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Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment in Times of Crisis: Insights Shared at the 2023 FROGEE Conference

On October 19-20, 2023, the International School of Economics at Tbilisi State University Policy Institute (ISET Policy Institute), in partnership with the Forum for Research on Gender Economics (FROGEE), organized the conference “**Gender Equality and Women's Economic Empowerment in Times of Crisis**”. The conference addressed critical issues surrounding gender equality and women's economic empowerment. By bringing together academics and practitioners from various sectors it served as a dynamic platform for knowledge sharing and collaboration on actionable solutions and commitments to address multifaceted challenges faced by women globally. This policy brief outlines the keynote, academic and other presentations and discussions featured at the conference.



Introduction

Gender equality and women's economic empowerment are vital issues that have gained increasing global attention in recent years. Their significance is even more pronounced in times of crisis, such as during economic downturns or global health emergencies. Such challenging circumstances often exacerbate existing gender disparities and vulnerabilities, making it crucial to address the specific challenges women face in accessing economic opportunities and resources. Discussions on these matters delve into the complex intersection of gender equality and economic empowerment and how empowering women economically can contribute to more resilient and equitable societies.

The October 19-20 conference was aimed at examining and addressing the various aspects of gender equality and female empowerment. The conference began with opening introductions by Tamar Sulukhia, Eva Atterlöv and Kaori Ishikawa (see the participant list at the end for all associations). Following the opening remarks were two distinctive keynote presentations, a policy panel discussion, and academic presentations. This policy brief summarizes the key takeaways from the conference.

Keynote Addresses

The conference's first keynote speaker, Elizabeth Brainerd, deliberated on the impact of World War II on marriage and fertility among Russian women. Brainerd shows that the war affected these women's lives for decades, leading to lower rates of marriage and fertility and higher out-of-wedlock births and divorce rates in urban areas than would have been the case in absence of the war. These effects were likely exacerbated by a war and post-war institutional environment that encouraged nonmarital births (in part by expanding the child benefit program) and increased the cost of binding commitments through marriage, particularly for men (absolving

fathers of any financial or legal responsibility for children fathered outside marriage). As shown by Brainerd the shock to sex ratios in the Soviet Union due to World War II was among the largest experienced by any country in the twentieth century. In this sense, the effect on Russian women and men was unique and arguably not directly relevant to other countries or time periods. Yet, highly unbalanced sex ratios characterize many populations – whether due to war, immigration and emigration, or preferences for sons etc., – and the analysis can therefore shed light on the effects of sex ratio imbalance also in other contexts. Brainerd's work supports the conclusion that sex ratios matter for marital and fertility outcomes, both on the marriage market itself and within marriage. The insights from the Soviet Union also highlights that the institutional context matters for determining both the size and direction of the sex ratio's impact on marriage markets and family formations.

In the conference's second keynote presentation, Maria Floro discussed the findings from a time-allocation survey in Georgia. Evident from the results, women's work differs from men's in the sense that women more often perform unpaid household tasks, and since they are primarily responsible for household and caregiving duties, including childcare and elderly care. Such combined responsibilities, coupled with working in typically low-paid jobs can negatively affect women's physical and mental wellbeing. As the data shows, 66 percent of Georgia's population engage in unpaid domestic work, with women (88.3 percent) and men (39.6 percent) participating at starkly different rates. Rural women's participation is the highest, at 90.3 percent. On average, the Georgian population spends 2.1 hours per day on unpaid domestic services for household and family members – with a large gender disparity. In general, the time spent per day by men is 0.7 hours while, in contrast, the time spent by women on these activities is 5 times higher in rural areas (3.6 hours) and 4.7 times higher in urban areas (3.2 hours). Women working



full time spend 2.7 hours per day on unpaid domestic services, five times higher than the 0.5 hours spent by men working full time. For all areas of residence, the time spent on unpaid domestic services by women increases with age up until 64 years of age when the numbers drop. Further, women's time spent on unpaid caregiving work (0.9 hours per day) is 4.5 times higher than the time spent by men. Even for full time working women, the daily time spent on unpaid caregiving work (0.6 hours) is three times higher than that of their male counterparts (0.2 hours). Women who have completed a higher level of education spend higher time on unpaid caregiving services (0.9-1.1 hours per day) than those with a lower level of education (0.4-0.7 hours per day). The difference in women's and men's time spent on unpaid caregiving work is greatest for Georgians aged 25-44. Such unequal sharing of household and caregiving responsibilities limits women's job prospects and is a major reason behind their low participation rate in the labor force, as well as the gender pay gap.

