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The Global Gateway and the EU as a digital actor in Africa

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At the European Union (EU) - African Union (AU) Summit in February 2022, the EU and its member states announced a series of major initiatives for Africa under its Global Gateway strategy, promising €150 billion in investments by 2027, including investments in the area of digital infrastructure. Driven by a combination of global geopolitics and an externalisation of domestic policy priorities, the EU's approach to digital policy in its external action is evolving.

This paper explores the EU's changing approach and argues that the Global Gateway strategy has the ingredients to help make Team Europe – including the EU, its member states, the European financial institutions and the private sector – a geopolitical actor in the digital area. However, this will require delivering impact at scale whilst offering an attractive narrative through its digital diplomacy that responds to partner countries' needs. It will also need the buy-in of the European private sector and to take their concerns seriously.

We touch on African digital priorities at the continental level and in certain partner countries, arguing that a significant part of the European proposal must focus on tailoring its offer to these priorities and at the same time offering long-term sustainability. This means investing in not only infrastructure, but high-level digital skills, developing joint research projects with African countries and looking at integrating African economies into its digital value chains. These kinds of moves will show that the EU is serious about supporting Africa in developing a truly sustainable digital economy, thereby supporting Africa's digital sovereignty, rather than recreating dependencies.

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Acronyms

4G	Fourth Generation
4IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
5G	Fifth Generation
ACT	Assertive Community Treatment
ACET	African Center for Economic Transformation
AEDIB/NET	African European Digital Innovation Bridge Network
AfD	Agence française de développement
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AI	Artificial Intelligence
APRI	Africa Policy Research Institute
AU	African Union
AUC	African Union Commission
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CENFRI	Centre for Financial Regulation and Inclusion
CEPS	Centre for European Policy Studies
CoEU	Council of the European Union
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
CSA	Cyber Security Authority
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
D4D	Digital for Development
DCD	Datacenter Dynamics
DCDT	Department of Communications and Digital Technologies
DFI	Development Finance Institution
DG INTPA	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
DIE	German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik
DTS	Digital Transformation Strategy
E-ID	Electronic Identification
EC	European Commission
ECDPM	European Centre for Development Policy Management
ECIPE	European Centre for International Political Economy
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EEAS	European External Action Service
EFSD+	European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus

EIB	European Investment Bank
ESG	Environment, Society and Governance
ESTDEV	Estonian Centre for International Development
EU	European Union
FEPS	Foundation for European Progressive Studies
GAP	Gender Action Plan
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GG	Global Gateway
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GSMA	Global System for Mobile Communications
HR/VP	High Representative / Vice President
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ID	Identification
ID4D	Identity for Development
IPI	International Procurement Instrument
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
ITU	International Telecommunications Union
LINK	Learning Information Networking Knowledge
MFWA	Media Foundation for West Africa
MIP	Multiannual Indicative Programme
MPCA	Multi-Partner Contribution Agreement
MTN	Mobile Telephone Network
NCSAM	National Cyber Security and Awareness Month
NDICI	Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument
NIIMS	National Integrated Identity Management System
ODI	Overseas Development Institute
OJEU	Official Journal of the European Union
PRIDA	Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa
REC	Regional Economic Community
RFI	Radio France Internationale
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SES	Société Européenne des Satellites
SIM	Subscriber Identity Module
SMEs	Small to medium-sized enterprises
STEM	Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics
TEI	Team Europe Initiative
TSMC	Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co
UN	United Nations
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNECA	United Nations Economic Commission for Africa
US	United States
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive Summary

At the European Union (EU) - African Union (AU) Summit in February 2022, the EU and its member states announced a series of major initiatives for Africa under its Global Gateway (GG) strategy, promising €150 billion in investments by 2027, including investments in the area of digital infrastructure.

China's imprint as a digital infrastructure actor in Africa and other parts of the world is significant, raising European concerns about how China is impacting digital governance and state surveillance. In response, the EU and its member states hope to step up their digital investments and cooperation in Africa and other regions across the world, demonstrating that Team Europe (the EU, its member states and their agencies, financial institutions and private sectors working together) can be a reliable and significant partner. The Global Gateway strategy should provide both the brand and the way of working to make this happen.

The Global Gateway aims, above all, to play a role in selling the EU's vision for digital in global affairs. Yet that vision is still somewhat in evolution. The EU approach to digital in external action has been driven by a combination of global geopolitics and an externalisation of internal policy priorities. These internal priorities are developed in the Digital Compass and are gradually being elaborated in a host of new digital laws like the Digital Services Act, the Digital Markets Acts and the AI Act that are now being developed at a previously unimagined speed. Alongside this, a European approach to industrial policy has been gradually and somewhat haltingly emerging within parts of the European Commission (EC) and amongst selected member states.

The EU's digital diplomacy is still in its infancy but will need to provide strategic guidance for the Global Gateway, helping to shape and communicate it. There is a clear desire to increase the EU's footprint in the area of digital diplomacy and efforts have picked up considerably since 2021. The European External Action Service (EEAS) created a new division on connectivity and digital transformation in 2021 and appointed a Special Envoy on connectivity. The July 2022 Council Conclusions on EU digital diplomacy attempt to give the EU's recent partnerships and investments in digital infrastructure a strategic direction and visibility by calling for the EU and its member states to develop a digital diplomacy through their delegations and embassies.

It is against this backdrop of an evolving European approach to digital in external action that the Global Gateway was developed. The EU frames the strategy as its response to speed up sustainable development and the global recovery from COVID-19, its contribution to addressing the global infrastructure investment gap, and a tool to position itself in the global infrastructure and connectivity race while promoting its democratic values and sustainability. Importantly, the Global Gateway was developed amidst growing geopolitical competition, exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and more recently, by the Russian war in Ukraine. It aims to serve as an alternative and trusted brand, and in the area of digital geopolitics, it aims to promote an alternative vision for digital development and governance.

There is a lot of potential overlap between the Digital for Development (D4D) Hub and the Global Gateway, and many of the initiatives of the D4D Hub will likely be suitable to be labelled as Global Gateway initiatives. The D4D Hub is playing a vital role in ensuring that the EC and its member states with a strong interest in digital cooperation work together in a coordinated 'Team Europe' approach, thereby strengthening the EU's role as a digital actor. However, while the Global Gateway must certainly integrate the D4D Hub, it should also aim to bring on board an even stronger political and diplomatic dimension than the D4D Hub and must involve a wider range of stakeholders.

The EU's announced shift towards building partnerships requires more engagement with partner countries and listening to their priorities. The Global Gateway communication promises to work closely with like-minded partners to develop synergies, and to develop projects 'in close cooperation and consultation with partner countries.' However, the focus to date has been on the EU's offer rather than on the demand side. Many African digital

stakeholders see an added value in European investment in infrastructure, but also in hearing about the EU's experience in building its digital single market, and in bringing European and African digital businesses together in a spirit of real exchange. Yet, they are clear that they do not want to be lectured to.

The AU's Digital Transformation Strategy (DTS) has a strong focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and economic growth and defines broad objectives to deliver the digital transformation of the continent. These include building an inclusive and digital society by 2030, strengthening the economic sector and ensuring continental ownership with Africa leading digital innovation. Digital infrastructure is the first priority mentioned by many African stakeholders, but many interlocutors also emphasise that infrastructure must go hand in hand with skills development, better regulation to stimulate innovation and investment in digital services.

Different African countries are at very different stages of digital development. Some have developed overarching digital strategies, whereas others have even developed sub-strategies for specific areas of the digital economy. Kenya, Senegal, Ghana and South Africa are amongst the continent's most digitally connected economies. Building on foundational strategies, they are now trying to integrate digital policy into different sectors in order to expand digital inclusivity and cross-sectoral digital growth. Amongst their main priorities are expanding connectivity, developing digital skills across the population, digitising services and creating an enabling environment for the private sector, but EU programmes in each case will of course need to be adapted to local circumstances.

There are a number of other digital actors with diverse perceptions on Africa's digital priorities, including civil society organisations, think tanks, academia and UN agencies. Multistakeholder approaches to digital transformation will be essential to ensuring that digital transformation in Africa is inclusive and that citizens' rights are respected. Further, a strong civil society and research ecosystem, producing evidence-based research, can feed stronger policymaking and help to ensure that policy is data-led.

The AU and African states do not have a common narrative on digital sovereignty. Some use it to refer to technological autonomy and others to data localisation to protect against extractive market players and authoritarian governments. Yet at the heart of the debate on digital sovereignty is Africa's growing effort to find a balance between meeting its immediate digital infrastructure needs and the long-term goal of driving technological innovation and ensuring that African citizens are not objects of data extractivism. Developing home-grown digital innovations, policies and regulations that give African actors more control over their data and technology will be essential to ensure Africa's digital sovereignty.

Working with the European private sector is an integral part of the Global Gateway strategy and will be vital to its success. There has already been a sea-change in terms of the way that the EC approaches the private sector, particularly in the area of digital cooperation; private sector actors are being repeatedly consulted by the EC and a private sector advisory group was recently created as part of the D4D Hub, bringing together over 40 European digital private sector actors. Private sector actors are keen to engage, and emphasise that they can draw on their experiences in partner countries in order to help identify gaps and codesign offers together with the European Commission, the member states and Development Finance Institutions (DFIs).

The EU has a number of ingredients that it can offer partners via the Global Gateway, but it needs to now deliver and do so whilst offering an attractive narrative that responds to partner countries' needs. This includes developing a holistic offer and developing new ways of working in order to deliver. A major part of the European offer must be focused on listening to partners and offering longer-term sustainability, including investments that will allow Africa to develop a truly sustainable digital economy, rather than recreating dependencies. This includes investing in high-level digital skills, industrial development, developing joint research projects with African countries, and looking at integrating African economies into its digital value chains. These kinds of moves will show that the EU is serious about not just developing its own digital sovereignty, but also supporting Africa's own digital sovereignty.

