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THE ACTIVITIES OF THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR ORGANIZATION IN THE CONTEXT OF ACHIEVING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS*

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Abstract. This study examines the pivotal role of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in advancing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular focus on promoting decent work and ensuring safe and secure working conditions. The article explores the mechanisms of international regulation of social and labour relations, highlighting both the historical and contemporary contributions of the ILO to global labour standards. It evaluates the transformative impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on progress toward achieving these goals, emphasising the emergent challenges and the need for innovative measures to enhance occupational safety and health. The study also analyses the ILO's historical legacy, which has shaped the international labour landscape over the past century, and discusses its current initiatives to address modern labour challenges. Special attention is given to the interconnection between economic growth, financial sustainability, and the implementation of international labour standards. By exploring specific strategies for improving workplace conditions and fostering financial resilience, the research presents actionable recommendations for global policymakers, organisations, and stakeholders. The findings underscore the importance of adopting a multidimensional and cooperative approach to resolving global social and labour issues. The study concludes that achieving the SDGs - particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) - requires strengthened international collaboration and a shared commitment to aligning labour policies with sustainable development objectives. This comprehensive examination of the ILO's role provides valuable insights into its strategic importance in ensuring equitable and sustainable progress in labour relations worldwide.

Keywords: social and labour relations; sustainable development goals; international labour organisation; occupational safety and health; decent work; international standards; economic growth

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1. Introduction

Global changes in the labour and economic spheres necessitate the creation of effective mechanisms to ensure social and economic balance and development of society. In this context, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), approved by the UN General Assembly in 2015, become the basis for international cooperation to achieve proper working conditions, economic progress and social protection. Of particular importance is SDG 8, which covers the goal of ensuring decent work and productive employment for all in the modern world, where inequality, labour market instability, unemployment and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic pose significant challenges.

Despite a long history of regulating social and labour relations at the international level, many issues remain unresolved. Insufficient coordination of governments' actions and limited access to innovative approaches and financial resources, especially in low-income countries, make it much more challenging to achieve the set goals. In this context, the activities of the International Labor Organization (ILO) are of particular importance, as this organisation is engaged in developing labour standards, protecting workers' rights and strengthening international social dialogue.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated labour inequality and emphasised the need for international cooperation. While economically developed countries have partially recovered, low- and middle-income countries have faced additional challenges that have significantly affected their ability to implement the SDGs. Rising economic inequality, declining employment, and volatile financial markets have highlighted the need for more coordinated action at the global level.

Achieving decent work and economic progress is a complex task encompassing economic, social and environmental dimensions. The ILO's activities are unique, as the organisation develops international labour standards and ensures their practical implementation in different countries. However, despite its extensive experience, there is still a need for a deeper study of its impact on the implementation of the SDGs.

2. Theoretical background

Today, the importance of international aspects of regulating social and labour relations is growing rapidly. In this sense, the SDGs deserve attention, as they have become a benchmark for the global community to develop various spheres of social life. Among the SDG targets, target 8.5 is of particular importance: "Promote safe and secure working conditions for all workers, including through the use of innovative technologies in the field of occupational health and safety," which is part of SDG 8. This target includes a set of tasks to ensure decent work and economic growth. Along with it, it is worth noting the improvement of the socio-economic and financial conditions of enterprises and organisations, which is envisaged by SDG 8.10. It is no coincidence that both tasks are integrated within the same goal.

In such circumstances, the ILO is of great importance, as it has been focusing on developing international labour standards and protecting working people globally for more than a century. The history of research on the topic outlined in the title of this article demonstrates both the chronological process of knowledge accumulation and regulatory development, as well as the focus on new issues, particularly those arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The initial research stage on this topic is based on the works of authors such as Hák, Janousková, and Moldan (2016), who substantiated the need for a more precise definition and further detailed the mechanisms for implementing the SDGs. Their work emphasised the importance of developing systematic approaches to assessing progress in achieving these goals.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis in social and labour relations that arose as a result of its consequences have become a kind of milestone in research on this issue. In particular, Naidoo and Fisher (2020) emphasise that UN documents "have become another victim of COVID-19". These and similar statements formed the basis of studies (Meschede, 2020; Swain & Yang-Wallentin, 2020). Even so, most researchers agree that the

ILO, within its mandate and specialisation, should play a decisive role in achieving some of the goals (Rantanen et al., 2020). Moreover, in our previous works, it has already been noted that in this case, the creation of appropriate conditions for ensuring occupational safety and health should be of fundamental importance (Yarotskiy et al., 2021; Dreval et al., 2021; Sramka et al., 2023).

