

LIFE IN ARMENIA

FOR DIGITAL NOMAD FAMILIES

MARCH 1ST, 2024 | NO.14 | LIFE IN ARMENIA

TECH HUBS BEYOND YEREVAN
UNVEILING THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY CENTERS IN ARMENIAN REGIONS

INVESTIGATING BANKING PROCESSES IN ARMENIA
HOW EASY CAN YOU GET A CONSUMER LOAN IN ARMENIA COMPARED TO THE US?

CULTIVATING HOPE
THE SARI-SAFRAN PROJECT EMPOWERING WOMEN IN SARIGYUGH, ARMENIA

VISIT ARMENIA IN 2024
ARMENIAN RESIDENCE PERMITS FOR SOLOPRENEURS AND ENTREPRENEURS

CATCHING A MARLIN
FINDING HEARTFELT HOMES FOR SENIOR LEADERS IN ARMENIA

THE GITUZH INITIATIVE
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REMOTE WORK REDEFINED
WHY REMOTE PROFESSIONALS SHOULD CHOOSE TO WORK FROM ARMENIA?

OPPORTUNITIES IN ARMENIAN STARTUPS
A CLOSER LOOK AT ARMENIA'S INVESTMENT-WORTHY STARTUP VENTURES





MATHEW ZEIN

EDITOR'S LETTER

Standing tall, the Mother Armenia statue has captivated me since our first week in Armenia. It embodies a powerful message: an entire nation symbolized by a strong, protective woman. Unlike many countries I've visited where such figures are male, Armenia proudly depicts its spirit as feminine.

International Women's Day (March 8th) takes on a special meaning in Armenia. Here, it's a day of profound celebration, exceeding the spirit of many other places. It's a day to wholeheartedly appreciate the women who enrich your life.

This issue of Life in Armenia shines a spotlight on exceptional women from diverse backgrounds who are driving the country's prosperity and development. We feature women making a difference in agricultural projects, angel investing, scientific research, international recruitment, and the world of remote work. I had the privilege of meeting these inspiring women and including their stories in this special issue honoring Armenian women.

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TECH HUBS BEYOND YEREVAN UNVEILING THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY CENTERS IN ARMENIAN REGIONS

Discover the transformative impact of the Gyumri Technology Center (GTC) on the region's technological and cultural landscapes with Bella Harutyunyan, Business Development Manager at GTC. Explore how GTC's multidisciplinary approach to innovation cultivates an environment where technology intersects with arts, science, engineering, and culture.

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Join Anush Amirkhanian, co-founder of Sari-Safran, to explore how the project has empowered women by involving them in every aspect of saffron production, from cultivation to processing. Witness firsthand not only the economic opportunities it has brought to the women of Sarigyugh, but also the sense of agency it has fostered, challenging norms and building community pride.

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Explore the transformative power of science and innovation alongside the Gituzh Initiative, led by Lilit Margaryan. Learn how Armenia is revitalizing its science and technology sector, from championing increased funding to fostering media engagement. Gituzh is building a future defined by scientific excellence and technological innovation.



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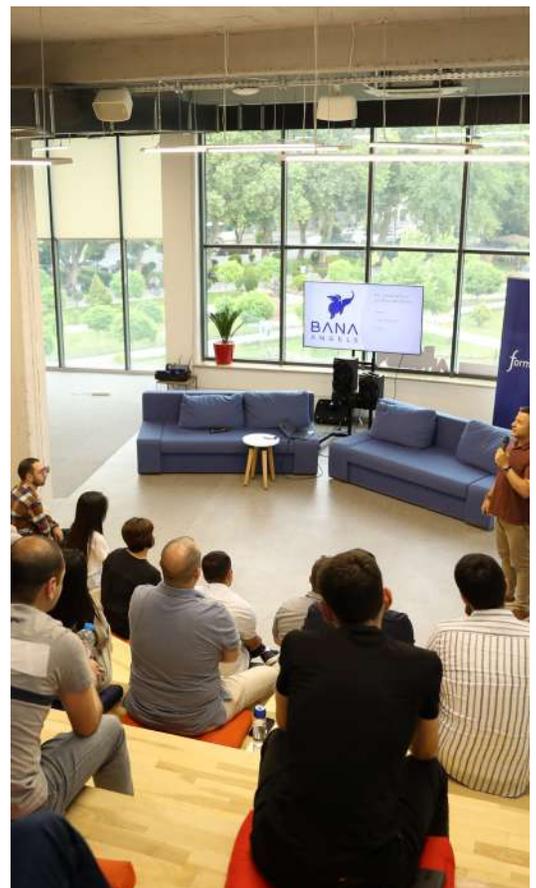
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Join Sirapi Sahakyan, a remote work marketing director, to discover why Armenia is a prime destination for remote professionals seeking a harmonious work-life balance with rich cultural immersion. From thriving coworking spaces to a welcoming expat community, Armenia offers the ideal environment to elevate your remote work experience.

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Uncover the reasons why Armenia is attracting international investors seeking high-growth ventures with a balanced approach. Dive into this insightful article featuring an exclusive interview with Sona Veziryan, Director of BANA Angels. Learn about investment opportunities in Armenian startups, from attractive valuations to globally scalable products.



CTRL + ALT + DELI

QUALITY ON-SITE DINING IN TECH COMPANIES



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

INTERVIEWING



**VAHAN
VARDANIAN**
FOUNDER AND CEO
OF KERPAK



CTRL + ALT + DELI QUALITY ON-SITE DINING IN TECH COMPANIES

Regaining control of a computer system through Ctrl + Alt + Del is like insisting your coworker take a lunch break. Essentially, it's like handing them a healthy salad and saying, 'Take twenty, clear your head.' Hopefully, they return refreshed and ready to tackle the rest of the day.

Companies are embracing the link between employee well-being and productivity, offering food options. However, the **constant ordering and delivery process in fast-paced environments like tech can be inefficient**, wasting valuable work time and creating distractions.

As David Brent from The Office UK humorously points out, "There's no point in skipping lunch for work. You just end up working slower and making more mistakes in the long run."

Finding innovative solutions like on-site cafeterias or streamlined ordering becomes crucial to balance employee needs with efficient food access. Although on-site cafeterias offer convenience, they can lack diverse food options, require dedicating space in already expensive office locations, and potentially lead to challenges managing contracts, vendors, and other logistics.

While incorporating a variety of vending machines offering food within tech offices could cater to different tastes, it hardly constitutes an innovative solution. These machines are commonplace across businesses and have already been adopted as a convenient option. However, they **lack the holistic approach that could transform them into a cultural shift** in food experiences within the company.



Connecting the Dots in the Supply Chain

[Vahan Vardanian](#), Armenia based tech entrepreneur currently building a white label store as a service (SaaS) unmanned retail technology solution, **recognized a missing link in the food supply chain for tech giants**. He envisioned a tech-driven software-based solution that could boost employee productivity and elevate his business beyond traditional delivery options or vending machines.

Today, many global tech giants leverage Vahan's technology to deliver quality food to their employees through autonomous smart kiosks. Some notable examples in Armenia include Service Titan, Picsart, Krisp, VMWare, DataArt, Instigate, Synergy, Align Technology, and Veeam. Upon learning this, I was intrigued and wanted to delve deeper into his story and meet him. After all, when such prominent names **find value in specific technologies and approaches**, it's certainly worth exploring further.

To my surprise, meeting Vahan shifted my perspective. His solution, as he calls it, addresses a surprising cultural aspect: **"corporate food culture."** This concept underpins his entire business. Vahan believes vending machines should not merely dispense food but rather **contribute to a positive work lifestyle** by ensuring employees have opportunities to recharge throughout the day. Vahan's unique



selling proposition, and a powerful one it is, centers around empowering employees to reach their full potential through **cultivating a positive food culture**.

Beyond that, his software solution prioritizes waste management, ensuring every stakeholder in the supply chain benefits. With each point Vahan made, the pieces started falling into place, and I grasped the broader vision behind his innovative solution.

Versatile Approach to Business Solutions

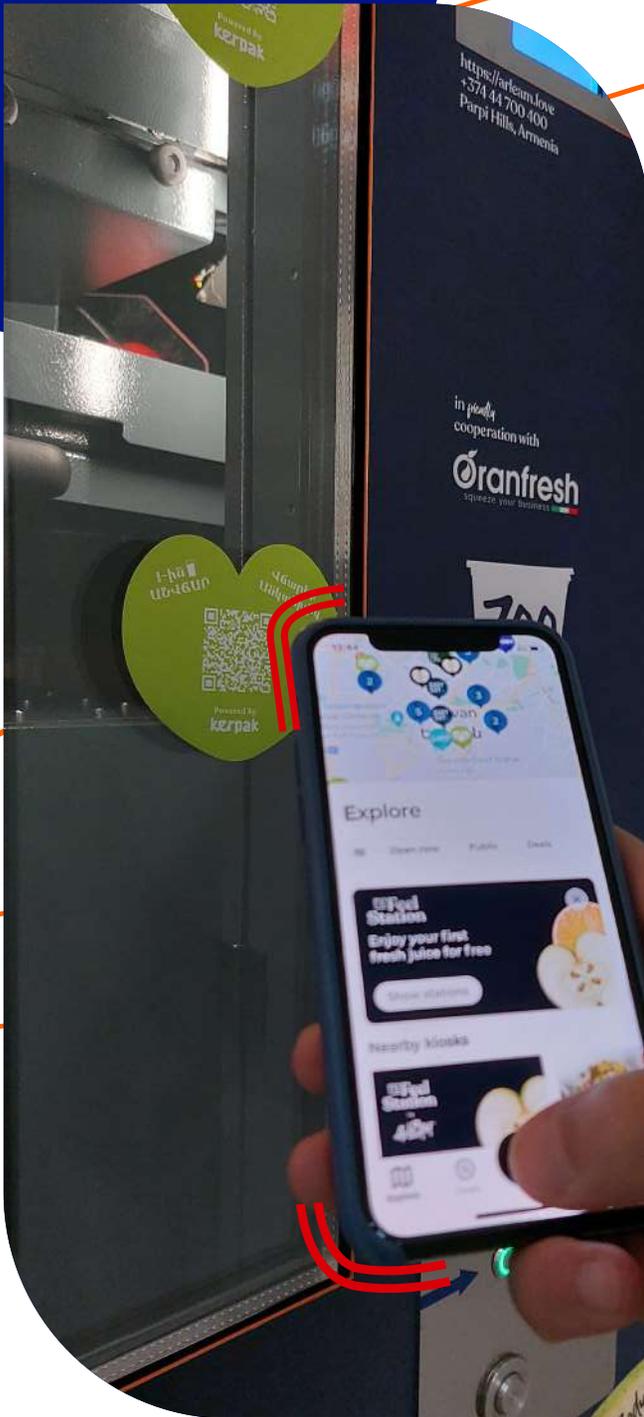
Originally focusing on their own hardware, the Kerpak Connect kit, they have evolved to **integrate seamlessly with various smart fridges and vending solutions** across the globe. This adaptability allows a broader range of clients to utilize their software for specific needs, such as customer loyalty management, employee food benefit programs, or even integrating online ordering functionality into existing businesses. This shift signifies their commitment to offering a versatile and holistic solution that goes beyond hardware sales.

