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# The European Union's Global Gateway: An institutional and economic overview

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**Abstract**

Infrastructure investments are the material way of turning sustainable development goals into practice. Climate action requires renewable energy plants, power grids and electric-vehicle charging infrastructure, in the same way that health requires hospitals, education requires schools or connectivity requires ports. In this context, the Global Gateway can help meet the European Union (EU)'s international pledges, such as on climate finance, by supporting partner countries in the implementation of their sustainable development agendas. It can enable EU industry to enter new growing markets, a win for EU industrial policy. On top of this, it can help economic development in the EU's partner countries, providing an invaluable foreign policy dividend for the EU. In geopolitical terms, the Global Gateway can help the EU better position itself in the global infrastructure and connectivity race. Rule-based cooperation focussed on a clear set of priorities represents an attractive alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative in several partner countries, starting in Africa. By scaling up cooperation on economic and social infrastructure projects, the EU thus has an opportunity to promote its values and vision of sustainability in a way that is tangible and long-lasting.

**KEYWORDS**
development policy, European Union, Global Gateway, Global South, industrial policy, infrastructure

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The European Union unveiled in December 2021 the Global Gateway, its plan to support infrastructure development around the world (EC, 2021a). This initiative aims to mobilise €300 billion between 2021 and 2027 for connectivity projects, notably in the digital, climate and energy, transport, health, education and research sectors.

The rationale behind the Global Gateway is clear: The world needs major infrastructure investments. The World Bank (2019) estimates that to achieve the goals of climate and environmental protection, universal access to energy, water and sanitation, greater mobility, and improved food security, the world must invest around €1.3 trillion per year in infrastructure.

## 2 | ALTERNATIVES TO THE BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE

China understood the strategic importance of global infrastructure development when it launched the Belt and Road Initiative in 2013. To provide an alternative to the Chinese approach to global infrastructure development, some G7 leaders committed in June 2021 to a values-driven, high-standard and transparent set of infrastructure partnerships (G7, 2021): the US's Build Back Better World, the UK's Clean Green Initiative and the EU's Global Gateway.

The European Commission pitched the Global Gateway as 'a template for how Europe can build more resilient connections with the world' (EC, 2021a, 2021b), but critics quickly attacked the initiative, claiming it represents a repackaging of existing instruments rather than fresh EU cash.

However, this view misses the point. The EU and EU countries are already the world's leading providers of official development assistance (ODA). In grant equivalent (a methodology in which only the grant elements of loans are reported, instead of their full-face values), Europe disbursed €66.8 billion in 2020, 46% of world's total (OECD, 2021). What Europe really needs is not new resources, but to use existing ones more strategically.

To further put things into perspective, between 2014 and 2018, the EU and EU countries provided around €350 billion in ODA grant equivalent (EC, 2021a, 2021b), while the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)—against which the Global Gateway is being compared—provided around €200–€400 billion in loans, according to different estimates of the American Enterprise Institute and UNCTAD (USITC, 2021). Given that a grant represents a much bigger financial contribution than a loan, Europe's role as a donor is thus more significant than that of China or any other country.

## 3 | REDUCING FRAGMENTATION IN EU GLOBAL ACTION

The problem is that EU action in the field is fragmented into countless initiatives, undertaken at both EU and national levels. As clearly outlined by the High-Level Group of Wise Persons on the European financial architecture for development, this has led to overlaps, gaps, inefficiencies and lack of geopolitical stance (Wiser et al., 2019).

The EU has recently taken two steps to reduce this fragmentation and increase the coherence of its external action.

1. It has combined its funding for the neighbourhood and international development into a unique instrument, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI), endowed with €79.5 billion for the period 2021–2027 (EC, 2021b).
2. It has launched the 'Team Europe' package, which combines resources from the EU, EU countries, the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), to provide around €40 billion to partner countries to deal with the health and socio-economic consequences of the pandemic (EC, 2020a).

