

Female Investment Professionals in US Private Equity:

A Numerical Analysis and Opportunities for Further Exploration





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Overview

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Introduction

Produced as a collaboration between Columbia Business School, Level 20 and Three Cairns Group, this inaugural report tracks women’s representation in US private equity (PE) investment roles. This report is in draft and will be finalized over the coming months.

→ WHY WE PRODUCED THIS REPORT?

The report presents data and analysis on the proportion of women working in investment roles across 661 private equity and multi-strategy firms with a significant private equity business operating in the US. It is one of the largest published datasets on the US private equity market. Our aim is to:

- i. Provide data to key decision-makers in this important industry;
- ii. Improve and refine the data over time with input from investment professionals, PE industry participants, academics, and other interested parties; and
- iii. Engage the industry on the representation of women investment professionals in private equity.

→ WHY FOCUS ON INVESTMENT PROFESSIONALS?

Our research focuses specifically on investment professionals because investing is the primary function of the PE industry. Working on investments is an exciting but demanding role, and it has been one of the most challenging areas to find consistent and meaningful participation by women. Through the analysis of women’s representation across seniorities, as well as candid conversations with female investment professionals and HR professionals in focus groups, we hope to provide the industry with actionable insights that will deepen the conversation around attracting, retaining and promoting female PE investors.

→ WHAT DOES OUR ANALYSIS SHOW?

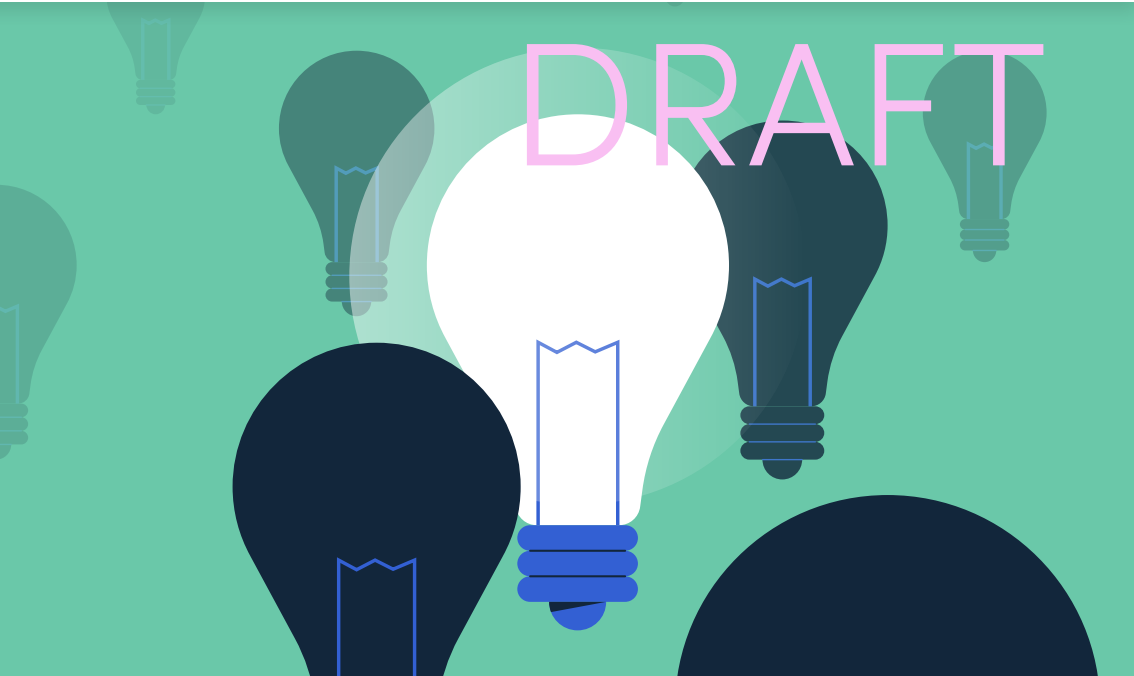
Our research suggests that, while there was some progress in female representation among investment professionals at the mid and junior levels between 2021 and 2023, improvement was slow-going. At the senior level, female representation has remained steady at 6%, and at the mid and junior levels, representation increased from 25% to 27% and 18% to 20% respectively during this period. At mid and junior levels, this movement appears to be driven by Mega firms managing assets greater than \$25bn, however understanding the reasons for this will require further investigation.

While there has been some progress in the US private equity industry, the pace of change will need to increase to make investment teams meaningfully more representative of women. A preliminary parity analysis performed by Columbia Business School during the course of this research suggested that it will take 20+ years to reach parity at the mid level due to low rates of junior promotion and long timeframes to promotion. Given the female representation levels shown in our data, and the rate of progress over the last two years, the representation of senior women will not see meaningful change without substantially higher rates of progression at the junior and mid levels.

→ WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Given the important role private equity plays in the United States¹ through the businesses the industry owns and the people they employ, it is important to understand how women participate in this industry. Greater representation of women in decision-making roles brings different perspectives when investing in portfolio companies, supporting their growth and contribution to the broader economy. Access to the best talent is vital for success in any industry, including the private equity industry, where competition for capital and deal flow is fierce. Inclusive cultures where all team members thrive, supported by intentional, well-developed practices and clear paths to career progression, enable organizational resilience by attracting and retaining strong performers. Our report provides a series of questions and examples of good practices, based on our research and focus group discussions, to assist firms and further support existing efforts. Over the coming months, we plan to work with the industry to improve the depth and quality of data and insights in this report.

This report provides useful data to the industry and insights about the role women play in private equity. We have also raised a series of questions that need further investigation. In addition to finalizing the report, we intend to update the data and to incorporate suggestions from industry participants and parties focused on this topic on an annual basis.



Our data project is unique because it:

- Represents one of the **largest and most comprehensive review** to date of women’s representation on investment teams in US private equity
- Uses **data collected from publicly available sources**
- Analyzes **data at an individual level**², which allows for granular analysis over the long term
- Will be updated annually so that trends can be identified and tracked over time with increasing levels of detail
- Will provide the basis for a public **benchmarking tool**³ so firms can assess progress against peers in the same Assets Under Management (AUM) banding
- Will make the **database available to academics** on a licensed basis for further research

1 PE directly employed 12 million workers in the US in 2022 and generated approximately 6.5% of total gross domestic product. Source: Economic contribution of the US private equity sector in 2022 – A report by EY prepared for the American Investment Council, April 2023. Available [here](#).

2 Data is collected at an individual level and aggregated for the purposes of this report. This is a unique feature of this research and more detail is included in the Methodology on page 24.

3 The benchmarking tool allows users to view the female representation among investment professionals by seniority for a custom comparable set of firms. Users can create the custom comparable set by selecting AUM band upper and lower bounds, as well as geographic locations.



About the Report Collaborators

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Professor Michael Ewens and the Columbia Business School Private Equity Program.

Professor Michael Ewens is a faculty member in the Finance Division of Columbia Business School. He studies private equity and entrepreneurship, with a focus on discrimination and financial intermediation. He is co-director of Columbia Business School’s Private Equity Program which serves as the Business School’s primary point of contact with the private equity industry, unifying students, alumni, and the business community into a single network.

 **Read more online**
business.columbia.edu/privateequity



Level 20 is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving gender representation in private equity. Our mission is to inspire women to join and succeed in private equity, and to work with industry leaders to increase the share of women working in senior positions, particularly investment roles, to at least 20%. Level 20’s activities across Europe, including mentoring programs and research, all focus on attracting, retaining and promoting women in private equity and venture capital.

