The 2022 State of Data Visibility Report

New research shows the majority of companies still face steep challenges keeping track of the personal data they hold—posing a problem for effective privacy compliance.

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A company's ability to know precisely what personal data they control and how it's being used is critical for fulfilling multiple privacy law requirements: completing data subject requests (DSR), identifying risky data processing activities, and creating and maintaining records of processing activities (ROPA)—a requirement of GDPR Article 30.

But how are companies actually doing when it comes to knowing how and why they use customer, user, and employee data?

To better understand the problem, Transcend surveyed technical leaders across different industries on the state of their data inventory efforts—focusing on the biggest challenges they face and the most obvious opportunities for improvement. Our research finds that:

In 2022, against a backdrop of globally increasing privacy regulation, data visibility is throttled by data system sprawl, reliance on manual processes, and insufficient resources.

As a result, the data mapping process is slow, inefficient, and, for a majority of respondents, incomplete—**a staggering two-thirds of companies still don't have an accurate picture of the data they hold.**

Read on for the detailed findings from our research.
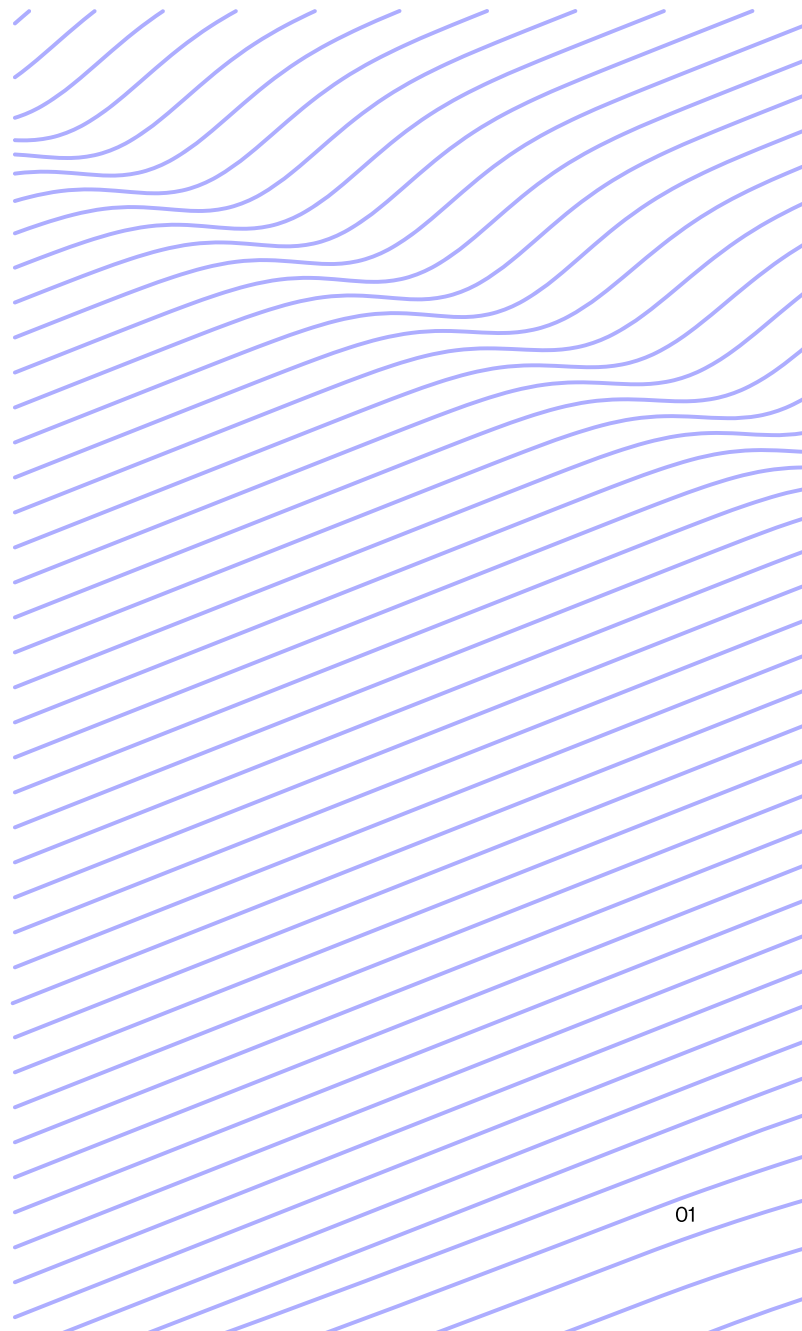
THE FINDINGS

System sprawl, reliance on manual processes, and insufficient resources create a difficult environment for effectively identifying and organizing company data.