The South Caucasus Gender Equality Index

Following the keynote presentations, Davit Keshelava, presented the ISET Policy Institute's most recent work on the **South Caucasus Gender Equality Index (SCGEI)**. The index, developed by ISET Policy Institute in close collaboration with Swiss Cooperation Office in Georgia and updated on an annual basis, draws inspiration from the European Institute for Gender Equality's Gender Equality Index. It comprises of six domains: work, money, knowledge, time, power, and health, alongside eleven subdomains and nineteen indicators.

The index is calculated for three South Caucasus countries, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and nine benchmark countries: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia. The 2023 edition, mainly based on data from 2021-2022, reveals that

within the South Caucasus Armenia is ahead concerning gender equality in the work domain, while Georgia trails behind its regional counterparts. Gender equality in the work domain is lower in the South Caucasus (64.0) than in the baseline countries (67.3).

Georgia stands out as the South Caucasus leader in gender equality within the money domain but significantly trails the baseline countries (South Caucasus – 51.1 vs. baseline countries – 80.5). This discrepancy is the most prominent across all six domains. Azerbaijan leads in the knowledge domain (with Armenia displaying the greatest inequality), yet the South Caucasus slightly outpaces baseline countries in this domain (South Caucasus – 59 and baseline countries – 58.8). This is however the sole equality domain where the South Caucasus surpasses the benchmark countries.

Georgia and Armenia exhibit higher equality in the power domain than Azerbaijan while, in the time domain, Georgia takes the lead in the South Caucasus. In the health domain, Armenia leads in equality, although the difference in index values is marginal.

In the overall index, Georgia emerges as the regional leader in gender equality (60.4), followed by Armenia (57.5) and Azerbaijan (53.0). However, South Caucasus countries as a whole have a lower index (55.4) than the baseline countries (64.1).

Panel Discussion: Topics and Takeaways

The SCGEI presentation was followed by a policy panel discussion, moderated by Tamar Sulukhia and including the panelists Nino Okribelashvili, Nino Chelidze, Nani Bendeliani and Nino Lortkipanidze. The panelists discussed gender inequalities in different areas such as within academia and the tech industry as well as the role of women during crises and the progress made in Georgia towards ensuring gender equality.



Nino Okribelashvili deliberated on the role of women in academia emphasizing that gender inequalities in higher education attainment become obvious when looking at the representation of women across different fields of science. The share of women in subjects such as social work, education and nursing is more than 80 percent, while it is 20 percent in subjects such as computer science, electrical engineering and mechanical engineering. Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) oriented institutions are still generally perceived as male dominated. The second glaring gap concerns the representativeness of women in higher rank and leadership positions in academia, where women remain underrepresented in academic and professorial positions across all subjects.

While Nino Okribelashvili discussed the role of women in academia in general, Nino Lortkipanidze focused specifically on the tech industry. She discussed the industry's potential to create job opportunities for women through various strategies and initiatives such as STEM education and training, diverse hiring practices, leadership development and flexible work policies – including remote work possibilities. Lortkipanidze emphasized that with the right support and opportunities, the rapidly growing tech industry could allow working mothers to thrive in their careers while also enjoying the advantages of a family-friendly work environment.

Shifting the focus to women in times of crisis, Nino Chelidze emphasized the aggravated impact of war on women using the example of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Chelidze highlighted the need for urgent, coordinated action from the donor community to address the challenges of internally displaced persons, most of whom are women and children.

The panel discussion wrapped up with Nani Bendeliani highlighting Georgia's advancements in gender equality and female empowerment over the past three decades. Bendeliani mentioned different institutional mechanisms adopted in the

country for the advancement of women alongside legislative initiatives implemented in different areas concerning for instance maternity and paternity leave, changes to the labor code and the election code. According to Bendeliani, the progress towards gender equality is visible but slow, with available data and multiple assessments showing there is still much to be done.

