

International Search Funds 2026

Selected observations



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Abstract

The core search fund model is a path to entrepreneurship through acquisition that has gained traction globally since its inception in 1984. This note reports on all 492 known international search funds formed outside the United States and Canada. It sheds light on their key characteristics and financial returns as of December 31, 2025. The sample set includes international searchers in 48 countries and on five continents. Conducted by the International Search Fund Center at IESE Business School in collaboration with the Stanford Graduate School of Business, this biennial study draws on both quantitative and qualitative survey data.

Keywords: Search funds; International search funds; Entrepreneurship through acquisition (ETA); Entrepreneurial acquisitions (EA); Entrepreneurial finance

1. Introduction

In 2011, IESE Business School (IESE) began to identify and track international search funds in collaboration with the Stanford Graduate School of Business (GSB). This note is the eighth edition of the biennial publication by IESE's International Search Fund Center. It provides an overview of all 492 known international search funds.¹ This study reports continuing strong acquisition rates and returns of search funds. These findings provide evidence for the sustained appeal of the core search fund model.²

A search fund is an entrepreneurial path undertaken by one or more individuals (the “searchers”) who form an investment vehicle supported by a small group of aligned investors to search for, acquire, and lead a privately held company for the medium to long term, typically five to ten years. Search funds offer entrepreneurs the opportunity to become equity-owning business operators (typically as CEO) without necessarily having accumulated the capital or experience often required to buy or lead a company. For investors, a search fund can provide attractive returns in a two-stage investment: an initial small investment in support of the entrepreneur's sourcing of an existing business, followed by a larger investment in the acquisition of that company.

The life cycle of a search fund can be divided into four stages: (1) raising a search fund (i.e., a pool of capital) from a group of investors backing the searcher(s) to find and

acquire an attractive company for the searcher(s) to manage; (2) searching usually over one or two years before acquiring the sourced company; (3) operating, the longest and most compelling stage for the entrepreneur(s), during which the searcher(s) lead and grow the business; and (4) exiting, at which point the searcher(s) and investors achieve liquidity. For detailed background information on search funds, see the Stanford GSB Grousbeck-Holloway Center for Entrepreneurial Studies (GHCES) *Search Fund Primer*³ and the IESE note *Search funds—What has made them work?*⁴

Based on survey data, this report provides insights into the evolving characteristics and performance of known search funds outside the United States and Canada between 1992 and the end of 2025.⁵ A record number of new core search funds launched (96) in 2024 as well as acquisitions consummated (46) in 2025 illustrates the continuing growth of the asset class. This study includes analyses of the returns achieved through investing in search funds. As of December 31, 2025, international search funds generated an aggregate return on investment (ROI) of 2.8× and internal rate of return (IRR) of 30%—both substantially higher than in the 2024 study (from 2.0× to 2.8× and from 18% to 30%, respectively). This rise in returns goes hand in hand with longer holding periods for operating businesses and a wave of exits resulting in part from search funds maturing internationally.

¹ “International” in this report refers to outside the United States and Canada to coordinate with the Stanford study. For more information on Stanford's research in the United States and Canada, which has tracked more than 862 search funds formed since 1984, see the 2026 *Search Fund Study* | Stanford Graduate School of Business, <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/case-studies/2026-search-fund-study-selected-observations>

² The term “core search fund model” is used to describe the funded search model previously also referred to as the “traditional search fund model.”

³ For a comprehensive description of the search and acquisition process, readers may obtain the *Search Fund Primer* here: <http://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/centers-initiatives/ces/research/search-funds/primer>

⁴ To help understand the practices and values underpinning the search fund model, readers may obtain the note titled *Search Funds—What has made them work?* here: <https://www.iese.edu/entrepreneurship/search-funds>

⁵ “Known search funds” refers to those that could be identified through the author team's research. Despite the extensive network of search fund principals, investors, and advisors who share searcher data for this purpose, it is possible that some search funds that existed or exist were not considered in this analysis.

2. About the study

This analysis exclusively considers first-time core search funds launched between 1992 and 2025 outside the United States and Canada. This dataset deliberately excludes self-funded searches, second-time search funds, and single-sponsor searches, as these imply different skill sets, capital needs, and external requirements. This study further omits derived models, such as search accelerators, entrepreneurs in residence, and other hybrid models. Consequently, the authors caution against extrapolating conclusions from core search funds and applying them to other forms or models without considering individual specifics and possible contextual contingencies.

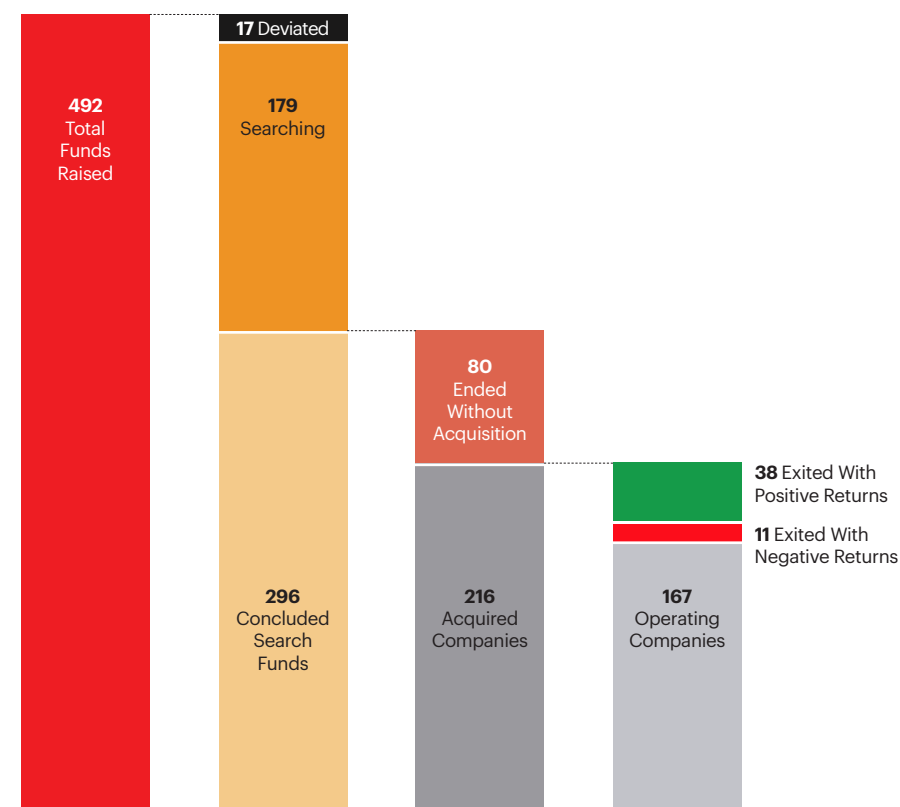
Data collection took place in early 2026 by way of a standardized electronically distributed survey. Principals of all identified search funds were queried about their personal backgrounds and professional profiles, as well as their fundraising, geographic focus, target industries, and target company characteristics. Searchers who acquired a company were further asked about acquisition and operating metrics. In cases where at least one year had passed post-acquisition, CEOs were asked about concurrent company valuations, capital flows, and investor returns. The current study covers a total of 492 known core search funds,

including active searches, those that closed with or without an acquisition, the ongoing operations of acquired businesses, and those that concluded with an exit, either for a gain or a (total) loss.

Figure 1 summarizes the split of all included search funds by status as of December 2025. As of year-end 2025, 179 of the total 492 international search funds were either searching for or fundraising for an acquisition. Meanwhile, 216 had already acquired a company, 80 had ended their search without an acquisition, and 17 had deviated from the search fund model. Of those 216 that had acquired a company, 167 were operating the company as of late 2025, 38 had exited their businesses with a positive return to investors, and 11 had exited or closed their companies at a loss for investors.⁶

With each consecutive edition of the study, the data set is validated, completed, and extended to account for all identifiable searches internationally. Although every effort was made to collect information from every known search fund outside the United States and Canada, a few cases could not be included. The 2026 study draws on responses from 94% of all known core search funds and supplementary public data. Missing responses to individual questions by participating searchers or CEOs may result in differing sample sizes across analyses or over time.

Figure 1. International Search Funds by status, December 2025



⁶ For the purposes of this study, a liquidity event in which investors sell at least 50% of their cumulative equity shares is considered an exit or termination of the search fund.

3. International search fund activity

Search fund activity across the globe has increased significantly since its emergence in 1984. **Figure 2** illustrates the continued growth of the asset class outside the United States and Canada following the launch of the first search fund in the United Kingdom in 1992. The number of new search funds launched internationally peaked in 2024 at 96 and exceeded the number of new launches in the United States and Canada for the first time in 2025 at 82. A total of 71 new acquisitions were reported between 2024 and 2025. These make up one-third of all 216 acquisitions in the international sample. Similarly, the strong rise in the number of exits since 2022 indicates that search funds are becoming a more mature asset class internationally. Over half of all successful exits in this study (21) happened in the last two years.

The data set in this study includes search funds in 48 countries on five continents. After the first international search fund was raised in the United Kingdom in 1992, search funds have been raised across Latin America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and Australia. In 2024 and 2025, search funds were formed for the first time in Norway, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, and Uruguay. **Figure 3** illustrates the totals by country.