All businesses employ an array of connected platforms to collect, store, and manage their data, including Salesforce, HubSpot, Google Workspace, Notion, Asana, Jira, and many more.

In fact, in 2020, mid-size companies were using an average of 288 different software-as-a-service (SaaS) apps to perform these tasks [1].

When the goal is to create a unified view of all data under a company's purview, the sheer quantity of systems in play is a challenge in and of itself. Combine this with the speed at which these systems are added and implemented, and the difficulty only grows.

[1] Diaz, Ariel. "2020 Annual SAAS Trends" Blissfully, April 6, 2022. https://www.blissfully.com/saas-trends/2020-annual-report/.

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57% of tech leaders surveyed say new systems containing user data are added weekly, and in some cases, daily within their companies.

Compounding this issue is the fact that, when it comes to identifying new data systems, the majority of companies still rely on manual processes such as team-wide surveys, cross-functional conversations, and discretionary reporting—approaches that cannot scale without leaving gaps in visibility.

Automated data mapping approaches—such as automatic system discovery—save time and increase accuracy when maintaining a data map, but the majority of companies have yet to take advantage of this technology.

How often are new databases, tables, systems, or SaaS tools added at your company that store user data?

49%	Weekly	
20%	Monthly	
12%	Every 2-3 months	
8%	Daily	
7%	Every 4-6	
4%	Every year or less frequently	

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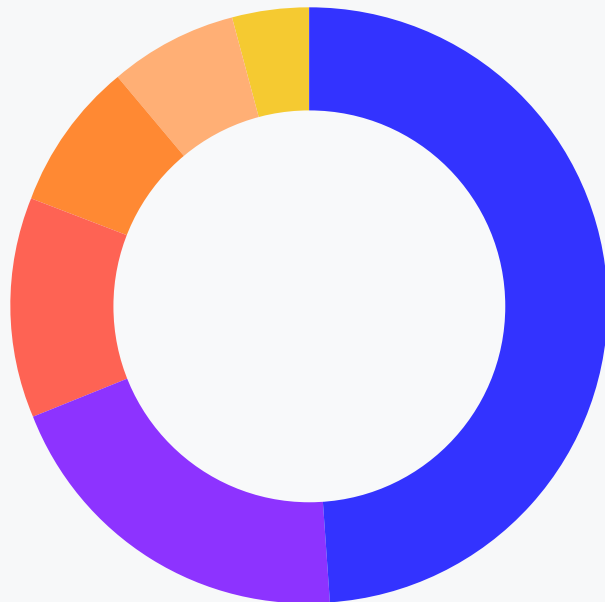
Only 22% of companies have implemented automated data mapping approaches like automatic system discovery.

Seen through this lens, it makes sense that so many companies are still struggling to create and maintain an accurate data map. However, that's not the full story.

Insufficient resources in terms of leadership support, budget, and time also stood out as significant roadblocks for the majority of survey respondents.

How do you know when new data systems are added at your company?

