

Migrants and Refugees: Barriers to Accessing Information about Services On the Internet

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The aim of this research was to explore barriers migrants and refugees in New Zealand face when accessing information about services on the internet. 29 government and non-government organization websites have been sampled to conduct this study. It was found that most websites provided very little information in other languages apart from English, most of which are inaccessible due to navigation. Some specific examples of the issues were provided. Recommendations are made in two sections: short-term and long-term solutions. In general, websites should look at translating information that migrants and refugees would need access to, make sure that the information is easily accessible and provide options for professional translators and interpreters. A possible long-term solution is to translate govt.nz as they are very user friendly and have all types of information.

New Zealand is becoming increasingly diverse¹. The 2013 Refugee Resettlement Strategy and the 2014 Migrant Settlement and Integration Strategy seek to enhance the effectiveness of settlement in NZ by focusing on economic, social and wellbeing outcomes. To achieve these outcomes migrants and refugees need access to information and services.

We want every migrant and refugee in New Zealand to be able to easily access public information and services, as it is granted by their human rights, stated by the United Nation 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 21 (2):

21-(2) Everyone has the right of equal access to public service in his country.¹

Equal access implies an autonomous access for everyone, and this task belongs to the government. A 2007 research report commissioned by the New Zealand Federation of Ethnic Councils² pointed that a lot of migrants faced difficulties in locating public information, the major barrier being language. Migrants often have a low proficiency in English language, and this causes them to struggle to access public information.

A 2009 report from the Labor and Immigration Research Centre³ noted as well that a lack of proficiency in host country language is a major barrier to employment and to accessing

¹ United Nations (1948). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. New York: United Nations.

² Centre for Applied Crosscultural Research, Victoria University of Wellington: “*Nau mai haere mai ki Aotearoa: Information seeking behaviour of New Zealand immigrants*” (may 2007).

³ McMillan, N. & Gray, A. (2009). *Long-Term Settlement of Refugees: An Annotated Bibliography of New Zealand and International Literature*. Wellington: Department of Labour.

training to improve or prove qualifications or courses designed to convert overseas qualifications to be acceptable in the host country. It can also be a barrier to the acculturation process, and to public health and access to other services. This problem is not a small scale one: the 2013 Census⁴ stated that 10% of the New Zealand population have very low English proficiency or cannot speak it. This accounts for more than 400,000 people, who possibly struggle on a daily basis to access public services and information.

Technology has changed the way people access information. More and more people are starting to rely on the internet as a source of information everyday. Due to the relatively emerging nature of smart technology, there is little existing research in the area. Our study focuses on the internet and Government's websites as a means of accessing public information and services for Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities.

Statements differ when it comes to the importance of the internet among migrants: the 2007 report from Victoria University⁵ shows that the internet is the most popular media among migrants to access information. However, the 2009 Department of Labor's one⁶ shows that although the internet is the prime source of information before migration, person to person interaction becomes the preferred source after arrival. Furthermore, some of these migrants, and especially among refugees, are computer illiterate and thus cannot access online information by themselves, be it translated or not.

Both reports and the literature on migrant's acculturation in general⁷ agree on the importance for migrant's self-sufficiency of the internet, which is widely used by migrants trying to settle in their new home country. It allows one to quickly access information at any time without having to move around and jam public information services. Furthermore, it allows citizens to access information on their own: this independence is a big step in the acculturation process. It can also allow migrants to access information without being judged by their community, for example regarding mental health disorders.

The purpose of this report is to present the findings from a small research project that sought to assess the accessibility of public information and services online for CALD communities and see how the Government websites can be improved, adapted and promoted among non-English speaking migrant communities as a way of accessing public information and services. To achieve this purpose, we have undertaken a thorough "accessibility to CALD communities" screening of 29 government and non-government organization websites based on the migrants'/refugees' main information needs. This report will first describe this screening and

⁴ Statistics New Zealand, the New Zealand Census of Population and Dwellings 2013

⁵ Centre for Applied Crosscultural Research, Victoria University of Wellington: "*Nau mai haere mai ki Aotearoa: Information seeking behaviour of New Zealand immigrants*" (may 2007).