The Global Gateway, which will also be delivered via Team Europe initiatives, represents another important step in this process of consolidation of Europe's development finance, and an important one because of its focus on the strategic issue of infrastructure development and connectivity.

The real question will be how well strategic coordination between EU countries and EU institutions and financial institutions will work. The attempt to improve that coordination is positive, but whether it will succeed remains to be seen.

On the grants-versus-loans discussion, it is also important to flag that the loans provided in the framework of the BRI have often contributed to economic instability in the initiative's partner countries. There is evidence that BRI lending practices have increased indebtedness to alarming levels in some partner countries. Even before COVID-19, the World Bank (2019) estimated that nearly a third of the initiative's partner nations were at high risk of debt distress. The Belt and Road Initiative doubtless represents one of several factors behind this debt pressure, but there are clear examples of its megaprojects having significantly worsened the macroeconomic situation of several countries, including Djibouti, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Montenegro, Pakistan and Tajikistan. A working paper by Gelpern et al. (2021) analysing the financing of 100 Chinese projects overseas highlighted that 'cancellation, acceleration, and stabilization clauses in Chinese contracts potentially allow the lenders to influence debtors' domestic and foreign policies'.

## 4 | THE GLOBAL GATEWAY IN NUMBERS

€300 billion: This is the overall investment that the initiative seeks to mobilise between 2021 and 2027. This sum is composed of:

1. €135 billion in investment foreseen under the European Fund for Sustainable Development plus (EFSD+), where the EU provides €40 billion in guarantee capacity—of which €26.7 billion via EIB and €13 billion via a EFSD+ new window dedicated to Global Gateway, targeting national financing and development finance institutions;
2. €18 billion in grants under other EU external assistance programmes;
3. €145 billion in planned investments by EU countries' financial and development finance institutions; and

4. Existing programmes such as the Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III, Interreg, InvestEU and Horizon Europe will also be used to mobilise resources under Global Gateway. To add to this financial tool kit, the EU is exploring the option of creating a European Export Credit Facility to complement existing credit arrangements by EU countries and increase its overall firepower in this area.

Lack of fresh EU funds aside, there is scepticism about the ability of EU guarantees to really crowd-in private investment. This represents a classical criticism of EU guarantee schemes, where the leverage effect is generally between 10–15.

For instance, the Juncker Plan sought to leverage €315 billion of private investments on the basis of €21 billion of EU guarantees (a factor of 15), while the investment framework of the recently-launched NDICI seeks to leverage €500 billion of private investments on the basis of €53 billion of EU guarantees (a factor of 10).

In comparison with these crowding-in factors, the expected leverage factor of the Global Gateway is a lot smaller: The EU component is foreseen to mobilise €135 billion of private investment on the basis of €40 billion of EU guarantees (a factor of 3.4). This looks reasonable, as political risk insurance is often needed by private investors before they invest in developing countries. After all, the World Bank and other development banks have always made an extensive use of guarantees to mobilise private-sector resources for development projects.

In this respect, the Global Gateway, with its focus on limiting risks of debt distress in partner countries, seems to provide a more reliable alternative for global infrastructure development.

First, as already mentioned, the EU funding model is a mix of grants, soft loans and guarantees aimed at crowding-in private sector investments, while the BRI exclusively focusses on loans.

Second, the EU requires partner countries to adhere to the rule of law, upholding high standards of human, social and workers' rights, as well as a respect for international norms and standards of intellectual property. This contrasts with China's lending practices, where contracts often include stabilisation clauses challenging human rights and sustainable development policies. Lending contracts of both the China Development Bank and the China Eximbank include stabilisation clauses that 'create carve-outs within the rule of law, limit the borrower's self-governance, and potentially block state-of-the-art environmental, public health, labor, and other potentially vital and popular regulations' (Gelpern et al., 2021). This might also help explain why the BRI is perceived negatively in certain countries (Herrero & Xu, 2019).