1. Introduction

At the European Union (EU) - African Union (AU) Summit in February 2022, the EU and its member states announced a series of major initiatives for Africa under its Global Gateway (GG) Strategy, promising €150 billion in investments by 2027. The Global Gateway is the latest in a series of efforts to operationalise the EU's ambitions to be more geopolitical on the global stage. In the area of digital cooperation, the EU and its member states hope to step up their impact in Africa and other regions across the world, demonstrating that Team Europe (the EU, its member states and their agencies, financial institutions and private sectors working together) can be a reliable and significant partner. Unlike the other areas covered by the Global Gateway, digital cooperation is one where the EU does not currently have a significant footprint in Africa or other regions, and it is thus looking to scale up very quickly in order to demonstrate what a European model of digital cooperation has to offer.

The geopolitical context was always central to the rationale behind Global Gateway, but has only become more complex since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. While China remains the predominant digital player in Africa, the war has increased European concerns regarding Russian disinformation and the general fracturing of the rules-based international order. China's imprint as a digital infrastructure actor under the Digital Silk Road in Africa and other parts of the world is significant, raising European concerns about how China is impacting digital governance and state surveillance in many countries across the world, including in Africa. Although the United States' (US) influence is mostly felt through big tech companies, it is also trying to increase its presence through increased investments, notably in broadband infrastructure. Other emerging actors, including India, Turkey and the Gulf countries, are also beginning to make their presence felt in the telecoms and digital space. Meanwhile, Africa's underdeveloped regulatory environment and the low number of competitors in many markets across the continent give telecommunication companies opportunities to charge excessively high prices, and allow the world's biggest technology companies to exploit citizens' data, which is mostly hosted on non-regional servers.

With the Global Gateway, the EU hopes to invest in digital infrastructure, not only to meet African development priorities, but also to shape the direction of its digital development and governance (digital laws, rules and regulations). Notably, the EU places a focus on sovereignty and sustainability and hopes to shape the regulatory choices of its partners; complementing physical digital infrastructure with "country-level assistance on ensuring the protection of personal data, cybersecurity and the right to privacy, trustworthy artificial intelligence (AI), and fair and open digital markets." (EC and HR/VP 2021) In practice, the EU hopes to sell its emerging vision of digital sovereignty based on what it calls "human-centric" digital governance; a notion that is never clearly defined, but that broadly includes strong data protection, respect for human rights and a regulated free market (EC 2021a).

Yet, questions remain about how the EU and its member states can effectively formulate and implement a coherent digital hard and soft infrastructure strategy with Africa, and how its limited resources and influence can be used most strategically to maximise its impact. In this paper, we argue that the EU's selling point vis-à-vis partners is the fact that it is also building its own model of digital sovereignty in response to the US and China. Yet, the EU still needs to refine its offer to partner countries, and rather than simply trying to export its model, it will be important for the EU to enter into dialogue with partner countries about what their needs are and with the European private sector to define its offer. The EU's digital diplomacy will need to be further developed so as to provide strategic guidance for Global Gateway and to tailor the EU's narrative to the needs of its partners.

This research is based on more than 20 interviews and conversations with European and African policymakers in recent months, as well as a number of events and webinars organised by ECDPM and by others. It also draws on

relevant policy documents of the EU, AU and their member states, where relevant. In Section 1, we will explore the evolving European vision of digital in external action, and the tools that the EU and its member states have at their disposal to implement that evolving vision. In Section 2, we will look at African approaches to digital transformation and how the EU can begin to meet the priorities expressed by African actors. In Section 3, we look at the role and needs of the private sector in implementing the digital dimension of Global Gateway, and in Conclusions we look at some initial steps the EU is making and could make to become a stronger geopolitical actor. We finish by suggesting some recommendations for how the Global Gateway could be used to improve the EU's geopolitical standing in Africa.

2. Context: An EU digital vision

The EU has gradually increased its commitments to integrate digital policy in its external action but there has been a marked uptick since the von der Leyen Commission took office in 2019. The EU's 2016 Global Strategy for the EU's Foreign and Security Policy already reflected the EU's ambition to play a greater role in supporting multilateral digital governance and shaping global frameworks on cybersecurity, while Council Conclusions in 2016 and 2017 pointed to the desire to increase the focus on digital in EU international cooperation (EEAS 2016; CoEU 2016; CoEU 2017). However, it was not until 2019 that clearer elements of a European strategy on digital in external action began to emerge with digital policy being one of the five priorities of the new Commission. The EU has become a more assertive actor in terms of affirming its geopolitical interest as is evident in the Global Gateway strategy and in the July 2022 Council Conclusions on digital diplomacy, which state that digital technologies have "become key competitive parameters that can shift the geopolitical balance of power" (EC and HR/VP 2021; CoEU 2022a). Digital was also included as a priority under the new Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI-Global Europe) with a spending target of 10% (Sergejeff et al. 2022).

However, while the EU bubble recognises the EU's need to become a more coordinated and effective actor, there is a need to balance between the EU's ambitions regarding commercial competitiveness and geopolitical objectives on the one hand, and its development objectives on the other (Sial and Sol 2022). Some argue that the Global Gateway follows a trend in which the EU instrumentalises development aid to meet the EU's economic and security interests, and in particular to address the perceived threat of China's growing influence (Furness and Keijzer 2022). This means that although the Global Gateway aims to encompass the Team Europe approach and the NDICI-Global Europe, some question whether strategic goals should determine investment (Keijzer et al. 2022).

Going forward, the EU needs to reconcile the two approaches, namely the EU's more geopolitical and interest-driven international cooperation agenda with its demand-driven developmental agenda. Bringing the two together will also be vital to the EU's geopolitical interests, as developing strong partnerships that deliver results will require that the EU is led by partner countries' needs. The Global Gateway is, in many ways, the EU's vision for integrating development policy and spending with its wider foreign policy interests, but it needs to clearly demonstrate what its added value is for partner countries if it is to have a real geopolitical impact.

The emerging EU digital vision

The EU approach to digital policy in external action is gradually emerging, driven by a combination of global geopolitics and internal policy priorities. A lot remains to be defined but certain elements are already clear, drawing heavily on the domestic approach. The Digital Compass is the main Communication defining the EU's vision for digital, laying out its vision for the EU's own digital development, which is mirrored in the external approach elaborated therein, in line with the overall methodology of the Geopolitical Commission (Teevan and Sherriff 2019).

The EU approach has also become apparent in a host of new digital laws that are being developed at a previously unimagined speed. Alongside this, a European industrial policy has been gradually and somewhat haltingly emerging within parts of the Commission and amongst selected member states, although there are varying degrees of enthusiasm for this.

Presented by the EC in 2021, the EU's Digital Compass is the EU's vision for a 10-year roadmap for Europe's digital transformation. To meet the vision, the EU has set milestones along four cardinal points:

1. fostering a digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals;
2. building secure and performant sustainable digital infrastructure;
3. enhancing the digital transformation of businesses through the Digital Single Market; and
4. digitalisation of public services (EC 2021a).

Although it is not clear how the EU is going to achieve these targets, the Compass acknowledges the digital divide within Europe and the EU's dependency on non-European technology and calls for initiatives that can help pave the way for its digital sovereignty. These points are very close to the four priorities that had been established in the earlier report of the 'EU-AU Digital Economy Task Force' (EC 2019).

Alongside this, the EU's evolving approach has been most clear in a host of new laws and policy documents, most notably the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act adopted in 2022, which aim to improve competition amongst tech companies and to fight online disinformation. The EU hopes that externally, these laws will build on the perceived success of the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in becoming something of a gold standard for data protection regulation globally. Yet, it is not always clear that the external dimension has been well considered in the development of these new laws.

The EC and some member states have also shown a growing interest in industrial policy as a means to achieve the EU's strategic autonomy, meaning the EU's ability to act without depending on other countries in strategically important policy areas (European Parliament 2022). This was first indicated by the 2020 New Industrial Strategy and was updated in 2021 as supply chain shortages began to emerge as a result of COVID-19 (EC 2020; EC 2021b). The European Strategy for Data 2020 aims to develop a European market for industrial data in order to feed European industry and notably provide the necessary data so that homegrown European companies working in artificial intelligence (AI) and related areas can become competitive (EC 2020a; EC 2020b). This is very much still a work in progress. The EU Chip Act, which contributes to this ambition, aims to increase the EU's self-sufficiency in semiconductors (EC 2022a). In addition to securing a \$33 billion investment from the US Intel, the EU is hoping to attract investment from Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) and South Korea's Samsung to drive the development of the European semiconductor industry, although these are still very uncertain (Haeck and Westendarp 2022). On top of these initiatives, the EC President von der Leyen recently indicated in her State of the Union 2022 that the EU will increase its financial support to Important Projects of Common European Interest and also explore developing a European Sovereignty Fund. She summed up her approach in one sentence: "Let's make sure that the future of industry is made in Europe." (EC 2022b). Yet, critics still argue that the EU approach is half-hearted, driven largely by the big member states and more beneficial for them, not backed by enough resources, or simply not connected enough with the actual priorities of the European private sector, particularly small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Haeck and Westendarp 2022; Bauer 2022). Further, following a much larger US industrial subsidies package, the so-called US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), there are worries about the implications for European industry.

The Digital Compass also proposes a European digital diplomacy with the purpose to "strengthen the EU's global role in digital affairs, on the basis of common geopolitical priorities" (CoEU 2022b). Together with EU member states,

the EC aims “to develop a comprehensive and coordinated approach to digital coalition-building and diplomatic outreach including through the network of EU delegations.” Demonstrating the interlinkages between the EU’s internal and external policies, it aims to build strong international digital partnerships by aligning the four priorities of the Compass. The EU sets out key principles it hopes to promote related to its values and interests in the digital space, including a level playing field in digital markets, a secure cyberspace, and upholding fundamental rights online (EC 2021a). Yet, overall this first statement of the EU’s agenda for digital in external action remains relatively vague both in terms of what it hopes to achieve precisely and in terms of the means to implement that vision. This approach is gradually being refined through the EU’s evolving digital diplomacy, which we will now turn to.

