

## OVERVIEW

**Number of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) commonly cited:** Figures vary widely from one source to another. Between 1996 and 2010, the [UN recorded](#) 200,000 cases of sexual violence. In 2019, [REDRESS](#) estimated that 250,000 women were victims of rape during the conflicts in the in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). [UN Women](#) estimates that more than one million women have been raped. Since the resurgence of the conflict in 2025, rates of CRSV are [far higher than ever recorded](#). Figures from February recorded [60 rapes per day](#), and healthcare facilities in the region have recorded five times the usual number of CRSV cases, [with children accounting for 30% of victims](#).

**Estimates of the real number of survivors of CRSV:** The figures cited reveal only a fraction of the real number of survivors, most of whom do not report these acts due to deep-rooted stigmatisation and fear of reprisals.

**Domestic legal framework for administrative reparation programme:** National legal framework for the administrative reparations programme: [Law 22/065](#) establishing the fundamental principles for the protection and reparation of victims of CRSV and victims of crimes against peace and the security of humanity was promulgated on 26 December 2022.

**Mechanism to implement administrative reparation framework:** [The National Fund for Reparations for Victims of Sexual Violence](#) (*Fonds National des Réparations des Victimes de violences sexuelles liées aux conflits et des crimes contre la paix et la sécurité de l'humanité – FONAREV*) was created by Decree 22/38 of 06 December 2022, then modified and completed by Decree 23/20 of 09 June 2023. Law 22/065 also created the Single Consolidated List (*Liste unique consolidé – LUC*) and the Inter-institutional Commission for Victim Support and Reform.

**Domestic avenues for reparation through courts:** Despite the existence of legal recourses to seek reparation through the courts, [victims rarely receive justice, and never reparation](#).

**Approximate number of survivors having received any formal reparation for CRSV:** [43 survivors of sexual violence were compensated](#) in the [Songo-Mboyo case](#), a landmark ruling by the Military Court of Equateur Province that ordered seven members of the DRC's armed forces, jointly with the State, to pay USD 165,317 in damages. However, the compensation is said to have been paid more than ten years after the ruling, [much of it administered unequally or misappropriated by State agents and intermediaries](#).

**Survivor perception regarding state of implementation of reparation:** Survivors have lost confidence and hope in the judicial system. However, they welcome the State's efforts to adopt the Law 22/065 establishing the fundamental principles relating to the protection and reparation of victims of CRSV and crimes against the peace and security of humanity.

**Resurgence of conflict and sharp rise in CRSV (2025):** The Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict has [expressed grave concerns over the resurgence of conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), particularly M23-led attacks supported by the Rwandan Defence Force (RDF) in North and South Kivu since January 2025. The renewed offensives have triggered a sharp rise in sexual violence against civilians, especially displaced women and girls, amid surging mass displacement, with [500,000 newly displaced individuals in January alone](#). On 27 January, a prison break at Muzenze Prison in Goma reportedly led to the [rape and murder of at least 165 women](#).

## NATURE AND SCOPE OF CRSV

Since the 1990s, the DRC has endured conflicts marked by the massive and systematic perpetration of sexual and gender-based violence designed to terrorise and destabilise entire populations. CRSV has reached endemic levels and continues to be used as a weapon of war. The [UN has reported a significant increase](#) in CRSV since 2023, as conflicts continue, particularly in the east of the country. The escalation of hostilities in early 2025, particularly M23-led offensives supported by the RDF, has further exacerbated the situation, with reports of sexual violence perpetrated by [M23, the RDF as well as the Armed Forces of the Democratic Republic of the Congo \(FARDC\)](#), in conflict-affected areas, including [displacement camps](#).

The [United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\) Mapping Exercise report](#) highlights the systematic use of rape and other forms of sexual violence by all the warring parties and highlights the recurrent, widespread and systematic nature of these acts. The majority of acts of sexual violence constitute offences and crimes under Congolese law, international law, human rights law and international humanitarian law. Depending on the broader context in which the crimes are committed, they may also constitute crimes against humanity and war crimes. Reports from 2025 indicate that armed groups, including M23 are using CRSV as a [deliberate strategy](#) to assert control over territories and [instill fear and terror within communities](#).