⁶ McMillan, N. & Gray, A. (2009). *Long-Term Settlement of Refugees: An Annotated Bibliography of New Zealand and International Literature*. Wellington: Department of Labour.

⁷ Mikal, J. & Woodfield, B. (2015) Refugees, Post-Migration Stress, and Internet Use: A Qualitative Analysis of Intercultural Adjustment and Internet Use Among Iraqi and Sudanese Refugees to the United States. *Qualitative Health Research*, 25(10) 1319-1333

its detailed method, and interpret the results. Then, based on the results and the existing literature and precedents in other countries, a set of possible answers to better meeting the information and service needs of migrant's are analyzed on their efficiency and their political, economic and technical feasibility.

Method

Sample

This research was conducted in April, 2016 in Christchurch, New Zealand. The sample of websites that are chosen as a part of our study are based on the services that refugees and migrants frequently access. These priority services accessed by refugees and migrants were identified from existing literature and provided by staff at the Christchurch Resettlement Services who work with people from CALD communities. While refugees are supported by specialist services to access support and information for up to twelve months, both the literature and professional refugee support service providers agreed that there are many services that there are many services that migrants and refugees need access to after the first 12 months of settlement. Previous researches found that migrants and refugees have different needs depending on the stage in settlement process. At arrival, the needs are focused on language, employment, housing, and understanding life in New Zealand. Later in settlement, however, their needs are shifted to factors like health, education, political information, transportation, and community events.⁸

From the information collected on a list of services refugees and migrants want access to, 29 websites have been sampled for the research (See Appendix for the full list of websites). While most of these were chosen based on the list of needs, there was one exception. Canterbury West Coast Cancer Society was added to the list during our engagement with CLING, they directed us to look at this website.

Questionnaire

A set of questions that we used to analyze the websites were developed on the basis of the issues faced by people from CALD communities when accessing information from government websites and services. These issues were identified by the social workers at Christchurch Resettlement Services. While there are computer illiterate individuals, those who are literate have language problems and struggle to get the most out of websites. There are very limited translation on those websites, and the English terms are too specialized to be translated. Further, many struggle to find the right website for the information they need.

There are a total of 16 questions made to analyze the accessibility of websites for refugees, migrants but also the general public. While 6 questions were made to assess

⁸ Herrick, R. & Morrison, A. (2010). Providing Information Service to Migrants: A Literature Review. Wellington: Department of Labour.

information available in other languages, 10 questions look at factors that would be beneficial to everyone accessing information (See Appendix for full set of questions). The questionnaire was pre-tested to check for ambiguities within questions and to maximize understanding; to remove redundant questions; and to rearrange some questions so that they were grouped in themes

Ethical Issues

We have considered possible ethical issues associated with this research. None were identified since we were working with professionals who voluntarily agreed to assist us or accessing publicly available information.

Results

Table 1: Translated Material

Questions	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	Total
Is there information translated in languages other than English?	18	62%	11	38%	29
Is it easily accessible?	4	22%	14	78%	18
Is all the information translated?	1	5%	17	95%	18
Does it offer access to professional interpreters or translators ?	17	59%	12	41%	29

From a total of 29 websites analyzed, only 18 websites (62%) provided some information in a language other than English. Out of the 18 websites that included information in languages other than English, only 4 (22%) made this information easily accessible (obvious on the main page). Only 1 website (5%) had equal amounts of information available in foreign languages compared to the English version.

59% of the websites offered access to professional interpreters or translators, most of which are through Language Line. However, when the service is through Language Line, only one website mentioned this service. The only way we found out whether they did offer the service was to go through a list of participating agencies on the Language Line website.

Table 2: Amount of information available in different languages

Amount*	Very little	Little	Enough	A lot	Total
Result	6	8	3	1	18
Percentage	33%	44%	17%	6%	62%

**Where 'very little' included information such as one document.*

'Little' included a couple of forms, brochures and/or videos

'Enough' included important information for accessing the services, sometimes these are specific pages made for translation

'A lot' had all of the information translated

Even though there are many websites that provide information in a different language, most of the websites (77%) only included 'very little' or 'little' amount of information that is not useful enough. An example of this is the New Zealand Government website, which only provided information in other languages regarding The Flag Consideration Project. It would be very useful to have translations on sections such as "immigration and visas" as well.

