

**Spotlight on the Global
Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
Thematic Fund**

2025



Cover: In the Assayta refugee camp where she lives, 9-year-old Eritrean Asiya dreams of becoming a doctor. However, in the drought-stricken Afar region of north-eastern Ethiopia, water scarcity and loss of livelihoods are threatening the future of girls who are increasingly forced into child marriage.

UNICEF works across 12 of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to bring about positive change for children. The Global Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Thematic Fund makes vital contributions to SDG 6: Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all.

1. UNICEF's Global WASH Thematic Fund: Ensuring safe water and good hygiene to keep children alive

Clean water, safe sanitation and good hygiene are foundational to every child's survival, health, dignity and opportunity. Yet for millions of children, these basic rights remain out of reach, especially in fragile, underfunded and climate-vulnerable settings.

In 2025, the world was reminded how fragile WASH progress can be. Climate shocks, protracted conflict, disease outbreaks and a sharp contraction in humanitarian funding converged to place unprecedented pressure on already stretched water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) systems worldwide. Approximately 2.1 billion people still lack safely managed drinking water, 3.4 billion lack safely managed sanitation, and 1.7 billion remain without basic handwashing facilities. Nearly one billion children live in areas of significant water stress, and recent global analyses describe a world entering an era of "water bankruptcy," in which overuse, pollution and climate impacts have pushed many freshwater systems beyond sustainable limits.

When water flows, progress follows. Reliable WASH services keep children healthy and in school, empower women and girls, reduce disease risks, strengthen entire health systems, and help communities withstand climate shocks. They also unlock broader social and economic gains, from improved learning and productivity to stronger public systems and more resilient communities.

"Flexible thematic funding is one of UNICEF's most powerful instruments for transforming WASH systems. It allows us to respond where needs are greatest, invest in long-term solutions, strengthen national capacity, and build resilience to climate and other shocks. More than funding projects, it enables us to create the conditions for lasting change – so every child, everywhere, can realize their right to safe water, sanitation and hygiene."

Evariste Kouassi Komlan, Director, WASH, UNICEF



That is why UNICEF's WASH work is not just about delivering services; it is about helping governments and partners build inclusive, climate- resilient communities and systems that last. The Global WASH Thematic Fund is one of UNICEF's most strategic financing instruments for this purpose – delivering impact at scale and powering long-term, inclusive and climate-resilient WASH solutions wherever they are needed most.

Flexible funding is what makes this possible. Unlike tightly earmarked resources, thematic funding allows UNICEF to adapt to emerging country priorities, test and scale innovation, generate evidence, strengthen institutions and build systems required for long-term impact.

2. Financial results

Investment catalysing progress for generations

Across decades of work, governments, households and long-term partner commitments have driven some of the greatest gains in global WASH – helping countries deliver inclusive, resilient and sustainable solutions that reach every child, everywhere.

In 2025, the Global WASH Thematic Fund mobilized US\$8.7 million in contributions from committed public and private partners – an increase from US\$7.1 million in 2024. While the increase in 2025 contributions is encouraging, it should be viewed against the broader performance of the Fund across the Strategic Plan period. Total contributions to the Global WASH Thematic Fund during the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan amounted to

2025 marked the final year of UNICEF's Strategic Plan 2022–2025 and amidst transitions to the 2026–2029 Strategic Plan and a strengthened Global WASH Practice, the Global WASH Thematic Fund remains central to UNICEF's ambition: a world where every child has access to safe, sustainable and climate-resilient WASH services, and where no community is left behind.



US\$31.6 million, compared with US\$114.4 million during the 2018–2021 Strategic Plan period. This represents a significant contraction in flexible thematic support and a notable challenge for UNICEF's ability to sustain catalytic, long-term WASH investments at the scale required.

UNICEF extends its sincere appreciation to the Governments of Sweden and Luxembourg, and to our private sector partners, including National Committees for UNICEF, for their vital contributions to the Fund. These flexible, catalytic investments enable UNICEF to help meet urgent needs today while building public systems that will safeguard children's health, safety and dignity for generations to come.

The path to universal WASH access is urgent and ambitious, but achievable. With the continued support of our partners, UNICEF is helping governments move beyond fragmented interventions towards stronger systems, smarter investments and lasting results – one community, one system and one child at a time.

