

Needs of women and girls in humanitarian action in Gaza Gender Alert for the 2016 Response Plan¹

During the 2014 hostilities in Gaza, there was significant concern for the protection of civilians. The intense Israeli shelling on Gaza, one of the most densely populated areas in the world, meant that even residential neighborhoods, schools, and hospitals were not spared from the violence. The majority of civilian casualties and fatalities took place in people's homes. Civilians were also injured inside hospitals and schools used at the time as shelters². The indiscriminate use of military action resulted in the high toll of civilian casualties and fatalities and the large scale of displacement affecting more than one quarter of the total population in Gaza. The physical damage to more than 13% of total housing stock in Gaza as a result of the Israeli offensive has meant that even with the ending of hostilities, a significant number of the population remained displaced and in need of medium and long term shelter solutions.

The 2014 hostilities affected a predominantly refugee population that has already been living in dire humanitarian conditions due to the Israeli occupation and the blockade imposed since 2007 on movement of people and goods, including reconstruction materials. Being the third round of military offensives on Gaza since 2008 has meant that the existing fragile reality affecting the livelihoods and protection of the population had already been depleted leaving them with very little resources to fall back on. Indicators on food insecurity, poverty, unemployment, and gender based violence including domestic violence and early marriage show that Gaza's humanitarian situation is more fragile than other areas in oPt.

In Gaza, there is rigid gender division of labour between men and women. With few exceptions, men are largely viewed as the heads of households and the main providers and protectors of their families - a role that Gazan men are mostly unable to meet due to the fragile security situation, and lack of work opportunities. Men's employment has suffered as a result of the restrictions on accessing work opportunities inside or outside Gaza, leaving men and women to compete over the limited labor demand inside blockaded Gaza. Women are responsible for all care work related to their often large and extended families with high numbers of children. According to UNRWA, the average size of families in Gaza is 6.3 with a total fertility rate being 4.3 per woman³. Women's labour force participation in Gaza is amongst the lowest in the world (16% compared to 17.4% for all of oPt⁴). Their economic activity is largely concentrated in unpaid agricultural work or informal employment. The strict social codes of segregation between men and women meant that women and girls are confined to the private sphere of their homes and are mainly reliant on male family members for their livelihoods as well as access to critical information about the security situation, work opportunities, humanitarian assistance and services and other. The gendered division of roles and social restrictions on women and girls often translates into their exclusion and limited role in decision making within the household and beyond. Added to that, an increase in incidence of domestic violence has been recorded in Gaza over the past few years which is largely attributed to

¹ This document is based on the assessments and analyses cited in the list of references and has greatly benefited from inputs from UNRWA,, UNFPA, and women's organizations in Gaza

² UNRWA Schools used to shelter IDPs in the aftermath or the emergency were referred to as collective centres

³ UNRWA, Health Department 2014 Annual report, <http://www.unrwa.org/resources/reports/health-department-annual-report-2014>

⁴ PCBS 2013

the impact of conflict and internal Palestinian political divide, high poverty and unemployment and the overall restrictions on movement of people and goods as enforced by the blockade.

Key facts about the population affected by the 2014 war on Gaza:

- The majority of civilian casualties and fatalities during the 2014 hostilities in Gaza occurred inside homes, hospitals and schools used at the time as collective centres resulting in high toll amongst women and children. Amongst the 2151 Palestinians killed during the war on Gaza 1462 were civilians of which 551 were children, and 299 were women including at least 16 were pregnant. (protection cluster) At least 142 families lost three or more family members, a total of 739 people⁵.
- It is estimated that around 700 women were widowed as a result of the war in 2014.
- According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health, over 11,100 Palestinians, including 3,374 children, 2,088 women and 410 elderly were injured. It is estimated that some 10 per cent of the injured may be long-term or permanently impaired.⁶
- Based on demographic calculations, there were 45,000 pregnant women in Gaza in need of maternity care during the war. Their access to antenatal care was restricted due to displacement, closure or damage to health facilities. According to UNFPA and UNRWA, since the second half of 2014 there has been a doubling of registered cases of maternal and neonatal mortality.
- At the height of the conflict, about 500,000 Gazans were displaced from their homes. Over 300,000 of them moved into UNRWA and MoE schools which were used as temporary shelters, and later transformed into collective centres. Today about 17,817 families (about 100,000 people) are displaced due to total or severe damage to their homes.
- IDPs currently live in temporary housing arrangements or with host families often under inadequate conditions of overcrowding, lack of privacy or protection from weather elements. Female IDPs face particular vulnerabilities including reported increase in incidence of gender based violence and harassment. They are also at risk of exclusion from shelter assistance given that women are unlikely to have tenure of their housing.
- The average size of families in Gaza is 6.3 while economic dependency ratio reaches almost 8 dependents per income earner at the household level. This high economic dependency ratio is a key driver of food in security which is largely driven by the low labour force participation amongst women and the high unemployment rates. Women's labour force participation in Gaza standing at 12.4% (compared to men's of 63.9%) is amongst the lowest in the world. While the female unemployment rate in Gaza reaches as high as 44.0% (compared to men's 25.8%). This reality, coupled with women's limited share of assets (only 6% of agricultural holdings in Gaza is owned by women), leaves women in an extremely vulnerable economic situation that is generally overlooked by humanitarian response.

