# GLOBAL GATEWAY AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH: A PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT

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## INTRODUCTION

At the end of 2021, the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, introduced Global Gateway (GG), the European Commission's new strategy for international investments in smart and sustainable infrastructure in key sectors such as energy, transport, digitalization, education and research, and health. This flagship initiative in international development cooperation aims to redefine European foreign policy, promoting the twin green and digital transitions globally while deepening European strategic autonomy. Furthermore, the strategy pledged to mobilize up to € 300 billion by 2027.

This strategy emerged against the backdrop of increasing global tensions, instability, and significant domestic crises and redefinitions within the European Union (EU). On the one hand, the COVID-19 crisis marked a turning point in Europe's self-perception and its global role. Supply chain vulnerabilities and internal tensions stemming from the health crisis resulted in one of the EU's most robust financial stimulus packages, particularly after a decade of stringent austerity policies: the renowned Next Generation funds. These funds kickstarted a new sustainable and digital development model that the Commission had advocated since its inception, characterized by profound transformations in production and consumption patterns. The European Green Deal, approved in mid-2021, became the cornerstone of this model.

Simultaneously, in early 2022, Russia's invasion of Ukraine sent shockwaves across Europe, leading to a marked economic slowdown due to disruptions in Russian gas supplies. Once again, the EU found itself vulnerable, this time due to instability in its natural sphere of influence, Eastern Europe. Adding to these challenges were escalating conflicts between the US and China in a commercial and technological race to dominate supply chains and lead cutting-edge sectors such as renewable energy technologies (solar, wind, electric vehicles) and digitalization (artificial intelligence, semiconductors, microchips). Consequently, the EU began to perceive itself as a secondary actor on the global stage, losing competitiveness in the race for the Fourth Industrial Revolution and facing significant strategic vulnerabilities in security and economic competitiveness. It was within this context that the design and implementation of the Global Gateway strategy began.

## STOCKTAKING'S SO FAR

In the three years since Global Gateway's inception, various studies have analysed the EU's strategy (De la Cruz and Martínez, 2024). However, most of these works are technical, produced by official European institutions, think tanks, foundations, and consultancies, focusing on governance, implementation, and design aspects of the strategy. Few studies adopt theoretical perspectives to address fundamental questions in international relations or international political economy. Additionally, limited information, design deficiencies, and a small number of associated initiatives have narrowed the scope of study, restricting analyses to a few documents, statements, and political commitments.

Nevertheless, several key issues have emerged as focal points of technical and academic interest. Firstly, some works highlight tensions between European geopolitical interests and the development objectives of recipient countries within GG initiatives (Ricart and Otero, 2022; Teevan et al., 2022; Furness and Keijzer, 2022). Secondly, debates are intensifying about whether the central actors in implementing the green transition in the Global South should be private or public entities and the implications of each format (Gabor, 2021; GIZ 2022; Karaki et al. 2022; Gerasimcikova et al. 2024). Thirdly, another set of studies examines the governance and coordination of the various actors involved in GG, identifying associated limitations and challenges (Burni et al., 2021; Buhigas and Costa, 2023). Fourthly, a consensus exists among most studies on the lack of information, communication, and transparency from the Commission regarding what GG is and aims to be, especially concerning specific project details and a comprehensive GG roadmap (Olivié and O'Shea, 2023; Szczepański, 2023). Lastly, financing issues reveal that funding largely relies on previously committed financial resources and expectations of leveraging resources from Member States and other actors (Tagliapietra, 2021; Gavas and Pleeck, 2021).

In summary, three years after its adoption, GG still presents numerous uncertainties, centred around strategic aspects – its nature, motivations, and interests – and technical, bureaucratic, and normative aspects, such as governance, financing, and access to information. In light of this updated discussion on GG, this article focuses on the strategic aspects, particularly the Commission's „developmentalist" interests, which increasingly align with its foreign policy objectives and less with the development goals of its partner countries.

