



## **Cross-Border Migration: Challenges and Experiences of Nigerians in the United Kingdom Between 2013 and 2023**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study empirically examined the relationship between Nigerian cross-Border migrants, their challenges and experiences in the United Kingdom. The challenges and experiences examined include the United Kingdom's immigration policies on Nigerian migrants, racial discrimination, prospects of getting employment, remittances and socio-cultural factors. The study utilized a combination of two theories as its framework of analysis: The New Economic Theory of Labour Migration and the World System Theory. The survey research design was adopted for the study. Specifically, Google survey and interview (WhatsApp chat). The respondents in this study were Nigerians in the United Kingdom who were randomly selected and administered 1105 copies of questionnaire online through Google survey. Also, convenience sampling method was employed to distribute copies of the questionnaire to respondents in the four countries of the UK (England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland). The data collected from the questionnaires as well as the interviews were analyzed utilizing descriptive statistics. The finding of the study showed that the United Kingdom's immigration policies have negative impact on Nigerian migrants (especially those who migrated recently). The study recommends that intending Nigerian migrants should acquaint themselves of all the relevant immigration laws before embarking on such journey. Also, that Nigerians who intend to migrants to the United Kingdom should envisage possible racial discrimination in the country.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Migration is not a new development or phenomenon. It is an age-long practice that dates back to earliest human history. However, what is new in contemporary times is the rate at which people move across national or international boundaries. This is largely due to modern transportation system that enhances the movement of the people. Africa could be described as a continent on the move. It has witness large population movement overtime, especially during the slave trade (trans-Saharan slave) in which large number of Africans were forcefully transported to Europe,

Arab world, the Americas and West Indies as domestic and plantation workers to meet the manpower needs of their owners (Adegbola, 1990).

The Berlin Conferences of 1884/1885 marked a turning point in African migration where the colonial authorities created artificial boundaries across the continent. These demarcations laid the foundation for both colonial and post-colonial interactions within the region. Since then, African people have continued to migrate from place to place in search for better living conditions (Ufo-Okeke, et al, 2021). Also, both, internal and external factors have

continued to shape and reshape migration of Africans out of the continent. These include bad governance, wars, conflicts, unfriendly economic conditions and political upheavals corroborated by severe global pressure as well as natural disasters, human rights violations and abuses and unemployment among others.

In Nigeria, with the advent of colonial rule, many Nigerians began to migrate to urban areas as labourers and traders seeking better living conditions. Aside the fact that these areas served as colonial administrative nerves centers, they were connected with roads and railway lines for easy transportation of goods and services. From the 1950s, the colonial government (Federal and Regional), communities and families began to send their children and wards to United Kingdom (UK) for higher education. Some of these migrants later returned home after further studies abroad while significant others remain in their countries of destination. However, migration of Nigerians out of the continent did not occur on a very large scale until 1960. According to Mberu (2010:10), "from the 1950s through the 1970s the emerging elites moved mainly to the UK". This was due to the colonial legacy for educational pursuits and in few cases for administrative matters.

The general belief was that Nigerians who studied abroad would return home after their studies with valuable skills (knowledge) needed for nation- building by taking up jobs in the civil services and the burgeoning oil and private sectors of the Nigerian economy. Unfortunately, after independence in 1960, the country began to witness the migration of highly skilled professionals to the UK and the United States (U.S.). As political tensions engulfed the nation (during the civil war 1967-1970), the country and its economy stagnated in the late 1970s. Thus, the stream of migration out of the country increased unlike early migration pattern. This latter group of Nigerians tended to stay abroad permanently after graduation (Kalu and Joseph, 2021). To Mberu and Pongou, (2010:35) "a developed trend of professional migration emerged by 1978, as an estimated 30,000 Nigerians graduates from UK higher institutions were living outside African, with 2,000 of them living in the United States". By 1984 the Nigerian population living in the U.S. had increased to 10,000 according to Afolayan (1988), Kalu and Joseph (2021). Until the early 1980s, few Nigerians professionals saw emigrations as a rewarding option because local working conditions were attractive and internationally competitive. However, the biting effects of economics restructuring, authoritarian military dictatorship and the fluctuating economic situation fueled large scale emigration especially skilled professionals pushing many of them to market their skills internationally (Adegbola, 1990). It was estimated that 103, 500 professionals and technicians emigrated from Nigerian to the UK, U.S. and Canada and the Middle East between 1987-1989 (Adepoju, 2000, Adegbola, 1990). The annulment of June 12 Presidential

election led to increases of Nigerian asylum seekers in the UK from 20 asylum seekers in 1989 to 4,000 in 1994. In the first three months of 1995 over 1,700 new asylum seekers arrived in the UK from Nigeria fleeing the country's military regime which had imprisoned political opponents (Mberu, 2010).

