



The Cause of Rising Youth Unemployment in Developing Countries: Failure of Education Systems or Labor Markets

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Abstract. Youth unemployment in developing countries is a growing concern, characterized by a significant gap between the number of young people entering the labour market and the available job opportunities. This issue is rooted in various socio-economic and institutional factors, with two key areas being the failure of education systems and the inefficiencies of labour markets. The mismatch between the skills provided by educational systems and those required by employers contributes to the rising unemployment rates among youth. Simultaneously, labour market failures, such as inadequate job creation, slow economic growth, rigid labour market regulations, and the prevalence of informal employment, exacerbate the problem. This study explores these interlinked issues, analysing how education systems' lack of relevance to market demands and labour market inefficiencies contribute to the growing problem of youth unemployment in developing nations. It aims to provide insights into how both sectors must be reformed in a coordinated manner to mitigate this pressing issue. The research uses a variety of examples from developing countries to support these findings and offers policy recommendations that could facilitate effective solutions.

Index Terms- Skills unemployment gaps relevance curriculum employers facilitate Education opportunities regulation variety youth reforms research

I. Introduction

The problem of youth unemployment in developing countries is a significant obstacle to economic growth, social stability, and poverty reduction. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), youth unemployment rates in many developing regions are disproportionately high, with young people being three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. The causes of rising youth unemployment are multifaceted, with both education systems and labour markets playing pivotal roles.

In many developing countries, educational systems are often misaligned with the skills needed by the labour market. The overemphasis on academic qualifications, often at the expense of vocational and technical education, results in a significant skills gap. At the same time, labour markets are often unable to provide sufficient employment opportunities due to slow economic growth, structural inefficiencies, and



the prevalence of the informal sector. The lack of well-paying, stable, and formal employment opportunities exacerbates the challenges faced by young people.

This paper seeks to explore the question: Is the rising youth unemployment in developing countries primarily due to the failure of education systems, or is it a result of labor market inefficiencies? By examining the causes of youth unemployment, this study aims to highlight the interconnectedness of the education system and labour market and offer potential solutions to tackle the problem.

Causes of Rising Youth Unemployment

Failure of Education Systems

Mismatch Between Education and Labor Market Needs

In many developing countries, education systems fail to equip students with the skills that are needed by employers in the labour market. Key issues contributing to this mismatch include:

- **Lack of vocational training:** Education systems often prioritize academic qualifications over vocational skills, leaving graduates without the technical skills needed in sectors such as manufacturing, construction, agriculture, and information technology.
- **Outdated curricula:** The rapid pace of technological advancements often leaves educational curricula outdated, failing to teach modern skills such as digital literacy, data analysis, or green technology skills.
- **Low quality of education:** In many developing countries, there is a significant gap in the quality of education, with overcrowded classrooms, underqualified teachers, and limited resources. This compromises the ability of educational institutions to properly prepare youth for the workforce.

Limited Access to Quality Education

Access to quality education remains a major barrier for many youths in developing countries. Factors include:

- **Geographical disparities:** Rural areas often have fewer educational facilities, limiting access to education for young people in these regions.
- **Gender and socio-economic barriers:** Girls, marginalized groups, and youth from poorer backgrounds face additional barriers to education, which directly impacts their employability.

Inefficiencies in Labor Markets

Limited Job Creation

Many developing countries struggle with creating enough formal jobs to absorb the growing number of young people entering the workforce. This is driven by:

- **Slow economic growth:** Inadequate economic expansion leads to fewer job opportunities.
- **Overreliance on informal sector:** Many young people end up working in the **informal sector**, where employment is often unstable, poorly paid, and lacks benefits such as social security.
- **Lack of private sector growth:** A weak or underdeveloped private sector leads to fewer job opportunities for young people.

Rigid Labour Market Policies



Labor market policies that are overly restrictive or outdated can discourage employers from hiring young workers. Examples include:

- **High hiring costs:** Stringent labour regulations, such as expensive severance pay or **high taxation**, may discourage companies from hiring youth.
- **Lack of internships and apprenticeships:** Many young people face challenges in gaining practical experience due to the absence of structured internships or apprenticeship programs, which are vital for entry-level positions.