The article is structured as follows: first, a brief presentation of GG's current state is provided. Second, key geopolitical and geoeconomic factors are outlined to contextualize the analysis. Third, an analysis is conducted of the unsystematic, publicly accessible project portfolio from the European Commission. Finally, the paper presents the main conclusions of the analysis and raises open questions for future research.

## GLOBAL GATEWAY: PROBING ITS MOTIVATIONS AND INTERESTS

### WHAT IS GLOBAL GATEWAY?

According to the European Commission's official documents, Global Gateway is an EU strategy designed collaboratively by the European Commission and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy to promote smart and sustainable investments worldwide. This initiative aims to bridge the global infrastructure gap while contributing to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) outlined in the 2030 Agenda and the targets set in the Paris Agreement for reducing $CO_2$ emissions.

To achieve these goals, GG focuses on specific sectors: digitalization, climate and energy, transportation, health, and education and research. Operationally, it adheres to six guiding principles: democratic values and stringent standards; good governance and transparency; equal partnerships; ecological and clean approaches; security-centric strategies; and the catalysation of private sector investments. To date, these principles have been translated into three regional investment strategies: the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, the EU-Africa Global Gateway Investment Package, and the EU-LAC Global Gateway Investment Agenda and EU-LAC Digital Alliance, each encompassing a broad portfolio of projects.

In terms of financing, the Commission aims to mobilize € 300 billion by 2027 in collaboration with Team Europe – a collective involving EU institutions, Member States, and private entities. These funds consist of € 200-230 billion in investments and approximately € 40-50 billion in guarantees under the EFSD+ framework. The Commission plans to contribute up to € 135 billion, primarily through the NDICI-Europe Global instrument (notably EFSD+), thus leveraging an additional € 150 billion from European financial and development institutions.

In summary, while the strategy's essence is relatively clear – with defined objectives, sectors, key actors, and allocated resources – its operationalization remains opaque. Questions persist regarding the specific projects being implemented, and the criteria used for geographic, sectoral, and actor prioritization in allocating funds.

### HISTORICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL CONTEXT OF GG

To strategically understand GG, it is essential to consider the historical context in which it was conceived, particularly the geopolitical and geoeconomic framework it serves within European external and internal policy. Understanding this requires two perspectives: first, the evolving historical context within international relations across domains such as geopolitics, economics, and environmental challenges; and second, the EU's growing awareness of its diminishing relevance in the international arena and its economic and industrial lag, which it has sought to address through a new development model centred on the green and digital economy.

Throughout the 21st century, the EU has faced a series of crises that have exposed the fragility and vulnerability of the European project. The 2008 financial crisis revealed the shortcomings of Western economies, particularly in

Europe, highlighting the fragility of economic and monetary integration. This situation was exacerbated by austerity policies, which further deepened economic, social, and political costs. Years later, the COVID-19 crisis again exposed European economies' vulnerabilities, especially regarding dependence on global value chains. This time, however, the EU responded more decisively with counter-cyclical measures materialized through expansive spending plans like the Next Generation funds (De la Cruz and Iribarren, 2022). Two years later, Russia's invasion of Ukraine starkly illustrated Europe's dangerous dependence on Russian gas and the urgent need for an energy transition that would bolster regional strategic autonomy.

Similarly, intensifying tensions between the US and China to dominate key sectors of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (digital and green technologies) have underscored Europe's dependency on critical raw materials for its industry and its increasingly secondary role in the global economy. Finally, the growing impacts of climate change and European voters' heightened sensitivity to this challenge have made the transition to more sustainable production and consumption models imperative.

In response to these trends, the European Commission has launched several initiatives, both domestically and internationally. Internally, the Commission has redefined Europe's growth model, anchoring it in two fundamental pillars: the green economy and the digital economy. The European Green Deal forms the core strategy for transitioning to a sustainable economy and redefining Europe's development model. These sectors – green and digital – are also pivotal in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where major powers compete for supremacy. The US-China trade war and the substantial subsidies for emerging industries in the US through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) exemplify the shifting dynamics of global competition. The European Green Deal aims to position the EU in this race to dominate markets in the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Sanahuja, 2022b).

