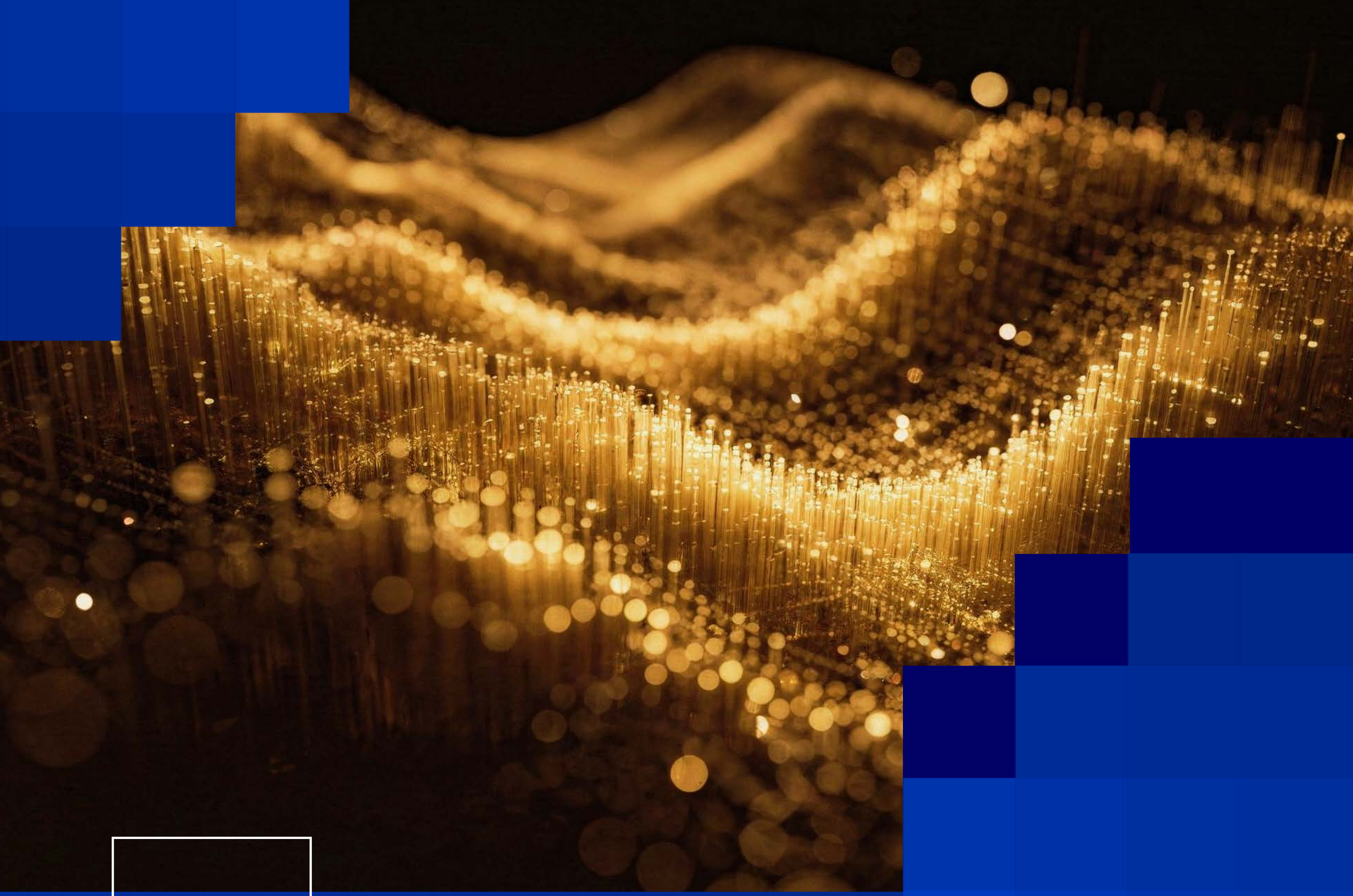


INDUSTRY
SECTOR
REPORT

MARKET UPDATE

Finance

JUNE 2026

Executive Summary

The finance industry in 2026 is being reshaped by the convergence of AI, regulation, and the rapid expansion of private markets. While traditional banking and corporate finance remain stable, the strongest growth is concentrated in private credit, FinTech, ESG, digital assets, and AI-enabled financial services. Firms are increasingly moving from transaction-based models toward advisory, technology, and data-driven business models.

