

## Chapter 1

### School education in Portugal

*School governance in Portugal is fairly centralised. The main lines of action about the curriculum, the educational programmes, national examinations, teacher recruitment and deployment, and the budget distribution are defined centrally by the Ministry of Education and Science. There has been some devolution of responsibilities to municipalities in areas such as curricular enrichment activities, management of the schooling infrastructure, and non-teaching staff resources; as well as some autonomy granted to individual schools in areas such as the hiring of part of the staff (on fixed-term contracts, trainers for vocational courses) and the selection of textbooks. Public schooling is dominant and public schools receive the majority of their funds directly from the State budget. A major handicap for Portugal has been the very low starting point in terms of educational attainment and literacy of its population, prior to the 1974 Revolution. Nevertheless, efforts to ensure access to education for all Portuguese resulted in a rapid expansion of enrolment even if attainment levels remain a challenge. Student learning outcomes in Portugal are around or slightly below the OECD average following some progress in the last decade, depending on the skills assessed. Recent reforms include new arrangements for school leadership, the setting of learning goals, the reorganisation and redeployment of the school network, the generalisation of full day schools and the diversification of educational offerings (in particular through the promotion of vocational/professional programmes).*

## Main features

### *The structure of the education system*

The school system in Portugal is organised in three sequential levels: pre-primary education (ages 3 to 5), basic education (typical ages 6 to 14) and secondary education (typical ages 15 to 17). Basic education is organised according to three cycles (Grades 1-4; Grades 5-6 and Grades 7-9) (see Figure 1). Compulsory schooling was extended to 12 years for any student enrolled in the 7<sup>th</sup> Grade or below as of 2009/10.

**Figure 1.1 The Portuguese school system**

Age	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
Grade	Pre-primary education			1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>	5 <sup>th</sup>	6 <sup>th</sup>	7 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	9 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	11 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	
Level/ cycle	Pre-primary education			1 <sup>st</sup> cycle			2 <sup>nd</sup> cycle		3 <sup>rd</sup> cycle			Secondary education				
Basic education																

Secondary education (Grades 10-12) is organised according to strands, with courses that are either mainly geared to working life or the continuation of studies at higher education level. It currently includes: science-humanities courses, geared towards further study at higher education level, which cover four areas (science and technologies, social and economic sciences, languages and humanities, visual arts); technological courses, geared towards either entering the job market or further study, especially via post secondary technological specialisation courses and higher education courses; specialised artistic courses; and vocational courses, geared towards an initial qualification for pupils, giving priority to their entering the job market while, at the same time, allowing them to study further.

The Portuguese school system also provides opportunities for non-traditional students through a range of alternative offerings under the umbrella of the New Opportunities programme.<sup>1</sup> These provide a second opportunity to those individuals who left school early or are at risk of doing so, as well as those in the labour force who want to acquire further qualifications at the school level. Several training alternatives are available.<sup>2</sup> Education and Training Courses (CEF courses) are targeted at young people (15 years old or above), at risk of leaving school or who have already left the education system before concluding Grade 9, and lead to a vocational qualification (at levels 1, 2 or 3). Adult Education and Training Courses (EFA courses) are targeted at individuals aged 18 or over who need to improve their schooling qualifications. The System of Recognition, Validation and Certification of Competences (RVCC) is intended to formally validate learning gained in different contexts by adults who intend to obtain an academic or vocational certification. This process assesses the knowledge and skills acquired by adults throughout their life and typically includes some training in schools. The Basic Skills Training Programme is intended for people aged 18 or over to acquire basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy so they are able to access EFA or RVCC courses. Modular Training is also offered to individuals aged 18 or over who are in the labour market to gain credit towards a qualification or to complete processes of RVCC. Paths for Completion of Secondary-Level Education is aimed at individuals aged 18 or over who are a few subjects short of completing a secondary qualification. Finally, Learning Courses are professional courses targeted at young individuals who are aged below 25, have completed basic education but not completed secondary education.

In secondary education (Grades 10-12), in the 2009/10 school year, students were distributed as follows: 40.9% in general courses (science-humanities), 3.0% in technological courses, 0.5% in specialised artistic education, 22.2% in vocational courses, 3.6% in learning courses, 0.5% in education and training courses (CEF courses), 8.7% in adult education and training courses (EFA courses), 2.6% in recurrent education, and 18.0% in RVCC processes (Ministry of Education, 2011).

