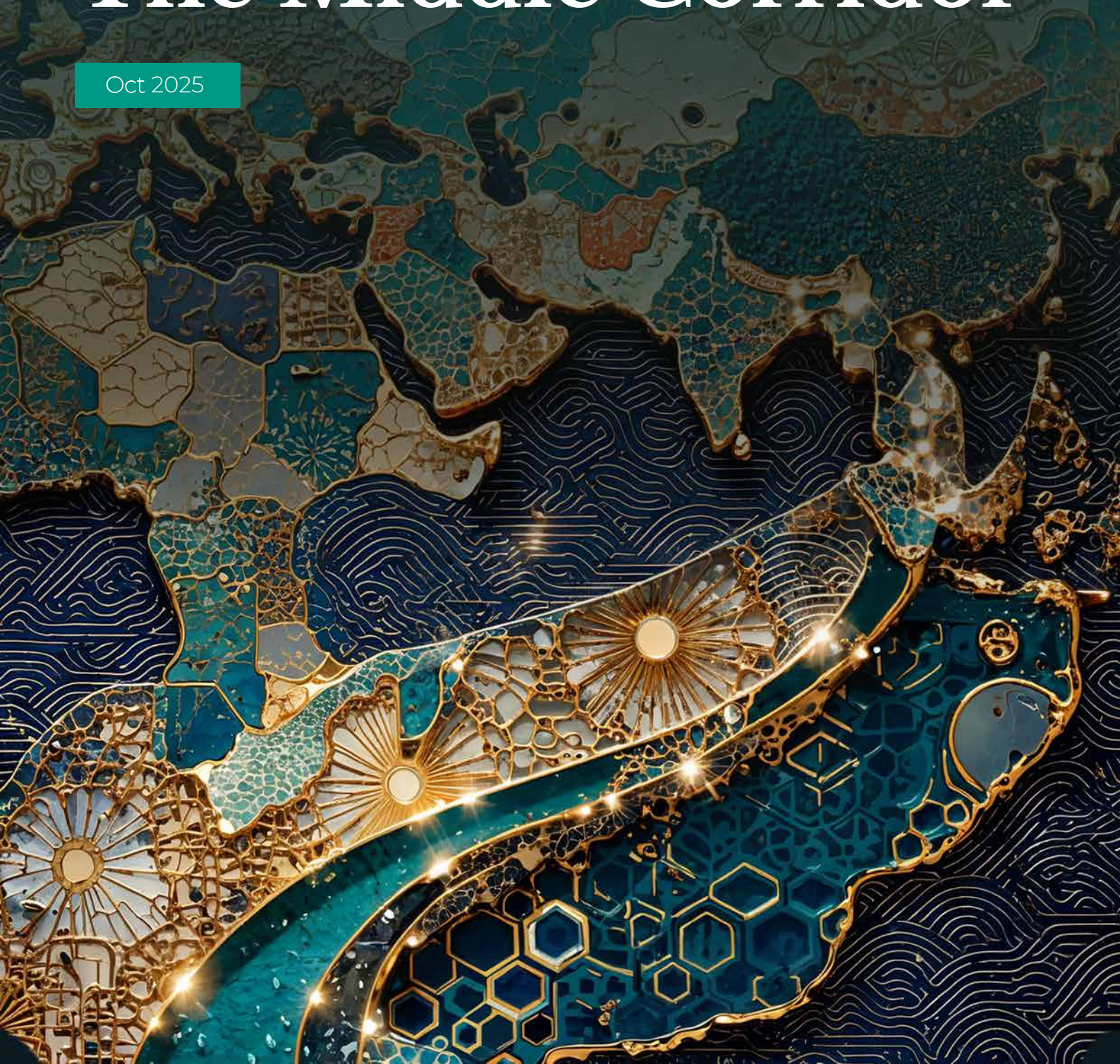


Fintech at the Crossroads: Digital Rise Along The Middle Corridor

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About

The Global Finance & Technology Network (GFTN) is a Singapore-headquartered organisation that leverages technology and innovation to create more efficient, resilient, and inclusive financial systems through global collaboration. GFTN hosts a worldwide network of forums (including its flagship event, the Singapore FinTech Festival); advises governments and companies on policies and the development of digital ecosystems and innovation within the financial sector; offers digital infrastructure solutions; and plans to invest in financial technology startups through its upcoming venture fund, with a focus on inclusion and sustainability.