Thus, systemic regulatory approaches to ensuring proper working conditions are a critical element in the implementation of international standards, but in order to achieve the SDGs, it is also necessary to take into account the innovative potential of the private sector, especially in the context of the use of modern technologies. Some authors (Rayevnyeva et al., 2023; Sidak et al., 2024; and Stryzhak et al., 2024) have examined specific aspects of identifying tools and processes for achieving the goals (measurable indicators) of sustainable development in their research studies.

As noted in the study (Jones et al., 2017), their implementation requires the involvement of governments and the private sector. Information and communication technologies have a significant impact on improving working conditions, overcoming poverty, and other areas of social development. The authors examine the role of companies such as Ericsson and Microsoft, as well as industry organisations such as the GSMA and the Global e-Sustainability Initiative, which demonstrate how innovative solutions can contribute to achieving sustainable development goals.

The conceptual basis for this study is the work “The UN Sustainable Development Goals: A Comparative Mid-Term Review of Research” (Sorooshian, 2024), which provides a comparative analysis of the achievements and difficulties in implementing the SDGs. The author emphasises the importance of an integrated approach that considers the interrelationships between individual tasks, which allows for more effective implementation of global sustainable development initiatives.

Barua (2021) explores the importance of human capital in long-term economic development. Her research demonstrates that a prioritised approach to human resource development is important for national progress, especially in middle-income countries where resources are mainly directed to economic growth rather than social welfare.

In their study, (Grzebyk et al., 2023; Labunska et al., 2023) assess the implementation of SDG 8 in the European Union using multivariate analysis. Their results show that positive changes in labour productivity and social protection vary significantly depending on the economic development of individual countries, and the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has had a negative impact on their implementation.

A study by a team of scientists (Boudt et al., 2024) draws attention to research projects funded by the European Union. An analysis of the CORDIS database shows that projects aimed at implementing SDG 8 focus on productivity, entrepreneurship, and economic growth, emphasising the important role of funding in achieving these goals.

Paksi, Nabilazka and Silawa (2024) analyse the implementation of SDG 8 in Indonesia during the pandemic. Using the Voluntary National Review (VNR) reports, the authors conclude that, despite the economic downturn, the country has been able to maintain positive momentum in achieving its targets.

The study of Shabbir (2023) outlines the role of entrepreneurship in implementing SDG 8. The author demonstrates that entrepreneurial activity contributes to the development of social responsibility, creating new jobs, and improving economic performance in different regions.

Pasinovych and Myskiv (2023) studied corporate social responsibility's role in Ukraine, particularly in supporting social initiatives during the Russian aggression. The authors found that business plays a significant role in economic recovery and in promoting the population's welfare. Their main conclusion is that the priority SDG for business after the war will be, first of all, Goal 8 "Decent Work and Economic Growth".

Bieszk-Stolorz and Dmytrów (2023) focus on comparing the geographical distribution of SDG 8 implementation in the European Union. Using the COPRAS method and cluster analysis, the authors determine the impact of the pandemic on the decline in economic growth and job creation.

Balcerowicz-Szkutnik, Szkutnik, and Szkutnik (2020) examine the impact of social and economic conditions on poverty reduction. Masha and Fihla (2025) analyse specific tools of poverty alleviation by financial associations in South Africa. The authors emphasise that fighting against poverty in low-income economies is important for overall development, including the achievement of labour and employment-related targets.

The literature review demonstrates that ensuring decent working conditions and economic growth are fundamental tasks of modern global development. Given the wide range of scientific research, the choice of the topic of our study is due to the need to highlight the role of the International Labor Organization in the implementation of international labour standards, as well as the importance of these initiatives for the implementation of the SDGs.