Priorities for the 2016 HRP: Groups facing particular protection risks:

The slow recovery and reconstruction of Gaza, coupled with the long standing Israeli blockade and the tightened restrictions from the Egyptian side continue to deepen humanitarian needs and are having a visible impact on various aspects of the lives of the population. Various assessments and research have pointed to evidence of particular vulnerabilities experienced by groups of the population. It is hoped that the humanitarian response in 2016 will pay special attention to ensure that humanitarian assistance is tailored to address the needs of these particular groups.

⁵ OCHA, Humanitarian Needs overview 2015, March 2015

⁶ OCHA, Gaza Initial Rapid Assessment Report, September 2014 http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/gaza_mira_report_9september.pdf

Adolescent boys and girls:

Due to the war, displacement and impoverishment in Gaza, adolescent boys and girls are especially vulnerable to school drop out and significant protection concerns including physical and emotional violence, sexual abuse, arrest and detention, child labour, recruitment and use by armed groups, and early marriage.

There is evidence that prevalence of early marriage for girls has been on the increase over the past few years especially in communities living in poverty and overcrowdedness⁷. 2.8% of women are married before the age of 15 in Gaza compared to 1.6% in West Bank. According to 2010 UNFPA data, 24.6% of marriage contracts in Gaza were for girls below 18 compared to the West Bank rate of 20% and less than 1% male⁸. Data for all of oPt shows that 4.6% of females between 15-49 are married before their 15th birthday with the percentages being highest in rural areas and refugee camps. The insecure reality of the life of IDPs, the loss of livelihood sources, the overcrowded housing and loss of familiar social networks create an increased sense of urgency to marry adolescent girls as early as the age of 15 years. This is perceived as a protection measure for the girls as well as a relief from the economic burden of a family member. Early marriage for girls often entails their dropping out of schools either as a result of family pressure or to school practices.

School drop out rates are higher for boys than it is for girls with seeking work being the main reason for boys leaving schools (UNICEF) as adolescent boys are expected to contribute to household income in times of crises. Adolescent boys are also subject to direct protection threats either as a result of their involvement with armed groups or their targeting by Israeli attacks in access restricted areas. Boys are more at risk of being injured from ERWs.

Recommended action:

- Education cluster to address school dropout rates for adolescent girls and boys in Gaza.
- Psychosocial support for adolescent boys and girls acknowledge their gender differentiated vulnerabilities

Widows:

About 17,817 families have been displaced due to total or severe damage to their homes resulting in the displacement of about 100,000 people . In addition, 161123 families had suffered from minor damage to their houses. Shelter related assistance is provided to home owners whose houses were damaged or destroyed during the war. This assistance includes cash assistance to repair or rebuild. Families whose homes were rendered uninhabitable are also eligible for a reintegration grant and an interim rental subsidy. Delay in funding and limitations imposed by the Israeli blockade on entry of construction material have extended the displacement of these IDPs.

There is no accurate data on numbers of women who were widowed as a result of the war but MOWA estimates around 700 women were widowed as a result of the war in 2014. A similar figure was estimated for the 2012 invasion. A number of associations provided cash assistance to widows, but often these women could not access this assistance because of lack of information, transportation fees they cannot afford or social restrictions described earlier. Consequently, widows send a male relative to receive the assistance on her behalf. These women report that there were many instances where this assistance did not reach them.