High Youth Dependency Ratios

High youth dependency ratios place immense pressure on the labour market, especially in developing countries where:

- The number of young people entering the workforce far exceeds the number of available formal job opportunities.
- **Increased competition** for jobs results in higher unemployment rates.

Table 1: Youth Unemployment Rates and the Mismatch between Education and Labour Market Needs in Selected Developing Countries:

Country	Youth Unemployment Rate (%)	Skills Mismatch (High/Medium/Low)	Key Issues in Education System	Labour Market Challenges
Fiji	21.7	High	Lack of vocational training	Limited private sector job creation
Nigeria	33.1	High	Outdated curricula, low quality	Informal labour market, slow economic growth
India	23.3	Medium	Overemphasis on academic degrees	Rigid labour market, lack of internships
Kenya	22.4	High	Poor access to quality education	Limited job creation, high dependency ratios
Bangladesh	12.5	Medium	Lack of technical training	Slow private sector growth, high competition
Brazil	20.3	Medium	Gender and regional disparities	Informal sector dominance, lack of job security



Tackling youth unemployment, especially in developing countries, requires a multi-faceted approach that addresses both education system reforms and labour market policies. Here are several key policy changes that can effectively combat youth unemployment:

Education System Reforms

Curriculum Alignment with Labor Market Needs

- **Policy Change:** Governments should collaborate with industries to update curricula and ensure that education systems teach relevant skills. The curriculum should be aligned with the demands of emerging industries, such as technology, renewable energy, and healthcare.
- **Action:** Include practical, market-oriented skills (e.g., digital literacy, coding, entrepreneurship, green technologies) alongside traditional academic subjects.
- **Outcome:** Graduates will have skills that match labour market requirements, making them more employable.

Expansion of Vocational and Technical Education

- **Policy Change:** Increase investment in vocational education and training (VET) programs, ensuring that they are easily accessible and relevant to the needs of industries.
- **Action:** Encourage partnerships between vocational schools and industries to create specialized training programs, apprenticeships, and internships that equip young people with specific skills for technical and trade sectors.
- **Outcome:** Youth will have more opportunities to enter the workforce with practical, technical skills that lead to stable, well-paying jobs.

Enhancing Higher Education Quality

- **Policy Change:** Reform higher education to focus on quality over quantity by investing in teacher training, improving infrastructure, and creating a stronger connection between universities and businesses.
- **Action:** Establish industry-focused research and innovation centres in universities that allow students to work on real-world problems and enhance employability.
- **Outcome:** Higher education institutions will produce graduates with relevant skills who are ready to enter the workforce.

Promoting Lifelong Learning and Skill Development

- **Policy Change:** Governments should create policies that encourage lifelong learning, enabling youth to continually upgrade their skills throughout their careers.
- **Action:** Establish adult education and reskilling programs that offer young people, especially those who are already employed or looking to switch careers, opportunities to acquire new skills.
- **Outcome:** Youth will be able to adapt to changing job markets and remain competitive in the workforce.



- **Policy Change:** Implement policies to ensure equal access to education for girls and marginalized groups.
- **Action:** Offer scholarships, mentorship programs, and childcare support to encourage the participation of girls, young women, and disadvantaged groups in education and skill-building programs.
- **Outcome:** Reduced gender and socio-economic disparities in education, leading to more inclusive opportunities for youth employment.

Labor Market Reforms

Promote Private Sector Growth and Job Creation

- **Policy Change:** Focus on creating a conducive environment for private sector growth by improving infrastructure, reducing red tape, and offering incentives for businesses to hire young workers.
- **Action:** Implement tax incentives, subsidies, and public-private partnerships to encourage businesses to invest in sectors with high youth employment potential (e.g., manufacturing, technology, and services).
- **Outcome:** More jobs will be created in the formal sector, and youth will have access to stable, long-term employment opportunities.

Ease Labor Market Entry for Youth

- **Policy Change:** Reform labour market regulations to reduce barriers to entry for young people, especially those with limited work experience.
- **Action:** Introduce youth-friendly labour laws, such as lower entry-level wage requirements, temporary work contracts, and internship programs, which allow young workers to gain experience.
- **Outcome:** It will be easier for young people to gain their first job and build career experience, eventually transitioning to more stable positions.