## 5 | UNDERSTANDING EFSD+

The European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+) is the financial arm of NDICI-Global Europe and will make available up to €135 billion in investments guaranteed by the External Action Guarantee for Global Gateway projects, in addition to up to €18 billion in grants and a further planned €145 billion in investment volumes by European financial and development financial institutions (EC, 2020b).

Financing will rely on systematic mechanisms to filter out abnormally low tenders, and foreign subsidies that undermine the level playing field. The EFSD+ is an innovative instrument that will help generate investments in a variety of Global Gateway sectors through its guarantee capacity and blending grants. It makes available 40 billion in guarantee capacity.

The EFSD+ guarantees are offered on favourable, highly competitive conditions. They allow private investors to finance projects in more challenging markets, by assuming the risks of more unstable environments while avoiding market distortions.

Because the EFSD+ covers a share of the risks, the EU's development finance partners can match the EFSD+ guarantees with their own resources, which in turn will attract additional investors. The investment programmes will be implemented through the following main paths:

First, in a partnership with the EIB, the EU will provide a guarantee covering EUR 26.7 billion in financing to support investments in several sectors, such as clean energy green infrastructure and health, for which the EIB has already a strong record of accomplishments under the previous External Lending Mandate. The risk coverage provided will allow the EIB to offer loans to partner countries to make sustainable investments in connectivity and other priority sectors. The EU guarantee will have a maximum impact on Global Gateway investments in those partner countries where sovereign and other public sector risks are still a major bottleneck. The partnership approach under EFSD+ will ensure a strong steer in line with the Global Gateway priorities, promoting synergies and complementarity with all areas of EU external action.

Second, as one of the sectoral windows of the EFSD+, a specific Global Gateway window will be opened which, together with other thematic windows such as the Sustainable Finance window, will focus on sectors such as sustainable energy, clean transport and digital. A dedicated sub-window will also be created for digital connectivity with a country-level approach to reinforce convergence with the EU's digital economy packages. Working with a variety of European financial institutions will allow to fully reap the wealth of geographic and sectoral expertise available in those institutions to unlock investment bottlenecks faced by the private sector in host countries.

Third, blending. Where projects have a public added value that is not monetarised and that guarantees cannot address, the EU will use the EFSD+ blending facilities. These facilities make use of grants and loans to support non-bankable investment projects in EU partner countries while enhancing their sustainability, climate proofing and development impact.

Finally, the EU is also exploring the possibility of establishing a European Export Credit Facility to complement the existing export credit arrangements at Member State level and increase the EU's overall firepower in this area. The Facility would help ensure a more level playing field for EU businesses in third country markets, where they increasingly have to compete with foreign competitors that receive large support from their governments, and thus facilitate their participation in infrastructure projects.

It is also important to underline that the Global Gateway has a strong focus on expertise, alongside financial assistance. This is important, because creating an enabling environment to attract investment in partner countries with support for reform of regulatory frameworks, or technical support for the development of infrastructure projects, is important to ensure the scale and long-term durability of development actions, beyond individual infrastructure projects.

## 6 | AFRICA: THE KEY REGIONAL PRIORITY OF THE GLOBAL GATEWAY

Africa is the key regional priority of the Global Gateway and is the focus of the most important investment package delivered by the EU for the Global Gateway strategy. The package aims to support Africa for a strong, inclusive, digital and green recovery and transformation. In total, €150 billion in investments are due to be deployed through Team Europe initiatives in order to reach five ambitious goals in Africa: (i) quickening the green transition; (ii) boosting the digital transition; (iii) accelerating sustainable growth and improving working conditions; (iv) enhancing health and pharmaceutical systems; and (v) improving education and training.