### *Major characteristics*

- **The school network.** The public school network is made up of school clusters and non-grouped schools: the school cluster is an organisational unit with its own administration and management bodies, which comprises several establishments of one or more education levels, possibly including pre-primary education, around a common pedagogical project; the non-grouped school is a single establishment providing one or more levels of education. School clusters are more typical of compulsory education, bringing together establishments covering the entire set or a subset of the three cycles of basic education as well as possibly pre-primary education, but can also include an establishment of secondary education. Non-grouped schools, more typical of post-compulsory education, sometimes solely provide secondary education. In other cases they might include the third cycle of basic education. A school cluster seeks to facilitate the transition between levels and cycles of teaching. It also seeks to overcome the isolation of establishments and prevent social exclusion, to consolidate the pedagogical capacity of the establishments that are part of it and the rational use of its resources. In school clusters, there is a school director and one co-ordinator per establishment within the cluster.
- **Public schooling is dominant.** The great majority of students attend public schools. In the 2009/10 school year, the proportion of students attending public schools was 51.4% in pre-primary education, 85.2% in basic education and 76.4% in secondary education (Ministry of Education, 2011). Private education is mostly self-financed (through attendance fees) but some private schools (about half of them) receive some public funding (in most cases if they fill a gap in public supply as in more remote locations, artistic areas and special education and through family support for disadvantaged families). It is governed by legislation and statutes of its own, which should respect the Education Act. As part of their autonomy, private schools are responsible for the recruitment and evaluation of their teachers and take responsibility for their own quality assurance.
- **Funding.** Public schools receive the funds for the majority of their expenses directly from the State budget. They are able to raise complementary revenue through activities such as services provided to the community and donations.
- **Increasing diversity in the classroom.** In the last decade the number of immigrants has increased considerably, many of whom do not have Portuguese as a mother tongue. This is a development which represents a new challenge to the education system.
- **High degree of inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream schooling.** In the last two decades there has been considerable progress in including students with special needs in mainstream schooling. In 2009, while 2.6% of students in the school system had special educational needs, only 0.2% of

the overall student population attended special schools (Ministry of Education, 2009).

### ***Distribution of responsibilities***

School governance is fairly centralised. The main lines of action about the curriculum, the educational programmes, national examinations, teacher recruitment and deployment, and the budget distribution are defined centrally by the Ministry of Education and Science.<sup>3</sup> At the time of the review visit, Ministry services included the Directorate General for Human Resources in Education (DGRHE), the Directorate General for Innovation and Curricular Development (DGIDC), the Financial Management Office (GGF), the Office for Education Statistics and Planning (GEPE), the Information System Co-ordinating Office (MISI), the Office for Educational Evaluation (GAVE), the National Agency for Qualification (ANQ), the Scientific and Pedagogical Council for Continuous Training (CCPFC), and the General Inspectorate of Education (IGE). The CCPFC took responsibility for the accreditation of professional development courses for teachers and the accreditation of the associated providers. The IGE role included controlling the legal conformity of procedures in schools, auditing school management activities, promoting best practices in schools and, in particular, running the National Programme for the External Evaluation of Schools. The ANQ co-ordinated the implementation of vocational education and training policies and managed the National Qualifications System. This included the co-ordination of the alternative offerings under the New Opportunities programme.

At the time of the review visit, five regional education authorities (Regional Directorates for Education: North, Centre, Lisbon and Tagus Valley, Alentejo and Algarve) co-ordinated the implementation of policy within their respective territorial limits. Their tasks included supporting the schools in their activities, planning of the school network, disseminating centrally-dictated guidelines for implementation of specific programmes and collecting information for policy development. In recent years, in the context of decentralising decision making, municipalities have been granted some responsibilities mostly in basic education. These include the provision of curricular enrichment activities in the first cycle of basic education (including the hiring of the associated trainers); management of non-teaching staff resources; social support such as the provision of school meals and transportation; and the management of the school infrastructure in such a way it accommodates full day education.

