

Why TRIPS flexibilities are a crucial mechanism for access to medicines

Every year, HAI accepts a few bright and ambitious students into its internship programme at our bustling Amsterdam headquarters. This provides valuable educational experience for students who are interested in conducting research and/or advocacy on a number of access to medicines issues in the European Union or internationally.

This year, our interns spent their first few weeks in the office before the working from home requirements as a result of COVID-19 meant they could no longer come into the office. Instead, they have continued their work from their own homes, shifting their focus slightly to accommodate the new arrangements.

We wanted to learn a little more about what each of them have been doing, and how they've managed to adapt their work in recent weeks. Today, we're hearing from Sara Silva, an intern with the European Projects Team studying MSc Public International Law at the University of Amsterdam.

Continue to watch this space in the coming weeks for our monthly intern spotlight. And if you're interested in doing an internship at HAI, you'll find more information about how to apply [here](#).

How has your research approach/project changed since having to work from home?

My project approach hasn't changed much since I started working from home... It certainly brought a very different dynamic: no colleagues to turn to for a quick question, no "proper" work environment, and so on. Nevertheless, my motivation in assisting the European Projects team and making a useful contribution to HAI's work keeps me grounded and focused on doing my best on every project I work on!

What's the best part of your work, and what's the worst or hardest part?

I'm not doing any research in HAI, as my internship consists in assisting the European Projects team in its projects. However, I would say the hardest part of that task is familiarising myself with all the health-related issues my team works on, especially those of a highly technical nature (for instance, matters related to TRIPS flexibilities).

What do you wish people would know about what you're focusing on?

I wish people knew that governments have at their disposal a variety of mechanisms ([TRIPS flexibilities](#)) that, when properly used, would significantly improve both availability and affordability of a wide range of medicines. If such tools exist, they ought to be used, as access to medicines is a right inherent to all human beings, whatever our nationality, place of residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status.

What would you tell someone else looking at doing an internship at HAI?

I would say that doing so is a very rewarding and valuable learning experience. At HAI, an intern has the opportunity not only to grow professionally in an environment where the interdependence between staff makes them feel welcomed, but also to broaden their horizons in specific yet important issues that impact the health and wellbeing of people around the world: at HAI, interns get to see firsthand how intelligent and well-informed health-related policies recommendations are reached.

What do you think is the single most important thing in this area at the moment and why?

The thing I would draw more attention to among the many projects developed by the European Projects team would be the TRIPS flexibilities issue. As I mentioned before, these mechanisms were created to address the fact that current research and development models incentivise innovation through monopoly rights (for example, through patent protection) and, as such, generate high medicines prices. Affordability and availability of medicines must be a priority on country's health agenda, as a more productive and socially cohesive society is only achievable through policies that promote physically and mentally healthier people.