Figure 2. International Search Fund activity by year, 1992–2025

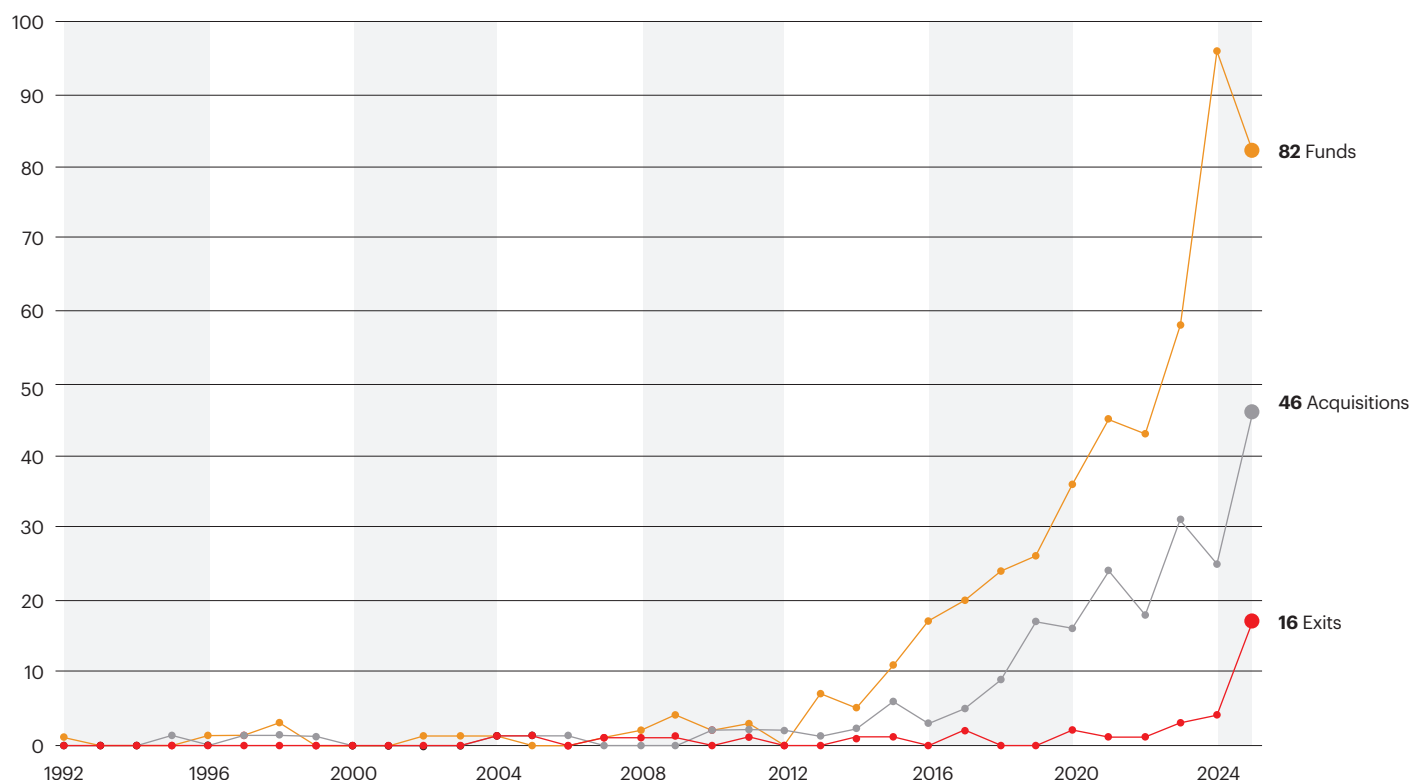
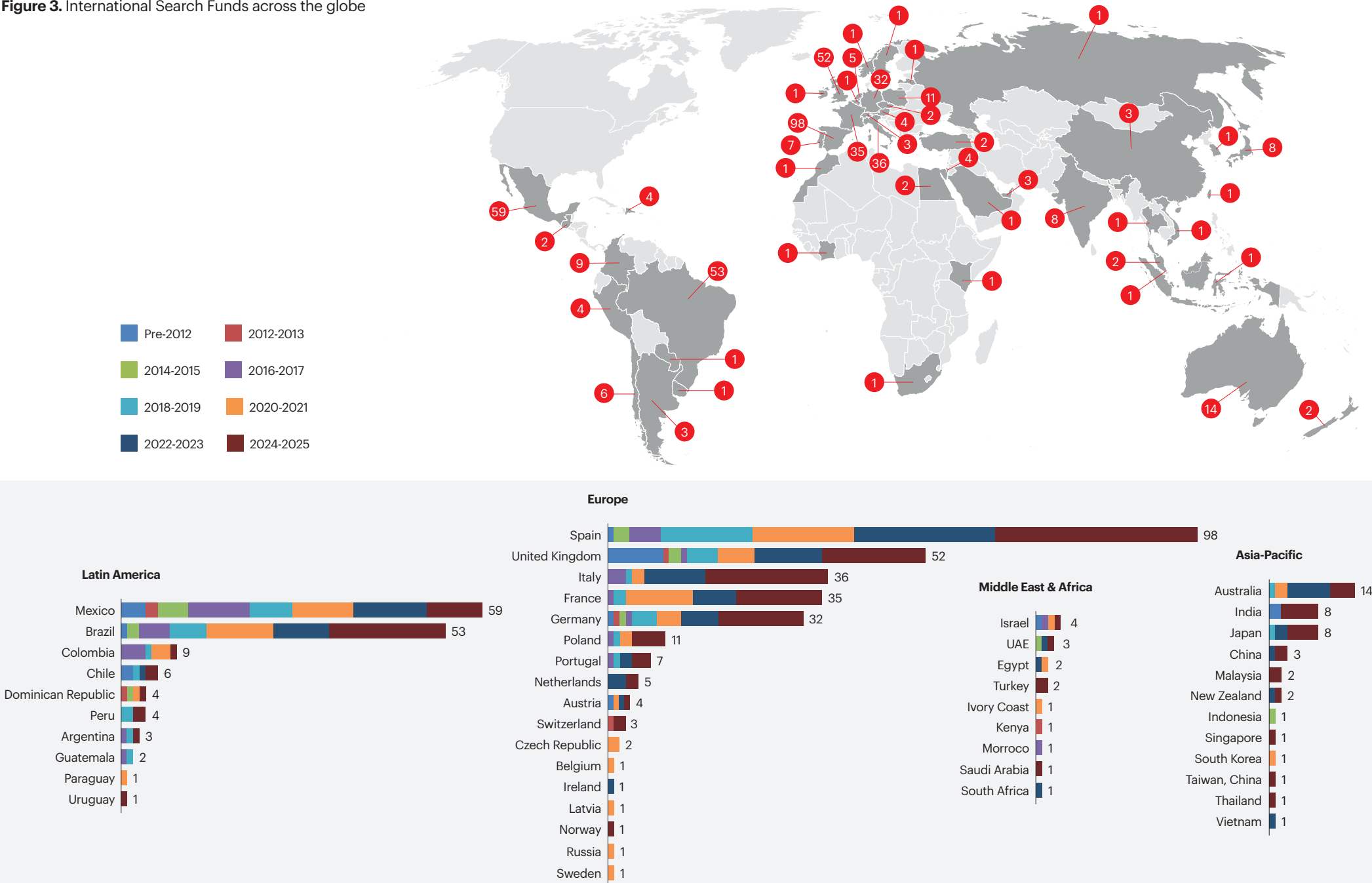


Figure 3. International Search Funds across the globe



4. New search funds

4.1. Search fund principals

The proportion of partnerships among international search funds has decreased slightly, totaling 37% of all search funds in the study and 31% in the 2024 and 2025 cohort. By the end of 2025, 676 entrepreneurs had launched a search fund. The age of new principals at the time of launching their search fund shows a weak upward trend. Ages ranged from 23 to 55, with a median of 34, which is up by 5 years compared to ten years ago. Notably, fewer new principals hold an MBA (60% compared to 71% in the whole study) and fewer launch their search funds within a year of graduation (19% compared to 37%). Of all MBA graduates in the study, 39% attained their degree from US business schools, and nearly 54% attended a course on entrepreneurship through acquisition (since 2021). The share of female principals remains similar to that of the previous study: 7% since 2022 and 5% overall.

Part of the appeal of the search fund model is that successful searchers come from a variety of professional backgrounds, which underscores that success does not depend on any specific professional profile. This also confirms that, when well executed, the core search fund model prepares searchers to become successful CEOs. The most common searcher profile continued to be—albeit to a lesser extent—management consulting (22%). In turn, experience in private equity (18%), line or general management (14%), and operations (9%) has overtaken investment banking and financial services (8%). Meanwhile, the share of searchers with previous entrepreneurial experience has doubled to about 8%. **Exhibits 1 and 2** provide further details on principals' characteristics and backgrounds.

4.2. Fundraising and searching

In 2024 and 2025, the median search fund was supported by 15 investors contributing around \$502,000 in search capital.⁷ This represents a continuous upward trend in capital raised (\$463,000 for all search funds in the study) but varies widely. Naturally, the search capital differed markedly for solo (median of \$450,000) and partnered (median of \$649,000) searches. With a median of \$100,000, annual searcher salaries constitute a large use of this capital.⁸ Indeed, salaries as a percentage of search capital reach approximately 45% for solo searchers and 60% for partnerships. The median time required to raise a search fund increased slightly from five to six months. **Exhibit 3** further details the longitudinal development of these search fund metrics.

The primary search strategy for international searchers remained opportunistic and high-volume search. Still, about 42% of those actively searching at some point during 2024 and 2025 reported relying 'heavily' or 'exclusively' on an industry-focused search. The most popular industries were technology (75%), with a particular focus on with a particular focus on software (23%) and tech-enabled services (22%), healthcare (67%), services (61%), and manufacturing (59%).⁹ **Exhibits 4–6** present the full breakdown of the principals' search focus.

⁷ All financial information presented in this study has been converted to US dollars using the historic conversion rate as quoted by the API solution of exchangerate.host. This currency was chosen for two reasons: (1) the euro was not in circulation for search funds raised prior to 2002, and (2) many search funds, although located outside the United States, are also reported in US dollars because many of their investors are in the United States.

