

PhD & Postdoc Program

Information for Applicants







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01

About









Strengthening Europe's Leadership in AI through Research Excellence

ELLIS by the Numbers

1800+ 16

Programs

44 400

Sites PhD Students & Postdocs

The ELLIS Mission

ELLIS is a pan-European research network of excellence connecting scientists and labs in the field of machine learning—the driver for modern AI.

It's committed to ethical and trustworthy AI and aims to attract top talent for basic research, technical innovation and positive societal impact.

The mission of ELLIS is to benefit Europe in two ways:

- To have the best basic research be performed in Europe to enable Europe to shape how machine learning and modern Al change the world.
- To have economic impact and create jobs in Europe, and believe this is achieved by outstanding and free basic research.

ellis.eu

Members



3 Pillars Make an Impact in Europe

Regional AI Ecosystems



Cross-Border Scientific
Innovation





ellis Sites

- Serving as hubs for world-class Al research, the network of sites across Europe brings together top researchers and fosters collaboration.
- 42 hubs for world-class Al research in 17 countries and 2 Institutes in Tübingen & Finland

Programs

ellis

- Connecting top researchers to engage in high-impact areas that could significantly shape the future of modern AI
- 16 Research Programs Led by ELLIS Fellows
- Cross-border exchanges via workshops



PhD & Postdoc Program

- Supporting young scientists to conduct cutting-edge research in machine learning
- Joint supervision by ELLIS Members in 2 countries with a required exchange visit
- Centralised application for European-wide positions





About the ELLIS PhD & Postdoc Program

The ELLIS PhD & Postdoc Program supports excellent young scientists to conduct cutting-edge research in machine learning with joint supervision across borders in Europe. Unique features of the Program include:



Dual supervision spanning 2 countries



Cross-sector collaboration



1 centralised application to 50-100 institutions



Choose from 3 tracks of study



6-month research exchange in Europe, or Canada with CIFAR Fellow/Canadian Al Chair

Benefits of being an ELLIS PhD Student:

- Join a global network of 400+ top ML PhD students in academia and industry
- Receive joint supervision from leading European researchers in your field
- Get advisor-funded support for research and conference travel
- Network with top groups via workshops, summer/ winter schools, and events
- Tackle high-impact challenges and advance ethical, trustworthy AI made in Europe
- Graduate with an ELLIS Certificate and ELLIS Membership



3 Tracks of Study

The ELLIS PhD & Postdoc Program offers three tracks serving your preferred research and career goals. Each track provides the same benefits, networking opportunities, and resources to students but has different requirements for admission and completion.

Academic Track

The academic track is based on a collaboration between 2 top European academic institutions or universities in different European countries, with one advisor from each institution supervising the research.

Industry Track

The industry track is based on a collaboration between 1 top European academic institution and 1 European industry partner (e.g. a university and a company).

Interdisciplinary Track

The interdisciplinary track is based on a collaboration between 2 top European academic institutions (e.g. universities), with one advisor in machine learning and the other in an unrelated field (e.g. Biology).



All Tracks of Study

Focus Emphasis on research excellence and publishing Co-supervision by 1 ELLIS Fellow/Scholar/Unit Faculty + 1 Fellow/Scholar/Unit Faculty/Member¹ **Advisors** based in Europe or 1 ELLIS Fellow/Scholar + 1 tenured faculty² or 1 ELLIS Fellow/Scholar based in Europe + 1 CIFAR Fellow/Canadian AI Chair³ A minimum amount of funding must be provided through the advisors' resources: 3 years overall for **Funding** a PhD student, and 2 years overall for a postdoc.4 Via (1) central recruiting (application is once yearly in autumn, PhDs only⁵) **Application** or (2) nomination (possible year-round)