Kerpak **allows delivery companies to create and operate autonomous kiosk stores**, enhancing customer convenience. Food service companies can enter the lucrative corporate catering and employee benefit program market, **reaching new customer segments**. Moreover, grocers and restaurants can leverage Kerpak's technology to reduce food waste, contributing to sustainability efforts. By partnering with Kerpak, businesses can gain a **competitive edge through innovation, market expansion, and environmental responsibility**.

Kerpak boasts several key advantages over similar solutions in the market. Firstly, their platform utilizes a highly flexible and user-friendly Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) model, making it easy for businesses to **configure, operate, and integrate the system into their existing infrastructure**. In 2024, Kerpak will also launch its newest AI machine vision checkout solution that will even make the checkout process even more frictionless.

One example lies in Kerpak's mobile app features, which are made available through APIs. This facilitates seamless integration with existing branded apps, allowing partners to enhance their own functionalities without needing to build from scratch.





Furthermore, Kerpak uniquely offers the ability to combine various checkout technologies, including self-scan, computer vision AI checkout, and RFID. This versatility allows businesses to choose the most suitable technology for their specific needs. For instance, a self-scan option might be most cost-effective for a private setting, while RFID or AI computer vision checkout might be better suited for semi-private or public spaces.

By prioritizing ease of use, **Vahan aims to democratize the industry**, making AI-powered checkout solutions accessible to a wider range of customers, including small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs).

Recognizing the evolving landscape, Kerpak prioritizes partnering with food suppliers, producers and retailers who exhibit a commitment to quality and adaptable offerings. Today's consumers are increasingly seeking healthy options and increased flexibility to cater to diverse dietary needs, such as vegan, keto, halal, and kosher options. This is not just about food but about the culture people create around it in tech companies. Partnering with suppliers who demonstrate these qualities ensures that Kerpak can offer a comprehensive and relevant selection to its customers.

Additionally, Kerpak is piloting a solution that leverages autonomous kiosks powered by their platform. These kiosks sell perishable items nearing their best-before dates at discounted prices, offering an **additional sales window even outside regular store hours**. This initiative aims to rescue sellable food and divert it from waste streams, contributing to a more sustainable food ecosystem.

Reducing Waste, Maximizing Value

Kerpak's commitment to sustainability is evident in two key aspects: real-time inventory management and dynamic pricing strategies.

Real-time tracking of product shelf life and production dates empowers partners to optimize inventory management and minimize waste. This **allows for informed decision-making regarding stock levels and ordering**, preventing overstocking and subsequent spoilage.

Furthermore, Kerpak **utilizes dynamic pricing strategies** to encourage customer purchases of items approaching expiration dates. By applying discounts and other incentives, they incentivize consumption and reduce write-offs, ultimately leading to less food waste.

Kerpak is **actively exploring machine learning integration** to further enhance its sustainability efforts. By leveraging historical data and predictive analytics, they aim to better forecast consumption patterns, allowing partners to further optimize inventory management and pricing strategies.

It's worth mentioning that Kerpak is expanding its services to promote "at-home consumer food culture" by deploying various machines dispensing food in residential buildings and large complexes. The rollout is expected to continue in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) with several CPG brands and food technology companies considering Kerpak as part of their distribution landscape

As my interview with Vahan concluded, I couldn't help but express my admiration for his ability to identify a problem and pursue a solution.



TECH HUBS BEYOND YEREVAN

UNVEILING THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY CENTERS IN ARMENIAN REGIONS



**BELLA
HARUTYUNYAN**

GYUMRI TECHNOLOGY MANAGER AT
ENTERPRISE INCUBATOR FOUNDATION

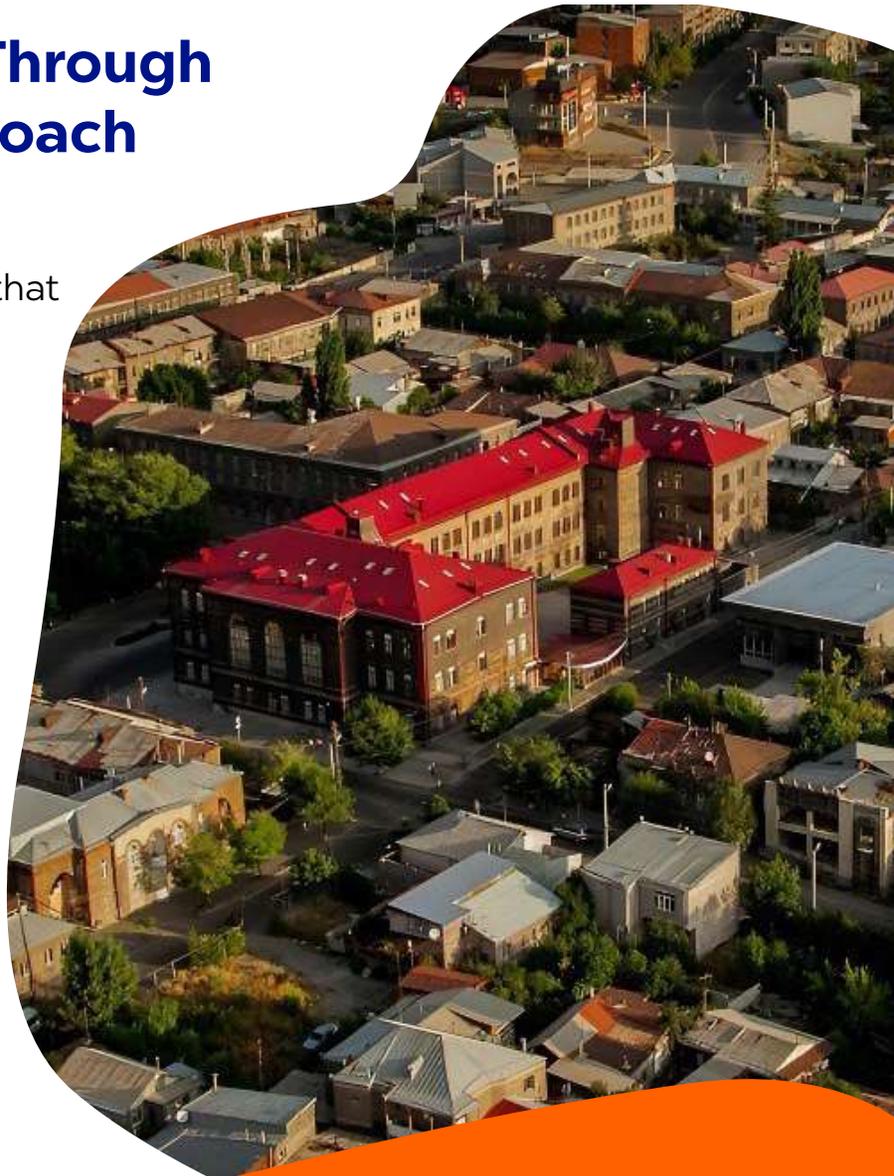
TECH HUBS BEYOND YEREVAN UNVEILING THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGY CENTERS IN ARMENIAN REGIONS

In the heart of Armenia's cultural and historic city, Gyumri lies a hub of innovation and creativity that is redefining the technological and cultural landscapes *not only of the region but of the nation at large*. The Gyumri Technology Center (GTC), established by the [Enterprise Incubator Foundation](#) (EIF) in 2014, represents the *first regional high-tech development model in Armenia* aimed at fostering a thriving ecosystem for tech innovation and artistic expression. For professionals around the globe contemplating a move to Armenia, Gyumri, especially those embracing remote work, GTC offers compelling *reasons to make this city their new home*.

Fostering Innovation Through Multidisciplinary Approach

At its core, GTC is built on the belief that innovation thrives at the intersection of *arts, science, engineering, and technology*. This multidisciplinary approach not only cultivates an environment for technological advancement but also fosters a unique cultural and creative ecosystem.

With over 30 high-tech startups and companies (from multinational companies operating their regional branches from Gyumri to small local IT and animation startups and studios), educational foundations, and NGOs under its roof, GTC serves as a vibrant community for artists, developers, engineers, and entrepreneurs.



The center's [commitment to inclusivity and diversity](#) is evident in its range of initiatives aimed at uniting individuals from various backgrounds. GTC has become a vital hub for generating impactful solutions and fostering

personal and professional growth. Its state-of-the-art facilities, including multimedia labs, co-working spaces, and a supportive community, provide an ideal environment for creativity and innovation.

Educational Impact and Community Engagement

Education and skill development are at the forefront of GTC's mission. In the past year alone, [more than 600 students participated in courses offered by EIF GTC](#), highlighting the center's role as a premier destination for learning and development. Programs such as the Vol2 Youth Initiative and collaborations with international organizations like USAID, UNICEF, and others have empowered young individuals, equipped them with essential skills, and engaged them in community development projects.

GTC [supports regional youth in entering the job market](#), from technical and soft skill training to addressing gender disparities in the game development industry by empowering young women through education and mentorship.

Adding to educational and developmental initiatives, GTC collaborates with the Depi Hayq Birthright program. This collaboration aims to engage the diaspora by providing them with community volunteering opportunities in Gyumri. Remarkably, these opportunities sometimes [inspire volunteers to relocate and establish their lives in Gyumri](#), further enriching the community with diverse perspectives and skills.



Expanding the Ecosystem Through Events and Incubation Programs

Beyond its educational endeavors, **GTC actively enhances its ecosystem** through a series of dynamic events, including large-scale conferences, masterclasses, and workshops. These gatherings are not just platforms for learning and networking but also serve as catalysts for innovation and collaboration.

GTC's support for startups and entrepreneurs extends into comprehensive incubation programs. These programs offer vital resources, mentorship, and the necessary support to transform visionary ideas into successful enterprises. By fostering an environment where startups can thrive, GTC is instrumental in driving the technological advancement and economic growth of Gyumri and Armenia at large.



Extending Reach and Fostering Innovation Beyond Gyumri

In a significant move to extend its reach and impact, GTC has established a replication of its Co-creation Lab within the Sisian Cultural Center after H. Sahyan in the Syunik region. This strategic expansion is designed to foster learning and innovation beyond Gyumri, connecting the local youth to businesses and job opportunities worldwide.

The establishment of the Co-creation Lab signifies GTC's commitment to nurturing talent and promoting technological advancement across Armenia, bridging the gap between remote regions and the global tech community.



This expansion into Syunig illustrates GTC's holistic approach to innovation, emphasizing the importance of accessible education and career opportunities for all Armenians. By creating a network of learning and innovation hubs throughout the country, GTC aims to empower a new generation of tech leaders and entrepreneurs ready to make their mark on the world stage.

A Cultural Renaissance Through Technology

GTC's ambition extends beyond technological innovation. It aims to transform Gyumri into the capital of Creative Technologies, merging technology with artistic approaches to rejuvenate the city's cultural scene. This vision is being realized through projects like the Black Box Hub supported by the Sensorial Xplorers Idea Contest, which challenges traditional perceptions and encourages interdisciplinary collaboration.



The Black Box Multidisciplinary Lab exemplifies **GTC's commitment to blending art, science, engineering, and technology**. This initiative seeks to address global challenges such as climate change, cultural heritage preservation, and mental health through innovative, immersive experiences and institutional cooperation with Engineering City, Matenadaran, Byurakan Observatory, and others.

Why Gyumri?

