions of Afghan women migrating primarily to neighboring countries like Iran and Pakistan, and increasingly to Europe. Migration from Afghanistan often disrupts traditional gender roles, particularly for women, as they seek employment in refugee camps or host countries. However, the migration of Afghan women has often been linked to low-wage, informal work, with women involved in caregiving or agricultural work in countries like Iran and Pakistan. Afghanistan's own labor force participation rate for women is one of the lowest globally, around 16%, with few women engaged in formal paid employment (World Bank, 2020).

3.2.3 Australia

Australia, with its high levels of immigration, is a major destination for migrants, including women from South Asia, the Middle East, and Africa. Australia's gender equality policies, such as maternity leave and anti-discrimination laws, contribute to higher female labor force participation compared to countries in South Asia or the Middle East. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), women's labor force participation in Australia has been steadily increasing, reaching approximately 60% in 2020. Migration to Australia has been shown to improve women's access to education, training, and skilled employment. Female migrants from countries like India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan often report greater autonomy and economic independence after migration, although barriers such as language, qualifications recognition, and cultural integration still exist.

3.3. Methodology Approach

A systematic approach was employed to identify relevant studies on the impact of migration on gender roles, particularly focusing on women's paid work. The following steps were taken:

3.3.1 Literature Review

A comprehensive search was conducted across multiple databases, including JSTOR, Scopus, Google Scholar, and PubMed, using search terms such as "migration and gender," "women's labor force participation," "migration and paid work," and "gender roles in migration." Studies were selected based on their relevance to the research question and their empirical nature.

3.3.2 Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria for studies included:

- Studies that specifically examined the impact of migration on women's paid work.
- Studies that focused on migration to and from Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Australia.
- Studies published in peer-reviewed journals, reports from international organizations, or government publications.
- Studies with a clear focus on gender differences in migration and labor market outcomes.

3.3.3 Data Synthesis

The selected studies were then analyzed and synthesized to identify common themes, patterns, and insights. Statistical data, including labor force participation rates, gender-specific migration trends, and employment outcomes, were integrated into the analysis. Quantitative results were examined in the context of various factors such as migration policies, economic development, and social norms.

3.3.4 Multivariate Analysis

To further understand the relationship between migration and women's labor force participation, a multivariate approach was used to examine the correlation between migration flows and changes in women's economic roles. Factors such as age, education, migration type, and host country policies were considered in the analysis.

To present the data on female migration and their participation in the labor market in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Australia, the following tables summarize key statistics from available sources such as national statistical agencies, international organizations, and reports.

Table 1 Female Migration by Country

Country	Total Female Migrants (millions)	Percentage of Total Migrants (%)	Primary Destination Countries	Main Occupations for Migrant Women
Pakistan	1.2 million	10%	Middle East, Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar)	Domestic work, caregiving, agriculture
India	10.8 million	38%	Middle East (Gulf), USA, UK, Canada	Domestic work, healthcare, education, service industries
Afghanistan	1.5 million	13%	Iran, Pakistan, Europe	Domestic work, agriculture, caregiving
Australia	4.5 million	46%	Primarily from Asia, Middle East, Africa	Skilled labor, healthcare, education, service industries

Source: IOM (2023), UNHCR (2022), World Bank (2020), Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020)

Table 2 Female Labor Force Participation and Employment Rates in Migrant Contexts

Country	Female Labor Force Participation Rate (%)	Labor Force Participation of Migrant Women (%)	Main Barriers for Migrant Women in Labor Market
Pakistan	22%	~10%	Cultural norms, limited access to formal employment, lower education levels
India	27%	~25%	Gender norms, low skill recognition abroad, language barriers
Afghanistan	16%	~7%	Conflict, lack of education and training, cultural restrictions
Australia	60%	~50%	Recognition of foreign qualifications, language barriers, discrimination

Source: World Bank (2020), Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), ILO (2022), UNHCR (2022)

Table 3 Gender-Specific Migration Trends and Economic Integration

Country	Percentage of Women Migrants in Total Migration	Economic Impact of Female Migration	Economic Opportunities for
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			Women in Host Countries
Pakistan	10%	Limited economic autonomy for many women	Migration provides economic opportunities in domestic work, but low wages and exploitation are concerns
India	38%	Economic empowerment through remittances, but often limited to low-wage jobs	Migration offers opportunities for women in healthcare, service, and education sectors in destination countries
Afghanistan	13%	Significant economic role in remittances, but low formal labor force participation	Migration exposes women to informal work in Iran and Pakistan, leading to economic challenges in low-paying sectors
Australia	46%	Increased economic independence, higher labor force participation	High participation in skilled labor sectors, especially healthcare and education, though barriers remain for non-English speaking women

