

Flexibilities Navigator: An evermore valuable resource

Over the last few years, HAI's European Projects and Communication Teams have been hard at work developing a specialised resource, the [TRIPS Flexibilities Navigator](#), to encourage, embolden and enthuse decision-makers to make use of TRIPS Flexibilities, and in particular compulsory licensing, as a way to improve access to medicines.

In the way of a little re-cap, the Navigator was born as the winning idea of a [competition](#) (or Diplohack) that took place back in 2020, gathering participants from fields as varied as the health advocates, the legal profession practice and software development, plus students and academics. Now, almost exactly three years later, that winning idea is not only a full-on reality being used for its intended purpose but ready for its next step: to scale up and reach further.

While built on data from sources like the Medicines Law & Policy [TRIPS Flexibilities Database](#), the point of the navigator was not be a static repository, but a living resource around which a community could grow according to the input from its users. To this end, extra features were added, including a chat function and calendar. Now, to make sure we are still heading in the right direction and to develop ideas of how to be more effective in how we reach the target audiences of the Navigator, we decided to refocus on the original collaborative idea of its birth. That meant again inviting stakeholders from different backgrounds to collectively shape the Navigator's future. This time not in a competition, but an open workshop.

So, in late September we gathered together a group of advocates researchers, academics, data scientists, developers and journalists and set them some tricky questions about the Navigator, where to take it and with what aim. I can tell you, reader, they did not let us down. The first thing to note was the level of enthusiasm for the tool and its ease of use, something for which we could thank the developers in the room. There were also positives to be taken from the types of information it gives, from granular country data to the legal basis for the use of compulsory licensing. But there's always room for improvement, so it was interesting to hear thoughts, for example, on how to avoid the pitfalls of segmenting audiences too rigorously lest we alienate or confuse those who may fit into a number of categories. These discussions helped set up our session-based work as we started to focus more on these audiences and their needs.

First up, how to work with civil society? One of the great assets of the Navigator is providing an easy to use, visual tool as an evidence base for credible, solid messaging on the use of TRIPS Flexibilities. One task would be to make sure that we're working with various groups and campaigns to see where the Navigator can fit into and contribute to their work. This is already happening in some cases, but there is plenty of opportunity to expand! This could all be aided by updates to make the tool even more interactive.

The idea of slotting into existing campaigns and processes came back when thinking about how to reach policy- and other decision-makers. They are, after all, the ultimate target group whose knowledge (or lack thereof) of TRIPS Flexibilities can have a profound impact on access to affordable medicines—they are in fact the sole actor who can actually trigger the use of a compulsory license and other flexibilities. Another idea was to approach contacts in this world and hear directly from them how they would want to work with the Navigator. We were asked, why do we limit ourselves to the domestic or European Union realm of public officials, and why not attempt to engage World Health Organization delegates currently involved in pandemic accord negotiations?

For a session on how to make it work for academics and researchers, we were particularly grateful to have an academic and researcher in the group! The first question here was “is this an audience that will have a use for the Navigator”. The answer was an encouraging “yes”, with a subtle “but” ... The overview and visualisations are useful to these groups when making their work more accessible, but first and foremost academics need raw data, the kind found in the aforementioned TRIPS Flexibilities Database of our partners at Medicines Law & Policy. So, linking back to those sources also remains important, while also acknowledging that some other sources may serve some needs better than the Navigator. This part of the discussion also threw up some other interesting and exciting ideas to play with for how to make the Navigator evermore engaging and useful. We’ll be looking at these more carefully in the coming weeks and elaborate on them in the not too distant future, so watch this space.

In the meantime, if you haven’t yet used the TRIPS Flexibilities Navigator, visit www.flexibilitiesnavigator.org now and find out how it can help your work. And if you have any questions or ideas on the subject of this blog or want to discuss how it can fit into your advocacy campaigns, drop me a line at alex@haiweb.org and follow our updates at @haimedicines.