For professionals considering a move to Gyumri, the city offers a unique combination of cultural richness, technological innovation, and community engagement. GTC is at the forefront of this transformation, providing opportunities for career growth, personal development, and a chance to be part of a vibrant, multidisciplinary community.

The initiatives and projects spearheaded by GTC are a testament to its role as a catalyst for change, driving both regional and national development. As Gyumri emerges as a center for creative technologies, professionals from around the world have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from this exciting phase of growth.

In conclusion, the Gyumri Technology Center is more than just a hub for technological innovation;

it is a community that embraces the future while honoring its cultural heritage. It offers a unique proposition for those looking to integrate into a dynamic ecosystem where technology and arts converge to create a brighter, more inclusive future. Whether you're an artist, engineer, entrepreneur, or educator, Gyumri, with GTC at its heart, presents a compelling new chapter for those daring enough to be part of its renaissance.



INVESTIGATING BANKING PROCESSES IN ARMENIA

HOW EASY CAN YOU GET A CONSUMER LOAN IN ARMENIA COMPARED TO THE US?



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

CHIEF EDITOR OF LIFE IN ARMENIA



INVESTIGATING BANKING PROCESSES IN ARMENIA HOW EASY CAN YOU GET A CONSUMER LOAN IN ARMENIA COMPARED TO THE US?

Living in Armenia for the past seven years has been an eye-opening experience. Initially, my wife and I, like many newcomers, **felt like outsiders navigating daily life with workarounds**. But after deciding to make Armenia our long-term home away from home, we actively sought to integrate into the local way of life. This naturally led us to engage with the Armenian financial system.

One of the first essential steps for anyone settling into Armenian life is **opening a bank account, both personal and for business**, if applicable. Over the years, I've gained extensive experience with various banking processes here, including opening and closing accounts and utilizing various banking products through mobile apps.



Today's article **focuses specifically on consumer loan applications in Armenia** compared to the United States, a topic that can feel daunting to foreigners in Armenia but becomes much easier with a little guidance. The ability to obtain a consumer loan can be a lifesaver, helping you finance various personal expenses, from consolidating debt to renovating your home or making a big purchase. But how easy is the process, and how does it differ depending on your location?

My initial encounter with consumer loans in Armenia came when I wanted a year-long gym membership, costing nearly a thousand US dollars at the time. The gym conveniently offered to cover the entire cost with a consumer loan from InecoBank. **The process was incredibly streamlined**; I only signed a few documents on-site at the gym and secured the loan to join right away. Later, I became a regular InecoBank customer.



Factors Impacting Consumer Loans in Armenia and the US

Both Armenia and the US share some common ground when it comes to applying for consumer loans. In both countries, you can get loans for various purposes, and lenders typically require similar documentation for approval. This documentation usually includes identification proof, verification of your income, and, if available, your credit history.

One key difference between Armenia and the US consumer loan markets is interest rates. Generally, **some types of consumer loans in Armenia tend to carry higher interest rates** than loans in the US, which can significantly impact

It's important to emphasize that not all consumer loans in Armenia have higher interest rates than those in the US. It depends on several factors, such as the loan type, repayment terms, and the lender.

The US has **a well-established credit reporting system** maintained by bureaus like [Equifax](#), [Experian](#), and [TransUnion](#). This means lenders have a clear picture of your creditworthiness through credit scores. With a strong credit score and verifiable income, obtaining a loan can be a streamlined process.



Louis DeNicola

Personal Finance Writer

For a score with a range between 300 and 850, a credit score of 700 or above is generally considered good.”

the total cost of your loan. Additionally, the loan amounts you might qualify for in Armenia could be lower than what you'd find in the US. This difference often boils down to variations in income levels and creditworthiness assessment.



Additionally, fierce competition among lenders in the US market, estimated at around [4,100](#) regional and community banks and nearly [4,900](#) credit unions, **translates to a wider range of loan products.**

Interest rates for consumer loans in the US currently range between [6% and 36%](#), depending on creditworthiness, loan purpose, and lender. According to a study conducted by [Bankrate](#), US consumers are increasingly turning to personal loans for debt consolidation, attracted by the potential for lower interest rates than those offered by credit cards, with an average personal loan interest rate of 12.10% as of March 20, 2024.



Annie Millerbernd

Lead Writer and Spokesperson
at Nerdwallet

Lenders primarily use your financial and credit information to determine your rate, but may consider additional information like whether you own your home, your education level, and your employer.”

Armenia’s credit reporting system, established in 2007 with [ACRA Credit Bureau](#) as the primary bureau, is still developing compared to the US. This can make it **more challenging for first-time borrowers to establish a credit history** and secure a loan.



Armenia currently has around [17 commercial banks](#). The average interest rates for consumer loans in Armenia currently range between 12% and 20%, depending on creditworthiness, loan purpose, and lender. The higher interest rates in Armenia relate to the country’s overall financial system, including the cost of funds in national currency.

While both countries consider your credit history during the loan application process, it plays a more prominent role in the US. A strong credit history in the US can lead to better loan terms and interest rates. In Armenia, **credit history might be less crucial for approval**, but lenders will still consider it.

Another factor to consider is the loan term or the amount of time you have to repay the loan. Repayment terms for consumer loans in Armenia tend to be **shorter compared to those in the US**. Based on what I have seen, the average loan term for consumer loans in Armenia is around 36 months (3 years), with various consumer loan products ranging from 12 to 60 months (1 to 5 years). In the US, consumer loan terms can vary widely depending on the loan type and lender, but they often range from [24 months \(2 years\) to 84 months \(7 years\)](#) or even longer for specific products.

This difference in repayment terms can **significantly impact your monthly payments**.

Shorter loan terms in Armenia, while potentially reducing the overall interest paid, can lead to higher monthly payments compared to loans with longer terms in the US.

Since the internet doesn't provide comprehensive information about consumer loans in Armenia, unlike what you can find for the US, I decided to **share my personal experience**. Moreover, I visited **Armenia's largest digital lender**, InecoBank, to find out more about the topic from industry experts.

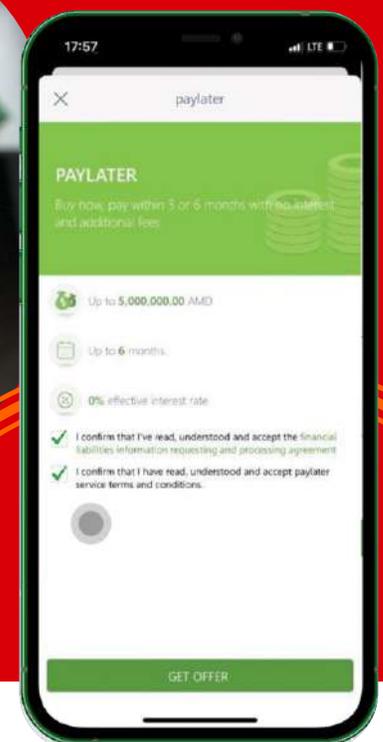


My Experience with Consumer Loans in Armenia

While I can't rate all bank experiences in Armenia, mine was a pretty good one. I've been a happy [InecoBank](#) customer for years. One thing I liked about the bank in general when I first joined was the simplicity of the process and the friendliness of the staff, a far cry from my experiences with some international banks outside Armenia.

Besides the aforementioned loan for the gym subscription, which I repaid over 12 months, I secured two additional personal loans via Ineco's mobile app. These loans have repayment terms of 4 years, with interest rates of 21.5% and 20%, respectively. While the interest rates are higher than those offered in the US, the ability to access these funds in 2 minutes using my mobile phone proved invaluable when faced with urgent financial needs.

Ineco's mobile app allows me to obtain a consumer loan of up to 10,000,000 AMD (around \$25,000) with a term of up to 48 months. **The entire process takes only a few minutes**, and the funds are deposited directly into my bank account. It's a very simple and straightforward process. Additionally, I have a PayLater (BNPL) limit, which allows me to make purchases using Ineco credit for up to 5,000,000 AMD (around \$12,500). I can repay this credit within 3-6 months with no interest or additional fees, resulting in a 0% effective interest rate.



Consumer Loans in Armenia's Banking Sector

I had a productive meeting with [Levon Rubinyan](#), Retail Banking Director, and [Grigor Baghdagulyan](#), Head of Digital Business Development at InecoBank, to discuss consumer loan processing and its digitalization efforts.

Before moving on, it's worth mentioning that InecoBank implements a locally developed loan-processing digital solution developed by [Highway](#), an Armenia-based fintech company.



Grigor Baghdagulyan



Levon Rubinyan



What were the key strategic considerations that led InecoBank to implement a locally developed digital solution for consumer loans instead of acquiring one from a foreign company?

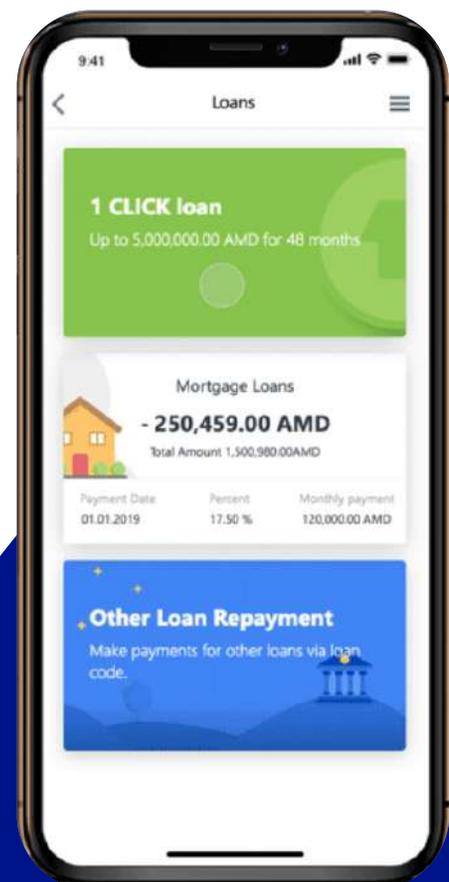
Our first digital loan platform was introduced in 2011, revolutionizing POS lending and boosting the Armenian retail consumer goods market. Today, Ineco is the largest digital lender in the country, which puts us under great responsibility toward our customers and the entire financial system in Armenia.

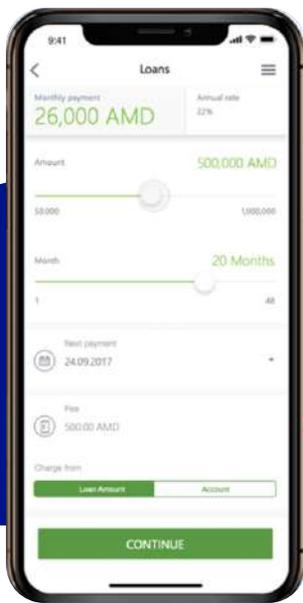
We have collaborated strongly with Highway, an Armenian fintech solution provider. Our bank implements several of Highway's products, including the digital loan processing system, which has **proven to be reliable and efficient**. This collaboration enables us to align closely with the specific market dynamics of our local environment, be agile in developing new features and customizable loan product flows, and reduce ongoing maintenance costs.

How has digital lending impacted the accessibility and reach of consumer loans in Armenia?

Since 2011, when we became the first bank in Armenia to offer **a fully automated lending process through our online systems**, customers have had access to loans 24/7. This innovation has eliminated the constraints of traditional banking hours, allowing individuals to apply for loans at their convenience, whether it's during the day, at night, or on weekends.

