

GISWatch  
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# GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH

*National and Regional Internet  
Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)*



ASSOCIATION FOR PROGRESSIVE COMMUNICATIONS (APC)

# Global Information Society Watch

**2017**



Global Information Society Watch 2017  
National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

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A special edition of GISWatch, "Internet governance from the edges: NRIs in their own words", is being published as a companion edition to the 2017 GISWatch annual report. It looks at the history, challenges and achievements of NRIs, as recounted by their organisers. It is available at <https://www.giswatch.org>



## Observatorio de Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (ObservaTIC)

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### Introduction

This report discusses the challenges and opportunities in holding the first national Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Uruguay in 2016. Although the Uruguay IGF can be considered a success, it shows that work needs to be done to involve key stakeholders in the internet governance process in the country, and that awareness about the importance of internet governance among the general public needs to be created through working closely with the media.

### Policy and political context

Uruguay ranks first in Latin America and 19th worldwide on the Democracy Index prepared by the Economist Intelligence Unit.<sup>1</sup> It has also been among the top three positions since 2002 on the Latin American Democratic Development Index (IDD-Lat).<sup>2</sup>

If we refer to indices for social inclusion (Americas Quarterly),<sup>3</sup> prosperity (Legatum Institute)<sup>4</sup> and political stability (World Bank),<sup>5</sup> Uruguay ranks first in South America. It is also well positioned on indices for economic freedom (Heritage Foundation),<sup>6</sup> human development (United Nations Development Programme),<sup>7</sup> and global innovation (Cornell University).<sup>8</sup> When it comes to freedom of expression,

the country ranks ninth in the latest Freedom House report, with a score of 98 out of 100.<sup>9</sup>

With regard to information and communications technologies (ICTs), on the ICT Development Index (IDI) of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU),<sup>10</sup> Uruguay was ranked 47th worldwide and first in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) in 2016.

Institutions – in the sense of rules of the game that model the interaction between individuals<sup>11</sup> – have a strong bearing on the development of societies, and in the case of Uruguay these are relatively favourable. The digital inclusion agenda, for example, has favoured processes where academia and civil society are involved, and are active participants in the construction of digital citizenship. Under the Agency for Electronic Government and Information Society (AGESIC),<sup>12</sup> which was formed in 2007, digital strategies have been developed in line with human rights and the pursuit of sustainable development. For example, a policy that has been praised internationally is the Ceibal Plan, which provides a laptop to every child and adolescent in primary and secondary public education, as well as to primary and secondary public school teachers at the national level.

### Challenges and opportunities

A recent process that demonstrated the collaborative and multistakeholder approach to policy formulation in Uruguay was the holding of the first national IGF on 17 May 2016. While the event was a success, it also encountered challenges.

There are three key levels of analysis relevant to the process of holding an IGF: a) the process of organising the event, including how the organising committee was shaped, and the balance of influence when it came to making decisions; b) the development of the content for the event, including the stakeholder balance among panellists; and finally, c) the level of participation, including the

1 <https://www.eiu.com/topic/democracy-index>

2 [www.idd-lat.org/2016/downloads/idd-lat-2016.pdf?nocache=7687652837](http://www.idd-lat.org/2016/downloads/idd-lat-2016.pdf?nocache=7687652837)

3 <https://www.mef.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/10114/9/indice-de-inclusion-social-2016.pdf>

4 [https://www.mef.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/10114/9/indice\\_prosperidad.pdf](https://www.mef.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/10114/9/indice_prosperidad.pdf)

5 <https://www.mef.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/10114/9/indice-de-estabilidad-politica-2016.pdf>

6 [https://www.mef.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/10114/9/indice\\_libertad\\_economica.pdf](https://www.mef.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/10114/9/indice_libertad_economica.pdf)

7 [https://www.mef.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/10114/9/indice\\_desarrollo\\_humano.pdf](https://www.mef.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/10114/9/indice_desarrollo_humano.pdf)

8 <https://www.mef.gub.uy/innovaportal/file/10114/9/indice-global-de-innovacion.pdf>

9 Freedom House. (2017). *Freedom in the World 2017*. [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH\\_FIW\\_2017\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/FH_FIW_2017_Report_Final.pdf)

10 [www.itu.int/net4/ITU-D/idi/2016/#idi2016rank-tab](http://www.itu.int/net4/ITU-D/idi/2016/#idi2016rank-tab)

11 North, D. C. (1990). *Institutions, institutional change, and economic performance*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

12 <https://www.agesic.gub.uy>

extent to which this participation was reflected in deliberations on public policies.