⁷ Women's Affairs Centre, Early Marriage in Gaza: Causes and Impact, Palestine 2015 (Draft)

⁸ These figures are particularly concerning in light of the increasing age at first marriage in oPt. In 2000, it was 24.1 for males and 18.9 for females. By 2005, it was 24.7 for males and in 2012 it was 21.9% for females(UNFPA)
<http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/Portals/PCBS/Downloads/book1941.pdf>

Widows face particular challenges in accessing humanitarian assistance or inherited assets.

Particular attention needs to address barriers facing widows based on the following reasons:

- The traditional division of roles amongst women and men may render women unprepared to take on all roles played by men
- Due to the low economic participation of women, few widows are able to provide for their families once the head of household has died.
- Widowed women mostly are incorporated along with their children into the households of their parents or in-laws. In both cases, their direct access to assistance is interjected informally by her male kin and in-laws with no guarantees for her control over any benefits or entitlements
- In cases of ownership of property or assets, Islamic inheritance laws are applied. According to these, widows receive a partial share of the property which does not grant them security in their residence or control of inherited assets otherwise. In addition the rights of widowed women are often compromised as evidence shows that they are often pressured to forego their inheritance rights. According to a 2013 PCBS survey⁹, 38% of women do not claim their denied inheritance rights.
- According to social and religious norms, widows are expected to observe a mourning period of four months during which they are to be confined to their homes (*Iddah*). It is normally during this period that inheritance matters need to be arranged in sharia courts as well as notification to organizations providing humanitarian assistance. Leaving the house during this period is frowned upon socially with rare exceptions when the woman is accompanied by a relative. Young widows are subject to closer scrutiny and social restrictions.
- The current Palestinian family law does not guarantee widows the guardianship rights of the children and therefore, widows' custody of their children often become a bargaining chip to force widows to forego their inheritance share, or to remarry a brother-in-law or similar.¹⁰

Action:

- Ensure that legal assistance projects target and respond to the needs of widows
- Ensure that humanitarian assistance related to shelter, land rehabilitation and food assistance is inclusive of widows as direct beneficiaries.
- humanitarian partners and women's organizations should ensure targeted interventions to address the economic and protection needs of widows.

Women with disabilities:

With the high number of casualties who have been left with a disability from the 2014 conflict, there is a concern that the capacity to respond to the needs of people with disabilities (children and adults) in Gaza is very limited. Women with disabilities face particular challenges and discrimination. Global WHO reports indicate that rates of violence among persons with disabilities may be 4-10 times greater than among non-disabled persons. This has significant implications for their protection in displacement settings—especially when it comes to protection from gender-based violence (GBV)¹¹. Data on oPt shows that children with disabilities have unequal access to education with girls being less likely to attend schools than boys. A survey on access to education for children with disabilities conducted by Diakonia in 2011 revealed the existence of serious biases especially against girls with disabilities. While 97.2% of the respondents to the survey confirmed their belief that it is their right to attain education, 18.5% of the respondents stated to

⁹ UN Women, Building Ties, UNW 2014

¹⁰ WATC.

¹¹ www.womensrefugeecommission.org

never have had the opportunity to education (22.5% in Gaza and 15.5% in the West Bank). Girls with disabilities were more likely not to attend school 29% compared to 19% of the boys)

Amongst adults, married women with disabilities continue to be responsible for household chores and have reported reverting to their daughters and other female family members to assist them in their care responsibilities and the little help from their husbands. The mobility for people with physical disability is highly restricted due to inaccessibility of homes and public infrastructure and humanitarian actors need to ensure outreach to those who are unable to access humanitarian assistance. Single women with disabilities are more likely to face discrimination and marginalization.