Academic Presentations

The remainder of the conference was comprised of several academic sessions all contributing to the overall theme of multifaceted gender-related issues. The topics, as detailed below, were: gender disparities in the labor market, violence against women, gender dynamics during the Covid-19 pandemic, the gender divide in education, women in academia and female empowerment and access to services.

Gender Disparities on the Labor Market

The presenters focused on gender disparities on the labor market, exploring aspects such as the implications of labor protection regulations on both men and women, biases and discrimination in employment and wage negotiation, and the impact of female labor force participation on the advancement of women's rights.

In his presentation, Michal Myck outlined the consequences of labor protection policies in Poland for employees within four years of retirement (regulation that protects them against layoffs, a lowering of their wages or adjustment of their responsibilities). Preliminary results indicate no economically or statistically significant adverse impacts on the employment of men and women approaching labor protection eligibility. These findings suggest that either the anticipated negative effects are absent, or that any concerns employers may have harbored regarding prospective employment protection were counteracted by robust labor demand during the reform period. The general conclusion is that



extending protection to specific groups of workers, both men and women, does not necessarily lead to the adverse outcomes often highlighted in standard economic theory.

While Michal Myck focused on labor protection regulations, Francisco Lagos addressed the topic of weight-related employment discrimination and its impact on hiring outcomes. In an experiment, job applications accompanied either by a facial photo of a normal-weight person or by a photo of the same person manipulated to look overweight were sent out to real job opening across 12 occupations in Spain. The results reveal a significant disparity in callback rates for weight-manipulated male applicants, who received fewer callbacks compared to their normal-weight counterparts, with a more pronounced effect in female-dominated occupations. Conversely, weight-manipulated female applicants experienced a slight increase in callbacks, particularly in female-dominated fields. For men, the weight manipulation effect is attributed to the overweight making them appear less attractive, which translates into an attractiveness wage premium. On the contrary the findings for women suggest evidence of an attractiveness penalty, which is also combined with a weight penalty.

The topics of discrimination and biases were also central to Ramon Cobo Reyes Cano's presentation, which outlined the results of a field experiment on anticipated discrimination and wage negotiation. The findings show that female applicants ask for a lower salary than male applicants in the baseline treatment group – when the full name of the applicant is visible. In the main treatment group, when the gender of the applicant was no longer visible to the employer, the wage requested by female applicants increased by 86 percent, whereas male applicants' wage requests were 18 percent lower. Evidently, the gender gap in requested wages completely disappears (and even slightly reverses) when the applicants know that their sex is not visible for the potential employer.

The presentations on gender inequalities in the labor market were concluded by Nisar Ahmad,

who empirically investigate the impact of women's labor force participation on women's rights. In general, female labor force participation has a positive effect on women's rights in countries with at least some legal economic rights for women. In countries where women's rights are extremely limited or non-existent, female labor force participation has a negative or negligible impact on women's rights.

Violence Against Women

In the academic session devoted to violence against women, the presenters elaborated on the primary factors influencing such violence in various countries at different time periods, including during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Monika Oczkowska explores how social norms, values, and stereotypes determine beliefs about abuse, including recognition of abuse, what is considered as abuse, whether abuse is ever justified, and societal consent towards gender-based discrimination. In countries where gender inequality is rampant, reported rates of abuse in standard surveys are sensitive to the socio-economic status and beliefs about gender norms of the participants, highlighting a high scale of variation in the perception of gender-based discrimination in Central and Eastern Europe.

These findings are in line with the results presented by Salome Gelashvili, who consider potential determinants of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Caucasus. According to the research, key factors contributing to GBV in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia include alcohol abuse, social stigma, being a member of a marginalized groups, a pervasive patriarchal culture, adherence to traditional gender roles, a high level of bureaucracy when reporting GBV to the police, generally weak legal support, limited awareness about various forms of GBV, and economic factors such as financial dependence on an abusive partner.