WASH Global Thematic Fund Pool, Contributions Received in US\$, 2025

Resource Partner	Donor	Contributions Received
Public Sector	Sweden	6.7 million
	Luxembourg	0.78 million
Private Sector	Spanish Committee for UNICEF	0.36 million
	Canadian UNICEF Committee	0.33 million
	Belgian Committee for UNICEF	0.13 million
	German Committee for UNICEF	0.11 million
	United States Fund for UNICEF	0.08 million
	Portuguese Committee for UNICEF	0.07 million
	Slovenian Foundation for UNICEF	0.04 million
	Danish Committee for UNICEF	0.02 million
	Korean Committee for UNICEF	0.02 million
Grand Total		8.73 million

Note: Numbers may not add up due to rounding.

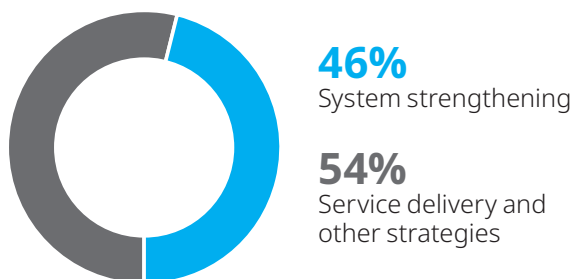
Why flexible funding matters

The value of the Global WASH Thematic Fund lies not only in the resources it provides, but in the flexibility it enables. With flexible, multi-year funding invested over the four-year period of UNICEF's Strategic Plan (2022–2025), UNICEF adapted to country needs, scaled effective interventions and invested in the systems that make WASH access sustainable and equitable. This flexibility is vital. It enabled UNICEF to go beyond project-based delivery and help build national systems that last.

In 2025, UNICEF spent US\$5.3 million in flexible thematic funding from the Fund, reaching 85 countries, with the greatest share of expenses in West and Central Africa. These resources helped UNICEF sustain support across country, regional and global levels, ensuring that technical expertise, evidence, innovation and catalytic investments reached the places where they could unlock the greatest impact.

Across UNICEF's overall WASH programming in 2025 (US\$953 million in total expenditure across more than 100 countries), 26 per cent was invested in systems strengthening (Result Area 2) and 74 per cent in direct service delivery (Result Area 1). This balance reflects the dual mandate UNICEF carries; delivering life-saving WASH services today while strengthening the systems that will sustain progress tomorrow. Looking ahead, UNICEF will continue to increase the strategic focus thematic funding on systems strengthening, climate resilience and sustainable financing.

UNICEF expense by programme strategy, 2025



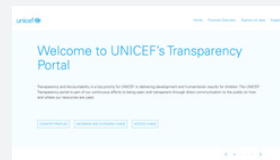
A call to scale what works

Achieving SDG 6 – universal access to clean water and sanitation – is not a distant aspiration. It is an urgent and achievable imperative. But it will not be accomplished through infrastructure alone. Lasting progress requires stronger systems: institutions that can plan and finance services, workforces that can maintain them, data that can guide investment, and communities that can sustain healthy behaviours.

The Global WASH Thematic Fund is UNICEF's most strategic financing vehicle for enabling this shift. It helps countries strengthen climate-resilient WASH solutions, advances equity and helps governments build inclusive, shock-resistant WASH systems that reach the most vulnerable and endure over time.

These are not short-term projects. They are transformative investments in children's survival, health, dignity and learning that continue to deliver results long after individual funding cycle end.

We invite more partners to join us. With flexible, long-term support, we can scale what works, close the access gap and help build a future where every child grows up safe, healthy and with quality access to water, hygiene and sanitation services.



The UNICEF's Transparency Portal

UNICEF has a strong financial transparency record, including for thematic funding. We encourage UNICEF partners to the Global Child Protection Thematic Fund to visit the [Transparency Portal](#) and access real-time information on spending in the countries receiving funds.



Afghanistan
Latrines in Khas Kunar Camp, Kunar province, a camp for people displaced by the earthquake in Kunar province.