Action:

- Address protection and economic needs of women and girls with disabilities
- Incorporate women with disabilities as direct beneficiaries targeted by humanitarian assistance interventions

Women working in agriculture:

The war has resulted in significant damage to areas that were predominantly reliant on agriculture. In areas such as Khan Younis, Beit Lahia and the eastern border areas. The damage to agricultural land caused by the war has greatly impacted women's agricultural work in livestock, herding, food processing and small scale gardening. While women farmers have been greatly affected, their access to humanitarian assistance provided to farmers has been limited due to a number of factors:

- There are structural barriers to agricultural land ownership by women due to inheritance rights, slow land reform and social attitudes therefore land ownership does not accurately reflect women's role in agriculture. According to PCBS data (2011) women constitute only 6.1% of agricultural land holders and 8.5% of holders of livestock in Gaza.
- Women face greater gender biases related to their inheritance rights and control of their agricultural land .
- The work of rural women as agricultural labour is under-recognized and women farmers are considered "helpers" even in cases where they are responsible for the bulk of the work in farming. PCBS data indicates that 18.2% of economically active women work in agriculture and constitute 30% of agricultural employees in Gaza (8.5% of economically active men work in agriculture). This data masks biases in recognizing the contribution of rural women in agricultural labor including as unpaid family workers in this sector. Local level data provides a more accurate picture. According to IDCO – Gaza, in Beit Lahia alone, it is estimated that 70% of working women are dependent on agricultural work (IDCO Gaza).
- There is little data available on women's role in agricultural production work e.g. dates, dairy..etc.

Action:

- Agriculture related humanitarian assistance should not be based on land titles alone. Currently, emergency response to the agricultural sector is based on lists prepared by Ministry of Agriculture that are mainly guided by land titles rather than actual affected population.
- Humanitarian assistance should ensure that projects take into account women's contribution to agricultural labour in those areas, their access to wages, and control over resources provided through humanitarian response.
- Humanitarian actors should engage with local level committees and consult with women

farmers in order to inform the design of agriculture related intervention is essential to ensure effective targeting of such assistance

Health:

According to UNFPA, 2015 registration of maternal deaths in the Gaza Strip indicated that the number has nearly doubled (from 6 to 11 cases) during the last six months of 2014 compared to the first half of that year and that the first two months of 2015 recorded as many deaths as the number of the six months prior to the war¹². This registered increase raises concern over the fragility of health related indicators in the current humanitarian context in Gaza. Maternal mortality rates for Gaza which have been kept at a low level with 29.9 maternal deaths recorded per 100,000 live births are now at risk of increase (WHO). Similarly, UNRWA's Health Department data assessing changes between 2013-2014 indicated that there has been a slight increase in infant mortality rates in Gaza (from 20.2 in 2008 to 22.4 in 2014) and a significant increase in Neonatal Mortality Rate from 12.0 in 2008 to 20.3 in 2014¹³.

Action:

- Ensure availability of mobile clinics which address constraints faced by women in accessing healthcare.
- Explore solutions to address home-based healthcare.
- Ensure integration of GBV related services in the health service provision and strengthen coordination for a comprehensive referral system

Water and Sanitation (WASH):

Over 70% of households in Gaza receive 6-8 hours piped water once every two to four days and large areas of Gaza experience 12-16 hours a day electricity blackouts. With strict gender division of labour where women and girls have the primary care responsibilities, the limited households' access to water and energy has significant implications for women's time use, health and ability to generate income. Similarly, this has implications for the wellbeing of other family members in terms of health, nutrition and education.

Water and sanitation in education facilities have immediate implications on school enrollment and protection. In particular, availability of latrines, affect hygiene, school enrollment and protection needs for girls. Prior to the war, a total of 300,000 students throughout the oPt suffer from poor WASH facilities in schools. Assessments indicated that at least 189 public schools were damaged (of which 26 were seriously damaged) and 84 out of 156 UNRWA schools incurred damage (with at least twenty-two schools completely destroyed).

Action:

- WASH related humanitarian assistance to households is critical to women's care work. Humanitarian actors should ensure consultation with women and their participation in WASH projects in order to inform the design of WASH projects.
- School reconstruction have to ensure gender sensitive WASH facilities.
- serious efforts need to made in order to ensure that WASH Projects address social impact and community needs and are more inclusive of females in their staffing and community

¹² http://unfpa.ps/index.php?lang=en&page=news&news_item=1429704286153

¹³ UNRWA 2014 annual report, department of health

consultations.