The purpose of our study is to analyse the ILO's activities in the context of the SDGs, in particular, to ensure decent work and safe working conditions for employees, as well as to develop proposals for improving international labour standards in the light of current conditions.

3. Research objective and methodology

The study is based on a philosophical understanding of methodology as a complex and multidimensional means of cognition. Moreover, special attention is paid to the concept of "sectoral methodology", i.e., the selection of appropriate starting principles and tools from the general methodological arsenal for conducting a specific research work. For our subject matter, it is the selection of those phenomena and subjects of legal reality from the complex of social and social and labour relations which are directly related to the general principles of realisation of the goals of sustainable development and ensuring labour safety, their interconnection and interactions with the so-called "environment".

In this regard, considerable attention is paid to the method of system analysis, which is recognised as one of the main directions of the methodology of special scientific knowledge and whose application allows the linking of all the necessary phenomena and processes into a single holistic object. The main factors for applying this method in the context of the task at hand include the scale of the problem under consideration, as well as the emergence of numerous challenges and threats that cannot be adequately addressed without considering various related issues.

The implementation of the tasks is also based on several other methods, namely the structural and functional method (to characterise the significance of the ILO's activities in general and its individual structures in the implementation of the SDGs, to fully disclose the problems of interrelationships between individual goals and indicators, as well as to substantiate the conclusions that, in the aggregate of individual provisions, are important both for the implementation of individual goals and for a complete understanding of the significance of SDG 8 for the development of social relations in general); the method of comparison (thus realising the task of clarifying the essential characteristics of the SDGs and their difference from previous international documents of the relevant direction).

4. Results and discussion

International labour standards are the conceptual and regulatory framework of international labour law, accumulating global experience in social and labour regulation in individual countries and certain international organisations. In this regard, the activities of the International Labor Organization, which has been studying and developing such standards for more than a century, are particularly important.

This organisation already has considerable experience in effectively responding to numerous challenges and threats faced by workers in the world of work (in particular, by developing comprehensive socio-economic

measures to counteract the Great Economic Depression, protecting workers during numerous military disasters, reducing the negative effects of the global economic crisis of 2008, etc.) Today's activities of this organisation are largely focused on ensuring decent work for people worldwide, regardless of race, gender or other characteristics (Rayevnyeva et al., 2023).

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the UN Millennium Declaration, adopted in 2000 at the UN Millennium Summit, became relevant, defining a comprehensive framework of values, principles and key factors for development under the three main mandates of the United Nations: peace and security, development and human rights (GA/9758, 2000).

Today, the world community is invited to pay attention to the global transition from the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015, which includes 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets. The approved goals and targets cover various areas of social relations (social, economic, humanitarian, environmental, security, etc.).

In the context of the subject matter of this article, we should first pay attention to **Goal 8**: Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. This goal becomes functional in the following targets:

SDG 8.3. Increase the employment rate.

SDG 8.4. Reduce the proportion of unemployed young people, out of school, or not in training or education.

SDG 8.5. Promote safe and secure working conditions for all workers, including through the use of innovative technologies in the field of labour protection and industrial safety

SDG 8.10. Strengthen the capacity of national financial institutions to promote and expand access to banking, insurance and financial services for all.

The above goal and objectives cover a set of interrelated issues traditionally addressed by the ILO: economic growth is not an end in itself, it must be combined with effective social protection and adequate safety of workers (besides, it has been repeatedly proved that the costs of measures on workers' safety and health lead to an acceleration of economic growth rather than slowdown); full and productive employment is the first and core component of social protection; decent work for all is the basis of the Decent Work Program, which was developed in the late 1990s and has become a kind of guideline for improving international labour standards, and which today has become a guideline for improving international labour standards (Labunska et al., 2023).