Nonetheless since 2012, young Nigerians began to emigrate to Europe overland through Saharan desert and the Mediterranean Sea. The launching pad for these movements was the North African countries of Libya, Tunisia Algeria and Morocco. Thus, the irregular migration to Europe, particularly through Libya and Morocco by Nigerian youths created different dimension that could best be described as exodus of youths. Unfortunately, those who embarked on these journeys were children of secondary school age and their higher institution equivalents. Despite the numbers of recorded deaths in both the hostile Saharan desert and Mediterranean Sea, many Nigerian youths since 2012 are willing to take the risk (either with family support or their peer groups). Sadly, enough children from not sufficiently endowed families risked their lives in order to migrate from the country. Consequently, many parents put their properties on sale to enable them raise funds to send their children to Europe. In the same vein, youths who are less privileged, engage in crime in order to raise funds to travel to Europe.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Migration to the United Kingdom by Nigerians has a long history. In the past century, it was motivated mostly by the desire for higher education by young men and women in the country. This was facilitated by the scholarship programmes put in place by both colonial and post-colonial administrations. While some of the early beneficiaries of these facilities did not return to the country, the desire of more Nigerians to migrate to the UK remained steady. Since 2020 there has been a steady increase in the number of highly skilled professionals, students and their dependants to emigrate from Nigeria to the UK. This is a major concern that has informed policies by both the Nigerian and UK governments to seek a panacea.

Some of the problems these Nigerian migrants face range from racial discrimination, low paying jobs, disparity in wages and difficulty in remittance to Nigeria. Currently in Nigeria, those in good paying jobs such as banking, insurance, Information Technology (IT) experts and lecturers are resigning their jobs and some sell-off their properties to migrate the UK with their families in droves. The UK Government in 2014 introduced a policy where irregular migrants were deported before they were allowed to appeal their deportation in order to stem the tide of irregular migration in the country. The current UK policy on migration from 2024 does not allow migrants to enter the country with their dependants. Those Nigerians who were

granted visa for higher degrees had up to two years to stay in UK and regularize their stay in the country or be forced to go back to their country of origin.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to explore the challenges and experiences of Nigeria migrants in the United Kingdom, especially those that migrated recently. The research focused on the migrant's own narratives which encompassed personal experiences, racial discrimination, host government policies, employment and remittances. The study therefore sought:

1. to examine the impact of United Kingdom government policy towards Nigerian migrants.
2. to examine the impact of racial discrimination on Nigerian migrants in the United Kingdom.
3. to examine the prospects of Nigeria migrants getting employed in the United Kingdom.
4. to examine whether Nigerian migrants in the United Kingdom are remitting fund back home.
5. to examine other socio-cultural challenges facing Nigerian migrants in the United Kingdom.

### Propositions of the Study

The following research proposition were formulated to guide the study:

1. United Kingdom Government immigration policies adversely affect Nigerian migrants in the country.
2. Nigerians in the United Kingdom face some forms of racial discrimination in their work place and daily life.
3. The prospects of getting employment in the UK by Nigerian migrants are slim.
4. There are irregular remittances from Nigerian migrants in the United Kingdom.
5. Nigerian migrants in the UK face diverse socio-cultural challenges.

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

This study utilized a combination of two theories as its framework of analysis. They were the New Economic Theory of Labour Migration and the World System Theory. The choice of these theories was to significantly give inclusive explanation of the current wave of migration in Nigeria; why Nigerians in well-paying jobs are migrating in droves to the UK as well as the demand for highly skilled professionals and youths (students) in the UK.