AI has become the defining structural shift across finance. Beyond automating repetitive tasks, AI is now integrated into decision-making, risk management, client advisory, and operational workflows. As a result, employers increasingly value professionals who combine strong financial fundamentals with AI literacy, strategic judgment, critical thinking, and communication skills.

At the same time, private markets, embedded finance, and tokenization continue to expand, supported by improving deal activity and regulatory clarity through frameworks such as MiCA and DORA. The most in-demand talent profiles include AI Finance Analysts, Private Credit professionals, ESG and Climate Risk specialists, FinTech Product Managers, Digital Asset experts, and compliance professionals.

For IE University, finance remains the largest employment sector, representing 17.7% of placements in 2025 (397 placements). Corporate Finance and FP&A are growing strongly, while Investment Banking, PE/VC, Asset Management, and Global Markets have declined and represent key strategic priorities for recovery.

IE's international profile, multidisciplinary programs, and strong positioning in Spain, LATAM, and emerging Middle Eastern markets create a significant competitive advantage. However, the institution faces increasing competition from schools such as INSEAD, LBS, IESE, and EDHEC, particularly in elite finance recruitment. The largest identified gap is the integration of AI and technical finance skills within the curriculum.

The strategic priority for IE is therefore to position itself as a leading producer of "AI-native finance talent" — graduates who combine financial expertise, technological fluency, quantitative skills, and global business judgment. To achieve this, IE should accelerate AI integration across finance programs, strengthen technical and quantitative training, expand partnerships with top global financial institutions, and deepen exposure to private markets, ESG, digital assets, and development finance.

PURPOSE OF THIS REPORT

This report provides an annual update on the state of the Finance industry, key talent trends, employer landscape, and strategic recommendations for IE University's Careers team and academic stakeholders.

1. Industry Overview & Market Trends

A consolidated view of the current state of the finance sector, including macro trends, regional dynamics, emerging technologies, and the regulatory environment.

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Current landscape

The Global Investment Banking & Brokerage market reached $410.2 billion in 2026, growing at a CAGR of 1.7% since 2021, with JPMorgan Chase, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, and Bank of America as leading players.

Market maturity

Finance is entering a dual-track maturity phase: traditional banking and corporate finance are consolidating and becoming more tech-driven, while private markets, FinTech, and digital assets represent high-growth frontiers.

Key dynamics

AI adoption, private credit expansion, rising deal volumes (M&A, IPO, ECM), and a global talent shortage for hybrid finance-tech profiles are the four primary forces reshaping the sector in 2026.

KEY TRENDS

AI & automation

AI is transforming finance from automation of repetitive tasks (reporting, KYC, credit scoring) to agentic systems capable of end-to-end workflow execution. Demand for AI-fluent finance professionals is at an all-time high.

Business model shifts

Business models are pivoting from transaction-based to advisory and data-driven revenue streams. Firms are increasingly building AI platforms to enhance decision quality, client personalization, and risk management.

Client/employer expectations

Clients and employers now expect finance professionals who can critically evaluate AI outputs, translate data into strategic narrative, and operate comfortably in AI-augmented environments alongside traditional technical skills.

MARKET GROWTH & OUTLOOK

Growth projections

The investment banking market is projected to grow from $150.5 billion (2025) to $161.4 billion in 2026 at a CAGR of 7.2%, driven by M&A recovery, ECM/DCM activity, and cross-border deal advisory.

Geographic opportunities

London remains the dominant hub for PE/VC and IB. New York anchors bulge-bracket headquarters. Frankfurt is growing as a public finance and ECB/development-institution centre. Dubai and Riyadh are emerging as Middle East sovereign wealth and PE markets.

In-demand profiles

AI-augmented analysts, Private Credit/Direct Lending specialists, ESG data analysts, FinTech product managers, Tokenization and Digital Asset professionals, and Wealth Tech advisors are among the most in-demand profiles for 2026.

GLOBAL & REGIONAL INFLUENCES

Macroeconomic factors

Interest rate normalization in 2026 is stimulating capital flows, reviving M&A, consumer lending, and IPO pipelines after a subdued 2024. US BLS projects ~942,500 annual finance/business job openings through 2034.

GEOGRAPHIC BREAKDOWN 2026

Regional strengths in the global finance sector

NORTH AMERICA

Bulge-bracket headquarters

Anti-ESG headwinds at the federal level.