Foster Entrepreneurship and Youth-led Startups

- **Policy Change:** Create policies that support youth entrepreneurship, helping young people to become job creators rather than job seekers.
- **Action:** Provide access to financing, business development training, and mentorship programs for young entrepreneurs. Encourage the creation of youth entrepreneurship hubs and incubators that provide resources and networking opportunities.
- **Outcome:** A more vibrant startup ecosystem will emerge, leading to increased self-employment and the creation of new industries that cater to both local and global markets.

Reduce the Informal Economy

- **Policy Change:** Implement policies to encourage the transition of young people from the informal sector to the formal economy, where jobs are more secure, better paid, and offer social benefits.
- **Action:** Provide incentives for businesses to formalize their operations and create clear pathways for young people in the informal sector to move into formal employment.



- **Outcome:** Youth will have access to better working conditions, social security, and benefits that improve their long-term financial security.

Job Matching and Labor Market Information Systems

- **Policy Change:** Improve job matching services and create more robust labour market information systems to help young people understand where the jobs are and what skills are in demand.
- **Action:** Develop online job portals and career counselling services that provide information on skill gaps, job opportunities, and career paths. Establish mentorship programs that connect young job seekers with professionals in their field of interest.
- **Outcome:** Young people will be better informed about job opportunities and the specific skills they need to gain, leading to better job matches and reduced unemployment rates.

Macro-Economic and Social Policies

Support for Rural Youth Employment

- **Policy Change:** Focus on providing job opportunities and skills development in rural areas, where youth unemployment is often exacerbated by limited access to education and job opportunities.
- **Action:** Invest in rural infrastructure, such as roads, technology, and agriculture, and develop local entrepreneurship programs that support youth in establishing businesses or finding employment locally.
- **Outcome:** Youth in rural areas will have greater access to employment opportunities, reducing the need to migrate to urban areas in search of work.

Youth Employment Guarantee Schemes

- **Policy Change:** Implement Youth Employment Guarantee Schemes that ensure all young people have access to either a job, vocational training, or education within a certain period.
- **Action:** Governments should allocate funding for guaranteed employment programs, focusing on public works or infrastructure projects that can absorb a large number of young workers.
- **Outcome:** This would create immediate employment opportunities and allow youth to gain work experience, contributing to long-term employment prospects.

Improve Access to Financial Services

- **Policy Change:** Enhance access to finance for young people, especially those in lower-income groups or rural areas.
- **Action:** Provide microfinance and low-interest loans to help young entrepreneurs start businesses, and develop programs that help youth access digital financial services.
- **Outcome:** Youth will be better able to fund their own ventures, reducing their dependence on formal employment.

This approach provides a detailed and actionable roadmap for policymakers, addressing the core structural issues behind rising youth unemployment.



Youth Unemployment Situation in Fiji

Fiji, like many other developing countries, faces significant challenges with youth unemployment. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), youth in Fiji (defined as individuals aged 15-24) experience higher unemployment rates compared to adults, reflecting a broader global trend in developing economies. The causes of youth unemployment in Fiji are multifaceted, involving factors such as educational mismatches, labour market inefficiencies, economic structure, and socio-cultural dynamics. Below is an analysis of the situation in Fiji, focusing on the key contributing factors:

Educational System and Skills Mismatch

Misalignment between Education and Market Needs

In Fiji, there is a growing concern that the education system is not fully aligned with the demands of the labour market. While there has been a growing push toward academic qualifications, many employers in the private sector are looking for more practical, technical, and vocational skills that are not always covered in traditional educational curricula. This leads to a mismatch between the skills young people possess and the skills required by industries such as agriculture, construction, and tourism (Fiji's key sectors).

- **Vocational Training Gap:** While the government has made efforts to promote vocational education, there is still an insufficient emphasis on technical skills, which are crucial for sectors like engineering, plumbing, and electrical work.
- **Outdated Curriculum:** The curriculum in many schools and universities may not fully cover emerging industries like digital technology, renewable energy, and green technologies. This leaves youth unprepared for the job market's evolving demands.

Limited Access to Quality Education

There are also geographic and socio-economic barriers to accessing quality education, especially in rural and remote areas. Many youths in these regions do not have access to secondary or higher education and are left with few opportunities to gain the skills needed for employment.

