HUNGARIAN FINTECH REPORT 2024

THE ERA OF A GROWING ECOSYSTEM

HUNGARIAN
FINTECH
ASSOCIATION

HUNGARIAN FINTECH ECOSYSTEM 2024

BANK'S SERVICE COMPARISON TOOLS
- Bank360
- Biztos Döntés
- money.hu
- netrisk.hu
- Bankmonitor

INVESTING
- Dorsum
- Broker Chooser
- HiMoney
- iO Charts

PAYMENTS
- festipay
- peak
- cellum
- Big Fish Payment Gateway
- barion
- hellopay
- Standard Pay
- simplepay
- CardNet
- PastPay
- BudaPay

CASHBACK/LOYALTY
- DIVERZUM

LENDING
- appello
- instacash
- péntech
- milpay

TAXTECH
- fluentax
- taxually

SME SERVICE /ACCOUNTING
- PSC Payment & Sales Consulting
- Innonest
- billzone.eu
- Flexibill
- ebiz
- binx
- dbh group
- számlázz.hu
- QUiCK
- Acounto
- MBH
- Adriana Accounting
- bookkeepie
- IBO/OKR
- Bill Soft
- Billingo
- Kulcs-Soft
- SLM System
- credit4sales
- Revolution
- Creative Számla

BANKING & PFM
- ff. next
- spend wyze

DEBT MANAGEMENT
- payee.
- FairPay

BIG DATA/ANALYTICS
- Cégjelző
- Lexunit
- MACEI Kft.

CYBERSECURITY /ANTI-FRAUD
- Hackrate
- SEON

ECOSYSTEM BUILDERS
- OTP Lab
- MBH Fintech Lab

BLOCKCHAIN /CRYPTO
- ChainyAcc
- inlock
- CoinCash
- AiSCAPE
- Multiversum Blockchain
- Moonbit
- NATRIX
- RowanHill Global
- Kripteus
- Blockben

INSURTECH
- Cherrisk by Uniqa
- Danubius Informatika
- DBX
- insurwiz

ENTERPRISE PROCESSES/INFRASTRUCTURE
- brighthills
- Perfinal
- R34DY
- LCXON
- Comnica
- IDTrust
- Computrend
- DLM Solutions
- Xanta
- Lippert
- Bankszámlakivonat.hu
- Cardinal
- Online Business Technologies
- Microsec
- Infoteco
- aggreg8.io
- E-Group
- TC2
- Wanari
- suIT Solutions
- finshape
- salesform
- Sprintform
- FINTECH
- intuitech
- linistry
- goodID
- Monolith
- FaceKom
- partnerHub
- shiwaforce

CROWDINVESTING /CROWDFUNDING
- Tőkeportál
- brancs

CHATBOTS
- Roborobo
- Talk-A-Bot

AUTOMOTIVE FINTECH
- cristo
- VoxPay
- Rollet Industrial

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Zoltán Ács

Chairman
Hungarian Fintech Association

We can hardly keep up.
Just as the fintech sector had begun to recover from the crises of 2022 and 2023 – driven in part by a drying up of venture capital amidst high-yield environments – today, a geopolitical earthquake is shaking the entire financial sector.
Yet, every crisis brings opportunity: Europe now has the chance to unite. Fragmented regulatory environments can become clearer and more harmonised, and our dependence on systems and infrastructure outside of Europe could be significantly reduced. This represents a major opportunity not only for European fintechs but also for those from other regions who have previously struggled to find a gateway to the European Union. However, turning a crisis into growth and resilience can only be achieved through collaboration.
That is why we have deepened our connections with European and Asian ecosystems: in 2024, we brought 23 Hungarian fintech companies to 6 countries and within the framework of 4 MoUs, we strengthened our relationships with 34 fintech associations.
Together with our neighbouring countries, we conducted a comprehensive fintech survey across the Visegrad region, and nearly 40% of the visitors and speakers at Budapest FintechWeek — which attracted hundreds of participants — came from abroad, turning Budapest into a meeting point for Western and Eastern ecosystems, even if just for a few days.
The world has been turned upside down, but we remain flexible, open, and welcoming.
That is the only way to build anything of lasting value.

Best regards!

Dr. Viktor Urbán

General Secretary
Hungarian Fintech Association

I am pleased to welcome you to the latest market report from the Hungarian Fintech Association. This publication not only highlights the key milestones of the recent period but also faithfully reflects the spectacular development of the domestic fintech ecosystem, to which we have contributed through our community's collaboration.
I look back with pride on the achievements of the HFA over the past period, particularly how our members' innovative solutions have become integral to everyday financial services. The draft European PSR regulation and the launch of Hungary's Digital Citizenship Programme have brought new impulses to the industry, further amplifying the interest in fintech enterprises. The alliance of Hungarian fintech players continues its dynamic growth. We actively support our members' international successes through agreements and opportunities for international exposure, helping to elevate Hungary's fintech ecosystem onto the global stage.
I hope this publication will provide you with valuable insights, and the HFA warmly invites you to connect with our members and become part of our vibrant community, operating at the forefront of financial innovation!

Best regards!

Hungarian Fintech sector by numbers

212
Hungarian-based FinTech companies were actively operating in the market

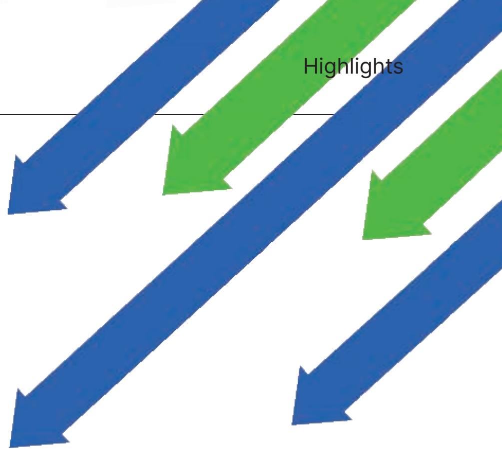
80%
of the fintech market is composed of micro and small firms

25.9%
of the Hungarian fintech companies are in the financial software development and system integration

9000
people employed in the fintech sector

780
million EUR is the sector wide sales revenue

Source: MNB Fintech and Digitalisation Report 2024



Real Action Happens Behind the Scenes

When I last sat on stage at the Money Motion fintech conference in Zagreb alongside several leaders of European fintech associations, we were just emerging from a fresh wave of policy turmoil initiated by Donald Trump. Instead of despair, we were filled with energy and enthusiasm. No chance for the EU on the global stage? Nonsense: we can build our own technological infrastructure. Today, that same energy is still alive – this article is a snapshot of how the sector currently stands, shaped by new tools, regulations, and a maturing fintech ecosystem.

Geopolitical Fragmentation and the Financial Technology Landscape

As the world shifts toward multipolarity, marked by rising tariffs and an increasing use of sanctions among nations, the financial system is also feeling the strain. Europe has become acutely aware of its dependence on American technology. Perhaps the continent will finally continue down the path it began with Open Banking and complete the development of a robust account-to-account payment infrastructure – one that provides a sovereign payment system.
While this won't happen overnight, I expect more Middle Eastern and Asian fintech players gaining ground in Europe in the meantime. Thanks to technology, geographical distances are shrinking, and payment infrastructures are becoming more decentralised. The most compelling developments in blockchain today aren't in cryptocurrencies, but in how DeFi principles and blockchain-based ownership records are beginning to penetrate regulated environments. The tokenisation of assets – from equities and bonds to real estate – is spreading explosively. Anything could be tokenised.

Embedded Finance: Financial Services as Infrastructure

A clear trend is emerging: instead of offering standalone products, fintechs are building the infrastructure that enables other industries to become financial service providers themselves. Finance is becoming less tied to fixed destinations like bank branches, mobile apps or account portals, and increasingly available as a utility embedded across digital platforms. This B2B2C model is particularly relevant in light of the EU's upcoming FIDA (Framework for Financial Data Access) regulation. Regulated data access will enable innovations such as financial coaching tools that deliver real-time, personalised advice using diverse data inputs, or accounting software that recommends factoring services based on newly issued invoices or identified late payments. Consider a platform designed for small agricultural businesses, offering billing, seed pre-orders, and automatic access to working capital loans via an embedded lending partner.
Complex? Perhaps. Yet, in practice, it simply means receiving tailored financial products exactly when and where they're needed.

The Bank-Fintech Relationship: From Competition to Co-opetition

How fast are these fintechs scaling? Like rockets. Artificial intelligence is significantly accelerating development cycles and fuelling a rise in "solopreneurs." Meanwhile, no-code and low-code platforms are enabling new financial services to reach the market in a matter of weeks.
For banks that have been refining buggy apps for years after their initial development, it may be time to reassess their fintech collaboration strategies.
And many already are. Increasingly, the bank–fintech dynamic is defined by "co-opetition" – collaborative competition – where both sides co-develop emerging technologies without stepping on each other's toes. The most advanced banks are now operating as platforms, seamlessly integrating fintech solutions.
We are in a transitional era — one that is exceptionally exciting for fintech. The convergence of technological progress and global realignment is creating unprecedented opportunities. And never before has the European Union's doctrine of regulation-led innovation looked as attractive as it does in 2025.