Emergency preparedness and contingency planning:

Given the unprecedented scale of destructions and casualties and displacement, the humanitarian country team had immense challenges in responding to the emergency needs during the conflict and immediately following the cease fire. According to assessments and analyses carried out in Gaza, many of the shortcomings in the delivery of assistance in the initial emergency stages were addressed once the security situation stabilized and humanitarian access was secured. However, it is important to emphasize a number of shortcoming which were related to the lack of attention to gender differentiated needs in the design and targeting of humanitarian interventions which jeopardized the ability to reach key groups of the population facing particular vulnerabilities related to age, gender and disability.

As examples, female IDPs reported that temporary shelter arrangements did not provide minimum standards of privacy and protection. WASH facilities were mostly inadequate in terms of availability and standards to meet the needs of women and children. Shelters were also described as often inadequate for persons with disabilities, despite the fact that UNRWA shelters provide for accessible toilets and entrances. Similarly, elderly persons lacked access to adequate medical treatment and medication and faced additional challenges in evacuating their homes¹⁴. Protection mechanisms in temporary shelters were not systematically fully equipped to monitor, prevent and respond to GBV related needs.

Women also faced challenges in accessing emergency humanitarian assistance despite the information campaigns on emergency assistance channels conducted in UNRWA shelters. According to numerous reports based on interviews with IDPs, food assistance was mostly distributed to men, without proper organization of distribution lines, leaving women and elderly to fight for their shares. There were also reports of favoritism according to clan, or political affiliation in distribution of food assistance. In several communities, IDPs reported inadequacy of the content of food assistance packages particularly the shortages in milk for children and micronutrients for pregnant and lactating women. Similarly, NFIs provided did not include items which are necessary for women. Dignity kits were not available during the early days of the war and women were not aware of appropriate channels to demand those kits.

While many men chose not to stay in the shelters with their families, women had the main responsibility of ensuring protection for their children. However, women reported not having access to emergency related information.

Action points for preparedness and contingency planning:

- Review preparedness and contingency plans to incorporate measures to address gaps and lessons learnt from the 2014 emergency response with regard to consideration of groups with specific needs (e.g. people with disabilities, elderly, pregnant women, female heads of households, abandoned women..etc.) Gender roles and gender differentiated needs form a key basis of an effective emergency response with implications for multiple cluster responses.
- Ensure that gender sensitive practices and protection measures are systematically incorporated in all SOPs of shelters, emergency assistance distribution, content of NFIs to include female hygiene needs, information campaigns to ensure outreach to women.
- Protection mechanisms in temporary shelters should ensure strengthened capacity to monitor,

¹⁴ Persons with disabilities in Gaza are estimated to represent 2.4 per cent of the population and people aged 55 and above account for 5.5 per cent of the population of Gaza.

prevent and respond to GBV related needs amongst women as well as children.

- health system preparedness plans need to account for antenatal care as gaps in securing continuity result in direct impact on maternal and neonatal mortality UNFPA RH assessment “victims in the shadow” has also shown that the war has resulted in a 90% reduction in family planning services and 70% reduction in antenatal care.
- Ensure targeted outreach to provide women with information on key emergency information related to protection and assistance.

Role of women’s organizations in the emergency response:

Local women’s organizations played an active role during the emergency response and in the following period. Organizations like UN Women, OCHA, UNFPA and OHCHR have facilitated this participation through providing space and strategic opportunities in order to ensure that the emergency response capitalizes on the resources and outreach available to local women’s organizations. This was reflected in the following actions:

- Convening of women’s organizations during the war to collect initial information of the needs of IDP women and girls in shelters
- Inclusion of representatives of women’s organizations as key informants in the MIRA
- Documentation and dissemination of gender related needs, gaps and vulnerable groups to humanitarian partners (UNW, OCHA, UNFPA, protection cluster)
- Delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance to women and girls including provision of dignity kits and tailored psychosocial support and active outreach of women’s organizations at community level to assist in addressing gaps in distribution of humanitarian assistance
- Coordination between national women's organizations and international NGOs through AIDA gender working group and the GBV Working Group which served as a platform to discuss gender gaps in the response to the crisis with special focus on the GBV related needs of women and girls in Gaza.
- Production of analytical reports on the gendered impact of the war on men, women, boys and girls by women’s organizations (see list of references)
- Mobilization of the Amal coalition of NGOs working on protection of women and girls and provision of services to GBV victims (legal, psychosocial, shelter, protection, social)
- implementation of humanitarian projects related to GBV with funding from the Humanitarian Pooled Funding mechanism. (Aisha and Hayat Centre)

Beyond the emergency response, women's organizations in Gaza continue to actively participate in humanitarian processes advocating for increased focus on the needs of women and girls in the humanitarian response and providing much needed information on their situation. Women's organizations have also been critical in developing humanitarian interventions that are targeted to the specific needs of women and demonstrating gender sensitive approaches to provision of humanitarian protection and assistance.