 **Read more online**
level20.org

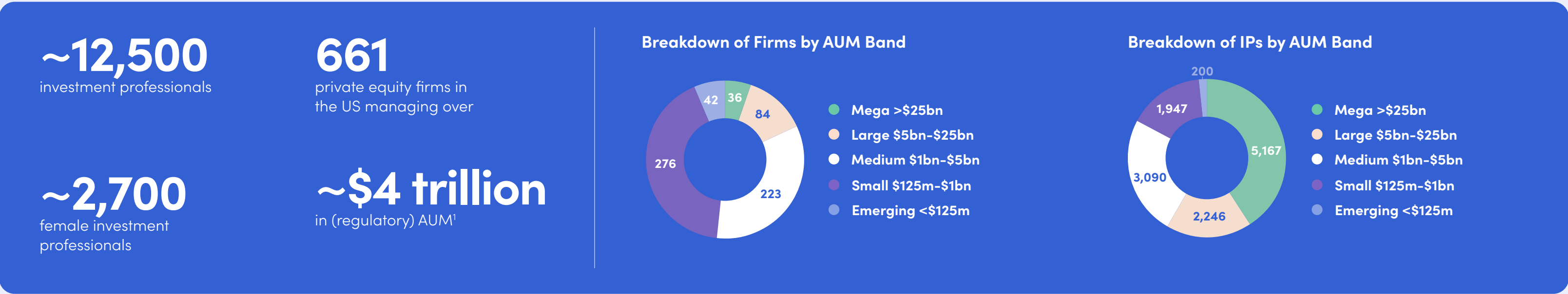


Three Cairns Group is a philanthropic investment firm primarily focused on the climate crisis. We believe in bold climate action that empowers people and communities to thrive in a rapidly changing world. While our primary focus is the urgent challenge of climate change, we also support a number of initiatives including strengthening democracy, mental health, and gender equity in private equity.

 **Read more online**
threecairnsgroup.com

About this Study

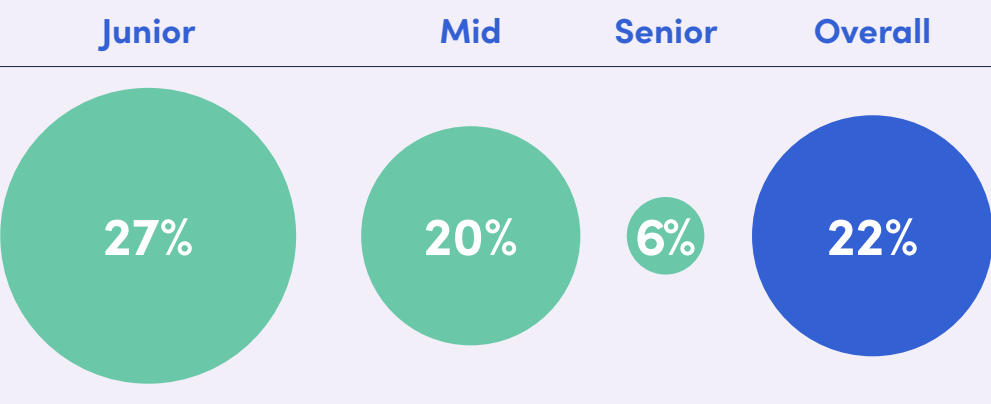
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Executive Summary

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Percentage of Female Investment Professionals by Seniority Level



31%
of firms had investment teams with no women

5%
of firms were female-founded

Highlights From the Data

- There was an increase of approximately two percentage points in female representation among all investment professionals from 2021 to 2023 (20% to 22%). At the senior level, there was no improvement over this time with female representation steady at 6%. The mid and junior levels improved by two percentage points each (18% to 20% and 25% to 27% respectively).
- By AUM, the Mega firms (>\$25bn, managing 65% of AUM in this sample) have the highest female representation at the mid and junior levels, with women representing 26% and 35% of investment professionals respectively.
- Senior female representation ranges from 5% to 9% across the five AUM bands. The Emerging (<\$125m) and Mega firms have the highest female representation at 9% each. At Large firms, 7% of senior investment professionals are women. Small (\$125m-\$1bn) and Medium (\$1bn-\$5bn) sized firms have the lowest proportion at 5% and 6% respectively.
- The lowest representation of women is in Small firms (\$125m-\$1bn, managing 3% of AUM in this sample), with women representing 12% of investment professionals.
- 31% of firms had investment teams with no women. This figure is driven by smaller firms primarily managing less than \$1bn in AUM. The firms with no female investment professionals represent roughly \$161bn in AUM, or 4% of the total AUM managed by firms in this sample.
- Firms with senior female investment professionals see higher levels of female representation at mid and junior levels. In firms with senior female women, the representation of mid and junior level women was four percentage points higher than at firms without senior women – 24% vs 20% at mid level and 32% vs 28% at junior level.
- 5% of firms were female-founded and 4% of firms had female managing partners and CEOs.

Insights and Actions to Drive Change from Our Research

This data-led research includes views and insights gathered from focus groups with women working in the US private equity industry, and HR and DEI professionals at US private equity firms, as well as individual conversations with male and female investment professionals. Key themes from the candid conversations held are highlighted below, and this feedback is consistent with research carried out by Level 20 in recent years¹.

Being an investment professional in private equity is a demanding yet fulfilling role. Some firms are working to attract talent at all levels, but lateral hiring at the mid and senior levels is challenging, making the retention and promotion of women all the more critical. In our discussions, and in findings from previous Level 20 research, sponsorship and transparency were regularly cited as key actions to advance female representation.

Senior leaders, especially men, can support women’s careers by being effective sponsors – giving them opportunities to develop their skills and networks, and advocating for them to ensure their contributions are recognized and they get access to deal flow. Transparency means providing detail on what it takes to get to the next level through regular clear and constructive feedback. Investing is an ‘apprenticeship’ career, and the insights and feedback provided is essential.

However, based on our focus group discussions, women seem to receive less feedback than their male counterparts.

Increasing the visibility of successful women and role models inspires the next generation. Building a strong culture, which eliminates ‘in/out group’ dynamics and makes all professionals feel included, drives engagement. Firms that provide support and flexibility to balance work and life responsibilities, and transition parents back into deal environments quickly after family leave, should see higher levels of retention based on feedback from our focus groups and Level 20’s previous work on family leave. Mentors and coaches were also considered helpful for professional and career development by being a useful sounding board.

Next Steps

We will gather and analyze data on the representation of women in private equity investment teams annually. Our goal is to have consistency of information over time. This will help improve comparison across the US and European markets using Level 20’s other research. The data and insights provided in this report can be used by the private equity industry, including LPs who have an influential role, to identify areas to discuss further. Columbia Business School, Level 20 and Three Cairns Group plan to facilitate more collaboration on the actions and initiatives that will support talented women to succeed in this dynamic and economically consequential industry.

¹ Example reports include ACCELERATE: A framework for attracting, promoting and retaining talented women in private equity – A report by The Inclusion Initiative at the London School of Economics and Level 20, June 2023. Available [here](#). UK Diversity & Inclusion Report – A report by the BVCA and Level 20, May 2023. Available [here](#).