Digital diplomacy

The EU’s digital diplomacy is still in its infancy when compared to other policy areas, such as climate diplomacy. Yet, there is a clear desire to increase the EU’s footprint in this area. Attempts to integrate digital policy in external action can be reflected by the development of a cyber diplomacy toolbox in 2017, by the connectivity partnerships announced with various Asian countries, and by the 2030 Digital Compass. The EEAS created a new division on connectivity and digital transformation in 2021. The latest and most significant of these examples is the July 2022 Council conclusions on EU digital Diplomacy, which attempt to give the EU’s recent partnerships and investments on digital infrastructure a strategic direction and visibility by calling the EU and member states to develop a digital diplomacy through the delegations (CoEU 2022).

Earlier efforts to begin to develop the EU’s digital diplomacy and partnerships include the Joint Communication ‘Connecting Europe and Asia’ of 2018 under former President Juncker’s Commission, which aimed to create partnerships between the EU and Asian countries including through interoperable transport, energy and digital networks (EC and HR/VP 2018). In 2019 and 2021, the EU signed connectivity partnerships with Japan and India respectively, aimed at increasing their digital capacities and influence on digital governance (Armanini and Esteban 2022). The Global Gateway should bring all these different connectivity partnerships under one umbrella. Indeed, the July 2021 Council Conclusions on ‘a Globally Connected Europe’ emphasised the importance of a more geostrategic approach to connectivity to advance the EU’s economic, foreign and development policy and security interests and promote EU values globally.

The Council Conclusions on digital diplomacy stress the importance of coherence between the EU’s different policies and setting clear EU digital objectives for the Union to become a relevant global digital actor promoting human-centric digital infrastructure and regulation worldwide, the conclusions call for delegations to develop a common understanding of technology in geopolitics, remarking on the importance and relevance of technological rivalry in the digital era (CoEU 2017). In line with the ambition to make “digitalisation an integral part of EU external action”, the EEAS is currently engaged in a Workload Assessment of EU Delegations, with a focus on the adequacy of resource allocation to geopolitical topics, and policy priorities including green and digital (EEAS 2021).

The EU is also opening an office in San Francisco (Hall 2022) and has recently appointed a dedicated Digital Affairs Officer at the EU Delegation to the UN and other international organisations in Geneva, and is generally stepping up its coordination at multilateral institutions. In Geneva, there has been a specific focus on further developing EU member state coordination. EU member states and other like-minded states have stepped up efforts to share information in order to respond effectively to Chinese efforts to influence regulations at the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) (EEAS 2022). They are also beginning to increase outreach to a wider number of states so as to begin to actively engage on the human-centric approach to digital governance. Meanwhile, the EU-US Trade and Technology Council (TTC) aims to reinvigorate EU-US cooperation, including by collaborating in third

countries, with initial digital connectivity projects to be signed with Kenya and Jamaica at the 5 December 2022 meeting (Bertuzzi 2022).

The EU and member states are thus gradually developing their digital diplomacy, which will be vital to defining and communicating Global Gateway to partners across the world. Yet, as previously argued, building a stronger European digital footprint will also require the EU institutions to develop greater coherence between internal and external digital policy. Member states should also embrace a more comprehensive approach to digital in external action, ensuring that economic, digital, foreign and development ministries are well coordinated (Teevan 2022). To develop strong digital partnerships and communicate effectively around the impact and value of the Global Gateway, the EU and member states will also need to continue to coordinate between their digital diplomacy and cooperation policy, ensuring that the former provides the necessary strategic guidance.

Global Gateway

It is against this backdrop of an evolving European approach to digital in external action that the Global Gateway was developed. The EU frames the strategy as its response to speed up sustainable development and the global recovery from COVID-19, its contribution to addressing the global infrastructure investment gap and a tool to position itself in the global infrastructure and connectivity race, while promoting its democratic values and sustainability. However, perhaps most importantly, the Global Gateway was developed amidst growing geopolitical competition, exacerbated by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and more recently by the Russian war in Ukraine. The EU hopes it will serve as a trusted brand with the potential to challenge the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The Global Gateway is an ambitious strategy but it has sparked debate about the fact that it does not really include new funding and about whether it will be able to deliver on its targets.

According to the G20 estimates, the global infrastructure investment deficit is expected to reach €13 trillion by 2040 (EC 2021c). The G7 pledged to raise \$600 billion in investment in infrastructure for developing countries to counter China's BRI (Shalal 2022). Under the Global Gateway, the EU promises to mobilise €300 billion between 2021 and 2027 in investment in infrastructure through a Team Europe approach, bringing together the EU, its member states, the European financial institutions and the private sector. The EU aims to become a more relevant and coherent global actor by increasing investment in infrastructure, coupled with increased support to improving the regulatory environment and delivering digital services.

Chinese technology and telecommunications companies play a dominant role in the continent's digital transformation. Between 2005 and 2020, China invested a total of \$7.19 billion in digital infrastructure. The Chinese tech company, Huawei, is believed to have built around 50% of Africa's 3G and 70% of 4G (Hruby 2021). Some have argued that the financial target under the Global Gateway will not be enough to challenge the Chinese initiative. Nevertheless, too much focus on the financial targets would undermine the whole purpose of the Global Gateway, which is to use the EU's resources more effectively and meet its objectives to remain a credible partner. By increasing funding in infrastructure, the EU aims to strongly position itself in the global infrastructure and connectivity race, while promoting its democratic values and sustainability (Tagliapietra 2021). The EU wants to support partner countries to implement their sustainable development agenda to achieve its geopolitical interests such as creating opportunities for its industry to access new markets.

As we wrote in an earlier paper on the Global Gateway (Teevan et al. 2022), it is a brand that if successfully implemented, may allow the EU to project its influence on the global stage. However, we argue that to do that it will need to overcome five challenges. Firstly, Global Gateway will need the full buy-in of member states, including not just financial but political resources. Secondly, it will need to build an effective brand - not only through

communications but through real impact and true political engagement. Xi Jinping built relations with African countries through repeated multi-country visits to the continent. Thirdly, in order to tackle the EU's perception problem, notably in Africa, it will be vital to centre partner countries' needs in the Global Gateway. Fourthly, more will need to be done to shift how EU and member state ministries engage with the intersection between geopolitics, investment and development, developing a much more fluid approach to economic diplomacy across ministries, development banks and other relevant bodies. Finally, the Global Gateway will need to achieve a steady increase in private sector investments and develop a sustainable pipeline of projects into the future, as this will determine the success of the whole.

With regard to digital infrastructure, the EU aims to create secure and sustainable connections between Europe and the rest of the world as well as help address the digital divide. In Africa, the EU has committed to deploy secure digital infrastructure, such as international submarine fibre cable connecting the EU with Africa to increase inter-continental data flows, terrestrial fibre-optic cables across sub-Saharan Africa to address the digital gap between landlocked and coastal countries, combined with standards and protocols to ensure network security, resilience, interoperability and open and secure internet, as well as improve the business environment through connecting digital innovation hubs and increasing access to finance for SMEs (EC 2021d).

The Commission is working with the Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS) to develop the GG Digital Masterplan by December 2022, to elaborate a more comprehensive vision for the digital connectivity strategy in external action, drawing on a wide range of experts through two rounds of meetings with a taskforce, of which ECDPM is a member. The Masterplan should ensure a comprehensive vision and set concrete steps on what the EU can do in the digital domain. It will take a holistic approach, integrating hard infrastructure, digital governance and regulation, as well as digital services in order to connect with end users. The EU offer is likely to be strongly oriented around the promotion of digital sovereignty, and while the EU's interests will be central to its offer, there is a strong awareness of the need to meet external demand. ECDPM has emphasised the need to integrate a strong focus on digital skills throughout, as this is vital to ensure investments in different areas are sustainable and truly benefit the local economy in partner countries by creating local jobs. A gender analysis will also be vital to ensure that Global Gateway lives up to the ambitions laid out in the Gender Action Plan (GAP) III, including the spending targets indicated therein, but also in order to live up to the wider political commitments in this area. The private sector is very much engaged in the EU's planning around the digital dimension of Global Gateway, with major European companies taking part in the taskforce to develop the Masterplan.

Alongside the Masterplan, the Commission is also having conversations with a number of private sector actors to identify quick wins (for example, where EFSD+ might be used to add important additions to already planned projects). Yet, it remains to be seen how the Commission will facilitate these 'quick wins' as it is the development banks that will ultimately make the investments. With regard to Africa, the EC is developing a TEI on connectivity in Africa, which will identify the main regional fibre backbones that it hopes to invest in, building on consultations by EU Delegations with partner countries.

Thus, the Global Gateway is likely to develop along two different lines. On the one hand, there will be a focus on developing a coherent overarching vision and strategy, and on the other hand, it will be necessary to deliver some big impactful projects under the banner of Global Gateway within the current budgetary cycle. Having a coherent strategy will be essential to the sustainability of the Global Gateway, and to developing a longer-term pipeline of projects that will allow it to grow into something truly significant in the medium-term. Yet, there is also the need to demonstrate that the brand is actually delivering in the short term for the EU's credibility.

D4D Hub/Team Europe approach

The [Digital for Development \(D4D\) Hub](#) is playing a vital role in ensuring that the EC and member states with a strong interest in digital cooperation work together in a coordinated ‘Team Europe’ approach, thereby strengthening the EU’s role as a digital actor. The D4D Hub aims: “to coordinate European digital development efforts globally and regionally, strengthen and promote the European approach to human-centred digital development and to increase knowledge development and the sharing of best practices.” (D4D Hub, unpublished) The D4D Hub has already facilitated discussions between member states and the EC in different formats, including within thematic working groups and internal workshops. One of the thematic groups is focused on connectivity and another on civil society and academia advisory. An advisory group with private sector actors is also currently in the process of being created to enhance the participation of the private sector in Global Gateway investments. The D4D Hub has a vital role to play in delivering on Global Gateway by facilitating interactions between member states and the EU institutions and building visible and impactful Team Europe Initiatives (TEIs) that can contribute to delivering on Global Gateway.