The basic assumption of the New Economic Theory of Labour Migration places emphasis on the fact that migration decision is made by household or family unit rather than individual migrant. Stark and Bloom (1985:76), argue that "the decision to migrate cannot only be explained at the individual level but rather within the social context of a social entity called household". The household tends to be risk avoiding when its income is insufficient. Thus, "one way of reducing the risk of

insufficient household income is labour migration of a family member abroad who may send remittances". A family that sends a member to another country loses production and investment restrictions. However, the remittances they receive have positive impact on the economy of source of sending countries (Taylor, 1999). Thus, families or households plan and sponsor one of their members to migrate with the intension of reducing risks to income, properties and production or to gain access to scarce investment capital. As such, families plan and send one or more members to work abroad (Bogue, 2010).

The purpose is either to reduce risk through diversification and create multiple sources of income rather than income maximization and "that the prospect of remittances back to the family for purpose of migrants remittances provide income insurance for households of origin" (Bogue 2010:15). The risk-spreading mechanism reveals the occurrences of migration in the absence of wage differentials. According to Lucas and Stark (1985:100), "the basic idea is that for household as a whole, it may be praetorian means of sharing or as investment in access to higher earnings stream"

Nonetheless, the above explanation does not adequately capture the socio-cultural environment that necessitates the desire of the migrants. Also, the impact of international pull factors is not sufficiently explained. Since migration is caused by a combination of both the push and the pull factors, a recourse to the World System Theory is apt.

Furthermore, the basic assumption of the World System Theory places emphasis on the fact that international migration are driven by disruption and dislocation in "periphery" states as a result of capitalist penetration in the "periphery" leading to movement or the migration of skilled labour toward the core where there are labour shortages or where there is high demand of skilled professionals in the "developed countries" from "less developed countries" of the Global South. However, De Haas (2014:10) argues "that the world system theory is rooted in neo-Marxist traditional understanding of the social, economic, cultural and political structures that direct the behaviour of individuals in ways that do not generally create greater equilibrium but rather reinforce such disequilibria". The unequal distribution of political and economic relationship continues to reproduce itself thereby creating inequalities between the 'core' and the 'periphery'. In this regard, the State and the Multi-national Corporations shape migration and see migrants as cheap source of labour force that will protect the interest of "developed countries" thereby reinforcing social and geographical inequalities. (Castles, De Haas and Miller, 2014).

To Wallenstein (1974), the historical-structural approach places emphasis on the role of distortion and displacement in the peripheral region of the world, as a result of colonial and the capitalist expansion of neo-

colonial government and the Multi-national Corporations. The activities of Multi-national Corporations “have had profound consequences for migration as issues are not only on the capitalist mode of production, but also the socio-cultural ones including transportation, communication and military links that are used to penetrate peripheries land consolidation” (Zanker, 2008:62). As a result of these links, it creates demand for labour in major cities in advanced countries which act as pull to migration from less developed countries. Also, while Labour migration follows the dynamics of market creation and structure of the global economy, it does not put individual motivations into consideration (Zanker 2008). In this context, migrants are seen as victims of the capital system who have no alternatives but to emigrate in order to survive. Nonetheless, this view did not consider the diversity of migration and the fact that most persons who migrate succeed in significantly improving their quality of life through migration (De Haas, 2014).

## METHODOLOGY

To meet the specific objectives of this study, the research design is based on survey method. This method was purposely chosen to generate the required data for analysis from varied sources. By the survey design method, data were collected from primary sources with the use of telephone interviews (WhatsApp) and questionnaires of the research subjects. These instruments were intended to generate data that could be used to analyze the issues, challenges and experiences facing Nigerian migrants in the UK (especially those that migrated recently). It was also used to elicit data on how these experiences have impacted on the lives of these new set of migrants in the UK. Also, how immigration policy, racial discrimination, employment opportunities among others affect their lives was measured.

### Population of Study

According to the UK National Office of Statistics (2022), a total population of 280,226 Nigerians lived in the country in 2022. Of this number, 44,195 Nigerians migrated to the UK in the same year according to the same source. However, the combined population of Scotland and Northern Ireland is 9,458. Also, the population for both England and Wales are 270,768. The reason for this grouping is based on the data provided by UK National Office of Statistics (2022).

