

Enabling Social Innovation in Uruguay



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Country Snapshot

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ¹

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Uruguay’s social innovation ecosystem.

Direct focus on social innovation Connected but indirect focus on social innovation No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Official Definition of Social Innovation



There is **no legal definition of social innovation** in Uruguay. Public actors frame social innovation implicitly within broader **science, technology, innovation and social inclusion** agendas, particularly through inclusive innovation, entrepreneurship and cooperative development (2007–). ^{1,2}

Government Body for Social Innovation



No dedicated ministry. Main bodies:

- **Agencia Nacional de Investigación e Innovación (ANII)** (2007–): national agency funding research, innovation and entrepreneurship, including projects with social and territorial impact. ¹
- **Ministerio de Desarrollo Social (MIDES)** (2005–): leads social inclusion and poverty-reduction policies, indirectly enabling social innovation through social programmes. ³
- **Consejo Nacional de Innovación, Ciencia y Tecnología (CONICYT)**: advisory body coordinating national innovation policy across sectors. ²

Government Strategy for Social Innovation



No standalone strategy. Social innovation appears within:

- **National Innovation and Knowledge Policy frameworks** coordinated through ANII and CONICYT. ^{1,2}
- **Uruguay Innova (U+I)** programme (2025–): integrates science, innovation, internationalisation and regulation to strengthen inclusive development. ⁴

Policies, Laws & Regulations



- **Cooperative Law N° 18.407** (2008; amendments 2014): legal framework for cooperatives and the social economy. ⁵
- **Innovation and R&D policy instruments** administered through ANII (2007–). ¹
- **Draft Social and Solidarity Economy legislation**: parliamentary initiatives to recognise and promote the sector (not yet fully enacted). ⁵

No legal category for social enterprises.

Official Statistics



No dedicated statistics on social innovation. The government produces **general innovation indicators** (R&D, entrepreneurship) via ANII and **sectoral statistics on cooperatives**, but no consolidated social-innovation dataset. ^{1,5}



Government Programs

Key programmes:

- **ANII innovation and entrepreneurship calls** (prototyping, scaling, research–industry links).¹
- **Uruguay Innova (U+I)** ecosystem coordination programme.⁴
- **University-based research and innovation for social inclusion** initiatives (competitive funding).⁶

ECOSYSTEM



Stakeholders

Main actors: ANII, MIDES, CONICYT, Universidad de la República, LATU, cooperative federations (e.g., CUDECOOP), NGOs and foundations.^{1 3 5 6}



Sectoral Networks

Active networks include cooperative confederations, university innovation hubs, entrepreneurship networks and civil-society coalitions. No national network dedicated exclusively to social innovation.^{5 6}



Non-Financial Support Organisations

Key types: university incubators and research centres, innovation hubs, cooperative support institutions, NGO capacity-building organisations.^{1 5 6}



Support Initiatives

Common: innovation grants, incubators, research–community partnerships, entrepreneurship training. Notable: ANII calls, university-led social inclusion projects.^{1 6}



Collaboration

Public–academic–private collaboration is common in innovation policy and university projects. Explicit large-scale social-innovation partnerships with government scaling mechanisms are limited and weakly documented.^{1 6}

FINANCE



Financing Schemes

No consolidated national estimate. Funding spread across **ANII grants, university funds, cooperative finance, philanthropy and international development banks**. Only a portion explicitly targets social innovation.^{1 7}



Key Types of Financing

- Public: ANII grants, sectoral innovation funds.
- Cooperative finance: cooperative banks and mutual funds.
- International: IDB and development-bank innovation support.
- Instruments: grants, seed funding, soft loans.^{1 5 7}



Financing Inclusivity

Some programmes target **youth, territorial development and inclusion**, but systematic earmarking for women, rural or minority-led social innovation is limited and not consistently reported. ^{1 7}

SOCIETY



Public Awareness of Social Innovation

Public discourse references social innovation mainly through **entrepreneurship, cooperatives, digital transformation and social policy**, rather than as a distinct concept. ⁸



Research

Universities conduct research on innovation, development and social inclusion. Notable practitioner and policy research from ANII, IDB and OECD. No dedicated national social-innovation research institute. ^{6 7 9}



Education & Human Capital

Few formal degrees in social innovation. Topics embedded in **public policy, economics, engineering and entrepreneurship** programmes. Informal training via incubators and universities is common. No national graduate estimates. ^{1 6}

Entrepreneurship



Business Environment

Relatively strong regional performer. ¹⁰
EIU Business Environment Ranking



Innovation Capacity

GII 2024: rank ~62. ¹¹



Social entrepreneurship prevalence

GEM Uruguay: moderate early-stage entrepreneurial activity, with social entrepreneurship present but not dominant. ¹²

Social & Environmental Consciousness



Solidarity

Strong cooperative tradition and civic engagement. ^{5 8}



Political participation

High regional standing in democratic participation. ¹⁰



Volunteering

Mid-range globally. ¹³



Sustainability

Strong environmental governance; EPI rank ~52; strong climate and renewable-energy performance. ¹⁴