Similar outcomes, but with more emphasis put on norms and the patriarchal system, were found by



Reina Shehi, who assesses gender-based violence in Albania. The results show that the patriarchal system and gender-based norms are the two main factors contributing to gender-based violence. However, there is a growing awareness of the importance of patriarchal institutions and gender norms when addressing GBV in Albania.

Violence against women increase in times of crisis, as shown by Velan Nirmala, who studies women's empowerment and intimate partner violence (IPV) in India. The findings reveal that, regardless of socio-economic factors, the main types of IPV during the Covid-19 lockdown were physical and emotional violence. The results also highlight that a large majority of victims, regardless of education, wealth, region, household structure, religion, and caste, do not disclose the abuse due to societal taboos.

Gender Dynamics During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The unequal effect from the Covid-19 pandemic was further examined in an academic session in which the presenters keyed in on repercussions of the pandemic on women in terms of employment outcomes, decisions related to time allocation, and the division of unpaid household labor.

Nabamita Dutta presented work on gender inequality in employment during Covid-19 related lockdowns in India. The results show that during the pandemic, women were, in general, 8 percent less likely to be employed than men. While return migrants generally suffered less in terms of finding alternative jobs, being a female return migrant, increased the probability of joblessness to about 17 percent. For female return migrants belonging to marginalized castes, the probability of joblessness was about 10 percent, an interesting result considering that women belonging to marginalized castes (but not being return migrants) experience a higher likelihood of being unemployed than women that are not part of marginalized castes.

Anne Devlin further elaborated on this topic, assessing the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on people living in disadvantaged areas in Ireland. The results indicate that Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP) rates were higher in more deprived areas during lockdown periods and that women, on average, receive PUP for a slightly longer duration than men. Further, female unemployment has a negative and statistically significant relationship with the length of PUP claims. The findings show that average PUP durations tend to be shorter in areas with a higher share of individuals with lower education levels, and in areas with historically higher levels of female unemployment.

Jacklyn Makaaru Arinaitwe presented work on how gender, culture, norms, and practices contributed to the unequal distribution of unpaid care work during Covid-19 in Uganda. The findings reveal that there are policy gaps in addressing the issue, as current policies don't acknowledge the value of unpaid care work at a personal and national level. This lack of recognition and failure to come up with new ways to reduce or share women's disproportionate burden of unpaid care work creates obstacles to girls' education and hinder women's economic empowerment in Uganda.

Also, on the topic of the Covid-19 pandemic impacts on women, Alessandro Toppeta presented work on the impacts of the pandemic on the role of parental beliefs in England. The results show that parents believe that the time they spend with their children is more valuable and less risky than the time children spend in formal childcare or with friends and that parents' beliefs can predict the choices they make in investing time with their children. Further, the findings align with previous indications of the increased burden on women's time experienced during the pandemic being a consequence of limited availability of alternative childcare options.



The Gender Divide in Education

Within the topic of gender in education, the presenters delved into the connection between education and gender roles and the importance of parental education for children's education.

Sumit S. Deole presented work on the causal impact of education on gender role attitudes based on evidence from European datasets. The results suggest that an additional year of education prompts egalitarian gender role attitudes. Furthermore, the impact of increases in education is particularly prominent among women and, to some extent, in urban areas.

Fethiye Burcu Türkmen-Ceylan focus specifically on the importance of maternal education for children's education in Turkey. Preliminary results indicate that maternal education has a distinctive positive impact on households' budget allocation for children's education among Turkish households.

Saumya Kumar also presented work on the importance of maternal education, considering the impacts of paternal education as well. The presented research finds that both maternal and paternal education reduce the gender gap in educational enrollment. However, having an educated mother is more important when it comes to increasing girls' enrollment as compared to boys' enrollment. The research also indicates that as mothers' education levels rise, there is a greater increase in spendings on education for both boys and girls.

Further on the gender divide within education, Lubna Naz deliberated on how drought affects school attendance in rural Pakistan. The income decline caused by drought leads to a four-month decrease in schooling for all children, and a six-month decrease for boys. Asset ownership also has a negative impact on school attendance, suggesting a possible reverse causality or **Simpson's paradox**. The combined effect of asset ownership and drought, however, has a positive impact on school attendance, Naz concluded.