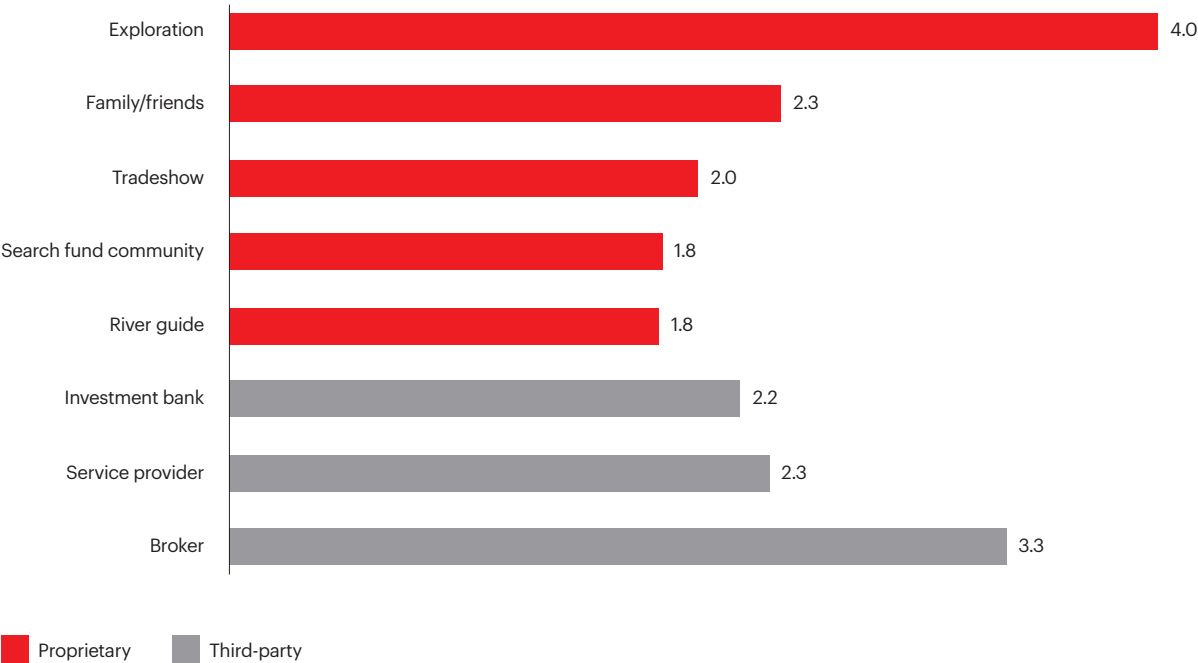
⁸ The authors point out that compensation data are particularly sensitive, which can reduce the response rate. Questions on compensation were only introduced in recent studies. The presented overview draws from data on 400 search funds (81% of the total sample).

⁹ Principals were asked to choose all industries they targeted rather than choosing only one.

With the goal of acquiring a good business in a strong industry at a reasonable price, international principals primarily opted for doing a proprietary search. This approach relies heavily on individual exploration with selective support from their network and professionals. **Figure 4** summarizes searchers’ use of proprietary and third-party approaches on a score between 1

(never used) and 5 (exclusively used). Jointly, these channels create a deal flow funnel where potential targets undergo rigorous screening in four stages: exploration, personal conversations, letters of intent (LOIs), and due diligence. In 2024 and 2025, the average searcher signed close to six LOIs before either acquiring or terminating the search.

Figure 4. Primary deal sourcing approaches by searchers, 2024–2025



Deep dive 1: Search funds across Europe and Latin America

Europe and Latin America constitute the two largest regional ecosystems for search funds outside the United States and Canada. They account for 32% of all known core search funds and 33.8% of acquisitions globally. Three Deep Dive sections throughout this report compare their characteristics.

As reported earlier, Europe was home to the first core search fund outside of the United States and Canada back in 1992. By 2025, search funds had been formed in 17 European countries. The first known Latin American search fund was founded in

2003. By 2025, search funds had formed in ten Latin American countries. Both regions enjoy active support from both local and international investors, including US and Canadian investors. Direct comparison of individual characteristics suggests a highly congruent spread and stable nature of the core search fund model: primarily MBA graduates in their early thirties chose to launch search funds backed with approximately \$350,000–\$400,000 search capital per principal. It is worth noting that partnerships are particularly popular in Latin America.

	# Search funds	# Principals	% Partnerships	Age (median)	% MBA	% Female	Search capital/principal (median, \$k)
Europe	291	398	36	33	64	5	392
Latin America	142	207	45	31	80	4	357
Others	59	71	20	33	85	14	360

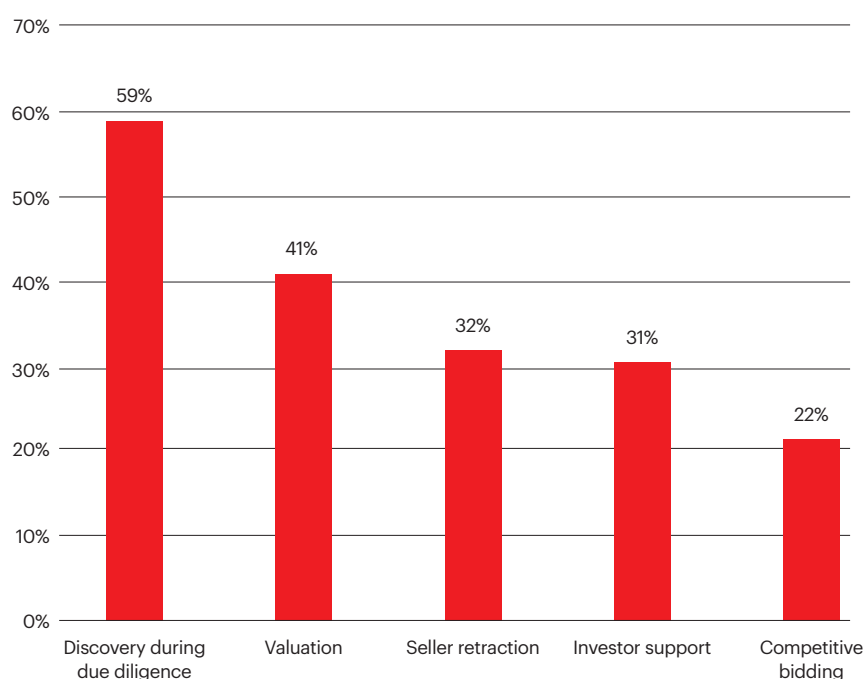
5. Search fund acquisitions

5.1. Search outcomes and acquisition rates

Navigating the path to acquisition is complex and often tedious, and not all engagements culminate in successful acquisitions. While the absolute number of unsuccessful searches has more than doubled in the last two years, acquisition rates have remained comparably high internationally. Across all concluded search funds outside the United States and Canada, as much as 73% led to an acquisition—down from 79% in the 2024 study, yet substantially above 58% of concluded search funds in the United States and Canada. Drawing on their experience with a total of 716 signed LOIs, recent searchers most commonly pointed to adverse discoveries during due diligence (59%) and disagreements concerning valuations (41%) as reason for not acquiring. In addition, eventual retraction by the seller (32%) and a lack of investor support (31%) prevented potential deals. These reasons may also co-occur.

Of note, principals who recently closed their search with an acquisition reported an average of 4.6 LOIs, with the first typically signed by month six and only in 18% of the cases after the first year. In turn, principals who recently closed their search without an acquisition reported an average of 8.2 LOIs, with the first typically signed by month eight and in 29% of the cases after more than 12 months or never. Together, the rate and timing of unconsummated LOIs, as well as the wide variance in underlying reasons, stress the importance of searchers' preparedness and continuous learning during the search stage. This interpretation is also consistent with the findings of the *Stanford 2026 Search Fund Study* of the United States and Canada. Accordingly, balancing in-depth engagement with potential targets early on with maintaining an active pipeline throughout the search phase is essential.

Figure 5. Reported reasons to forego acquisition upon LOI, 2024–2025



5.2. Acquired businesses

From the 492 known search funds outside the United States and Canada, 216 had made an acquisition as of year-end 2025 (compared with 862 known US and Canadian search funds consummating 382 acquisitions). Supported by the proven principles of the core search fund model, investment criteria often include high-quality revenue (such as recurring revenue); high earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) margins; and solid industry growth. The median international search fund acquisition had the following characteristics: a purchase price of \$12 million, \$8 million in revenues, EBITDA margin of 26%, purchase price-to-EBITDA multiple of 5.7x, purchase price-to-revenue multiple of 1.4x, trailing annual revenue growth rate of 11%, trailing annual EBITDA growth rate of 12%, and 50 employees. At acquisition, searchers classified the annual recurring revenue rate of the acquired business as

high (>66.7%) in 59% of cases and as low (<33.4%) in 26% of cases. **Exhibit 7** provides company details and deal specifics over time and offers a comparison with acquisitions in the United States and Canada.

Most recent international search fund acquisitions were made in manufacturing (18 acquisitions), followed by technology (17 acquisitions) and services (13 acquisitions). See **Figure 6** for the distribution of industries across all known international search fund acquisitions over time. Of these acquisitions, 135 were made in Europe, 67 in Latin America, 11 in the Asia-Pacific, one in the Middle East, and two in Africa. The new acquisitions in 2024 and 2025 include pioneer acquisitions of companies headquartered in Austria, Singapore, and South Africa. Totals by country are shown in **Figure 7**.