The OHCHR report lists forms of CRSV of [unprecedented brutality](#); *“unbearable proportions and cruelty and [...] seem[ing] merely to increase in number exponentially.”* Rape (often public, collective and/or massive, sometimes with the deliberate intention of spreading HIV/AIDS), forced incest, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, torture and inhuman treatment of a sexual nature, genital mutilation and disbowelling of pregnant women, to name but a few examples. Rapes have led to forced pregnancies, forced abortions and death due to the extreme brutality of the acts committed.

Women and girls of all ages – ranging from young children to the elderly – are the primary victims of sexual violence. Men and boys are also subjected to sexual violence; however, the full extent remains unknown as stigma continues to discourage disclosure. In 2025, the number of child victims of CRSV has risen sharply, with recent reports indicating that [children account for 30%](#) of recorded cases in North and South Kivu. The humanitarian crisis, particularly in displacement sites, has left thousands of children at heightened risk of sexual violence, exploitation, and forced recruitment by armed groups.

Factors that increase a person’s vulnerability to CRSV include suspected or proven links to opposition parties, enemy forces, trade unions, political activism, or familial connections with individuals allegedly affiliated with these groups. The Mapping Exercise report also highlights places and contexts of increased vulnerability – including detention centres, military encampments, roads to markets, fields, and forests. Finally, it reports incidents of sexual violence committed on the basis of ethnicity and hatred and in the name of mystical beliefs or ritual practices. As of 2025, these findings remain more relevant than ever, with alarming rates of CRSV reported against [detainees](#) and [children](#), as well as an increased risk for [displaced persons](#) due to insecurity, overcrowded camps, and limited access to emergency response services.

The security situation in the DRC has further deteriorated following [the withdrawal of the United Nations Organization Stabilization Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo \(MONUSCO\)](#) from South Kivu in June 2024. This withdrawal, marking the end of the first phase of MONUSCO’s disengagement from the country, has left a security vacuum, particularly in the eastern regions, leading to increased activities by armed groups and heightened risks of CRSV.

## HARMS CAUSED TO SURVIVORS, FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

CRSV leads to multiple physical and gynaecological traumas such as tears and injuries to internal tissues and genitals, fistulas between the vagina, rectum and bladder, incontinence and related infections, prolapse, disfigurement, scarring, reproductive problems and sterility, headaches, back and lower abdominal pain, limb dysfunction. In 2025, the humanitarian crisis and worsening security conditions have further [reduced access to medical care](#) for survivors. The lack of immediate and appropriate care exacerbates these physical consequences, often for life. Many survivors can no longer carry out their daily activities due to permanent physical injuries.

Additionally, there are also severe psychological consequences. Survivors show symptoms of depression, extreme anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, such as hopelessness, intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, fear, eating and sleeping disorders, relational difficulties, self-harm and fears of abandonment. These psychological problems, along with concerns about their children’s safety, survival and education, hinder their working capacities, as well as their ability to care for their children, and prevent them from being able to plan for the future.

Cases of forced pregnancy and the number of children born of rape, are extremely high. Abortion is prohibited in the DRC. Some women who have been raped several times have had

several children as a result. Having a child born of rape has profound psychological consequences for the victims, both for the women and children. Many survivors of CRSV have been re-victimised, reinforcing stigma and further deterring them from coming forward. In some cases, children born of CRSV have also been subjected to sexual violence in recent attacks, perpetuating the cycle of trauma across generations.

Survivors carry multiple burdens: that of having been raped, of living with the physical and psychological after-effects of such crimes and of being subsequently rejected by their partners, families and communities. Repudiation, stigmatisation, ostracism and the impossibility of gaining access to employment, generating a stable livelihood, access education and healthcare for their children, are part of their daily lives and impacts not only their lives, but also that of their children.