The simplified loan application process has made financial services more accessible to residents in Armenia, **including those with varying levels of digital literacy**. This has led to an expansion in the reach of consumer loans, which now reach segments of the population previously underserved by traditional banking channels.





In essence, our solutions democratized access to financial services in Armenia. Customers are now empowered to **address their borrowing needs efficiently**, conveniently, and from anywhere at any time.

Has InecoBank observed any notable changes in customer behavior or preferences since the introduction of digital lending platforms?

We have observed a clear shift towards digital banking since introducing its mobile app. This applies to both local Armenians and foreign residents living in the country with legal residence permits.

With the convenience of the InecoMobile app and other lending platforms (SprintOnline.am and POS lending solutions), more customers are opting to apply for loans and manage their finances online rather than visiting physical bank branches. Additionally, there has been a shift towards greater self-service among customers, with many preferring to **initiate and manage their loan applications independently** through the above-mentioned platforms.

After learning about Ineco's digital lending platform, I wanted to delve deeper into the technical aspects and explore how it compares to US lending platforms. This led me to [Highway](#), the above-mentioned Armenian fintech solutions provider. I interviewed the Founder/CEO, [Davit Baloyan](#), and the Co-founder/CPO, [Avetis Ovakimyan](#).

Speed, Security, and Simplicity

Highway's core objective was to empower banks to offer a completely new loan application experience. They envisioned a platform where customers can view all available loan options with pre-approved credit limits in one place. Firstly, my conversation started with Davit Baloyan, Highway's Founder/CEO.



Avetis Ovakimyan

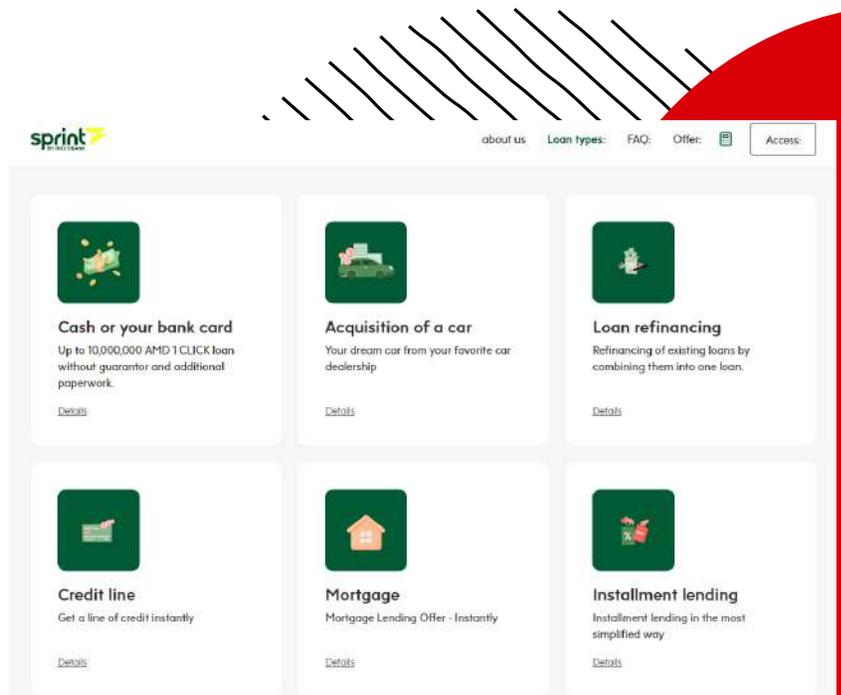


Davit Baloyan

What were the primary goals and considerations behind developing the digital lending platform that is now used by Inecobank's mobile app for consumer loans (Sprintonline)?

Highway is a product company. We build products and solutions to help banks on their digital transformation journey. Our primary goal at Highway in building a digital lending platform is to allow banks to offer a completely new approach, a new way of providing a customer experience to their clients.

Instead of going to banks and applying for different loans, our platform allows the client to see all loan options with already pre-approved credit limits on one platform, which allows them to plan their actions better and make more calculated decisions.



Currently, there are 4 different loan types available on Sprintonline.am (consumer loans, car loans, loan refinancing, and credit lines), with 2 of them (Credit line and loan refinancing) being the **first in their kind in Armenia and in our region** overall.

Did Highway primarily use international mobile banking apps, particularly those from the US, as inspiration for its app design and functionality?

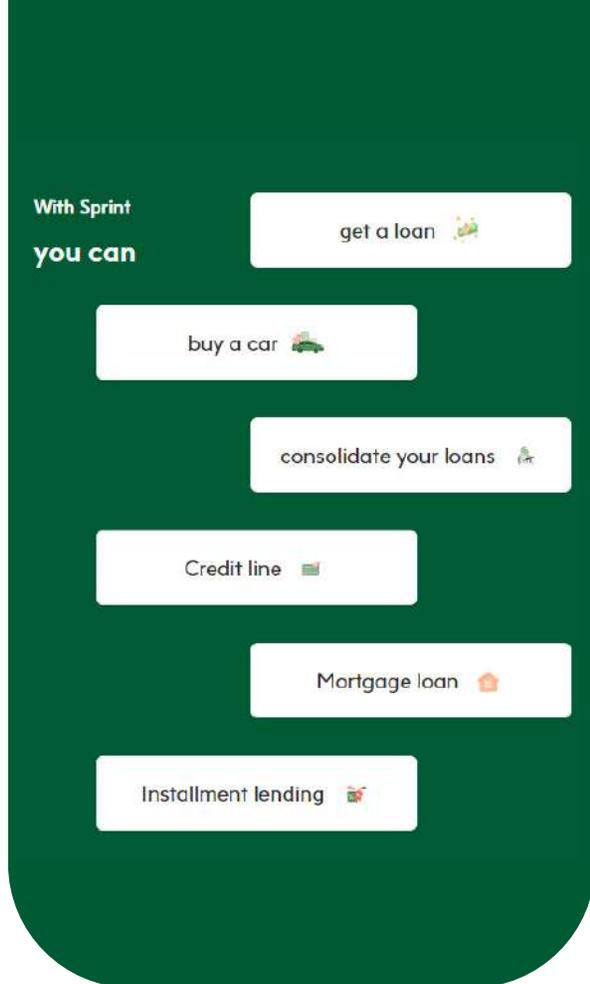
Currently, we have a team of 50 professionals (engineers, product managers, UI/UX designers, and quality assurance experts). All the credit goes to our team, who conducted a thorough research of the market, including the US market, before starting the actual development of our digital lending platform.

To our surprise we haven't found many examples of what we have built at Highway. Most banks offer only 1 type of consumer loan on their mobile apps, and usually, you need to be an already existing client of a bank to be able to apply for that loan. This is something we didn't want, and I can say that, in a way, we have built a unique product, and you can see the results today.

With Sprintonline.am, Inecobank can onboard any client using a very advanced KYC solution, and the client can see available loans right after completing his/her onboarding. This saves a tremendous amount of time both for the bank and for their clients and hugely increases customer satisfaction

HIGHWAY
YOUR WAY TO BANKING





What unique challenges did you face while developing a user-friendly mobile loan application for the Armenian market, which has diverse users from Armenia and abroad?

Obviously, there are many challenges when you are building a completely new product with a new concept from scratch. One of the challenges that I personally had was to **keep believing that this concept would eventually work** because it had not been tested before, and as I mentioned earlier, we hadn't found many examples like our product in the market.

To what extent did your team conduct research into existing mobile loan applications to understand local and international user preferences and regulatory requirements?

One thing we discovered during our research phase was that **clients were using different apps for different loan types**. This was especially the case in the US market, where many fintechs offer just 1 niche loan product, such as Klarna with its BNPL offering, Affirm with its consumer loans, or Sunbit, which offers loans for car repair services.

We thought that there was no reason why a client shouldn't be able to **have all these loans in one place** and see how much of a loan he/she could use for each purpose.

On the regulatory part, we know that each market has its own set of regulations and rules that must be considered. However, in most markets, the difference between regulations is not very significant, and our approach here has been to build the platform so that it is **agnostic to local rules and regulations**. This means that you can easily configure and make changes to the platform to comply with any local regulation.

So I had to literally wait a year and a half to see Sprintonline.am go live and perform until I was completely sure that we were on the right track. But of course, the team also faced other challenges during the work. One of them was the lack of APIs that would provide the necessary data about the clients.

Luckily for us there is a really professional IT team on the bank's side as well (Inecobank) who was able to **produce all necessary APIs**, which enabled our digital lending platform to go live. I think this is not a unique challenge for Armenia and Armenian banks. The concept of open banking and embedded finance is gaining pace nowadays, which means that more and more bank services will need to be accessed from outside, and having the right API infrastructure is going to be a crucial enabler here.



Many professionals and remote workers from the US who are considering an extended stay in Armenia **express concerns about the financial and banking system**. For that reason, I moved to more technical questions about the development of the digital lending platform, and for that, I talked to Avetis Hovakimyan, Highway's CPO.

How does Highway ensure the scalability and reliability of the mobile app platform for handling loan applications efficiently?

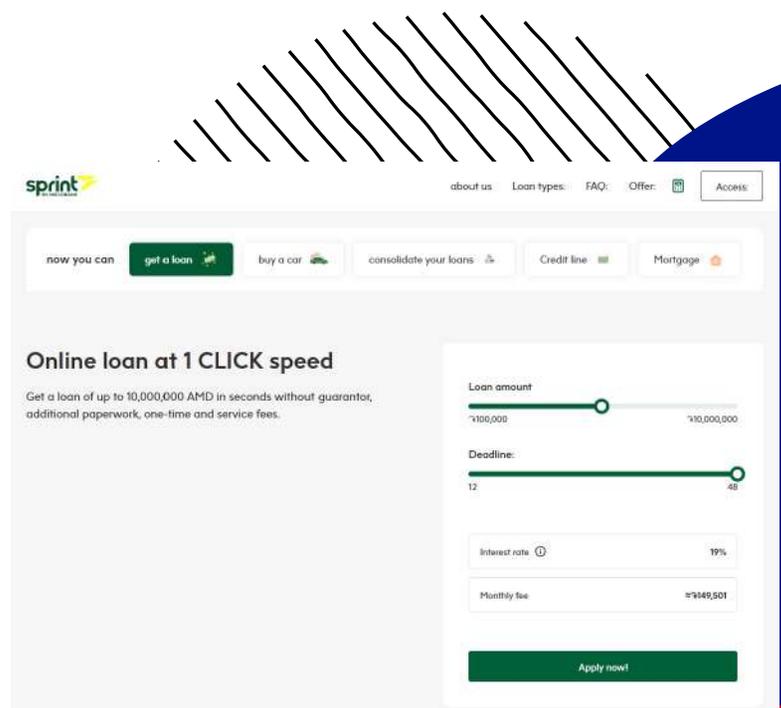
Mobile app relies on a composable and modular architecture that ensures scalability and reliability. The system's capacity is determined by the core system's limitations that provide the data and perform the transactions themselves.

Highway has also provided improvements for slow legacy systems with **advanced caching mechanisms and a dedicated Datawarehouse**. Our integration with core banking uses our proprietary No-code platform that allows instant changes to business processes and swift deployment. The systems have undergone rigorous testing, demonstrating performance levels that are higher compared to the current load seen in Ineco.