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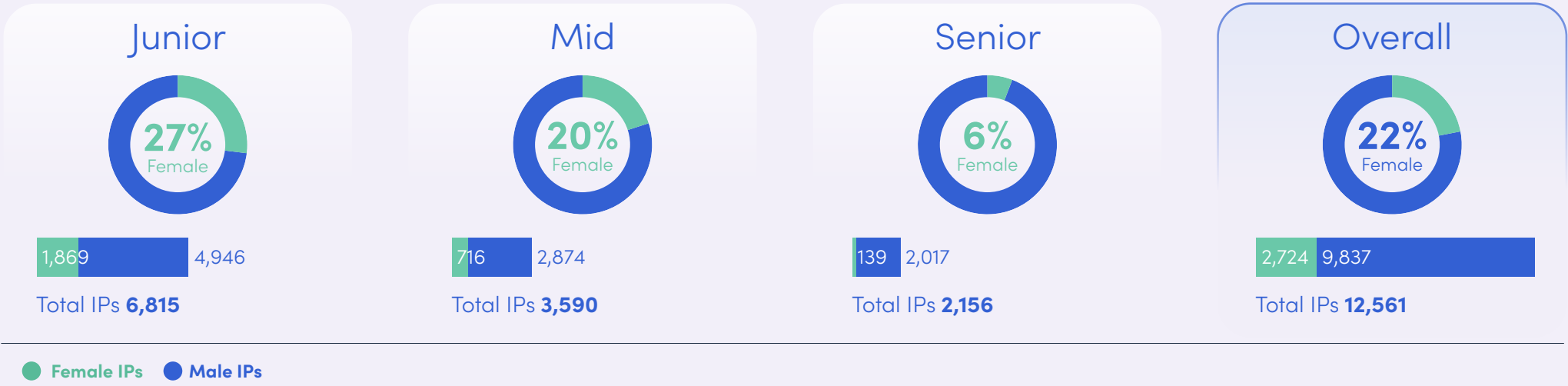
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Female Investment Professionals

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Female Representation Among Investment Professionals by Seniority 2023



Female Representation Among Investment Professionals by Seniority 2021 – 2023



Under a quarter (22%) of all investment professionals across the 661 PE firms in the US are women. The majority of these women are in junior and mid level positions, with markedly lower female representation (6%) at the senior level. There are important differences in participants largely based on AUM, which will be discussed in the next section.

The 2023 figures do show some progress at the mid and junior levels over the prior two years. There was an increase of approximately two percentage points in female representation among all investment professionals from 2021 to 2023 (20% to 22%). At the senior level, there was no meaningful improvement over this time with female representation steady at 6%. The mid and junior levels improved by two percentage points each (18% to 20% and 25% to 27% respectively).

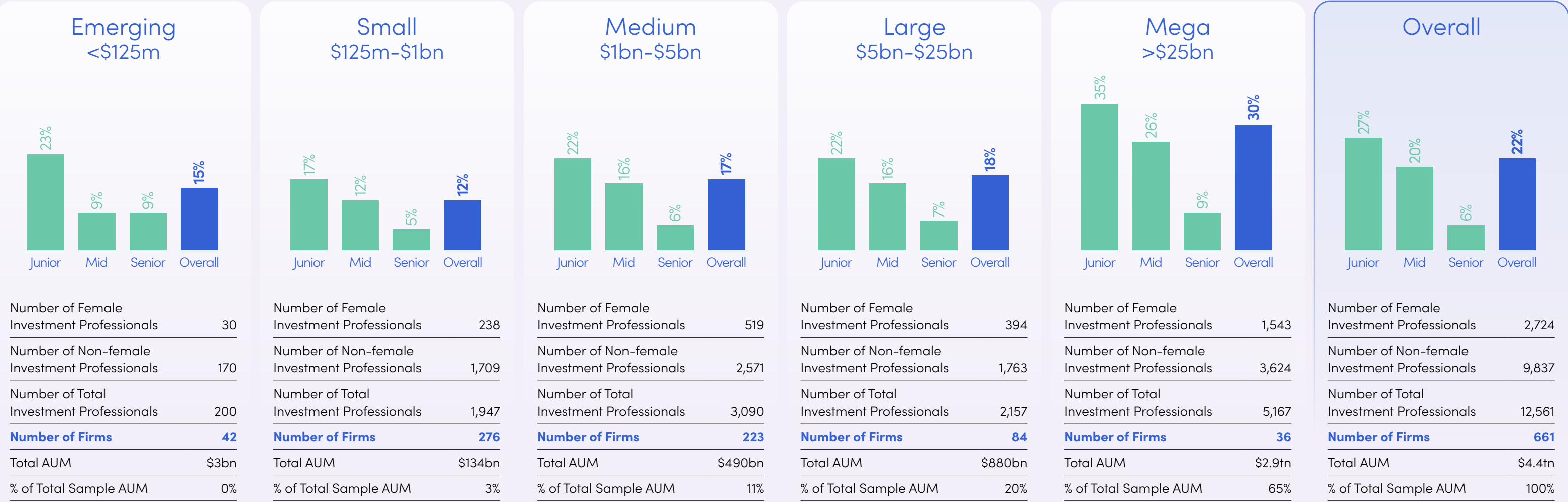
Across Europe, Level 20’s 2022 report shows the average percentage of women in investment teams is 20% for both private equity and venture capital. When looking at private equity only, the proportion of women in investment roles overall is 18%.

With respect to senior investment roles, some countries have more female representation than others, e.g. France at 12%, Germany at 5% and Denmark at 4%. The European report is being updated and published in September 2024. In the UK, the latest report (2023) shows that at the senior level, female representation was 12% for private equity, having increased from 6% in five years.

Female Investment Professionals by AUM Band

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Female Investment Professionals by AUM Band 2023



Female Investment Professionals by AUM Band (cont.)

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Female representation on investment teams varies considerably by the AUM band of firms, which we are using as a proxy for firm size.

Mega Firms (>\$25bn)

In our dataset, Mega firms that manage more than \$25bn in AUM generally have a greater proportion of female investment professionals overall than smaller firms, and particularly at the mid and junior levels. A better understanding of what is driving this will require more research, however possible factors include Mega firms being able to:

- Support investment professionals with a greater level of dedicated infrastructure associated with human resources, training, and sponsorship programs.
- Offer more attractive compensation and career packages than smaller firms.
- Recruit many more people on a consistent basis, especially as these firms often have growing rather than static AUM.
- Offer opportunities across a variety of investment strategies, some of which may have a greater representation of women.
- Provide the opportunity for professionals to move from one business area to another, which may be beneficial at certain points in their career, resulting in increased retention.

Where firms have greater levels of female representation across seniorities, this may encourage other women to join. Larger firms also have greater brand awareness among potential employees, including women.

Large Firms (\$5bn–\$25bn)

Larger firms that manage \$5B–\$25bn in AUM have a lower proportion overall of female investment professionals compared to Mega firms at 18% vs 30%. The proportion of women in mid and junior level roles is similar to Medium firms, and at a senior level, female representation is lower than that of the Mega firms (7% vs 9%). Larger firms may also benefit from the areas noted above for Mega firms, e.g. brand awareness, ability to offer attractive compensation and benefits packages and greater firm infrastructure.

Medium Firms (\$1bn–\$5bn)

Medium firms that manage \$1bn–\$5bn in AUM have a similar proportion overall of female investment professionals compared to Large funds at 17% and similar proportions at the junior (22%) and mid (16%) levels. At the senior level, female representation is just 6%. There may be fewer opportunities to progress into more senior roles at these firms and more research will be required to understand better the reasons for the drop between mid and senior level roles.

