

Project Agorá – Frequently Asked Questions

What is Project Agorá?

- Project Agorá is a ground-breaking initiative led by the BIS. It involves seven central banks (including the five top international reserve currencies) and a large group of private sector companies convened by the Institute of International Finance (IIF).
- The project aims to test the desirability, feasibility and viability of a multi-currency unified ledger for wholesale cross-border payments based on the vision laid out in [Chapter III of the 2023 BIS Annual Economic Report](#).
- The project is a public-private collaboration that seeks to use new technology to improve the correspondent banking model.
- It has the potential to lay the foundation for a new regulated financial market infrastructure to facilitate cross-border payments using tokenisation and smart contracts, something that does not exist today.
- Central banks are working directly with commercial banks and other private sector players in the cross-border payment ecosystem. The project will investigate proposals and solutions that combine tokenised commercial and wholesale central bank money on a programmable platform.
- The project commenced in April 2024 and expects to report in the first half of 2026.
- BIS Innovation Hub projects are experimental and aim to develop public goods to support central banks and improve the functioning of the global financial system.
- Agorá is not about creating *the* platform of the future – rather it is a prototype that can be used to assess the merits of a digital infrastructure that combines at its core tokenised commercial bank deposits and safe central bank settlement assets and that can, as deemed appropriate, provide insights for potential next steps.

Who is participating?

- The project is a public-private partnership between central banks and a large group of regulated private sector firms with a presence in the cross-border payment ecosystem. Project Agorá is the BIS Innovation Hub's largest and most complex

project in geographical scope and number of participants.

- The BIS has brought together seven central banks (representing the five top international reserve currencies): the Bank of France (representing the Eurosystem), the Bank of Japan, the Bank of Korea, the Bank of Mexico, the Swiss National Bank, the Federal Reserve of New York (through its New York Innovation Center) and the Bank of England.
- The IIF has convened a private sector group of regulated financial institutions.

What are the project's objectives?

- The project's main objective is to demonstrate how a unified ledger could enhance the efficiency of business and regulatory processes in correspondent banking payment chains, thereby reducing transaction times and costs, enhancing payment transparency and mitigating risks for banks involved in cross-border payments.
- The project aims to build a technical prototype to test wholesale cross-border payments to demonstrate the following:
 - The ability to represent tokenised commercial and wholesale central bank money on a unified ledger that meets technical and business requirements.
 - Atomic cross-border transactions between currency areas leveraging a single currency pair or a vehicle currency in a way that preserves depositor-bank relationships.
 - The ability to streamline pre-validation efforts, eg reducing duplication of efforts, in the payment chain without changing existing standards and requirements.
 - Improved efficiencies in complying with sanctions screening as well as anti-money laundering and rules on countering the financing of terrorism.
- The project also seeks to analyse and identify potential legal and regulatory issues and gaps across all seven jurisdictions related to tokenised commercial and wholesale central bank money, settlement finality and compliance.

What sets Agorá apart from other tokenisation projects?

- We have a unique proposition: seven central banks (including five top global reserve currencies), and a large group (40+) of private sector financial institutions working together to investigate how a tokenised platform with a safe settlement asset could improve how international payments are conducted and create new ways for businesses to transact.
 - Agorá has transformative potential in a rapidly evolving digital finance ecosystem while building on the current system with central banks as the foundation.
 - Agorá investigates solutions that bring together tokenised commercial bank money and tokenised wholesale central bank money on a common digital payments infrastructure.
 - The Agorá vision is to make wholesale cross-border payments cheaper, faster, more transparent and more accessible through the correspondent banking model.
 - Agorá is exploring how a tokenised platform would look if it were to replicate – and improve – today's system, with central banks and deposits at its core.

Why is the project focusing on tokenisation?