- 1. Co-supervision by two ELLIS Members (who are not Fellows/Scholars) is not possible, unless one of the Members belongs to the **Unit Faculty**. This entails that: (i) the person is an ELLIS Member and belongs to an ELLIS Unit; (ii) the person is entitled to supervise PhD students at the respective institution; (iii) the person is appointed by a Unit Director to participate in the central recruiting/nomination process. See **ellis.eu/units**.
- 2. In the case of the Interdisciplinary Track only. Both advisors are based in Europe.
- 3. CIFAR fellows can be based in Canada or elsewhere, Canadian Al chair holders are based in Canada.
- 4. ELLIS itself does not provide funding except for smaller travel grants via the Mobility Program for PhDs and Postdocs.
- 5. PhD students who are already doing a PhD with an advisor in the ELLIS network may apply to the ELLIS program via the central recruiting if: (a) they are still within the first 6 months of their doctoral studies (i.e. students who started on May 15 or later can apply in the next round) and (b) their primary advisor is participating in that year's central recruiting round; only advisors in the list of "Available advisors" can accept students via the Central Recruiting. If they are no longer within the first 6 months or if the advisor is not listed as a recruiting advisor that year, ELLIS only accepts nominations.



Academic Track

PhD students and postdocs in the academic track strive for international collaboration as they partner with two European academic institutions in their research.

These candidates are supervised by one ELLIS Fellow/Scholar/Unit Faculty and one ELLIS Fellow/Scholar/Member, each from different European countries and academic institutions.

<u>Or</u>

One ELLIS Fellow/Scholar based in Europe and one CIFAR Fellow (Canada/US)/Canadian AI chair holder (Canada)

During their appointment, PhD students and postdocs will visit the secondary partner institution for an extended research stay of at least 6 months, where they will have first-hand access to the facilities and network of the partner.

PARTNERS¹

2 European² academic institutions (e.g. universities)

LOCATION

Partners must be located in different countries in Europe²

EXCHANGE

Minimum 6 months at the secondary partner (can be split up into multiple visits)

- If one of the advisors is a CIFAR Fellow/ Canadian AI chair holder, one of the institutions can be based in Canada or at the CIFAR Fellow's location (Canada or elsewhere).
- Exception: The exchange institution can be outside of Europe, but only if the exchange host (secondary advisor) is an ELLIS Fellow/Scholar. This exception only holds for the Academic Track.



Industry Track

The industry track aims to facilitate collaboration between European academic institutions and industry with the understanding that a vibrant and interactive ecosystem is key to stimulating innovation. Within the industry track, PhD students and postdocs conduct their research in collaboration with an academic institution and an industry partner. They are co-supervised by two advisors, one from each of the partners, and split their time conducting research and working between the two. Beyond the resources of the ELLIS network, industry track PhD and postdocs benefit from practical, first-hand experience working with industry while completing their appointment.

For this track, both advisors may be located in the same country. One advisor will represent the academic institution and the other the industry partner. Both the academic and industry advisor must be ELLIS Members and at least one of them a Fellow, Scholar or Unit Faculty.

PARTNERS¹

1 European academic institution + 1 European company

LOCATION

Partners² can be located in the same European country and/or city

EXCHANGE

Min. 6 months at the secondary partner (cumulative)³ and min. 50% in academia

- If one of the advisors is a CIFAR Fellow/ Canadian AI chair holder, one of the institutions can be based in Canada or at the CIFAR Fellow's location (Canada or elsewhere).
- The industry partner, industrial research lab, and industry advisor must all be based in Europe (regardless of HQ location), but can otherwise be in the same country/city as the academic partner.
- 3. In case there already is an extensive collaboration between an industry and academic partner at one site, e.g. a jointly funded and run industrial-academic lab, slightly different regulations may apply (for more info: phd-industry@ellis.eu).



Interdisciplinary Track

The interdisciplinary track supports PhD students and postdocs aiming to foster collaborations in two different research fields, one of which is not traditionally associated with machine learning/AI (e.g., law, biology, social sciences or humanities). The candidates are co-supervised by at least one ELLIS Fellow/Scholar and one advisor whose main expertise is unrelated to machine-learning/AI; if this second advisor is not an ELLIS Fellow/Scholar, they are a tenured faculty. The candidates spend a minimum of 50% of their time with their main advisor and at least 6 months (flexible partitioning) with their co-advisor.

Both advisors are based in Europe and may be located in the same institution/city. Should one advisor be based in the US/Canada (CIFAR Fellow) or Canada (Canadian Al chair holder), then the other advisor must be an ELLIS Fellow/Scholar based in Europe.