At the same time, a number of issues related to the implementation of the SDGs and the social protection of employees remain without proper argumentation. The scientific community has not yet adequately responded to the peculiarities of the ILO's current activities related to responding to new challenges and threats. This applies, in particular, to clarifying the place of OSH in the updated agenda of the international community. Moyer and Hedden highlighted this state of affairs quite imaginatively and convincingly, asking the following questions: "Are we on the right track? Or are we already very close to achieving these SDGs, and we just need to make a few important policy decisions to put us on the right track? Or are we unable to achieve the SDGs with only a few options to close the gap between current levels and the targets?" (Moyer & Hedden, 2020).

Over the past twenty years, the concept of decent work has been contained in various variations and substantiated in most documents of programmatic importance, international legal norms and analytical developments of this organisation. This concept has been the subject of intensive research in several thousand articles, monographs and dissertations (Sidak et al., 2024; Stryzhak et al., 2024).

From the point of view of our research, it is advisable to focus on the key points of the development of the GSP, which are given in the basic documents of this organisation. In a systematised form, they are presented in the table "ILO Activities on the Development and Implementation of the GSP" (see Table 1).

Table 1. ILO activities on elaboration and development of the basic principles of the MEA

Title of the report	The essence and structuring of the basic principles of decent work
Declaration	Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (FPRW): freedom of association and the right to collective bargaining; elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour; elimination of child labour; elimination of discrimination in employment and occupation (International Labour Organization, 1998).
Report	The goal of decent work is defined as ensuring productive work for women and men in conditions of freedom, justice, security and human dignity; ensuring decent work for men and women worldwide is the main goal of the ILO in the current situation. In this regard, it is pointed out that it is necessary to move from several dozen major programs to four strategic objectives, which are given in the 1998 Declaration (International Labour Organization, 1999).
Declaration	Four strategic objectives of the ILO are named and detailed: (1) promoting employment (structured according to three pillars); (2) developing and expanding social protection measures - social security and workers' protection (also structured according to three pillars); (3) promoting social dialogue and tripartism (four tasks in total); (4) respecting, promoting and implementing fundamental (International Labour Organization, 2008)
Declaration	All workers should be guaranteed adequate protection per the GPG, considering the following factors: respect for their fundamental rights, adequate minimum wages, maximum working hours, and occupational safety and health. Safe and healthy working conditions are fundamental to ensuring decent work (International Labour Organization, 2019).

Source: own processing

Naturally, the ILO's current agenda is traditionally compiled taking into account the peculiarities of the development of social and socio-economic relations. With the adoption of the updated World Development Agenda, the lion's share of the organisation's efforts began to be directed precisely at the specification and implementation of the SDGs (primarily in the part that directly relates to employment and social protection, safety and health of workers). The work on fulfilling the ILO's main tasks and the Decent Work Program has also been carried out with due regard to the SDGs.

Formally speaking, the impact of the SDGs began to be reflected in the content of most decisions: declarations, resolutions, current normative acts - conventions and recommendations, etc.

First of all, the ILO reports, which are traditionally prepared for presentation at the sessions of the International Labor Conference (hereinafter - ILC) and cover the most important issues of social and labour relations development, deserve attention. The 2019-2020 period is a watershed in the content of these reports, which led to the beginning of work on defining qualitatively new benchmarks for the development of social and labour relations.

These reports gradually reveal the most important principles of the ILO's participation in the development and implementation of the SDGs year after year (for a description of the most important reports in terms of the subject matter of the study, see Table 2).

Table 2. ILO reports with a thematic basis in the form of development and implementation of the SDGs

Title of the report	The thematic focus of the reports
World Social Protection Report 2017–19	The report is based on a comprehensive assessment and prospects for developing social protection in light of the goals to be achieved by 2030; it analyses the progress and main gaps in this area of relations that need to be addressed (International Labour Organization, 2017).
ILO. Towards 2030	The report is based on a methodological framework that outlines the need to adhere to basic principles and HRBAs in implementing SDGs (International Labour Organization, 2018).
Time to Act for SDG 8	The report focuses on the provision that SDG 8 harmonises sustainable development's economic, social and environmental dimensions. This means that the lack of progress in achieving SDG 8 will not allow progress towards the realisation of other SDG goals (International Labour Organization, 2019).