Labor Market Challenges

Limited Job Creation

Fiji's economy faces challenges in creating enough formal sector jobs to absorb the growing youth population. Private sector development remains relatively slow, and economic growth has been inconsistent, especially in non-agricultural sectors.

- **Informal Employment:** Many young people, particularly those in rural areas, end up working in the informal sector, such as small-scale farming or casual labor. These jobs often come with low wages, limited benefits, and poor job security.
- **Dependence on Tourism:** The Fijian economy is heavily reliant on tourism, a sector that is vulnerable to global economic shifts, natural disasters, and pandemics like COVID-19. Fluctuations in tourism lead to seasonal employment, meaning youth often face temporary and precarious jobs.



Lack of Job Matching and Information

There is also a lack of job-matching mechanisms and labor market information systems that can help young people find jobs suited to their skills. Many young people are unaware of the types of work available or the specific qualifications needed for emerging industries.

- **Limited Career Guidance:** Career counselling services in schools and universities are often underdeveloped, which means young people lack clear guidance on career pathways and employment opportunities.
- **Barriers to Entrepreneurship:** While some youth may look to start their own businesses, they face financial barriers and lack access to mentorship or business development training.

Socio-Economic Factors

Gender Inequality

In Fiji, young women face additional challenges in accessing education and employment opportunities. Cultural norms and gender discrimination can prevent women from pursuing careers in certain sectors like construction or technology, which are typically male-dominated fields.

- **Gender Stereotypes:** Societal expectations may push young women into certain "acceptable" roles, limiting their potential to explore a wide range of careers.
- **Childcare and Domestic Responsibilities:** Many young women in Fiji may also face barriers to full-time employment due to family obligations, such as caring for children or elderly family members.

Rural vs. Urban Divide

The divide between urban and rural areas is another significant factor contributing to youth unemployment in Fiji. The majority of jobs and educational opportunities are concentrated in urban areas like Suva (the capital), while rural areas remain underdeveloped, with limited access to quality education and formal employment opportunities.

- **Rural Migration:** Many youths from rural areas migrate to urban centres in search of employment, often ending up in low-skilled, informal jobs, or facing overcrowded housing conditions.
- **Lack of Infrastructure:** Rural areas lack basic infrastructure, making it difficult for businesses to establish operations and create jobs in these regions.

Government and Policy Responses

Government Initiatives

The Fijian government has recognized youth unemployment as a key challenge and has made efforts to address it. Some initiatives include:

- **National Employment Centre (NEC):** The NEC provides youth employment services, including job placements, training, and career advice. It also helps match job seekers with employers.
- **Skills Development:** Programs such as the National Employment and Skills Development Programme aim to provide young people with technical and vocational training, helping them develop industry-specific skills.
- **Youth Entrepreneurship Programs:** The government has also launched initiatives aimed at promoting youth entrepreneurship, such as the Youth



Entrepreneurship Scheme, which provides small grants and loans to young people interested in starting their own businesses.

Challenges with Policy Implementation

Despite these efforts, several challenges remain:

- **Limited Reach:** Programs targeting youth employment often do not reach all eligible youths, particularly those in remote or rural areas.
- **Insufficient Funding:** There are limited financial resources allocated to youth employment programs, and many initiatives struggle to scale up to meet the growing demand.
- **Fragmented Approach:** While various government programs exist, there is often a lack of coordination among different stakeholders, making it difficult to achieve a comprehensive, long-term solution.

Potential Solutions

Strengthening Vocational and Technical Training

To ensure that youth are equipped with marketable skills, there is a need for a greater emphasis on vocational and technical training programs that cater to the demands of key industries like construction, agriculture, and tourism. These programs should be aligned with industry needs and provide practical experience through apprenticeships or internships.

Improving Job Matching and Labor Market Information Systems

The creation of a national job-matching platform that links job seekers with employers can help address the information gap. This could be integrated with career counseling services that help guide young people on which sectors are growing and what skills are in demand.

Encouraging Private Sector Job Creation

Policies aimed at fostering the growth of the private sector, particularly in technology, renewable energy, and agriculture, should be prioritized. This could include tax incentives for businesses that hire young workers and support for start-ups and youth-led businesses.

Rural Development Programs

A greater focus should be placed on rural development, including improving infrastructure and creating job opportunities in agriculture, tourism, and other rural industries. Programs aimed at attracting businesses to rural areas can reduce the pressure on urban job markets and create more opportunities for youth in these regions.