### Sampling Techniques

The sampling technique for the study was the survey method. However, purposive sampling was deployed to ensure the research objects responses were adequately captured given the international focus of the study. To achieve this, questionnaires (Google survey questionnaire) and telephone interview (WhatsApp chat) were used. The combinations of purposive or judgmental and snowball

sampling techniques were also utilized. The choice of the purposive sampling techniques was informed by the fact that this approach helped the researchers to select the sample or units they intended to study or observe base on their own “judgment about which ones or units was useful or representative” (Babbie, 2005:189) for the study. The snowball sample was also used because it helped the researchers and the research assistants to collect data from the few numbers of the targeted population which helped to locate other members of population under study.

Furthermore, the study made use of trusted research assistants based in the UK who were given an elaborated pre-field work training to administer the prepared questionnaires for the exercise. These assistants were Nigerians who were trained through the University of Benin Webmaster (Information and Communication Technology Unit of the Vice Chancellor’s Office). This communication was intended for the above category and is confidentially in compliance to the ethics of social research.

### Sources of Data Collection

Data for the study were generated from primary sources. The is entailed the gathering of data through the administration of questionnaires (Google survey questionnaire forms) and the in-depth interview schedule was telephone interview method (WhatsApp chat). The questionnaires and the in-depth interview schedule were structured in line with set objectives of the study. Both schedules were intended to elicits the views of respondents who are Nigerian migrants in the UK on the purpose of the research study titled.

Also, the primary sources of data were used to elicit the views of Nigerian migrants in United Kingdom on their experiences and challenges. The in-depth interview was adopted to tease out information from some knowledgeable individuals under the population of the study that were not available to be selected respondents. Each of the selected research respondents was interviewed at length and the data gathered.

### Statistical Techniques of Analysis

The qualitative data derived from the study were quantitatively analyzed with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22. Also, for the quantitative data, thematic analysis was deployed. This is because the data generated for this study were largely unstructured. Thus, themes for the study were isolated from participant’s responses. Nonetheless, a combination of simple percentage and chi-square were adopted for the data analysis. However, being largely unstructured and qualitative in nature, the data derived through in-depth interview were analyzed by developing themes and organizing the data under the themes. The questionnaires distributed to respondents were in line with the specific

objectives of the study. The responses generated therefore are shown in the tables and charts below.

Below is the tabular presentation of the analyzed data for this study: This was done in line with the articulated propositions:

### Data Analysis

**Table 1: The Impact of United Kingdom's Immigration Policy on New Nigerian Migrants.**

Questions/ Responses	Item 1	%	Item 2	%	Item 3	%	Item 4	%	Item 5	%
Strongly Agree	482	66	541	74	611	84	481	66	340	47
Agree	160	22	159	22	82	11	222	30	296	40
Undecided	25	3	----	----	13	2	-----	----	15	2
Disagree	48	7	25	3	17	2	16	2	55	8
Strongly Disagree	16	2	6	1	8	1	12	2	25	3
Total	731	100	731	100	731	100	731	100	731	100

Source: Author's Field Work, 2024

**Table 2: The Impact of Racial Discrimination on Nigerian Migrants in the United Kingdom**

Questions/ Responses	Item 6	%	Item 7	%	Item 8	%	Item 9	%	Item 10	%
Strongly Agree	286	39	334	46	395	54	431	59	285	39
Agree	127	17	225	31	282	39	198	27	311	43
Undecided	15	2	52	7	14	2	40	5.5	35	5
Disagree	211	29	85	11	24	3	39	5.3	56	7
Strongly Disagree	92	13	35	5	16	2	23	3.1	44	6
Total	731	100	731	100	731	100	731	100	731	100

Source: Author's Field Work, 2024

**Table 3: The Prospects of Nigerians Migrants Getting Employment in the United Kingdom**

Questions/ Responses	Item 11	%	Item 12	%	Item 13	%	Item 14	%	Item 15	%
Strongly Agree	482	66	20	3	12	1.6	514	70.3	14	2
Agree	190	26	54	7	28	3.8	192	26.3	11	2
Undecided	9	1	26	4	11	1.5	---	---	16	2
Disagree	27	4	295	40	280	38.3	10	1.4	280	38
Strongly Disagree	21	3	336	46	400	54.7	15	2.1	410	56
Total	731	100	731	100	731	100	731	100	731	100