Source: own processing

In the context of our study, the World Social Protection Report 2017-2019 stands out among other related documents, which links specific SDGs to the existing set of international legal norms and provides guidance on ensuring safe and healthy working conditions (see Figure 1 below for a schematic representation of this).

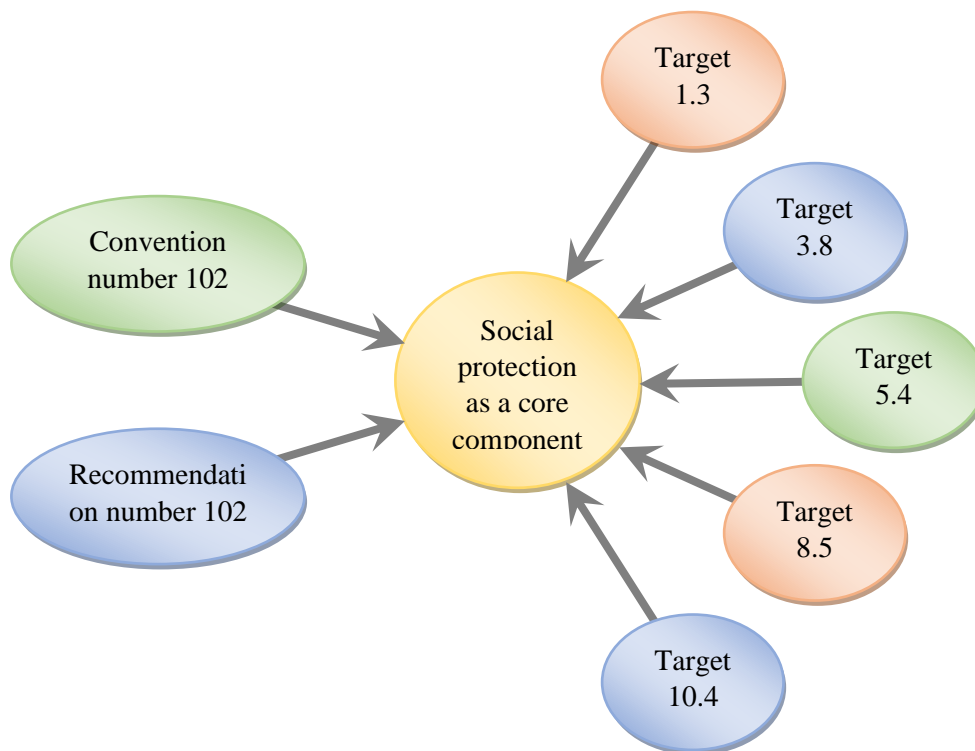


Figure 1. ILO core normative documents and the SDGs in the area of social protection
Source: own processing

The focus of the reports has changed qualitatively due to the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has prompted an intensive search for ways to counteract its destructive power in all social and labour relations areas. At the same time, it should be noted that most of these reports lack a systematic approach to analysing topical issues, as evidenced by the lack of references to the relationship between individual proposals and already-developed international legal norms.

As a single positive example, the report "ILO. 2021. Working from home: From invisibility to decent work" clearly links the solution of modern problems of domestic work to the norms set out in the ILO Domestic Work Convention, 1996, and its corresponding Recommendation, 184 (ILO. Working from home: From invisibility to decent work/International Labour Office. Geneva, 2021). Convention No. 177 emphasises the equality of all forms of labour relations (International Labour Organization, 1996).

In our previous publications, we have further substantiated that the content of fundamental conventions reveals and gives normative value to certain principles and rights in the world of work (Conventions No. 29, 87, 98, 100, 105, 111, 138 and 182).

In 2022, the content and structure of the MWC were qualitatively updated, thanks to the adoption by the 110th session of the ILC of the Resolution on the inclusion of safe and healthy working environments in the fundamental principles and rights at work of the ILO. Therefore, based on the exact position of the relationship of each of these principles to the most important conventions, the fundamental ones should include Convention No. 155 on Occupational Safety and Health and the Working Environment, 1981 and Convention No. 187 on the Fundamentals Promoting Safety and Health at Work, 2006 (International Labour Conference, 2022).

