

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

URUGUAY | Coronavirus UY

This research takes as study case the “Coronavirus UY” system, administered by the Ministry of Public Health of Uruguay (MSP), as an **information management mechanism to face the COVID-19 pandemic**. It is a computer system developed by private and public actors, mainly by the Agency for Electronic Government and the Information and Knowledge Society (Agesic) and has as one of the most important components a smart mobile phone application called Coronavirus UY.

The goal of the Coronavirus UY application is to provide relevant public information on statistics of contagion of the new coronavirus and data on current sanitary measures, monitor cases of possible infection through the collection of individual self-diagnosis information, provide remote medical assistance during the periods confinement, and from mid-2020, alert users if they have been in close proximity to infected people. **The system aims to gather information centrally to direct state actions both at a general level and with respect to individual cases, where it can provide from care recommendations to helthcare actions via telemedicine.**

Given the broad potential of impact of the novel coronavirus, the system targets the entire population, with some emphasis on the groups most susceptible to the virus as elder and pre-existing diseases population. In addition, it should be noted that the deployment of measures had to be carried out by a government that had just taken over the country administration and represented an important political change; that is why the existence of a normative and institutional framework that would allowed rapid and coordinated action became especially relevant.

From the study of the conditions that preceded the technological implementation and how they played as the pandemic progressed, several significant elements stand out. In the first place, the first actions with technological components were adopted by the incoming government along with other health measures, through coordination between various agencies and state ministries and private actors, in direct contact and **without mediating a competitive evaluation between different proposals**. Second, despite the development of an initial data collection and processing model, **over time the functionalities of the mobile application increased** to incorporate exposure alerts, even though the system had a strengthened epidemiological surveillance network capable of developing contact traceability in a traditional way. Third, the strong normative and institutional development, in particular in relation to state entities on charge of digital government and personal data protection regulation, **put the state modernization institutionality as a logical point of coordination of the public, even when the responsibility for the measures rested with the MSP.**

Finally, the case shows some peculiarities that make it necessary to look critically at the response to the health crisis through the use of digital technologies. On the one hand, the conditions of access to technologies and connectivity are still unequal, limiting the scope of digital mechanisms, and motivating a certain political criticism aimed at encouraging the use of the system by the population. On the other hand, **the speed of deployment implied the lack of public participation in the design and the formal evaluation of the impacts of the data processing systems;** at the same time, despite the existence of some transparency measures on some of the technological components, there is still no institutional and participatory mechanism for continuous evaluation and monitoring of the system's operation.

The fact that certain regulatory developments occurred in parallel with technological deployment also deserves attention. In particular, the approval of a Telemedicine Law and the recognition of exceptions to the need for consent for the use of health data. However, given the exceptional context in which the Coronavirus UY application was implemented, the possibility of advancing the technological initiative while institutions rapidly organized to facilitate its operation can be understood as a positive sign of the country's readiness to respond to a contingency such as the COVID-19 pandemic. This is true as long as the measures adopted are framed in **solid pre-existing protections and do not serve, on the contrary, to advance opportunistic purposes taking advantage of the emergency situation.** It does not seem to have been the case, although it is a point that deserves more in-depth monitoring of the case over time.

This research was developed by **Dina Yael.**



About Derechos Digitales

Derechos Digitales is a Latin American, independent, non-profit organization, founded in 2005, whose main objective is the development, defense, and promotion of human rights in the digital environment

Since 2019, Derechos Digitales has been part of the Cyber Policy Research Centers Network funded by the International Development Research Center (IDRC), along with leading organizations on technology and public policy issues in the Global South..

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