In 2021, five EU member states launched the D4D Hub, a multi-stakeholder platform to bring together the EU, member states, their DFIs, private sector actors, civil society and academia to share expertise, steer D4D hub projects and implement them. So far, the EU has launched two regional D4D Hubs: the D4D Hub Africa and the D4D Hub Latin America and the Caribbean. In addition, the D4D Hub will be constituted by eight working groups. The D4D Hub is operationalised through the Team Europe approach, but as a major coordination exercise, it will need to bring in actors working in development, foreign and economic policy areas, foster greater participation of African partners, as well as secure increased financial support (Domingo and Sherriff 2021). The D4D Hub has to date been very focused on facilitating dialogue between European digital actors and has been rather slow in engaging with external partners, including in Africa, to co-build TEI proposals. However, several members have voiced their intent to increase the pace of consultation with partner countries. While some EU member states are assertively leading the discussions on D4D hub initiatives, other member states are still defining their role and added value within the D4D hub.

The Global Gateway and the D4D Hub are complementary. The TEIs developed through the D4D hub have the potential to increase the EU’s visibility and can bring together the maximum number of EU member states, and could be labelled as Global Gateway initiatives. The regional MIP for sub-Saharan Africa indicates that investment to strengthen links between Europe and Africa will be in line with the geostrategic interests defined by the Global Gateway. This means that investment will be allocated to opportunities identified through the D4D hub and pursued through the EFSD+ (EC 2021e). Of the overall €10 billion budget for the regional MIP, €940 million will be for digitalisation. This should also be complemented by the EFSD+ and by member states’ own resources.

The D4D hub projects are at different stages of development. The EU-AU Data Governance Initiative is amongst the most developed and will be launched before the end of 2022. The African European Digital Innovation Bridge (AEDIB), which is a TEI built on an earlier joint project by GIZ, AfD and the EC, is still in the conceptual phase (AEDIB/NET 2022). Other initiatives which are still in the planning phase are a TEI on the Twin Transition, on digital regulatory frameworks, on cybersecurity, on e-health, on e-governance and E-ID, and of course on connectivity. A digital Alliance with Latin America and the Caribbean is also being developed as a TEI. A recent workshop on a TEI on the Twin Transition established five areas of focus: 1) Policy, regulation and capacity building; 2) digital innovation ecosystem support; 3) financing innovative green tech; 4) sustainable digital infrastructure; and 5) twin transition demonstration projects.

Box 1: Complementarity between D4D Hub TEIs and the Global Gateway

The EU-AU Data Governance in sub-Saharan Africa Initiative

The EC has so far invested €30 million in the action, EU-AU Data Governance in sub-Saharan Africa, which falls under regional TEI for Digital Economy and Society in Sub-Saharan Africa. The action, which will be focused on the implementation of the AU Data Policy Framework, will be launched in December 2022.

The action focuses on data governance frameworks, data use cases and data infrastructure. Estonia, Belgium, Finland and France and Germany have joined the action to work in different areas. Germany will implement data governance frameworks. Finland and Belgium and Germany will implement data use cases. And Finland and Germany will implement data infrastructure. To be part of the Multi-Partner Contribution Agreement (MPCA), member states have to bring in fresh money amounting to at least €1 million.

How does it fit with the goals of Global Gateway?

1. The Global Gateway includes a strong focus on governance and regulation, which is at the core of the EU-AU Data Governance Initiative.
2. The use cases of data that fall under this initiative will be vital to the Global Gateway's focus on digital services.
3. The third pillar of this initiative focuses on investments in data centres, which fits with the Global Gateway's focus on hard infrastructure and digital sovereignty.

Source: ECDPM

There is thus a lot of potential overlap between the D4D Hub and the Global Gateway, and many of the initiatives of the D4D Hub will likely be suitable to be labelled as Global Gateway initiatives. However, while the D4D Hub should certainly be a core element driving the Global Gateway forward, GG should have an even stronger political dimension than the D4D Hub. It must bring on board a wider range of actors, including not only those working on cooperation but also the wider political and diplomatic community and a wide range of domestic digital actors. GG will need to go beyond the D4D hub, for instance, by strengthening the digital diplomacy capacity of the EU delegations to mobilise further support of the private sector both in Europe and in partner countries, and by bringing in more EU member states and DFIs to propose additional projects. It will also require the member state politicians, including prime ministers, foreign ministers and others, to actively embrace the brand and actively communicate it in their foreign policy engagements.

Conclusion

Since 2019, the EU has increasingly made efforts to integrate digital into the EU's external action, this process has been largely driven by domestic policy developments focused on ensuring Europe's digital sovereignty and by growing geopolitical competition in the digital domain (and indeed beyond). The conflict in Ukraine has only upped the stakes, highlighting the importance of cyber and information warfare in modern conflicts, and in the propaganda battle that accompanies them. A shift has taken place from perceiving digital policy simply as a catalyst of sustainable development towards perceiving it as imperative to defending the EU's interests and achieving the EU's geopolitical objectives. The Global Gateway is an attempt to respond to the multifaceted challenges of the current geopolitical moment. But determining investment in infrastructure based on geopolitical ambitions should not come at the expense of the EU's sustainable development objectives. Indeed, doing so would be short-sighted and ultimately fail to protect the EU's longer-term interests. As the EU is in the process of shaping a concrete digital diplomacy and tapping into the potential of its network of delegations to shape and communicate the EU digital policy, it will be key to understand the digital infrastructure needs and priorities of partner countries to respond effectively and deliver on its projects.

3. Listening to partners: African priorities in the digital space

The EU's announced shift towards building partnerships requires more engagement with partner countries and listening to their priorities. This has not always been the case in the context of EU-Africa continental relations, in part due to the still unbalanced relationship, especially with regard to digital policy. African interviewees stressed that African officials still need to build their digital expertise in order to better negotiate their interests when faced with often more numerous European counterparts. The Global Gateway communication states that "the EU will work closely with like-minded partners to develop synergies between their respective efforts on connectivity and quality infrastructure with third countries" and that "projects will be developed and implemented in close cooperation and consultation with partner countries" (EC 2021). Although the communication broadly identifies the infrastructure needs of partner countries, the focus so far has been on the offer rather than the demand side, leaving many questions open. Many African digital stakeholders consulted see an added value in European investment in infrastructure, but also in hearing about the EU's experience in unfolding its digital single market, and in bringing European and African digital businesses together in a spirit of real exchange. However, they are clear that they wish to set their own priorities, such as driving local digital innovation. To become a key partner in supporting African countries' digital transformation, the EU and member states need to focus on understanding where the demand for EU support is.

In 2015, the AU adopted Agenda 2063, its vision and roadmap to an integrated, educated, well-connected and poverty-free continent by 2063. The AU's DTS focuses on sustainable development and economic growth, in contrast with the EU's digital approach which stresses governance and human rights principles. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) is a major priority for the AU and should be a catalyst for digital transformation on the continent, as African countries scale their efforts towards the establishment of a free trade area, including for digital trade. Because of its development needs, the different continental documents signal the need for a multidimensional approach, integrating physical infrastructure, regulation, and digital services, combined with digital and entrepreneurship skills. African policymakers and analysts consulted as part of our research similarly emphasised that Africa could not afford to focus only on one dimension of digital transformation, and must move forward simultaneously with basic digital infrastructure and skills, alongside advancing the AfCFTA and developing more advanced digital services and research facilities to drive forward digital transformation.

The digital divide between different social groups, regions and urban-rural populations is pervasive in Africa. In 2021, 50% of the urban population used the internet and just 15% of the rural population. In the same year, internet penetration ranged between 22% and 43%, with Eastern Africa and Southern Africa recording the lowest and highest rates respectively (Statista 2022). In 2020, only 24% of African women enjoyed access to the internet compared to 35% of men (Salzinger et al. 2021). In least developed countries, which are mainly located in Africa, only 19% of women used the internet in 2020, compared to 86% in developed countries (Kapiyo 2022). At the same time, Africa has demonstrated innovation and is the world leader in mobile money, which has become the preferred method to access financial services in Africa, with 548 million registered accounts across 157 providers in 2022 (Debate Ideas 2022). Further, the continent's demographics can be a boon if sufficient investments are made in developing this human capital, particularly by providing widespread access to digital skills. Africa thus faces immense challenges, but it also offers potential opportunities if the right investments are made now.

The continental approach

Many African policymakers and analysts refer to the AU's DTS as the continent's vision for its digital transformation, and indeed many national strategies mirror many of the focus areas of the DTS. The Strategy has a strong focus on the SDGs and economic growth, and defines broad objectives to deliver the digital transformation of the continent.

These include building an inclusive and digital society by 2030, strengthening the economic sector and ensuring continental ownership with Africa leading digital innovation. It also contains a strong focus on regulatory harmonisation with the goal of building a Digital Single Market. The DTS identifies four foundation pillars to catalyse sustainable economic development: digital infrastructure, digital services, digital entrepreneurs and skills as well as conducive policy and regulatory environment (AU 2020).

Hard digital infrastructure is the first priority mentioned by many African stakeholders consulted, who emphasise that the rest of the digital economy depends on this first element. However, many interlocutors also emphasise that infrastructure must go hand in hand with skills development, better regulation to stimulate innovation and investment in digital services. At a national level, expanding national broadband coverage, and ensuring a conducive regulatory environment for private sector development are key priorities, although civil society and private sector actors in many countries highlight that different parts of the same government can often have quite differing priorities. Most of the data consumed in the continent comes from outside. To be able to meet its data needs, Africa will need around 700 data centres as the flow of data within the continent grows to sustain a data-driven economy (Judge 2022). For many countries, the question of data sovereignty has become a key question, leading to efforts to ensure that at least certain key data is stored within the country's borders (Kugler 2022).