Author: Zoltán Ács

Budapest Fintech Week: Bridging Ecosystems, Sparking Innovation

Aiming to reflect on current affairs, pressing questions and challenges, the latest regulations, technological advancements, and business trends in the fintech sector, Budapest Fintech Week has emerged as one of Central Europe's most dynamic platforms for financial innovation. Organised by MBH Fintechlab, the Hungarian Fintech Association (HFA), the Ergomania design agency, and BrightHills, the event series is designed to foster dialogue, partnership, and progress across both domestic and international fintech landscapes.

BUDAPEST FINTECH WEEK

At its core, Budapest Fintech Week connects key players from fintech, banking, investment, and start-up sectors, offering a fertile ground for the exchange of knowledge, good practices, and emerging ideas. It provides a stage both for thought leadership and real business collaboration by bringing together entrepreneurs, regulators, designers, technologists, and investors from across Europe and beyond.

What sets this initiative apart is its inclusive, collaborative format. While the central events are led by the founding partners, any organisation can participate as a co-host, sponsor, or speaker. This openness ensures a diversity of voices and perspectives, resulting in richer discussions and broader impact.

Fintech Showcase from CEE

From startup pitches to in-depth discussions on shaping the future of fintech in the CEE region, the opening day of Budapest Fintech Week set the tone for a high-impact series of events. Thought leaders, innovators, and investors from across the globe gathered to explore collaborative opportunities and new market directions.

Day two focused squarely on innovation. The transformative potential of artificial intelligence was front and centre, alongside critical conversations about the evolving regulatory landscape: particularly the implications of MiCA (Markets in Crypto-Assets) and PSD3 (Payment Services Directive 3). Participants also got insights on the architecture of digital ecosystems and drew inspiration from Turkey’s fast-growing fintech sector, which offered valuable lessons in scaling and adaptability.

The final day delivered a diverse and engaging programme, ranging from the future of open banking and cybersecurity to the importance of diversity in technology. A strong emphasis was placed on emerging trends such as super apps and youth-centric financial innovation. The evening programme continued in the same spirit of collaboration and creativity, with the Ergomania Meetup at Rudas Bistro that spotlighted breakthrough financial solutions tailored for younger generations. The official after-party served as a fitting close, bringing together fintech professionals to celebrate a week rich in insights, connections, and ideas.

The Week In Numbers

300+
participants

76
expert speakers

22
industry partners

29
countries represented

28
presentations and panel conversations

5
dedicated networking event

Hungarian Fintech Association: Building The Fintech Ecosystem Together

Founded in 2020, the Hungarian Fintech Association (HFA) is becoming a cornerstone of Hungary's digital finance transformation. With a clear mission to unite the country's fintech ecosystem and guide regulatory understanding, HFA is actively making Hungary an attractive hub for financial innovation. Today, with more than 70 members and a growing international presence, the association is bridging local expertise with global fintech trends.

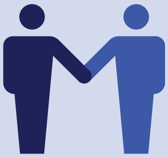
Shared Vision for Growth

HFA's primary objective is to support decision-makers, regulators, and financial institutions in better understanding the fintech sector and its evolving needs. Its long-term vision is bold yet strategic: to make Hungary a launchpad for fintech companies aiming to grow and scale within Europe.

To achieve this, HFA facilitates international business opportunities, engages in policy dialogue, and fosters knowledge sharing. Recent initiatives include the formation of specialised working groups in InsurTech, LegalTech, and Open Banking – a clear signal of a maturing ecosystem with a sector-specific focus.

Pillars of Progress

HFA's impact is built around six foundational pillars



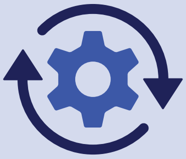
Membership
Creating strong community ties through frequent meetups and engagement.

Reporting
Offering data-driven insights into Hungary's fintech operations through research and analysis.

Networking
Strengthening relationships among ecosystem players with events and international outreach.

International Relations
Facilitating global partnerships and knowledge exchange.

Education
Partnering with institutions like the Budapest University of Economics and Business to promote fintech literacy.



Regulation
Collaborating with authorities to foster a supportive regulatory environment for startups and innovators.

Signature Programmes and Events

HFA has developed a robust calendar of activities to support its members:

Business Breakfast Talks offer informal yet insightful discussions on cutting-edge topics like AI, blockchain, and crypto. With 11 sessions held so far, these gatherings foster open dialogue between experts and members.

Global Fintech Ecosystem Tour, a webinar series, connects Hungarian fintechs with global markets. Past sessions have featured insights from countries including Iceland, Israel, Turkey, and the Philippines.

Mentoring Program provides personalised support through lectures and workshops, helping newcomers and emerging professionals navigate the industry.

Fintech Meetup Series, co-hosted with Tőkeportál, allows member companies to showcase their work while facilitating deeper collaboration within the community. Past events have explored financial literacy for youth, AI in product design, and the evolution of neobanks.

Connecting Hungary

HFA's influence goes far beyond national borders. In 2024, the association played a pivotal role in several international engagements, including the Hungarian-Turkish Fintech Meetup in Istanbul, where Hungarian startups such as Peak, Bookkeepie, and Benker presented innovations and explored cross-border collaboration. The Dubai Fintech Summit marked a major milestone, with HFA President Zoltán Ács signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the MENA Fintech Association, extending Hungary's fintech ties across 22 countries.

At Romania's UNCHAIN Festival, HFA members joined a roundtable to discuss regional fintech synergies, showcasing the dynamism of Hungary's ecosystem; and during the Singapore Fintech Festival, HFA formalised an MoU with the Singapore Fintech Association. Backed by the Hungarian National Bank, this partnership is expected to position Hungary as a strategic EU entry point for Far East fintechs.
In addition to these, HFA also organises regular business forums in other fintech ecosystems, providing members with on-the-ground networking and partnership opportunities abroad.
In total, HFA has signed MoUs with fintech associations from 34 countries in 2024 alone and joined the European Digital Finance Association (EDFA), underlining its growing influence.

Member Benefits: More Than Just Networking

Beyond events and international visibility, HFA offers members a unique blend of advocacy, intelligence, and support.

- Direct influence on legislation and regulatory developments through coordinated lobbying.
- Early access to legal and policy updates affecting the fintech sector.
- Assistance with international market entry, leveraging HFA's global network.
- Support in talent acquisition through university partnerships and job market outreach.

Join HFA and discover how you can benefit from your membership!

Board members


Nóra Szeles
Tőkeportál Zrt.
CEO


Dr. Bálint Réti
PastPay
Co-founder


Sándor Kiss
Barion Payment Zrt.
CEO


Tamás Rátkai
BÁV Faktor Zrt.
CEO


Balázs Sándorfi
Bankmonitor
CEO, Managing Director


Dr. Péter Fáykiss
Director of International Business Development at HOLD Asset Management


Dr. András Rung
Founder of Ergomania

Faces of the Hungarian Fintech Scene

Innovators who have discovered something others hadn't before. Mavericks who refused to follow the beaten path. Personalities who are shaping the sector with their passion, dedication, and expertise. Meet the trailblazers at the forefront of Hungary's fintech landscape.

Baiba Rozenberga

Head of Startups
at MBH FintechLab

Baiba is a key figure connecting Hungary's fintech scene to global networks. A firm believer in embedded finance, Web3, and regulation-led progress, Baiba is helping shape the next chapter of the financial services industry.

Originally from the Baltics but now a prominent voice for Hungary's fintech ecosystem on the international stage, she describes her journey as serendipitous. "I moved to Hungary without a plan, and after five years I realised I had no desire to leave," she recalls. Representing Hungary at major events like the Digital Finance Summit in Brussels and the EU's SME Assembly, she often finds it a delightful icebreaker when people discover that a Latvian is championing Hungary's fintech scene.

Her unique vantage point across ecosystems reveals fascinating contrasts. "One constant is the openness across startup communities: people help each other, regardless of borders," she notes. While both regions boast strong technical talent, Hungary's fintech environment is marked by a much noisier event scene, with multiple gatherings every week, compared to the Baltics' focus on flagship events like TechChill in Riga.

Yet the Baltics' defining edge lies in political commitment. Lithuania's streamlined fintech licensing system, established a decade ago, has propelled it to lead the EU in licensed fintech firms. Estonia's innovative e-Residency programme has helped it top the EU in unicorns and venture capital per capita. Hungary, by contrast, is still catching up on foundational digital policies. "I value initiatives like the Hungarian Startup University Program," she says, "but the absence of a national digital ID infrastructure remains a major hurdle." She contrasts this with her experience in Latvia, where "I could sell my car and close a business account online. Here, that same process required 15 in-person visits."

Having worked with founders across generations, she sees generational expectations profoundly shaping digital banking's future. Most B2C fintechs target Millennials and younger users, whose demands for instant payouts, BNPL options, and digital assets sharply differ from the Boomers' preference for traditional banking and wealth management. "Serving both is a challenge," she says.

But she expects a shift towards embedded financial services: "just as branches once opened in shopping centres, banking will be woven into social media, Roblox games, and chat applications – and we are already seeing the first signs of that shift."