Women in Academia

Gender inequalities are apparent also in the academic sphere. Liis Roosaar's research looks into the impact of having children on women's careers within academia. Roosaar find that becoming a mother doesn't impact earnings per hour, but that mother's do work fewer hours. More than four years after having a child, women in academia have lost the equivalent of two years of full-time work. Interestingly, men don't face the same reduction in work hours after becoming fathers. The study also reveals that the career setback for women in academia after having a child is shorter compared to the general population. However, female academics experience a decline in citations as a consequence of the reduced working hours.

Barbara Będowska-Sójka's research on women in academia focus on female representation on editorial boards of finance journals. According to Będowska-Sójka women account for 20 percent of all editors on average, with considerable variance between countries. When it comes to editor's affiliations they are strongly concentrated in the United States, and to a lesser extent in the United Kingdom. Additionally, a small number of extremely well-connected editors sit on many boards. The gender ratio is consistent in substructures for editors that are better connected (have so-called a high degree of centrality in terms of network analysis) or editors who serve on a large number of boards, yet men outnumber women.

Female Empowerment and Access to Services

Although their research focuses on distinct topics, Fazle Rabbi and Ulrich Wohak both presented research on the overarching theme of women's empowerment and enhanced access to goods and services.

In his paper, Fazle Rabbi and his co-authors consider a new way to support marginalized individuals, most of whom are women, through



the introduction of a new donation model where development agencies provide goats to project beneficiaries. Goat ownership might help beneficiaries generate income and devote more time to education. The research results show that the proposed donation model significantly enhances the economic empowerment of participants, providing them a steady income, better access to education, and more access to the financial system – with the results being more pronounced for women.

Ulrich Wohak evaluated tampon tax reforms (efforts to reduce the taxation of menstrual hygiene products, including tampons, pads, and menstrual cups) as a means to address gender-based tax discrimination. Using transaction-level scanner data, the study finds that when countries lower their standard VAT rates, the extent to which these reductions are passed on to consumers ranges from 57 percent to 119 percent.

Concluding Remarks

The ISET conference “Gender Equality and Women’s Economic Empowerment in Time of Crisis” brought together diverse voices, perspectives, and expertise from various sectors to engage in discussions and knowledge sharing on how to advance gender equality in times of normality and in times of crises. The conference also served as a platform to inspire actionable solutions and commitments to address the multifaceted challenges women face worldwide.

List of Participants

Alessandro Toppeta - Assistant Professor at SOFI, Stockholm University, Sweden. “Parental Beliefs, Perceived Health Risks, and Time Investment in Children: Evidence from COVID-19” (in collaboration with Gabriella Conti and Michele Giannola).

Anne Devlin - Research Fellow, Economic and Social Research Institute, Ireland. “The Impact of COVID-19 on Women’s Employment in Ireland” (in collaboration with Adele Whelan, Seamus McGuinness, Paul Redmond).

Aswathi Rebecca Asok - PhD Fellow, University of Portsmouth, United Kingdom. “Unveiling Gendered Dimensions of “Volunteerism”: The COVID-19 Story of Kerala, India”.

Barbara Będowska-Sójka - Head of Department, Poznań University of Economics and Business, Poland. “Editorial boards of finance journals: the gender gap and social networks” (in collaboration with Claudia Tarantola, C., Mare, C., Ozturkkal, B., Paccagnini, A., Perri, R., Pisoni, G., Shala, A., Skaftadóttir, H., K.).

Davit Keshelava - Lead Economist, ISET Policy Institute.

Elizabeth Brainerd - Susan and Barton Winokur Professor of Economics and Women’s, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Brandeis University.

Eva Atterlöv - Deputy Head of Development Cooperation, Embassy of Sweden.

Fazle Rabbi - Deputy Head of School of Business, Crown Institute of Higher Education, Australia. “From Goats to Education: An Innovative Approach to Community Empowerment” (in collaboration with Laurel Jackson and Zahid Hasan).

Fethiye Burcu Türkmen-Ceylan - Research Fellow, Ahi Evran University, Turkey. “Educate a Woman, And You Educate a Generation: How Does Maternal Education Affect Intro Household Resource Allocation for Education among the Children?” (in collaboration with Ulucan, H., Çakmak, S.).