In addition to affordable and secure internet connectivity, the DTS (and many interlocutors consulted during our research) also emphasise the need to build digital skills for the continent to stimulate the digital economy in Africa, support the digital transformation of government and take advantage of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). Policymakers emphasise that skills are required at every level, from basic digital literacy to digital skills that can help transform SMEs to higher-level skills for the tech sector.

But some policymakers and analysts also warn against too strong a focus on vocational skills, emphasising that Africa also requires much greater investments in high-level research and innovation. Just as the EU and the US are making efforts in order to secure their supply of chips against future supply chain problems, it is essential that Africa also invests in developing not only basic infrastructure or digital services but the underlying 'producer infrastructure' that will allow it in future to produce its own infrastructure. This includes notably investing in developing the necessary high-level skilled personnel (Augustine 2022). This will require major investments in science and technology, as well as considerable investments to develop centres of research excellence. Indeed, a recent study from the African Centre for Economic Transformation (ACET) demonstrates that even some of the most advanced African digital economies are not doing enough to embrace 4IR and risk being left behind. The authors argue that African countries should invest in developing regional 4IR Hubs (Traoré et al. 2022).

African countries are at vastly different stages of digital development and show different levels of willingness and ability to engage on digital topics. The Smart Africa Alliance, which is made up of 30 African states, and has members from the private sector and research institutions, hopes to be the implementation arm of the AU. Its model is based on the understanding that some countries will be able to advance more quickly toward digital integration than others, while not losing sight of the goal of full continental integration. It has developed a number of blueprints to help African governments digitise different sectors, each championed by a different AU member state. As part of its work to strengthen knowledge sharing between digital stakeholders and build a skilled digital population, Smart Africa has established the Smart Africa Digital Academy. Together with international partners, the alliance focuses on developing digital and entrepreneurship ecosystems, which means that the transfer of digital technologies goes hand in hand with digital skills development. As a number of the blueprints move to the pilot stage, this will be a key test of Smart Africa's approach for advancing digital integration more swiftly.

Given the plurality of global digital actors with an interest in supporting African countries' digital transformation, the AU and member states will need to develop a common approach to be able to determine the type of technology and models of digital governance that will emerge on the continent (Teevan and Tadesse 2022). African governments have started to play on the rivalries between global powers to move their interests forward, although they have not yet put forward a continental framework to engage with the multiple technology providers, and thus to a degree still fall into dependencies (Domingo 2022). Further, as geopolitical rivalries and technology decoupling between the US and China intensify, there is a risk of African countries being pulled into rival camps if they do not develop a joint approach (Teevan and Tadesse 2022). The increased competition in the digital sector poses a significant challenge to the EU, but this is an opportunity for the EU and member states to put forward their offer in a way that meets African digital needs, while also advancing other interests such as human development, health, energy and migration.

National approaches

Different African countries are at very different stages of digital development. Some have developed overarching digital strategies, whereas others have even developed sub-strategies for specific areas of the digital economy. We briefly look at the evolving approaches to digital transformation in four countries, Kenya, Senegal, Ghana and South Africa, which are among those leading digital transformation in Africa. These countries have each adopted not only comprehensive strategies but a series of sub-strategies, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to digital transformation. Yet, each of these countries still faces a number of challenges, and there are clear areas where further cooperation with international partners is considered desirable.

Kenya is leading digital transformation in Africa. Its ICT sector amounts to 7% of the country's GDP. The growth of the Kenyan digital economy is a result of the increased access to smartphone and internet services, as 98% of Kenyans have SIM cards and 65% have access to the internet. In 2007, Kenya's Safaricom famously launched M-Pesa, a mobile money payment system that today has 50 million monthly active users across the continent (Armstrong 2022). The mobile wallet, which worked without an internet connection, facilitated the financial inclusion of the population living in remote areas. Since then, the country has experienced a wild growth of fintech and technological innovation that has helped position the country as one of the international digital hubs in the continent often referred to as the 'digital Savannah'.

In 2021, the Government developed a ten-year National Digital Master Plan to strengthen the work being done in the digital sector. It defines four pillars to achieve an affordable, secure and accessible digital ecosystem. On digital infrastructure, it aims to expand connectivity to meet the objectives under the [Kenya Vision 2030](#), the country's development blueprint to transform Kenya into a middle-income country by 2030. In e-government, it focuses on data management and protection. Kenya enacted its first Data Protection Act in 2019 as part of a wave of African countries adopting data privacy and data protection laws. In the same year, the Kenyan Government launched the National Integrated Identity Management System (NIIMS) but this was ruled unconstitutional by the Kenyan High Court raising concerns over data privacy risks and the absence of a clear strategy to address those risks (Bueermann and Fanti 2022). A recent study by Dalberg (2021) encourages the Government to strengthen its partnership with the private sector to ensure that regulatory requirements under the Data Protection Act are practical for all organisations and provide technical support for their compliance. Civil society actors interviewed also raised questions about the need to strengthen the Office of the Data Commissioner, a goal that the EU Delegation is now actively supporting. On digital skills, the focus is on allowing Kenyan citizens to be able to benefit from both government and private-sector digital services, and to develop human capital to push the implementation of the 10-year plan and drive digital transformation in the region. On digital innovation, enterprises and business, the

Government plans to develop an enabling policy and regulatory environment for digital innovation and businesses (Ministry of ICT, Innovation and Youth Affairs, Kenya 2021).

The ten-year plan is a comprehensive strategy covering twenty flagship programmes, but to guarantee the successful implementation of the strategy, experts have recommended the government improve strategic and operational coordination. In the digital economy sector, for instance, issues around exclusion, digital safety, foundational resources and supporting ecosystems, which are needed to deepen the adoption of digital services, are blocking the growth of Kenya's digital economy. Developing shorter action plans, establishing a clear governance structure to mainstream digital transformation across different sectors and manage the cross-ministry projects effectively, could help address the bottlenecks (ESTDEV 2022). Further, despite Kenya's thriving innovation, Kenyan entrepreneurs complain about the fact that foreign founders have significantly better chances of accessing funding, which largely comes from abroad. It will be vital for the sustainability of Kenya's digital economy that the benefits are seen to accrue to the local population and not only to ex-pat founders. In general, although Kenya has made progress in its digital transformation, there are still segments of society that do not benefit from digital technologies. To address this issue, Dalberg argues that the Government and the private sector should ensure that the implementation of digital projects are more responsive to people's needs (2021). The EU, which has developed a TEI in Kenya on [Human-Centred Digitalisation](#), can play a role in supporting the implementation of Kenya's ten-year plan in a manner that responds to the needs of the population.

Senegal launched their national strategy *Digital Senegal 2016-2025* to catalyse economic development, respond to global challenges, and become an innovative leader in the digital field in the continent, as part of the Plan for an Emerging Senegal (Ministère de l'Économie Numérique et des Télécommunications, Senegal, 2016). This strategy was updated in 2019 due to implementation challenges connected to financial and governance issues as only 18 of the 97 projects were being implemented. With a view to improve the implementation of the strategy and better integrating gender, the three pillars of the strategy now focus on the legal and institutional framework, on human capital and on digital trust. The Government has earmarked over €2.5 billion for 69 projects and 28 reforms under the strategy, 36% of which will be provided by the private sector. One of the aims of the Government under this strategy is to make the digital industry contribute to 10% of the country's GDP and create 140,000 direct and indirect jobs by 2025, a goal that has already been reached according to UNDP analyst, Njoya Tikum (2022). In line with this ambition, in 2022, the Ministry of Finance and Budget also launched a [National Financial Inclusion Strategy](#) (2022-2026) which highlights the development of digital financial services as one of the four pillars of the strategy. Specific projects have also been put in place to target women entrepreneurs and foster women-led job creation (Senegal Emergent n.d.). In light of the impact of COVID-19 on the underserved population and their limited access to schools, the Senegalese Government also aims to use ICT to improve access, quality and governance of education systems as well as develop digital literacy and skills for teachers.

Although broadband subscriptions have been growing in recent years, only 39.5% of Senegal's population uses the internet. To facilitate connectivity, the Government aims to decrease the costs of fixed and mobile broadband, increase both 4G and 5G network coverage within the next five years and provide online services to 100% of its urban and rural population (Miller et al. 2021; World Bank 2019). In Senegal, Orange dominates the fixed and mobile markets with 54% of the market share. Senegal is also leading the [Smart Africa Broadband 2025 Strategy](#), which is an overarching guideline for member states to increase broadband penetration, including helping them deploy high-speed infrastructure, develop digital services and increase internet users. The strategy has seven pillars including one on policy and the regulatory environment, which Senegal is leading.

Overall, Senegal has seen some major advances and has been relatively successful at reaching some of the key goals of its Digital Senegal plan ahead of time. It has made important advances in developing a supportive environment

for start-ups and in beginning to digitalise public services (Tikum 2022). Since 2017, a number of schools and programmes offering digital skills have emerged - many led by the private sector - leading Senegal to experience a 7.5% growth in the number of developers in 2021, the highest in Africa. Yet, there is also a problem of brain drain due to better salaries elsewhere (Poireault 2022). A World Bank report comments on the very weak uptake of digital tools by companies in Senegal, particularly by small and micro enterprises (Cruz, Dutz and Rodríguez-Castelán 2022). One official interviewed also emphasised the need for investment in high-level research and development so as to ensure the country is a creator of value and not simply a consumer. On the international front, Senegal continues to court both China and Western powers. Its strong preoccupation with data sovereignty led it to agree to a national data centre built by Huawei to store government data in-country, while at the same time it is likely to be one of the first countries to participate in the EU-AU data governance TEI, aimed at improving its data governance frameworks.