Survivors are left without medical, emotional or economic support, while the seriousness of the crimes they have suffered is denied and impunity for the perpetrators is almost total.

## **SURVIVORS' PERSPECTIVES**

The 2011 [report by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) on Remedies and Reparations for Victims of Sexual Violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo highlights a recurring demand for a return to peace and security – seen as a necessity not only for reducing the frequency of CRSV and enabling people to resume their daily activities, but also for survivors to benefit from any form of reparation received.

### **Forms of reparation**

Survivors show a preference for individual as opposed to collective reparations, and sometimes even a certain resistance to collective reparations, considering that they will also benefit individuals who are not victims. Material reparation (medical, psychosocial and economic measures) seems to be more important to survivors than merely symbolic reparation, which is seen as not solving the immediate problems arising from the sexual violence suffered in a context of extreme poverty. Survivors nonetheless attach a certain importance to symbolic reparations and link them both to the process of personal, family and community memory and to the process of raising society's awareness, and thus preventing new atrocities. Trauma-informed education and vocational training are also forms of reparations that appear crucial for survivors, for themselves and for their children.

### **Reparation measures**

The main needs and priorities expressed by survivors of CRSV primarily concern material and economic issues such as the possibility of accessing income-generating activities, covering school fees for children, being able to own a house or have a field or a plot of land. The need for medical care and psychological support is also reported, but to a lesser extent – which could indicate a certain dissociation between the impacts and self-identified needs. Issues of security, acknowledgement and accountability are also present, be it to a lesser degree, amongst the expressed needs and priorities. As far as collective reparations are concerned, the survivors put the emphasis on symbolic reparations, specifically the erection of a monument, and were unanimous that it should not bear the names of the victims so as not to add to the stigma. During the activities of the [OHCHR Panel](#), other collective reparations measures were mentioned, such as *'the construction of roads, hospitals, memorials, as well as psycho-social support programs. The need to develop a structure in remote areas to ensure victims access to health care within 72 hours was noted, as well as trainings of doctors, particularly to deal with fistula'*.

## **SURVIVORS' INITIATIVES**

The [National Movement of Survivors of Sexual Violence in the DRC](#) (*Mouvement national des Survivantes des violences sexuelles liées aux conflits en RDC* or MNSVS-RDC) has been providing holistic support to survivors since 1999, organising awareness-raising campaigns in communities, schools, churches and among survivors, and has also consistently lobbied the national authorities for the right to reparation.

In partnership with the MNSVS-RDC and the Panzi Foundation, the Global Survivors Fund (GSF) developed [Interim Reparative Measures project](#) (IRM) in North Kivu, South Kivu, and Central Kasai. A total of 1,093 survivors co-created the project, which included the following individual and collective reparative measures: interim financial reparations accompanied by financial management training and professional training, employment support, medical and psychological care, obtaining birth certificates for children born of CRSV, and the construction of four centres for survivors within the project communities. [This project](#) remains the only concrete example of an initiative that is granting reparations (in the form of IRM) to survivors of CRSV – and moreover through a process centred on survivors and co-created with them. [98 per cent of survivors](#) who participated in the project expressed that it changed their lives, sharing that the participation, was in itself, reparative. The [evaluation of the IRM project](#) found that that survivors feel happier and more confident.