Small Firms (\$125m–\$1bn)

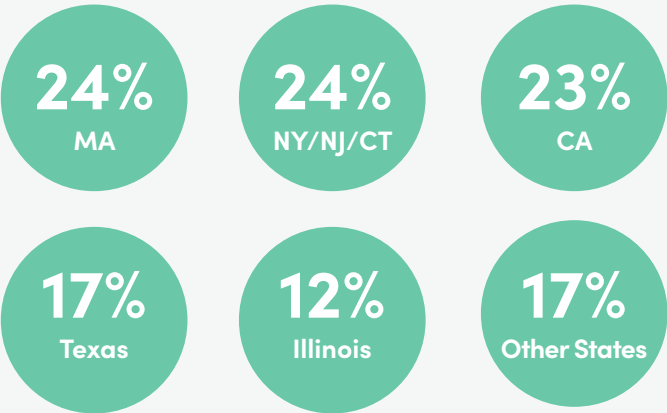
Small firms managing between \$125m and \$1bn have the lowest overall representation of female investment professionals at 12% compared to firms in other bands in this analysis. Small firms also have the lowest proportion of female investment professionals at every seniority level (5% senior, 12% mid and 17% junior). This may be because Small firms face more challenges in recruiting and retaining female talent than the Larger firms. This is possibly because in lower AUM bands, workforces tend to be more static, making these firms less likely to participate in annual recruitment rounds at the junior level.

Emerging Firms (<\$125m)

An exception to the decreasing pattern of female representation seen for Small firms is the sub-\$125m AUM band, where 9% of senior investment professionals are women (versus 5% and 6% for the two bands covering \$125m to \$5bn AUM). The Emerging firm band has the highest proportion of female control persons, managing partners and CEOs (see pages 13-14 for more details), which may partly explain this result. However, these results need to be taken in the context that this is a much smaller number of individuals than in other bands. A small change in the number of senior women – positively or negatively – can significantly impact representation.

Regional Differences Across the US

Female Representation Among Investment Professionals by Geography of Firm Headquarters

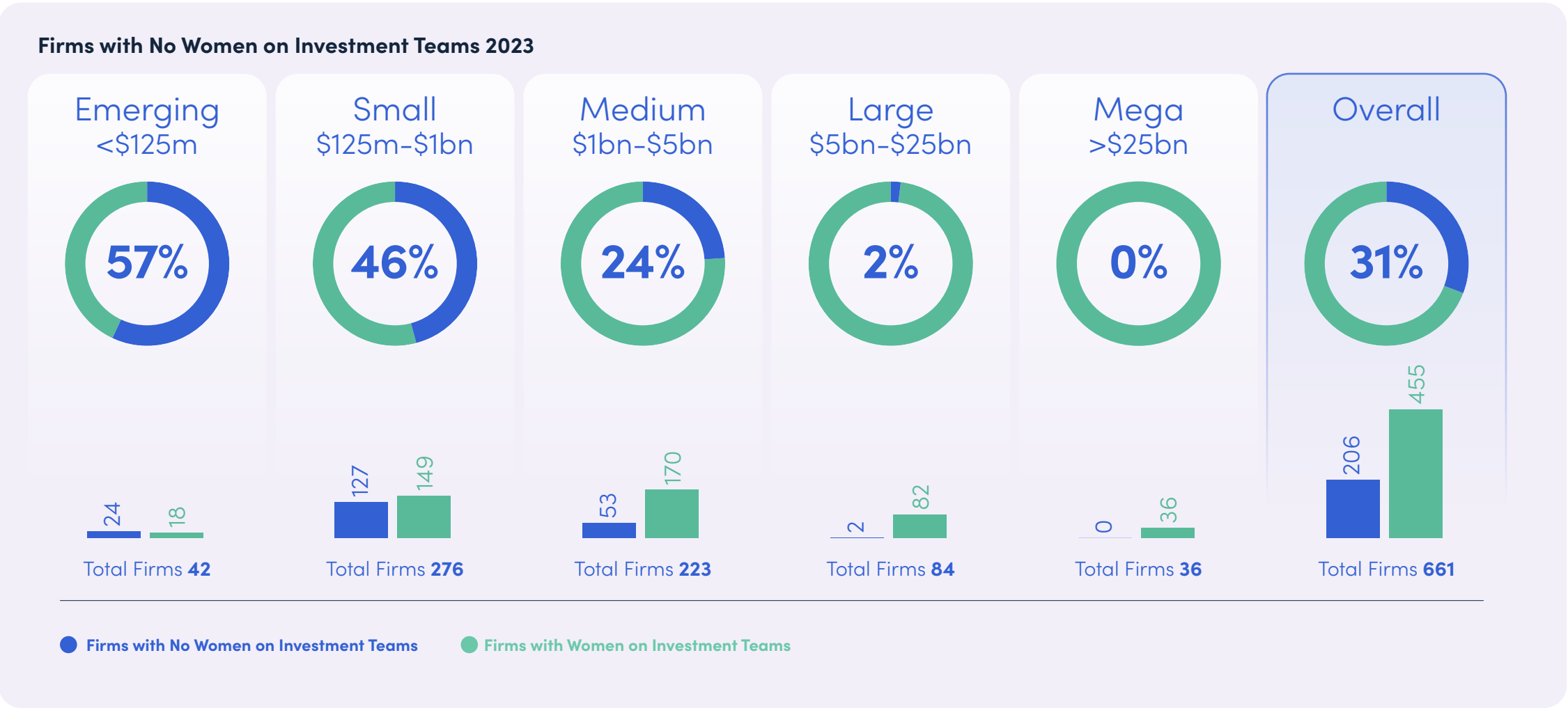


Note: The above excludes 23 firms that are headquartered outside of the United States but have a significant presence in the US (see Appendices for methodology on the inclusion of firms in our sample).

In this report, female investment team representation at all levels is higher in the established private equity hubs of Massachusetts, the greater New York City area, California and Texas. These hubs are where many of the larger firms are located and are home to a deeper private equity talent pool than other states. Firms outside these major private equity centers may face additional hurdles in attracting talent.

Investment Teams with No Women

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Of the 661 US PE firms in our sample, 31%, representing \$161bn in AUM (4% of the total sample AUM) have no female investment professionals.

Investment teams with no women are much more prevalent in smaller than larger firms by AUM in our sample. The top two AUM bands (\$5bn-\$25bn and >\$25bn) have almost no firms with no women on their investment teams, while nearly half of the Small firms (\$125m-\$1bn) have no female investment professionals and 57% of Emerging firms (<\$125m) have no women on their investment teams.

Women in Senior and Decision-Making Roles

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Female Senior Investment Professionals

Across our entire sample of 661 US private equity firms, there are 139 senior investment professionals (Managing Director to Partner-level) who are women.

These women are in 106 firms. Of the remaining 555 firms, 349, representing \$1.6tn in AUM (37% of the total sample AUM), have no senior female investment professionals and an additional 206 firms have no female investment professionals at any seniority level.