PARTNERS¹

2 European academic institutions

LOCATION

Partners can be located in the same European country, city, and/or university

EXCHANGE

Time split between main advisor (min. 50%) and secondary advisor (min. 6 months, cumulative)²

- If one of the advisors is a CIFAR Fellow/ Canadian AI chair holder, one of the institutions can be based in Canada or at the CIFAR Fellow's location (Canada or elsewhere).
- If the co-advisor is in the same institution/city, no 6-month visit is required but the PhD student/postdoc should regularly meet with their second advisor. The candidate is then also encouraged to spend at least a month abroad.



3 Tracks' Comparison

	Academic	Industry	Interdisciplinary
PARTNERS1	2 European² academic institutions (e.g. universities)	1 European academic institution + 1 European company	2 European academic institutions (e.g. universities)
LOCATION	Partners must be located in different countries in Europe ²	Partners³ can be located in the same European country and/or city	Partners can be located in the same European country, city, and/or university
EXCHANGE	Min. 6 months at the secondary partner (can be split up into multiple visits)	Min. 6 months at the secondary partner (cumulative) and min. 50% in academia ⁴	Time split between main advisor (min. 50%) and secondary advisor (min. 6 months, cumulative) ⁵

- 1. If one of the advisors is a CIFAR Fellow/ Canadian AI chair holder, one of the institutions can be based in Canada or at the CIFAR Fellow/s location (Canada or elsewhere).
- 2. Exception: The exchange institution can be outside of Europe, but only if the exchange host (secondary advisor) is an ELLIS fellow/scholar. This exception only holds for the academic track.
- 3. The industry partner, industrial research lab, and industry advisor must all be based in Europe (regardless of HQ location), but can otherwise be in the same country/city as the academic partner.
- 4. In case there already is an extensive collaboration between an industry and academic partner at one site, e.g. a jointly funded and run industrial-academic lab, slightly different regulations may apply (for more info: phd-industry@ellis.eu).
- 5. If the co-advisor is in the same institution/city, no 6-month visit is required but the PhD student/postdoc should regularly meet with their second advisor. The candidate is then also encouraged to spend at least a month abroad.

Application Process







Contents

- → How to Join the Program
- → Requirements
- → Central Recruiting Details
- Nomination Details



How to Join the PhD & Postdoc Program

There are two ways to join the ELLIS PhD & Postdoc Program as a junior researcher:

Central Recruiting

Prospective PhD students apply through the central ELLIS application portal once yearly in autumn. ELLIS pools candidates across Europe, allowing students to apply to multiple potential advisors with a single application and find the best match.

Nomination

PhD students or postdocs already working with an ELLIS Fellow, Scholar or Unit Faculty may be nominated throughout the year by their advisors. Currently, postdocs are only recruited non-centrally through the nomination process.



Research Topics

The ELLIS network covers a wide range of machine learning-driven research areas. We are looking for talented students and postdocs who are passionate about research in these fields. Research areas include but are not limited to:

AutoML · Bayesian & Probabilistic Learning · Bioinformatics · Causality · Computational Neuroscience · Computer Graphics • Computer Vision • Deep Learning • Earth & Climate Sciences • Health • Human Behavior, Psychology & Emotion • Human Computer Interaction • Human Robot Interaction • Information Retrieval • Interactive & Online Learning • Interpretability & Fairness • Law & Ethics • Machine Learning Algorithms • Machine Learning Theory • ML & Sustainability • ML in Chemistry & Material Sciences • ML in Finance • ML in Science & Engineering • ML Systems • Multi-agent Systems & Game Theory • Natural Language Processing • Optimization & Meta Learning • Privacy • Quantum & Physics-based ML • Reinforcement Learning & Control • Robotics • Robust & Trustworthy ML • Safety • Security, Synthesis & Verification • Symbolic Machine Learning • Unsupervised Learning • Social Sciences & Humanities • Entrepreneurship & Tech transfer



Requirements by Track

ACADEMIC		
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Advisors	1 ELLIS Fellow/Scholar/Unit Faculty + 1 ELLIS Fellow/Scholar/Member	
Candidate	There is a publication requirement for existing PhD students/postdocs who are nominated : at least 1 first-author publication in one of the top-tier venues in machine learning-driven fields (see. list in nomination form). There is no publication requirement for new students applying via the central application portal.	
Partners	2 European academic institutions that are located in different countries	
Exchange	Min. 6 months at the secondary institution (can be split up in multiple visits)	
Publication	ELLIS PhD students and postdocs will publish the results of their research in top-tier venues in machine learning-driven fields (cf. list of accepted venues in admission form/Letter of Intent).	