3. The global footprint of the Global WASH Thematic Fund

Catalytic support across all levels

The Global WASH Thematic Fund spans across all seven UNICEF regions, delivering catalytic support through an interconnected model that links country implementation, regional expertise and global technical leadership:

- At **country level**: Investments support governments expand WASH services, strengthen national systems and reach communities facing the greatest barriers. In 2025, the Fund allocated resources to 16 countries.
- At **regional level**: Investments support technical guidance, quality assurance, coordination and cross-country learning, helping promising practices move from pilots to scale. West and Central Africa recorded the greatest share of 2025 Thematic Fund expenses.
- At **global level**: Investments support UNICEF's technical leadership in generating evidence, tools, standards and guidance that drive impact across the entire WASH portfolio and benefit children worldwide.

Together, these three levels create a multiplier effect enabling UNICEF to drive sustainable, system-wide improvements in access to WASH services.

The **Global Thematic Fund for WASH** contributed to:



Over **33 million people** gaining access to safe water that is available when and where it is needed



More than **18 million people** gaining access to basic sanitation services



Over **19 million people** gaining access to basic hygiene



Uganda

Women using buckets provided by UNICEF for laundry and washing dishes at the Bunambutye Resettlement Centre. Devastating landslides hit Bulambuli District in Eastern Uganda following heavy rainfalls, claiming lives and displacing hundreds. Survivors and the displaced are currently relocated to a primary school within Bunambutye Resettlement Centre. UNICEF is supporting the affected families by providing temporary shelters, medical supplies and sanitation services.

WASH Global Thematic Fund Pool, Top Allocations by Country, 2025

1 Liberia \$166,302

UNICEF supported climate-resilient WASH planning through the development of the WASH Development Plan 2026–2030, the establishment of a national WASH Policy Framework, the updating of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and the development of a Climate Rationale for WASH.

2 Benin \$142,150

UNICEF supported the development of a WASH finance strategy, a costed roadmap for universal WASH coverage, and a Green Climate Fund (GCF) Readiness project approved in 2025, helping strengthen climate-resilient WASH planning and investment.

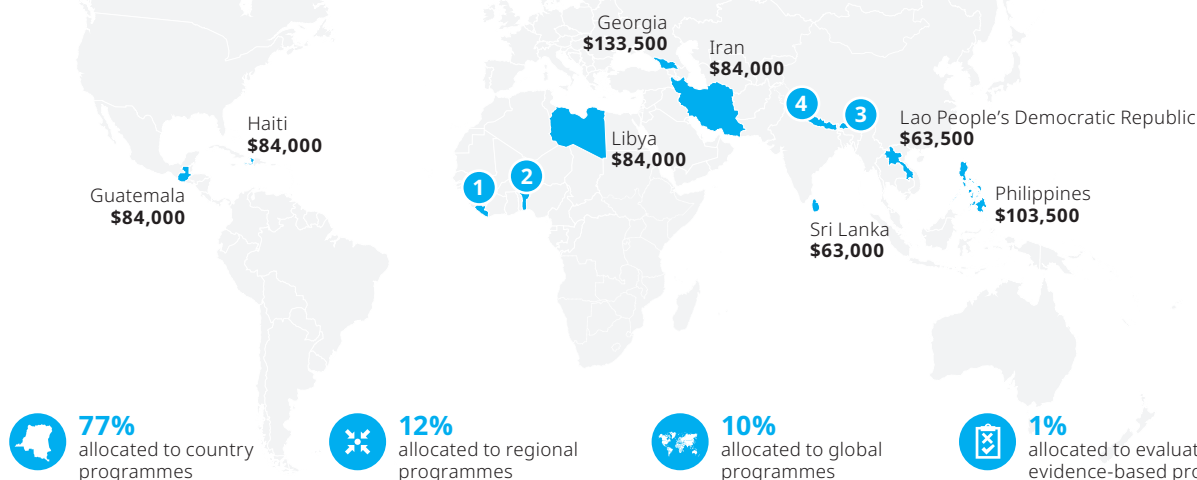
3 Bhutan \$129,550

UNICEF supported the revision of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), to better recognise climate risks to WASH services, while engaging young people in integrating climate change into WASH initiatives.