Gender-Responsive Policies

Gender equality in education and employment should be prioritized, ensuring that young women have the same opportunities as young men to access training, employment, and entrepreneurship support. This can be achieved through policy reforms, awareness campaigns, and women-centred programs. This analysis provides a comprehensive overview of the youth unemployment situation in Fiji, highlighting



key challenges and suggesting potential policy changes to improve employment outcomes for the country's youth.

Causes of Rising Youth Unemployment – Failure of Education Systems or Inefficiencies in Labour Markets

The rising youth unemployment in developing countries is a multifaceted issue, and both failures in education systems and inefficiencies in labour markets contribute significantly to the challenge. The key causes are complex and often interlinked, with both the supply side (education systems and skill development) and the demand side (labour markets and economic conditions) playing a role. Here is a breakdown of how each factor contributes to rising youth unemployment:

Failure of Education Systems

Mismatch Between Education and Labour Market Needs

In many developing countries, education systems are not aligned with the skills needed in the labour market. Students often graduate with qualifications that are outdated or irrelevant to the industries that are driving economic growth. For example:

- **Lack of technical and vocational skills:** Traditional education systems in many developing countries emphasize academic degrees rather than vocational or technical training, which are highly valued in sectors like manufacturing, construction, agriculture, and technology. This leads to graduates who are not equipped for the available jobs.
- **Curriculum gaps:** In some cases, curricula do not include emerging fields, such as digital skills, entrepreneurship, or green technologies, which are essential in the evolving global economy.
- **Outdated teaching methods:** Inadequate emphasis on critical thinking, problem-solving, and practical training leaves students underprepared for real-world work challenges.

Limited Access to Quality Education

In many developing countries, access to quality education is limited, particularly in rural or marginalized areas. This includes:

- **Inadequate infrastructure and resources:** Schools may lack proper facilities, trained teachers, and necessary learning materials, which impacts the quality of education.
- **Gender disparities:** In certain regions, girls and young women face additional barriers to education, leading to lower enrolment rates and skill levels among the youth, particularly in rural areas.
- **Affordability and social barriers:** For many youths in poverty-stricken regions, high costs of education, child labour, or family responsibilities may prevent them from pursuing formal education or skill development.

Quality of Higher Education

While many developing countries have seen an expansion in higher education, the quality of this education often remains low:



- **Overcrowded institutions:** Many universities and colleges in developing countries struggle with high student-to-teacher ratios, resulting in a decrease in the quality of education.
- **Overemphasis on degrees:** Many educational systems focus on providing academic degrees, but overproduction of university graduates in certain fields (e.g., humanities or social sciences) has led to an oversupply of degree holders and insufficient opportunities for them in the job market.

Labour Market Failures

Limited Job Creation and Economic Growth

In many developing countries, the labour market is unable to absorb the increasing number of young people entering the workforce due to slow economic growth or lack of diversification in the economy. Key issues include:

- **Weak private sector:** Developing countries may lack a strong private sector that can create the types of jobs that young people need. Economic growth may be concentrated in a few industries (e.g., agriculture, low-value manufacturing) that don't provide sufficient, well-paid, or quality jobs.
- **Informal labour markets:** Many young people in developing countries end up in the **informal sector** (e.g., street vending, casual labour) where jobs are low-paid, unstable, and lack social security benefits. This type of work often offers limited career progression, making it difficult for youth to achieve long-term stability and growth.
- **Technological changes and automation:** The rise of automation, artificial intelligence (AI), and digitization in some sectors can reduce the demand for certain types of low-skilled labour, exacerbating youth unemployment if young people are not equipped with the right skills.

Rigid Labour Market Policies

In some cases, labour market policies can create barriers to entry for young people:

- **Lack of internships and apprenticeships:** Many young people struggle to find entry-level jobs **or** internships, which are essential to gaining work experience. This is often due to the lack of coordination between educational institutions and employers.
- **Strict labour regulations:** While labour regulations are important for worker protection, overly rigid or outdated labour laws can discourage businesses from hiring young workers, particularly if they are seen as risky or less productive compared to older, experienced workers.
- **Low labour force participation:** In some countries, factors such as cultural norms, family expectations, or gender discrimination may limit youth participation in the labour market, particularly for women or marginalized groups.