Source: Author's Field Work, 2024

**Table 4: Impact of Remittances on Resignation of Nigerians in Well-pay Jobs and Migrating to the United Kingdom**

Questions/ Responses	Item 16	%	Item 17	%	Item 18	%	Item 19	%	Item 20	%
Strongly Agree	501	69	406	56	422	57.7	541	74	495	67.7
Agree	167	23	282	38.5	250	34	142	19	187	25.6
Undecided	----	----	9	1.2	12	2	8	1.09		
Disagree	41	6	25	3.4	31	4.2	16	2	26	3.6
Strongly Disagree	22	3	18	2.5	19	2.6	20	3	15	2.05
Total	731	100	731	100	731	100	731	100	731	100

Source: Author's Field Work, 2024

**Table 5: Socio-cultural Challenges Facing Nigerian Migrants in the United Kingdom**

Questions/ Responses	Item 21	%	Item 22	%	Item 23	%	Item 24	%
Strongly Agree	360	49	441	60	506	69.2	402	54.9
Agree	292	40	232	32	165	23	298	40.7
Undecided	9	1.2	25	3	10	1.4	—	—
Disagree	36	4.9	20	3	40	6.	18	2.5
Strongly Disagree	34	4.6	13	1.7	10	1.4	15	2
Total	731	100	731	100	731	100	731	100

Source: Author's Field Work, 2024

**Research Findings**

The major findings from the study are as follows:

1. On the proposition that UK government immigration policy adversely affects Nigerian migrants in the country. The result showed that changes in immigration policy had adverse effects on Nigerian migrants (especially those on study route). For example, if they fail to get employment after graduation, they could face deportation with their dependants
2. The analysis on the proposition that Nigerians in the UK face some forms of racial discriminations in their work places and daily lives proved that some Nigerians are discriminated against both at home and offices. To corroborate this, Sveinsson (2015), in his study on Nigerian doctors working with National Health Scheme in England are discriminated against when it comes to area of specialty in the medical field.
3. The proposition on the prospects of Nigeria migrants getting employed in the UK demonstrated that although the desire for better job opportunities was the main reason most Nigerians embarked on the study route to the country, many of them were disillusion upon arrival. This was consequent upon the non-availability of the much-expected jobs as the UK government could not guarantee enough jobs for her citizens, let alone immigrants. The net effect of this is that many Nigerians resident in the country survive through menial jobs regardless of their professional trainings.
4. The analysis on the proposition that Nigeria migrants in the UK remit funds back home, showed that although remittance is the major driver of the current migration of Nigerians, it is dependent on the availability of good paying jobs. Nonetheless, as one of the respondents said "of what use it is for someone to stay in a big office in Nigeria and at the end of the day nothing to take care of his family. It is better to do a menial job in UK and have something to send back home than stay in Nigeria with a big office".
5. The analysis of the proposition that Nigerian migrants in UK face diverse socio-cultural challenges showed

manifestations in the areas of children up bring and the protection of women over property rights. Thus, Nigerian migrants with strong patriarchal background find it difficult to adapt to a new socio-cultural environment quickly. In some cases, Nigerian migrants who attempted to disciplined their children were either reprimanded or suffered the pains of denied parenthood by relevant UK authorities.

**Discussion of Finding**

The findings on proposition one that UK Government immigration policies will adversely affect Nigerian migrants in the country. A large percentage of the respondents agreed that immigration policy by the UK authorities do impact negatively on new Nigerian migrants, especially, those on study route. Indeed, there is the 2022 agreement between UK and Nigerian governments which allows the deportation of Nigerians who overstay their visa. Similarly, there is the 2024 UK policy of reducing the number of foreign students who bring their dependents along to the country (especially where the spouse work while the student goes to school). One respondent said "some Nigerian students in UK universities have lost their studentship because of their inability to pay their tuition fees as result of declining value of the Naira".