From her perspective at the Hungarian Fintech Association, Hungary's fintech scene benefits from world-class engineering talent and a growing pool of corporate partners willing to pilot new solutions. However, funding remains a critical obstacle. "Our early-stage startups are underfinanced, and we lack strong seed and Series A investment. The market is a comfortable size to validate your solution and reach initial revenue, but if you linger too long or think too locally, you risk missing the momentum to scale abroad."

She calls for greater investor diversity, faster access to growth capital, and a cultural shift that embraces risk and failure as integral parts of entrepreneurship. Looking ahead, she identifies embedded finance as the single most disruptive force poised to reshape the industry. "Not just payments, but insurance, credit, and wealth tools, integrated into non-financial platforms. Fintech won't be its own vertical; it'll be woven into every industry."

Dr. Bálint Réti

Co-founder of PastPay and Vice President of the Hungarian Fintech Association

Dr. Bálint Réti is the co-founder and Head of Business Development and Legal at Pastpay. A legal and fintech expert, he is dedicated to bringing ethical, digital financing solutions to market, most notably by launching the region's first Buy Now, Pay Later solution for SMEs, PastPay.

Originally trained as a lawyer, Réti has always been drawn to the world of transactions and business structures. As he puts it, he approached law as a "logic game" – and today, he continues to operate at the intersection of law, finance, and technology, where innovation is key. "What we do is pioneering – both legally and commercially," he says.

The inspiration behind his fintech venture was simple: small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) often don't fail due to lack of demand, but because they're unable to pre-finance their growth. With 30–60–90 day invoice payment terms throttling cash flow – and traditional bank loans proving inflexible – the pain point is clear: "The biggest struggle for SMEs is having to wait to get paid."

Réti's model addresses this directly. The platform automatically assesses a customer's financial risk and instantly finances the invoice. It's not a loan, but a real, legally sound cash flow solution. Decisions are made in under a second, via API, powered by artificial intelligence. The system is fast but also secure: an advanced AI model monitors fraud indicators, interprets contracts in multiple languages, and predicts a company's risk of default with high accuracy. "AI can detect suspicious patterns in seconds," Réti explains. "Once, it flagged three different companies operating from the same Danube riverboat."

The fintech is scaling rapidly: tripling in size within a year and expanding into multiple countries. But hypergrowth brings human pressure, too: "Last year was intense. One of our biggest achievements was automating everything we could – there are now very few roles left that aren't handled by bots."

Réti doesn't just build companies – he also helps shape the fintech ecosystem in his role as Vice President of the Hungarian Fintech Association. In his view, digital financial tools shouldn't be considered luxuries. On the contrary: "The goal is to make them accessible to the people who need them most. People waste a lot of time and energy on avoidable tasks. I want to give them better options."

Alongside his professional work, Réti is also a new father. The line between work and personal life is blurred – he sometimes takes client calls while changing nappies. But he doesn't complain; he sees this as the new normal, where men, too, must deliver on both fronts: "A family is like a business – if you don't manage it consciously, it won't run well."

Viktor Bodnár

Co-founder
of BlockBen

Viktor Bodnár is an accomplished project and corporate leader with a master's degree in project management from the University of Queensland, Australia. He has successfully delivered property development projects across both Europe and Australia, with a combined value in excess of $100 million. Transitioning to fintech and blockchain in 2017, he has held key leadership roles, including CEO at Benker – an Electronic Money Institution (EMI) regulated by the Bank of Lithuania – and currently drives the growth of BlockBen, an EU-licensed B2B crypto platform. He leverages international expertise to ensure strategic and operational excellence.

The rapid advancement of digitalisation and blockchain technology is fundamentally reshaping financial markets. In this evolving landscape, BlockBen positions itself as an active player, developing a B2B platform that bridges the gap between the crypto world and traditional finance.

From the outset, BlockBen has built its operations on regulatory compliance: a distinguishing feature of the company. As a B2B platform focused on cryptocurrency issuance, it has developed a sophisticated infrastructure to support the lawful and secure use of tokenisation. The company also offers forward-looking digital products backed by gold, ensuring value stability and trust.

"Gold remains one of the most trusted assets in the financial world – particularly in times of crisis, it retains its role as a safe haven," says Viktor Bodnár. The company's development strategy follows a project management mindset, with every product built modularly and designed with risk analysis, compliance, and auditability in mind. As a result, BlockBen offers a comprehensive and scalable solution for players looking to enter the digital asset space within a transparent, regulated framework.

BlockBen has an expanding international client base and actively adapts to changes in Europe's regulatory landscape. The company is now focusing on the Markets in Crypto-Assets (MiCA) regulation, fully in effect from 2025, which establishes a unified regulatory framework for the EU's digital asset market. BlockBen is also a committed supporter of the Hungarian Fintech Association, viewing it as a key player in the local fintech ecosystem. Looking ahead, Viktor Bodnár is not merely exploring the future: he is claiming a stake in it. He believes blockchain and AI technologies are capable of integrating faster and more deeply than many expect. "This isn't a passing trend – it's a structural transformation. The real question is: who will implement it credibly and sustainably?" he concludes.

Sándor (Alex) Kiss

Co-founder and
CEO of Barion

Sándor (Alex) Kiss is the co-founder and CEO of Barion, a leading Hungarian fintech company specialising in e-wallet and online payment solutions. Under his visionary leadership, Barion has expanded regionally and established itself as a key player in shaping the future of digital payments in Central and Eastern Europe.

"I attended a bilingual Hungarian–English secondary school, which I really enjoyed. Some teachers thought I was a humanities person, others were convinced I was more inclined towards sciences. The truth is, I was interested in both," he recalls. "I was programming at a fairly high level for my age, and in my free time, I wrote demos for the Amiga."

After secondary school, Alex continued his studies at the Budapest University of Economics, focusing on marketing, particularly marketing research. "I found it exciting that you could try to predict consumer behaviour. I studied to become a programmer mathematician at ELTE, but I didn't finish as I found it too theoretical. Around that time, I was awarded a scholarship to study in the Netherlands. While studying there, I was given an electronic money card – which later became a key inspiration behind Barion."

By his own admission, Alex is the type of person fascinated by the "hard science" side of things – maths and programming, – but equally drawn to humanities. "Barion became the company where I could finally combine both of my interests. The core idea of Barion is: how can we build an IT system that extracts value from analysing purchasing data? This segment includes law – since it's a regulated market – business, marketing, business development, and IT."

When the idea for Barion was first floated, many people told him it was impossible. "That only fueled my determination to prove them wrong," Alex says. "Of course, had I known back then what I know now, I might not have gone through with it. A bit of ignorance is necessary – it's what gives you the courage to try."

Barion's core mission is to help small and medium-sized businesses compete with larger players. "We started with online payments, but that service isn't limited by geography. We're constantly adding new features so we can serve even more needs for our clients."

This year, the revenue of Barion and its subsidiaries is projected to reach around 4 billion forints, and the company has been profitable for the past four years. "We've built a solid customer base in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, and now we're focusing on entering Poland and Romania, with full local currency and payment method support," Alex shares. "By the end of this year, we expect to grow the team to over 60 people."

Nóra Szeles

Founder and
CEO of Tőkeportál

Nóra Szeles is the founder and CEO of Tokeportal.com, Hungary's first equity crowdfunding platform to obtain both domestic and international regulatory approval. As a pioneering figure in the Hungarian and regional capital markets, she and her team launched a digital fundraising service while also playing an active role in developing the broader ecosystem and contributing to regulatory dialogue.

Achieving a Maltese international licence was the result of years of perseverance. According to Szeles, the team deliberately chose the more demanding path: "As far as we know, other international service providers have tried to obtain a licence in Malta but so far, we're the only ones who've succeeded. This is, of course, a significant professional validation." The other one that she mentions is her board membership at Eurocrowd, the largest European trade association in the EU, that contributed a lot to the birth of a new asset class: crowdfunding.

Tőkeportál's foundations were laid back in 2017, when the concept was still in its infancy. The biggest challenge in the early days was the lack of capital: "It was difficult to find investors in Hungary. Institutional players didn't quite see the crowd as a legitimate co-investor – some even looked down on it. But crowdfunding offers more than capital: it's validation, marketing, and a funding channel all in one. It's the launchpad for future public companies. A campaign is a form of market test: if the crowd believes in it, that's something institutional investors can anchor to," Szeles explains.

Over the past few years, more than HUF 1,5 billion has been raised for 23 startups via the platform, without any spending on advertising or media campaigns. "The growth of our 11,000-strong investor base was entirely organic, showing that there's real demand for this kind of financing. The goal is to activate dormant capital, and crowdfunding can turn on that tap. It is great to see when the textbook case turns into reality."

Nora previously held senior roles in the traditional stock exchange world before pivoting to focus strategically on startup and innovation finance. Drawing on her research and published works on the history of capital markets, she argues: "If there aren't enough services in place to support early-stage businesses, there will be no future large enterprises to speak of. This is true not just in Hungary but internationally – unbankable companies often struggle to access capital."