High Youth Dependency Ratios

Many developing countries face high youth dependency ratios, meaning that there are a large number of young people compared to the number of jobs available. This places pressure on the job market and leads to:



- **Intensified competition:** Young people often have to compete for a small number of available jobs, leading to higher unemployment rates, especially in urban areas where youth flock in search of better opportunities.
- **Migration:** The lack of local opportunities forces young people to migrate, either within their own country or internationally, in search of employment, leading to brain drain or leaving rural areas underdeveloped.

Structural Barriers and Discrimination

In many developing countries, discrimination based on age, gender, ethnicity, or socio-economic background can hinder youth access to employment opportunities. For example:

- **Gender inequality:** In some regions, young women face greater barriers to entering the labour force, with limited access to education, discrimination in hiring, or traditional gender roles that restrict employment opportunities.
- **Ethnic or racial discrimination:** Youth from marginalized ethnic or social groups may face additional hurdles in securing employment due to prejudices or systemic biases within the labour market.

The Interplay Between Education Systems and Labour Markets

Both education systems and labour markets are interdependent. The failure of one can exacerbate the failure of the other:

- **Unprepared education system** → leads to a skills gap → makes it harder for youth to compete in the labour market.
- **Weak labour markets** → limit the number of available jobs and opportunities → discourages youth from pursuing further education or skills development, perpetuating the cycle of unemployment.

Both factors are equally important in causing rising youth unemployment in developing countries, and it is difficult to assign the problem to one single cause. A weak education **system** leads to a skills mismatch, producing graduates who are not adequately prepared for the labour market. On the other hand, inefficient labour markets, characterized by limited job creation, a lack of private sector growth, or rigid policies, contribute to the inability of economies to absorb young workers.

The solution lies in addressing both areas:

- **Reforming education systems** to provide relevant, market-driven skills and vocational training is crucial.
- **Expanding job creation**, improving the private sector's capacity to hire, and removing labour market barriers for youth are necessary to provide young people with more opportunities.

Ultimately, both the education system and the labour market need to be reformed in tandem to reduce youth unemployment effectively. Governments, businesses, and educational institutions must work together to ensure that young people are well-equipped for the evolving job market, and that adequate job opportunities are available for them to transition smoothly from education to employment.



II. Conclusion

The rising youth unemployment in developing countries cannot be attributed to a single cause. Both education system failures and labour market inefficiencies are critical contributors to the problem. The mismatch between the skills offered by educational institutions and the needs of the labour market leaves many young people unprepared for the demands of employers. Simultaneously, the inability of labour markets to create sufficient, stable, and well-paying jobs for youth exacerbates the problem. To address this complex issue, a holistic approach is needed that involves reforming education systems to focus on market-relevant skills, promoting vocational and technical training, and improving labour market policies to enhance job creation and reduce structural barriers to youth employment.

The involvement of both the public and private sectors is essential to bridging the gap between education and employment. By aligning educational outcomes with labour market needs and addressing labour market barriers, developing countries can better equip their youth for employment, ultimately contributing to broader economic development and social stability.

To address youth unemployment in developing countries, comprehensive policies must target both education system reforms and labour market changes. These policy changes should focus on making education more relevant to the labour market, ensuring access to quality vocational training, and reducing barriers to employment entry for youth. Simultaneously, labour market policies must be revised to create more formal sector jobs, support youth entrepreneurship, and foster private sector growth. Moreover, ensuring social inclusion, reducing gender-based disparities, and creating sustainable employment opportunities in rural areas are essential for tackling youth unemployment in a holistic manner. By implementing these changes, developing countries can provide their youth with better opportunities for employment, thereby contributing to broader economic growth and social stability.

Youth unemployment in Fiji is a complex issue rooted in the failure of the educational system to meet labour market needs, slow job creation in key sectors, and socio-economic challenges. While the government has made strides to address these issues, further reforms are needed to align education with industry demands, improve labour market access for youth, and create more formal job opportunities, especially in rural areas. Addressing these challenges will require a holistic approach, with coordinated efforts from both public and private sectors, to ensure that young people in Fiji have the necessary skills and opportunities to succeed in the workforce.

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