61%

42%

22%

22%

Identified during the vendor procurement process

Identified whenever an update to our company's data map is manually made

Through regular surveys to cross functional teams

Regularly uncovered with automated, real-time data map scans

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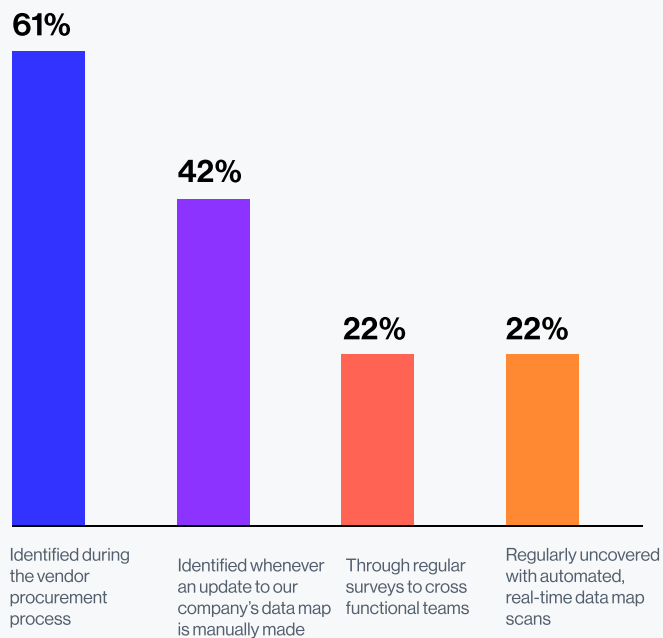
62% of respondents cited lack of support from leadership as the top reason they were unable to create a data map.

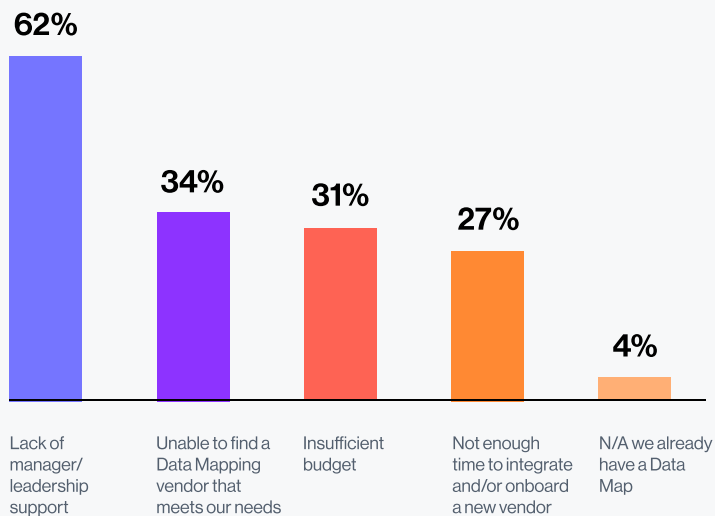Though it may be counterintuitive at first, this finding lends more weight to the value of automating an organization's data mapping processes. Compared to the support and budget needed to build out an entirely new team or the cross-functional tightrope of siphoning time and resources from an existing team, implementing automated tooling is a much lighter lift.

Given its importance to effective privacy compliance on a global scale, it's unclear why better data visibility hasn't garnered more support at the executive level. ROPA are a requirement of GDPR Article 30, and understanding what data your company processes is foundational to both fulfilling data subject access requests (DSAR) and identifying risky data processing.

What is clear is that for a majority of respondents, data mapping efforts face formidable challenges—there is so much data to be accounted for, yet not nearly enough support, i.e., the right tools and resources to complete the job effectively.

Combined, these roadblocks have created a situation in which the overwhelming majority of companies still don't have a full view of the data they control.

If your company doesn't have a Data Map, what reasons are blocking you from kicking off a Data Mapping project?

62%	34%	31%	27%	4%
Lack of manager/ leadership support	Unable to find a Data Mapping vendor that meets our needs	Insufficient budget	Not enough time to integrate and/or onboard a new vendor	N/A we already have a Data Map

Most companies still struggle to create a comprehensive, up-to-date data inventory— creating downstream effects on privacy compliance activities.

Between 2016 and 2021, the amount of data organizations manage grew from 1.45 petabytes to 14.6 petabytes—a 10x increase [2].