New York

Bulge-Bracket Hub

EUROPE

Dominant PE/VC & IB hub

Regulatory enforcement leader — DORA, CSRD, MiCA.

London
Frankfurt

Regulatory Hub

MIDDLE EAST

Emerging sovereign wealth & PE markets

Most stable regulatory growth trajectory.

Dubai
Riyadh

Emerging Market

ASIA-PACIFIC

Stable regulatory growth

Most stable regulatory growth trajectory.

Stable Growth

Regional breakdown

Europe is shaped by DORA (Digital Operational Resilience Act) enforcement, CSRD sustainability reporting, and MiCA crypto regulation. North America faces anti-ESG headwinds at the federal level. Asia-Pacific and the Middle East are showing the most stable regulatory growth trajectories.

Societal trends

ESG has transitioned from voluntary branding to regulatory enforcement in Europe, with CSRD, revised SFDR 2.0, and EU Taxonomy updates requiring companies to embed sustainability intelligence into core operations — creating demand for green finance professionals.

EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES & INNOVATIONS

Key innovations

Agentic AI (autonomous systems for fraud, reconciliation, KYC, lending), tokenization of real-world assets, blockchain-based settlement, and AI-powered ESG data platforms are having the deepest operational impact on finance.

Impact on operations

AI is compressing junior analyst workflows — first-draft models, research pipelines, client reports — shifting the value of human talent toward origination, judgment, and client relationship management.

Disruption risk

Standard data processing, routine underwriting, and rule-based compliance roles face medium-to-high automation risk. Roles blending sector expertise with AI fluency and human judgment are becoming structurally protected.

REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

Key regulations

DORA (EU): Active enforcement in 2026. Boards are personally liable for ICT risk. Firms face fines up to 2% of global turnover. Drives demand for compliance, risk technology, and operational resilience professionals.

Compliance impact

MiCA (EU): Provides legal clarity for stablecoins and tokenized assets, enabling institutional adoption. Companies are hiring digital asset lawyers, crypto compliance officers, and blockchain product managers.

Policy outlook

Revised SFDR 2.0 and CSRD scope changes (reducing mandatory reporters from ~50,000 to under 7,000) reduce reporting burden for mid-market, but large financial institutions face stricter enforcement through 2026.

2. Sector-Specific Insights

Deep-dive into the dynamics specific to each Finance sub-vertical and their implications for IE University.

FINANCIAL MARKET TRENDS

Investment Banking

2025 was the best year for IB revenues since 2021. M&A volumes are projected to exceed the 10-year average in 2026. IPOs are returning across the US and European markets. ECM and DCM activity is booming.

Private Markets

Private Equity is back with secondaries and follow-on funds. Private Credit/Direct Lending remains an attractive yield play even with rates moderating. Infrastructure and Real Assets funds are growing. VC is recovering selectively, with AI startups attracting the largest rounds.

FinTech & Payments

Revolut, Stripe, Klarna, and a wave of European neobanks are expanding into full-service financial institutions. AI Finance (credit risk, algorithmic trading, fraud detection) and Sustainability Tech are the fastest-growing FinTech sub-segments.

Crypto & Digital Assets

Tokenization of securities and real-world assets is moving from pilot to production. Goldman Sachs and Citigroup are building tokenized securities and digital custody products. The ECB may begin digital euro pilots by 2027 if legislation passes in 2026.

ESG & SUSTAINABLE FINANCE

Market relevance

Sustainable finance remains highly relevant, especially in Europe, where regulation continues to anchor demand.

Talent effect

Demand is strongest for ESG reporting, climate-risk, and sustainability data profiles, often supported by AI-enabled platforms.

Regional split

Europe continues to formalize ESG compliance, while the US remains more politically fragmented despite ongoing practical climate-risk work.

$257 bn

Global sustainable finance emissions
First months of 2026

REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT IN FINANCE

Sub-sector	Key Regulation	Talent Impact
Investment Banking	MiFID II updates, Basel IV capital requirements	Creates compliance and risk advisory roles
Asset Management	SFDR 2.0, AIFMD revision, CSRD	ESG data and sustainability reporting specialists
Banking / FinTech	DORA, Open Banking, PSD3	Digital resilience, cyber risk, API compliance
Crypto / Digital Assets	MiCA (EU), ongoing SEC guidance (US)	Regulatory strategy, compliance, legal counsel
Insurance	Solvency II updates, CSRD	Risk modeling, climate actuaries, data analysts

EMERGING SUB-SECTORS

Embedded Finance

Embedded finance, Buy Now Pay Later regulation, and AI-native credit scoring are reshaping consumer and SME lending, with new roles for product managers, compliance officers, and credit risk analysts.