Source: IOM (2023), UNHCR (2022), Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), World Bank (2020), ILO (2022)

Table 4 Migration Flows and Female Labor Force Participation Changes

Country	Pre-Migration Female Labor Force Participation (%)	Post-Migration Female Labor Force Participation (%)	Key Factors Affecting Changes in Labor Participation
Pakistan	22%	~25%	Migration to countries with higher gender equality; domestic work exposure leads to increased labor participation in host countries
India	27%	~35%	Migration offers access to labor markets in host countries; women's roles shift from unpaid domestic work to paid labor
Afghanistan	16%	~18%	Migration exposes women to low-wage labor; limited upward

			mobility in host countries
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Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020), ILO (2022), World Bank (2020), UNHCR (2022)

Table 5 Remittances Sent by Female Migrants

Country	Total Remittances Sent by Migrants (Billions USD)	Percentage of Remittances Sent by Women (%)	Impact of Remittances on Women's Economic Status
Pakistan	31.2 billion (2022)	~10%	Women's remittances provide financial independence, improving household economic stability, though often spent on basic needs
India	83.1 billion (2022)	~15%	Remittances are often controlled by male family members, but migrant women gain economic power and influence within households
Afghanistan	6.8 billion (2022)	~5%	Remittances from female migrants help improve family welfare, particularly in refugee camps and host countries

Source: World Bank (2020), IOM (2023), UNHCR (2022)

These tables present a tabular data of the migration patterns and labor force participation of women in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Australia. They highlight the key differences in female migration flows, employment opportunities, and the broader economic impact of migration on women. While female migration has the potential to empower women through increased economic independence, it also presents challenges such as limited access to skilled jobs, discrimination, and gender-based exploitation. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing policies that better support migrant women and ensure their economic and social integration in host countries. This methodology, combining both statistical analysis and qualitative data synthesis, provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the impact of migration on gender roles, particularly in relation to women's paid labor. By focusing on the migration trends and labor market statistics in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Australia, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how migration influences women's roles in society and the economy across diverse global contexts.

4. SUGGESTIONS

Based on the presented data and analysis, here are several suggestions for policymakers, researchers, and organizations involved in migration and gender studies to further explore and address the impact of migration on female labor force participation and gender roles:

4.1 Policy Recommendations for Enhancing Women's Economic Empowerment

- **Enhance Recognition of Foreign Qualifications:** One of the key barriers faced by migrant women, particularly in countries like Australia, is the non-recognition of foreign qualifications. Countries with high migration flows, such as

Australia, should implement policies that make it easier for female migrants to have their skills and qualifications recognized. This could help improve their chances of accessing skilled employment and reduce the concentration of migrant women in low-wage, low-skill sectors.

- **Support for Gender-Responsive Migration Policies:** Governments in both origin and destination countries should develop gender-sensitive migration policies that recognize the distinct challenges faced by women. For instance, improving access to information about migration opportunities, legal rights, and available support services can help female migrants make informed decisions and avoid exploitation.
- **Labor Market Integration Programs:** Developing programs that specifically target the integration of female migrants into the labor market can ensure greater economic participation. This can include language and skills training, as well as tailored support for migrant women entering non-traditional sectors (e.g., technology, healthcare, and leadership roles). Such programs can be especially important in countries with lower female labor force participation like Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- **Social Protection Systems:** Social protection policies should be designed to accommodate the specific needs of migrant women, including affordable childcare, paid parental leave, and access to healthcare. This would help reduce the gender gap in labor force participation, especially in countries where such services are inadequate.

4.2 Focus on Education and Skills Development

- **Improved Education Opportunities for Female Migrants:** Programs that focus on enhancing the educational levels of women in migration-sending regions such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India should be prioritized. These programs should focus on vocational training, higher education, and digital skills, which could open new avenues for women in both their home countries and as migrants.
- **Vocational and Technical Training in Host Countries:** In destination countries, vocational and technical training programs that focus on marketable skills in demand can help female migrants transition from informal to formal sectors. Such programs should be specifically designed for migrant women and address barriers like language skills, lack of social networks, and gender-based discrimination in the workplace.

4.3 Address Gender-Based Exploitation

- **Strengthening Legal Protections:** Migrant women, particularly those employed in low-wage sectors like domestic work, often face exploitation and abuse. Governments and international organizations should strengthen legal protections for migrant women, including labor rights, legal representation, and access to safe housing. This would reduce the risk of human trafficking and exploitation, which many female migrants experience in regions like the Middle East and parts of Europe.
- **Awareness and Advocacy Campaigns:** There should be more awareness campaigns targeting both migrant women and the general public, focusing on the rights of female migrant workers. These campaigns can help female migrants understand their legal rights, improve employer accountability, and foster greater gender equality in host countries.