As the amount of data to be managed continues to increase, a staggering **two-thirds of survey respondents reported that their company doesn't have a unified inventory** of all the data they collect.
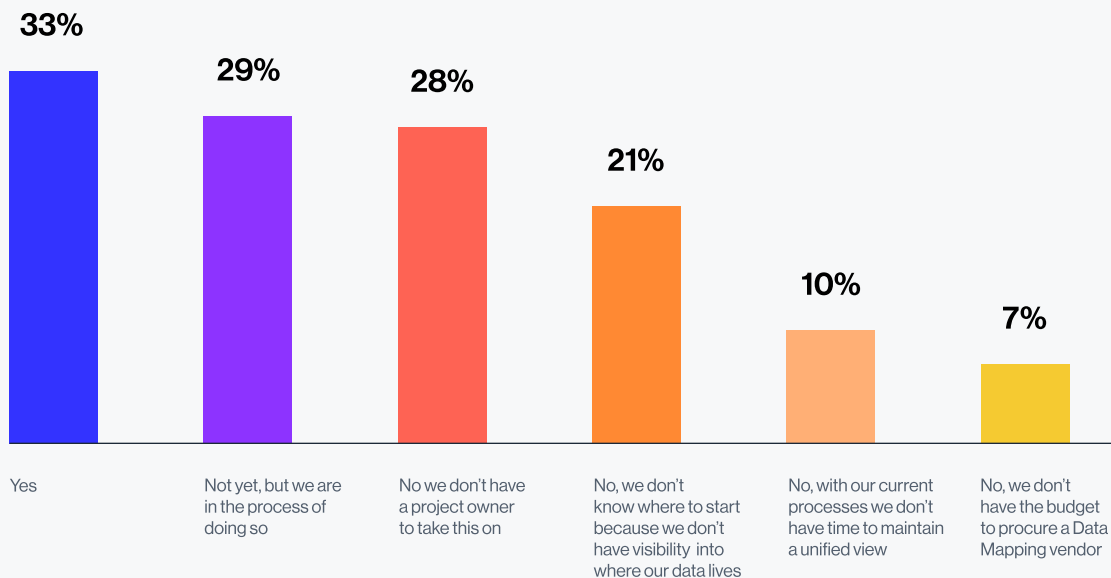
[2] VansonBourne. "Global Data Protection Index Report." Computers, Monitors & Technology Solutions. Accessed May 13, 2022. https://www.dell.com/en-us/dt/data-protection/gdpi/index.htm#scroll=off.

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2/3 of companies do not have a unified inventory of all of the user data they collect.

While nearly a third of respondents reported they are currently creating their data inventory, the majority have yet to complete the task, and many companies haven't started at all.

For those companies that are working towards a unified view of their data, the outlook is still less than ideal—the majority of respondents reported a process that was slow and resource intensive.

Does your company have a unified inventory of all user data collected? What is stopping you from achieving this? (select all that apply)

33% Yes

29% Not yet, but we are in the process of doing so

28% No we don't have a project owner to take this on

21% No, we don't know where to start because we don't have visibility into where our data lives

10% No, with our current processes we don't have time to maintain a unified view

**7%** No, we don't have the budget to procure a Data Mapping vendor

Over 50% of companies will need more than a year, multiple internal teams, and an external vendor to discover all data systems and create a unified data map.

But why is it important that companies create a complete data inventory in a reasonable time frame? Remember, data mapping is a foundational part of data privacy compliance, a field in which legislation and enforcement are quickly evolving in favor of greater consumer portability and control.

The inability to understand where the personal data you hold lives and how it's being used has a negative ripple effect throughout the entire privacy compliance process. One significant example is DSAR, a consumer right provided by the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), as well as by the latest privacy laws in California, Colorado, Connecticut, Virginia, and Utah.