DeFi & Open Banking

DeFi is maturing from speculation toward regulated infrastructure (tokenized bonds, settlement layers). Institutions are hiring DeFi protocol analysts and blockchain engineers.

Wealth Tech

The convergence of private banking, robo-advisory, and digital wealth platforms is creating Wealth Tech as a distinct hiring category, combining investment expertise with UX, data, and AI skills.

Wealth Tech as a distinct hiring category, combining investment expertise with UX, data, and AI skills.

3. Talent Landscape & Recruitment Trends

↗

A comprehensive view of talent demand, hiring patterns, timelines, and emerging roles across all Finance sub-verticals.

IN-DEMAND SKILLS

Technical skills

Financial modelling (DCF, LBO, M&A comps), Python/SQL for data analysis, AI prompt engineering and tool fluency, valuation methods, quantitative risk management, and portfolio construction techniques.

Analytical skills

Critical evaluation of AI-generated outputs, scenario analysis under uncertainty, strategic business judgment, cross-asset market intuition, and data-to-narrative translation.

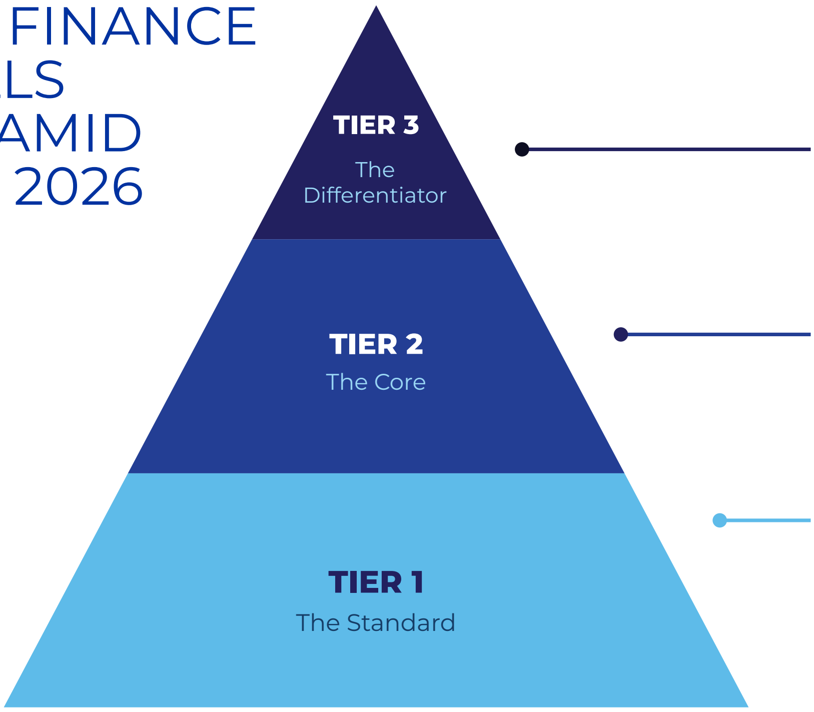
Soft skills

Communication and storytelling with data, client relationship management, cross-cultural adaptability, leadership in deal teams, and ethical decision-making in AI-augmented environments.

Digital fluency

Sector-wide minimum: AI literacy (understanding what AI can and cannot do), data fluency, prompt engineering. Advanced: Python, Tableau/PowerBI, Bloomberg, FactSet, Aladdin (BlackRock), Salesforce for client management.

THE FINANCE SKILLS PYRAMID FOR 2026



JUDGMENT, CRITICAL THINKING, BUSINESS PARTNERING

Separates analysts from advisors

FINANCIAL FUNDAMENTALS (ACCOUNTING, VALUATION, RISK)

Required for all specialist roles

AI LITERACY & DIGITAL FLUENCY

Required for 100% of finance workforce

EMERGING ROLES IN 2026

New job titles (last 12–18 months)

AI Finance Analyst, AI Risk Officer, Tokenization Product Manager, ESG Data Scientist, Climate Risk Modeler, Digital Asset Compliance Specialist, Embedded Finance Product Lead, Private Credit Analyst, Wealth Tech Advisor.