Ghana developed the Ghana ICT for Accelerated Development Policy in the early 2000s and is a top performer in the use of ICT advancements for economic growth. MTN Ghana is among the seven most efficient internet service providers in Africa, and the country's internet penetration and connectivity has improved drastically over the past few years with an estimated 53% internet penetration in 2022 (Kpessa-Whyte and Dzisah 2022; Kemp 2022). In 2021, around 77% of businesses increased their use of the internet (N Dowuona and Company 2021). Even though Ghana is a low-income country, it is delivering well in online service provisions. Despite this progress, it is unclear how much technological innovation is impacting people, especially vulnerable groups. The Government is now focused on scaling the digital economy, combined with new programs to accelerate digital services (Abimbola et al. 2021). In this vein, the Ghanaian Government is prioritising digitalisation to grow the formal economy, open new sources of revenue mobilisation, improve the identification and registration of citizens and improve public service delivery.

The Government has developed a [National Financial Inclusion and Development Strategy](#) (2017-2023), a [Digital Financial Services Policy](#) as well as a [Digital Payments Roadmap](#). In addition to these strategies, Ghana is also championing the Smart Africa Blueprint on e-payments, which aims to help African countries drive cross-border interoperability of digital payments in order to drive e-commerce at the continental level (Domingo and Teevan 2022). Ghana is also one of the African countries prioritising cybersecurity issues in infrastructure development. In 2020, the Government passed the Cybersecurity Act to facilitate cybersecurity development in the country and respond to cybersecurity threats. After that, the [Cyber Security Authority](#) was set up to implement the Act and has been operational since October 2021. The Government is still conducting cybersecurity awareness campaigns to sensitise more digital stakeholders in order to ensure the successful implementation of the Act. For instance, civil society organisations need to be more involved to make sure that the digital rights of individuals are respected (Ministry of Communications and Digitalisation 2022; MFWA 2022).

Despite the diverse strategies contributing to Ghana's digital development, some argue that Ghana still needs to make a regulatory shift to ensure an enabling environment for digital innovation and a more cohesive and effective delivery of public services (Sear 2022). Even though digital penetration has improved, digital infrastructure in Ghana is concentrated in urban areas, while rural populations lack access to internet and digital services (Kpessa-Whyte and Dzisah 2022). There is a disconnect between the Government's digitalisation efforts, which frame digitalisation as a way to increase its revenue-generating capacity, and citizens who use the internet for social media and yet still find it difficult to access government services. But the Government is already taking steps to improve digital skills and access to digital technologies with the support of international partners. In 2022, the [World Bank approved \\$200 million](#) to support the Government to increase access to broadband, enhance efficient public services and strengthen the innovation ecosystem.

South Africa has also embraced digital transformation to promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth. When the National Development Plan was launched a decade ago, the Government foresaw the establishment of a seamless universally available and accessible information infrastructure (Abrahams et al. 2022) that would meet the needs of citizens, businesses and the public sector, providing a range of services necessary to contribute to effective economic and social participation by 2030. Building on the National Integrated ICT Policy White Paper of 2016 by identifying the building blocks for South Africa's digital economy and society, the 2017 [National e-Strategy: Digital Society Africa](#) was adopted to promote ICT research and development expenditure, address the ICT skills gap, conduct specific sectoral interventions and foster a digital industrial revolution in South Africa.

Under this overarching strategy, the country has developed thematic policy frameworks. Examples include the National and Future Digital Skills Strategy of 2020 which aims to develop the digital skills ecosystem to strengthen the country's digital innovation capacity (Abrahams et al. 2021). In 2021, the unemployment level reached 35.3% which has forced the Government to focus on developing job opportunities for young people, with a particular focus on gender equality. While this is commendable, attention should also be put on accelerating the digital transformation of SMEs, which are lagging behind due to financial concerns (Small Business Institute 2021). The Government also launched the [National Digital Health Strategy 2019-2024](#), which builds on the four-year eHealth strategy from 2012, to consolidate its commitment to drive the transformation of the health system through digital health. In the domain of data governance, South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act came into effect in July 2021. The objectives of the Act are to protect personal information, to strike a balance between the right to privacy and the need for the free flow of data and access to information, and to regulate how personal information is processed. The Cybercrimes Act, which became enforceable in 2021, six years after its launch, is an e-commerce law recognising cybercrimes as a criminal offence under South African law (Government of South Africa 2021).

The combination of the different policies and strategies lays out what needs to be done to accelerate South Africa's digital transformation but does not provide a comprehensive roadmap on how these strategies should be translated into concrete actions. Over the past seven years, the ICT sector's revenue increased by 4.3%, becoming an increasingly important pillar of the country's economic growth (Mzekandaba 2022). However, according to recent reports of the National Planning Commission, the country has, in fact, made limited progress towards real digital transformation of the economy. For instance, while South Africa's electronic communication sector is one of the most advanced in the continent, MTN and Vodacom dominate the sector by jointly owning 78% of the market share (Abrahams et al. 2022). To improve implementation of the diverse strategies, the Government aims to improve access to infrastructure to ensure broadband connectivity, skills development focused on driving technological innovation to push economic growth and services for citizens.

Kenya, Senegal, Ghana and South Africa are among the African countries leading digital transformation in their respective regions. However, much of the digital innovation they have experienced has not necessarily been inclusive and cross-sectoral to date. Building on foundational strategies, they are now each integrating digital policy into different sectors, focusing on expanding connectivity, developing digital skills across and the population, digitalising various services and creating an enabling environment for the private sector to drive digital innovation. African governments across the continent can draw important lessons from these countries in terms of the type of technologies to drive their digital economy, but also on how to develop roadmaps to successfully implement their digital strategies.

Ultimately, what this initial analysis suggests is that like the DTS, these countries are also adopting a multifaceted and holistic approach to digital transformation, encompassing digital infrastructure, skills development, the transformation of government services and the development of the business environment. The emerging European approach to the digital dimension of Global Gateway, with its holistic approach, is thus potentially a constructive

one if it is adapted to local realities in different contexts. However, policymakers, analysts and civil society actors consulted during the research emphasise the importance of the EU adopting a multistakeholder approach and being led by local priorities. ECDPM plans to carry out much more detailed research into the digital economy in specific partner countries and the attractiveness of the potential EU offer in those contexts in future work.

Other African actors

Other African actors also highlight different priorities when it comes to Africa's digital economy and its impact on society. Several African countries have an active civil society engaging on digital topics, while a number of think tanks and academics are also trying to play a role in shaping the policy debate on the continent. Similarly, UN agencies have hired leading African digital thinkers to help develop their digital strategies on the continent and to engage with key debates at the national and regional levels.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) play a crucial role in pursuing the SDGs and often raise specific concerns about the human rights impact of digital technologies. CSOs should be empowered to ensure that digital technologies for development benefit the unserved communities by addressing the digital divide. For example, Access Now and the #KeepItOn coalition advocate for free and open internet and challenges politically motivated internet shutdowns across Africa through evidence-based research (Domingo and Tadesse 2022). Similarly, as African countries enthusiastically adopt digital identification systems for sustainable growth, without clear policy and data protection regulations, these systems risk reinforcing already existing inequalities. Over 70 activists, academics and civil society organisations from all over the world sent a letter to the **World Bank's ID4D initiative** raising concerns over the rollout of digital ID systems in developing countries (Privacy International 2022). They called for a review of the impact of digital identification systems on human and civil rights and to include increased participation of civil society organisations in these processes. Multiple local CSOs are also bringing light to specific concerns in local contexts across Africa.

Academia and think tanks are untapped resources that could play a more active role in policy debates about digital transformation in Africa. Evidence-based research can help develop technologies and regulations that are responsive to African contexts, bringing up the needs and knowledge of indigenous communities. Given the fact that think tanks do not have the recognition and support of governments in Africa, they lag behind in terms of the research they publish on digital transformation in particular (Handy 2020). Yet a number of think tanks are playing active roles in shaping conversations across the continent. Notably, specialised think tanks such as Research ICT Africa, the Africa Digital Rights Hub and Policity are actively engaging in debates about digital rights and data protection at the national and continental levels. ACET's annual African Transformation Reports shines a spotlight on the central role that digital transformation has to play in the economic transformation of the continent, while the Centre for Financial Regulation and Inclusion (CENFRI) is bringing attention to the advantages of data-led policy making.

United Nations (UN) organisations like the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) have also been very active in recruiting highly engaged African policymakers and thinkers to drive forward their work on the continent. Notably, UNECA and UNDP have been greatly engaged in conversations around the AfCFTA, including the digital trade protocol. For example, as part of UNCTAD's e-commerce and digital economy programme, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) started the process of establishing a regional e-commerce strategy (UNCTAD 2021). ECOWAS is, in turn, playing a leading role in the e-commerce agenda under the AfCFTA by organising capacity building for digital trade, including increasing member states' capacity to negotiate on the e-Commerce Protocol (ECOWAS 2021).

There are a number of different digital actors with diverse perceptions on the digital priorities for the continent. Multistakeholder approaches to digital transformation will be essential to ensuring that digital transformation in Africa is inclusive and that citizens' rights are respected. Further, a strong civil society advocating on key issues, and a dynamic policy research ecosystem producing evidence-based research, can feed stronger policymaking, and help to ensure that policy is data-led. This means that in the implementation of the Global Gateway projects, the EU should create partnerships with a diverse set of digital actors to make sure that the projects developed across the continent contribute to benefit those who need them the most. The D4D advisory group for Civil Society and Academia, which is in the process of being launched, will be one essential part of this, but these stakeholders should also be consulted and integrated into specific projects, where their expertise will bring value.

An African narrative on digital sovereignty?