For more information, visit www.gftn.co



At the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Georgia is fast emerging as a strategic hub for the next phase of financial transformation. As trade routes shift and digital infrastructure takes root, the region offers a powerful vantage point for reimagining how finance moves, scales, and governs itself across borders.



Held in partnership with the National Bank of Georgia and the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development of Georgia, in conjunction with the Silk Road Forum, the summit brings together decision-makers and senior leaders from government, finance, technology, and investment to explore new capital corridors, policy frameworks, and digital innovations.

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1 Executive Summary

The Middle Corridor (the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route) is rapidly becoming one of Eurasia's most strategic arteries for trade, finance, and digital integration. Spanning China, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe, it represents a market of nearly 200 million people. By 2030, the World Bank projects freight volumes will triple, and transit times will be cut in half ^[1].

This transformation is not only logistical, but also financial. The Corridor's diverse economies are experiencing rapid but uneven fintech growth. Mobile banking penetration ranges from 81% in Kazakhstan to just 44% in Uzbekistan ^[2], while fintech ecosystems are expanding rapidly. Kazakhstan has grown from approximately 50 Fintechs in 2018 to over 200 in 2024 ^[3], and Azerbaijan has doubled from 22 in 2022 to approximately 55 in 2024 ^[4]. These trends highlight both the momentum and the gaps that fintech can address across the region.

At the centre of this momentum is Georgia. Strategically located on the Black Sea, Georgia is building the regulatory and digital infrastructure to act as the entry point for fintech.

expansion into the Corridor. Georgia's Fintech Development Strategy prepared by the NBS is aligned with regional needs and focuses on:

- **Corridor-wide fintech integration** – mutual license recognition, cross-border sandboxes, and open finance APIs.
- **Regulatory-driven innovation** – digital bank licensing, clear Payment Service Providers (PSP) / Virtual Asset Service Provider frameworks (VASP), and Single European Payments Area (SEPA) integration.
- **Technology-led experimentation** – Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) pilots, tokenization, and AI-enabled regulation.

Georgia provides the regulatory clarity and digital testbed, while the Middle Corridor offers the scale. The inaugural Tbilisi Finance Summit (Sep 2025) will bring policymakers, investors, and innovators together to turn this vision into action.

^[1] <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/7e6a216e-eb56-4783-ba1b-b7621abddcd9/content>

^[2] <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/globalindex>

^[3] <https://astanatimes.com/2024/07/number-of-fintech-startups-quadruple-in-kazakhstan-as-market-booming/>

^[4] <https://thefintechtimes.com/richie-not-done-yet-fintech-in-the-caucasus-armenia-azerbaijan-georgia/>

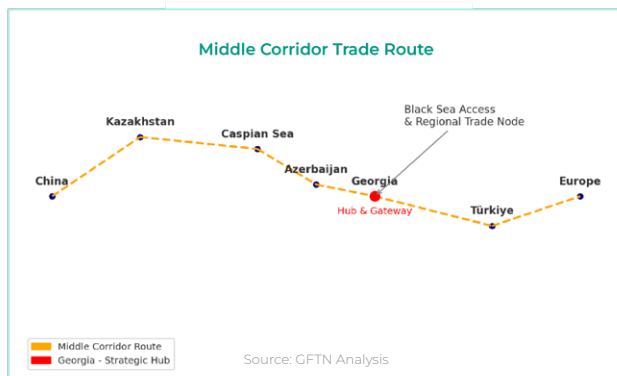
2 The Middle Corridor & Georgia

The Middle Corridor is emerging as a critical link between Asia and Europe, providing a faster and more stable alternative to northern rail and maritime routes.

But the Corridor's success will not depend on logistics alone. Financial infrastructure must keep pace to ensure that the movement of goods is matched by the movement of capital. Faster cross-border payments, streamlined trade finance, and interoperable banking standards are essential to:

- Reduce transaction costs for exporters and importers.
- Increase liquidity and speed settlement cycles.
- Strengthen trust and transparency in multi-jurisdictional trade.