Future roles (2–3 year outlook)

Agentic AI Workflow Designer (finance), Quantum Finance Analyst, CBDC Implementation Specialist, Impact Measurement Officer, Real Asset Tokenization Lawyer.

IEU profile fit

IEU MiF and MiM graduates are well-positioned for Technical Analyst and Corporate Finance Associate roles. MBA graduates are competitive for PE/VC and senior advisory positions if AI fluency is demonstrated. The AI gap is the most pressing skill deficit for current graduates across all programs.

RECRUITMENT PATTERNS

Hiring volumes

83% of finance and accounting leaders feel confident about their 2026 business outlook. 61% of hiring managers report it is significantly harder to find skilled candidates than a year ago — intensifying competition for candidates with AI + finance hybrid skills.

Most in-demand profiles

Investment Banking Analysts, Corporate Finance/FP&A Associates, Private Credit Associates, ESG Reporting Specialists, FinTech Product Managers, and Compliance Officers for DORA/MiCA are among the most actively recruited profiles.

Competition for talent

Top candidates are moving fast. Firms report losing offers when processes exceed 3–4 weeks. Selective hiring for quality over volume is the dominant strategy, particularly in IB and PE.

EMERGING ROLES · FINANCE SECTOR 2026

New job titles
(last 12–18 months)

- AI FINANCE ANALYST
- AI RISK OFFICER
- TOKENIZATION PRODUCT MANAGER
- ESG DATA SCIENTIST
- CLIMATE RISK MODELER
- DIGITAL ASSET COMPLIANCE SPECIALIST
- EMBEDDED FINANCE PRODUCT LEAD
- PRIVATE CREDIT ANALYST
- WEALTH TECH ADVISOR

→

Future roles
(2–3 year outlook)

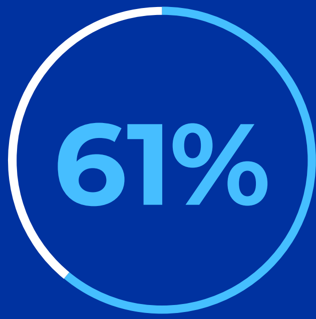
- AGENTIC AI WORKFLOW DESIGNER (FINANCE)
- QUANTUM FINANCE ANALYST
- CBDC IMPLEMENTATION SPECIALIST
- IMPACT MEASUREMENT OFFICER
- REAL ASSET TOKENIZATION LAWYER

FINANCE AND ACCOUNTING LEADERS

Feel confident about their 2026 business outlook

"— intensifying competition for candidates with AI + finance hybrid skills."

HIRING MANAGERS



Report it is significantly harder to find skilled candidates than a year ago

GEOGRAPHIC HIRING TRENDS

City / Region	Key Sub-sectors	IE Context
London	PE/VC, IB, Asset Management, Hedge Funds	Highest density; strong alumni base; competitor schools dominant
Madrid & Spain	Corporate Banking, FinTech, Corporate Finance	IE home market; anchor recruiters BBVA, Santander, CaixaBank
New York	Bulge Bracket IB, PE, AM	NYC office gap; key target for MOU expansion
Frankfurt	ECB, EIB, Deutsche Bank, Public Finance	Development finance and German banking opportunity
Dubai / Riyadh	Sovereign Wealth Funds, MENA PE, Islamic Finance	Less competition from peer schools; emerging IE hub
LATAM	Corporate Finance, Regional Banking, FinTech	Strong MBA pipeline; 37% of LATAM finance placements via MBA

RECRUITMENT SEASONALITY & TIMELINES

Peak hiring months

Investment Banking and Asset Management: Summer internship applications open September–November for following summer (off-cycle year-round). Graduate programmes: October–January for September starts.

Process duration

IB: 4–8 weeks from application to offer (structured processes). PE/VC: highly variable, often 2–6 months. Corporate Banking: 6–10 weeks. FinTech: 3–5 weeks, faster for technical roles.

Internship timelines

IB and large banks recruit for summer internships 12+ months in advance (London on-cycle: Oct–Dec). PE and VC are primarily off-cycle. Asset Management: October–March for September intakes.

Full-time timelines

US firms (Goldman, JPM, Morgan Stanley) recruit for full-time Analyst roles in Oct–Jan. European banks open in Sep–Nov. PE/VC full-time is almost entirely off-cycle and relationship-driven.

