

The Guifi.net Initiative (Spain)

Good practice: Providing crowdsourced infrastructure for high-quality Wi-Fi service

Relevant DFI commitment: Promote affordable, inclusive, and reliable access to the Internet for individuals and businesses where they need it and support efforts to close digital divides around the world to ensure all people can benefit from the digital transformation.

Type of initiative: Project

Stakeholder Group: Civil society

Launch/adoption: 2004 - Now

Goals

The Guifi.net initiative in Catalonia, Spain, represents a groundbreaking approach to community-led internet connectivity. Its primary goal is to provide affordable, high-speed internet access by leveraging a commons-based model that promotes cooperation and shared ownership. Guifi.net aims to foster social inclusion and bridge the connectivity gap that traditional telecom providers often overlook by addressing the digital divide, particularly in underserved rural areas. A cooperative providing crowdsourced infrastructure for high-quality Wi-Fi service, grown from a single node to over 34,000 nodes. It's a bottom-up, citizen-driven project to create a free, open, and neutral telecommunications network based on a commons governance model. The project eases access to quality, fair-priced telecommunications and generates a model for collaborative activity.

A key objective of Guifi.net is to enable local communities, small businesses, and individuals to build and manage their network infrastructure. This initiative emphasises sustainability in equitable digital access and its non-profit model, which reinvests surplus resources into maintaining and expanding the network. Guifi.net also seeks to empower users by prioritising openness, transparency, and collaboration, ensuring that internet access remains a shared resource for the public good.

Description

Guifi.net is one of the most significant community-led network projects globally, providing an alternative model for internet connectivity that operates outside traditional corporate frameworks. The project began as a grassroots initiative in rural Catalonia, Spain, where access to affordable internet was limited. Today, it spans thousands of kilometres of fibre-optic and wireless infrastructure, connecting hundreds of thousands of users. The network operates on a commons model, where participants collectively contribute to the deployment and maintenance of the infrastructure. This decentralised approach allows individuals, businesses, and municipalities to build local network nodes, which are then interconnected.

Guifi.net's governance is managed by the Guifi.net Foundation, which ensures the network adheres to its guiding principles of openness, neutrality, and free access. Participants sign the "Commons Collaboration Agreement," a framework that governs network use, expansion, and maintenance. This agreement ensures that all users contribute fairly to the network's upkeep and share resources transparently. Beyond connectivity, Guifi.net promotes local innovation and economic development. Small businesses, such as local ISPs, are empowered to operate within the network, offering tailored services without the overhead costs imposed by traditional telecom operators. Furthermore, the initiative contributes to environmental sustainability by repurposing existing infrastructure and minimising electronic waste.

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