The increased attention of the global community to OSH issues has provided national governments with significant opportunities to improve measures to improve the relevant part of social and labour relations. First of all, it is worth noting the potential inherent in the content of Convention No. 187, particularly regarding the

inclusion of a national tripartite consultative body or bodies dealing with OSH issues in the national OSH system (International Labour Organization, 2006).

In this case, it is also worth noting that the content of the latest ILO reports contains up-to-date information on the problems of international regulation in the most important areas of social and labour relations. Given the subject matter of the article, the content of the report with the eloquent title "Sustainable Development, Decent Work and Social Justice. Update on progress towards SDG 8" (September 2023). However, progress can only be made formally (based on adopting a particular share of documents with the relevant regulatory scope). Indeed, based on a thorough analysis, this report concludes that "the world is significantly behind schedule in almost two-thirds of the indicators reflecting progress towards the implementation of SDG 8." Thus, according to the ILO, "the international community is almost as far from meeting the SDG 8 targets today as it was in 2015" (International Labour Organization, 2023).

The rapid multiplication of global challenges facing humanity today requires concerted efforts by all global community members. First, it is about overcoming the crisis and restructuring social relations aimed at sustainable development and protecting the vital interests of individuals and society. Indeed, in the face of a difficult situation affecting all spheres of social and socio-economic relations. Therefore, the content of the UN Sustainable Development Goals should become a reliable guide to overcome negative trends and ensure uninterrupted development. This applies, in particular, to providing decent work and economic growth. Moreover, there are many problems and miscalculations about the achievement of SDG 8. In this regard, creating and ensuring safe and healthy working conditions for millions of workers is essential.

Therefore, the activities of the ILO, which has been developing international labour standards for a century, should be of particular importance. The implementation of the declared goals and objectives should be based primarily on the concept of decent work, which was developed long before the adoption of the updated UN Agenda and until recently included four ILO strategic objectives: promoting employment, developing and expanding social protection measures; promoting social dialogue and tripartism; and respecting and implementing fundamental principles and rights at work. Today, a fifth component has been added to them: creating safe and healthy working conditions is not only already defined as a fundamental factor in ensuring decent work but also refers to basic principles and rights at work. These targets provide a solid foundation for many other targets outlined in SDG 8 and many other goals.

5. Conclusions

The essential features of the ILO's current activities in the context of the SDGs implementation include, first of all, the emphasis on decent work as a reliable basis for social protection in various variations and the achievement of specific goals (which is seen in the content of the programmatic documents, as well as in numerous analytical developments of this organisation). To this should be added the provision on the existence of a clear relationship between decent work and safe and healthy working conditions.

The peculiarities of the ILO's activities in the context of these goals are primarily manifested in the clarification of prerogatives or priorities depending on the new challenges and threats facing the world community (the biggest irritant was the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused significant changes in the lives of millions of people around the world, including in social and labour relations and social protection of workers). In this regard, the tone of the ILO's reports has changed qualitatively, as the lion's share of efforts has been directed to additional social protection of workers and the Organization's development prospects in connection with the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, these documents only partially address or ignore the issues of the UN Agenda.

The scientific value of the provisions presented in this article is primarily in defining the essence and features of the ILO's activities in the context of the SDGs, as well as in substantiating specific proposals for the implementation of certain goals based on already developed international labour standards. In particular, it seems appropriate to develop a new ILO document with detailed proposals for implementing individual SDGs in the context of the pandemic. First of all, in our opinion, it should be about making some additions to certain

indicators, namely indicator 8.3, which refers, among other things, to the creation of decent jobs (we propose to add the following: ensuring outstripping job creation relative to the growth of unemployment) and 8.5, which refers, among other things, to ensure full and productive employment and decent work for men and women (our addition: ensuring full social dialogue in the field of labour to create conditions for additional protection of the most vulnerable).

Given the content of SDG 8.10, it is also essential to emphasise the importance of increasing access to financial services to ensure sustainable economic development and social protection. This implies creating conditions for the development of financial literacy, expanding the range of available financial products and services, and ensuring their accessibility to all social groups, including the most vulnerable.

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