While crowdfunding has always existed, the internet was the game-changer, enabling real-time and global access to consistent information – one of the cornerstones of a transparent market. Landmark regulations like the US JOBS Act (2012) and the EU Crowdfunding Regulation (2020) opened the door to digital capital raising. Nóra also serves on the board of the Hungarian Fintech Association, contributing to ecosystem development. "Crowdfunding is more than financing. It's about networks, knowledge-sharing, and mentorship. The ecosystem can only thrive if these factors are embedded into the system."

The direction is now clear. Armed with a Maltese licence, years of experience, and a growing international network, Szeles and her team are focused on scaling up. "We move forward with a licence, credible content, and a tested model. This isn't a campaign – it's a system."

Rising Fintech Frontiers: The CEE Visionaries Redefining European Finance

In recent years, Central and Eastern Europe has emerged as one of the most dynamic fintech regions in Europe. Once seen as a fragmented cluster of developing digital economies, the region now boasts a growing cohort of innovators, regulators, and entrepreneurs reimagining finance from the ground up. Whether in payments, open banking, digital identity, or climate-aligned investments, CEE's fintech pioneers are carving out a distinctive place on the global map.

"Over the past five years, the fintech sector in Central and Eastern Europe has seen significant growth and maturity. The region moved from early-stage innovation to more established scale-ups," started Branislav Slobodník, PhD candidate at the University of Economics in Bratislava. "Countries like Poland, Czechia, Hungary, and Slovakia became important fintech hubs, attracting foreign investment despite market fragmentation."

Maturing Ecosystems Across Borders

This trajectory – from experimentation to expansion – has played out across the region, albeit with unique local flavours.

In Romania, fintech has surged thanks to a powerful mix of regulatory support and accelerated digital adoption following the COVID-19 pandemic. "The Romanian market has seen tremendous growth in digital payments and enterprise technology provisioning," said Adrian Drinceanu, Project Manager at the Romanian Fintech Association. "The economic slowdown made investors more selective, but it also highlighted fintech's resilience and role in enabling financial inclusion and operational efficiency. Consequently, despite initial slowdowns, fintech attracted sustained investment, notably in solutions addressing digital transformation and financial inclusion."

That resilience has echoed across borders. In Slovakia, a digitally savvy population has powered rapid adoption of digital payments and mobile wallets, fueled by the rise of e-commerce and the implementation of instant payments. At the same time, stricter EU regulations have led to the growth of compliance-focused regtech. "Wealthtech is also gaining momentum," Slobodník added, "as consumers seek affordable and accessible digital investment platforms."

One of the most successful Slovak fintech startups is Fumbi Network. It offers a user-friendly platform for cryptocurrency investing, making digital assets accessible to the general public through automated, regulated, and secure solutions. Fumbi's innovative approach allows even beginners to invest in a diversified crypto portfolio without technical knowledge. Their success lies in simplifying complex crypto investments while maintaining transparency and compliance with local regulations.

The strength of these ecosystems often hinges on a blend of policy foresight and entrepreneurial drive – a formula Lithuania has perfected. The country leads the region in the number of licensed financial institutions and has become the EU's fastest-growing fintech hub. There are 282 Fintech companies operating in Lithuania, serving more than 30 million

Greta Ranonytė

CEO of Fintech Hub LT

Nikola Škorić

CEO of Electrocoin, Cofounder of Money Motion conference, Board member of Croatian Association for Blockchain and Cryptocurrency

customers across the EU. "In 2024 alone, Lithuanian fintechs processed over €150 billion in payments, and fintech now attracts 38% of all startup investment in the country," explained Greta Ranonytė, CEO of Fintech Hub LT. This growth is not just in volume, but also in strategic depth. With segments like payments, P2P lending, blockchain, and compliance software rapidly expanding, Lithuania has shifted from hypergrowth to sustainable maturity. "What we're seeing now is an ecosystem focused on scale, specialisation, and operational resilience," she said.

Among the standout Lithuanian players is TransferGo, the cross-border payments company serving over 7 million customers. Others like InSoil (formerly HeavyFinance) are charting new territory by marrying fintech and climate tech, funding regenerative agriculture through innovative carbon offset structures. Meanwhile, Paystrax, NEO Finance, and SME Bank highlight the country's strengths in payments and SME-focused digital banking.

In Croatia, the story has taken a distinct turn, towards fintechs born from partnerships with traditional banks and a wave of crypto-driven innovation. "The past five years have been a whirlwind for digital payments and neobanks in Europe," said Nikola Škorić, CEO of Electrocoin and board member of the Croatian Association for Blockchain and Cryptocurrency. "Revolut is the poster child here, having surpassed 10 million retail users in CEE by late 2023, a 43% increase in its customer base over the preceding 12 months. In cities like Bucharest, Warsaw, and Budapest, Revolut is now a daily banking staple, processing more than 138 million transactions each month." In Croatia it is the fastest growing bank, and in Romania it is the 3rd biggest bank already by customer numbers, while Croatia's KEKSPay, developed in collaboration with Erste Bank, has become the country's top-rated financial app, with over 500,000 users, and features ranging from bill-splitting to utility payments – all offered free of charge.

Škorić sees fintech momentum in four key segments: payments, investments, insurtech, and crypto. From Aircash's multi-functional wallet to LAQO's digital insurance, Croatian fintechs are raising the bar for user experience and scale. "Electrocoin's PayCek platform is now being integrated into mainstream financial services, and we're working directly with banks to offer crypto trading within their own apps," he added.

Some of the region's fintech stars are scaling fast across borders. In Poland, BLIK has transformed mobile payments, reaching nearly 17 million active users by mid-2024 and processing over 2.4 billion transactions this year. It is now expanding across Central and Eastern Europe. Other regional standouts include Romania's Finqware, which launched FinqPayments, the first corporate payment automation service in the region based entirely on open banking APIs, already adopted by major Romanian firms, while Croatia's Monri now handles a third of all card payments in the country, having grown from a startup to a €12 million business with over 500 clients. "Monri has truly reshaped the competitive landscape by outpacing legacy players in payments," Škorić said.

Investors Tread Carefully, But Potential Remains Strong

Despite macroeconomic headwinds – including high inflation, rising interest rates, and geopolitical instability – investors are still backing standout companies. “Fintech investment dropped sharply in 2023, but the sector bounced back in 2024,” Ranonytė noted, pointing to Lithuania’s €48.8 million in fintech funding as evidence. Across the region, high-potential players such as Vorpen AI (Lithuania), ElevenLabs (Poland), Mews (Czech Republic) and Wealthon (Poland) have all secured nine-figure funding rounds, showing that investor confidence remains for companies with clear value propositions and global ambitions.

Looking ahead, the European Investment Fund seems to maintain an optimistic outlook for CEE fintech. “The EIF is scaling up support for digitalization, innovation, and closing the funding gap, confident that the current correction will lead to a more mature, resilient, and competitive fintech ecosystem in the region,” says Škorić.

What’s Next: Five Trends Defining the Future of Fintech in CEE

Looking ahead, the fintech leaders of CEE agree on the forces shaping the next five years. Embedded finance, open banking, and Banking-as-a-Service (BaaS) will break down the silos between financial and non-financial services. As Slobodník put it, “Financial tools will be integrated into every corner of digital life—from social platforms to e-commerce.”

AI and machine learning are also set to mature. While many firms still use AI behind the scenes for fraud detection or automation, more customer-facing applications are on the horizon: personalised advice, adaptive risk scoring, and fully AI-powered financial assistants. “A 2024 survey by Fintech Hub LT found that 48% of its members had integrated new AI and RegTech solutions into their operations monitoring systems,” Greta Ranonytė added. This not only strengthens operational resilience but also drives the growth of Lithuanian technology providers whose products are tailored to support fintech businesses. “As a result, the synergy between compliance, talent development, and tech-driven innovation is set to become a defining feature of Lithuania’s fintech ecosystem in the years ahead” – finished Ranonytė.

Adrian Drinceanu

Project manager at Romanian Fintech Association

Branislav Slobodník

Ing. Mgr. LL.M - PhD, Department of Insurance, Faculty of National Economy, University of Economics in Bratislava.

“We’re moving from AI hype to AI utility,” Škorić concluded. “The next five years will show which applications actually deliver value.”

At the same time, regulation will shape the playing field. The introduction of the EU’s MiCA regulation and the development of a digital euro could be transformational. “MiCA will demand more from crypto companies in terms of compliance,” Škorić noted, “but it will also open up trust and broader adoption.” The same goes for digital identity frameworks and AML requirements, particularly in markets like Lithuania, where compliance culture is becoming a competitive advantage.

Building Systems That Work Better for Everyone

Yet perhaps the most powerful throughline across all these markets is the shift in mindset. Throughout the region, founders and regulators alike are embracing fintech not as a niche, but as a foundation for national digital economies. The goal is no longer just building fast-growing startups, but embedding innovation into the financial fabric of everyday life.

Or as Adrian Drinceanu put it: “Fintech isn’t just about disruption anymore. It’s about building systems that work better for everyone.”