How did Highway prioritize user experience and accessibility when developing the Ineco mobile app for loan applications?

Loan applications in our App are seamlessly integrated with the Digital Lending platform, where the user can directly access to **6 (2 new upcoming included) loan offers in one place**. It is an unprecedented customer experience to have access to such loans as credit lines and even refinancing in one place.

In such a competitive market like Armenia, the **speed of disbursement and overall customer journey** are the #1 priorities for the customer, and the numbers show that we have nailed them.



The screenshot shows the Sprint mobile app interface for loan applications. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the Sprint logo and links for 'about us', 'Loan types', 'FAQ', 'Offer', and 'Access'. Below the navigation bar, there is a section titled 'now you can' with buttons for 'get a loan', 'buy a car', 'consolidate your loans', 'Credit line', and 'Mortgage'. The main content area features a prominent heading 'Online loan at 1 CLICK speed' and a sub-heading 'Get a loan of up to 10,000,000 AMD in seconds without guarantor, additional paperwork, one-time and service fees.' To the right, there is a form with a 'Loan amount' slider set to 100,000,000, a 'Deadline' slider set to 12, an 'Interest rate' field showing 19%, and a 'Monthly fee' field showing 2949,501. A green 'Apply now!' button is at the bottom of the form.

What measures does Highway have in place to protect users from potential fraud or security breaches, given the sensitive nature of financial transactions through the mobile app?

We have approached this question from different perspectives to ensure 360-degree security for our users. Firstly, **the architecture uses modern authentication and authorization systems** that comply with the latest standards. Secondly, regarding the

human factor/fraud, our multi-factor authentication system allows new device logins only after a multistage process that starts with simple phone verification and facial recognition that uses AI to ensure that it's the real client in front of the device.

Did Highway employ a user-centered design (UCD) approach throughout the development process, involving Armenian and international users from InecoBank client base testing and feedback sessions?

Highway product and design teams worked effortlessly on gathering feedback from current app users and explored the areas of improvement during face-to-face customer interviews. The team hasn't stopped there, and we have **partnered with a UX research company** to ensure that our clients get the most modern and intuitive design for their daily routines.

Currently, the app undergoes internal testing and a usability feedback collection process. Thanks to our solution architecture, the changes have been implemented swiftly and presented to our users.

In conclusion, Armenia's consumer loan market might not offer the low interest rates for some types of loans and vast loan amounts found in the US. However, Armenia makes up for this with **a user-friendly and streamlined loan application process.**

In Armenia, borrowers can enjoy a streamlined application process, with features like quick loan approval and 24/7 access. This ease and speed can be very attractive, **especially for borrowers with limited credit history or facing urgent financial needs.** Even though interest rates might be higher in Armenia, the convenience of the digital banking system can make obtaining a loan a much smoother experience.

CULTIVATING HOPE

THE SARI-SAFRAN PROJECT EMPOWERING WOMEN IN SARIGYUGH, ARMENIA



**ANUSH
AMIRKHANIAN**

CO-FOUNDER OF SARI GROUP
ARMENIA



CULTIVATING HOPE THE SARI-SAFRAN PROJECT EMPOWERING WOMEN IN SARIGYUGH, ARMENIA

In the rugged, mountainous terrain of the Tavush region in Armenia lies the village of Sarigyugh. Nestled close to the border, Sarigyugh has long been a place marked by its resilience amidst adversity. Despite the backdrop of conflict and economic challenges, the Sari-Safran project was a venture that not only brought economic opportunities but also **empowered the women of Sarigyugh.**



Entrepreneurship, Family, and Homecoming

The story of Sari-Safran traces its roots back to 1997 when I, Anush Amirkhanian, an Armenian macroeconomist, crossed paths with Urs, a Swiss photographer, in the bustling streets of Moscow. Little did we know that this chance encounter would sow the seeds of a remarkable journey. Driven by a shared passion for entrepreneurship and a desire to make a difference, we embarked on a mission to create something meaningful together.

As our professional partnership blossomed, so did our relationship. In addition to becoming business partners, we embarked on the journey of building a family, blessed with the arrival of two children.

Despite our success and prosperity in Moscow, both of us felt a profound connection to Armenia, my birthplace. It was this deep-rooted love for our homeland that ultimately led us to make a life-changing decision.

In 2006, we made the bold choice to establish roots in Armenia, choosing Sarigyugh as our home. Despite its proximity to the border and the looming threat of conflict, Sarigyugh held a special place in our hearts. Determined to contribute to the prosperity of our adopted village, we envisioned a project that would not only create economic opportunities but also **empower the local community**, particularly the women.

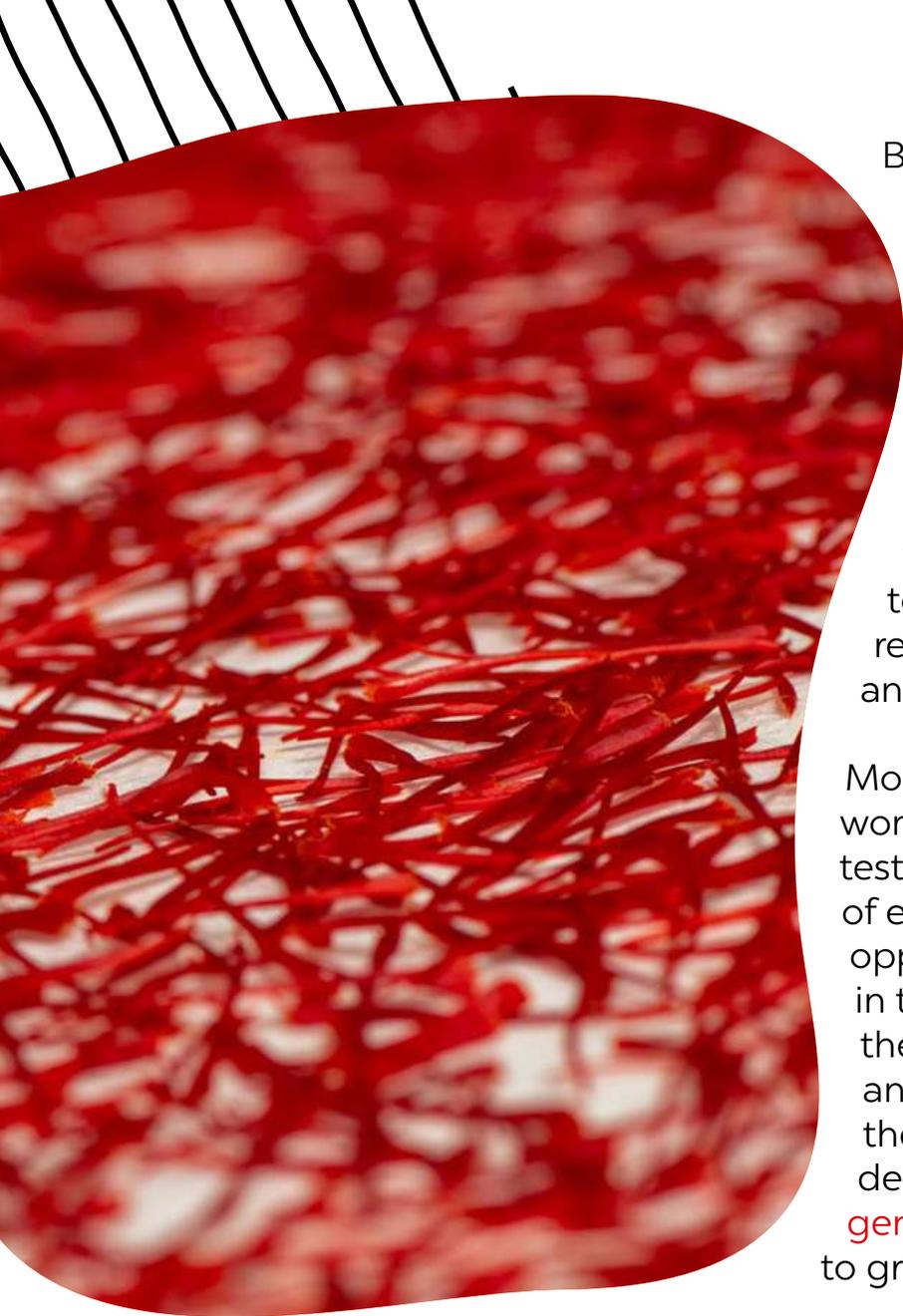
Empowering Women, Transforming Communities

Thus, the Sari-Safran project was born. **Harnessing the fertile soil and favourable climate of Sarigyugh**, we embarked on the cultivation of saffron, a prized spice with a rich history dating back centuries. However, our vision extended beyond mere agricultural pursuits. Recognizing the **potential to create sustainable employment opportunities**, we prioritized the involvement of women in every aspect of the project.

In a region where traditional gender roles often confined women to domestic spheres, the Sari-Safran project offered a newfound sense of agency and empowerment. Through training programs and skill development initiatives, women in Sarigyugh were equipped with the knowledge and resources needed to **actively participate in saffron cultivation, harvesting, and processing**.

For many of these women, the opportunity to work alongside Anush and learn the intricacies of saffron cultivation represents more than just a job; it's a pathway to empowerment and self-reliance. Under my guidance, they are not only mastering the art of saffron production but also gaining valuable skills and knowledge that will serve them well into the future.





Saffron filaments

Beyond economic benefits, the project fosters a sense of community pride and cohesion. As the vibrant purple blooms of saffron dot the landscape, they symbolize more than just a spice; they embody the resilience and determination of the people of Sarigyugh. Each harvest season, the entire village comes together to celebrate the fruits of their labour, reinforcing the bonds of camaraderie and solidarity.

Moreover, the involvement of local women in the production process is a testament to the transformative power of entrepreneurship. By providing opportunities for women to participate in traditionally male-dominated fields, the project challenges gender norms and promotes gender equality. As these women break barriers and defy expectations, they **inspire future generations to dream big** and aspire to greatness.

More Than a Spice

Despite its reputation as the most expensive spice in the world, saffron's allure extends far beyond its culinary applications. With origins dating back thousands of years, saffron has left an indelible mark on human history. From the Sumerians to the Persians, from Alexander the Great to Cleopatra, saffron has captivated civilizations with its multifaceted allure.

Furthermore, saffron's reputation as an aphrodisiac is well-documented, while its ability to regulate circulation and promote cardiovascular health underscores its medicinal value. From alleviating pre-menstrual pain to preserving memory, saffron's therapeutic potential knows no bounds.

In the face of skepticism, the Sari-Safran project bloomed in Armenia's Tavush province. We, however, were true believers, and there, amidst the saffron fields, **we discovered our life's calling**. Today, Sari-Safran offers a vibrant range of Armenian-made products, all featuring our very own Sari-Safran saffron. We've cultivated a loyal following, selling both locally and internationally through various channels, including our convenient [online shop](#).

Armenia's reputation as a tech hub is well-deserved, but its potential extends far beyond that. **Innovation thrives in diverse fields, not just on laptop screens**. From agricultural projects to social ventures, Armenia remains a land of opportunity waiting to be explored by entrepreneurs from all walks of life. The rewards are plentiful if you're willing to invest your skills and effort.

As the hills of Sarigyugh continue to bloom with the vibrant hues of saffron, they bear witness to the enduring legacy of this ancient spice and the untold possibilities it holds for the future. The Sari-Safran project serves as a shining example of what can be achieved when **passion, determination, and a commitment to social impact** converge.