Although digital sovereignty is a term that is widely used in digital governance discussions, there is no consensus on what it exactly entails (Teevan 2021). Similarly to their European counterparts, the AU and African member states have not come up with a common narrative on digital sovereignty. Some use it to refer to technological autonomy and others to data localisation or protection to protect against extractive market players and authoritarian governments. However, the Digital Transformation Strategy 2020 does make the case for the digital sovereignty of African countries by arguing that Africa should be “a producer and not only a consumer in the global economy” and highlighting the need to “ensure digital identity data belongs to, and remains in the control of Africans” (AU 2020). Yet, the strategy avoids addressing the question of digital sovereignty head-on, focusing instead on a strong vision of sustainable development (Tadesse and Teevan 2022). Yet at the heart of the debate on digital sovereignty is Africa's growing effort to find a balance between meeting its immediate digital infrastructure needs and the long-term goal of driving technological innovation that can ensure that African citizens are not objects of data extractivism. Developing policies and regulations that give African actors more control over their data and technology, will be essential to ensure Africa's digital sovereignty.

Digital infrastructure is the foundation of economic and social activity, however, dependency on a small number of foreign digital technology providers renders African governments vulnerable to geopolitical rivalries and subjects them to systems that enforce global digital inequalities. Some call this ‘digital colonialism’, a term reflecting the US tech giants’ extraction of data and profit from users in developing countries (Augustine 2022). Over the past six years, Africa's tech sector has been growing and it has achieved six ‘unicorns.’ Yet some analysts argue that unless regulators take a more proactive role to accelerate the rise of African tech by creating an enabling environment for growth, African tech will simply contribute to the extractive capitalist economy in the absence of regulation (Komminoth 2022). To control their digital spaces, some African countries are developing comprehensive legislation. For example, 24 African countries have developed online consumer legislation, 39 have passed cybercrime laws, and 27 have data protection and privacy laws (University of Johannesburg 2021). Yet, with the exception of cybersecurity laws and consumer protection laws, the continent is behind the global average in terms of legislation (Lemma et al. 2022).

Africa is even more vulnerable than the EU when it comes to basic digital technologies, and depends almost entirely on foreign investment in order to build its basic digital infrastructure, while it risks once more falling behind in the industrial sector due to its slow adoption of 4IR technologies. Therefore Africa's digital sovereignty will not be guaranteed by replacing Chinese infrastructure with other foreign infrastructure but ultimately will require African countries to become more autonomous through developing strong and implementable digital and industrial strategies, and investing in a digitally skilled population that can drive home-grown innovation.

As a growing number of African governments establish the infrastructure for a data-driven digital economy, they are concerned about data localisation. The continent only hosts 2% of the global data centres. Senegal, for instance, moved all of its government data to a new national data centre with the intention to ensure the country's full ownership of its data (van der Made 2021). By centralising data storage facilities, the Government hopes to have more control over the data of their citizens, businesses and government. Yet, data localisation raises major questions in terms of the usability and shareability of data, which are important to drive local and regional innovation, particularly as Africa aims to increase digital trade under the AfCFTA. What is very clear is that as digital penetration increases, the demand for data centres and the market in the continent are growing.

The African Union Data Policy Framework of 2022 is the AU's latest effort to create a common position on data sovereignty in Africa. While it does not provide a clear answer on how to approach data sovereignty, it highlights the importance of finding a balance between data protectionism and cross-border data flow that are important for the digital economy and innovation (Teevan and Tadesse 2022). The Framework also encourages member states to "re-invent a harmonised legal system that adequately balances corporate interests and relevant digital rights: (AU 2022). Most interestingly, the Framework pushes member states to adopt a holistic approach to data governance, for instance, by localising and adapting data protection laws to their context but also putting an emphasis on good quality shareable data as a driver of innovation. The Data Policy Framework overlaps to a great extent with the negotiations currently underway regarding the Digital Trade protocol of the AfCFTA, which should lead AU member states to harmonise their different regulations on data flows, which is key for economic integration and allowing digital trade.

Conclusion

Africa has recorded positive trends in connectivity levels over the past few years. However, it lags behind other world regions due to a pervasive digital divide between countries, social groups and urban-rural populations. The AU has made strides in developing key policy and regulatory frameworks to support the digitalisation of African countries. The AU DTS defines Africa's key digital development needs with a focus on sustainable development and economic growth, while the AU Data Policy Framework defines a roadmap for African countries to harmonise their different laws and data regulations to create an enabling environment for investment in digital transformation.

Africa needs to strike a balance between attracting investment to meet its immediate digital infrastructure needs with driving homegrown digital innovation to ensure its digital sovereignty. In the face of growing geopolitical competition in the digital space, increasing its digital sovereignty is imperative for Africa. Beyond the AU and member states' own strategies, the AfCFTA is giving impetus to digital transformation within Africa and has the potential to drive much more in future, notably through the negotiation of the digital trade protocol. The EU will need to be conscious of - and seek to support - already existing strategies and efforts that are underway on the continent. This engagement will be essential to demonstrating that it is serious about truly engaging with, and supporting African digital priorities. Over the coming years, ECDPM plans to carry out a more detailed analysis of digital developments in Africa and hopes to be able to offer further insights into where the EU can play a role based on our own research and on partnerships with African institutes.

4. Role of the European private sector in delivering GG

Working with the private sector is an integral part of the Global Gateway, and will be vital to its success. There has already been a sea-change in terms of the way that the EC approaches the private sector, particularly in the area of digital cooperation; private sector actors are being repeatedly consulted with regard to the development of the EC

Directorate-General for International Partnerships' (DG INTPA) approach. A private sector advisory group was also recently created as part of the D4D Hub, bringing together over 40 European digital private sector actors, including some of the major players (for example, Nokia, Eriksson, Orange, Vodafone). Alongside this, DG INTPA is in regular touch with private sector actors in order to get advice and to brainstorm about potential areas of collaboration.

Private sector actors are keen to engage and have welcomed the uptick in interactions with the EC and with DFIs. Private sector actors emphasise that they are keen to continue this engagement and to draw on their experiences in partner countries in order to help the EU identify gaps and codesign offers together with the EC, the member states and DFIs. They also have strong views on what is needed to compete with Chinese and American companies.

What the European private sector can offer

In all the discussion about Huawei's dominant role in the roll-out of internet connectivity and particularly 5G, the actual footprint of European companies across the world is sometimes forgotten. Nokia and Eriksson are the second and third largest providers of internet infrastructure, making up around 30% of the global market. While Huawei continued to lead the global market at the end of 2021, Ericsson and Nokia accounted for about 20% of the market outside of China each, while Huawei accounted for 18% (Pongratz 2022).

At the same time, Global Gateway can also open opportunities in a host of other areas and play a role in helping European businesses to grow and develop. This is notably true for a host of businesses working in the areas of e-government and e-services. Many of the leading companies supporting digital ID are European, while several European countries have also developed specialist expertise in wider e-government services, including data exchanges and cybersecurity services. Similarly, the European private sector is active in developing e-education and e-health solutions, and given the focus on the twin transitions, support to innovative digital solutions that support sustainability will be key.

What the private sector wants

Selected private sector actors also emphasise that if the EU wants to compete with China, it will be necessary to build projects of sufficient scale to really make an impact. This is notably true in the area of digital infrastructure, where China is currently by far the most important actor in many regions of the world, including particularly in Africa. While it is difficult to locate the statistics behind the claim, it is widely cited that China has built 70% of Africa's 4G infrastructure (Mackinnon 2019). While this statistic may require some updating, what is certain is that China dominates much of the market for hard infrastructure in Africa. Therefore, if Team Europe and by extension European companies want to have a real influence in the area of hard infrastructure, they will need to develop projects that are of significant scale and impact.

Related to this, private sector actors emphasise that even where projects are not large, the tendering processes are currently just as long and complicated to complete. Some actors suggest that smaller projects are not an issue but the current level of paperwork is. The digital sector is a fast-moving one and China is considered to generally move very quickly with its projects. The fact that European processes are so slow in comparison is often cited as an issue as it undermines European competitiveness.

A European export credit facility is mentioned in the Global Gateway Communication as something that the EC is exploring, which might complement existing efforts at the member state level. It would help to level the playing field for European companies who often compete with Chinese companies that receive such support. For example, a *Wall Street Journal* review showed that Huawei received as much as \$75 billion in state support as it rose to global

prominence, including cheap loans, export credits and tax breaks. For example, during the five-year period prior to 2018, Huawei received 17 times as much state support as Nokia (Yap 2019). These imbalances are one of many divergent areas between the EU and its allies and China at the World Trade Organization (WTO). Technical negotiations aimed at establishing common rules around export credits in the International Working Group on Export Credits broke down in 2020, with the EU and allies withdrawing, feeling that positions were too divergent after eight years of negotiations (EC 2020c). The EU is now looking into ways to modernise its approach to export credits, as called for in Council Conclusions on export credits in March 2022 that: “design a comprehensive EU strategy for public finance for exports, trade and investments; take the lead and engage key providers of official finance on a global set of rules for public export finance; develop a strategy for the dedicated use of export finance to support the mobilisation of capital for the green transition.” (CoEU 2022c). Private sector actors emphasise that a European export credit facility could indeed be a very helpful tool in helping them to compete with China.

The question of levelling the playing field is a major concern for European companies and aside from the support other companies receive from their home governments, European private sector actors also feel that European companies do not always have access to a level playing field in many markets due to the existing regulations in those countries that they feel favour Chinese companies. For these companies, European support to developing regulatory frameworks in partner countries would be a vital step in the right direction.

Other regulatory challenges were mentioned by private sector actors, that if addressed would have a major impact on the ease of doing business in specific partner countries. For example, telecoms deregulation or better regulation of telecoms markets was mentioned as essential in really allowing the digital economy to take off. Similarly, spectrum harmonisation is another area that was mentioned as vital in the context of Africa. The EU is already supporting the AU Policy and Regulation Initiative for Digital Africa (PRIDA) in this area, bringing together regulators from across Africa, and has also organised joint convenings with European regulators to share experiences. PRIDA aims to “facilitate efficient and harmonized spectrum utilization”, as well as support harmonisation of ICT/Telecommunications policy, legal and regulatory frameworks and strengthen African participation in internet governance at the global level (AU 2020). A potential TEI that is currently being discussed and is likely to be further developed in 2023 will also potentially support regulatory harmonisation at the level of African states.

