

Europe counters China's Belt and Road strategy with plans for €150 billion investment in Africa



China's President Xi Jinping says trade with Belt and Road countries has exceeded \$5 trillion AFP/File

Jan van der Made with RFI
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EU chief Ursula von der Leyen on Thursday unveiled plans to invest €150 billion in Africa, explaining that her goal is to make Europe the continent's biggest and "most reliable" partner.

The scheme is the first regional plan from the European Union's Global Gateway - an investment blueprint that seeks to mobilise up to €300 billion for public and private infrastructure around the world by 2027.

Seen as a response to China's [Belt and Road](#) initiative, the strategy will use funding from EU institutions and member countries to leverage private-sector investment.

The EU has set a target date of 2030 for the African funds under the plan, according to [a document](#) from the European Commission.

The money will be earmarked for renewable energy, reducing the risk of natural disasters, internet access, transport, vaccine production and education in Africa, the document said.

Speaking at a press conference in the Senegalese capital Dakar, von der Leyen told reporters she was "proud" to announce plans for Africa, where the aim was to amass at least €150 billion in investment.

Je suis heureuse d'annoncer que le plan Afrique-Europe est le premier plan régional sous [#GlobalGateway](#), notre stratégie mondiale d'investissement.

Il mobilisera 150 milliards d'euros d'investissements. <https://t.co/7tno48lBgW>

– Ursula von der Leyen (@vonderleyen) [February 10, 2022](#)
She did not offer details about how the funds would be raised or spent.

The EU's [website](#) says money under the Global Gateway will be earmarked for "smart, lean and secure links" in communications and transport and for boosting health, education and research. Von der Leyen, who is president of the powerful executive European Commission, arrived on Wednesday to prepare for a [summit](#) between the EU and the African Union on February 17-18.
China's 'Vision 2035'

Speaking to AFP before arriving in Senegal, von der Leyen warned that foreign investment in Africa too often came with "hidden costs" attached.

Critics often accuse other large investors in Africa, such as China or Russia, as being less stringent on environmental protection or human rights.

China in particular is accused of luring African countries into debt traps, offering huge unaffordable loans. Beijing disputes the charge, arguing that its loans are designed to alleviate poverty.

For his part, Senegalese President Macky Sall told reporters on Thursday that he expected the EU-AU summit to produce a "renewed, modernised and more action-oriented partnership."

"Europe and Africa have an interest in working together", he said, referencing the geographical proximity of the two continents and common security concerns, among other things.

But he seems to want to have the best of two worlds.

Just three months ago, in November 2021, Sall hosted the 8th Forum on China and Africa Cooperation ([Focac](#)), where the "[China-Africa Cooperation Vision 2035](#)" involving \$60 billion of investments was presented, as well as the "[Dakar Action Plan](#)" (2022-2024) which foresees in "at least" €9 billion worth of investments in Senegal alone.

A recent [study](#) by the Brookings Institute, commenting on Vision 2035 remarks that "14 years is a rather long timeframe, and a striking digression from past (Chinese) commitments," but it remains to be seen to what extent the EU will be able to take the lead.