## 6.1 | Quickening the green transition

The first objective can be achieved by considering maximising the benefits of a job-rich green transition and minimising threats to the environment to address the global challenge of climate change. The European initiative for a Great Green Wall in Africa is hoped to mobilise a broad package of support. This initiative aims at increasing climate resilience in the Sahel region, and at restoring sustainable living conditions, helping to improve stability and security across the region. The funding for this initiative should help restoring soil fertility and supporting value chain development and livelihoods, while at the same time also: (i) ensuring food and nutrition security; (ii) protect biodiversity and ecosystems; (iii) combat climate change; and (iv) improve energy security.

The Global Gateway also seeks to increase renewable energy and green hydrogen production in Africa, as well as fostering access to affordable, reliable and sustainable energy and support market integration and sector reforms. The initiative will include funding for major ongoing projects for electricity interconnections and transmission lines, as well as support through technical assistance for setting up the Africa Single Electricity Market. In particular, the Energy Transition Partnerships included in the Global Gateway represents an approach aimed at providing EU partners countries that endorse enhanced climate objectives and new robust commitments to decarbonise their energy mix with a tailored support package that fully considers the needs of the single country. At the same time, the initiatives are aimed at fostering a respectful and sustainable use of natural resources. The Global Gateway Investment Package also seeks to enhance agri-food systems and fish-processing, making them more sustainable by setting up a transparent policy environment for private investments and facilitating innovation. For example, the Team Europe Sustainable Agri-Value Chain Initiative aims to boost public and private investments in African agri-value chains. It includes support to research and innovation, tailored technical assistance, policy support and the use of blending facilities to facilitate and de-risk investments in value chains, including agro-processing.

This initiative is expected to trigger catalytic investment specific to each value chain, such as the sustainable cocoa initiative, and new initiatives on cashew nuts and plant-based proteins. It contributes to alternative livelihoods creation and to sustainable agriculture, including in those countries that are part of the Great Green Wall initiative.

The Team Europe Initiative on Resilient Food Systems supports African food systems to become more resistant towards unfavourable trends, shocks and crises, for instance when facing climate change, pests, diseases and price shocks. It seeks to: (i) support applied research and innovation in agriculture for climate; (ii) foster change adaptation, also of keen interest for the EU; (iii) tackle pests, plant and animal diseases that restrain growth potential; (iv) improve food security information; (v) support more resilient production of nutritious food and more robust marketing systems; (vi) strengthen essential public services such as veterinary services; and (vii) improve crisis-reaction capacities at regional and national levels.

Finally, the Investment Package for Africa aims at contributing to increased resilience by supporting climate change adaptation, effective responses to natural catastrophes and stronger risk management. The Natural Disaster Risk Reduction programme, starting already in 2022, will reduce the impact of disasters, including those related to climate change and biological hazards, and increase resilience in partner countries. The Climate Services Programme aims to make climate data accessible, timely and user-friendly to respond to climate-related risks, to reduce the vulnerability of populations and improve their resilience to climate change.

Overall, the Global Gateway's flagship green energy targets for 2030 in Africa are: (i) increasing renewable energy generation capacity by 300 GW (at least). The key role in unlocking new business opportunities in both supply and demand side for energy-intensive industries will be played by hydrogen production; (ii) improving the lifestyle of 65 million people, ensuring secure access to clean water and stabilising 3 million $km^2$ of land; (iii) accelerating the transformation of African agri-food systems in compliance with the African development agenda; and (iv) supporting partner countries in reducing disaster risk and recovering better from climate change-related disasters.

## 6.2 | Boosting the digital transition

With its second objective, the Global Gateway will focus on facilitating the process of submarine and terrestrial fibre-optic cable laying, creating or upgrading cloud and data infrastructures and supporting a better regulatory framework that protects the citizens with regard to digital connectivity. The general purpose of accelerating the digital transition is to close the digital divide between Europe and Africa and across African countries, ensuring strong digital connections between the regions. The ambition by 2030 is to guarantee universal access to reliable and safe internet networks to all African citizens, no matter where they live.