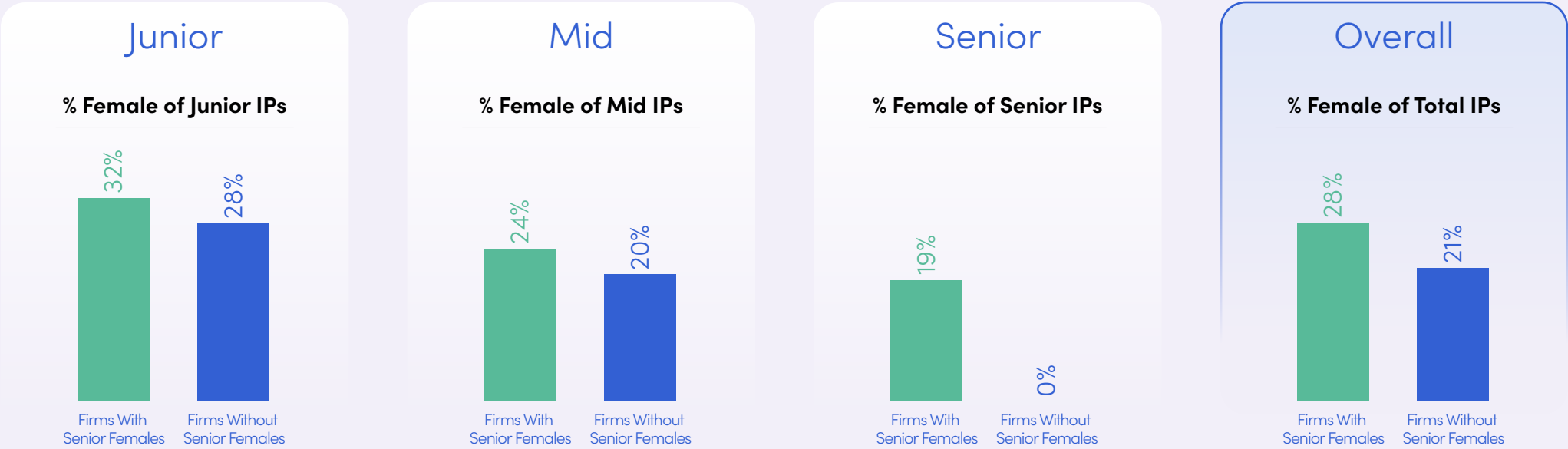
106

firms with senior female IPs

349

firms without senior female IPs

Representation of Female Mid and Junior for Firms With and Without Senior Women 2023



Firms with senior female investment professionals see higher levels of female representation at mid and junior levels. In firms with senior female women, the representation of mid and junior level women was four percentage points higher than at firms without senior women – 24% vs 20% at mid level and 32% vs 28% at junior level.

Our research shows a clear relationship between the presence of senior female investment professionals and the balance of men and women in the junior and mid levels. In the firms with at least one senior investment team member who is female, there are significantly higher proportions of female junior and mid level investment professionals than in those firms with no senior female investment professionals.

The influence may run in both directions. Where firms have more junior women, there are more opportunities to support the junior cohort so they stay and are promoted into senior positions. Meanwhile, firms with more senior women are likely to attract and retain more junior and mid level investment professionals, who perceive the firm as a place that advances women.

Based on our focus group discussions, senior female role models are critical to helping junior and mid level female investment professionals see that a career and progression in private equity is attractive and possible for them. This is supported by themes that emerged from our focus groups (see next section), as well as research by Level 20 and The Inclusion Initiative at the London School of Economics, which suggest that role models can influence cultures and change the stereotypes of what is needed to succeed in private equity¹.

¹ ACCELERATE: A framework for attracting, promoting and retaining talented women in private equity – A report by The Inclusion Initiative at the London School of Economics and Level 20, June 2023. Available [here](#).

Women in Senior and Decision-Making Roles (cont.)

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Senior Decision-Makers

Our study focuses on investment professionals in PE at junior, mid, and senior levels. We have also segmented senior investment professionals to identify the more senior members of the organization: founder, managing partner, CEO and control persons. Specifically, we analyzed our sample to ascertain female firm leaders. It is important to note that there are women in the data who were captured in multiple categories (for example, a female founder may have the title of managing partner and will show up in both counts).

Female Founded Firms

Among 611 firms with information on founders, 28 (or 5%) have female founders. About two-thirds of the female founders in our dataset are investment professionals, with the rest predominantly COOs.

This low percentage can be for a number of reasons, including the fact that founding a firm requires professionals to have built up an attributable track record and enough wealth to seed the organization and make sufficient commitments to funds. Realistically, only senior investment professionals already in the industry can make this leap, and the current female representation in these levels in our overall dataset is low.

Female Managing Partners (MPs) and CEOs

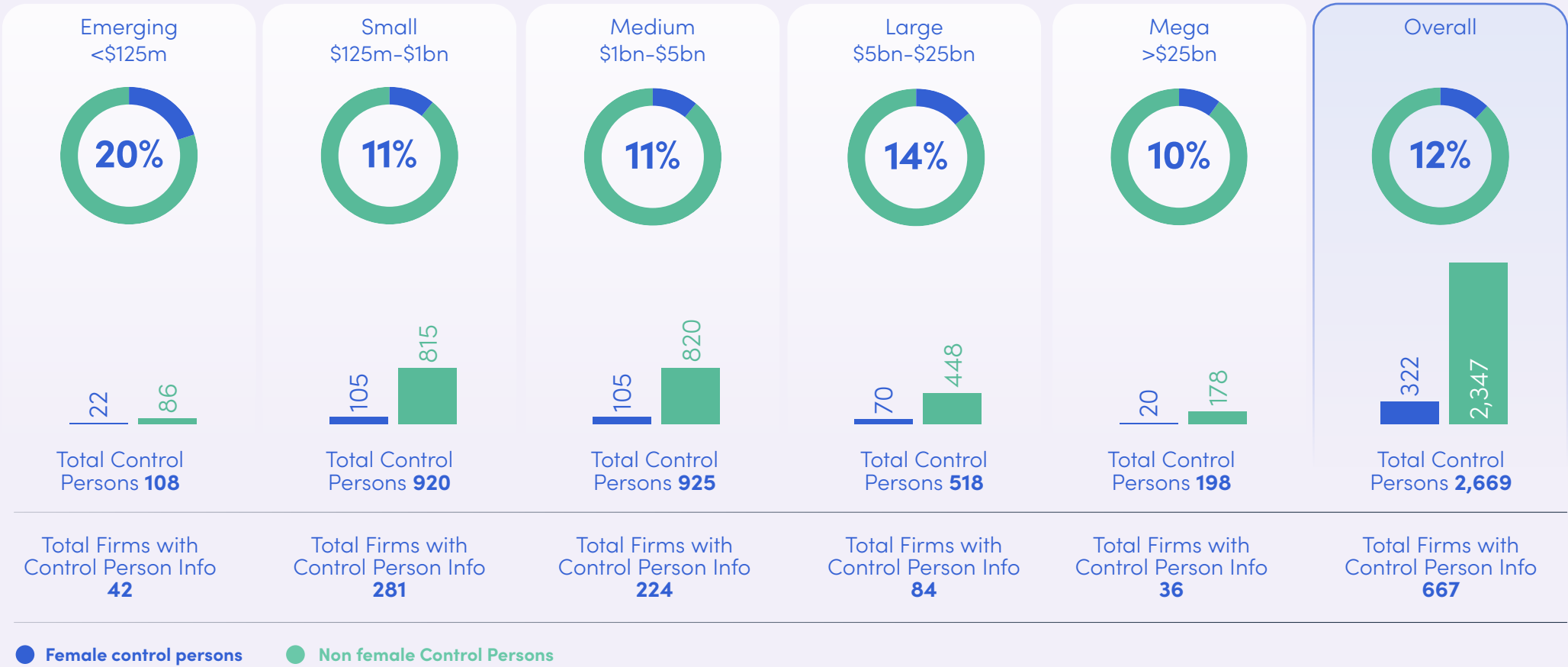
At 3%, the proportion of firms in our dataset with a female managing partner or CEO is lower than that for firms with a female founder. The exception here is the smallest of firms, where the proportion rises to 16%, which is higher than the percentage of female-founded firms.



Women in Senior and Decision-Making Roles (cont.)

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Female Control Persons 2021-2023



Note: For this analysis, we examined all of the firms in the dataset across 2021 to 2023 resulting in more total firms with control person data (667) than firms in the 2023 segment of the dataset (661).

Female Control Persons

Using information contained in ADV filings, we analyzed our sample to identify the proportion of control persons who are women. In summary, these are individuals that have the power, directly or indirectly, to direct the management or policies of a company, including through ownership of securities. For example, partners or directors exercising executive responsibility are presumed to control the firm¹.