4 Nepal \$68,000

At the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development, Nepal officially joined the Head of State Initiative, reaffirming WASH as a fundamental right and demonstrating strong political commitment to accelerating universal WASH access through sustained investment in infrastructure, institutional capacity and systems.

 **87 countries**
supported by the Fund
since 2022



 **77%**
allocated to country
programmes

 **12%**
allocated to regional
programmes

 **10%**
allocated to global
programmes

 **1%**
allocated to evaluation for
evidence-based programmes

COUNTRY-LEVEL ALLOCATION CRITERIA

Strengthening national child protection systems, including justice systems and civil registration

Prioritizing services that protect children from harm

Closing resource gaps for child protection in high-burden contexts

Note: This map displays the countries having received the largest allocations from this GTF pool in 2025, as well as in the fourth quarter of 2024. The total allocated amount displayed includes all country allocations from this GTF pool during the same period.



Haiti

Noel-Dina, 11, washes her hands with help from her mother after using the toilet. When cholera struck their neighborhood, young Noel-Dina fell seriously ill. Her mother, Oriata, did everything she could to save her. Through awareness campaigns, Oriata learned that the lack of latrines was contributing to the spread of the disease. Using whatever resources she had, she built one to protect her daughter.

4. From programmes to policies: A systems shift in WASH

The scale of unmet WASH needs remains vast, but so does UNICEF's ambition. Across regions, the Global WASH Thematic Fund is helping drive a paradigm shift: from fragmented service delivery to strong, integrated systems that position WASH as central to child survival, health, learning, gender equality and climate resilience.

UNICEF's systems-strengthening approach focuses on the foundations required for services to last: skilled workforce, effective policies and legal frameworks, sustainable financing, reliable data and evidence, social and behaviour change, and resilient infrastructure for service delivery. Together these building blocks enable countries not only to expand access, but to sustain quality service over time.

In 2025, flexible thematic funding played a catalytic role across UNICEF's global WASH portfolio. It helped UNICEF sustain technical leadership, support national priorities, deliver high-quality WASH services where they are needed most, from schools and health centres to the most remote and crisis-affected communities, and maintain momentum even as the sector faced severe funding contractions and unprecedented humanitarian need.

The following results demonstrate how Global WASH thematic funding, as part of UNICEF's broader WASH portfolio contributed to lasting change.

Infrastructure for service delivery

Robust WASH infrastructure is essential for protecting child health, advancing gender equity and enabling sustainable development. In 2025, UNICEF-supported programmes enabled 34.7 million people across 73 countries to gain access to safe water supply, bringing the cumulative Strategic Plan (2022–2025) total to 134.6 million people – more than double the original target. Of these, 9.9 million people gained access to the higher standard of safely managed water services, and 9.1 million were reached through climate-resilient approaches.

UNICEF also supported 5,761 schools in 87 countries to gain access to a full complement of WASH services in 2025, bringing the cumulative Strategic Plan total to 54,930 schools – surpassing the original target of 50,000. Cumulatively, over 20,700 health care facilities have been reached with basic WASH services, also exceeding target.

- In the **Philippines**, UNICEF's Climate-Resilient WASH in Schools initiative deepened youth engagement in climate action, reaching almost 5,000 children and adolescents through social and behaviour change strategies, with climate change and WASH concepts integrated into the school curriculum through self-learning modules.

Workforce development

Sustainable WASH services depend on the people who plan, operate, manage and maintain them. Behind every functioning water point, every hygienic school and every safe toilet is a skilled professional making it happen. In 2025, UNICEF continued to strengthen the sanitation, water and hygiene workforce across regions, professionalising services and improving working conditions along the entire service chain.

- In **Iran** and **Libya**, UNICEF and WHO delivered national WASH-FIT Training-of-Trainers workshops for health care facility staff – 40 environmental health experts across 25 provinces in Iran, and 25 Ministry of Health participants for Libya – as part of a wider MENA capacity-building push that trained around 200 professionals in climate-resilient WASH in health care facilities.

Legal and policy change

Strong WASH systems require more than pipes and pumps; they need policies, budgets, legal frameworks and accountability mechanisms that guarantee every child's right to clean water and hygiene. In 2025, a total of 50 countries met the triple criteria for a Climate Rationale for WASH – developing the rationale, articulating climate risks in national climate or WASH documents, and implementing or monitoring climate-resilient services – achieving the Strategic Plan target and a striking rise from a baseline of just 11 countries in 2021.