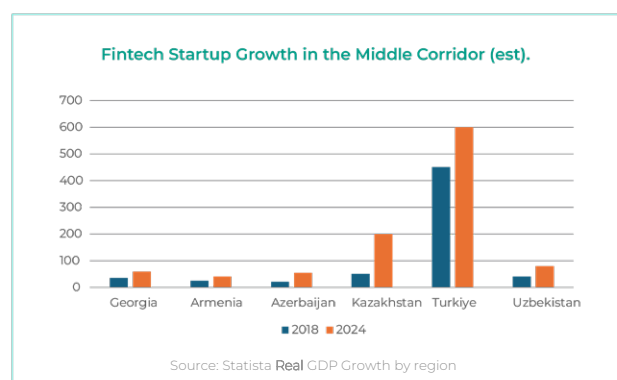
Source: GFTN Analysis



Fintech Momentum Across the Corridor

- **Mobile banking penetration:** Kazakhstan (81%), Türkiye (74%), Georgia (70%) are leaders; Armenia (55%), Azerbaijan (46%), Uzbekistan (44%) represent growth opportunities. ^[5]

- **Startup ecosystems:** Kazakhstan's fintech market has quadrupled since 2018, while Azerbaijan's doubled between 2022 and 2024.
- **Inclusion gaps:** Large segments of the population remain underserved, creating space for digital wallets, neobanks, and e-KYC solutions.



Georgia as the Gateway

Amid this diversity, Georgia is uniquely positioned as the connector. Its location on the Black Sea provides direct access to European markets, while its regulatory clarity — including open banking mandates, a cross-border sandbox, and SEPA membership application — allows fintech solutions to scale across borders with confidence.

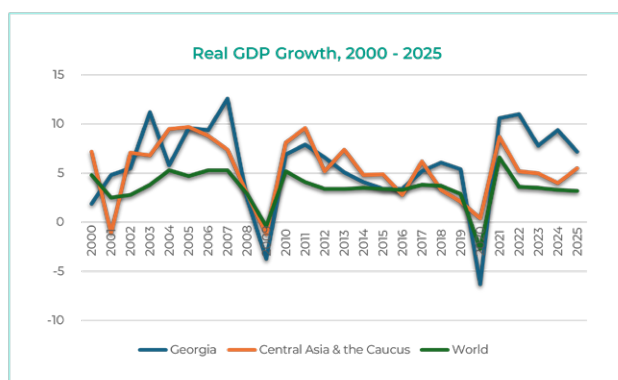
By embedding fintech into the Corridor's logistics and trade backbone, Georgia is not only strengthening its own economy but also serving as the entry point for digital finance across Eurasia.

^[5] <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/globalindex?utm>

3 Economic and Digital Landscape in the Middle Corridor

The Middle Corridor's fast growth in trade is matched by a rise in digital financial adoption across its economies. Together, the Corridor and nearby countries form a market of around 157 million people, growing to nearly 200 million when including the broader Central Asia region.

Over the past twenty years, Georgia has consistently outperformed both the global economy and its regional neighbours in Central Asia and the Caucasus, although with greater fluctuations. After major post-independence reforms in the early 2000s, Georgia experienced some of the highest growth rates in the region, with peaks exceeding 10% annually in the mid-2000s.



Source: Statista (Global GDP)

Notably, in 2008–2009 during the global financial crisis, and again in 2020 with the COVID-19 shock, there were sharp but short-lived declines. In each case, Georgia rebounded faster than the regional average, underscoring its economic resilience and reform-driven dynamism.

Looking ahead, projections from the IMF and World Bank report that:

- Georgia is projected to grow at **7% in 2025 and 5% in 2026** — still above regional and global averages^[6].
- Central Asia and the Caucasus are expected to grow by **approximately 5.5% in 2025 and 5.1% for 2026**^[7].
- Global GDP growth is projected at **approximately 3% in 2025 and 3.1% in 2026**^[8].

This consistent growth premium positions Georgia as a resilient, high-potential economy within the Middle Corridor, and a natural entry point for investors, innovators, and fintech firms seeking scalable opportunities across Eurasia.

The region's performance has moderated in recent years, particularly following the oil price downturn in 2014 and external shocks linked to Russia's economy. The global economy, by contrast, has grown at a steadier pace of around 3–4% annually, with downturns in 2009 and 2020.

Georgia's financial credibility is reinforced by TBC Bank and the Bank of Georgia, both of which are listed on the London Stock Exchange.

Its fintech and IT companies benefit from government incentive schemes such as 0% corporate tax on foreign-sourced revenue, a 10-year tax holiday, and 0% personal income tax for startups in their first three years, along with strong investor protection and transparent regulation.

Strategically located between Europe and Asia, Georgia acts as a gateway to the Middle Corridor. Its digital infrastructure with more than 80% broadband penetration, 5G pilots, and advanced e-government systems reduces costs and improves efficiency. With a young, STEM-skilled, multilingual workforce and significantly lower operating costs than the EU and neighbours, Georgia is positioned as a launchpad for fintech and IT solutions serving more than 200 million consumers across the Corridor.