Gender sensitive practices for inclusive, equitable and effective humanitarian assistance

Despite the great challenges, many humanitarian partners in oPt have demonstrated good practices to ensure that humanitarian assistance is more inclusive and effective in reaching the most affected groups. Below are highlights of a number of those good practices that would hopefully be upscaled at cluster level and across all humanitarian interventions.

IDP Protection Strategy:

The IDP protection Strategy of the Humanitarian Country Team (February 2015) identifies a set of principles and priorities that emphasize the commitment to tailoring humanitarian assistance to meet the differentiated needs of the affected population based on gender, age, and disability and commits to steering away from a one size fits all approach. Further, the strategy identifies a range of actions that would ensure a gender sensitive approach such as the full participation of female and male IDPs and specialist groups such as women's organizations, Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and other in planning and decision making processes; and the establishment of a feedback/complaints mechanisms in all programmes that are accessible to members of the community including women and children.

UNRWA's job creation projects:

Since the beginning of May 2015, UNRWA has started to employ 21 female guards in its Health Centres across the Gaza Strip as part of the Agency's efforts to ensure a protective environment for service delivery and enhanced gender-equity. The employees are hired through UNRWA's Job Creation Programme (JCP) and will work in their new positions for a period of three months. This is the first time that the Agency has systematically employed this many female guards¹⁵. In addition, women work in other JCP-funded roles as well, including at UNRWA food distribution centres, schools and offices. In addition, from February to October 2015 UNRWA is implementing an agriculture project with 60% of beneficiaries being female. UNRWA continues to work toward identifying new JCP opportunities in both skilled and unskilled categories.

UNRWA's reconstruction and housing projects:

UNRWA has recently adopted a policy whereby housing assistance provided by UNRWA specifies joint benefit of the housing unit to husbands and wives. This entails moving away from past practice where the male heads of households were the main signatories of UNRWA housing units. As of May 2015 husbands and wives co-sign a joint undertaking specifying joint benefit. The document does provide women with leverage in the traditional and local court systems as it can be used as evidence of her right to continue benefitting in the event of e.g. death of husband.

Food Aid (UNRWA)

The reform of the UNRWA Poverty Assessment System (PAS) method has introduced modifications in order to improve vulnerable women's access to UNRWA food assistance. At present, UNRWA issues refugee registration cards to the male head of household; registration cards provide the key to access services, and therefore, exclude women from control over certain forms of assistance. Women in polygamous marriages, widows (who are registered under their father or father-in-law when their husband dies), divorced women (who return to being registered under their fathers' following divorce), refugee women married to non refugees, and abandoned women¹⁶ are all potentially vulnerable in terms of access to services. The PAS reform has now made it possible for certain categories of women to apply for independent assessment and receipt of food assistance

¹⁵<http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/%E2%80%9C-brilliant-idea%E2%80%9D-unrwa-employs-female-guards-its-health-centres>.

¹⁶http://www.unrwa.org/sites/default/files/pas_fact_sheet_english.pdf

from UNRWA. Those who are determined eligible for food aid will receive it directly in their own name.

UNDP Gaza Rubble and Debris Removal Project:

UNDP is ensuring that gender is mainstreaming in its USD 14 million's Gaza Rubble and Debris Removal projects aimed at removing one million tons of the rubble generated by the 2014 conflict. In collaboration with UN Women a road map for mainstreaming gender in the project was developed. The road map identifies a series of activities to ensure that the project implementation responds to the needs of men and women. These actions are: inclusion of women in community outreach activities, ensuring that staffing of project includes at least 20% females; requiring contractors and subcontractors to include female staff on their teams as beneficiaries of the 9,669 workdays generated by this project. In addition, particular attention is assigned to households that are headed by women in rubble removal activities

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