The EU's New Credit Directive Recasts BNPL and Micro-Loans

New EU Consumer Credit Directive: BNPL and Micro-Credit to Face Unified Oversight

In October 2023, the European Union adopted Directive (EU) 2023/2225 on consumer credit agreements, marking a major overhaul of the regulatory framework in place since 2008. The directive responds to the evolving dynamics of the digital credit market and aims to strengthen consumer protection. Member States are required to transpose the directive into national legislation by 20th November 2025, with full application from 20th November 2026.
While the new framework introduces more stringent compliance obligations for lenders, it also presents a strategic opportunity for both traditional financial institutions and fintechs to innovate and differentiate through compliant, customer-centric lending solutions.

Expanded Scope: BNPL and Alternative Credit Products Under the Regulatory Umbrella

One of the directive's most notable changes is its significant expansion of scope. Previously, numerous products were exempt, including loans under €200, overdrafts repayable within three months, and interest-free deferred payment arrangements. The new framework now applies to virtually all consumer credit agreements under €100,000, explicitly including micro-loans and Buy Now, Pay Later (BNPL) services.
This shift brings many previously lightly regulated fintech models – including BNPL offerings, certain vehicle leasing arrangements, and peer-to-peer lending platforms – within a harmonised EU-wide legal framework. For fintechs operating across borders, this provides a clearer, more predictable regulatory environment, but it also introduces more rigorous compliance benchmarks.

Implications for Fintech Providers: Compliance as a Trust and Growth Enabler

Fintech firms that have scaled rapidly with low-friction credit products will need to adapt to a more structured regulatory landscape. The upside: achieving compliance could serve as a competitive differentiator, enhancing consumer trust and enabling cross-border scalability.
For instance, BNPL providers, often characterised by simplified or absent credit assessments, will be required to implement more robust creditworthiness evaluations. The directive also mandates greater pricing transparency: total repayment costs must be

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disclosed at the point of sale. These changes not only align with consumer protection imperatives but also open the door for improved product design, risk modelling, and customer communication.

Another key development is the facilitation of cross-border data access. The directive requires Member States to grant non-discriminatory access to credit bureau databases and debtor registries for foreign lenders that are duly licensed and supervised, creating a more level playing field across the Single Market.

From Obligation to Innovation: Rethinking Customer Experience

The directive also imposes stricter standards on advertising and pre-contractual disclosures. All credit-related marketing must include clear, standardised warnings about the cost of borrowing (e.g. “This loan will cost you money”), and all offers must be accompanied by the EU-wide Standard European Consumer Credit Information (SECCI) sheet, with key terms highlighted up front.

Here, digital-native fintechs are well-positioned to transform compliance obligations into UX-driven innovation. Examples include interactive credit simulations, embedded comparison tools, and real-time visualisations of repayment terms and APRs—all of which can enhance transparency while differentiating the user journey.

Strategic Takeaway: Regulation as a Catalyst for Smarter Fintech Lending

Ultimately, the new EU Consumer Credit Directive is not merely a compliance hurdle—it can be a catalyst for next-generation financial services. For fintech players, it represents a timely opportunity to build products that are not only legally compliant but also aligned with evolving consumer expectations for clarity, fairness, and digital-first engagement.

With the countdown to implementation already underway, fintech companies operating in or entering the EU market should treat the directive as both a strategic inflection point and a blueprint for product innovation. Those who move early and invest in compliant design and cross-border readiness may find themselves ahead of the curve in the next phase of digital lending.

Zoomer's Fintech Usage, Attitudes, and Concerns: A Survey Analysis

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Péter Bagó PhD

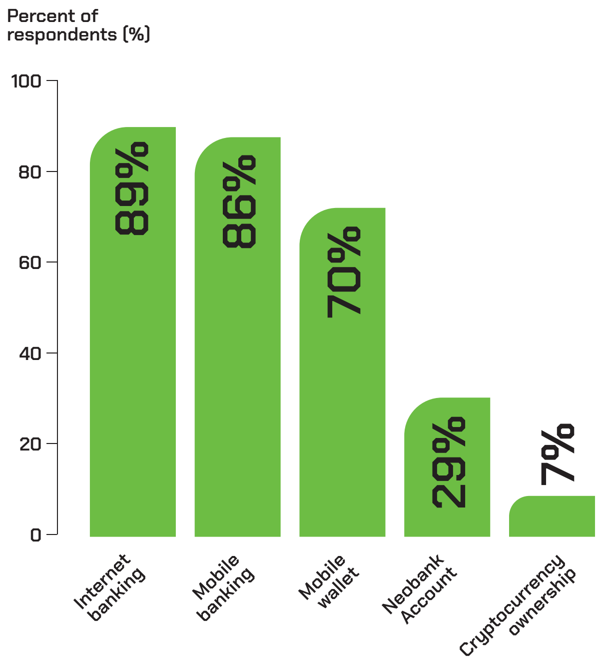
Financial technology (fintech) has rapidly transformed how individuals – especially younger, digitally native generations – manage money. From mobile banking apps to cryptocurrencies, fintech tools promise greater convenience and new financial opportunities. Understanding young people's fintech usage, attitudes, and concerns is crucial, as this cohort often leads in technology adoption. We examine how frequently youths use various fintech services, how much they trust these digital tools, what risks or barriers they perceive, and how fintech engagement relates to their financial behaviors (such as saving and investing). This study is based on a survey of more than 4000 (4180) young individuals, generation Z - colloquially known as zoomers. Respondents were predominantly university students in Hungary (average age ~21.5 years), providing a focused look at educated youth in early adulthood.

Fintech Tool Usage Among Youth

The vast majority of respondents regularly use traditional digital banking services. Nearly 89% use internet banking via a computer, and 86% use mobile banking apps through their smartphones. Indeed, 91% reported using online methods for money transfers. This indicates that basic digital finance has become deeply ingrained in youths' financial habits. In addition, about 81% use their banking apps for non-bank services like purchasing transit tickets, reflecting integration of finance with daily life needs. By contrast, adoption drops off for newer fintech offerings. About 70% of respondents use some form of mobile wallet service for payments (such as Apple Pay, Google Pay, or local wallet apps).

Adoption of digital financial tools among youth

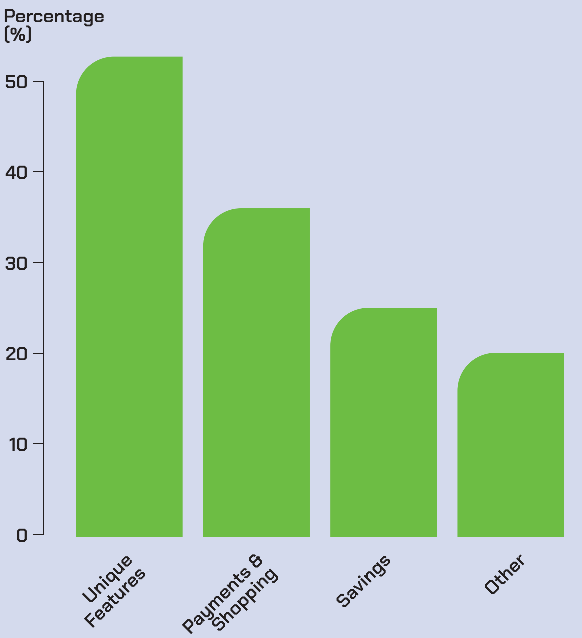
Traditional online banking (internet/mobile banking) has near-universal usage in this sample, followed by moderate uptake of mobile wallet payments (~70%). In contrast, only about one in three use a neobank account, and very few (7%) hold cryptocurrency. These figures highlight the gap between mainstream digital banking services and newer fintech innovations in terms of user penetration.



Neobank usage motivations: The survey asked those familiar with neobanks about their purposes for using such services. Respondents could select multiple reasons. The most cited motivation (by ~55% of respondents) was access to unique features not available from traditional banks. This implies that young people turn to neobanks primarily for innovative services – for example, favorable currency exchange rates, fee-free cards, budgeting tools, or cryptocurrency trading – that complement what their main banks offer. About 35% indicated they use or would use neobanks for payments and shopping, such as online purchases or everyday transactions, likely drawn by perks like cashback or easy app-based payments. Another 26% cited saving purposes, meaning they use neobanks to set aside money or earn interest (some neobanks offer "vaults" or savings pots). Lastly, around 20% mentioned "other" purposes, possibly including travel spending or peer-to-peer transfers. It's worth noting that even many who currently do not use a neobank still selected reasons they would consider using one – reinforcing that unique functionality is a big draw.

Stated reasons for using neobank services among respondents

Over half (55%) cited the availability of unique features (not offered by regular banks) as a reason to use neobanks. One-third would use them for convenient payments or shopping, one-quarter for saving money, and one-fifth for other reasons. (Multiple responses were allowed, so percentages do not sum to 100%.)



Attitudes and Trust Toward Fintech

Strong trust in digital payments: An overwhelming majority of young respondents exhibit trust in established digital financial services. About 89% agree that they trust electronic forms of payment (such as online banking transactions, card payments, and mobile payments). This high confidence level indicates that concerns about the security or reliability of electronic payments are relatively low in this group – digital payments are seen as safe and "normal." Corroborating this, 92% are satisfied with their current primary bank, suggesting that their positive experiences with traditional banking institutions (in digital form) contribute to an overall sense of trust in financial services. Only a small fraction harbor doubts about electronic payments, likely due to fear of fraud or technical glitches, but they are a clear minority (~11%).