Following the change of government in June 2011, a major rationalisation of Ministry services was undertaken, leading to a significant restructuring of its organisation. This was done in the context of the Plan for the Reduction and Improvement of Central Administration (*Plano de Redução e Melhoria da Administração Central*, PREMAC). At present, the services of the Ministry of Education and Science – which now combine schooling, higher education and science – include:

- Directorate General for Education (DGE, *Direcção-Geral da Educação*), which includes the former DGIDC.
- Directorate General for School Administration (DGAE, *Direcção-Geral da Administração Escolar*), which includes the former DGRHE and will include, from 2013 on, the services currently provided by Regional Directorates for Education. Regional Directorates will cease to exist as of 1 January 2013.

- Directorate General for Education and Science Statistics (DGEEC, *Direcção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência*), which integrated the statistics function of GEPE as well as the former MISI.
- Directorate General for Planning and Financial Management (DGPFGF, *Direcção-Geral de Planeamento e Gestão Financeira*), which integrated the planning function of GEPE and the former GGF.
- Office for Educational Evaluation (GAVE, *Gabinete de Avaliação Educacional*), as before.
- General Inspectorate of Education and Science (IGEC, *Inspecção-Geral da Educação e Ciência*), which includes the former IGE.

In addition, the National Agency for Qualification (ANQ) became the National Agency for Qualification and Professional Education (ANQEP, *Agência Nacional para a Qualificação e o Ensino Profissional*).

### ***Policy development***

The development of educational policies led by the Ministry of Education involves consultations with specific advisory bodies. These include the National Education Council (CNE), which forms views across the whole range of educational issues; the Schools Council, which represents the viewpoint of schools collected through representatives of school directors; and the Scientific Council for Teacher Evaluation (CCAP), an advisory body set up in February 2008 to monitor and provide recommendations on the implementation of teacher evaluation whose membership includes researchers, professional and disciplinary organisations, individual teachers, and individual school directors. Following the change of government in June 2011, both the CNE and the Schools Council remain active while the CCAP ceases to exist.

Other groups which are typically consulted include parents' organisations, the National Association of Portuguese Municipalities, and teachers' professional associations (including disciplinary associations). In matters which relate to teachers' working conditions, it is a legal obligation that teacher unions are consulted. Teacher unions have had an important role in the development of the teaching profession since democracy was re-established in 1974 and continue to be influential. Rates of teacher unionisation are high (around two-thirds of teachers). The organisations which represent the greatest number of teachers are FENPROF (*Federação Nacional dos Sindicatos de Professores*, National Federation of Teacher Unions) and FNE (*Federação Nacional da Educação*, National Federation for Education).

## **Main trends and concerns**

### ***Low starting point and significant quantitative growth***

A major handicap for Portugal has been the very low starting point in terms of educational attainment and literacy of its population. A fifth of all 15- to 64-year-olds were illiterate in the mid-1970s and less than 5% had completed upper secondary education (Guichard and Larre, 2006). Two consequences of the low educational attainment have been the difficulty in finding qualified teachers when the education system expanded and the impact parents' education has had on subsequent generations' educational attainment (Guichard and Larre, 2006). This is also part of the legacy of the

dictatorship which ended with the 1974 Revolution, as education was then confined to the élites. Nevertheless, efforts to ensure access to education for all Portuguese resulted in a rapid expansion of enrolment. The proportion of the population that has attained at least upper secondary education grew from 14% for the generation aged 55-64 in 2009 to 48% for the generation aged 25-34 in the same year (OECD, 2011). Lower secondary education is now virtually universal and enrolment rates for 15- to 19-year-olds grew from 68% in 1995 to 84.6% in 2009 (above the OECD average of 82.1%) (OECD, 2011). The coverage of pre-primary education has also increased rapidly and reached a participation rate of 77.2% for children aged 3-4, above the OECD average of 70.1% (OECD, 2011).