## REPARATION

| IN THEORY                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | IN PRACTICE                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
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| <p><b>International and regional obligations</b></p> <p>The DRC has ratified the key international human rights instruments. This obligates the country to prevent, protect, investigate, prosecute, punish, and provide reparation for various issues, including torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment, discrimination against women, the protection of children, the prohibition of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and conflict-related sexual violence.</p> <p>In April 2004, the DRC referred the situation on its territory to the International Criminal Court (ICC). The ICC can therefore exercise its jurisdiction over crimes covered by the Rome Statute and committed on DRC territory or by DRC nationals since 1 July 2002.</p> <p>In 2019, an <a href="#">Addendum</a> to the joint Communiqué with the UN to combat conflict-related sexual violence was signed. In it, the DRC reiterates its commitment to four priorities, which include not only access to fair reparation and payment of reparations established in judicial decisions, but also speeding up the process of adopting a law to set up a reparations fund for victims of CRSV and ensuring that it is properly funded and operational</p> | <p><b>International judicial remedies</b></p> <p>Of the five cases involving the DRC before the ICC <a href="#">Lubanga</a>, <a href="#">Katanga</a>, <a href="#">Callixte Mbarushimana</a>, <a href="#">Mathieu Ngudjolo Chui</a>, only the proceedings against <a href="#">Bosco Ntaganda</a> have resulted in a conviction for CRSV. He was found guilty as a direct or indirect perpetrator of 13 counts of war crimes and five counts of crimes against humanity, including rape and sexual slavery. This case led to the first-ever ICC order on reparations for victims of CRSV. These reparations notably included survivors of rape and sexual slavery – both women and men, including those victimised within the armed group – as well as children born of rape and sexual slavery. To date, only 72 victims in emergency situations have had access to reparation measures.</p> <p>In addition to implementing reparation orders, the ICC Trust Fund for Victims also implements victim assistance programmes in countries where the Court is conducting investigations and prosecutions. The Trust Fund has joined forces with national and international civil society actors <a href="#">to set up a series of assistance measures in the DRC</a>. The first cycle of the assistance mandate ran until 2017 and <a href="#">benefited 58,439 direct victims</a> and more than 230,000 direct and indirect victims. The second cycle of the programme began in 2020, initially with 10 projects. Since 1 May 2022, seven assistance projects in the Eastern provinces have been implemented.</p> |

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| <p><b>National Legislation</b></p> <p>The new <a href="#">Constitution of 2006</a> classifies sexual violence as a crime against humanity (art. 15). Furthermore, the adoption of <a href="#">Law 06/018 (2006)</a> amended the Penal Code by adding 12 new offences of sexual violence, increasing the scale of applicable penalties and establishing the obligation to compensate victims for the harm they have suffered. In addition, <a href="#">Law 06/019 (2006)</a> on criminal procedure specified new rights for victims of sexual violence.</p> <p>Following ratification of the Rome Statute, legislative reform (<a href="#">Law 024/2002</a>, and <a href="#">Law 023/2002</a>) sought to harmonise domestic military law, but the definitions of serious crimes, including sexual crimes, and applicable penalties are less detailed and differ from those in the Rome Statute.</p> <p>Articles 258 and 260 of the Civil Code (Livre III) recognise the right of victims to compensation for harm suffered: victims have the right to claim compensation by bringing a civil action, in parallel with criminal proceedings. In cases of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, victims have the right to seek compensation by bringing a civil action before a military judge. With regard to the punishment of crimes of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity, according to <a href="#">Organic Law 13/011-B on the organisation, functioning and jurisdiction of the courts of the judicial system</a>, the Military Courts continue to have jurisdiction over military personnel and police officers, while civilians are now under the jurisdiction of the Courts of Appeal, although the latter have not yet used their powers in this area.</p> | <p><b>National judicial remedies</b></p> <p>The vision of reparations in Congolese law is a narrow one, resulting in a single form of reparation: individual compensation.</p> <p>The many legal and procedural barriers mean that, in practice, there is a real and total lack of access to reparation measures and a preference for traditional and customary mechanisms. These include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of access to local judicial structures;</li> <li>• Lack of access to legal aid;</li> <li>• Difficulties in initiating proceedings and gathering evidence;</li> <li>• High evidence threshold falling on the victims;</li> <li>• The excessive cost of proceedings, in particular the obligation for victims to pay a deposit to become a party to proceedings and to pay a tax proportional to the damages, before claiming compensation;</li> <li>• The financial insolvency of convicted persons and the general inability of the government to respect and enforce payment obligations ordered by the courts.</li> <li>• From January 2023 to November 2024, the <a href="#">UN Joint Human Rights Office in Congo</a> (UNJHRO) supported 13 joint investigation teams and 19 mobile courts, leading to the prosecution of 1,010 alleged perpetrators of grave violations of international humanitarian law and human rights, in particular sexual violence against women and girls, resulting in 777 convictions.</li> </ul> <p>In 2025, despite the existence of Law 22/065 and the creation of the FONAREV, no significant payouts have been reported. Survivors express frustration over the continued failure to implement reparation mechanisms, with many losing hope that compensation will ever reach them.</p> |
| <p><b>Administrative Reparation</b></p> <p>As a result of many joint efforts, including those of the <a href="#">Ministry of Human Rights</a> and the <a href="#">Office of the First Lady</a>, the FONAREV ad hoc committee was created in February 2022. <a href="#">Law 22/065</a> setting out the fundamental principles relating to the protection and reparation of victims of conflict-related sexual violence and victims of crimes against the peace and security of humanity was promulgated on 26 December 2022. The decree on the implementing measures for this framework law has <a href="#">reportedly been adopted</a>, but has not yet been officially promulgated.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p><b>Implementation of administrative reparations</b></p> <p>FONAREV was created by Decree 22/38 on 6<sup>th</sup> December 2022 and amended and supplemented by Decree 23/20 on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2023. Placed under the supervision of the Ministry of Human Rights, it has its headquarters in Kinshasa. The <a href="#">management team</a> has been appointed, and at the time of writing, the FONAREV has so far visited five pilot provinces and has enabled a short claims form to be posted on its website. In addition, 11 per cent of mining royalties will be paid to FONAREV, in accordance with <a href="#">Decree No. 23/32 of 26 August 2023</a>, which sets out the procedures for collecting and distributing these royalties. However, the opacity in the functioning of this Fund was <a href="#">criticised in 2024</a>.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