Of the 322 control persons who are women, 54 are investment professionals, with the remainder largely holding COO, CFO, CCO, CLO or general counsel positions. While the proportion of female control persons is relatively stable across most AUM bands – at between 10% and 14% – the Emerging firms are again higher at 20%.

Drawing the results in this section together (Female Founders, Female Managing Partners and CEOs, Female Control Persons), the proportion of women in senior and decision-making roles is low. The under \$125m AUM banding appears to buck the trend with more female representation in these roles.

¹ Refer to the SEC’s website for the definition of a Control Person [here](#).



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03

Insights and Actions

Attracting, Retaining and Promoting Talented Women in Private Equity	p.16
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Attracting, Retaining and Promoting Talented Women in Private Equity

As part of our research, we held seven focus groups with 37 attendees¹ to supplement the data analysis and provide more context on different parts of the US industry. The commentary in this section reflects the feedback provided by focus group participants and is not intended to be commentary on all firms included in the sample covered by this report.

In this section, we set out:

- Feedback from our focus groups which covered their reflections on the draft data presented, and the effectiveness of initiatives and other actions to increase female participation in the industry. To analyze the discussions, we used a framework to determine whether an area was linked to the attraction, retention, or promotion of women.
- Questions and actions for consideration based on our research. The questions are intended to help industry participants to identify the areas to advance female representation on investment teams, that are most relevant to them.

This section is designed to assist firms in identifying actions to advance female representation on their investment teams.

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Attracting
Women to the Profession

[Read more P.17](#)



Retaining
Women in the Industry

[Read more P.18](#)



Promoting
Women with Transparency

[Read more P.20](#)

¹ Breakdown of focus group attendees: 21 investment professionals, 8 human resource professionals, 8 others.



Attracting women to the profession

FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

Awareness

Attracting women to join the industry at a junior level is vital to building a talent pipeline and increasing the representation of women at all levels. This is especially so given the apprenticeship nature of private equity investment roles. There have been some successes in attracting female candidates early in their careers, though some firms, particularly at the smaller end, have found this challenging. Internships and work experience opportunities, as well support for careers forums and organizations that create these, help to showcase and demystify careers in private equity.

Recruitment

The system for recruiting at junior levels via highly competitive on-cycle processes can present issues for smaller firms when it comes to attracting investment professionals early in their careers. The process has become intensely competitive and pressurized over recent years, with larger firms offering candidates positions up to two years in advance of start dates, before they have begun their first job out of college. Firms may miss out on potential talented candidates that opt out of this timetable or take more time to decide on their career path.

Further, requirements of junior-level recruits often lead many firms to recruit almost exclusively from investment banks. However, this can limit the pool of women entering the industry as investment professionals: in US investment banking, women held 33% of entry-level investing roles in 2023¹. Some focus group participants commented on broadening the pool from which people are recruited and supporting them by providing technical skills training (e.g. modeling). Junior hires are only part of the solution as it takes time for them to progress into more senior roles. Efforts to bring in more female talent at mid and senior levels, without poaching from competitors, are nascent and not common, and if firms want to increase female representation, they could investigate alternative routes into the industry, backed by appropriate training and development.

Our data suggests that female investment professionals are currently more likely to have particularly strong academic credentials relative to their male counterparts at all levels, but especially in the senior ranks. 53% of senior female investment professionals attended a top 20 US school² compared to 41% of senior male investment professionals.

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Questions for Firms to Consider

- Q How can we **establish or evolve undergraduate internships** to attract and identify upcoming talent?
- Q What resources do we have to **develop outreach programs** at colleges and universities to promote awareness of private equity investment careers? Alternatively, could we **join forces with other firms or organizations** to establish such programs?
- Q How **visible are the women** in our firm internally and externally? How can we make them more so?
- Q Should we **review candidate requirements and/or recruitment language** to attract more and/or different applicants?
- Q How could we better **support candidates during on-cycle recruiting**?
- Q Have we worked with recruiters on more **representative or balanced shortlists**?
- Q Can we investigate **widening the recruitment funnel** by sourcing candidates outside the more traditional investment banking routes? To the extent we can, what training could we provide to develop **key technical skills**, such as modeling?
- Q If we lack senior female investment professionals, could we **hire more women in areas such as value creation** who would work closely with investment teams?

¹ Breaking Stereotypes: Women’s Rise in Investment Banking – A blog by the Investment Banking Council of America, March 2024. Available [here](#).
² Top 20 US universities. Source: US News & World Report Rankings.



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Retaining Women in the Industry

FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

The industry increasingly recognizes that inclusive and supportive cultures are fundamental to retaining talent and helping it thrive. This is evident from our finding that female representation at senior levels drops significantly from mid level, as women either progress more slowly or opt for different career paths at this point. Providing opportunities and guidance on how to progress, as well as addressing the perceptions about PE investment careers and their compatibility with responsibilities outside of work, is essential to keep talented women.

Inclusive Cultures

Making statements about creating more inclusive work environments and putting in place policies and initiatives are important first steps to driving positive behaviors or culture change. Leaders who set the right example and engage in real efforts to support all team members to develop professionally can prevent ‘in/out’ group behaviors and drive engagement.

Networking and team-building activities which cater to some groups more than others, such as golf or drinks out of hours, are still prevalent in parts of the industry. Activities of this type can exclude people from the relationship-building opportunities that are so important to forging and advancing a career in private equity.

The Impact of Being the ‘Only’ One

We heard that being the only female investment professional in a firm can not only be an isolating experience, but sometimes also meant having to work hard to get appropriate policies and working practices implemented. Firms with more than one female senior professional were better placed to retain female talent, as these role models demonstrated to more junior professionals that they do not have to conform to a particular ‘type’ to be valued and progress in the firm.

Level 20 has found that mentorship can be an effective way of improving talent retention and progression in the European industry. A review of the first six years of Level 20’s UK mentoring program (2015–2021) found that 83% of women who participated have been promoted at least once and 92% remain in the industry¹. Over 1,200 women have participated in Level 20’s programs across Europe.

Many senior men in the European private equity industry act as mentors and this external perspective helps to build a better understanding of the challenges women face and their interests, which in turn enables industry leaders to champion more inclusive work environments.

¹ Further information about Level 20’s mentoring program is available [here](#).



Retaining Women in the Industry (cont.)

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Managing Work and Family

Having family/parental leave provision in place is table stakes for any firm today. Yet we often heard that not all team members (including men and people in senior roles) take their full entitlement, leaving more junior team members with the impression that this is what the firm expects – even if that is not the firm’s intention. We also heard that women returning from family leave wanted to get involved in new deals and return to their previous portfolio companies quickly, and further planning could support them on this, e.g. clear allocation of responsibilities and temporary support when women are on leave.

In what are demanding investment team roles, some flexibility allows parents to effectively balance competing work and family priorities, especially when there are issues (including beyond children’s early years), and demonstrates to junior team members that it is possible to do this, particularly for dual-career couples.

Growth-Oriented Environments

Supportive environments provide opportunities for team members to develop and work through any issues they are facing in their jobs. Mentors can play a vital role, by offering formalized support, advice and constructive feedback. Other feedback mechanisms which enable honest and constructive conversations are also vital to helping employees understand what is expected of them. Coaching, particularly for investment professionals in the earlier stages of their careers, was also thought to be valuable for professional development.