Requirements by Track

			INDUSTRY	
Ad	lvisors	1 ELLIS Fellow/Scholar/Unit Fa	aculty + 1 ELLIS Fellow/Scholar/Member	
Can	ndidate	publication in one of the top-tie	nent for existing PhD students/postdocs who are n er venues in machine learning-driven fields (cf.list in w students applying via the central application port	n nomination form). There is no
Pa	rtners		1 European academic institution + 1 European company; partners can be located in the same European country and/or city	
Exc	change		Min. 6 months at the secondary partner (cumulative) and min. 50% in academia	
Pub	lication		ocs will publish the results of their research in top- of accepted venues in admission form/Letter of Into	



Requirements by Track

			INTERDISCIPLINARY
Advisors			1 ELLIS Fellow/Scholar + 1 tenured faculty
Candidate	publication in one of the top-tier venue	existing PhD students/postdocs who ar s in machine learning-driven fields (cf.li nts applying via the central application p	st in nomination form). There is no
Partners		be located in t	2 European academic institutions; can be located in the same European country, city, and/or university
Exchange			time split between main advisor (min. 50%) and secondary advisor (min. 6 months, cumulative)
Publication		publish the results of their research in t with their co-advisor's research (pendin	op-tier venues in machine g the ELLIS PhD Committee's approval)



Central Recruiting Basic Information

A central, online application portal is available once yearly in autumn for new students looking for PhD opportunities within the ELLIS network.

- ELLIS offers a coordinated selection process for its pan-European PhD program.
- In their application, applicants choose from a set of ELLIS research areas and ELLIS Fellows/Scholars/Unit Faculty/CIFAR Fellows they would like to work with.
- Candidates will be centrally reviewed for excellence by a pool of experts; the best candidates will be shortlisted and may be invited for interviews by individual advisors. If an offer is made, the parties involved sign a Letter of Intent which specifies the main supervisor, the co-supervisor as well as plans for funding, exchange and graduation.
- ELLIS does not award degrees; the student must enroll at the degree-granting institution (typically the university the main supervisor is affiliated with).



Typically, more than 150 advisors advertise open positions in the call each year. On our application portal, you can apply to preferred labs with a single application!



Admission to the program is competitive. In a typical round, less than 5% of all registered applicants and between 5-10% of eligible applicants are accepted.



Central Recruiting

Important Details

ELLIS is a meta-program; the ELLIS society does not employ nor fund PhD students.

If you get an offer, you will be funded through your advisors' resources (nature and amount of funding and benefits may vary depending on country, institution etc. (contract vs. stipend). In some cases, a parallel application to a doctoral school, funding body or vacancy is required in order to be considered for that particular institution. The hiring process is local; conditions and regulations stipulated by the respective institution; admission requirements of local institutions apply.

Ask questions during interviews when in doubt.

Some institutions do not accept graduate students throughout the year

These institutions have strict deadlines for applying to their graduate programs (for instance, December or earlier) which overlap with the call's timeline.

In this case, you should not wait until the ELLIS selection procedure has ended, but apply in parallel through the advisor's institution. If you don't, or fail to meet the deadline, you might have to wait until the next year to enrol as a PhD student, despite having received an offer prior. In a worst case scenario, this might even jeopardize your offer as the advisor might not be in a position to wait/will lose the funding for this particular PhD position if the deadline isn't met.

Advisors are be able to indicate in their profile portal if a parallel application is required. Therefore, please make sure to read their comments and instructions carefully.

If unsure, visit the website of the institution or contact your preferred advisor. It's safest to apply to both programs in parallel to avoid any delays in the starting date of your contract.



Central Recruiting Timeline

Annual Call For Applications For Prospective PhDs Only

There is an annual application deadline on **October 31, 23:59 AoE**. Calls are announced on the ELLIS website and via the ELLIS Edge Newsletter. The application portal typically opens in October.

Only complete applications submitted before the application deadline will be considered.

This central recruiting process is for prospective PhDs only. Current PhDs and Postdocs should see the information about the Nomination Process.