Crocuses family



VISIT ARMENIA IN 2024

ARMENIAN RESIDENCE PERMITS FOR SOLOPRENEURS AND ENTREPRENEURS



**NERSES
ISAJANYAN**

CO-FOUNDER OF VARDANYAN &
PARTNERS LAW FIRM



VISIT ARMENIA IN 2024

ARMENIAN RESIDENCE PERMITS FOR SOLOPRENEURS AND ENTREPRENEURS

Armenia welcomes entrepreneurs and solopreneurs with a fairly straightforward process for obtaining residence permits. As long as you're self-employed and willing to register as a sole proprietor (think of it as a one-person business), you're eligible. The best part? Your work can be entirely international—you don't need to have Armenian clients or be involved in the local economy. Furthermore, the Armenian residency permit program [allows international residents to work with local clients](#) without the usual restrictions found in many other countries.

Armenia offers a [residency program that significantly benefits foreigners](#). Residents enjoy most citizen rights, including healthcare, education, and property ownership, but they do not have voting rights or military service obligations. The fundamental [freedoms of speech, religion, and privacy](#) are also well-protected.

One of the biggest advantages is the flexibility. Armenia doesn't require residents to spend a minimum amount of time in the country, and the application process is known for its speed and ease. This makes it possible to [obtain and maintain residency remotely](#).

Residency in Armenia is more than just a status; it can be a valuable tool. It [opens doors to banking services and investment opportunities](#) within the country.

In our previous articles for Life in Armenia, we've discussed the steps to obtaining a residency permit in detail. We also keep our website, [Armenian Lawyer](#), updated with the necessary documents and the steps you need to take.



Now, let's talk taxes. Armenia offers attractive tax rates, with the burden depending on your income. Many freelancers opt for the "turnover tax," a [simple 5% tax on your reported income](#). Furthermore, if your business falls under the "microbusiness" category, such as online education, you could pay zero taxes on income up to \$60,000 annually.



- Here's an example to break it down. Imagine you're an online educator. Under the "microbusiness" scheme, you'd enjoy tax-free income up to \$60,000 and wouldn't owe any social security contributions. However, a small monthly military stamp duty (between \$4 and \$25) would apply after you get your residency permit.
- On the other hand, if you're a business consultant (not considered a "microbusiness"), you'd pay a 5% turnover tax. Earning a monthly income of \$1,000 from consulting translates to a \$50 turnover tax. There's also a flat \$13 income tax fee. After your residency permit arrives, expect a flat social security contribution of \$13 and a \$5 monthly military stamp duty, bringing your total monthly tax bill to a very manageable \$81.

So, if you're seeking a beautiful, welcoming country with a thriving digital nomad scene and hassle-free residency options, [Armenia might just be your perfect remote work destination](#).

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CATCHING A MARLIN

FINDING HEARTFELT HOMES FOR SENIOR PROFESSIONALS IN ARMENIA



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

INTERVIEWING



**TATEV
BLBULYAN**

CEO OF MEETAL



CATCHING A MARLIN FINDING HEARTFELT HOMES FOR SENIOR PROFESSIONALS IN ARMENIA

In fishing, there's a world of difference between catching a small fish passively drifting downstream and landing a prized marlin. The first requires minimal effort, the latter, meticulous preparation and skilled action. Recruiting top talent follows the same principle.

Many recruiters rely on the readily available "local pond" of candidates. This can be effective for some roles, but when seeking senior leadership with a global perspective, the search needs to expand to the vast "ocean" of international talent. Envision a skilled angler casting their line from a riverbank, aiming to attract fish from the boundless sea beyond.



Connecting the Dots

Attracting global talent to senior positions in Armenia presents a unique challenge. Why would an established American or European professional leave their familiar surroundings for a country they might not know? The answer is multifaceted, and for the strategically minded, the **potential rewards can outweigh the initial adjustments.**

As the editor-in-chief of a magazine dedicated to attracting remote working professionals to Armenia, I'm constantly seeking compelling narratives that showcase the country's unique appeal. These stories serve as powerful testimonials for others considering a life-changing relocation.

A fascinating trend emerged through my research: some senior tech leadership positions in Armenia are filled by international experts. This influx of talent, often from the US and EU, suggests a compelling draw—**Armenia offers a lifestyle that resonates with these professionals.**

Influenced by this trend, my research led me down a path that ultimately crossed with Tatev Blbulyan, co-founder of Meettal. Her remarkable track record – **attracting over 100 international professionals** to senior tech positions in Armenia – instantly piqued my interest. A two-hour meeting ensued, filled with insightful conversations with Tatev and her team.

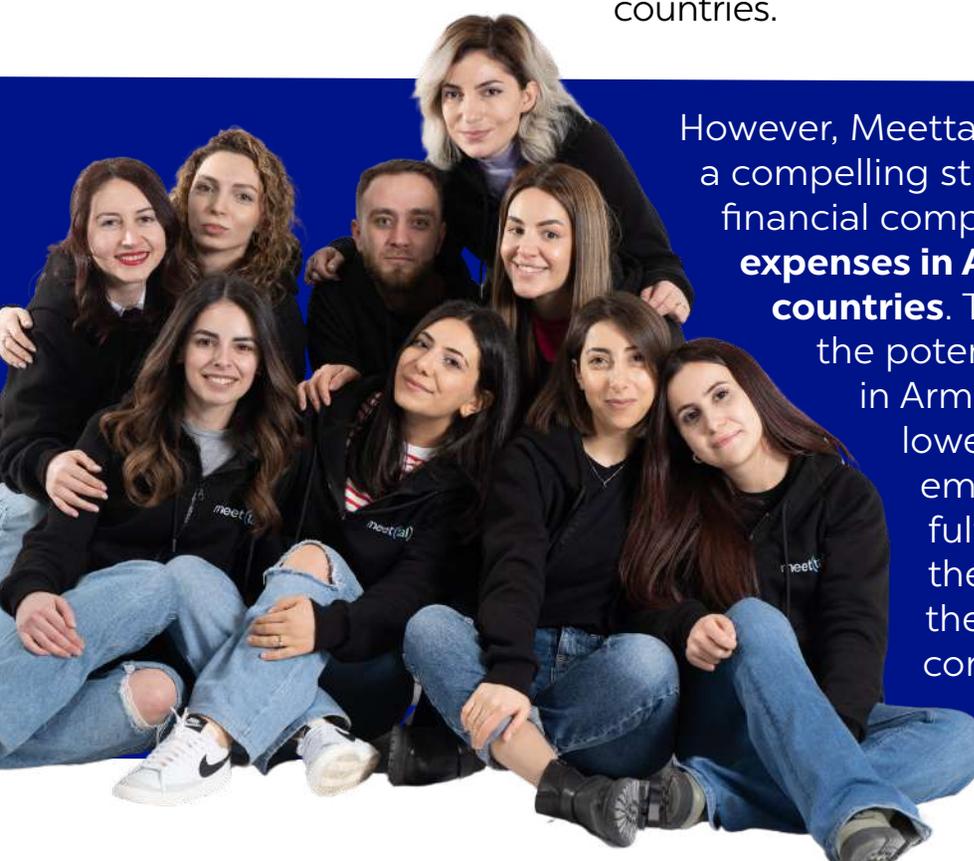
How is Tatev Blbulyan attracting such high-caliber talent – **the “marlins” of the tech world** – to Armenia?

Selling Armenia’s Lifestyle to Global Talent

Meettal is a Yerevan-based recruiting agency co-founded by Tatev Blbulyan, Narek Aslikyan, and Ach Petrosyan. It has a team of 10 recruiters and over 100+ partners worldwide. While many agencies facilitate talent movement, Meettal focuses on **attracting international talent to Armenia** and empowering Armenians within their homeland.

“**Our mission is twofold**,” Tatev explains. “We bring skilled professionals from abroad to fill senior positions in Armenian companies. Simultaneously, we connect Armenian talent with exciting opportunities, either remotely or within Armenian offices. We firmly believe in fostering Armenia’s tech sector by enriching it with international expertise while retaining and nurturing Armenian talent.”

According to Tatev, attracting senior talent presents a unique challenge. These professionals often lead comfortable lives with established careers. Relocating, particularly to a nation they might not be familiar with, rarely enters their equation. Further complicating things, **Armenian salaries may not match what they’re accustomed to** in their home countries.



However, Meettal counters this challenge with a compelling strategy. They present a detailed financial comparison – **income versus living expenses in Armenia compared to other countries**. This approach highlights the potential for a superior lifestyle in Armenia despite potentially lower salaries. Ultimately, Tatev emphasizes, the allure of a fulfilling life in Armenia becomes the tipping point, prompting these professionals to seriously consider relocation.

While Armenia may not have the sheer size and international presence of other tech hubs, it offers a distinct lifestyle quality unmatched elsewhere. This unique charm can often prove persuasive, enticing established professionals to step outside their comfort zones and discover a new home away from home in Armenia. Tatev highlighted this crucial factor during our discussion.

Nurturing Armenia's Tech Talent Ecosystem

Recognizing the above, Tatev, at Meettal, focuses her work on two key observations: first, Armenian companies are increasingly **scaling up and require specific global expertise**. Second, relocated professionals consistently report satisfaction with their Armenian employers. Meettal reinforces this positive experience by following up with candidates for years after placement, ensuring their happiness.

However, despite the allure of Armenia, attracting these talents isn't a simple feat. Tatev emphasizes the dedication required, with her team sending **countless emails and undertaking extensive outreach efforts** over months to secure a single candidate.

Beyond attracting international talent, Tatev also shed light on the thriving Armenian tech community. Her experience at Meettal revealed how they've successfully placed hundreds of local professionals with Armenian companies and remote international firms. This not only underscores the growing pool of Armenian talent but also suggests **a welcoming environment for incoming professionals**. They'll find a community of like-minded individuals, fostering a sense of belonging.



As Armenia continues to establish itself as a hub for innovation, attracting these top-tier professionals becomes even more crucial. By showcasing the country's unique lifestyle and the exciting opportunities within its tech companies, Meettal is playing a pivotal role in luring these “marlins”. Each successful hire isn't just a win for the company involved; it's a **significant contribution to Armenia's growing tech sector.**

These “marlins” bring not only their expertise but also lots of experience and global perspectives, enriching the local talent pool and fostering a vibrant professional community.

Huge credit goes to my friend [Alfred Yeranossian](#), a Project Director at Newsweek | Investment Reports. I recognized Alfred's prior connection with Tatev, so I reached out. Despite his busy schedule, he facilitated the meeting between Meettal's team and me.



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THE GITUZH INITIATIVE

PIONEERING THE REVIVAL OF ARMENIAN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY



**LILIT
MARGARYAN**

OPERATIONS DIRECTOR OF GITUZH

THE GITUZH INITIATIVE PIONEERING THE REVIVAL OF ARMENIAN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Gituzh Initiative is a response to the urgent need for Armenia's revitalization through science and innovation following the 44-day war. It represents a nationwide shift towards **prioritizing scientific and technological development** as essential for the country's future security and prosperity. This initiative is a strategic call to action to use science and technology not just for solving immediate issues but as essential elements for long-term national stability and growth.

Gituzh demonstrates a firm belief that the country's success and well-being are closely tied to its **commitment to fostering a strong culture of innovation and research** tailored to meet national objectives.