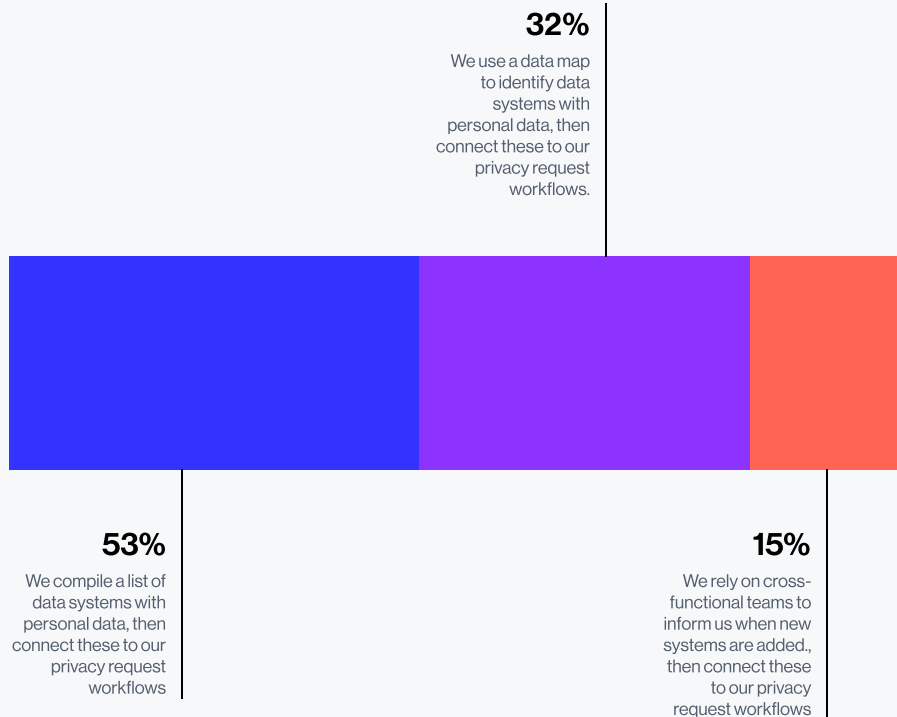How much effort goes into uncovering your company's data systems and organizing them into a unified Data Map?

32%	It's taken/will take several internal teams and a Data Mapping vendor 1-2 business quarters	
26%	It's taken/will take several internal teams and a Data Mapping vendor more than a year	
20%	It's taken/will take multiple teams more than a year	
14%	It's taken/will take multiple teams 1-2 business quarters	
6%	It's taken/will take one dedicated team more than a year	
2%	It's taken/will take one dedicated team 1-2 business quarters	
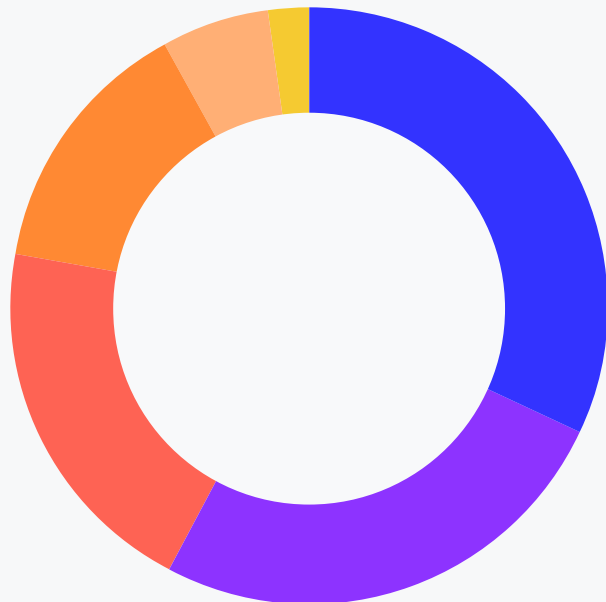
To identify which systems should be included in DSAR workflows, **68%** of companies rely on manual lists or ad hoc cross-functional communication.

Fulfilling a DSAR within the given time limit (30 or 60 days, depending on the law) requires that, when a request comes in, a company knows exactly where to find the relevant data. Without a complete, up-to-date data inventory, there's no way to give a user access to the personal data a company holds—leaving the company vulnerable to penalties and significant fines.

At your company, how do you ensure privacy requests (DSARs) are processed completely across all data systems?

32%
We use a data map to identify data systems with personal data, then connect these to our privacy request workflows.