## OPPORTUNITIES

- Progress in the creation and implementation of an administrative reparation policy with the promulgation of Law 22/065 and the creation of FONAREV.
- The existence of a dynamic and significant synergies between the various government players to make concrete progress on this issue.
- The existence of the MNSVS-RDC, and the exchange and advocacy activities of civil society, including more than 50 actors who organised themselves at the beginning of 2023 within The National Advocacy Alliance for Reparations for Victims of Conflict in the DRC (*l'Alliance nationale de plaidoyer pour les réparations des victimes des conflits en RDC* or ANPR), at the initiative of GSF.
- Lessons learned available from the implementation of GSF's IRM project.
- The massive, systematic, and continuous nature of sexual violence throughout the multiple armed conflicts since the 1990s which has escalated significantly in 2025.
- The destruction of [judicial institutions](#), further weakening access to justice for survivors.
- The normalisation and trivialisation of sexual and gender-based violence beyond situations of armed conflict.
- The persistence of [socio-economic vulnerability](#) among women, their unequal status in society, and gender-based discrimination.
- Impunity for perpetrators of CRSV remains a critical issue, with few prosecutions and no significant accountability measures implemented in 2025.
- The gaps and ambiguities in the reparation legislative framework that need to be addressed to ensure its implementation aligns with international obligations and standards in this area.

## KEY CHALLENGES

- The [escalation of the conflict](#) in the East Region of the country and significant [increase in CRSV, against displaced persons](#), women and [children](#).
- The increased poverty and inflation rendering access to basic needs like food extremely difficult.
- The complete withdrawal of [MONUSCO in June 2024](#) has left a security vacuum, exacerbating the risk of CRSV, which has been deeply amplified since 2025.
- Survivors are increasingly cut off from medical, legal, and psychological services due to ongoing violence and renewed mass displacement.
- Humanitarian and non-governmental actors, human rights defenders, and survivor-led initiatives are struggling to operate due to security concerns, displacement, and funding shortages.
- The loss of trust, hope, and interest among survivors in asserting their claims for reparations, due to their significant emotional, physical, and socio-economic vulnerability and the lack of adequate responses and concrete measures from the government.
- The lack of effective coordination between the various stakeholders who are, or should be, involved in the implementation of reparations at the national and local levels.
- The opacity in the functioning of the FONAREV was [heavily criticised in 2024](#), reflecting a broader lack of transparency in the handling of funds within governmental structures.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### TO THE CONGOLESE AUTHORITIES