^[6] https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDP_RPCH@WEO/GEO?zoom=GEO&highlight=GEO

^[7] <https://www.adb.org/outlook/editions/july-2025#:~:text=The%20subregional%20growth%20outlook%20for,line%20with%20earlier%20ADO%20expectations.>

^[8] <https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WEO/Issues/2025/07/29/world-economic-outlook-update-july-2025>

4 Focus on Georgia: Georgia's Fintech Development Strategy prepared by the NBG

Zooming in on Georgia's initiatives, The National Bank of Georgia (NBG) is driving a comprehensive National Fintech Development Strategy to position the country as a leading regional hub within the Middle Corridor. This strategy is designed to both strengthen Georgia's domestic financial ecosystem and create cross-border infrastructure that supports scalable, innovative business models.

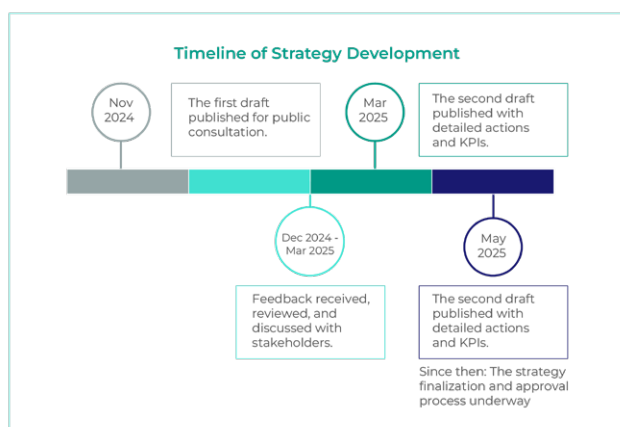
The strategy is anchored on three core pillars:

1. **Regional Fintech Integration** – Building a “Beyond-Georgia” ecosystem through mutual recognition of licenses, harmonized regulations, technical standardization of payment systems and shared e-KYC systems with neighbouring markets.
2. **Regulatory-Driven Innovation** – Offering clarity and flexibility through digital bank licensing, regulatory sandboxes, and SEPA integration to encourage new market entrants.
3. **Technology-Driven Experimentation** – Advancing initiatives in CBDC, tokenization of deposits, AI regulation frameworks, and open banking to create future ready infrastructure.^[9]

Flagship Cross-Border Initiatives

- Project mBridge: Connecting central and commercial banks globally via a multi-CBDC platform to enable faster, more efficient cross-border settlements.
- Project Aperta: Developing an interoperable API network to link domestic open finance ecosystems across borders, streamlining account opening and trade finance data transfer.
- SEPA Membership Application: Direct integration with the Single Euro Payments Area to improve connectivity with EU markets.

Through this strategy, NBG aims to create an innovation-ready, resilient, and globally connected financial system that not only fuels domestic growth but also positions Georgia as the digital finance gateway for Eurasia.



Source: NBG

^[9] <https://nbg.gov.ge/fm/>

5 Georgia's Fintech Ecosystem

Georgia's fintech ecosystem spans a diverse set of market segments, each playing a role in the country's ambition to become a regional fintech hub. Regulatory clarity from the National Bank of Georgia (NBG) has encouraged growth across payments, banking, asset services, and emerging technology infrastructure.

Payments & PSPs (Payment Service Providers)	VASPs (Virtual Asset Service Providers)	Digital Banks	Open Banking & Open Finance
35+ active PSPs facilitate payment initiation, merchant acquiring, e-wallets, and instant transfers.	Registration regime for VASPs was introduced in 2023 to ensure compliance with AML/CFT standards	Georgia has issued several digital bank licenses since 2022, enabling mobile-first, low-capital entry models.	All commercial, micro banks and non-banking institutions involved in open banking can use the Open APIs. However, publication of Open APIs is mandatory for only commercial and microbanks.
PSPs are at the core of embedded finance innovations, open banking integrations, and real-time settlements, with many participating in NBG's regulatory sandbox.	As of September 2025, there were 28 VASPs registered.	Licensed players include Hash JSC, Pave Bank Georgia, and Peysera Bank Georgia, each targeting different niches from programmable accounts to SEPA integration.	Supports innovation in credit scoring, digital onboarding, and API-driven financial services.
	There is increasing interest in cryptocurrency integration for cross-border trade payments.		