Questions for Firms to Consider

- Q What are the **behaviors** we value – at all levels – and how do we encourage them?
- Q How could we further develop **leadership training**? How do we **mentor and coach** our promising talent?
- Q How do we **monitor return to work experiences** to identify problem areas for individuals or teams? From there, how can we best **smooth transitions into and from leave**?
- Q How could we **develop discussions about balancing work and life priorities** to understand better how our firm can relieve pressure points? How **comfortable** are our teams in discussing this?
- Q How could we offer more flexibility on how and where team members work to **encourage a culture that values productivity**, while maintaining the learning benefits of working together in-person?
- Q Where are the **pockets of resistance** to inclusive practices in our firm and how can we foster buy-in?
- Q What **additional benefits** could we offer to ensure we retain our best talent?
- Q How could we arrange **social and networking activities** so all relevant team members can attend?
- Q What further opportunities can we provide to female investment professionals to **attend and represent our firm at external events**?



Promoting Women with Transparency

FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

Access

In a dealmaking and fundraising environment where track records matter, it is natural for firms to reward success and value strong performers. Access to networks and opportunities to work on deals for team members are just as essential as training on the technical and execution aspects of investment roles. Firms can still have competitive environments, without the alienating effect of ‘in/out’ groups.

Sponsorship

Throughout our focus group discussions, strong sponsorship from senior leaders was cited as key to achieving success in the industry. Examples of sponsorship included offering support for building a deal pipeline, providing opportunities to shadow on board roles, relationship introductions, and inclusion in important meetings with bankers, management teams and limited partners. Focus group participants also noted that sponsors play a critical role as in-house advocates, highlighting a team member’s successes and attributes, and putting their name forward for relevant promotions and compensation.

Feedback

A common thread in our discussions was the importance of giving feedback to women. This included managers and sponsors providing the regular, informal feedback necessary for advancement, as well as more structured feedback during performance review and promotion processes. Some feedback suggested managers gave feedback to men more regularly and were overly cautious about giving constructive or negative feedback to women, including on both technical and non-technical matters. This type of feedback is important to support all employees’ professional development.

Transparency

Many firms are formalizing their promotion processes and practices, but there is still often a lack of transparency about expectations and what it takes to progress in the organization, as well as on compensation decisions.

The influence and perspective of LPs was raised frequently in the focus groups. The view was that LPs can drive change and some LPs are challenging the composition of teams and the talent pipeline, alongside requests for demographic data.

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Questions for Firms to Consider

- Q How do we **review how work is allocated** to ensure team members have fair access to deals, relationship building and development opportunities? Are any patterns emerging that suggest a different approach is needed?
- Q Are we inviting or encouraging a **variety of perspectives** when analyzing deals and making investment decisions?
- Q How could we **improve feedback and performance review processes** to make them more effective? How frequently do our team members receive feedback?
- Q How can we formalize our **promotion criteria** to make them more transparent? Can we develop a **framework with clear expectations for every position** in the firm?
- Q How could a **sponsorship program** help develop our talent pipeline? Who would be effective sponsors and what **training** could we provide for senior investment professionals to foster understanding of how best to support and advocate for rising talent?
- Q What **training** could improve the **feedback** given to team members to support their career development?
- Q How can we train leaders to be effective **mentors and/or coaches** in their teams and across the firm?



Conclusion and Further Resources

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This report marks the first step of gathering and analyzing data on the representation of women in US PE investment teams on a regular and consistent basis. Having established this baseline dataset, we hope the data and insights provided will be used by key decision-makers and engage the industry on the representation of women.

The report presents data and analysis on the proportion of women working in investment roles by different seniority levels (junior, mid, senior) across 661 PE firms in the US and is one of the largest published datasets on the industry. The firms in the sample were identified as US PE firms that filed a Form ADV (650 firms), supplemented with additional Level 20 sponsors and GPs on ILPA’s Diversity in Action Signatory list that were not included in the initial set of firms (11 firms). At multi-strategy firms, all investment-facing individuals’ data was collected and non-PE investment professionals (i.e. those working in credit, etc) were excluded to the extent possible. This is most applicable for firms in the Mega (>\$25bn) AUM category and the data is likely to still include investment professionals in non-PE roles. We will investigate how we can disaggregate this data as part of our future work. The data was collected using online and open sources and the detailed methodology is in the Appendices.

Key Findings and Insights

We have highlighted below the key findings from this research:

- The dataset includes data on 661 PE firms in the US managing over \$4 trillion in Regulated AUM, as stated on Form ADV filings, covering approximately 12,500 investment professionals.
- The percentage of women in investment teams and at different seniority levels varies by AUM.
 - Overall, 22% of investment roles are held by women. The Mega sized firms (>\$25bn) have more female representation at all seniority levels, with women representing 30% of all investment professionals.
 - At the senior level – 6% of senior investment professionals overall are women and this percentage has stayed steady since 2021. At Mega (\$>25bn) and Emerging (<\$125m) firms, senior female representation is highest at 9% each. At Large firms, 7% of senior investment professionals are women. Small (\$125m–\$1bn) and Medium (\$1bn–\$5bn) sized firms have the lowest proportion at 5% and 6% respectively.
- At the mid and junior level there are more women in investment roles where the proportion overall is 20% and 27% respectively. Representation of women in these roles is higher in Mega firms (>\$25bn) at 26% for mid level and 35% for junior-level investment professionals. Small (\$125m–\$1bn) firms have the lowest female representation at 12% for mid level and 17% for junior level investment professionals.
- Note that we will need to investigate the potential impact of non-PE investment professionals in the sample on these findings.
- In firms with senior female investment professionals, the representation of women was four percentage points higher for the mid and junior roles (24% vs 20% at mid level and 32% vs 28% at junior level).
- 31% of firms (by number) had investment teams with no women. This figure is driven by smaller firms primarily managing less than \$1bn in AUM, amounting to 3% of the total AUM managed by firms in this sample.

To supplement the data analysis and provide more context on the industry, the report also includes feedback provided by 37¹ attendees in seven focus groups. To analyze the discussions, the feedback was linked to the attraction, retention, or promotion of women. In addition, questions are included to help industry participants to identify areas to advance women’s representation. Key themes were female role models, sponsorship, the need to maintain inclusive cultures, access to opportunities to develop professionally and furthering transparency – both through the giving of regular feedback on performance and clarity on requirements to be promoted.

1 Breakdown of focus group attendees: 21 investment professionals, 8 human resource professionals, 8 others.



Conclusion and Further Resources (cont.)

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Next Steps and Opportunities for Further Exploration

Our research shows there is room for more progress on the representation of women in investment roles in the US PE industry. It also shows the picture is nuanced and the proportion of female investment professionals, particularly at senior levels, varies depending on AUM.

We look forward to improving and refining the data over time with input from investment professionals, PE industry participants, academics, and other interested parties.

We also plan to continue our work with the PE industry on collective efforts to support talented women. Columbia Business School and Level 20 will be having further discussions with US firms following the publication of this report on areas for further collaboration.

Two additional studies, funded by Three Cairns Group, will seek to provide the industry with further insight on female investment professionals in PE. A qualitative study involving candid interviews with male and female investment professionals to shed light on the context and challenges female PE investors encounter is currently in process. In fall 2024, Three Cairns Group will begin work with Columbia Business School on a study of investment professionals, both women and men, to look retroactively at their career flows. Further detail on these research studies is set out below.

Other Resources and Reports Commissioned Benchmarking Tool

We have released a public comparison tool to enable GPs and LPs to benchmark women’s representation in investment teams, allowing users to view female representation among investment professionals by seniority for a custom comparable set of firms. Users can create the custom comparable set by selecting AUM band upper and lower bounds, as well as geographic locations.

The benchmarking tool is available at: <https://benchmark.genderequityinpe.com>

Level 20 Research Reports

Level 20’s research on gender representation in Europe is being updated for 2024. This will be available at the end of September 2024 at www.level20.org/research-insight

The 2023 report on the UK market is available [here](#).