A striking finding is that 91% of respondents are willing to track their spending using a mobile application. In other words, nearly all are open to using personal finance management apps or built-in bank app features to monitor budgets and expenses. This reflects both a comfort with apps and a proactive attitude toward managing money – a positive sign for adoption of fintech tools that promote financial literacy and control.

In contrast, when asked if they would enable financial "push" notifications (e.g. real-time alerts about transactions or tips), only ~48% said yes. The other half are hesitant to allow such push messages. The mixed response here suggests that while youth want information about their finances, they may be wary of information overload or find notifications annoying/intrusive, indicating a need for careful balancing of engagement versus nuisance in fintech app design.

When it comes to novel payment technologies and automation, attitudes are divided. About 43% of respondents expressed willingness to try biometric payment authentication (such as fingerprint or face recognition for authorizing payments), indicating a significant openness to using biometrics for convenience. A similar share – 41% – say they would be willing to make payments using cryptocurrency if given the option. This is notable given only 7% actually own crypto; far more are theoretically interested in using crypto for purchases, pointing to curiosity about this technology (perhaps awaiting better stability or integration into everyday commerce). On the other hand, only 31% would be willing to try financial services powered by artificial intelligence (for instance, robo-advisors or AI-driven financial planning tools). This lower acceptance of AI-based services likely stems from uncertainty about trusting algorithms with financial decisions. The most skeptical view was toward chatbots: a mere 9% of respondents agreed they would accept financial advice from a chatbot, while the vast majority (91%) would not trust a chatbot's advice. Additionally, only about one-quarter (25%) have ever engaged with a chatbot during an online purchase or banking query. Together, these findings highlight a nuanced attitude landscape: young people trust the fintech they know (digital payments, spending trackers) and are somewhat open to cutting-edge ideas (biometrics, crypto) but remain cautious about AI-driven or automated advisory services that lack human presence.

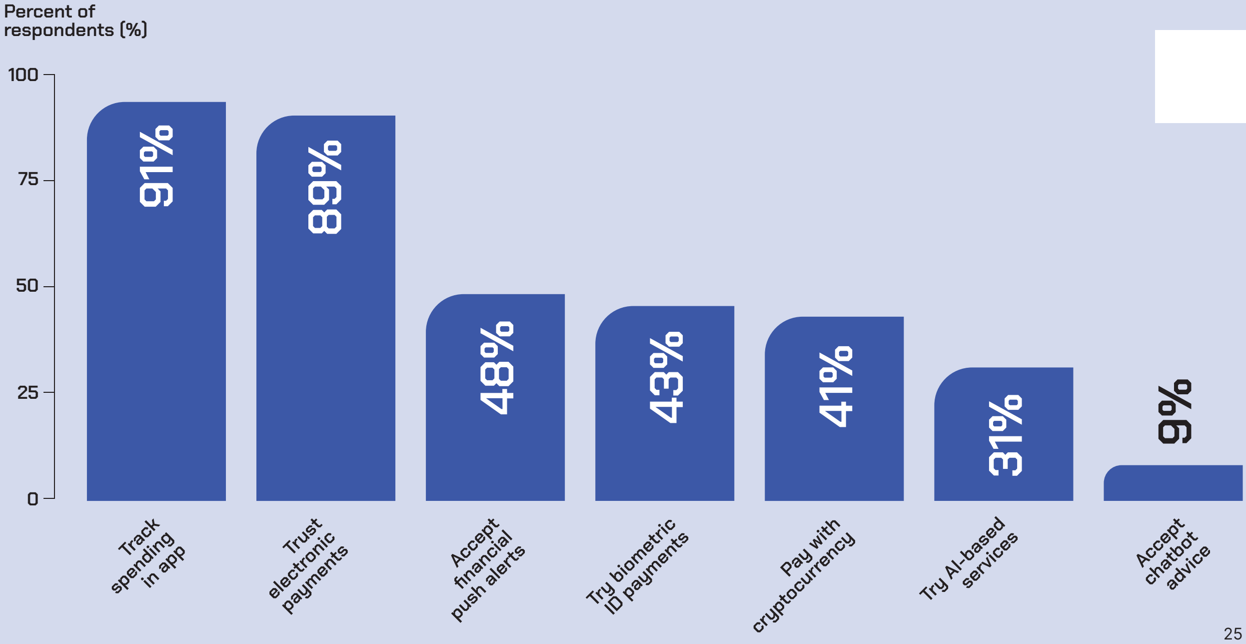
Saving and spending patterns: The data imply that many young people are budget-conscious. For instance, almost everyone is willing to use an app to track expenses (as noted, 91% said they would track spending). This indicates a proactive stance toward saving and avoiding overspending.

The study underscores that to understand fintech adoption, one must also understand youths' financial realities and values. Most respondents were not yet building significant wealth; they were budgeting limited funds, often with family support, and avoiding debt. In this context, fintech tools that help save money, make transactions cheaper, or simplify financial tracking have strong appeal. Conversely, tools that encourage risk or feel too experimental are met with skepticism. Young people appear to be savvy decision-makers: they are willing to try new financial technologies if those technologies align with their needs and if they feel secure using them.

For the fintech ecosystem, these insights are encouraging – a tech-comfortable generation is ready and willing to use digital finance – but also cautionary: simply being new and digital is not enough to guarantee adoption. Trust-building, clear value propositions, and user-centric design are paramount to engage this demographic. As fintech continues to evolve, bridging the gap between convenience and trust will be key. Educating young users, addressing their concerns (security, privacy), and offering tangible improvements over traditional services can gradually convert cautious observers into active fintech participants. In summary, the path to fintech's future among youth will be paved by solutions that empower users, earn their confidence, and integrate seamlessly into their prudent yet digital lifestyles.

Attitudes toward various fintech services and features

Nearly all respondents trust digital payments (89%) and are willing to use apps to track spending (91%). About half would opt in to financial push notifications (48%). Around one-third to two-fifths are open to trying newer technologies like biometric authentication (43%) or paying with cryptocurrency (41%), whereas only 31% are willing to use AI-based financial services. Trust in chatbot-based financial advice is extremely low (only 9% would accept it), underscoring a significant trust gap for automated advisors.



All Eyes on Agents: The GenAI Revolution Reshaping Financial Services in 2025

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Looking Back at Last Year

In 2024, all players in the financial sector were experimenting with GenAI solutions – implementing general-purpose tools like Microsoft 365 Copilot or their own versions, and testing RAG-based chatbots. Their workforce using GenAI was mostly seen as a “nice-to-have”, and the overall narrative around GenAI acknowledged its potential while revealing notable limitations in day-to-day applications.

On a broader level, there was an ongoing debate about whether “LLMs are hitting the wall” and the whole GenAI boom was merely a bubble without actual business impact, or whether we were at the starting point of a wide-scale, exponential transformation. The debate ended – or at least quietened – around December, when reasoning models such as o1 and o3 preview began demonstrating their potential. They were breaking all kinds of AGI benchmarks, to the extent that we actually had to invent new ones – like Humanity’s Last Exam, which, in not even two weeks after launch, was approximately 30% solved by OpenAI’s Deep Research team. The emergence of reasoning models made the concept of functional and reliable AI agents a reality, and the effective, reflexive use of GenAI tools in daily work shifted from being optional to essential.

We can clearly see this shift in the leaked internal memo from Shopify CEO Tobi Lütke, where he stated that: “Reflexive AI usage is now a baseline expectation at Shopify,” with employees expected to use AI to increase their productivity tenfold, or even a hundredfold in some cases. More importantly, the memo shifted the narrative around AI agents: it is no longer a question of whether we should use agents, but rather that agent deployment should be the first consideration before making new hires.

The Explosion of Agent Capabilities

AI agents. We hear about them everywhere, but what are they, exactly – and how do they differ from earlier generations of GenAI solutions? Well, it depends on whom you ask. In essence, AI agents are systems that can understand a desired outcome, break it into smaller tasks, and use external tools to complete those tasks – all autonomously, without constant human guidance.