Mind the deadline.

Don't submit last minute; submit at least a couple of days in advance to avoid any technical issues.

Remind your referees to submit in time (you can check the status in the portal).

Overall Timeline

Oct - Oct 31 Applications Nov - Dec Reviews Jan - mid-Feb Interviews late Feb - Mar Decisions



The application consists of 3 parts:

1 Application Form
2 Documents
3 References

1 Application Form

In the application form, you will provide your personal details, indicate your preferences for research fields and advisors, and list relevant degrees and experience.

A list of available advisors with open positions will be published on the application portal. Only advisors who participate in the current call (i.e. those that are listed on the portal in the "Advisor List") are eligible to recruit ELLIS PhDs.



2 Documents

You will need to upload the following documents (as PDFs):

- 1. A two-page motivational letter in which you
 - ☐ (1) explain why you want to earn a Ph.D. within the ELLIS network and
 ☐ (2) explain why you want to earn a Ph.D. within the ELLIS network and
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 - (2) include a research statement describing past research projects and interests as well as the future direction of your research.
 - Optional: In addition to (1) and (2), you may also mention specific advisors you are interested in working with.)
- 2. Your current CV that details your educational background, work experience, full citations of any publications you may have, any research presentations you have given, and any awards you have received.
- 3. Unofficial transcripts of all of your university studies (Bachelors, Masters), as well as a translation into English.
- 4. Optionally, additional documents such as a thesis, published paper, or project portfolio (or parts thereof) as a single PDF (<20 MB).



3 References

You will also be asked to provide the contact details of at least 2 referees (max. 3) who have agreed to submit a reference. You should contact your referees personally before you send a formal request via the portal. Referees will receive the upload link via the application system once you click the button to "request your reference letter."

After you send a request to one particular referee, you will no longer be able to make any changes to that referee's fields, i.e. you can no longer change or replace this referee or update their details. After the application deadline (**Oct 31**), you can no longer send out reference requests!

Triple-check that your email is valid; you will not be contacted if the request bounces back.



3 References

Selecting Your Referees



- At least two of the referees should be professionally established at the level of independent investigator, principal scientist, group leader, lecturer or above.
- We recommend that you include the principal investigator who supervised your thesis work.
- A maximum of one reference may come from a postdoc.
- Professional references are accepted, as long as the referee can comment on your academic/ research abilities (e.g. referees from industrial research labs).
- References from PhD students or classmates are not accepted.

Best Practice Guidelines



Contacting your referees directly beforehand ensures that they are willing to write a strong recommendation and will have the time to do so before the specified deadline.

Choose your referees carefully and think about who is best qualified to write you a strong recommendation. Referees must be able to assess your academic performance and research abilities.



Application Review Criteria

The following criteria address the candidate's scientific aptitude based on CV, transcripts, motivational letter and letters of reference. Top-tier publications are welcome, but not a necessary condition for admission.

- prior academic performance and potential
- track record relative to opportunities, career stage and any systematic differences in metrics for different areas of research
- competence for the selected research area
- uniqueness and quality of the motivational letter/research statement
- contribution to establishing an interdisciplinary and diverse community and culture
- general fit with the ELLIS Program and ELLIS vision

Eligibility Notes

Requirements for starting a PhD may differ across institutions/advisors (e.g. eligibility of BSc students, grades/GPA, language tests, etc.); admission requirements of local institutions apply (incl. parallel application if required).



Central Recruiting Advisors

Available Advisors

During the application process in the portal, the table "Available Advisors" indicates who is recruiting. By using the Advisor Map, you can find similar advisors based on research areas.

- You can indicate up to 10 "preferred" advisors in the application form. These are preliminary preferences; your "first" choice in the application does not need to be your "first" choice after the interviews. In order to join ELLIS, you must eventually get an offer from one of the advisors in the "Available Advisors" list.
- Familiarise yourself with their research, read up on requirements, parallel application and their comments in the portal and on their websites.

Interviews

Shortlisted candidates do not automatically get to speak with all of their preferred advisors; advisors decide whom to invite. Advisors you did not list as "preferred" advisor may contact you if they think you could be a good fit. You can interview with multiple advisors.