Figure 6. Industries of acquired companies over time

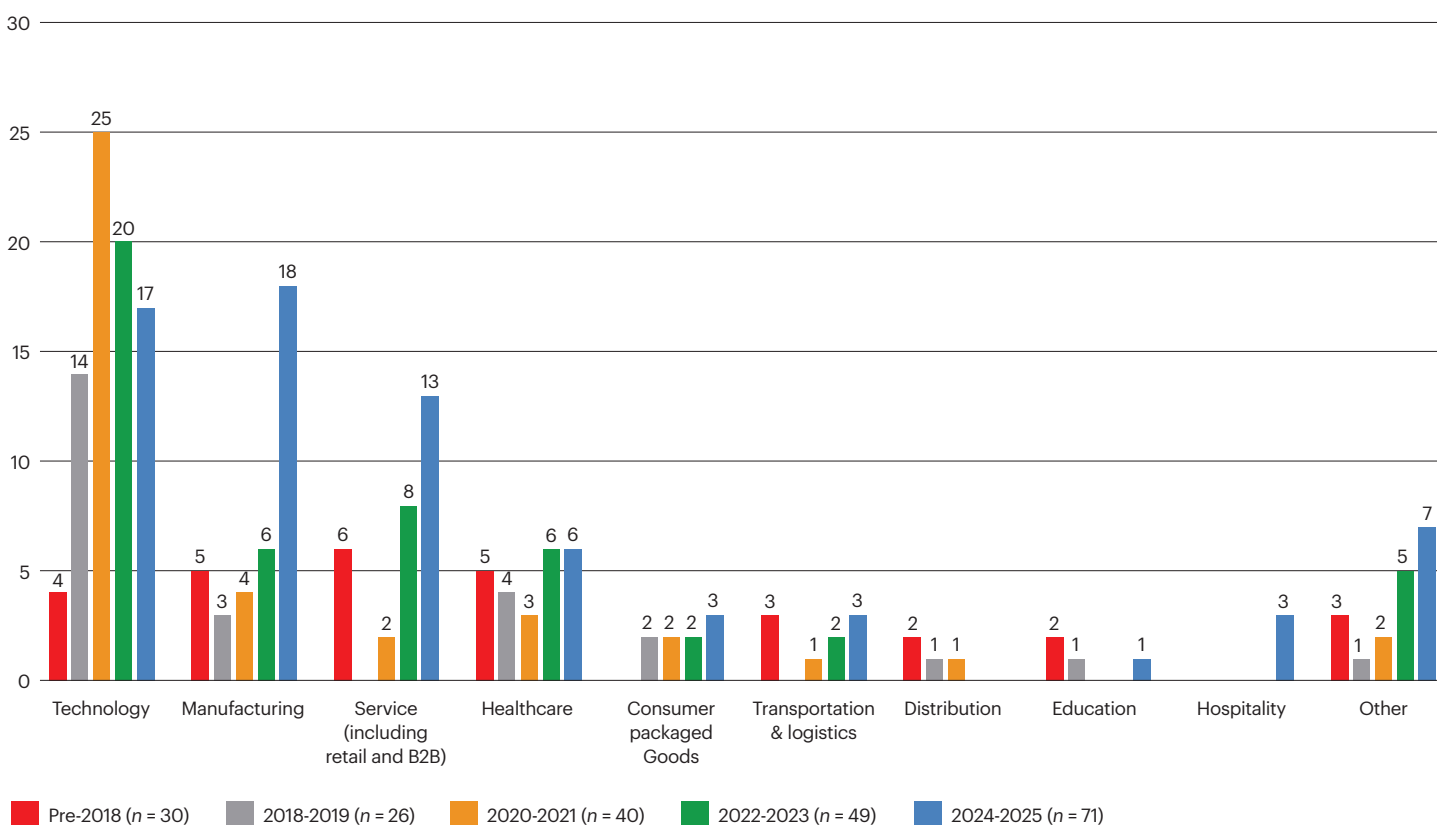
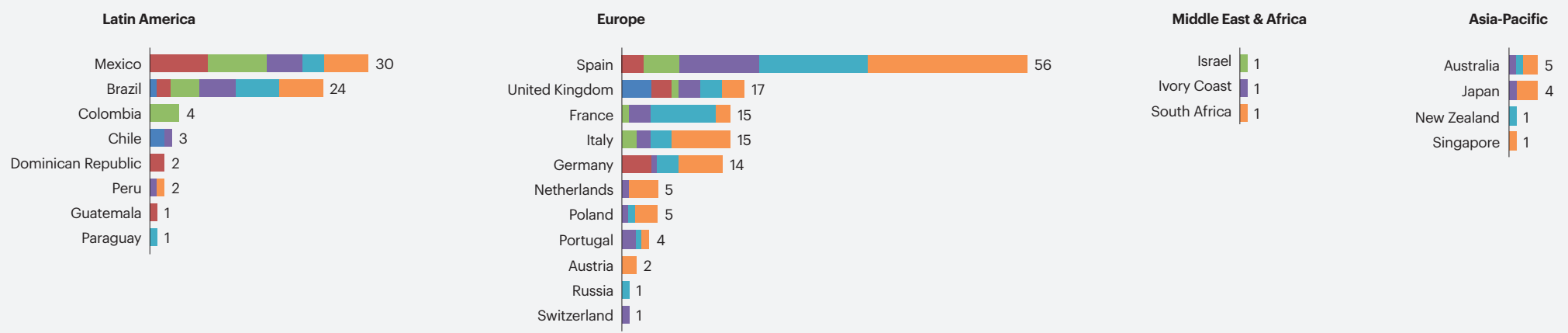
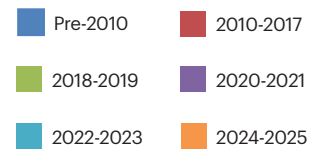
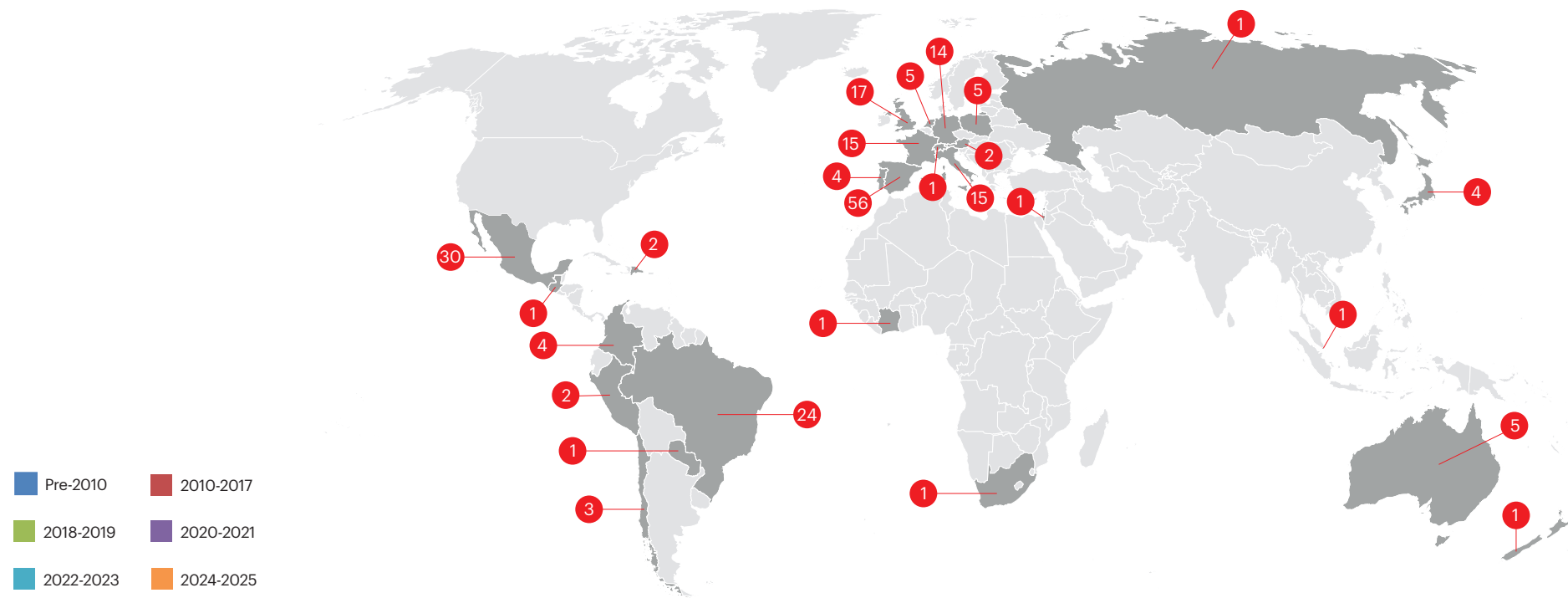


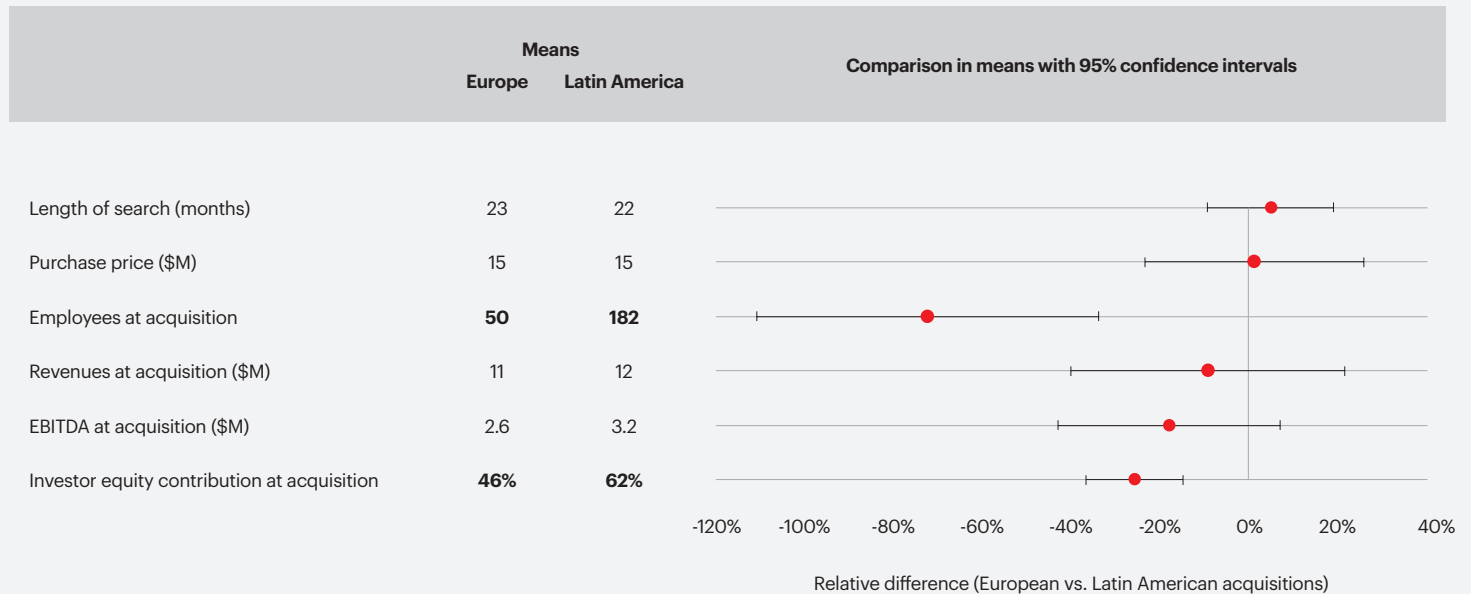
Figure 7. International search fund acquisitions across the globe



Deep Dive 2: Search fund acquisitions across Europe and Latin America

While reported search criteria and strategies are largely coherent across the globe, acquisition rates and characteristics reveal multiple differences between Europe and Latin America. First, European search funds have achieved higher acquisition rates than those in Latin America. Indeed, 135 of 172 concluded European searches ended in an acquisition (78.5%), compared to 67 of the 96 concluded Latin American searches ending in an acquisition (69.8%). Second, while differences in several acquisition characteristics turn out not be

statistically significant and generalizable, the average business acquired in Latin America had significantly more employees at purchase (+132 on average). In addition, due to lower appetite amongst debt providers, investors' equity contributions financed a significantly larger share of the acquisition (+16 percentage points on average). Neither of these findings put in question the fundamental principles of the core search fund model, as variation likely results from socioeconomic differences across countries.