Source: NBG Fintech Development Strategy

Fintech Success Stories: Scaling Beyond Borders

Georgia's fintech ecosystem is producing homegrown solutions that are designed from day one to be scalable, interoperable, and region ready. The following examples show how regulatory support, digital-first business models, and strategic partnerships are enabling Georgian Fintech's to address domestic gaps while targeting wider Middle Corridor opportunities.

- 1. Silk Bank** – Credit in Your Pocket In partnership with Silknet, Silk Bank embedded a fully digital loan application into the MySilknet app. Leveraging alternative scoring and open banking APIs, the process delivers approvals in under three minutes without paperwork; a breakthrough for freelancers and self-employed individuals. It is easily replicable across other telecom ecosystems in the Middle Corridor to reach underbanked populations.
- 2. Keepz** – One QR to Rule Them All Keepz, Georgia's first PSP with an open banking license, enables payments via a single QR code compatible with cards, Apple Pay, Google Pay, cryptocurrencies, and direct bank transfers. This is adaptable to multiple markets and payment environments, with expansion plans including crypto-powered cross-border payments.
- 3. Kursi.ge** – FX Without Borders Kursi.ge delivers a fully digital FX platform with open banking integration, replacing a traditionally cash-heavy market with faster, cheaper, and more transparent transactions. It is also well-suited for other high-remittance, FX-dependent markets across the Middle Corridor.

[10] <https://nbg.gov.ge/fintech-development-strategy-of-georgia>

6 Opportunities

Georgia's combination of regulatory foresight, digital infrastructure, and strategic geography makes it an ideal launchpad for fintech expansion across the Middle Corridor. The country's financial system is already moving toward interoperability with international standards such as SEPA (pending membership) and is actively testing multi-CBDC platforms and cross-border API frameworks.

Opportunities for Investors and Partners in Georgia:

- Payments & Digital Commerce – Build on Georgia's open banking infrastructure and PSP network to deliver instant, low-cost cross-border transactions.
- Trade Finance & Supply Chain Digitization – Develop blockchain-based or tokenized settlement solutions to support the Corridor's fast-growing logistics sector.
- Digital Identity & e-KYC – Expand interoperable digital ID services to simplify customer onboarding across multiple jurisdictions.
- Neobanking & Digital Asset Services – Launch digital-first financial institutions and regulated virtual asset platforms to serve underserved market segments in Georgia and beyond.

Opportunities in the Middle Corridor:

- Payments & Inclusion – Mobile banking penetration ranges from 44% in Uzbekistan to 81% in Kazakhstan, highlighting both strong adoption and significant inclusion gaps.
- Digital Trade Finance – Rising cargo volumes and high remittance flows create demand for blockchain-based finance, tokenization, and streamlined e-KYC.
- Startup Growth – Kazakhstan has grown from ~50 FinTech's in 2018 to ~200 in 2024, while Azerbaijan doubled from 22 to ~55 between 2022–2024 — ecosystems primed for collaboration.
- Regulatory Harmonization – Shared standards for PSPs, VASPs, and open banking remain critical. Georgia's leadership in Project mBridge, Project Aperta, and its SEPA bid positions it as the anchor for Corridor-wide alignment.
- Investor Potential – With fragmented but fast-growing markets, investors have the chance to back scalable fintech models that transcend national borders and capture Corridor-wide demand.

[2] <https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/globalindex>
[3] <https://astanatimes.com/2024/07/number-of-fintech-startups-quadruple-in-kazakhstan-as-market-booming/>
[10] <https://nbg.gov.ge/fintech-development-strategy-of-georgia>

7 Conclusion

The Middle Corridor is emerging as a vital artery for trade, connectivity, and digital integration across Eurasia. As freight volumes expand and regional economies become more interconnected, the demand for equally efficient, secure, and interoperable financial systems will only intensify.

Georgia stands ready to meet this moment. With its forward-looking regulatory strategy, digital infrastructure, and strategic location on the Black Sea, Georgia is uniquely positioned to serve as the gateway for fintech across the Corridor. The country's progress in open banking, blockchain experimentation, and cross-border fintech initiatives offer a blueprint for what regional cooperation can achieve.

Yet the opportunity extends well beyond Georgia's borders. Across Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Türkiye, and Armenia, fintech adoption is accelerating, startups are multiplying, and inclusion gaps present vast innovation potential. The prize lies in building shared frameworks and scalable solutions that connect these diverse markets into a cohesive fintech ecosystem.

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