53%
We compile a list of data systems with personal data, then connect these to our privacy request workflows

15%
We rely on cross-functional teams to inform us when new systems are added., then connect these to our privacy request workflows
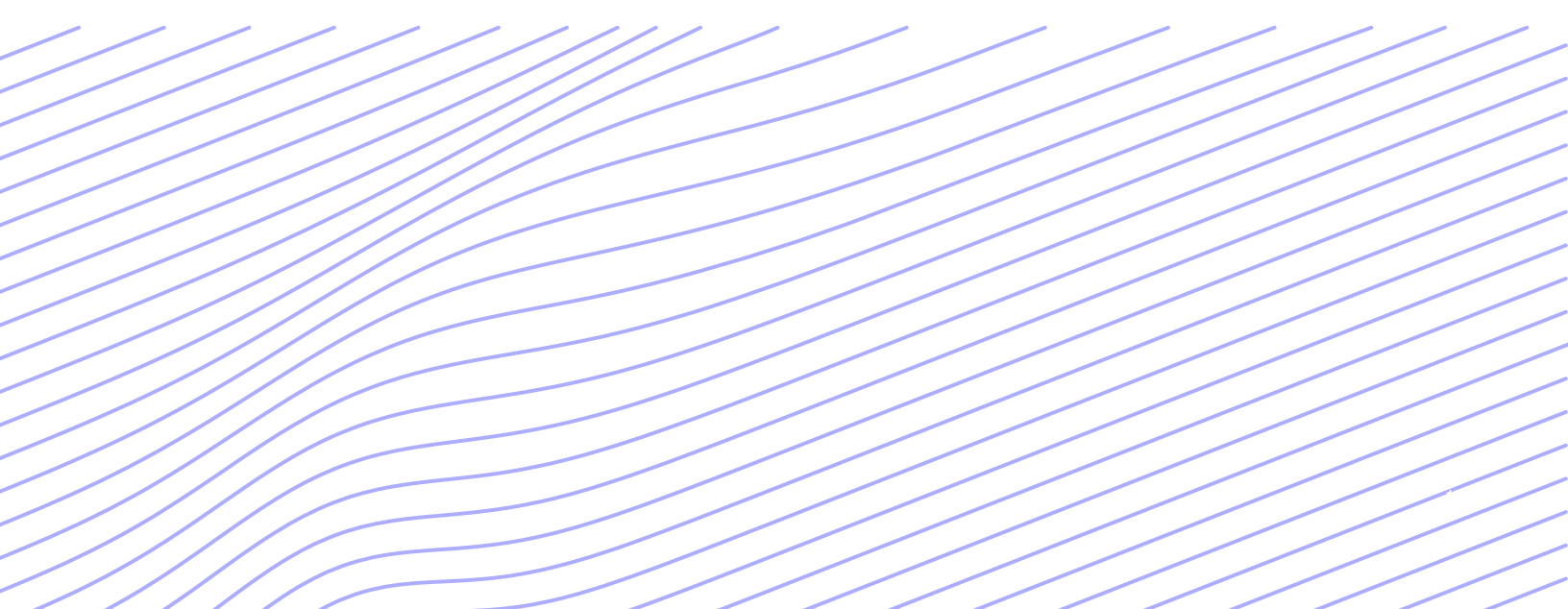
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In summary

Despite data mapping's foundational role in complying with modern privacy laws, many companies are still struggling to understand what data they control and how it's being used.

According to our findings, data mapping is a time-consuming and inefficient process for most companies—slowed by system sprawl, reliance on manual processes, and insufficient resources. More than just affecting the data map itself, this inefficiency has downstream consequences for other compliance activities, such as fulfilling DSAR.

As privacy regulation and enforcement continue to increase, savvy companies that value efficiency and respect their users' privacy will prioritize building a unified view of their data using tools that maximize the resources on hand.

Transcend is the privacy operating system that integrates directly with your tech stack for truly automated data governance—creating always-on visibility while saving time and resources.

Transcend unifies data management through automatic scanning, data silo discovery, and advanced data classifications, all in a collaborative platform where you can assign system owners, delegate tasks, and generate reports such as records of processing activities (ROPA).

Use Silo Discover to scan sites and connected plugins to automatically uncover new data systems, while Content Classification identifies and categorizes all personal data. Then, see all your company's data in a unified Data Inventory view.

By taking on the heavy lifting of scanning, discovering, and organizing your company's personal data, Transcend Data Mapping frees up resources, reduces oversights and human errors, and ensures continued compliance.

Explore Transcend Data Mapping

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