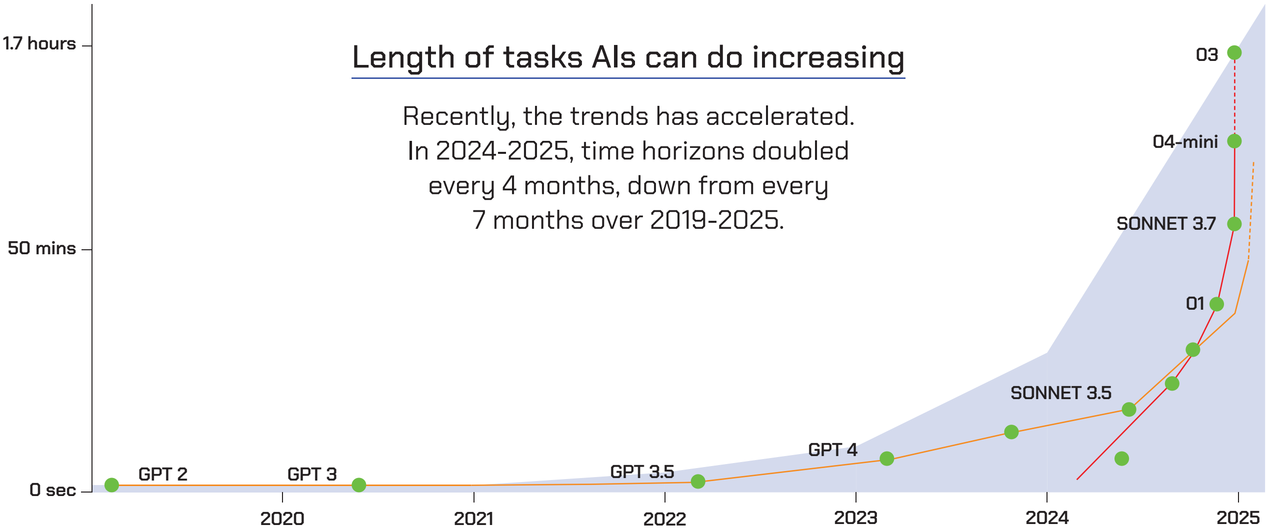
A year ago, agents could only manage a few minutes of uninterrupted work. Today, their run-time is increasing at an exponential rate. According to METR data, their operational capacity doubles roughly every four months – and each doubling is happening faster than the last. We have already advanced from single-digit minutes to nearly two hours. With this expanded capability, agents can now absorb complex goals, break them into steps, adapt mid-task, and complete entire workflows independently. This exponential growth is precisely why Sam Altman declared in January that “2025 will be the year of agents.”

The results are already tangible in the financial sector. Klarna’s agent-powered customer service now handles 2.3 million chats per month, resolving 65% of Tier-1 tickets without human involvement. Revolut’s fraud-screening agents have reduced false-positive alerts by around 25%, allowing analysts to focus on genuine threats. These early wins demonstrate where agents currently excel: tightly scoped, high-volume tasks with clear success metrics. However, when it comes to more complex areas – such as credit underwriting or high-risk KYC reviews – most institutions still keep humans firmly in the loop.

Limitations and the Path Forward

Despite their remarkable capabilities, agents remain fragile. Hallucination chains are still a concern, business processes can be highly complex, and governance frameworks are only beginning to emerge, leaving critical questions about accountability and data security unresolved. These challenges do not signal a reason to delay adoption, but rather emphasise the importance of a thoughtful, strategic approach.

The Shopify memo reflects the dual nature of this transformation: it is as much about organisational readiness as it is about technological implementation. Leaders must become visible advocates for reflexive AI usage, cultivating an “AI-first” mindset that is rapidly becoming a baseline expectation. At the same time, organisations must thoroughly understand their internal processes – not to delay change, but to identify where agents can drive genuine business value. Companies that invest in readiness—through training, process mapping, and leadership—will gain an edge. Those chasing AI without this foundation risk missing what could be the most significant workplace transformation since the internet revolution.



“One of Our Greatest Assets Is the Brand Itself” / Interview with András Fischer, Director of Innovation at OTP Bank

With five years of running a dedicated Startup Program and an expansion beyond the banking ecosystem, OTP Bank has positioned itself at the intersection of finance, technology, and innovation. But what does that really mean in practice? We sat down with András Fischer, Director of Innovation at OTP Bank, to talk about fintech partnerships, shifting customer habits, and how Hungary’s largest bank is preparing for a digital future.

Why are fintech partnerships important for banks, and how do they align with OTP's long-term digital strategy?
When we take a helicopter view, we see multiple pressures pushing banks toward innovation, like the changing customer habits, the rise of neobanks and fintechs, and fast-moving technological developments. But for us these aren't just threats, they're opportunities.

At OTP's innovation department, we've responded with a strategy based on three pillars. The first is acquisitions, of both fintechs and beyond banking businesses, to scale and increase operational efficiency. The second is the integration of pioneering technologies into the bank's operations, so we're not left behind. Take AI, for example: OTP Bank began working seriously with AI in 2021, among the first in the region. That same year, we announced a joint project with the government to create what's often called a "supercomputer," aimed at building a Hungarian language model. That system has now been handed over to a designated national knowledge centre.

The third pillar is building a beyond banking ecosystem, offering services that go beyond traditional finance and integrate into key moments in our customers' lives. Our oldest such entity, OTP Travel, was founded in 1983. If you look at the history, the bank came first, followed in the '90s and 2000s by a financial ecosystem within Merkantil Bank, the asset manager, various funds, pension and health funds. The conscious building of a beyond banking ecosystem really started in the 2020s.

Has the rise of fintechs influenced this strategic shift?
Absolutely. Even before then, we saw the growing influence of fintechs, as well as neobanks and Big Tech companies, whose vast customer bases allow them to set new norms. A few years ago, banks often demonised fintechs, and international financial media helped fuel this narrative, predicting fintechs would "devour" traditional banks.

The reality is quite different. Of every 100 fintechs, perhaps four compete directly with banks for end users. The remaining 96 offer B2B services and seek collaboration, not competition. So fintechs are both a pressure to innovate and a source of potential partnership. We find that inspiring, as we welcome the challenge and believe in fair competition.

How would you define a fintech company?
That's increasingly difficult. For example, we work with a New Zealand-based company, Cogo, that calculates your carbon footprint from transaction data. Is that fintech? What about startups that provide financial tools used mainly by non-financial companies – are they fintechs? With the rise of embedded finance, it's become easier than ever to integrate payment services into a customer journey. But that also means you don't need to be a bank to offer financial functions.

Bio

András joined OTP Bank in 2015, and has led the bank's innovation division, OTP Lab, since 2017. He is responsible for driving initiatives in automation and artificial intelligence, managing fintech and startup collaborations, leading investments, venture building, and overseeing innovation management. Prior to joining OTP Bank, András worked as a business consultant in the United States, where he led strategic, process and product development, modelling, and corporate valuation projects, primarily within the financial services and TMT (technology, media, and telecommunications) sectors. He holds degrees in economics and technology management from Corvinus University of Budapest and Columbia University in New York.

What lessons did you learn from OTP Bank's five-year Startup Program?
Our Startup Booster Program, initially launched in Hungary and later expanded internationally, has now evolved into a more focused initiative. At its peak, all OTP Group subsidiaries participated. Each country submitted their most pressing business challenges – about 70 in total. We then invited startups and fintechs from around the world to propose solutions. Over 400 companies applied, and after a rigorous selection process, we launched pilot projects with 11 of them, and five partnerships continued long-term.

Was it easy to integrate young startups into one of Hungary's largest companies?
It was a challenge. In the first year, we worked with a foreign consultancy experienced in such integrations. From there, the program, and we ourselves, evolved significantly. We started out focusing on Hungarian startups, but by the end, we were onboarding companies from anywhere in the world. The partnerships also grew deeper and delivered more tangible results over time.

How is OTP's ecosystem structured today?
We now have a venture building team at our Budapest HQ that constantly explores new business opportunities. When they identify a promising idea, they present a detailed innovation proposal to senior management. If it's approved, they begin implementation. We also have a dedicated ecosystem development team that strategically grows our existing portfolio, connecting banking and beyond banking services to enhance our presence across key customer journeys.

Are there companies you view as role models in ecosystem development?
OTP is already a regional leader here. We only realised how far ahead we were when we started doing international benchmarking: we often had to look far beyond Europe for comparable models. That said, MOL is an inspiring example domestically. They've transformed from an oil company into a mobility service provider: a totally different industry but an instructive approach. In banking, we see fascinating models in Central Asia, particularly in Kazakhstan, where several banks offer extensive beyond banking services. Further afield, DBS Bank in Singapore is perhaps the gold standard. It's won awards as both the world's best and most digital bank. Of course, Asia operates in a very different regulatory environment, often with more flexibility. At OTP, we believe that if we must meet regulatory standards, we should lead by example in doing so.

That doesn't sound like the easiest path.
It is not – it's definitely the harder road. But we believe our brand is one of our greatest assets. Whether people love or dislike OTP Bank, even our critics acknowledge our reliability and stability. No new technology is worth compromising that.

From a broader perspective, where is banking headed?
Banking is becoming more uniform. That's why building a beyond banking ecosystem is critical. It keeps us relevant and helps us stand out from new challengers. In our region, few banks operate across as many domains as OTP Bank does.

Redrawing the Map

Interview with Kutay Yalinkilinc, Co-Founder of Pars VC, President of Türkiye Fintech Association

Kutay Yalinkilinc is an entrepreneur, investor, and fintech strategist. Based in Turkey and working across global markets, he brings deep insight into how technology, regulation, and geopolitics are converging to reshape cross-border payments. As digital finance continues to evolve, he offers a sharp perspective on the future of global currency flows, emerging payment rails, and the role of fintech in a post-dollar world.

What concrete developments are shaping the future of cross-border payments?
From a global perspective, the cross-border payment landscape underwent significant changes. Initiatives aim to facilitate cross-border payments and financial cooperation through the use of digital currencies, blockchain technology, and alternative payment networks, with the overarching goal of reducing US dollar dominance. However, the cautious stance of key members, particularly China and India, could limit its overall impact. Stablecoins and institutional blockchain adoption are also notable developments.