Finally, a geopolitical challenge for European policymakers is the fact that current tendering rules at European development banks make it difficult to exclude Chinese companies. There is no equivalent of the US ‘Buy American’ rules and European tenders have instead gone to the lowest bidders. In many cases, this means a Chinese company. This has resulted in European funds contributing to projects built by Chinese companies. For example, the European Investment Bank (EIB) contributed €80 million (\$88.9 million) to the Bus Rapid Transit Dakar project, which also received €211 million from the World Bank, €17 million from the Green Climate Fund, €21.59 million from the Senegalese government and €40 million from the private sector. The tender was won by China Road and Bridge Corporation (Chadwick 2020). A new International Procurement Instrument (IPI) was finally adopted in June 2022 after years of wrangling, allowing the exclusion of third-country companies from EU public procurement tenders when those countries do not offer similar access to their markets for European companies. However, it is not yet clear if this will apply to tenders in third countries (OJEU 2022). Yet, even where it is difficult for the EU to restrict its tendering rules to exclude Chinese companies, some actors emphasise that stricter enforcement of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) rules could play a role in ensuring that European companies have a strong chance of winning European tenders.

Conclusion

The challenges for the European private sector and their demands vis-à-vis the EU thus remain diverse. While the EU is already making efforts to address many of these questions, it is also constrained by the fact that European policy processes are by their very nature relatively slow and procedural. This is in many ways one of the EU's strengths, as many of these processes were set up with a view to greater transparency but in the current geopolitical environment, this also makes things more complicated. Furthermore, the focus to date has tended to be on the European private sector but the EU should also pay strong attention to the needs of the private sector in partner countries for whom EU tenders and other processes are still harder to comprehend and therefore engage successfully with.

Conclusion: The EU's comparative advantage

The EU's comparative advantage may well be the fact that it is building its digital model in the face of two stronger global powers, therefore potentially leading the way for others to do likewise. However, it will need to show that its model is effective and leads not only to increased regulation but also to economic and societal successes. The fact that it is attempting to build its own digital sovereignty offers potential insights for other actors, including the AU and its members. If the EU's approach works, based on a mix of governance and industrial policy, it can be an inspiration to others. Yet, the EU must approach potential partners with humility, acknowledging that its own model is a work in progress and that it can also learn from the experiences of others.

The EU has taken major steps in the past couple of years to increase its footprint as a global digital actor and to reach out to a growing number of potential partners. As well as focusing on strengthening its relations with its closest allies, it is increasingly reaching out to a wide array of other actors in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Yet, the EU undoubtedly starts from behind when compared to other players such as China and the US and it will be vital that the EU approach truly integrates the concerns of partner countries and is not seen as simply pushing an alternative model.

Yet, at present, EU discourse still too often pushes the narrative of conditionality, which is much reviled in Africa. Explicitly articulating the idea that European investments and development cooperation are dependent on adopting European standards or supporting European positions at multilateral fora is not a winning approach. The narrative of competition with China is also not always welcomed as many countries do not want to have to choose between China and the West as long as their digital investment needs remain extensive. This is not to say that European interests should not be firmly integrated into the European offer. Indeed, Europe's digital governance model is widely viewed as one of its strengths. However, the offer needs to be a positive one, wherein the European governance model is part of a wider offer tailored to partner countries' needs. The EU should also make the case for GDPR and similar regulations based on the business case because this is ultimately why GDPR has been such a success. Furthermore, the EU needs to demonstrate the economic dividends that can come from adopting such measures, facilitate data adequacy agreements as swiftly as possible and actively encourage European investments in those countries that have adopted such measures.

There is already an effort underway to design a holistic offer on digital via Global Gateway, which should be apparent in the GG Digital Masterplan. This offer would integrate hard infrastructure with support to developing digital governance and regulatory frameworks, as well as supporting the development of public and private digital services to ensure that the infrastructure serves end users. This holistic approach, based on developing scale and impact in a select number of countries, makes a lot of sense given the EU's limited resources and the desire to demonstrate

real impact. It should also demonstrate the extent to which such a model is scalable and can be expanded to a wider number of countries/regions.

The key principles of the Global Gateway (democratic values, good governance, sustainability, security, et cetera) would thus be baked into a wider package, which offers real economic benefits to partner countries. However, this approach could go even further in order to connect with African priorities by really pointing to the potential economic growth and job creation possibilities of the digital economy and helping to drive innovation in the industrial sector. Indeed, the EU's own growing focus on industrial policy could also be integrated into its offer to partner countries.

Recommendations

A positive narrative: The EU is beginning to adopt a more positive narrative to sell its approach to digital governance and this has shown some initial signs of success, such as the Statement on the human-centric approach at the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference, which was delivered by the Czech Presidency of the EU on behalf of the 27 EU Member states and 27 other states across the world, including Ghana, Rwanda, Tunisia, Chile, Mexico and Japan. Yet, more can be done to ensure that the EU's offer to partner countries is a positive one and not one that is presented in terms of a rivalry with China. Starting with partner countries' needs and designing an offer that meets these needs is key to this.

A new way of working: As we wrote in an earlier paper looking at Global Gateway as a whole, what the strategy requires is a complete shift in the way of working by both the EU and EU member states. Global Gateway will require a cross-government approach, integrating both internally focused technical ministries - notably the economy ministry and digital ministries in this case - and external-facing ministries, including foreign affairs, trade and development. Furthermore, it will require that development banks adopt a whole new way of working, where political and geopolitical thinking is integrated into their way of working. Such changes will take time but are necessary in order to truly work geopolitically (Teevan et al 2022).

Digital diplomacy as a guide: The digital dimension of Global Gateway should become an important tool of the EU and member states' digital diplomacy. For that to happen, the EU's digital diplomacy must adopt a stronger economic dimension and provide clear political and geoeconomic guidance regarding the direction of the Global Gateway. This will require a continued investment in digital skills by the EEAS, DG INTPA and by member state foreign and development ministries, as well as increased coordination with domestic facing economic and digital policy actors. Member states will also need to coordinate and contribute further.

Member state buy-in: EU member states need to define their contributions to an EU overarching digital strategy, helping to articulate a comprehensive European digital diplomacy and bringing the focus to their own most relevant digital investments. Promoting an EU collective response to the COVID-19 pandemic under the Team Europe banner was sometimes a challenge because some member states felt this diverted attention away from their own bilateral efforts. Yet, if member states do not buy into Global Gateway or adopt and promote the brand as their own, then it will quite simply fail to have the impact it might have. Member states will need to actively engage with the digital dimension of Global Gateway, both by increasing their investments in this area and by considerably ramping up political buy-in to the strategy.

Using existing assets more effectively: Recent speeches by the High Representative conveyed an EU that is increasingly anxious about the growing geopolitically competitive international order and that is pulled behind by an inefficient diplomatic network (EEAS 2022a). The EU and its member states should better leverage the network of delegations and embassies through better coordination between the headquarters and delegations including

increasing their digital capacity and improving on-the-ground cooperation between the EU and member states. EU member states should use political visits more effectively to communicate and engage around Global Gateway. Similarly, EU Delegations should use EU Heads of Missions meetings to decide communication lines, use EU public diplomacy and communication assets in-country, and seek to engage print and social media on digital issues that matter to citizens.

Building the case for human-centric digital governance: GDPR and other similar European regulations have in the past been transmitted via market dynamics, because private sector companies that are unwilling to forsake the EU market prefer to adopt GDPR across their operations, rather than adopt different rules in different jurisdictions (the ‘Brussels Effect’). This in turn has pushed countries to adopt these regulations because multinational companies, together with the domestic private sectors in partner countries, often demand predictability and ease, which GDPR provides to a certain extent. The EU needs to make sure that this economic case is not lost, as in many countries economic necessity may be more powerful than the desire to protect citizens’ data.

Supporting industrial development: The EU has the potential to offer much more on industrial development and thereby really help demonstrate the potential impact of EU digital investments, whilst really contributing to the long-term sustainability of the digital economy in partner countries. European support to data governance in Africa by means of the EU-AU Data Governance TEI has the potential to play a role, while increased support for research and innovation will also be vital. With the increased focus on diversifying value chains following the outbreak of COVID-19, the EU should encourage strategic investments in key value chains in Africa.

Science and technology skills: Driving forward innovation in the digital economy will require high-level research and innovation skills, which will require major investments in African universities and strong partnerships with other African and international universities. Higher education and particularly Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) funding in many African countries, is deeply underfunded. The EU should work with selected African partners to support the development of centres of excellence in STEM research, including on the 4IR, potentially supporting cross-country regional efforts to combine resources.

Joint projects in the areas of research and innovation: The EU should explore ways to develop joint research projects with African countries. These kinds of moves will show that the EU is serious about not just developing its own digital sovereignty but also supporting Africa in developing its digital sovereignty. Previous ECDPM research has shown that cooperation around research and innovation is an area of great interest for some African countries (Di Ciommo et al. 2019) but the EU should further develop its partnerships with African countries under Horizon Europe.

Responding to private sector needs: The private sector should be brought on board early on in order to help design and develop the EU’s offer to partner countries, building on their knowledge of different contexts and often wide networks. However, it will also be essential not only to include the big players but to ensure that European SMEs are given the opportunity to fully participate in the Global Gateway. The challenge is to involve SMEs in the formulation phase of EC-funded initiatives in a way that is compatible with EU financial regulations.

The EU has a number of ingredients but it needs to now deliver and do so whilst offering an attractive narrative that responds to partner countries’ needs. This includes developing a holistic offer and developing new ways of working in order to deliver. A major part of the European offer must be on longer-term sustainability, including investments that will allow Africa to develop a truly sustainable digital economy, rather than recreating dependencies. This includes investing in high-level digital skills, industrial development, developing joint research projects with African countries and looking at integrating African economies into its digital value chains. These kinds of moves will show that the EU is serious about not just developing its own digital sovereignty but also supporting Africa in developing its digital sovereignty.

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