Table 3: Languages Available

Number of Websites	Languages
13	Maori, Samoan, Tongan
12	Chinese
10	Hindi
9	Arabic, Korean
5	Cook Islands Maori, Spanish
4	Farsi, Niuean, Punjabi, Somali, Tokelauan
3	Burmese, Fijian, French, Japanese, NZSL, Russian, Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Vietnamese
2	Gujarati, Khmer, Portuguese
1	Czech, Dari, Dutch, German, Hebrew, Indonesian, Italian, Malay, Urdu

The most common languages (after English) in the 29 websites analyzed were Maori, Samoan, and Tongan, appearing in 45% of all websites and 72% of the websites that had translated information. The website information available in languages available other than English is, to an extent, a reflection of the top languages used in New Zealand. According to Statistics New Zealand, the top three languages (after English) spoken in New Zealand are Maori, Samoan and Hindi ⁹

Table 4: Ease of Navigation

Questions	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
Is there a search toolbar?	28	97%	1	3%

⁹ Ethnic Communities 'Top 25 Languages in New Zealand' <http://ethniccommunities.govt.nz/story/top-25-languages-new-zealand>

Is the text broken into subheads and bullet points for ease of scanning?	29	100%	0	0%
Is the website optimized for mobile visitors?	16	55%	13	45%
Does the website present information in forms of diagrams/charts/pictures/videos that make the content easier to understand?	15	52%	14	48%

The majority of websites include a search toolbar which can be very useful as most of these websites contains a lot of information. All the websites analyzed also break up their texts into bullet points and/or sub-headings which makes it easier to find the topic of information. On the topic of interest.

Only 55% of the websites analyzed have optimized browsing on mobile phones. This means that they have made the text clear and easy to read and adjusted the layout to how the website looks on a computer screen. While most websites that were not optimized for mobile visitors simply didn't change the layout making the text very small on mobile phones, one of the website appeared distorted and was impossible to navigate around.

52% of the websites supported understanding through representing information in forms of diagrams, charts, pictures and videos alongside the text. Although it is not always necessary, it can be very helpful on sections such as health problems where it would be easier to present pictures and diagrams rather than just using text with technical words.

Table 5: Acronyms and Layout

Questions	Yes	Percentage	Mostly	Percentage	No	Percentage
Are the acronyms explained?	23	79%	6	21%	0	0%
Is the layout consistent?	22	76%	7	24%	0	0%

All the websites explain their acronyms to an extent. There are some cases where an acronym is only explained on a page and then used throughout the website without explanation which can be problematic as not everyone is going to check the page where it was explained. All the websites also have a consistent layout for most if not all pages. The layout of the website refers to the basic framework and structure, where text, navigation, or other elements are placed. Having consistency of this layout on the webpages makes it easier for visitors to navigate the site.

Table 6: Plain English

Question	Yes	Percentage	Mostly	Percentage	No	Percentage
Is the text in Plain English?	14	48%	12	42%	3	10%

Whether the text is in Plain English, it has to be accessed through 6 criteria *(see Table 7 for more details). Overall, the websites did well to include most of these criteria, with 48% meeting all 6, 42% meeting 4-5 and 10% meeting 0-3 of the criteria.

Table 7: Plain English Criteria

Questions	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
Language that the audience is familiar with	26	90%	3	10%
Short, clear sentences	18	62%	11	38%
One idea per sentence	24	83%	5	17%
Short paragraphs	29	100%	0	0%
Avoid long words where short ones will do	22	76%	7	24%
Avoid jargon when possible	26	90%	3	10%

Out of the 6 criteria set for Plain English, all the websites used short paragraphs. Most did well avoiding jargon and using language that the audience that the audience is familiar with (90%). There could definitely be improvements with using short and clear sentences which only 62% of the websites had done. While making sure that your information is in Plain English helps people using English as a second language understand the content, it also helps the general population and makes sure that the content is not misread.