- Prioritise the protection of civilians in conflict zones, particularly women and children at risk of CRSV;
- Prioritise access to basic services, such as medical and psychosocial care and access to food for survivors of grave violations of human rights;
- Take immediate action to ensure the full implementation of the FONAREV and expedite payouts to survivors. Ensure that FONAREV operates with full transparency regarding the availability and allocation of funds, with independent monitoring to maintain accountability and trust. This will strengthen confidence in the reparation process and ensure resources are used effectively to meet survivors' needs;
- Put in place a documentation, identification and registration process for CRSV survivors without risking or compromising their security, confidentiality of their information, as well as using a trauma-informed approach, ensuring survivors' meaningful participation and co-creation in these processes;
- Strengthen legal mechanisms to prosecute perpetrators of CRSV, ensuring that armed groups using sexual violence as a weapon of war face justice;
- Adopt and implement a comprehensive [Transitional Justice Strategy](#) in line with international standards, including: truth-seeking; preservation of memory; prosecution; reparations; institutional reform;
- Amend the existing legislation to broaden the concept of reparations beyond compensation and repeal the requirement of payment of a tax proportional to damages as a prerequisite for claiming reparations;
- Repeal article 4 of Law 22/065, which would make victim status conditional on a first instance decision by the High Court of the place where the offence was committed;
- Promulgate the Decrees pertaining to the implementation procedure for Law 22/065;
- Define the scope of Law 22/065 based on the UN Basic Principles on Reparations, specifying exclusions;
- Specify and clarify the responsibilities and decentralised organisation of the bodies created by Law 22/065;

- Define reparations measures that adhere to international obligations and standards, and provide standardised reparations (symbolic, material, individual, and collective) to victims based on the nature of the violation suffered;
- Ensure that the principle of good faith and the presumption of victim and survivor status prevails in the process of identifying, qualifying and registering beneficiaries of reparations, and that the burden of proof rests with the body responsible for the registration;
- Design and implement a decentralised programme for victim participation and consultation, both in the identification phase and in the formulation of reparations measures and their implementation. To this end, build strategic alliances and action networks with civil society organisations and other community players;
- Mobilise resources and secure funding through traditional and innovative funding mechanisms, both for the institutional and operational structure and for reparation programmes and measures;
- Recognise children born of CRSV as direct victims entitled to child-centred, gender-sensitive, trauma-informed, age-appropriate reparation and guarantee their access to legal documentation and nationality.

### TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

- Provide emergency funding for survivors of CRSV to ensure access to medical, psychological, and legal support;
- Support the independent fact-finding mission established by the [UN Human Rights Council](#) to document human rights violations in North and South Kivu;
- Encourage regional diplomatic efforts to prevent further escalation of violence and ensure accountability for crimes committed in 2025;
- Work towards the establishment of a comprehensive transitional justice strategy;
- Provide logistical, financial, and technical support to strengthen the judicial system and reform the justice sector;
- Support the FONAREV in establishing a programme for victims participation and consultation, along with a decentralised implementation process, in partnership with local civil society actors.

## **TO NATIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY**

- Continue documenting cases of CRSV and advocating for survivor-centred justice mechanisms;
- Strengthen community-led initiatives to support displaced survivors, particularly in regions where international presence has diminished;
- Systematically, critically and constructively monitor government progress in the light of international obligations and standards;
- Develop awareness-raising and support initiatives for survivors to facilitate their access to judicial and administrative reparations;
- Promote and collaborate in the participation and consultation of survivors throughout the process of approval, identification, and implementation of comprehensive reparations policies.



This country briefing is an excerpt from the Democratic Republic of the Congo Study on the status of and opportunities for reparations for survivors of conflict-related violence. To read the full report, please scan this QR code.

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