- In **Liberia**, UNICEF supported the development of the national WASH Development Plan (2026–2030) and establishment of a WASH Policy Framework that embeds climate-resilient planning into national strategy – one of the countries that developed a new Climate Rationale for WASH in 2025.
- In **Nepal**, UNICEF supported the development of national WASH plans and the revision of a technical manual integrating climate-resilient standards, water safety protocols, and gender- and disability-inclusive design.
- Through the Heads of State Initiative, **South Sudan** increased its annual WASH budget allocation fourteen-fold within a year of signing its Presidential Compact, and **Nepal** [2025 WASH GTF recipient country] became the newest country to join, reaffirming WASH as a constitutional right.

Social and behaviour change for lasting impact

Infrastructure alone does not guarantee sustained safe WASH; changed behaviour does. In 2025, UNICEF continued to combine local knowledge with scientific insight to break down barriers, shift social norms and foster environments where healthy WASH behaviours can flourish and endure. None of the source document's social and behaviour change vignettes could be confirmed as tied to one of the 10 named 2025 Fund-recipient countries; the examples below are broader sector illustrations.

- In **São Tomé and Príncipe**, Community-Led Total Sanitation (CLTS) contributed to the elimination of open defecation in 15 communities, benefiting 500 households, with the approach expanding to the Autonomous Region of Príncipe and to WASH improvements in 65 schools and 6 health facilities.
- In **Angola**, as a cholera outbreak affected nearly 30,000 people, community health promoters and a "Safe Back to School" campaign reached 113 schools and 173,333 children, including 84,102 girls, with handwashing stations, soap distribution and hygiene awareness.
- In **Kenya**, Global Handwashing Day celebrations across eight counties reached 1.37 million people with hygiene promotion messages through joint radio spots, social media, household visits and school events.
- On **menstrual health and hygiene**, UNICEF reached nearly 9 million women and adolescent girls in 90 countries in 2025 – bringing the cumulative Strategic Plan total to 46.3 million, well above the 40 million target – including through digital tools such as the Oky period-tracker app, used by more than 18,000 girls in Kyrgyzstan alone.

Data, research and evidence for WASH solutions

Reliable data, rigorous research and sound evidence are essential for strengthening WASH systems and delivering long-term results. In 2025, UNICEF deepened its investment in national monitoring systems and global analytics, moving the sector from measuring access alone toward tracking service quality, safety, functionality and resilience.

- In **Georgia**, UNICEF supported development of an electronic climate-resilient WASH monitoring tool, integrated into a nationwide IPC/WASH assessment of medical facilities.
- In **Nepal**, UNICEF supported important progress in institutionalising sustainability monitoring: the water-safe community sustainability check mechanism was introduced in eight additional municipalities, alongside approval of new Water Safe Community Guidelines and a review of National Water Quality Surveillance Guidelines.
- In **Lao People's Democratic Republic**, UNICEF supported the development of district WASH plans in four districts, alongside climate-resilient water safety planning training and support to WATSAN committees on tariffs, fee collection and fund management.
- In the **Philippines**, UNICEF supported the institutionalisation of a monitoring framework to ensure public WASH investments are assessed on climate-resilient outcomes, rather than physical completion alone.
- **Globally**, the WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme (JMP) and the GLAAS 2025 report – drawing on data from 105 countries and 21 development partners – continued to provide the evidence base underpinning national and global WASH policy and investment decisions.



Financing the future of WASH

Sustainable WASH systems require sustained, strategic financing. In 2025, 21 countries had developed and were implementing a costed, inclusive national WASH financing strategy meeting all five Strategic Plan criteria – more than double the baseline of 8 countries in 2021 – while 42 countries reported that UNICEF support had directly contributed to an increase in WASH sector funding.

- In **Guatemala** [2025 WASH GTF recipient country], UNICEF played a key role in leveraging US\$16 million for WASH municipal investments in the department of San Marcos, benefiting over 69,700 people across nine municipalities – one of the countries that also received a direct 2025 Thematic Fund Pool allocation.