Table 8: Hyperlinks, Videos and Contact Information

Questions	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	Total
Does it offer hyperlinks to other useful websites?	27	93%	2	7%	29

Are videos captioned, signed in NZSL, or has a transcript provided?	3	15%	17	85%	20
Is there a visible 'contact us' information	28	97%	1	3%	29

Most websites are doing very well regarding offering hyperlinks to other websites (93%) and including a 'contact us' (97%) button.

Regarding videos, not many (15%) are captioned, signed or have a transcript provided. This could make them difficult to understand by people who are not familiar with the English language as well as inaccessible for people who are deaf.

Discussion

From these results, we have made several observations, mostly about what needs to be improved. These observations will be discussed, and then different possible solutions will be compared.

a. Rare and hardly accessible translated material

It is surprising that 11 out of the 29 analyzed websites offer no translated material at all. However, even when translated material is available, several issues arise:

- This material mostly concerns only a few sporadic documents and is often hard to access, as it is not displayed obviously on the main page. It cannot be expected from a non-English speaker to browse a website they cannot read anything from to eventually find material that has been translated for them.
- The material chosen to be translated is not always the most relevant, like on the NZ government website where the only translated information is about the Flag Consideration Project. This raises questions about the process of selecting which information to provide in languages other than English.
- Lots of the analyzed websites are part of the Language Line programme. However, it is necessary to display that information on every website, rather than expecting people to go to the Language Line website to check it. This information needs to be displayed as well on the main page.

- Some websites offer great explicative videos, which are unfortunately rarely captioned or signed in Sign Language.

The main issue here is thus, in addition to the lack of translated material, the websites' lacks in design insight regarding their accessibility to non-English speakers: they are expected to find the available translated information or assistance by themselves, which makes them dependent on the help of an English speaker to navigate these websites. Translated information, as well as Language Line, aims at allowing people to autonomously access public services and information. Not displaying them in an obvious fashion on the main page (like with flags) is sabotaging these efforts.

b. Demographically unjustified language choices (table 3)

The Table 3 shows a superior representation of Maori, Samoan, Tongan, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic and Korean languages in the translated material. If Maori, Samoan, Chinese and Hindi are indeed the top 4 spoken languages in New Zealand (after English)¹⁰, Tongan is only the ninth one, Korean , the thirteenth one and Arabic the nineteenth one. Languages like French (7th) and German (9th) are less represented in the translated material, thus causing some irregularities between the languages of the translated material and the statistics regarding New Zealand's demographic makeup. Decisions to translate material should be based on demographic makeup of a population and studies that identify the type of information needed by these groups.

c. Ease of navigation

Only a bit more than half of the analyzed websites are optimized for mobile phones (see Table 4). Mobile phones are handy, extremely common nowadays and more affordable than computers: it is therefore important to make sure that information about public services can be accessed easily through mobile phones.

Although some websites are written in a somewhat complicated language, most of the websites have easy-to-read text. However, the extensive use of technical language can sometimes be an issue, and appropriate use of pictures, diagrams or videos to support complicated information could prove useful.

Providing information on the use/role of one website would also be appreciated, as lots of people struggle to find what website to access to reach the information or service they need. This would be, for example, some lines on the home page of the website explaining what one can use this website for.

¹⁰ “Top 25 Languages in New Zealand”, Ethnic Communities
<http://ethniccommunities.govt.nz/story/top-25-languages-new-zealand>

Overall, this study shows that it is very complicated for non-English speakers to access public information and services by themselves. There's very little translated material, and when support, like the Language Line, is provided, it is often not displayed on the main page, and thus cannot easily reach CALD communities. One needs assistance to access information, and it is necessary for migrants to be able to access it by themselves, as should be granted by the government in regard of their human rights.¹¹

Possible solutions

To answer this lack of accessibility, several possible measures have emerged that address the issues either in the short- or long term. We have decided to analyze these suggestions along criteria of economic, political and technical feasibility, as well as efficiency.

It is important to note that any 'translation' suggested in these solutions will also include decisions which languages to translate to. A list of a few languages has to be set up, based on the most spoken languages in this country, to guarantee the best policy efficiency: spending money where it will affect the most people.