6. Financial performance

This study calculates financial returns from the perspective of initial search capital investors; specifically, it measures returns based on investments from and distributions to the search fund investors who provided capital during the search and acquisition phases. Consistent with previous editions of this study, calculations exclude follow-on financing events. Both return on investment (ROI)¹⁰ and internal rate of return (IRR)¹¹ are calculated on a cash flow basis. Searches that ended without an acquisition were included, along with both operating and exited companies. All returns are calculated on a pretax basis using data provided by the principals of the funds, which were partly complemented or verified by involved investors.

Of the 296 concluded funds (those that had raised a search fund and either acquired a company or ended without an acquisition as of year-end 2025), 228 were eligible for calculations of investor returns.¹² This includes 76 unsuccessful searches and 152 completed acquisitions with a minimum of one year of operation post-acquisition. The assessment of enterprise and equity values is straightforward for terminal funds,¹³ because it corresponds to the value as of the terminal event (e.g., exit, sale, recapitalization) and materialized equity shares. For operating companies, valuations as of December 31, 2025, are based on the principals' reported market value and investors' current ownership. Searchers' reported equity shares are assumed to be fully vested to ensure conservative estimations, and distributions were generally considered in proportion to the investors' shares of equity following their contribution to search and acquisition capital.

It is important to note that the information received for fund contributions and distributions can be imprecise, especially

for funds with long operating histories and complex capital structures. Given the relatively low number of terminated funds and operations, possible conclusions about the general performance of core search funds as a global asset class remain limited. In any case, heterogeneity across businesses, as well as structural differences over time and across countries, should be considered when interpreting the findings of this study.

Overall, the international search funds considered in this study achieved an overall ROI of 2.8× and an IRR of 30%. The median search fund acquisition measured value at 1.1× investors' capital, while the top-performing search fund achieved 23.8× as of the end of 2025. **Figure 8** provides an overview of these outcomes. These overall returns differ markedly from the last IESE study (ending by year-end 2023), as overall ROI rose from 2.0× to 2.8× and IRR increased by 12 percentage points, from 18% to 30%. The increasing sample size and aggregate results indicate the maturation of the asset class globally. The current study encompasses more terminated search funds (23% compared to 14% in the 2024 study), as well as longer operating horizons. The substantial share of recent acquisitions, however, still affects the international search fund population and may partly account for discrepancies in return metrics with the Stanford study of US and Canadian search funds (IRR of 33.9% and ROI of 4.75×). Indeed, equity appreciation in search fund-acquired companies is typically reported to be greatest after years 3 or 4. More conclusions will be possible as these companies and entrepreneurs mature further.

¹⁰ Return on investment (ROI) represents the multiple of initial cash invested that is returned to investors; that is, if the group of initial investors invested \$5 million and later received \$10 million back, this would be described as a 2.0× ROI. A return of \$1 million would be a 0.2× ROI, and so forth. A complete loss of capital would be an ROI of 0.0×.

¹¹ Internal rate of return (IRR) represents the annual compounding rate derived from the adjusted dates and actual amounts of search and acquisition capital invested and returned by an investment. IRR is not a meaningful metric for investments that return nothing or only a fraction of the investors' original investment.

¹² A total of 46 funds were removed from the sample because the principals had acquired the company within the last year. One operating business was excluded because its operations had moved to focus on the United States. Terminal funds resulting in a total loss of equity and those with a positive return were removed due to insufficient data from the principals. Other operating businesses could not be assessed due to missing estimations about investor ownership by the end of 2025.

¹³ "Terminal" search funds are those that either (i) ended the search without acquiring a company or (ii) acquired and exited a business with a positive or negative return for investors.

Figure 8. International Search Fund outcomes¹⁴



¹⁴ Figure 8 captures the acquisition rate across all 296 concluded international search funds. Of the total 216 acquisitions, 46 were not eligible for return calculations because they were acquired in 2025 and thus operative for less than one year. The analysis further excludes 18 companies operating for over one year for which limited data were available. Accordingly, the outcome proportions shown here refer to the 152 search funds for which IESE has collected reliable post-acquisition return data.

Consistent with the power law concerning returns pertaining to alternative and risk capital investments, a small number of highly successful search funds positively affect aggregate returns. **Figures 9 and 10** show adjusted returns for all eligible search funds, as well as subsamples excluding the top three and top five performers, respectively.

Figure 9. International search fund asset class ROI ($n = 228$)

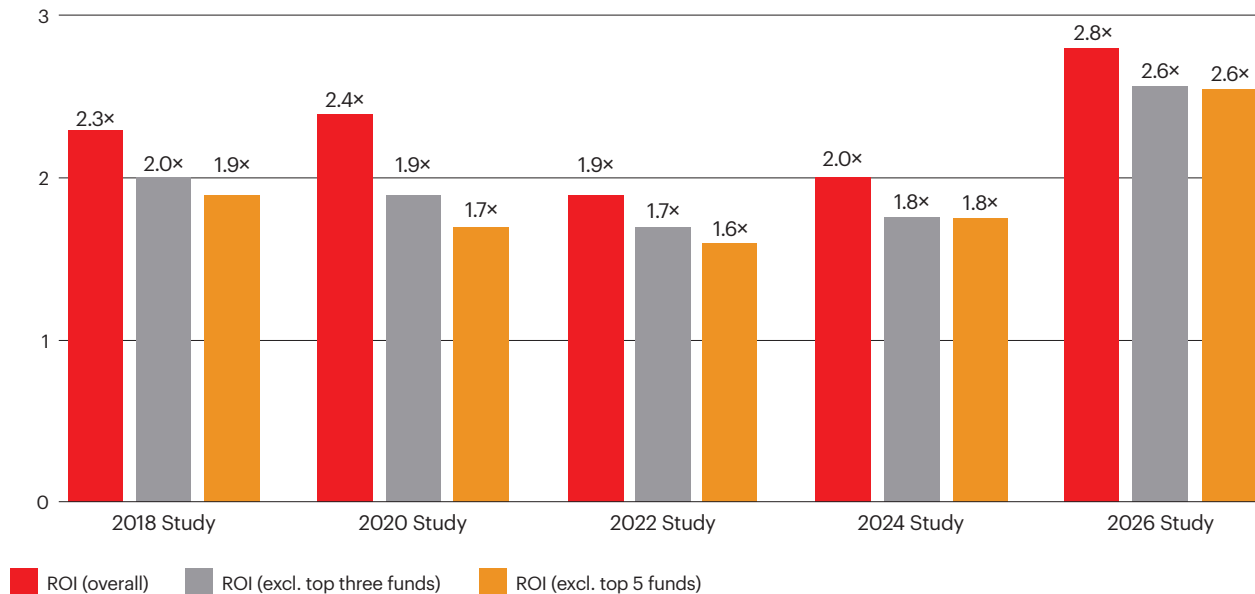
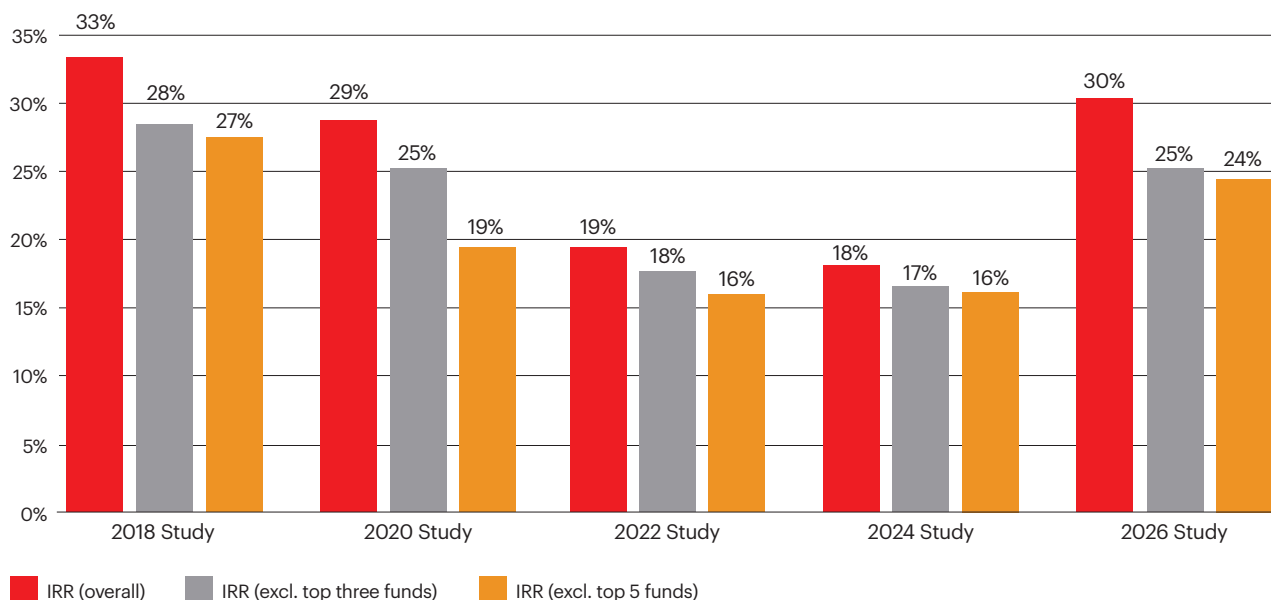