This internal dimension is inherently linked to the international domain. First, a more competitive and aggressive international environment necessitates strategic retraction and a higher degree of autonomy, particularly regarding critical materials for European production, which are currently outside EU control. In this context, the European Commission has promoted the concept of „European strategic autonomy," emphasizing the need to significantly reduce dependencies on energy and raw materials from third countries, especially „unreliable" suppliers. This concept explicitly references Russia due to Europe's reliance on Russian gas and indirectly China, which dominates the production of strategic materials and has become a leader in producing and commercializing resources essential for the energy transition. In line with this, EU institutions recently approved the European Critical Raw Materials Act, aimed at identifying and securing global and internal supplies, directly linked to the Global Gateway (European Commission, 2023b).

## MOTIVATIONS BEHIND GG: ALTRUISM OR INTERESTS?

The Commission has recognized the need to reorient its external influence to partially satisfy its new production priorities, redefining its main foreign policy instruments to achieve its goals and promote green and digital priorities. This „geopolitical Commission" seeks to integrate internal and external dimensions coherently across all policy priorities, not just those of a purely external nature. The European Green Deal exemplifies this integration by rearticulating European development policy alongside the new Critical Raw Materials Act. In its communication on March 16, 2023, the Commission specifically referenced GG, stating:

> *„But the game has changed, and we need to do more. Therefore, the Commission is today proposing a comprehensive approach, scaling up and accelerating the supply of primary and secondary raw materials within the EU. Through reinforced international commitments, we will work with our partners to diversify and integrate sustainable supply and value chains. To build long-term, mutually beneficial relationships with resource-rich countries, the EU will seek partnerships that ensure shared benefits in full complementarity with the Global Gateway strategy. While these partnerships should contribute to diversifying the EU's critical raw materials supply chain, they should also enhance sustainability and value addition in the production of these resource-rich developing and emerging countries … Global Gateway will serve as the vehicle to support partner countries with specific projects in infrastructure and connectivity, leveraging private sector investments along the critical raw materials value chain".*
>
> Source: European Commission, 2023c: 2, 12

Thus, GG aligns with European strategies for accessing and diversifying raw materials while promoting value generation and sustainability in partner countries. However, conflicts may arise when these objectives clash, forcing prioritization of one over the other. Will the European Commission prioritize geoeconomic interests or developmental values when these goals conflict? Only time will tell. Meanwhile, this new regulation has generated extensive strategic documentation on raw materials globally and identified key global supply hubs of strategic interest to the EU.

The European Commission has defined two main categories of raw materials (Table A). The first includes strategic raw materials, defined as „those with significant relevance for the green and digital transition, as well as for defence and space applications, considering: a) the number of strategic technologies utilizing a raw material as an input; b) the quantity of a raw material required for manufacturing relevant strategic technologies; c) the expected global demand for relevant strategic technologies." The second category pertains to critical raw materials, identified based on parameters such as i) the proportion of a raw material's end use in a sector, ii) the added value of the relevant sector, and iii) the substitution index related to economic importance. Based on these categories, the European Commission has outlined its interests in critical and strategic raw materials on a global scale, particularly in the Global South.

**Table A: European Commission's Lists of Strategic and Critical Raw Materials**

| Strategic Raw Materials | Critical Raw Materials (CRMs) |
|---|---|
| Bismuth, metallurgical-grade Boron, Cobalt, Copper, Gallium, Germanium, battery-grade Lithium, Magnesium metal, battery-grade Manganese, natural battery-grade Graphite, battery-grade Nickel, Platinum Group Metals, Rare Earth Elements for magnets (Nd, Pr, Tb, Dy, Gd, Sm, and Ce), Silicon Metal, Titanium Metal, Tungsten. | Antimony, Arsenic, Bauxite, Barite, Beryllium, Bismuth, Boron, Cobalt, Coking Coal, Copper, Feldspar, Fluorspar, Gallium, Germanium, Hafnium, Helium, Heavy Rare Earth Elements, Light Rare Earth Elements, Lithium, Magnesium, Manganese, natural Graphite, battery-grade Nickel, Niobium, Phosphate Rock, Phosphorus, Platinum Group Metals, Scandium, Silicon Metal, Strontium, Tantalum, Titanium Metal, Tungsten, Vanadium. |