Results that last

In 2025, strategic, catalytic, thematic funding contributed to the following achievements across UNICEF's WASH portfolio:

- **34.7 million people** gained access to safe water.
- Over **17 million people** gained access to at least basic sanitation services, with 94 per cent of beneficiaries in fragile contexts.
- **15.9 million people** gained access to basic hand hygiene services across 76 countries
- In humanitarian settings, **36.2 million people** were reached with safe drinking water and 7.1 million with emergency sanitation services in 2025, despite a historic humanitarian WASH funding shortfall.
- Nearly **9 million women and adolescent girls** were reached with menstrual health and hygiene support.

These are not just numbers. They represent healthier lives, restored dignity, safer learning environments and stronger communities. Every new connection to clean water or safe sanitation is part of a broader system transformation – one that will continue to deliver results for years to come, as UNICEF carries this work into its new Strategic Plan for 2026–2029.



**Flexible funding.
Direct reach.
Real results for children.**



Malawi

18-year-old Wisted Tembo, Mlambe Primary School, Chikwawa District, Southern Malawi, UNICEF Reticulated Solar Powered Water Taps Project Media Tour.

5. Impact story

Young Water Guardians: Students Leading Water Conservation in Iran

In Birjand, UNICEF supported efforts to promote responsible water use in schools through the “[Water-Guardians](#)” initiative. Working with the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Education and the Water and Wastewater Company, UNICEF helped upgrade school water taps, drinking fountains and restroom facilities, while also supporting the “Water for All, All for Water” educational campaign.

The campaign reached 700 students across three primary schools, engaging children as active participants in water conservation. At Sanders School, more than 340 Iranian and Afghan students took part in a Water Celebration, sharing stories, artwork and messages on responsible water use. The initiative helped students become agents of change in their schools, families and communities, with plans to expand the Water-Guardians initiative across more schools in 2025.

Women Strengthening Rural Water Systems in Nepal

UNICEF is supporting women to take on critical roles in maintaining rural water supply systems in [Nepal](#) through hands-on training in water supply maintenance, pipe fitting and system repairs. The training is delivered through the Joint Recovery Action Plan (JRAP), led by Nepal’s National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Authority (NDRRMA), supported by the UK’s Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), and implemented by UNICEF, IOM, UNFPA and WFP.

Following the training, Debikala successfully repaired faults in her village’s water supply system and began providing plumbing services to neighbouring households, creating a new source of income while improving access to safe drinking water. By building local technical capacity and empowering women in non-traditional roles, the programme is strengthening the sustainability and resilience of rural WASH services while helping communities maintain essential water systems.



Iran

UNICEF, in collaboration with the Ministry of Energy and WWC, aims to expand the Water-Guardians initiative in 2025, empowering more student volunteers to promote water conservation. The Water for All, All for Water campaign, reaching 5,000 students, culminated in a closing ceremony in February 2025, with high-level participation from government officials, UNICEF representatives and 400 students.

6. Hearing from our donors and partners

Sida-Sweden and UNICEF: Advancing resilient WASH systems for every child

UNICEF sincerely thanks the Government of Sweden for its steadfast commitment to children's rights as our leading WASH partner. In 2025, Sweden's contribution of US\$6.79 million accounted for more than three-quarters of all Global WASH Thematic Fund support – an even greater share than in 2024 – providing catalytic support to strengthen WASH systems, promote climate resilience and deliver sustainable services for children and communities worldwide.

Sida's investment remains strategically aligned with UNICEF's Strategic Plan, Goal Area 4 and SDG 6 – ensuring access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene for all, particularly in fragile, rural and underserved contexts. As UNICEF concludes the 2022–2025 Strategic Plan period, this long-standing partnership has helped countries adopt inclusive WASH financing strategies, integrate sustainability into national monitoring systems, and develop climate resilience plans for lasting change.

UNICEF thanks Sida for helping uphold children's rights, dignity and health worldwide, and looks forward to deepening this collaboration under the new Strategic Plan for 2026–2029.



Lao People's Democratic Republic

Grade 2 students wash their hands together at school. This activity happens in the morning before class starts and again after class ends. Handwashing is a simple habit that helps children stay clean, prevent illness and learn.



Spotlight on the Global WASH Thematic Fund

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