### ***Challenges with educational attainment remain***

Despite the expansion of the education system, educational attainment remains a challenge. It is the lowest in the OECD area for the working-age population, with 30% of 25- to 64-year-olds having attained at least upper secondary education in 2009 (against an OECD average of 73%, OECD, 2011). The high share of students leaving the education system too early with low skills remains also a major problem. Upper secondary graduation rates reached 63% in 2009 (when only individuals below 25 are considered), well below the OECD average (OECD, 2011). The high proportion of early school leavers is associated with the relatively low appreciation of schooling by large groups of the population likely to result from the parents' low educational attainment and the availability of unskilled jobs (Guichard and Larre, 2006). Upskilling Portugal's population also requires making the educational system more inclusive by allowing all individuals to acquire basic skills (OECD, 2010a). The impact of family background on the probability to dropout is also strongest in Portugal than elsewhere: according to 2005 household data, 98.9% of men aged between 25 and 34 who dropped out before the end of upper secondary school has a low-educated father, more than ten percentage points higher than it is on average across European OECD countries (OECD calculations based on the 2005 EU-SILC Database, OECD, 2010a).

### ***Student learning outcomes showing some progress and approaching the OECD average***

Student learning outcomes in Portugal are around or slightly below the OECD average following some progress in the last decade, depending on the skills assessed. In 2009, achievement levels of Portuguese students in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) were not statistically significantly different from the OECD average in reading literacy and were just below the OECD average with statistical significance in mathematics and science (OECD, 2010b). Trend analyses of PISA results have shown some encouraging improvement in student learning outcomes.

In PISA 2009, the main focus was on reading literacy. The performance of Portuguese 15-year-olds in reading was close to the OECD average – only 13 OECD countries scored significantly higher than Portugal. This is the result of a significant improvement since the first PISA study in 2000 (OECD, 2010c) – Portugal is among the seven OECD countries for which performance between 2000 and 2009 increased significantly. The mean score for Portuguese students in PISA 2000 was 470 points, compared to 489 for PISA 2009. In terms of the proficiency levels, at the lower end of the reading literacy proficiency scale, the proportion of students who failed to reach level 2 declined significantly from 26.1% in PISA 2000 to 17.5% in PISA 2009. Portugal raised

the performance of its lowest-achieving students while maintaining the performance level among its highest-achieving students.

The results of Portuguese 15-year-olds in mathematics are below the OECD average – 18 OECD countries significantly outperformed Portugal. However, the PISA 2009 results indicated a rise in test scores in comparison to the PISA in-depth assessment of mathematics in 2003 (OECD, 2010c). In PISA 2009, the average mathematics score was 487 points, 21 points higher than it was in 2003 – representing a statistically significant increase in mathematical literacy. Science results of Portuguese 15-year-olds were also below the OECD average in 2009 – 16 OECD countries scored significantly higher than Portugal and in this assessment area there was also significant improvement in the average scores between 2006 and 2009.

The variation in performance between high- and low-performing students in Portugal was lower than the OECD average in reading in PISA 2009 and a statistical significant decline was observed since 2000 (OECD, 2010d). Variations in student reading performance can mostly be found within schools (OECD, 2010d). Such variation significantly decreased between 2000 and 2009 and remains around the OECD average. The between-school variation of reading performance in Portugal remains lower than the OECD average, which seems to indicate that the specific school a student attends has only a modest impact on how the student performs (OECD, 2010d).

Regarding the PISA relationship between socio-economic background and performance (*i.e.* between the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status and the performance of 15-year-olds), the following indications emerge: *(i)* Portugal is not statistically different from the OECD average in terms of the percentage of variance in student performance explained by student socio-economic background (strength of the socio-economic gradient), but the impact of socio-economic background on learning outcomes tends to be larger than in most OECD countries; and *(ii)* Portugal is significantly below the OECD average in terms of the score point difference associated with one unit increase in the PISA index of economic, social and cultural status (slope of the socio-economic gradient) (OECD, 2010d) – and there was no significant change between 2000 and 2009 in this indicator.

### ***Severe austerity measures as a result of the financial crisis***

The current financial crisis is severely affecting Portugal, with a significant impact on the resources available to education. While public spending on education reached 5% of GDP in 2010, it is estimated that such proportion decreased to 4.7% in 2011, and the 2012 State budget plans a further reduction to 3.8% of GDP (Ministry of Finance, 2011). Austerity measures include salary cuts for personnel working in public education (all personnel above a given salary threshold), the freezing of career progression in the public service (including for teachers), posts in school management reduced, regional administration for education downsized, and a major rationalisation of Ministry services which led to a restructuring of its organisation (as described earlier).