Source: European Commission, 2023d

In summary, the von der Leyen Commission has outlined a new development strategy for the EU through the European Green Deal. Second, all European policies have been reoriented to align with the new development strategy, including foreign and international development policies. Third, given the importance of certain raw materials for the energy and digital transition, foreign policy instruments like Global Gateway have been linked to goals of accessing these materials in the Global South. An internal Commission document leaked to POLITICO this spring, addressed to the incoming Commission, appears to confirm these insights:

> *„... In today's world, Emerging Markets and Developing Economies are geopolitical and geoeconomic players that should be invested in. The EU cannot take its position for granted. We must avoid any sense of complacency and recognize that our economic security and competitiveness are inextricably linked to global dynamics. A global investment strategy is needed to complement the EU's industrial strategy and the European Green Deal.*
>
> *... Global Gateway sets out the right agenda; it should now be taken to the next level. The new College should further drive this modernization by engaging our strategic partners with a policy mix driven by economic interest, and less so by more traditional and narrow development and foreign policy approaches. The economy has become the key playing field for geopolitical competition; yet, as it stands, we are still too often trying to do „everything, everywhere, all at once," and avoid arbitration."*

Source: European Commission, Directorate General for International Partnerships; POLITICO 2024

More recently, following the confirmation of the second Von der Leyen Commission, the first statements by the President of the European Commission, as well as those by the new Commissioner of the Directorate-General for International Partnerships, Jozef Síkela, have reinforced the idea of deepening the geoeconomic approach of the Global Gateway. They also highlighted the need to align international development cooperation instruments with Europeans' external interests in a world marked by growing technological competition and increased risks to European security (EC, 2024).

In conclusion, any analysis of GG must consider its geopolitical and geoeconomic determinants and the historical context in which European internal and external policies are being redefined. Trends such as „proxy wars" between international and regional powers are generating a more unstable and unpredictable international environment. Similarly, commercial and economic tensions between China, the US, and other industrial powers drive competition for resources and raw materials in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, compelling the EU to secure reliable suppliers within its global value chains. Finally, the EU's domestic policies, such as the European Green Deal, extend their priorities beyond Europe's borders. The forms these policies take are currently being defined through trial and error, particularly with the arrival of the new Commission.

## A PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF AVAILABLE GG DATA

The following section analyses the data available on initiatives published by the European Commission. It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive database but a random selection of projects provided by the European Commission. Currently, there is no comprehensive list that includes all projects, their allocated budgets, or the loan conditions applied. Consequently, this analysis is severely limited by these informational constraints. Nevertheless, some trends and conclusions of interest can be derived from this list.

The analysis is based on 228 projects or initiatives distributed globally during 2023 and 2024. The sectoral distribution of the projects is as follows: Climate and Energy (116), Transport (51), Digital (28), Health (17), and Education and Research (16). By region, the distribution is: Africa (105), Latin America and the Caribbean (49), Asia-Pacific (37), Balkans and Neighborhood (32), and Multiregion (5) (see Figures A and B).

Geographically, the main recipients of GG projects are: Egypt (8 projects), Nigeria (7 projects), Brazil, Morocco, Mozambique, and Senegal (6 projects each); Jordan (5 projects); Angola, Benin, Colombia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Madagascar, and Peru (4 projects each); and several further countries (see Figure C).

Regarding the funding institutions, only the most reliable data from 2023 are utilized here. Within this analytical scope, over three-quarters of the projects are Team Europe Initiatives (TEI), with the remaining quarter originating from member states, financial institutions, or unidentified sources. The main institutions collaborating with the Commission are: the European Investment Bank (EIB) with 50 projects; the French Development Agency (AFD) with 31 projects; the Austrian Development Bank (OeEB) with 20 projects; the Credit Bank for Reconstruction (KfW) with 18 projects; the Netherlands Development Finance Company (FMO) with 17 projects; Proparco with 16 projects; the Belgian Investment Company for Developing Countries (BIO) with 15 projects; AECID/COFIDES with 10 projects; the Italian Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP) with 7 projects; and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) with 5 projects.