At the request of AGESIC, the Internet Society (ISOC)<sup>13</sup> and the Internet Registry for Latin America and the Caribbean (LACNIC),<sup>14</sup> a group of institutions were invited to participate in the organising committee for the IGF.

The following organisations and institutions were represented on the committee: AGESIC from the government; ORT University<sup>15</sup> and the Catholic University of Uruguay,<sup>16</sup> both private education institutions; the School of Engineering,<sup>17</sup> Central Computer Service (SeCIU)<sup>18</sup> and Observatory of Information and Communication Technologies (ObservaTIC)<sup>19</sup> from the public University of the Republic; DATA UY<sup>20</sup> from civil society; ISOC and LACNIC from the technical community; and the Inter-American Association of Telecommunication Companies,<sup>21</sup> Digital Chamber of Economy of Uruguay<sup>22</sup> and Uruguayan Chamber of Information Technology<sup>23</sup> from the private sector.

Although there were a significant number of institutions involved and all sectors were represented in the committee, not all representatives participated actively. For example, this was the case with civil society and the business sector, which was reflected in the make-up of the panels for the event.

The attendance at the one-day event was considered high, taking into account that the topic was internet governance, a relatively specialist field, and that Uruguay is a small country. The event itself had more than 200 participants, a number that at times swelled to 800 people when you include access to the event via streaming. The key agenda items were: a) governing the internet, b) net neutrality, c) the internet and the law, and d) the internet as a tool for development and inclusion. Twenty-two panellists participated: two from the private sector, three from civil society, four from the technical community, six from the government and seven from academia.

Besides aiming to attract a range of stakeholders to the event, the IGF attempted to encourage the equal participation of women and men, and participants of all age groups.

Although the goal was for the different panels to have a balance of representatives from the sectors, this was not always achieved. For example, on the “Governing the internet” panel there were four representatives: two from the technical community, one from civil society and one from the government. None of the panellists were women, and both the academic and business communities were absent.

On a panel on net neutrality, civil society was not represented, and there was no gender balance. On the “Internet as a means of development and inclusion” panel there was gender balance, but the business sector was not represented. Overall, the least-represented sector was the business sector, followed by civil society.

One of the concerns when it came to setting up the panels was gender balance; however, it was not easy to identify women who could comment on the issues that were being addressed. This reality is not generally different in other fields in Uruguay – except in some areas in education and the social sciences – where the leading or expert positions are mostly occupied by men. Of the 22 panellists, only five were women, and these only represented the government and academic sectors. The four moderators were men, and of the five rapporteurs, three were women. This seems to be a mirror of the reality beyond internet governance or multistakeholder spaces – and certainly when it comes to moderators, there is a strong sense that the gender balance could have been dramatically improved.

Another community that was not taken into account – and who are essential for any future IGF – are young people. It is necessary to ensure their participation in the event, and to introduce themes that are relevant to the role of young people as leaders in the future of the country.

While the committee tasked with organising the event had many ideas to improve the stakeholder balance among the panellists, it did not always have the capacity to carry these ideas forward. Nevertheless, what was appreciated was the respect shown to different stakeholders in the discussions. In part this was a reflection of the fact that the leadership in the process was given to representatives of sectors – academia, the technical community and the government – that are accustomed or committed to this form of open dialogue.

The content proved relevant to the local internet governance space in Uruguay. There was no doubt that there was a consensus regarding the need and importance of multistakeholder spaces for internet governance. Examples were given of similar practices from different sectors. The complex topic of net neutrality was approached from the perspective

13 <https://www.internetsociety.org>

14 <https://lacnic.net>

15 [www.ort.edu.uy](http://www.ort.edu.uy)

16 [ucu.edu.uy/es](http://ucu.edu.uy/es)

17 <https://www.fing.edu.uy>

18 [www.seciu.edu.uy](http://www.seciu.edu.uy)

19 [observatic.edu.uy](http://observatic.edu.uy)

20 [www.datauy.org](http://www.datauy.org)

21 [asiet.lat](http://asiet.lat)

22 [www.cedu.com.uy](http://www.cedu.com.uy)

23 <https://www.cutu.org.uy>

of needing a clear concept and definition of what it meant, given that it was understood in different ways. The panel on the internet and law attracted a great deal of interest, since a bill had been discussed in parliament that sought to regulate applications that act as intermediaries through the web (such as Uber). The law was not approved in the end. This panel also included debates on regulation and censorship by intermediaries. Meanwhile, the importance of equitable access was recognised in the discussion on the internet as a means of development and inclusion.