## **Main developments**

### ***A major reform of school leadership***

New arrangements for school leadership and administration were introduced in 2008 and consist of four main bodies. The General Council is responsible for operational, strategic, planning and monitoring decisions and for the appointment (or dismissal) of the

school director, who is accountable and responsible to the Council. It includes representatives from the teaching and non-teaching staff, parents and/or students (in secondary schools), local authorities and the local community.<sup>4</sup> The school director has executive power in relation to administration and management functions and the option of choosing the immediate team: deputy directors, assistants, school and curricular department co-ordinators and class co-ordinators. The Pedagogical Council acts as a pedagogical supervision and co-ordination and educational guidance body. Finally the Administrative Council takes responsibility for administrative and financial matters. The school director is the president of both the Pedagogical Council and the Administrative Council and is also a member of the General Council.

The new arrangements reflect a profound reform whereby leadership moved from *primus inter pares* arrangements to the figure of school director with well identified authority and responsibilities.<sup>5</sup> Until recently, Portuguese school clusters and non-grouped schools were headed by principals (or presidents of executive councils) who were teachers elected to this position by their peers. Principals were therefore “first among equals”. They chaired the executive councils – which had a majority membership of teachers – and functioned largely as administrators, ensuring that the school operated efficiently and complied with legislation.

### ***Setting of learning goals – towards educational standards***

The Learning Goals project (*Metas de Aprendizagem*), launched in 2009, is part of the strategy to facilitate the effective implementation of the national curriculum. For each content area and subject in both basic and secondary education, it defines learning standards that students are expected to meet at key stages of their learning (by school year). Learning standards are qualitative statements about competencies and skills that are expected to be demonstrated by students at a given point in their learning. For instance, the Learning Goals for Mathematics in the first cycle of basic education include, among the 37 final learning goals, the following two goals: “The student solves problems in numerical contexts, which involve arithmetic operations” (final goal 17); and “The student identifies, interprets and describes spatial relationships” (final goal 22). For each content area or subject, learning goals are provided for the end of the cycle (final goal) or the end of a given grade (intermediate goal). Learning goals are organised by domains and sub-domains and might contain concrete examples of what is meant for the specific learning goal.

The Learning Goals constitute a curriculum management support tool and are to be used by teachers on a voluntary basis. Given their non-prescriptive nature, they can be adjusted by individual schools. They are designed so they can be used as reference standards for the assessment of students by the teachers. The project is currently being implemented in basic education and will start in secondary education as of 2011/12. In addition to the development of the goals, there are plans to support their implementation in schools through curricular consultancy teams made available to schools. The project also involves providing examples of teaching strategies suitable to reach the learning goals as well as assessment approaches which are adequate to evaluate whether or not learning goals have been achieved.

### ***Setting of national targets***

In the context of its commitments with the European Union’s Strategic Framework for European Co-operation in Education and Training (“ET 2020”) and with the



Organisation of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture's 2021 Educational Goals Project, Portugal established targets for school education through the Education Programme 2015, as of the 2010/11 school year. Targets focus on two main areas, deemed as the most challenging ones in school education: improving the basic competencies of students; and ensuring that all young people aged 18 and younger remain in the education system.

The following targets, to be attained by 2015, were set: reduce the early school leaving rate at the ages of 14, 15 and 16 to levels below 1%, 2% and 4 % respectively; reduce the proportion of students who repeat grades in the first, second and third cycles of basic education and in secondary education to 2%, 5%, 10% and 12% respectively; and increase the proportion of students with a mark above the passing level in each national Portuguese language and mathematics tests in both basic and secondary education by four percentage points, relative to the figures for 2009/10. Indicators were devised to monitor progress towards these targets.

The strategy to achieve the targets involves the direct contribution of schools, and the engagement of the families and the school communities. Schools are requested to embrace the objectives of improving the learning results of students, reducing grade repetition and preventing dropouts in their individual educational project. They are also required to formulate their own targets in accordance with their circumstances (for the same national-level indicators) and to develop initiatives to contribute to the achievement of the targets. The Education Programme 2015 involves monitoring of the targets at the national, municipal and school levels.