The initiative's advocacy efforts began in earnest in early 2021, with a bold demand for a 50% increase in state funding for research and development (R&D) activities by the year's end. The vision extended beyond this immediate goal, setting sights on **a gradual increase in budget allocations** to at least 4% of the GDP by 2024.



Science and Tech
Journalism Bootcamp 2022

This strategic push aimed at enhancing Armenia's scientific ecosystem was met with widespread support, garnering backing from more than 180 company founders, entrepreneurs, and 22 associations and foundations. This collective endorsement underscored the broad recognition of Gituzh's objectives and the shared ambition to propel Armenia toward a future underpinned by scientific excellence and technological innovation. And the community is continuously expanding.

The Gituzh Initiative's persistent advocacy work has led to a noticeable change in the government's approach to financing science and R&D. In 2021 and 2022; there was a significant rise in funding for science and R&D, alongside a promise to maintain this growth in future years.

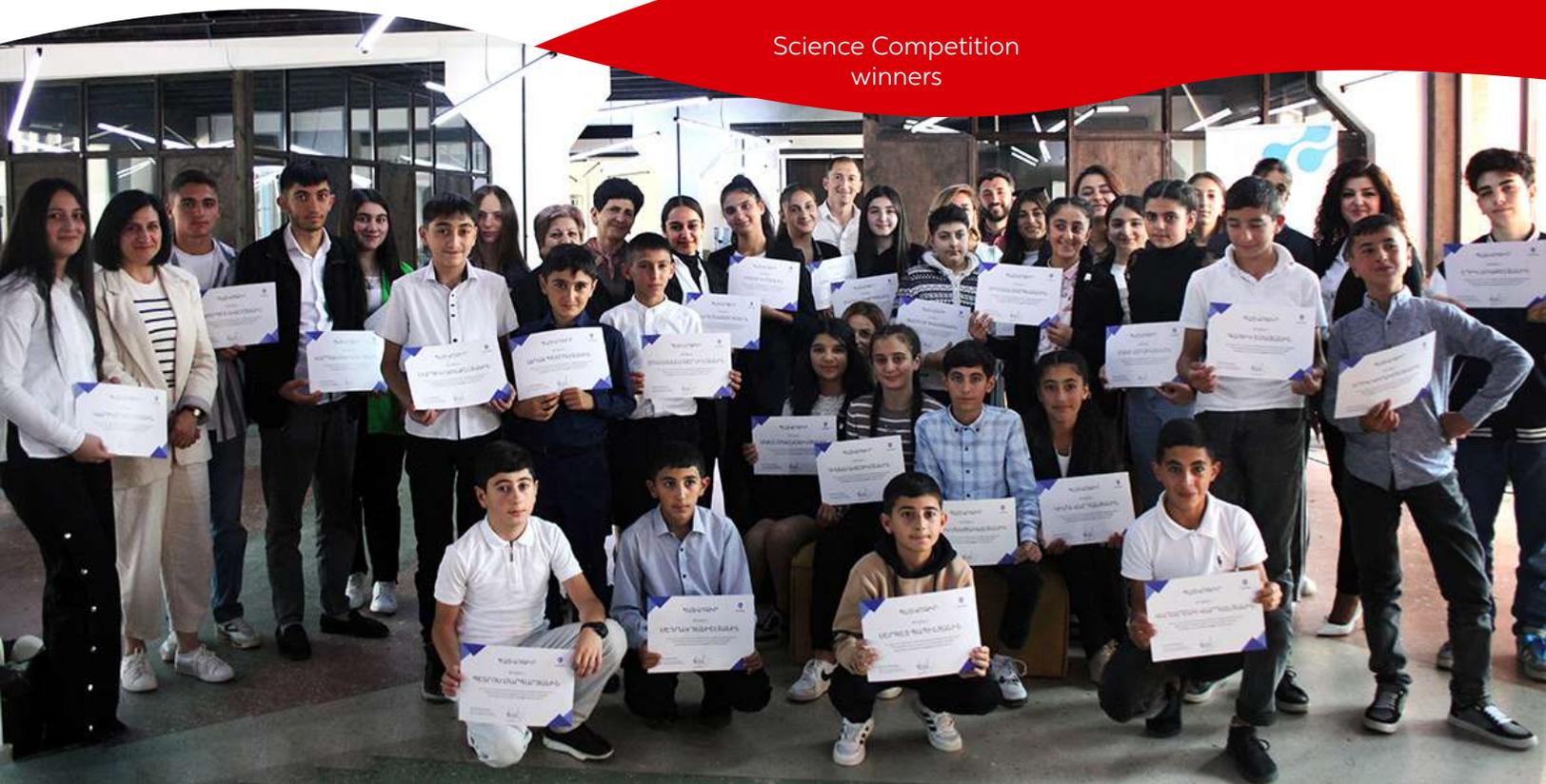
Despite these increases, the government primarily allocated the budget towards basic research rather than focusing on applied research

and development. This indicates that the government has not fully addressed the key issues highlighted by the Gituzh Initiative. Specifically, there's a gap in recognizing the need for a comprehensive and strategic approach to building a national research and innovation system capable of meeting Armenia's security and developmental objectives.

The Gituzh Conference, held in 2023, brought together a diverse

group of stakeholders, including policymakers, scientists, entrepreneurs, and thought leaders from both Armenia and the international community, to discuss the future of science, technology, and innovation in Armenia. The event was designed to showcase the progress made since the initiative's inception, explore challenges that still lie ahead, and identify strategies for fostering a more robust national research and innovation ecosystem.

Science Competition winners



Fostering Engagement and Communication

A key goal of the Gituzh Initiative is to enhance science communication. Gituzh collaborates with the media to boost the coverage of science-related topics. Through partnerships with organizations like the ISTC Foundation and Yerevan State University, it has facilitated the creation of “Science and Technology Journalism” bootcamps. These initiatives are designed to nurture a new generation of journalists equipped to cover the complexities and nuances of science and technology, ensuring that the R&D policy-making, achievements, and scientists’ work in Armenia are communicated effectively to the wider public.

Alongside fostering greater media coverage of scientific topics, Gituzh has established the “Covering Science” in collaboration with the Media Initiative Center. This award recognizes and encourages exemplary journalism covering science.



Gituzh Panel Discussion on R&D

Envisioning a Science-Centric Future

This year, the Gituzh Initiative envisions establishing an annual “Science Week,” a proposal that has received the endorsement of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture, and Sports and the Science Committee. Planned for October 1-7, this event aims to celebrate the pivotal role of science and technology in society, **inspire the younger generation**, and promote a culture of critical thinking and knowledge-based discourse across the nation.



Gituzh at Digitech-2023



Gituzh Volunteers

As Armenia continues on its path of rebuilding and reimagining its future, the Gituzh Initiative remains a symbol of the transformative power of collective action and innovation. The people consolidated around the Gituzh agenda are firmly convinced that establishing a foundation for enduring national security, wealth, and sovereignty requires the development of robust R&D capabilities and an innovative ecosystem capable of achieving these objectives.

REMOTE WORK REDEFINED

WHY REMOTE PROFESSIONALS SHOULD CHOOSE TO WORK FROM ARMENIA?



**SIRAPI
SAHAKYAN**

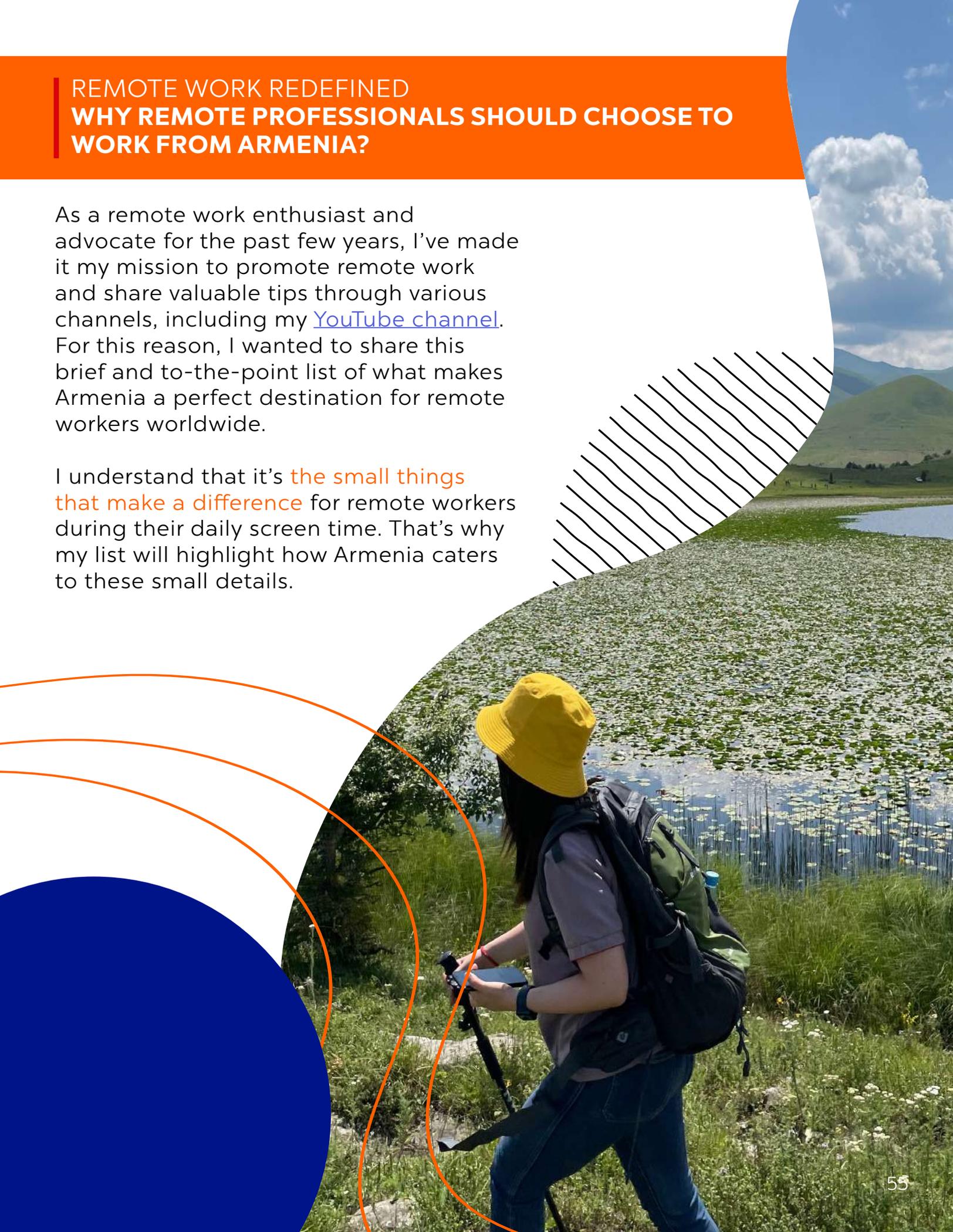
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING



REMOTE WORK REDEFINED WHY REMOTE PROFESSIONALS SHOULD CHOOSE TO WORK FROM ARMENIA?

As a remote work enthusiast and advocate for the past few years, I've made it my mission to promote remote work and share valuable tips through various channels, including my [YouTube channel](#). For this reason, I wanted to share this brief and to-the-point list of what makes Armenia a perfect destination for remote workers worldwide.