In previous rounds, about one third of the shortlisted candidates got an offer. Some shortlisted candidates did not get invited for interviews.

Offers

If you interview with multiple people and more than one advisor is interested in your profile, it can be the case that you get multiple offers. It can also be a good opportunity for a collaboration as part of our co-advisor model.



Central Recruiting Advisors & Time Sharing Requirements

ELLIS PhDs are co-supervised by one ELLIS Fellow/Scholar/Unit Faculty and one ELLIS Fellow/Scholar/Member. During the central recruiting process, the main focus will be on finding a match with the primary advisor. Finding a secondary advisor, or co-advisor, can be done simultaneously, or up to 5 months after acceptance to the program.

Primary advisors must all be at an academic institution. The PhD degree must come from a European institution, unless the main advisor is a CIFAR Fellow/Canadian AI chair holder. Based on the track, here are more details:

	Academic	Industry	Interdisciplinary
SECONDARY ADVISOR	At an academic institution in a different country	At a business or industry partner	An expert in a field unrelated to Al/machine learning
EXCHANGE	During their appointment, the PhD student must visit the secondary advisor in a different European country for min. 6 months (partitioning of the time is flexible).	The candidate will spend a minimum of 50% of their time at the academic partner institution and a minimum of 6 months with the industry partner. This can be accumulative (e.g. 2 days per week) or consecutive.	The candidate will spend a minimum of 50% of their time with the main advisor and a minimum of 6 months with the co-advisor (flexible partitioning). If the co-advisor is in the same country/university, the candidate should meet regularly with the co-advisor and is encouraged to spend at least one month abroad.

• For Industry Track to phd-industry@ellis.eu



Nomination Basic Info & Process

The nomination process is available for junior researchers who are already working as a PhD student or postdoc with an ELLIS Fellow, Scholar or Unit Faculty. Nomination is possible for any Track.

Nomination Process

Nomination	Review	Decision	
If the nomination requirements are fulfilled, the ELLIS Faculty advising the candidate can submit the nomination form and Letter of Intent .	The nomination is reviewed. A decision can be expected within 1 month.	If the nomination is approved, the PhD student/postdoc is admitted to the ELLIS PhD and Postdoc program, and will be listed on the	
Download the form at ellis.eu/nomination-phd-postdoc. Submit the documents:		website (ellis.eu/phd-postdoc).	
 For Academic & Interdisciplinary Track to phd@ellis.eu 			



Nomination Requirements

PHD STUDENTS

POSTDOCS

Degree

The anticipated degree must be from a European institution, unless one of the advisors is a CIFAR Fellow or Canadian Al Chair Holder.

Candidate

There is a publication requirement for existing PhD students/postdocs who are **nominated**: at least 1 first-author publication in one of the top-tier venues in machine learning-driven fields (cf. list in Letter of Intent)

ELLIS Membership

Membership in ELLIS is not required.

Membership in ELLIS is required. See ellis.eu/become-a-member for details.

Advisors & Exchange

Agreement to fulfill the co-advising and specific exchange or time-sharing requirements based on the selected track.

Publication

ELLIS PhD students and postdocs will publish the results of their research in top-tier venues in machine learning-driven fields.

Contacts







PhD & Postdoc Program Committee



Florence d'Alché-Buc Télécom Paris Committee Chair



Alex Bronstein Technion



Bernhard Schölkopf ELLIS Institute Tübingen



Gergely Neu Universitat Pompeu Fabra



Ingmar Posner University of Oxford



Mario Fritz CISPA Helmholtz Center for Information Security, Saarland University



Torsten Sattler Czech Technical University



Siyu Tang ETH Zurich



PhD & Postdoc Program Coordination



Charlotte Delage PhD & Postdoc Program Coordinator



Adela Pranindiati Industry Track Coordinator



Daniel Selinger Tech Lead



Program Contacts & Additional Details

Contact Email

ELLIS PhD & Postdoc Program: **phd@ellis.eu**

Academic & Interdisciplinary Track: phd@ellis.eu

Industry track: phd-industry@ellis.eu

Key Webpages

ELLIS PhD & Postdoc Program ellis.eu/phd-postdoc-program

Program FAQs ellis.eu/phd-postdoc-program

Mobility Funds ellis.eu/mobility-funds

Acknowledgments

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