The result from proposition two showed that there is racial discrimination against Nigerian migrants in UK. A large percentage of respondents agreed to the fact that some forms of racism exist in the UK (specially against Africans who are not UK citizens). The racial discrimination is more pronounced among low skilled workers. This was corroborated by the study conducted by Servission in 2015 in his work "Swimming Against: The Tide Trajectories and Experiences of Migration Amongst Nigeria Doctors in England". He wrote "that black doctors from Nigeria working with National Health Services are discriminated against by their colleagues and patients". In the area of specialties or career progression they are pushed to the psychiatry departments.

The result from proposition three showed that the prospects of Nigerian migrants getting employed in the UK were the main drivers for the current wave of migration. A

large percentage of respondents agreed that the desire to get employed is the reason behind recent increase in migration by Nigerians to the UK. Many respondents said “most Nigerians are not getting employed with their qualification”. Some or most of them are employed in the health-care sector as health assistants or as care givers. While some find themselves as security workers, shop attendants, others engage in menial jobs. Some of these Nigerians were professionals before leaving country. Those in the medical field have comparative advantage because of shortage of medical personnel in the UK.

Proposition four states the impact of remittances on resignation of Nigerians in well pay jobs and migrating to the UK in droves. A large percentage of the respondents agreed that the desire for improve leaving condition, falling value of the Naira as well as the desire for foreign currency is the reason behind the recent wave of migration by Nigerians to the UK. The majority of the respondents said that many of immigrants from Nigeria (because many of them relocated with their family members) spend money on their children education. Thus, the majority of the migrants are mainly students and their dependents. The result of the proposition five states that Nigerian migrants in UK faces diverse socio-cultural challenges. A great percentage of the respondents agreed that new Nigerian migrants face some forms of socio-cultural challenges in the areas of women and child rights. In the UK, women have more rights over properties and children upbringing. There were cases where some Nigerian women in the UK sought for divorce because of the benefits attached to it.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of the study showed that the United Kingdom’s immigration policies have negative impact on Nigerian migrants (especially those who migrated recently). Thus, the study recommends the following:

1. That intending Nigerian migrants should acquaint themselves of all the relevant immigration laws before embarking on such journey. This is necessary because of the regular changes in the UK immigration policies. For example, UK Government in 2014 introduced a policy where irregular migrants were deported before they were allowed to appeal their deportation in order to stem the tide of irregular migration in the country. The current UK policy on migration from 2024 migrants does not allow migrants to enter the country with their dependants. Nigerians who were granted visa for higher degrees had up to two years to stay in UK and regularize their stay in the country or be forced to go back to Nigeria.
2. That many Nigerians in the UK face work place racism and discrimination as well as in their everyday life. The major problems these Nigerian migrants face range from racial discrimination, working in low paid

jobs, doing menial jobs, disparity in wages, and finding it difficult to remit money back home despite being unemployed in UK. Currently in Nigeria, those in well pay jobs such as banking, insurance, information technology (IT) experts and lecturers are resigning their jobs and some selling off their properties and migrating to UK with their families in droves. This study has revealed the experiences of doctors from Nigerian and other African countries in UK that were recruited to practice where they were continually exploited. They work long hours and suffer unfair salary deductions. Furthermore, some Nigerians in the UK face work place racism and discrimination as well as in their everyday life.

3. That the possibility Nigerian migrants getting employed is slim and remitting funds back home is not as easy as it seems. Also, semi-skilled migrants should know that the UK is not looking for illiterates or semi-skilled people to emigrate to their countries but the brightest and the best.
4. That intending migrants should do a background check on the real-life situation in United Kingdom before embarking on such journey. This is particularly instructive to those who are well established in Nigeria and are resigning from their jobs.

## CONCLUSION

This study acknowledges that the challenges of Nigerian migrants in the UK are real. While it is true that the Nigerian State created the necessary conditions for some of her citizens to migrate, it is equally true that much of the problems they face in the UK are not Nigerian made. Problems like racial discrimination, inadequate employment, unfriendly social welfare policies and the risk of deportation are associated with the host country. For some genuine migrants who have overstayed their visa permit, the risk of coming irregular migrants make them possible candidates for deportation in line with 2022 immigration agreement between United Kingdom and Nigerian governments.

Despite the several challenges this study identified, Nigerian migrants to the UK are not in any discouraged from migrating to abroad. This is because socio-economic and security conditions in the country are the push factor for people to leave the country (especially those who have the means).

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