### ***Main developments in the first cycle of basic education***

In the first cycle of basic education, the Ministry of Education has been developing since 2005 a set of measures aimed at improving teaching and learning conditions. These measures include (Ministry of Education, forthcoming; Matthews *et al.*, 2009):

- *The reorganisation and redeployment of the school network* with the closure of small schools and those with below-average success rates, and the policy of school cluster formation. As a result the number of public schools in continental Portugal has decreased from 14 247 in 1999/2000 to 8 515 in 2009/10 (Ministry of Education, 2011).
- *The generalisation of full day school and provision of curricular enrichment activities (CEAs)*. The school day was extended in 2005 to a minimum of eight hours a day comprising, in addition to regular classes, English, study support and curricular enrichment activities which may include sports, art, music, sciences, technology, ICT, connecting school with its surroundings, charitable and voluntary work, and the European dimension of education. CEA teaching staff are new or relatively inexperienced teachers employed on a fixed-term basis by local authorities.
- *Government funding of school meals and transportation.*
- *Programmes for in-service training* for teachers of mathematics, Portuguese language and experimental science teaching.

### ***Other major initiatives***

- *The diversification of educational offerings*, in particular through the promotion of vocational/professional programmes. The proportion of students enrolled in non-general programmes in secondary education increased from 27% in 1996/97 to 59% in 2009/10 (Ministry of Education, 2011). The diversification of offerings also relates to alternatives such as adult education and training courses (EFA courses) and education and training courses (CEF courses), as described earlier.
- *Complementing regular classes with student support activities*, where possible provided by the form/subject teacher.
- The re-launch in 2008 of the Educational Territories for Priority Intervention programme aimed at promoting the success of students in disadvantaged areas (covering 104 school clusters in 2009/10).
- Continuing modernisation of the technological infrastructure through the Technological Plan for Education. This involves computers (one computer for two students in early 2011), interactive boards (one per three classrooms), video projectors (one in each classroom), and Internet connections.

### ***Increasing the autonomy of schools***

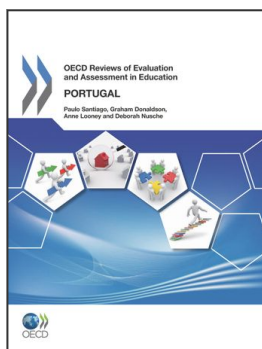
In addition to greater devolution of responsibility to local educational authorities, schools have been granted additional responsibilities in recent years. While levels of school autonomy remain modest compared to other OECD countries (see OECD, 2008), new areas of responsibility include hiring part of the teaching staff (on fixed-term contracts, trainers for vocational courses), the organisation of enrichment curricular activities, curriculum management procedures to fit own circumstances, and the selection of textbooks from a list certified by the Ministry. Schools can opt to be granted more autonomy by signing an autonomy contract with the Ministry of Education. Conditions to be granted an autonomy contract include undertaking a self-evaluation and receiving a positive external school evaluation. These contracts permit the consolidation of autonomy in areas such as pedagogical organisation, curriculum organisation, human resources, school social support and financial management. Only about 30 schools had been granted an autonomy contract by 2010.

## Notes

1. The New Opportunities programme, managed by both education and labour central authorities, seeks to expand and provide diversified or complementary training, appropriate for both job market requirements and for the specific characteristics of the unskilled working population.
2. The training alternatives are organised in New Opportunities Centres which are based in public and private schools, in training centres and in firms as part of the New Opportunities programme. Schools which host a New Opportunities Centre involve their regular teaching staff in supplying the alternative offerings.
3. Ministry of Education and Science is the new designation of the central educational authority following the change of government in June 2011. However, the designation “Ministry of Education” which prevailed at the time of the review visit, will be used in some instances throughout this document.
4. It is up to schools to determine the composition of the General Council, provided that two rules are respected: that all interested parties are represented; and that the professional representatives carrying out their duties in school cannot combine to hold a majority of seats in the Council.
5. This is a major departure from the *primus inter pares* arrangements intimately linked to the transition to a democratic regime in 1974. The figure of the school director still brings memories of the “authoritarian” figure leading schools during the dictatorial regime.

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