In summary, the aggregated analysis of GG at the global level reveals some strategic trends. Firstly, the data demonstrate the European Commission's notable leadership in defining and financing projects. Among the Commission's principal collaborators, the European Investment Bank (EIB) stands out as the Union's main financial arm abroad, alongside the French Cooperation Agency. When combined with Proparco, a subsidiary of the former, the French agency matches the EIB in prominence. Similarly noteworthy, though with a smaller portfolio, are other bilateral agencies specializing in reimbursable financial cooperation, such as those of Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, and Italy.

Thematically, Climate and Energy account for just over half of the initiatives (51 %), followed by Transport (22 %) and Digital (12 %). The least prioritized areas are Health and Education and Research, each with 7 %. This indicates that Global Gateway, in practical terms, represents the European Commission's significant investment in external dimensions of the Green Deal through „hard" infrastructure investments, especially in Africa. In terms of Digitalization, Transport, and Education and Research, Africa remains the predominant focus. In contrast, Health is prioritized more in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Geographically, there seems to be a certain balance in regional per capita income distribution, with around 40 % of projects in Africa, 30 % in Latin America and the Caribbean, 20 % in Asia, and 10 % in the Balkans. At the country level, no specialization pattern is evident, aside from significant project allocations to middle-income countries, likely due to their greater capacity to absorb funds. Overall, there is relatively equitable distribution across regions and limited concentration in specific countries.

Regarding sectoral allocation by region, „Climate and Energy" projects dominate across all regions. In Africa, „Transport" projects are second in prominence, while in Latin America, „Health" ranks second. Institutional participation reflects traditional ties between certain member states and their former colonies. France and Germany take leading roles in all regions except Latin America, where Spain is the primary partner.