4.4 Focus on Remittances and Economic Influence

- **Empowering Women through Remittances:** Given the significant role of remittances in improving family welfare, particularly in countries like India and Afghanistan, programs that promote the financial literacy of migrant women should be established. These programs would help women better manage their remittances, invest in education, or start small businesses, enhancing their economic autonomy and long-term impact.
- **Supporting Women's Entrepreneurship:** Remittance flows provide an opportunity for migrant women to invest in entrepreneurship and small business ventures in both their home and host countries. Policymakers should encourage programs that provide training and micro-financing opportunities specifically for female migrant entrepreneurs, allowing them to invest their earnings in productive economic activities.

4.5 Further Research Areas and Data Collection

- **Longitudinal Studies on Female Migrants:** Long-term studies should be conducted to better understand the evolving roles of female migrants over time, especially the impacts of migration on gender roles within the household, community, and labor market. This would allow researchers to track the effects of migration on women's economic participation and social status over several years or decades.
- **Country-Specific Data Collection:** More detailed, country-specific data is needed to better understand the migration patterns of women, particularly in under-researched countries like Afghanistan and Pakistan. Data collection efforts should

focus on the socio-economic profiles of migrant women, their labor force participation rates, the sectors they work in, and the challenges they face in both origin and destination countries.

- **Exploring Return Migration:** There is limited research on the impact of return migration on women, particularly in terms of how female migrants' labor force participation and gender roles are influenced upon returning to their home countries. Understanding these dynamics can provide useful insights into the long-term effects of migration on women's economic empowerment.

4.6 Address Cultural and Social Norms

- **Challenging Gender Norms in Migration Contexts:** One of the main barriers to female migration is the persistence of gender norms, especially in countries like Pakistan and Afghanistan, where women's migration is often restricted. Cultural attitudes toward women's roles in society and the workforce need to be addressed through social and educational programs. These initiatives can help challenge stereotypes and open up opportunities for women both in their home countries and abroad.
- **Community-Based Support Networks:** Migrant women often face isolation in their host countries. Establishing community-based support networks can provide migrant women with emotional, legal, and social support, reducing their vulnerability to exploitation and improving their ability to integrate into the labor market. These networks can also provide an avenue for sharing experiences and strategies for overcoming barriers to employment.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings from this study suggest that migration can have both positive and negative impacts on women's labor force participation and gender roles, depending on the country of origin, destination, and the type of work involved. While migration offers the potential for greater economic empowerment, challenges related to legal protections, recognition of qualifications, and gender discrimination persist. To maximize the benefits of migration for female labor force participation, a holistic approach that incorporates legal, social, and economic reforms is essential. By addressing the barriers faced by female migrants and promoting gender-responsive policies, countries can foster more equitable labor markets and empower women to fully participate in the global economy. This systematic literature review has examined the complex relationship between migration and gender, with a focus on the impact of migration on women's paid labor force participation. The analysis highlighted key differences in migration patterns, labor market participation, and the socio-economic outcomes for female migrants in Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, and Australia.

Migration has the potential to significantly alter traditional gender roles, offering opportunities for women to achieve greater economic independence and social mobility. In countries like Australia, where gender equality policies and labor market integration programs exist, female migrants benefit from higher labor force participation rates and better access to skilled employment opportunities. However, the situation in countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India presents a different reality. Female migrants from these countries often face significant barriers, including cultural norms, limited access to formal employment, and lower skill recognition abroad, which restrict their ability to fully participate in the labor market.

Despite these challenges, migration remains a vital source of economic empowerment for many women, particularly through remittances, which contribute to the welfare of their families and communities. However, migrant women continue to be overrepresented in low-wage, informal work, particularly in sectors such as domestic work and caregiving, where they are vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

The study also underscores the importance of addressing the gendered nature of migration through targeted policies and support programs. To ensure that female migrants can fully benefit from their migration experience, governments must create gender-responsive migration policies that address legal protections, skill development, and labor market integration. Additionally, efforts to challenge gender norms, promote education and vocational training, and provide social protection are crucial for increasing women's labor force participation and improving their socio-economic outcomes.

In conclusion, while migration offers significant opportunities for women, it also presents distinct challenges that require concerted efforts from governments, international organizations, and the private sector to ensure that migration contributes to gender equality and women's empowerment. By fostering inclusive policies and providing the necessary support, it is possible to unlock the full potential of female migrants, allowing them to play a transformative role in both their home and host countries.

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