The Global Gateway's investment package on digital transition is made up of different initiatives whose goal is to secure digital connectivity between Europe and Africa and reinforce interconnections within Africa. The first initiative, the EurAfrica Gateway Cable, connects the EU with Africa along the Atlantic Ocean coast through an international submarine fibre cable. This action will enhance the digital sovereignty of the two continents by ensuring the highest infrastructure and cyber security standards and increasing inter-continental data flows development. The second initiative enables the deployment of digital services, digital businesses and innovation by supporting construction of networks of fibre-optic cables across Sub-Saharan Africa in order to foster cross-border internet traffic and help bridge the connectivity gap between coastal and landlocked countries. The third, the Africa Europe Digital Innovation Bridge (AEDIB) Initiative, aims to support partner countries in strengthening their digital and innovation ecosystems and promote intercontinental cooperation between stakeholders in Africa and Europe, creating a single market for digital innovation. This will facilitate the launch and scale-up of innovative African start-ups and SMEs; strengthen digital innovation ecosystems in African countries and link them to European digital innovation ecosystems; support the creation of new Digital Innovation Hubs in Africa and strengthen existing ones. The last initiative, the European Secure Satellite Communications programme, aims to provide internet connectivity to the African continent, notably to remote areas and regions.

## 6.3 | Accelerating sustainable growth and improving working conditions

For the third goal, that refers to the increase in regional and continental economic growth and integration, the Global Gateway seeks to operate in six main directions. First, establishing strategic passages for smart, fair and affordable mobility and trade by developing multi-country transport infrastructure and improving the efficiency and the safety of the connectivity between the regions, it will ease the movement of goods and people within Africa and between the European and African continents. Second, through the offer of financial and technical backup, the initiatives will support early-stage business, start-ups and young entrepreneurs (especially women) to launch and grow businesses that are able to create decent and inclusive jobs. In particular this initiative (Young Businesses in Africa) will support more than 180 programmes aiming to help young African businesses to flourish. The programmes are expected to deliver access to finance for start-ups at seed and early stages; support for financial intermediaries and digital financing; an overall improvement in the investment climate and entrepreneurial ecosystem. The initiative will be implemented across Africa, with a first roll out of activities in Angola, Gabon, Rwanda, South Africa, Togo, Benin, Nigeria and Somalia.

The Global Gateway then seeks to consolidate the role of Europe as Africa's long-standing partner, strengthening Africa's regional and continental economic inclusion towards a stable and trustworthy single continental trade and investment system and developing competitive and viable continental value chains. In particular, Europe aims to enhance the connections with North Africa, promoting trade and investments in high value-added and/or future-oriented sectors and supporting young and female entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the EU seeks to empower African partner countries in extracting and adding value to their mineral raw materials at the local level. Lastly, the Global Gateway seeks to support the use of new technologies and knowledge transfers in Africa by leveraging the EU Space Programmes, allowing Europe to cooperate with partner countries in upgrading research facilities, boosting innovation systems and reinforcing research collaboration and opportunities.

## 6.4 | Enhancing health and pharmaceutical systems

On health, the Global Gateway seeks to assist Africa in vaccine deployment, strengthening hospitals, local pharmaceutical systems and health infrastructures capacities and in creating a universal health coverage, at the same time setting up the right regulatory framework and a sound investment environment. The ambition of the initiative for 2030 is double: develop regional pharmaceutical systems in order to have manufacturing capacity to meet local demand and needs and ensure vaccine coverage to the majority of people in Africa.

The Global Gateway's action in this field is composed of different initiatives. First, it seeks to deliver at least EUR 425 million for vaccine roll-out, supporting supply of auxiliary material (i.e., syringes), supply chain management, logistics and service delivery, administration of vaccines, vaccine confidence and information, sequencing capacity, diagnostics and therapeutics. Additionally, EUR 15 million will be mobilised to create digital COVID-19 certificates equivalent to the European Green Pass.

The Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority (HERA), the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the European Medicines Agency (EMA) will foster collaboration and exchange of best practices with their African counterparts, contributing to strengthening health security architecture as well as pharmaceutical systems in Africa.

The ECDC will contribute to strengthening the capacities of Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (Africa CDC) in terms of preparedness and response to health threats. Building on existing partnerships, this cooperation will also contribute to facilitating harmonised surveillance and disease intelligence of prioritised outbreak-prone communicable diseases at a continental level and supporting the implementation of Africa CDC's public health workforce development strategy.

Over EUR 1 billion will be deployed to strengthen Africa's local pharmaceutical systems and manufacturing capacity both at the regional and national level. The European Commission, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the European Investment Bank (EIB), in cooperation with the African Union, will create a new partnership to support health systems strengthening and more specifically primary health care in Sub-Saharan African countries. The goal is to mobilise at least EUR 1.15 billion in investments that will be used to: (i) improve access to quality essential health services; (ii) applying a One Health approach and strengthening response capacity; (iii) reinforce public health capacities; and (iv) advance the digitalisation of healthcare provision.

### 6.5 | Improving education and training

Finally, the Global Gateway seeks to support African countries in providing modern, equitably available and high-quality education, promoting youth mobility, making the labour market more accessible to young African professionals and encouraging innovative solutions to improve skills that are relevant to the contemporary, dynamic global job market. By 2030, the aim is that Africa's social and economic transformation will be led by young skilled leaders. There are four main initiatives in this field. The first targets skills and vocational education and training, to equip young people with the skills they will need in the future of work and to respond to global challenges through: (i) country programmes in vocational education and training; (ii) exchange of experiences on public–private partnerships in the field; (iii) Erasmus+ Partnerships for Vocational Education and Training. The second, the Team Europe Regional Teachers Initiative, will foster innovative solutions to enhance teachers' competences, including digital literacy and skills. The third, Global Partnership for Education (GPE), focusses on providing good basic education to both young boys and girls in the most inclusive and sustainable possible way, accelerating progress towards gender equality. The fourth, the Team Europe Initiative on Youth Mobility for Africa, is intended to integrate the African education system with the European one, promoting youth exchanges and mobility in Africa and between Africa and Europe through the Erasmus+ programme scholarships and traineeships.

## 7 | CONCLUSIONS: PROSPECTS FOR THE GLOBAL GATEWAY

Infrastructure investments are the material way of turning sustainable development goals into practice. Climate action requires renewable energy plants, power grids and electric vehicle charging infrastructure, in the same way that health requires hospitals, education requires schools or connectivity requires ports. By promoting Europe's values in the world, the Global Gateway can thus also become the export arm of a new EU industrial policy.

It can help meet the EU's international pledges, such as on climate finance, by supporting partner countries in the implementation of their sustainable development agendas. It can enable EU industry to enter new growing markets, a win for EU industrial policy. On top of this, it can help economic development in the EU's partner countries, providing an invaluable foreign policy dividend for the EU.

In geopolitical terms, the Global Gateway can help the EU better position itself in the global infrastructure and connectivity race. Rule-based cooperation focussed on a clear set of priorities represents an attractive alternative to the BRI in several partner countries, starting in Africa. By scaling up cooperation on economic and social infrastructure projects, the EU thus has an opportunity to promote its values and vision of sustainability in a way that is tangible and long-lasting.

In implementing Global Gateway, the EU will have to work closely with like-minded partners to develop synergies between their respective efforts on connectivity and quality infrastructure with third countries and achieve the maximum impact in closing the global infrastructure gap.

This cooperation will have to be extended to all aspects of the Global Gateway, including coordination of policies, collaboration on and co-financing of joint or parallel projects, joint engagement with host countries, the private sector and international financial institutions, and cooperation in the context of relevant international standard setting forums.

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