What are the key trends in this field?
The sector is rapidly evolving. This is evident in the growing investments by traditional payment companies and business models, such as SWIFT gpi and Visa Direct, in cross-border capabilities, while new networks like BRICS Bridge and P27 gain traction. Real-time payments and blockchain-based infrastructure are key areas of investment.

How are technologies like AI, blockchain, and open banking influencing cross-border payments?
AI enhances fraud detection and AML/KYC checks by analysing real-time data. Blockchain enables faster, more secure payments, but adoption varies, especially in regions like Turkey, where integration with traditional systems is still limited.

What effect regulations have on the sector?
Regulations like PSD3 and MiCA play a crucial role in shaping the fintech sector. PSD3 aims to improve traditional payments and advance open banking, with strong emphasis on consumer protection. MiCA focuses on harmonising crypto asset rules across the EU, enhancing security and global competitiveness. Together, they strive to build a safer, more transparent cross-border payment system, but their impact will depend on effective implementation and global regulatory coordination.

Can fintech startups compete with established banks in providing seamless international payment solutions?
While traditional banks remain strong in security and regulatory compliance, fintechs offer agile, innovative, and customer-focused structures international payment experiences, giving them a clear competitive advantage.

The main drivers of fintechs' speed and innovation include their regulatory agility and ability to leverage technologies such as blockchain, artificial intelligence (AI), and cloud computing. Lower operational costs and transparent pricing models also remain key factors behind their growing appeal in the cross-border payment sector.

How do you see the potential adoption of CBDCs influencing the future of cross-border payments?
CBDCs could significantly enhance cross-border payments—making them faster, cheaper, and more secure—but integration with existing systems like SWIFT or Visa will be slow and uneven. In some regions, adoption may remain domestic. Real impact will depend on international cooperation, regulatory alignment, and strong privacy protections. The challenge is balancing innovation with trust, and global ambition with local realities.

Redrawing the Map

Interview With Neha Mehta, entrepreneur, lawyer, writer

Neha Mehta is a leading voice at the crossroads of fintech, sustainability, and inclusion. From advising governments across ASEAN to founding FemTech Partners, she champions gender equity in digital finance. A Chevening, EUVP and Fortune Most Powerful Women Fellow, Neha has led multi-million-dollar initiatives in financial inclusion and climate finance, and her book One Stop explores the rise of super apps. Neha is also a faculty member at NTU and SMU, shaping the future of fintech and sustainable finance.

What are the key trends marking cross-border payments?

The cross-border payments landscape is evolving rapidly, driven by technologies like AI, blockchain, and open banking. Real-time systems such as SWIFT gpi and EPI improve speed and efficiency, while blockchain and digital currencies – including stablecoins and CBDCs –enable faster, lower-cost settlements by reducing intermediaries.

AI enhances fraud detection, AML compliance, and smart payment routing, and open banking APIs facilitate seamless integration across platforms, reducing friction and supporting more inclusive global transactions. Meanwhile, new regulations like PSD3 and MiCA are raising standards for security and compliance, and growing fintech–bank partnerships are blending innovation with regulatory scale.

What impact do evolving regulations like PSD3 and MiCA have?

These EU regulations foster a more secure and competitive environment, encouraging fintechs and financial institutions to invest in compliance and risk management. PSD3 enhances consumer protection, streamlines authentication, and expands open banking across the EU. MiCA provides a clear regulatory framework for crypto-assets, including stablecoins, ensuring safer digital transactions.

How do fintech startups compete with established banks in international payments?

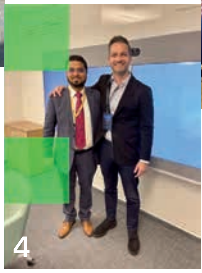
Fintechs offer faster, cheaper, and more user-friendly solutions by bypassing traditional correspondent banking, reducing fees and forex markups. Using emerging technologies they deliver quicker, more transparent transfers and embed payments into apps, e-commerce, and ERP platforms for superior user experience. Freed from legacy systems, fintechs adapt swiftly to new regulations and technologies. Meanwhile, banks maintain strengths in global reach, trust, and regulatory expertise, leading to growing bank-fintech collaborations that combine innovation with compliance and scale.

How do you see the potential adoption of CBDCs influencing the future of cross-border payments?

Central Bank Digital Currencies (CBDCs) could transform cross-border payments by boosting speed, lowering costs, and enhancing regulatory oversight. By cutting out intermediaries, CBDCs enable near-instant international settlements with less counterparty risk and more efficient infrastructure, reducing friction and saving costs for businesses and individuals.

They also give central banks greater control over cross-border flows, aiding the fight against money laundering and financial crime. However, varying national CBDC designs risk fragmentation. International cooperation is essential for interoperability and seamless integration.

While their full impact is still unfolding, CBDCs promise a more efficient, secure, and accessible global payments system.



HFA around the world

1. Hungarian-Turkish Fintech Meetup

In June 2024, we had the pleasure of introducing the vibrant Hungarian fintech ecosystem to Turkey along with representatives from innovative Hungarian fintech companies. The Hungarian-Turkish Fintech Meetup provided an incredible platform for us to explore the Turkish ecosystem and showcase our own. During the event, we participated in a roundtable discussion where we shared experiences and best practices, and discussed potential collaboration and business opportunities. We also gained valuable insights into the regulatory environment in Turkey.

2. Dubai Fintech Summit

HFA had the opportunity to participate in the Dubai Fintech Summit as part of the Hungarian delegation, alongside the Magyar Nemzeti Bank, MBH Fintechlab, and four Hungarian fintech startups. In addition to exploring future tech trends and attending business and investor meetings, our President, Zoltán Ács, achieved a significant milestone by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Nameer Khan, Chairman of the MENA Fintech Association, representing 22 countries.

3. UNCHAIN Festival, Romania

Representing our fintech community, we had the pleasure of participating in the UNCHAIN Festival in Oradea, Romania. Three of our members presented the Hungarian ecosystem in a roundtable discussion led by Baiba Rozenberga, Head of Startups at MBH Fintechlab. The discussions illuminated the exciting developments within Hungary's fintech sector and opened doors to new collaborative opportunities.

4. Singapore Fintech Festival

During the fintech festival we have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Singapore Fintech Association. Together with the Hungarian National Bank, we are building international relations and focusing on ensuring that if fintechs from Far East countries expand, they come to the EU through Hungary.

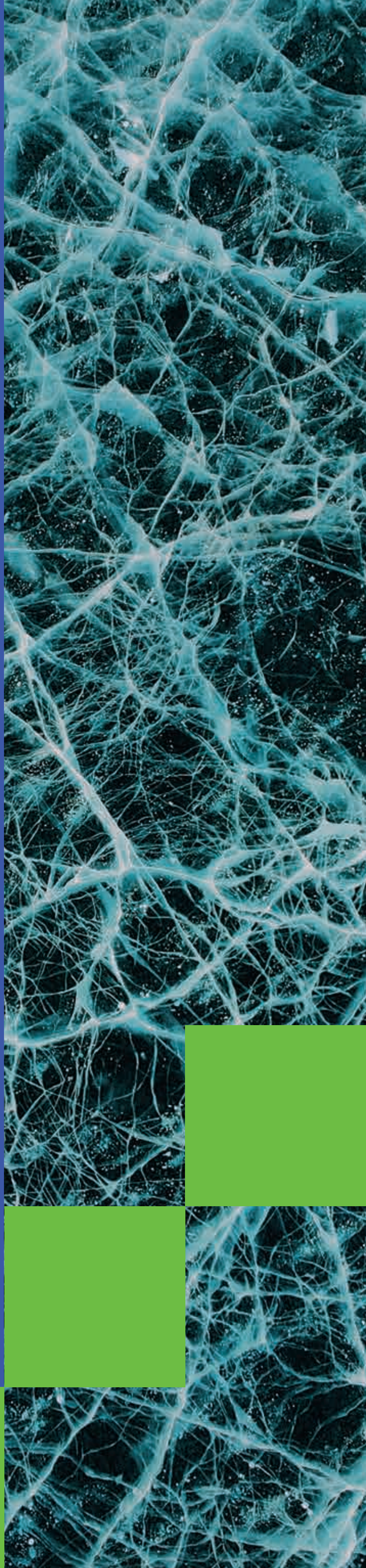
5. Digital Finance Summit 2024, Belgium

The Hungarian Fintech Association is proud to have participated in the Digital Finance Summit 2024 in Belgium, representing Hungary's thriving fintech ecosystem on an international stage.
We officially joined the European Digital Finance Association (EDFA), solidifying our commitment to shaping Europe's digital finance landscape. Furthermore, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the Hungarian Fintech Association and FINTECH BELGIUM, paving the way for deeper collaboration and shared innovation.

6. Finweek Bratislava

We were delighted to join Finweek Bratislava again in 2024 to discuss the future of finance and technology and to foster connections and establish collaborative partnerships with companies across the CEE region. Our chairman, Zoltán Ács, had the chance to participate in an engaging panel discussion that highlighted the pivotal role of fintech in Europe's economic landscape and the region's growth.

LET'S BUILD THE FINTECH ECOSYSTEM TOGETHER.



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