Figure 10. International search fund asset class IRR ($n = 228$)



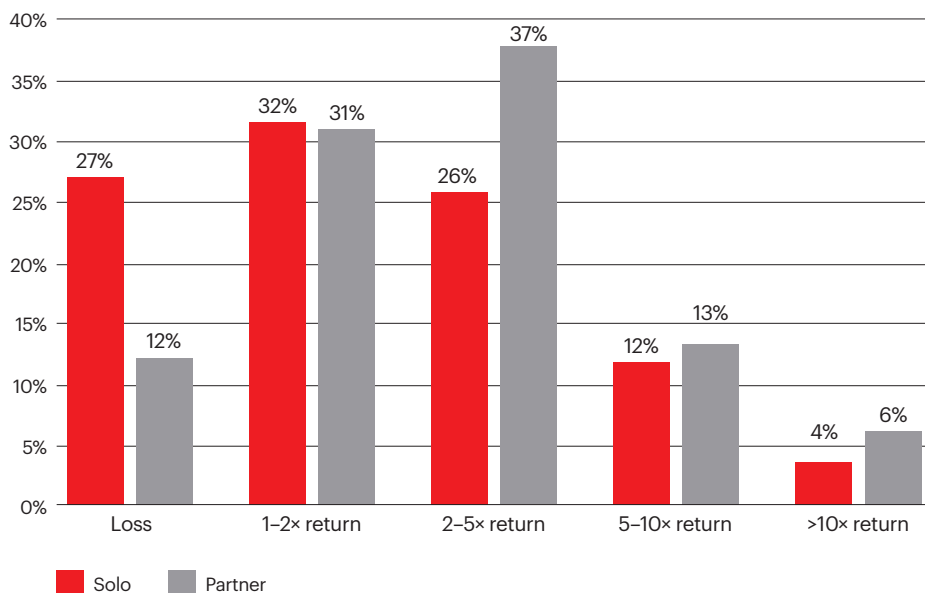
These aggregate investor returns provide an asset-class-level overview of search fund performance to inform the community and provide a data-driven foundation for potential and decision-making. Naturally, aggregation may also obscure underlying peculiarities. To shed light on potential contingencies and confounding factors, the following analyses examine differences across currencies and foreign exchange considerations in return calculations, differences between partnered and solo searchers, variance in performance by the holding period of search fund-acquired businesses, and differences across their lifecycle.

First, using the US dollar as the currency for return calculations facilitates asset-class-wide comparison but may also introduce confounding effects from varying foreign exchange rates over time. To control for this, we recalculated the individual returns for 107 international search funds whose principals originally reported data in a local currency. On average, no marked differences from the US dollar results were observed. ROI multiples increased by 0.1 $\times$, and IRR varied by less than 1 percentage point. Yet, differences ranged from -2 $\times$ to +5 $\times$

in ROI and -19.4 to +14.3% IRR for individual funds. The European subsample was also analyzed using the euro as the base currency. Excluding search funds founded before the euro's introduction in 1999, the aggregate return reached an ROI of 3.0 $\times$, slightly below the 3.1 $\times$ result for the same subsample in US dollars ($n = 126$).

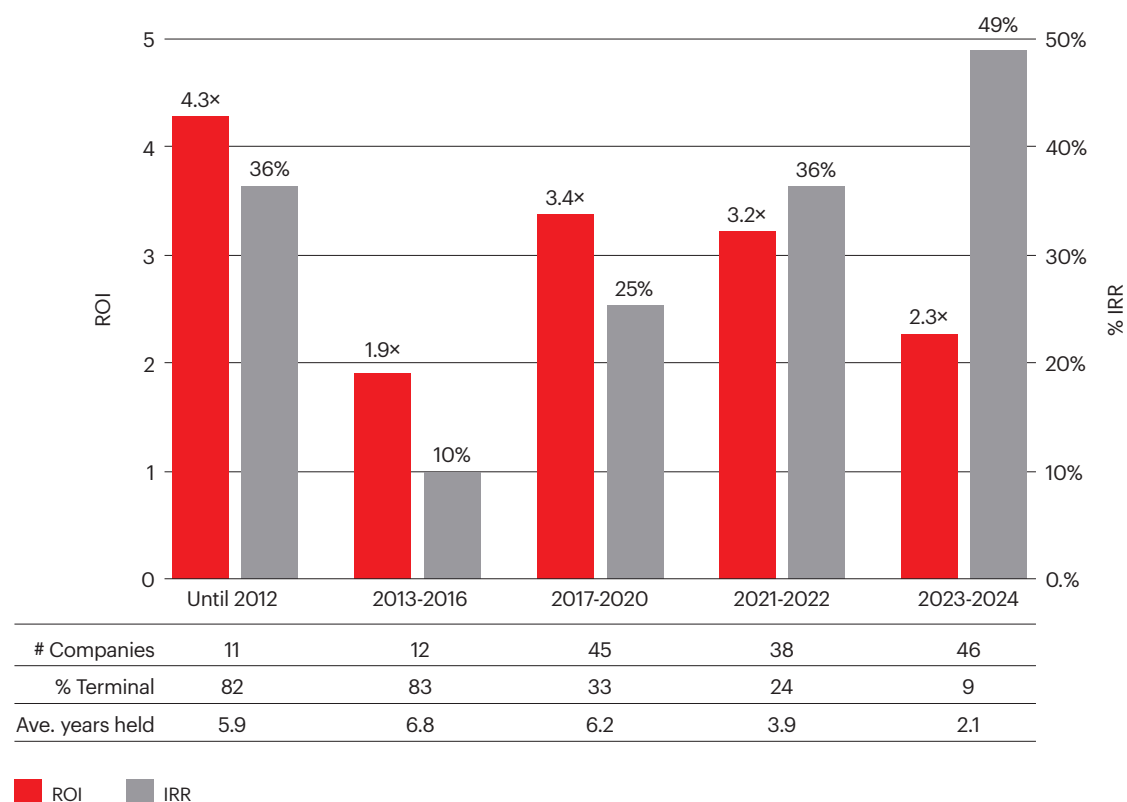
Second, how partnered and solo searches compare in terms of performance is a common question among entrepreneurs and investors alike. While the data support neither a general preference for nor a general benefit of partnered searches, the findings suggest an association between partnerships and relatively better baseline performance: acquisition rates are 7.6 percentage points higher for partnerships (77.5%, $n = 120$) than for solo searches (69.9%, $n = 176$). In addition, solo searches appear to be associated with higher odds of capital loss upon acquisition. Yet, no generalizable difference was identified for high returns—the so-called home-run investments above 5 $\times$ or even 10 $\times$ ROI. **Figure 11** juxtaposes partnered and solo searches by their distribution of investor ROI post-acquisition.

Figure 11. Investor ROI by partnership type ($n = 152$; 67 partnered, 85 solo)



Third, the previously discussed class-wide returns integrate search funds across outcomes and stages of operations. Further analysis provides finer-grained insights. Outcomes generally vary by cohort. The relatively consistent returns since 2017 demonstrate the attractive performance of the core search fund model outside the United States and Canada. The most recently acquired businesses (the 2023–2024 cohort) have yet to fully realize their early gains and future potential as time progresses and operational changes materialize. **Figure 12** separates the overall sample into subgroups according to the timing of acquisitions.

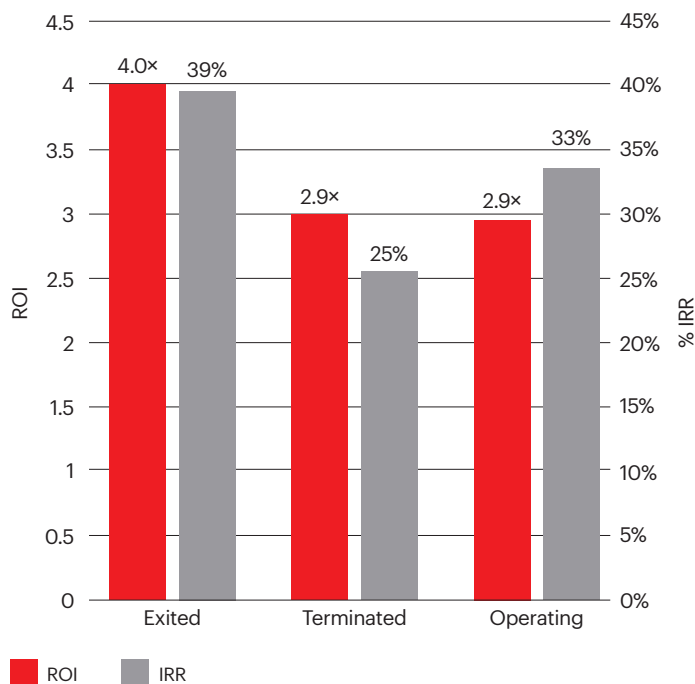
Figure 12. Investor ROI and IRR by year of company acquisition ($n = 152$)



Fourth, the lifecycle stage of each search fund–acquired business likely affects both the CEO’s expectations and actual performance. Splitting the sample by search fund status as of December 2025 supports this assumption. The highest-performing subgroup is exited search funds. Investors in these funds exited through either recapitalizations involving secondary buyouts or strategic mergers and acquisitions. This group achieved an aggregate ROI of 4.0× and IRR of

39% ($n = 37$). In contrast, search fund–acquired businesses that shut down led to almost complete loss of capital with an aggregate ROI of 0.01× ($n = 10$). Jointly, terminated search funds that acquired a business and closed either at a profit or loss reached an aggregate ROI of 2.9× and IRR of 25% ($n = 47$). Isolating returns for search funds still operating a business by the end of 2025 reveals an aggregate ROI of 2.9× and IRR of 33% ($n = 105$).

