

Getting Access to Gain Agency

a conversation about digitalisation trends in financial services with:



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Over the past decade, digitalisation has transformed how people manage money. Payments, transfers, account management and investing can now happen in seconds, often from a smartphone. But as convenience becomes the norm, the next question is more fundamental: can digital finance give people not just easier access, but greater control, understanding and opportunity?

For **Galya Dimitrova, Co-founder & CEO at IRIS Solutions and Board Member of the Bulgarian Fintech Association**, the sector is entering a new phase. "The next phase is not about digitalising more processes. It is about activating the financial infrastructure we already have," she says. Europe already has digital bank accounts, instant payments, APIs and regulated providers. The opportunity now is to connect these elements and turn them into real value for consumers.

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greater opportunities. **Vanya Manova, Regional Manager for Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania at Mastercard.**

Digitalisation has also changed what people expect from financial services. Consumers can open multi-currency accounts, transfer money internationally, track spending and invest through digital platforms. **Filip Mutafis, shareholder and Executive Director of Paysera Bulgaria and Paysera Romania**, describes the transformation as a move from "deliberate and often inconvenient actions" to a seamless, mobile-first experience.

But making money easier to move does not necessarily make it easier to manage. Digital payments can make spending feel less tangible, while easier access to investment opportunities can create new risks for people without sufficient financial knowledge. **Ivaylo Ivanov, co-CEO of Afranga** argues that the sector has already "democratised access to the tools"; the next step is to democratise the knowledge needed to use them. As online investors become younger, more cross-border and less tolerant of opacity, transparency and financial education become increasingly important.

The same principle applies to financial data. Open Banking has already enabled secure data sharing between providers, while the next step is a broader Open Finance ecosystem in which consumers can connect more of their financial information and services. For Dimitrova and Mutafis, this could give people a more complete picture of their finances, make it easier to prove income and access relevant products, while allowing users to decide who can access their data and for what purpose.

The coming shift could make finance increasingly intelligent, too. AI-powered systems may help people manage budgets, identify unusual spending and receive personalised information, while more advanced AI agents could eventually execute predefined financial actions on their behalf. The more autonomous these systems become, however, the more important human control becomes.

That is where trust and security enter the picture. Electronic identification, biometrics, tokenisation and real-time fraud detection are making protection increasingly seamless. For Manova, consumers should not have to choose between convenience and security: trust needs to be built into every digital financial interaction. "Today enabling open finance, digital wallets, AI-powered commerce, cross-border money movement or tokenized currencies, for Mastercard means working for meeting the trust of consumers. Trust is the foundation on which participation, growth and innovation depend. Organisations that make trust visible through their customer experience, security practices and value exchange will earn stronger relationships and unlock greater opportunities," she notes.

Nor should digitalisation mean digital-only. **Gergana Sarbova, Managing Director of ePay/EasyPay** points to the value of combining physical infrastructure with digital services, allowing consumers to move between cash and digital payments according to their needs. Financial inclusion, in this sense, means expanding choice rather than forcing everyone into the same model. "If the last decade was defined by the speed of payments, the next major shift will be defined by intelligence – AI-driven personalised advice, automated budget management, and proactive protection against financial risk," Sarbova points out.

The first phase of financial digitalisation was largely about access and speed. The next is about connection, intelligence and agency. For that transition to deliver its full potential, technology will need to work alongside financial education, security and user control. The measure of progress may ultimately be not how quickly a payment can be made, but whether digital finance helps people understand, manage and make more of their financial lives.

About the companies

IRIS Solutions

IRIS Solutions is an EU-licensed payment institution specialising in Open Banking, providing payment initiation and account information services. The company connects businesses and financial institutions across Southeast Europe to more than 70 banks and payment institutions.

Paysera

Paysera is an international fintech group providing digital payment and financial services to individuals and businesses. Its services include payment accounts, international transfers, currency exchange, e-commerce payments and other financial solutions through its digital platform.

Afranga

Afranga is a European crowdfunding service provider licensed under the EU crowdfunding framework, operating a platform that connects retail investors with businesses seeking financing through loans. It enables EU-based individuals to access an asset class traditionally more accessible to institutional investors.

ePay/EasyPay

ePay.bg and EasyPay are Bulgarian fintech companies that have built a comprehensive ecosystem connecting digital payments with an extensive and accessible physical infrastructure. With 27 years of experience, ePay.bg is a pioneer in online payments in Bulgaria.

Mastercard

Mastercard is a global technology company in the payments industry, providing payment solutions and related services designed to make transactions secure, simple and accessible. Its activities extend beyond payments into areas including cybersecurity, fraud and risk management and digital payment experiences.