Francisco Lagos - Professor of Economics, Georgetown University, USA. “Weight, Attractiveness, and Gender when Hiring: a Field Experiment in Spain” (in collaboration with Catarina Goulão, Juan Antonio Lacomba, and Dan-Olof Rooth).

Jacklyn Makaanu Arinaitwe - Director, Ace Policy Research Institute, Uganda. “Gender, culture, norms, and practices that promote gender gaps in the allocation of time to unpaid domestic work in the context of COVID-19 in Uganda” (in collaboration with Twinomugisha David).

Kaori Ishikawa - UN Women Country Representative to Georgia.

Liis Roosaar - Lecturer at the Chair of Economic Modelling, University of Tartu, Estonia. “Child penalty in academia: Event study estimate” (in collaboration with Jaan Masso, Jaanika Meriküll, Kärt Rõigas, and Tiiu Paas).

Lubna Naz - Associate Professor, Institute of Business Administration, Pakistan. “Left High and Dry: Gendered impacts of Drought on school attainment in Rural Pakistan”.

Maria Floro - Professor Emerita Economics, American University in Washington, DC.

Michał Myck - Director, Centre for Economic Analysis (CenEA), Poland. “Pre-retirement employment protection: no harm when times are good” (in collaboration with Paweł Chrostek, and Krzysztof Karbownik).

Monika Oczkowska - Senior Research Economist, CenEA, Poland. “Patterns of harassment and violence against women in Central and Eastern Europe. The role of the socio-economic context and gender norms in international comparisons” (in collaboration with Kajetan Trzcinski and Michał Myck).



Nabamita Dutta - Professor of Economics, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse, USA. "Lockdown and Rural Joblessness in India: Gender Inequality in Employment?" (in collaboration with Kar, S.).

Nani Bendeliani - Project Analyst, UN Women Georgia.

Nino Chelidze - Program Director of Women's Initiative for Security and Equity at Mercy Corps.

Nino Lortkipanidze - Women in Tech Ambassador for Georgia and Chief Innovation Officer at The Crossroads.

Nino Okribelashvili - Vice Rector for Research at Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

Ramon Cobo Reyes Cano - Professor of Economics, Georgetown University, USA. "Anticipated Discrimination and Wage Negotiation: A Field Experiment" (in collaboration with Gary Charness and Simone Meraglia).

Reina Shehi - Primary Appointment Lecturer, Epoka University, Albania. "Patterns of Geographic Gender-Based Violence in Albania" (in collaboration with Endi Tirana and Ajsela Toci).

Salome Gelashvili - Lead Economist, ISET Policy Institute, Georgia. "Gender-based violence in the South Caucasus" (in

collaboration with Lobjanidze, G., Seturidze, E., Shubitidze I.).

Saumya Kumar - Assistant Professor (Economics), University of Delhi, India. "Gender Differential in Parental Investment in Education: A Study of the Factors Determining Children's and Adolescents' Educational Investment in India" (in collaboration with Jawaharlal Nehru).

Sumit S. Deole - Scientific Assistant, Trier University, Germany. "The Causal Impact of Education on Gender Role Attitudes: Evidence from European Datasets" (in collaboration with Zeydanli, T.).

Tamar Sulukhia - Director ISET and ISET Policy Institute.

Ulrich Wohak - Teaching and Research Associate, Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria. "Free the Period? Evaluating Tampon Tax Reforms using Transaction-Level Scanner Data" (in collaboration with Kinnl, K.).

Velan Nirmala - Professor of Economics, Pondicherry University, India. "Women Empowerment and Intimate Partner Violence in India" (in collaboration with Lusome, R.).





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Mariam Lobjanidze joined the ISET Policy Institute in September 2018, where she is currently the Deputy Practice Head of Macroeconomic Policy. She received her Master's Degree in Economics from ISET. Since 2020, she has been working on elaborating the gender impact assessment (GIA) methodology for Georgia, conducting GIA together with Georgian ministries, and delivering Gender Impact Assessment Trainings. Her research interests include: Labour Markets, Gender Economics and Social Issues, Social Policy, Energy Security, and Climate Change.

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