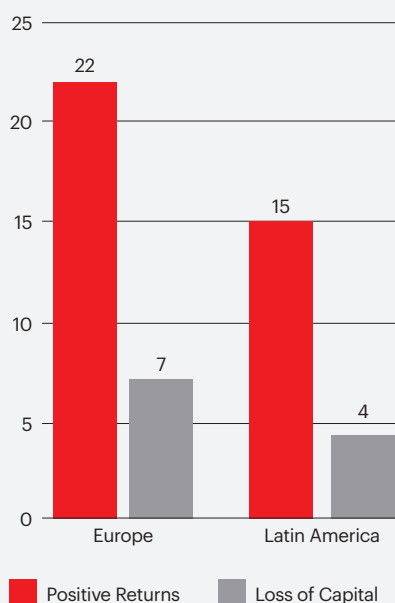
Figure 13. Investor ROI and IRR by status



Deep Dive 3: Search fund performance across Europe and Latin America

By the end of 2025, 45% of the businesses acquired in Europe had been in operation for at least three years and 27% for at least five years. In comparison, 73% of those acquired in Latin America had reached at least their third year of operation, and 52% had reached at least their fifth year post-acquisition. On an aggregate level, investor returns reached an ROI of 3.1× in Europe and 2.6× in Latin America. However, these differences are not statistically significant or generalizable. In addition, the present study includes 29 terminal search funds in Europe, compared to 19 in Latin America.

Positive and negative exits in Europe and Latin America



7. Conclusion and closing remarks

After more than three decades of development, the core search fund model continues to gain popularity and remains robust. Following the strong returns for the asset class in the United States and Canada, international entrepreneurs have spread the model across the globe. While the total number of search funds remains relatively small, this study captures what seems to be a historical inflection point in international exposure and maturation of the asset class. As of December 2025, nearly one-quarter of known businesses acquired by search funds had been terminated, predominantly with strong returns for both investors and CEOs. At the same time, operators report increasing value creation while new searchers continue to implement the model in new markets. This provides a pivotal opportunity for the search fund community to consolidate knowledge and build on the achievements of those who previously developed and continue to advance this field.

As search funds continue to spread and establish themselves across the globe, alternative approaches have emerged alongside the self-funded and core search fund models. A recent example is Long Duration Enterprises (LDEs), sometimes called *Long Term Holds*,¹⁵ and Committed

Capital Vehicles. Within the remit of the present study, the authors identified 13 recently launched international LDEs, with about twice that number of entrepreneurs currently fundraising for an LDE. At this time, limited available data and the early stage of most LDEs do not yet allow for accurate reporting. For more background on the model and details about this emerging asset class, readers may consider the note Long Term Hold, as well as the detailed analysis of the first 67 identified LDEs in the United States and Canada within the 2026 *Search Fund Study*¹⁶ by the Stanford GSB Grousbeck-Holloway Center for Entrepreneurial Studies (GHCES).

These extraordinary returns are a function of extraordinary entrepreneurs. They have distinguished themselves through hard work, perseverance, ambition, humility, coachability, grit, and a sense of humor. Behind most success stories (if not all), there have been sleepless nights, tears, pain, and heartache. The ones that did not succeed were often similarly hard-working, persevering, ambitious, humble, coachable, had grit, and a sense of humor. They most definitely went through sleepless nights, tears, pain, and heartache. To all of you we say: "Thank You!"

¹⁵ Readers may obtain the original note here: <https://www.gsb.stanford.edu/faculty-research/case-studies/long-term-hold>

¹⁶ For more information on Stanford's research in the United States and Canada, which has tracked more than 862 search funds formed since 1984, see the [2026 Search Fund Study](#) from the Graduate School of business.

Exhibit 1. International principals' background

	All time	Pre-2012	2012-2013	2014-2015	2016-2017	2018-2019	2020-2021	2022-2023	2024-2025
Age at start of search									
Minimum	23	26	27	27	26	26	24	26	23
Median	33	30	28	29	31	31	32	33	34
Maximum	57	49	37	42	39	47	44	57	55
Under 30 (%)	20	34	67	55	30	26	22	13	11
30-35 (%)	52	52	25	23	54	50	55	58	52
36-40 (%)	17	3	8	14	16	20	20	15	19
Over 40 (%)	11	10	0	9	0	4	3	14	17
Number of post-MBA years before search fund launch									
Minimum	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Median	1	0	2	0	0	1	1	2	2
Maximum	23	6	6	16	8	22	10	16	23
<1 year	37	67	33	68	61	45	43	24	19
1-3 years (%)	34	19	33	5	24	36	35	37	41
4-7 years (%)	18	15	33	21	9	11	16	20	23
8+ years (%)	12	0	0	5	7	9	6	19	17
No MBA (%)	29	7	50	14	9	13	30	33	40
Reported gender									
Male (%)	95	97	92	95	100	97	94	93	93
Female (%)	5	3	8	5	0	3	6	7	7

Exhibit 2. International principals' professional background (%)

	All time	Pre-2012	2012-2013	2014-2015	2016-2017	2018-2019	2020-2021	2022-2023	2024-2025
Management consulting	22	7	33	27	24	13	22	26	22
Private equity	17	7	8	27	17	25	21	11	18
Investment banking/finance	17	38	58	18	30	17	13	20	8
Line/general management	13	21	0	9	7	17	13	14	14
Operations	7	3	0	0	4	2	10	8	9
Entrepreneur	5	3	0	5	6	4	4	4	8
Sales	4	7	0	14	2	0	3	5	6
Investing (other than VC or PE)	3	0	0	0	0	6	4	2	5
Other	3	3	0	0	0	4	2	2	4
Engineering	3	0	0	0	4	6	3	2	3
Venture capital	2	0	0	0	4	0	5	2	1
Accounting	1	3	0	0	0	2	0	2	1
Marketing	1	7	0	0	2	0	2	0	0
Law	1	0	0	0	2	2	1	1	0
Military	1	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	0

Exhibit 3. International Search Fund metrics

	All time	Pre-2012	2012-2013	2014-2015	2016-2017	2018-2019	2020-2021	2022-2023	2024-2025
Number of principals (%)									
Single	63	68	29	62	51	60	59	64	69
Partners	37	32	71	38	49	40	41	36	31
Amount of initial capital raised (\$k)									
Minimum	15	15	250	200	300	168	287	150	91
Median	463	267	588	426	441	446	469	455	502
Maximum	901	525	651	800	650	875	901	830	835
Solo searchers—amount of initial capital raised (\$k)									
Minimum	15	15	350	333	300	168	287	150	91
Median	421	250	363	400	396	414	425	427	450
Maximum	830	485	375	697	526	550	505	830	754
Partnerships—amount of initial capital raised (\$k)									
Minimum	170	170	250	200	300	421	337	331	240
Median	630	436	600	590	586	606	647	632	649
Maximum	901	525	651	800	650	875	901	792	835
Number of search fund investors									
Minimum	2	2	6	6	5	8	2	2	2
Median	16	10	15	15	17	16	18	16	15
Maximum	30	20	24	25	22	28	30	30	25
Number of months fundraising									
Minimum	1	1	3	2	2	2	1	1	1
Median	5	6	4	6	5	5	5	5	6
Maximum	17	13	16	13	11	14	14	17	12