4. Key Employers, Partnerships & Alumni

An overview of the top employers recruiting IEU talent, strategic partnerships, and placement data across all Finance sub-verticals.

TOP FINANCE EMPLOYERS — IEU 2025

Employer Category	Companies & Notes
Tier 1 — Highest Volume	Revolut (12), BBVA (10), Banco Santander (8), UBS (7), JP Morgan (5), BNP Paribas (5), Rothschild & Co (5)
Tier 2 — Growing Engagement	Aon (4), Marsh & McLennan (4), Visa (4), Alter Domus (3), American Express (3), Mastercard (3), Deutsche Bank (3), Arcano (3)
Employers to Watch	Embat, Pagantis/Pagonext, Tarmeez Capital, Ant Group, Airwallex, Cleo AI — all active at INSEAD but missing at IE
Competitor Gap — INSEAD/LBS	24 companies recruiting at INSEAD/LBS but NOT at IE, dominated by PE/VC (65 firms gap) and FinTech (AmEx, Ant Group, Airwallex)
Competitor Gap — IESE	34 companies at IESE but not IE, primarily PE/VC (15 firms), Asset Management (5), and Iberian/Asian banking
Competitor Gap — EDHEC	15 companies at EDHEC missing at IE, concentrated in IB (BofA Merrill Lynch, BPCE, Crédit Agricole) and Asset Management (BlackRock, Amundi, Fidelity)

FLAGSHIP EVENT · Q3 MADRID

Targets for the flagship Q3 Madrid event

+25	+200
Firms	Students

KEY PARTNERSHIPS WITH IEU

Existing strategic partnerships

State Street (Asset Management Partnership — only current signed MOU). Target: 7 total MOUs by end of 2026 via the Red Carpet Strategy.

MOU pipeline

Tier 1 MOU Targets (Q1–Q2 2026): Allianz, Citi, BlackRock (AM Academy). Tier 2 MOU Targets (Q3–Q4 2026): Embat, Pagantis/Pagonext, Tarmeez Capital (PE MENA).

Events & engagement

Investment Banking Day (September), Asset & Wealth Management Day (October), Private Equity Day (April), IE FinTech Day (May). Target: 25+ firms, 200+ students at flagship Q3 Madrid event.

EVENTS & ENGAGEMENT

Key recruiting events across the year

ALUMNI OVERVIEW

Alumni in sector

Finance is the #1 employment outcome at IE University, representing 17.7% of all placements in 2025 (397 students). Over a 3-year horizon, 1,172+ alumni have been placed in finance roles through the Talent & Careers team.

Top companies

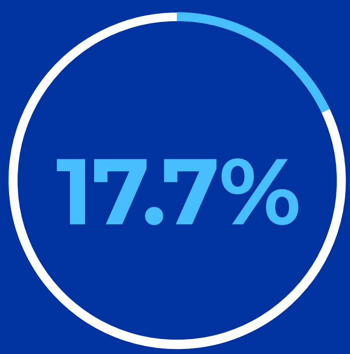
Top alumni concentration: BBVA, Santander, CaixaBank, Sabadell (Spanish banking); JPMorgan, Goldman Sachs, Rothschild (IB); BlackRock, State Street (AM); Revolut, Klarna (FinTech).

Career trajectories

Common paths: Junior roles → Associate (2–3 years) → VP/Director (5–8 years). MBA alumni tend toward PE/VC, Corporate Strategy, or CFO tracks. Undergrad/MiM alumni concentrate in Corporate Finance and Banking analyst roles.

+1,172

Alumni placed in finance roles over a 3-year horizon



Finance share of 2025 placements

397

Students placed in finance in 2025

Nº 1

Top employment outcome at IE University

5. Data & Bibliography

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Notes

This report integrates internal IEU placement data (2023–2025) with publicly available market research and industry reports current as of April 2026. Placement figures reflect employed students/alumni tracked by the Talent & Careers team and may differ from official Careers Report totals due to reporting timing. Competitor gap analysis is based on 2025 recruiter databases cross-referenced with IE's 2025 placements data. Market size and CAGR figures are sourced from IBISWorld and ResearchAndMarkets as referenced above. Forecast placement targets (418 for 2026) are aspirational goals set by the Finance T&C team, subject to market conditions and institutional support.

INDUSTRY
SECTOR
REPORT

FOR STUDENTS

Finance

IE University
Talent & Careers