Level 20 has also published European reports on the perspectives of women working in investment teams and family leave.

ACCELERATE: A framework for attracting, promoting and retaining talented women in private equity

In June 2023, Level 20 published a report with The Inclusion Initiative at the London School of Economics and Political Science. The research includes the voices of more than 60 women in investment roles at GPs across Europe. Their insights shaped the ACCELERATE framework, to help the private equity and venture capital industry attract, retain and promote women. The report includes actions firms can take and detail on how to measure them. The report is available [here](#).

Family Leave in private equity: a review of policy, practice and impact

In February 2024, Level 20 published research including data and insights from over 100 firms with offices across Europe. The report provides detail on family leave policies and practices in European private equity to encourage discussion of the topic and assist in review and evaluation. The report is available [here](#).

Research Commissioned by Three Cairns Group

Qualitative Study

Three Cairns Group is independently conducting a qualitative study, where we have interviewed approximately 50 senior female and male investment professionals, as well as other stakeholders, to understand the context in which women are operating, what holds them back, what helps to advance them and how firms can better retain them. A report of the findings of this study will be released in early 2025.

Career Flows Study

In fall 2024, Three Cairns Group will begin work with Columbia Business School on a career flows study of investment professionals, where we will extract a comparable subset of women and men from the database, as well as women who left the industry, and look retroactively at their career flows. Through this work, we hope to glean insights around what the similarities and differences in the way men and women’s careers progress tell us about what actions need to be taken to improve the retention of women.



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Methodology

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Data Collection

Using online and open sources, our objective was to identify and categorize the private equity (PE) investment professional workforce in the United States. The data reports seniority levels (junior, mid, and senior of investment (i.e. deal-facing) employees along with their gender. Individual-level data, such as titles, gender, and past experiences, and firm-level data, such as Assets Under Management (AUM), were collected from public LinkedIn profiles, government filings (e.g. Form ADV data), and manual data collection from private equity firm websites.

As the data is solely from publicly available sources, it may not be as accurate as firm-level information that is only known or available to the individual private equity firm. In many cases, LinkedIn/firm websites can characterize investment professionals differently. We have done our best to harmonize and cleanse this data, but the work is ongoing. Over the coming months we will work to improve the data quality, to the extent possible, before finalizing the report.

Dates of Research

The sample period spans from 2017 to 2023. The starting sample year was selected based on the data availability of public LinkedIn profiles. The ending year, 2023, was chosen based on the data availability at the time of project initiation. This report has focused on the years 2021 to 2023 because the information is consistent in its availability.

Firms Included in the Analysis

The main set of firms was identified as US PE firms (650 firms) that filed a Form ADV and had evidence of PE investing activity (detailed below). 11 additional firms were included in the dataset for a total of 661, as described below.

LinkedIn and Firm Website-based Conditions:

- **No LinkedIn Presence:** Firms without LinkedIn pages or with no employees listed on LinkedIn were excluded.
- **Unclassifiable Title Conventions:** Firms were excluded if their employee titles were not classifiable or if there was only one title level (e.g. only senior-level titles).

Form ADV-based Conditions:

- **Private Equity Entity/Fund Proportion:** Firms were excluded if less than 25% of their funds had GP relationships in their Form ADV filings, or if they had more than four funds but less than 25% of these funds were indicated as PE in their filings.
- **Recent Fund Closures:** Firms that have not closed a new fund since 2017 were excluded.

- **Employee Classification:** Firms were excluded if less than 33% of their employees listed in Form ADV filings were categorized as ‘investment advisors’.
- **Fund Allocation:** Firms were excluded if their capital allocated to funds-of-funds was more than twice the size of their aggregate PE fund AUM.

Important Notes

- 11 Level 20 sponsors and GPs on ILPA’s Diversity in Action Signatory list that were not a part of the initial set of firms were included in the sample.
- Included in the 661 firms are 23 non-US headquartered firms that have a significant presence in the US, however only their US AUM and US employees were included in the data.
- Major multi-strategy firms were included in the sample, but investment professionals in other investment strategies including infrastructure, venture capital, debt, credit, or real asset firms were excluded, to the extent possible.

Review Procedures

Columbia Business School, Level 20 and Three Cairns Group researchers conducted checks to verify the robustness of the data and consistency of the categorizations (especially at the senior level). We acknowledge that while the dataset can be considered comprehensive, there may be omissions or additional inclusions in the data.

Data Handling

Columbia Business School collected data using open sources and publicly available information. Any data released to the public is anonymized, and we do not share any personally identifiable information.

Gender Classification

Gender was assessed using first names and, where available, pronouns used in LinkedIn profiles and/or firm biographies. In the case of ambiguity (or a missing name) that could not be clarified through the availability of pronouns in the biography, an individual reviewed LinkedIn or the PE team website. No individuals were interviewed regarding their gender identity or gender expression.

Methodology (cont.)

Definitions and Categorizations Employed

Investment Professionals (IPs) are defined as employees who are directly involved with making investment decisions and managing the investment portfolio. The following provides the comprehensive list of titles in each seniority level:

Seniority	Investment Roles	Additional Contextual Information
Senior	<ul style="list-style-type: none">ChairmanChief Executive OfficerFounderFounding PartnerSenior Managing PartnerManaging PartnerGeneral PartnerManaging PrincipalChief Investment OfficerSenior PartnerPartnerSenior Managing DirectorManaging Director	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Leadership of investment teamLeadership of the firm, excluding non-investment roles, such as operations, financial, investor relations, human resources, administration, legal, finance, accounting and technologyResponsible for final investment and divestment decisionsResponsible for sourcing, evaluating, and executing deals
Mid	<ul style="list-style-type: none">DirectorPrincipalSenior Vice PresidentVice President	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Responsible for sourcing, evaluating, and executing dealsNon-investment roles were excluded such as operations, investor relations, human resources, administration, legal, finance, accounting and technology
Junior	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Senior AssociateAssociatePrivate Equity AssociateAnalyst	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Supports senior and mid investment professionalsNon-investment roles were excluded such as operations, investor relations, human resources, administration, legal, finance, accounting and technology

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AUM and Size Bands

AUM was primarily constructed using the ‘gross asset value’ fields in PE firms’ Form ADV filings for each fund flagged as PE. These filings were meant to report the total amount of uncalled committed capital plus the sum of invested capital (from current and predecessor PE funds). To aid analysis and presentation of results, data for each firm was assigned one of the following AUM bands:

Assets Under Management Band (Smallest to Largest)
Emerging < \$125m
Small \$125m-\$1bn
Medium \$1bn-\$5bn
Large \$5bn-\$25bn
Mega >\$25bn

Focus Groups

Following the data collection process, seven focus groups were held to further discuss emerging themes.

Three of the focus groups were held at the With Intelligence Women in Private Equity Summit with a mix of firm types, and roles varying from investment professionals to HR/DEI professionals, to LPs. Three of the focus groups were held virtually and exclusively included female investment professionals. The last focus group was held virtually and included only HR and DEI professionals.

All focus groups were held under Chatham House rules to allow for frank sharing of views and experiences.



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- Oliver Greene, Data Analyst, Level 20

With thanks

- Three Cairns Group, Mark Gallogly, Lisa Bethancourt and Nick Pike
- The Level 20 Team and Board, particularly Jess Carter, Pam Jackson, Gurpreet Manku and Tricia O’Shea
- Kristin Mugford, Melvin Tukman Senior Lecturer of Business Administration, Harvard Business School
- Tanya Carmichael, Roxborough Advisory, and all the participants in this report’s qualitative research for their time and insights
- Level 20’s Sponsors, Members and our wider network for their support and contributions

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