**Figure A: Geographical Allocation of GG Projects**

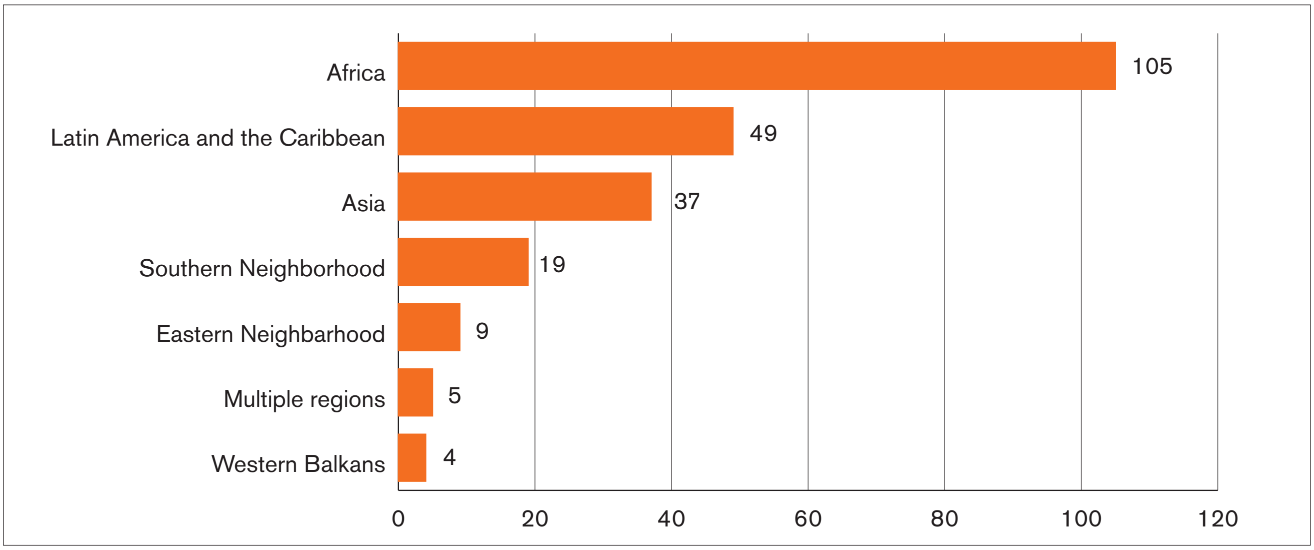
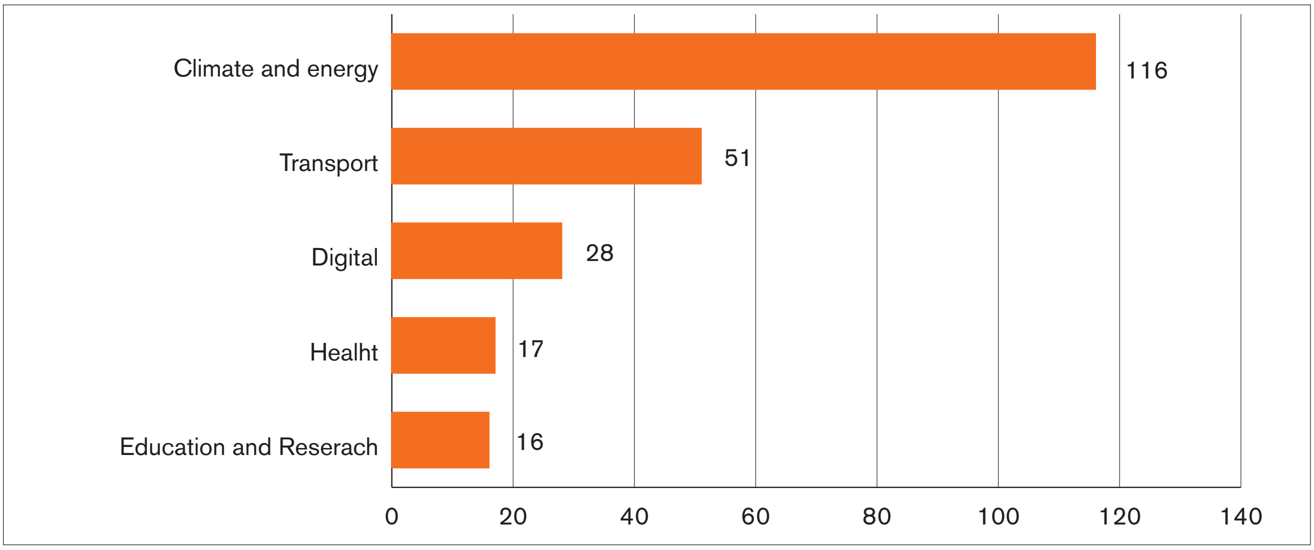
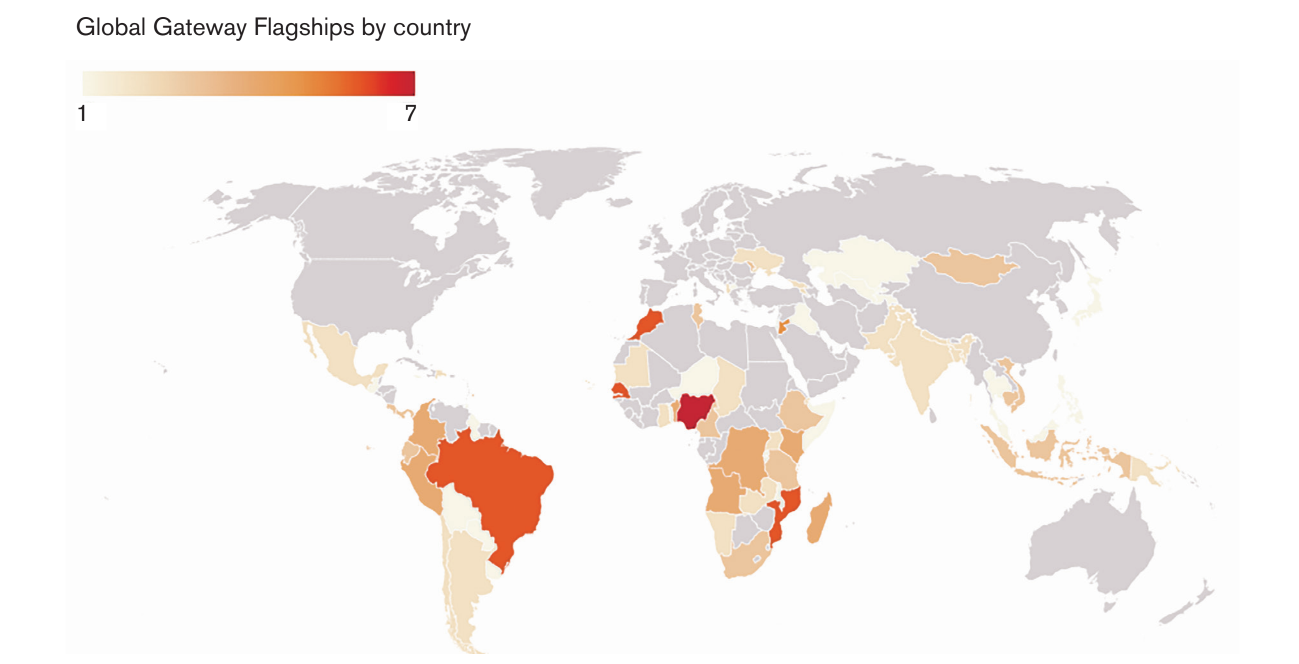