Exhibit 4. Targeted industries, 2024–2025^{17, 18}

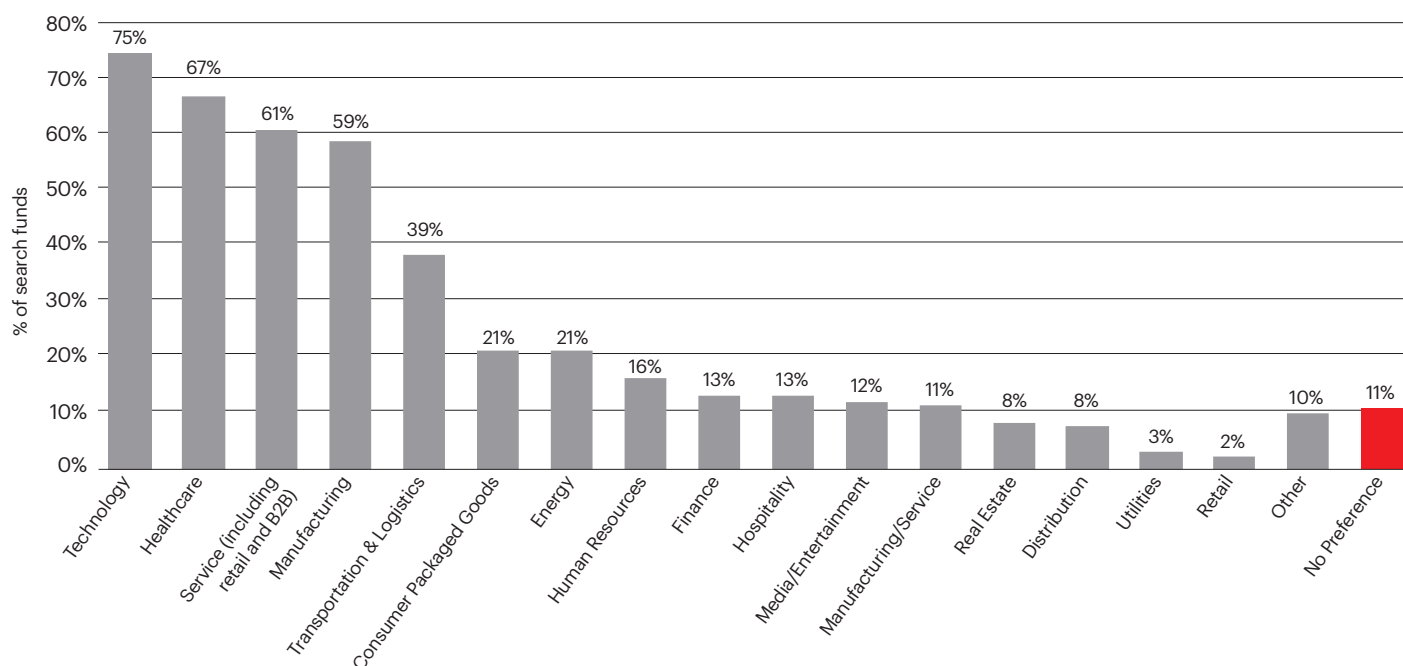


Exhibit 5. Targeted Technology Subcategories, 2024–2025

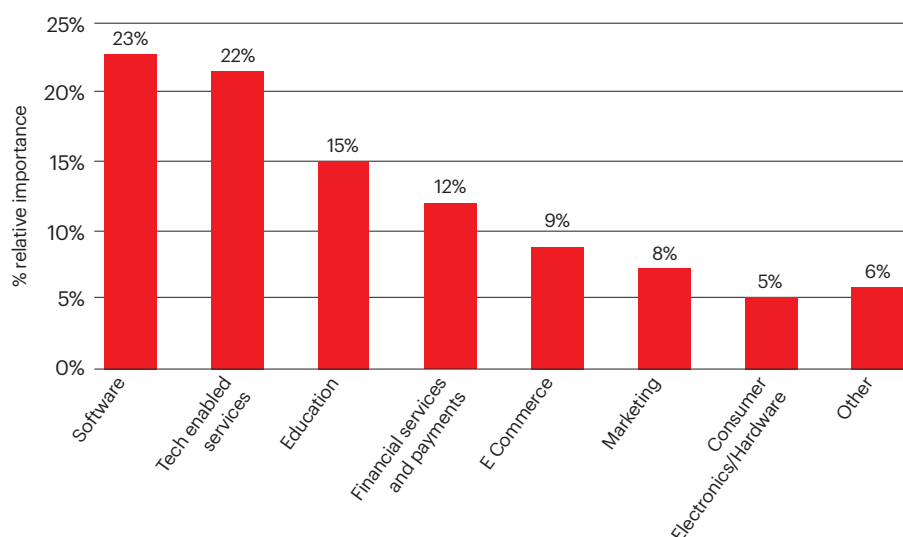
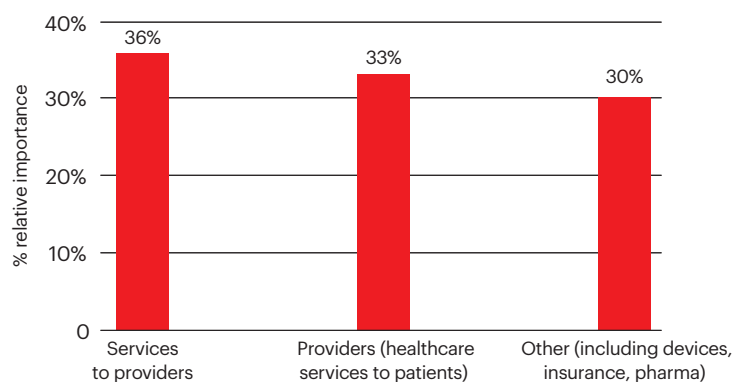


Exhibit 6. Targeted healthcare subcategories, 2024–2025



¹⁷ Principals were asked to choose all industries and subcategories they targeted rather than choosing only one. The above data represents the frequency of each response across all search funds newly surveyed for this study in the given years. The same holds for Exhibits 5 and 6.

¹⁸ For historical data on industries targeted by searchers (pre-2002–2021), refer to previous versions of the [International Search Fund Study](#).

Exhibit 7. Selected statistics for international search fund acquisitions

Median statistics for acquisitions over time								
	Pre-2012	2012-2013	2014-2015	2016-2017	2018-2019	2020-2021	2022-2023	2024-2025
Length of search (months)	15	29	22	16	22	23	23	20
Purchase price (\$m)	5	6	14	11	13	12	15	10
Revenues at purchase (\$m)	8	8	10	9	10	8	7	10
EBITDA at purchase (\$m)	2	1	3	3	2	2	2	2
EBITDA margin at purchase	19%	9%	24%	27%	28%	23%	33%	28%
EBITDA growth rate at purchase	7%	0%	5%	16%	8%	13%	15%	12%
Revenue growth rate at purchase	7%	0%	9%	10%	12%	13%	16%	10%
Purchase price/ EBITDA	4.5×	6.4×	5.8×	4.2×	5.7×	6.4×	6,1×	5.1×
Purchase price/revenues	0.8×	0.8×	1.5×	1.2×	1.6×	1.5×	1.6×	1.2×
Employees at purchase	80	33	68	90	58	42	39	45
First-year CEO base compensation (\$k)					151	138	132	147

Total number of months from start of search to deal close						
Minimum	Median	Maximum	<11	11-20	21-30	31+
1	21	58	10%	37%	35%	18%

Purchase price statistics						
Minimum	Median	Maximum	<\$4m	\$4-\$8	\$8-\$12	>\$12
0.8	11.6	65.4	7%	22%	25%	46%

Additional statistics all time						
	International search funds			US and Canadian search funds		
	Minimum	Median	Maximum	Minimum	Median	Maximum
Revenue at purchase (\$m)	1.0	8.0	80.0	0.5	7.6	82.0
EBITDA at purchase (\$m)	0.0	2.3	11.6	-1.6	2	25.0
EBITDA margin at purchase	0%	26%	70%	-23%	23%	67%
EBITDA Growth rate at purchase	-81%	12%	94%	-56%	11%	200%
Revenue growth rate at purchase	-50%	11%	60%	-50%	15%	100%
Purchase price/EBITDA	NM	5.7×	25.0×	NM	6.3×	164.5×
Purchase price/revenues	0.0	1.4×	6.9×	0.2×	1.8×	22.3×
Employees at purchase	2	50	1,500	4	40	2,500

Exhibit 8. Distribution of international search funds that have acquired a company by ROI (*n* = 152)

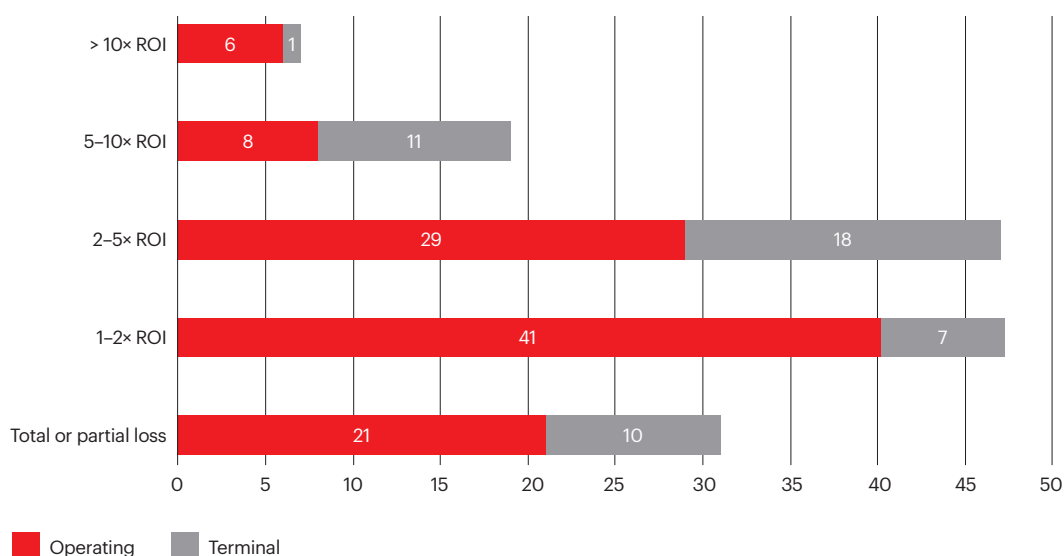
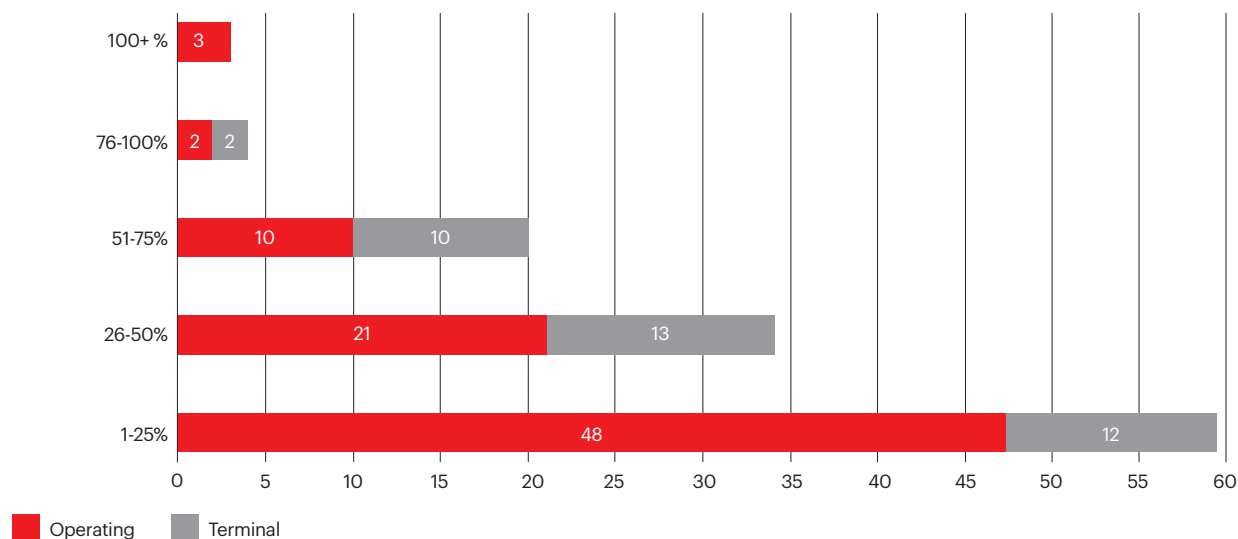


Exhibit 9. Distribution of international search funds by IRR (*n* = 121)¹⁹



¹⁹ Of the 152 operating businesses for which IESE collected return data, 121 reported positive IRRs as of December 31, 2025.

