

## **Giga, a partnership between UNICEF and ITU to connect every school in the world to the internet, ramps up momentum with new initiatives**

- The Giga mission is to empower governments around the world to connect every school to the internet, and every young person to information, opportunity and choice. It does this by designing and developing infrastructure plans, negotiating funding and supporting connectivity for schools.
- The Giga Technology Centre in Barcelona is the initiative's R&D arm, developing cutting-edge technological solutions, based on open source, for school connectivity. With a growing staff of over 25 tech specialists, it is intensifying activities.
- During the MWC 2025, the Giga team announced the Giga Accelerator set to commence in Q2 2025. This will comprise the selection and support of early-stage companies developing open-source digital infrastructure solutions for school connectivity.
- The work of the Giga Technology Centre in Barcelona is supported by the Government of Spain, the Regional Government of Catalonia and the Barcelona City Council.
- Giga has recently opened the Connectivity Centre in Geneva that will serve as its global HQ and home to its activities in financing and contracting for school connectivity. The centre will also be the hub for Giga's capacity development support in all aspects of achieving school connectivity, leveraging collaborations with the UN and the Geneva community.

[Photo]

*Photo Caption*

**Barcelona, March 4, 2025.** The internet has opened countless opportunities and transformed billions of lives, but it only benefits those who are connected. One-third of humanity — 2.6 billion people — is still unconnected, including millions of children whose schools are offline, denying them access to developments in the education sector and the skills needed to take part in an increasingly digital economy.

Established in 2019 as a partnership between the International Telecommunication Union and UNICEF, Giga's objective is to close this digital divide in education by getting every school in the world connected to the internet and every young person to information, opportunity and choice.

Since its inception, Giga has evolved into a globally recognized programme, mapping over 2.1 million schools, facilitating countries to connect more than 14,500 schools, and in turn benefiting more than 7.8 million students through improved internet access.

To accelerate its impact, the Giga Technology Centre in Barcelona was opened in 2023 and is ramping up activities this year. Situated in the city's dynamic tech district and staffed by over 25 engineers and data scientists, the centre is focused on building an integrated suite of open-source products to help governments plan, deploy and sustain school connectivity.

### **2025: Innovation and collaboration**

Giga presented key initiatives of its 2025 agenda for Barcelona this morning at the MWCcapital stand at MWC25.

The Giga Accelerator, set to begin Q2 2025, will issue its first open-call for proposals aimed at developing scalable, open-source solutions to enhance global school connectivity.

MWC was also the stage for the announcement of the winners of the recent AI for Connectivity Hackathon, Giga's first Barcelona-based hackathon. The hackathon, which was done in collaboration with NTTData Systems, was designed to promote AI and telecom open-source solutions that tackle global connectivity challenges.

Plans are underway for the third edition of the Government Technology Exchange Programme, which invites tech delegations to Barcelona from countries actively engaged with Giga to get hands-on experience with Giga's open-source products, while the Giga team gains insights into the unique requirements of each country to help improve those products. Visitors also have the opportunity to network with the local tech community.

"Giga is not just about connecting schools, it's about empowering people, empowering communities and changing the world," said ITU Secretary-General Doreen Bogdan-Martin. "Education plus connectivity can make that happen now."

Carla Haddad Mardini, Director of Private Fundraising and Partnerships of UNICEF, said millions of children are relying on us to act now. "Digital connectivity is no longer a privilege—it is a necessity. A connected school is more than just a place of learning—it is a gateway to a better future."

Francesc Fajula, CEO of MWCcapital, which was pleased to host Giga for its second participation at MWC, said "Giga exemplifies a modern and inclusive approach to addressing the challenges of digital inclusion and universal school connectivity by fostering collaboration between governments, international organizations, private companies and research institutes."

The speakers at the Giga session, in order of intervention, were: Francesc Fajula, CEO of Mobile World Capital Barcelona; **Mario Maniewicz**, Director of the Radiocommunication Bureau, International Telecommunication Union (ITU); **Carla Haddad Mardini**, Director of Private Fundraising and Partnerships of UNICEF; **Alex Wong**, Senior Advisor, Strategic Engagements and Initiatives, Executive Office, and Co-Lead, Giga, ITU; **Chris Fabian**, Giga Co-Lead, UNICEF; **HE Dr. Tatenda A. Mavetera**, Minister of Information, Communication Technology, Postal & Courier Services (ICTPCS), Republic of Zimbabwe; **HE Mr. Sherzod Shermatov**, Minister of Digital Technologies of the Republic of Uzbekistan; **Carlos A. Rodriguez**, Director General, Directorate of Management by Results (DIGER), Republic of Honduras; **Lucía García Rico**, Director General for the United Nations, International Organizations and Human Rights, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, Government of Spain; **Michael Donaldson** Chief Innovation Officer of Barcelona City Council and Director General Fundació Barcelona Institute of Technology for the Habitat of Barcelona City Council; **Lara Contreras**, Director of Influence, Programs and Alliances at UNICEF Spain; **Irene Kaggwa**, Giga Programme Manager, ITU, and **Jaume Duch**, Counsellor of European Union and Foreign Action of the regional Catalan Government.

#### **About Mobile World Capital Barcelona**

*Mobile World Capital Barcelona is a public-private foundation that promotes the digital development of society to build a more inclusive, equitable and sustainable future through the humanistic use of technology. MWCcapital contributes to positioning Barcelona as a global benchmark in the digital field and to consolidating MWC's legacy throughout the year, promoting initiatives in the field of technology transfer, the promotion of digital talent, and the development of innovative technological projects with social impact. MWCcapital hosts MWC in Barcelona, is the founder of 4YFN and connects the international community of developers with the Talent Arena Project.*

#### **About Giga**

*Giga is a partnership between the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) working to connect every school in the world to the internet and every young person to information, opportunity and choice.*

*Established in 2019, Giga's open-source solutions have boosted connectivity efforts worldwide. Giga offers governments connectivity solutions in school mapping and infrastructure modelling, capacity development and technical support in the areas of financing and contracting.*

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