**Figure B: Sectoral Allocation of GG Projects (number of projects)**




Sources: Compiled with data from De la Cruz and Martínez (2024).

**Figure C: Geographical Allocation of Global Gateway Projects**




Source: Compiled with data from De la Cruz and Martínez (2024)

Nonetheless, the conclusions drawn here are limited and do not provide a comprehensive map of what the Global Gateway is or intends to be, nor its implications for partner countries or European foreign policy. Until details regarding project amounts, financing conditions, and concrete outcomes are disclosed, the macroeconomic, social, or institutional impacts cannot be evaluated. Nor is it possible to analyse GG's connection to the redefinition of European foreign policy, its competitiveness vis-à-vis other initiatives such as China's, or its link to access to critical raw materials. Advancing these objectives will require access to complete and standardized databases from the European Commission.

## CONCLUSIONS

This article has provided an initial exploration of the implications of the Global Gateway for the European Union's development cooperation with the Global South. To this end, a brief overview of GG's current state has been presented, along with key aspects of domestic and European foreign policies influencing GG's design.

Although incomplete, the initial data reveal some trends of the new strategy. Firstly, GG is clearly oriented towards the „Climate and Energy" sector as a key instrument for internationalizing the European Green Deal, with secondary emphasis on Digital initiatives. Other sectors have minimal representation. Regionally, GG prioritizes Africa, followed by Latin America and Asia. No clear national priorities are evident. Lastly, implementation is primarily coordinated and led by the European Commission, the EIB, and leading bilateral concessional financing agencies. There is no systematic or relevant information on private sector actors involved. Beyond these general trends, no additional data is available for more detailed analysis to draw conclusions about geopolitical objectives and motivations underlying GG's funding allocations.

Finally, it is worth noting that the new Von der Leyen 2.0 Commission and the new Commissioner for International Partnerships, Jozef Síkela, have reaffirmed their commitment to the Global Gateway strategy. They have also underlined their intention to deepen the approach of the previous legislature, with a particular emphasis on the geo-economic perspective needed to navigate the current world of international uncertainties. Next summer (2025), the European Commission will present its first budget proposal in order to launch negotiations on the definition of the multiannual financial framework for 2027. The figures in this first proposal will provide valuable insights into the scope, priorities and financial power of the Global Gateway 2.0.

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