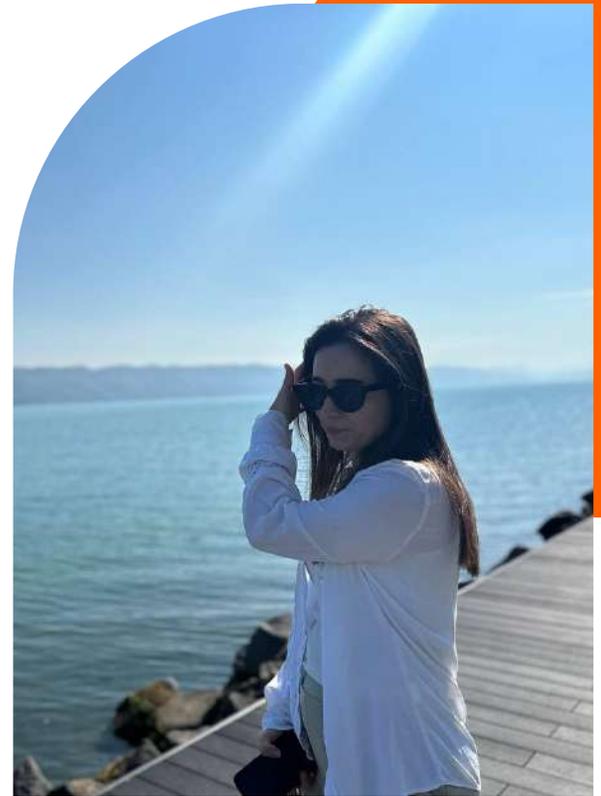
I understand that it's **the small things that make a difference** for remote workers during their daily screen time. That's why my list will highlight how Armenia caters to these small details.



Social Coworking Experience

The Armenian coworking scene offers more than just a desk and internet access. **It's about fostering a sense of community.** Forget renting a space; you're joining a vibrant network. Sure, these locations are fully equipped, but it's the people who truly elevate the experience. Here, you'll work alongside like-minded individuals who could become your next hiking partners or fellow food enthusiasts.

Armenia has many cafes specifically **designed for remote workers and freelancers.** You can enjoy the city while you work, grabbing food or coffee throughout the day. I personally recommend [Achajour](#), a cafe with delicious food, high-quality coffee, and an atmosphere that ignites productivity.



Engaging Repatriate Community

Far from feeling disconnected, moving to Armenia can be the opposite: **a chance to connect with a vibrant community** of foreigners who've shared the journey of adapting to a new life in this country.

You're likely to find a **welcoming community of repatriates and expatriates** who organize social events like board game nights and Friday outings. Armenia's repatriate community is flourishing, becoming a vibrant **melting pot of ideas, languages, and cultures.**

Groups like "Polyglots Armenia" on Telegram are a prime example. These groups extend beyond language exchange, fostering connections through board games, outings, and more. **Joining such a community eases the transition to a new country,** making it a smoother and more enjoyable experience.

Streamlined Business Setup for Entrepreneurs

Attracted by Armenia's streamlined business setup process and **favourable tax regulations**, many international entrepreneurs have chosen Armenia to launch their companies.

Armenia offers entrepreneurs a dream come true: **a streamlined business setup process**. In fact, you can register your business in under 10 minutes! While there may be some minor hurdles, Armenia's ease of doing business far outweighs them compared to other locations.



The Sense of Security

Working from cafes in Armenia allows for uninterrupted productivity. Unlike some places, you won't need to constantly worry about your belongings when nature calls. This **sense of security fosters a peaceful mind**, essential for laser focus on your work. It's a small detail that makes a big difference in the overall experience.

Hospitality Enriches Remote Stays

Armenians are renowned for their warmth and welcoming spirit. Remote work in Armenia doesn't have to be isolating, **especially outside the capital city**. Don't be surprised if a new acquaintance extends an invitation for a delicious feast – it's these **unexpected cultural experiences** that enrich your remote work journey far beyond the professional realm.



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OPPORTUNITIES IN ARMENIAN STARTUPS

A CLOSER LOOK AT ARMENIA'S INVESTMENT-WORTHY STARTUP VENTURES



**MATHEW
ZEIN**

EDITOR IN CHIEF

INTERVIEWING



**SONA
VEZIRYAN**

DIRECTOR OF BANA ANGELS



OPPORTUNITIES IN ARMENIAN STARTUPS A CLOSER LOOK AT ARMENIA'S INVESTMENT- WORTHY STARTUP VENTURES

Armenia's startup ecosystem is on the rise. While it's young and carries inherent risks like any emerging market, it offers a unique and compelling proposition for **investors seeking high-growth potential** with a measured approach.

To gain comprehensive insight into the investment opportunities within Armenian startups, I recently conducted a two-hour interview with Sona Veziryan, Director of Bana Angels. Our discussion explored the specifics of the Armenian startup ecosystem. This article may be particularly valuable for **international investors seeking emerging markets** with high-growth potential. To begin, here's.

1. Untapped Tech Talent

Armenia possesses a highly skilled and tech-savvy workforce compared to its regional average. This talent pool has **attracted many international tech giants** to establish branches in Armenia, recognizing the strength of the workforce.

Take Synopsys, for example. It has the largest engineering office outside the US in Armenia. Likewise, Cisco, National Instruments, NVIDIA, Adobe, Broadcom, EPAM and Siemens have all established a presence in the country. These international tech companies have evidently found value in Armenia, and **the number of such companies is increasing**, indicating the success of this approach.

2. Reasonable Valuations

Armenia's developing startup ecosystem presents an opportunity for international investors. **Valuations are still pretty reasonable** and may be attractive compared to more established markets, potentially offering higher returns if the chosen startups succeed.

Early investment in Armenian startups presents a compelling opportunity. Think of Ukraine's booming tech scene a decade ago. Armenia is at a similar tipping point. Early investors stand to gain significant benefits as the ecosystem matures and explodes onto the global stage, suggesting that **valuations are likely to rise in the coming years**.



3. Global Products

Armenia has a proven track record of nurturing successful startups that have **scaled to become global players**. This trend showcases the ecosystem's ability to produce high-growth ventures.

Armenian startups often target a global market from the outset, unlike startups in larger countries with established domestic markets. Armenia's relatively small population incentivizes this global focus, as success hinges on reaching international customers. Furthermore, the Armenian startup ecosystem benefits from **strong connections to Silicon Valley** and other global tech hubs.

4. Investor-Friendly Ecosystem

Armenia fosters a startup environment that prioritizes international exposure and collaboration. This investor-friendly ecosystem allows you to start your investment journey with as little as \$5,000-\$10,000, a perfect way to test the waters. The size and accessibility of the ecosystem **make it easier to gain familiarity with founders**.

Armenia caters to a diverse range of investors. Whether you prefer a passive approach through local funds or a more active role as an angel investor, there's a path for you. International angel investors have the exciting opportunity to personally connect with and support promising founders.

5. Transparency and Familiarity

Concerns about corruption often associated with emerging markets are minimal in Armenia. Additionally, **over 90% of Armenian startups are registered in Delaware** and operate under the established US banking system, ensuring transparency and familiarity for international investors.



Angel Conference 2023

6. Hungry Founders in A Budding Market

Unlike some established ecosystems, Armenian founders **haven't been spoiled by excessive funding**. They are hungry for investment, and their primary focus is on using capital to develop their businesses as quickly as possible. This translates to a passionate and dedicated team working tirelessly to succeed.

Armenia's investor market is also on the rise. **With successful exits becoming more common**, a domestic investor base is starting to take shape. This creates a dynamic environment where your investment can benefit from both local and international support.

Angel Conference 2023
with EBAN President
Janne Jormalainen



Investment Plan in Armenian Startups

During my inquiry regarding a suitable investment strategy for a typical international investor considering the Armenian startup landscape, Sonja presented this remarkably simple yet effective plan.



Investor Day event with Armenian Angel investors Dec 2023

Investment Strategy

- **Total Investment:** Starting from \$100,000 over 5 years
- **Target Investment:** \$5000 - 10,000 per startup (average)
- **Portfolio Size:** 10-20 startups
- **Investment Pace:** 2-4 startups per year

Investment Thesis

- Prioritize strong business fundamentals and a passionate founding team.
- Cultivate a genuine interest in diverse industries and a willingness to learn.
- Understand that this is a high-risk, long-term investment.
- Invest only with non-essential funds that won't impact your lifestyle.

Risk Management

Spread your investments across over 10 startups to mitigate risk. Industry diversification is also recommended. The following is the expected outcome based on international standards:

- **30% Fail:** Anticipate that 3 startups may not succeed.
- **30% Modest Return:** 3 startups might generate a small profit or break even.
- **30% Moderate Return:** 3 startups could offer a good return on investment.
- **10% High Return:** Aim for 1 "home run" investment that significantly outperforms and offsets potential losses.

Exit Strategy

Be prepared to hold your investments for 5-7 years. Patience is crucial for success in angel investing.

Wine Tasting and Angel Investing

Sona explained that the wine-tasting and angel-investing experience is one way how BANA Angels facilitates startup investment pitches for international investors interested in Armenian ventures.

Forget formal conference rooms and faceless pitches. Armenia redefines angel investing in a friendlier way, showcasing its rich cultural heritage. Imagine sipping exquisite Armenian wine while discussing your investment in a promising startup. This isn't just any wine; it's Armenian, a legacy dating back thousands of years.

Combining culture with startup investment led us to a longer conversation about Sona's role in BANA Angels and the work they have done in Armenia over the past years since its foundation in 2017.

[BANA Angels](#) is a network of investors, entrepreneurs and executives from Armenia and abroad. In today's startup world, where **timing is everything**, they take a proactive approach to identifying promising Armenian startups, giving international investors a crucial edge in the investment game. BANA has facilitated [30 investments](#) so far, injecting a total of over \$3.5 million into the Armenian startup ecosystem. In the Portfolio, BANA has startups like [10Web.io](#), [EasyDMARC](#), [Prelaunch.com](#), [Podcastle](#), [Zoomerang](#), [Coinstats](#), etc.



Sona Veziryan

Our mission is to ensure that international investors have a reliable partner within the Armenian Startup ecosystem. Our approach is hybrid, offering our angels worldwide seamless virtual access to all our activities. ”

Investor Day event with Armenian
Angel investors Dec
2023



BANA connects investors directly with selected deals through its network of partners. This insider access gives investors the chance to get involved with **high-potential startups at the earliest stages**, significantly increasing

their odds of securing a lucrative investment. Instead of reacting to applications, BANA encourages a proactive approach in which investors gain access to exclusive deals that are only available to BANA angel investors.

As our conversation wrapped up, I had one final question for Sona. I inquired about the current investment landscape for Armenian startups, specifically whether it's solely driven by the Armenian diaspora. Surprisingly, **the investors are a global mix**. While the diaspora played a crucial role in kickstarting this ecosystem and attracting initial investment, Armenia's potential now attracts investors worldwide. For these global investors, Armenia represents an exciting opportunity, and as the saying goes, **an early bird gets the worm**.

BANA 5 Year Anniversary with
Albert Colomer, EBAN Board
Member June 2022





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VARDANIAN



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HARUTYUNYAN



GRIGOR
BAGHDAGULYAN



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