However, an issue that emerged during the event was the tension between the limited time allowed for discussions, and the need to deepen the discussion of an issue. This is an important issue, because the interaction of the stakeholders is confined to events like the IGF – in between these opportunities, little interaction occurs.

The lack of continuity in multistakeholder engagement also results in issues being treated superficially, as stakeholders need to spend time trying to understand what is being discussed. The drive towards participation and inclusion also has this effect: new audiences spend much of their time trying to understand discussions, limiting the possibilities for deeper and more productive discussions.

Both of these areas could be improved if there was a) more interaction over time between stakeholders and b) more frequent and better reporting on internet governance by the media. Media engagement for future IGFs therefore becomes crucial.

Certainly the first points to a lack of visibility of the multistakeholder space as an area of reflection and debate outside of the IGF, and indirectly to a possible limitation to multistakeholder influence on the political and policy-making agenda. In this context, it is still premature to measure the impact of the IGF on the policy agenda; however, early indications suggest that it has had some influence on government decision-making processes, for example, through the government referring to or consulting experts in the field.

## Regional reflection

Stakeholders in Uruguay have participated in regional and global IGF initiatives from the start, and this was partly the incentive behind holding the first Uruguay IGF. While some of the issues that have been discussed at the Latin America and the Caribbean IGF filtered down to the local IGF last year, others did not. For example, in Uruguay the issues of internet access and the quality of internet access are not as

challenging as in other countries in the region. In comparison, the issue of net neutrality was a substantially more important topic, with not enough time to discuss the challenges. Similarly, a very specific topic that impacts on the local climate – how mobile applications are creating tensions between labour unions, the government and companies – needs particular attention in the national IGF.

## Conclusions

Although the overall outcome of the first IGF in Uruguay can be seen as positive, a balance among the levels of participation of different sectors, gender balance, and the participation of young people are problems that need to be addressed. There remain more questions than answers when we try to understand how to improve this: Why is it that in a country where civil society is active, its participation in the IGF is low? How should we make the event attractive to activists? How do we involve the private sector in internet governance debates? And how do we attract young people to the event? Future IGFs could look at the experiences of other countries in the region for answers.

Part of the solution involves the media. Future IGFs need to give more consideration to their media and communications strategy. How can they inform and raise awareness among groups and stakeholders that might have an interest in the event? How can the media also be used to raise the level of debate at the IGF?

While the discussions at the first IGF in Uruguay have had a marginal impact on public policies, the event has set a precedent for discussions on internet governance issues. The fact that it was the first IGF in Uruguay left a mark and has created strong interest among the different sectors.

## Action steps

It is important to take a number of steps to strengthen the IGF in Uruguay:

- Greater involvement of civil society and the business sector is necessary. Their lack of involvement needs to be properly understood, and a strategy developed to ensure their participation in future events.
- Work needs to be done on identifying leaders, especially women and young leaders, who can participate in the event. With regard to young people, the theme of future leaders in internet governance needs to be developed.
- As far as constituting the organising committee goes, it is important to publish an open call for participating in the committee rather than to

constitute it through invitation only. This will ensure more transparent and open participation in the organisation of the event and provide an opportunity for marginalised groups to participate.

- To strengthen and stimulate interactions at the IGF, an agenda that encourages debate and exchanges between stakeholders on different issues ahead of the IGF should be developed. This could be done using different tools and approaches (e.g. webinars, mailing lists, quarterly meetings, etc.). By doing this, stakeholders will be able to engage in the event with more depth and expertise.
- Capacity among journalists to report on internet governance issues also needs to be built. This could involve a series of meetings aimed at journalists, where internet governance topics are unpacked to encourage interest and develop the depth with which internet governance issues can be discussed in the media.
- Finally, a joint communication and dissemination strategy that promotes the IGF and shares its information and outputs effectively, and which involves the media, communicators and stakeholders, should be considered.

# National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs)

National and Regional Internet Governance Forum Initiatives (NRIs) are now widely recognised as a vital element of the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) process. In fact, they are seen to be the key to the sustainability and ongoing evolution of collaborative, inclusive and multistakeholder approaches to internet policy development and implementation.

A total of 54 reports on NRIs are gathered in this year's Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch). These include 40 country reports from contexts as diverse as the United States, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Italy, Pakistan, the Republic of Korea and Colombia.

The country reports are rich in approach and style and highlight several challenges faced by activists organising and participating in national IGFs, including broadening stakeholder participation, capacity building, the unsettled role of governments, and impact.

Seven regional reports analyse the impact of regional IGFs, their evolution and challenges, and the risks they still need to take to shift governance to the next level, while seven thematic reports offer critical perspectives on NRIs as well as mapping initiatives globally.

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