- Fully translating the websites: this would be the ideal solution, with a complete and reliable professional translation, but it is obvious that it would be extremely time-consuming and expensive, as the studied websites can present a very big amount of information, all of which is not always relevant to translate. Moreover, fully translating a website includes coding it again, which is a tedious process. Regarding the political aspect, it is surprising that the government websites are not translated into Maori language, an official language of the country. Starting to translate websites in other languages before addressing this issue might be hard to support politically.
- Translating selected information and display it on the home page: it would either be up to the organizations in charge of the websites (ministries, ...) or to a specially-gathered committee to decide what needs to be translated. Only migrant-sensible vital information like buying a home, finding a job or contacting the local city council would be available. This solution is simpler and cheaper than the previous one, however it won't erase the inequality in information access between CALD communities and English speakers. The information to be translated needs to be carefully chosen.

¹¹ United Nations (1948). *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. New York: United Nations.

- Include a Google Translate Toolbar on selected websites: a cheap short-term answer to the issue. Including this toolbar allows one to have the whole page directly translated in any language and thus navigate the website independently; it takes less than 10 minutes to set up. However, the quality of the translation cannot match that of a professional translator, and several cases of misinterpretation can arise.
- Fully translate the govt.nz website: this website allows one to find where to go to access the public service one needs. Furthermore, it offers very good and clear information on a lot of key subjects, gathering all the "vitals" from the different ministries and departments. Fully translating this website and support its use to CALD communities would thus allow migrants to easily access explanations and 'tutorials' on how to access the services they need. We consider the information on this website to be really suited for people with refugee and migrant backgrounds.
- Create a reduced version of the govt.nz website for migrants: to cut the costs and reduce the translated information to the most relevant ones, a reduced and fully-translated in several languages version of the govt.nz website could be created for the exclusive use of migrants, displaying only information considered vital to migrants.

Table 9: Possible long-term solutions

Solutions	Cost	Political issues	Technical difficulty (time needed)	Efficiency (quantity and quality of information)
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				translated)
Fully translating the websites	Very high	Problems regarding the previous absence of Maori translations	High	Very high
Translating selected information and display it on the home page	Moderate	None	Moderate	Moderate
Include a Google Translate Toolbar on selected websites	Very Low	Problems of credibility: critics regarding the quality of the translation	Low	Large quantity, low quality and no accountability
Fully translate the govt.nz website	Moderate	None	Moderate	High
Create a reduced version of the govt.nz website for migrants	Low	None	Moderate	Moderate

Short-term recommendations

There are some short-term changes that could be done immediately and would be very useful. Firstly, if Language Line translating services are offered, making sure it is included somewhere obvious on the website and giving clear instructions on how to access the service would be extremely helpful. Housing New Zealand, for example, offers Language Line services and actually included this information under the contact information. On other websites, however, we could not tell that they were offering the service unless we went through a big list of websites on the Language Line page which is very inconvenient.

There is another immediate change that could be done easily for websites that already have some translated materials: linking those resources on your homepage. While conducting our research, it was usually very difficult to find those resources on many websites. An example of this is the Christchurch City Council who has useful translated information for migrants and newcomers. This information was found under the section "Christchurch, the Garden City" and not under the section next to it called "Coming to Christchurch", which was where we navigated to first while

browsing the website. If the translated material were linked on the homepage and labelled 'information in other languages', it would help migrants and refugees access them without help.

Long-term recommendations

As of long-term solutions from the possible options (Table 9), we strongly recommend translating selected but vital information that migrants and refugees would need and linking it on the home page. A good example of this is the Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC). They have linked information in other languages on their main page which leads to translated information including who they are, how you can obtain assistance, how they can help, cultural advice and support, and contact information. While many websites have some translated materials, not all are useful and it would be much better to actually translate different and carefully chosen sections. An example of this is the New Zealand Government website who has translated information regarding the New Zealand flag alternatives, and no other translated content.

What we would recommend as the most efficient long-term action is a full translation of the govt.nz website, which offers sound and useful advice on the use of the different government services.. The cost is not as high as fully translating all of the reviewed websites, it raises no political issue, is technically doable and the information presented is relevant. It is a good 'services-navigation' website that helps one to find which ministry or department to go to, and provides guidance in a simple and understandable way.