- Tokenisation represents a transformative step in the evolution of money and finance, embedding rules of ownership and transfer into programmable assets. By merging messaging, reconciliation and settlement into a single atomic operation, tokenisation reduces inefficiencies and operational risks while enabling modular financial operations like conditional transfers and collateral management.
- By collapsing multiple steps, tokenisation offers the potential to improve existing processes and enable entirely new types of contracts and transactions, streamlining complex tasks through programmable platforms and smart contracts. These benefits extend to cross-border payments, where tokenisation can eliminate intermediary chains, reduce latency and enhance compliance through shared protocols and atomic settlement.
- Central to this transformation is the enduring role of tokenised deposits within the two-tier banking system, which combines trust, scale and elasticity to connect households and businesses to the broader monetary system. Central banks maintain a pivotal role in ensuring sound money by anchoring tokenised money to reserves,

maintaining elasticity and embedding safeguards against fraud and illicit use.

- Tokenisation therefore enhances the existing monetary architecture rather than displacing it, preserving the two-tier structure while adding programmability. With a technology-neutral approach focused on outcomes like efficiency, safety and trust, tokenisation offers a path for innovation that strengthens financial stability.
- This transition is a collaborative effort between the public and private sectors, with central banks providing tokenised reserves and regulatory frameworks while partnering on proof-of-concept projects through initiatives like Project Agorá.

Will Project Agorá ever be implemented or is it just a proof of concept?

- Project Agorá aims to go beyond proof of concept and deliver a prototype to test a range of potential current and future use cases. The lessons learned during the project may set out a path for a new type of financial market infrastructure tailored to cross-border payments based on new technology.
- It is important to emphasise that BIS Innovation Hub projects are experimental. As with any research project, the results cannot be anticipated at the outset.

What is the real net benefit from Project Agorá? If it aims to maintain all the existing structures, what really changes?

- This is about improving, enabled by technology, what central and commercial banks already do today, providing trusted money and enabling greater speed and efficiency as well as new possibilities for cross-border payments. This is particularly true in some jurisdictions where fewer banks are willing to offer correspondent services.

When will Project Agorá be concluded?

- Work is continuing throughout 2025. A report will follow when this phase is concluded in the first half of 2026. It will capture learnings, describe the prototype design and explain how it was tested. It will also analyse and identify potential legal and regulatory issues and gaps across all seven jurisdictions related to tokenised commercial and wholesale central bank money, settlement finality and compliance. The project may undertake further exploratory work when the platform prototype is developed; this will be determined together with participating partners.

What were the criteria for selecting the participating jurisdictions and, by extension, central banks?

- The seven invited central banks play a significant role in today's cross-border payment flows and foreign exchange markets. A key goal was to achieve global representation and geographical diversity in Project Agorá.

Why was the IIF chosen as the private sector convener?

- The BIS selected the IIF as the convener of private sector participants after a review of several potential candidates from different jurisdictions.
- The IIF was chosen based on its global presence, diverse membership and subject matter expertise. Additionally, the IIF has worked with the BIS on several initiatives.

Will other jurisdictions be able to join?

- Project Agorá is already the largest BIS Innovation Hub project in terms of the number of participants. We will evaluate the possibility of additional members at a later point.

What were the criteria for choosing private sector partners?

- The BIS published a list of eligibility requirements for different types of financial institutions and specific jurisdictions, the terms and conditions, and the selection criteria on its website when it issued the call for private sector participation on 14 May 2024.
- The project sought to ensure the diversity of the private sector participants in terms of business models, institution size, relevant expertise and geography. Other requirements included being a regulated financial entity – a commercial bank, payment services provider or financial market infrastructure company.
- Some eligibility requirements were specific to jurisdictions, such as access to a real-time gross settlement or clearing system or a reserve account with the central bank in the applicant's currency area or jurisdiction.
- Project Agorá also sought participants with a presence and involvement in international finance, specifically cross-border payments, as well as expertise with

innovation projects.

- IIF membership was not required to participate in Project Agorá.

Other projects are exploring tokenised payments with similar participants. How does Agorá fit in?

- It's not uncommon for institutions to explore different solutions to the same challenge – something the BIS Innovation Hub actively encourages across its projects.
- Project Agorá has already made strong progress, moving from design into the prototype phase. The design work involved deep engagement with business needs related to cross-border payment orchestration and settlement.
- Agorá's scope extends further by including the issuance of both commercial and central bank money, as well as the full settlement and orchestration process.
- With central banks directly involved, Agorá is helping to define one of the most critical elements of tokenisation: how money itself is represented in this new form.