If that website was to be translated, two more things could be done to raise the measure's efficiency:

1. Advertising the website and its use to CALD communities. Communicating more on it to make it a central and popular platform of governmental information research.
2. Creating a "migrant" section in the website, which gathers 'migrant-sensible' information. As to what 'migrant-sensible information' is, a thorough study of migrant's most common demands needs to be done.

If the cost is still deemed too high, a cheaper but nonetheless efficient solution is to only translate a "migrant" section on the govt.nz website (see above), and strongly communicate to CALD communities about it, so its use becomes generic.

Languages choice

Whichever solution is chosen, the considerations regarding "what languages to translate to" should be based on New Zealand's demographic makeup, and special care should be given to

determine which communities search for what information. For example, the Ministry for Pacific People reaches a sensibly different community mix than the Christchurch's City Council's one, and special efforts ought to be made to translate sensible information in the most spoken Pacific Languages.

Limitations & Future Research

Our study has some limitations and so our findings need to be interpreted carefully. First, because of the time limit, this research was only conducted on a small sample of websites and many were centered around services located in Canterbury and Christchurch. Therefore, to generalize the results for the country, the study should've involved more websites in other areas.

Second, due to our methods it is impossible to analyze every page of content-heavy websites and therefore some translations or videos in other languages may have been missed. However, if there were any content that we missed due to it being very difficult to find, it is unlikely that migrants and the general population would run into the content when browsing the website either.

Some recommendations for future research would be to expand the sample size to different areas in New Zealand as well as analyzing overseas government websites. This would lead us to seeing how other countries are overcoming language and cultural barriers for their migrants and refugees. As well as seeing how New Zealand is doing compared to the rest of the world, there may be some good practices that could be applied in our country.

Acknowledgements

We would like to acknowledge Lesley Campbell, our external professional supervisor on behalf of CLING.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: List of Websites Analyzed

Health-related websites

- Accident Compensation Corporation
- Canterbury District Health Board
- Canterbury West Coast Cancer Society
- Health Research Council
- Ministry of Health

Employment Websites

- Inland Revenue Department
- Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment
- Work and Income

Arrival and Settling in New Zealand

- Immigration
- NZ Customs Service
- Housing New Zealand

Education Websites

- Ministry of Education
- Study Link
- Ministry of Transport

Civil Defense Websites

- Earthquake Commission
- Civil Defense
- Get Thru

Websites for Support

- Ethnic Communities (language support)
- Foodbank
- Ministry for Pacific People
- Ministry for Women
- Child, Youth and Family
- Ministry of Social Development

Other Useful Government Websites

- Elections
- New Zealand Government
- Christchurch City Council
- Department of Corrections
- Department of Internal Affairs
- Ministry of Justice

Appendix 2: Questions used to analyze websites

Translated Material

1. Is there an option to browse the website/access information in an alternative language other than English ? (If Yes, answer 2-5, If No, skip to question 6).
2. Which languages are available?
3. Is it easily accessible ? (obvious on the main page)
4. Is it the same information as the English version or just selected information?
5. How much information is available?
6. Does it offer access to professional interpreters or translators ?

Ease of Navigation

1. Is there a search toolbar?
2. Are the acronyms explained?
3. Is it presented in plain English*?
4. Is the navigation/layout consistent from page to page?
5. If there is a lot of text, are they broken up into subheads and bullet points to make the text more scan able ?
6. Is it optimized for mobile visitors ?
7. Does the website present information in forms of diagrams/charts/pictures/videos that make the content easier to understand ?

Miscellaneous

1. Does it offer hyperlinks to other useful websites?
2. Are videos captioned or signed in New Zealand Sign Language, or is a transcript available ?
3. Is there visible contact information ('contact us' button)?

**The requirements for Plain English include the following:*

- 1. Language that the audience is familiar with*
- 2. Short, clear sentences*
- 3. One idea per sentence*
- 4. Short Paragraph*
- 5. Avoiding the use of long words when possible*
- 6. Avoiding jargon when possible*

where the results were interpreted as:

Yes: all 6 criteria were met

Mostly: 4-5 criteria were met

No: 0-3 criteria met

The assessment for plain English were done on web pages that include important information for refugees and migrant. Websites sometime contain sections like publication which use technical language that the general audience is not familiar with.