2025 Job Market Analysis for CFOs and Controllers

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CFO and Controller Job Market Outlook 2025

Job Demand Trends in 2025

The job market for senior finance roles is very robust in 2025, with high demand for both Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) and Controllers. **CFOs** in particular are experiencing significant turnover and mobility. Global CFO turnover hit ~15% in 2024 (near record levels) and remained elevated into 2025 (Source: russellreynolds.com)(Source: russellreynolds.com). In Q1 2025 alone, 95 new CFOs were appointed across major companies, exceeding the previous year's high (Source: russellreynolds.com). This churn is driven partly by retirements – over half of outgoing CFOs in 2024 retired or moved to board roles, with the average CFO retirement age dropping to just 56.6 (Source: russellreynolds.com). As a result, companies have many CFO vacancies to fill, and *quality CFO talent is highly valuable*: mid-market firms report that strong CFOs who feel overwhelmed or unhappy "can likely find another role if they wish to move on" (Source: cfo.com). In other words, skilled CFOs are in a seller's market.

Controllers (the lead accounting/finance managers in organizations) are likewise in strong demand. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects **financial manager** positions (a category including Controllers and CFOs) to grow by **17%** from 2023 to 2033 – *"much faster than average"*(Source: bls.gov). One analysis finds an estimated 123,100 new U.S. controller jobs will be created over the decade (Source: zippia.com). Unemployment rates for accounting/finance roles remain extremely low in 2025. For example, *financial managers* had just **1.9%** unemployment in Q1 2025 (versus ~4.2% overall unemployment) (Source: roberthalf.com). This indicates a tight talent pool and intense competition for qualified finance professionals. Robert Half's mid-2025 market report confirms that demand for skilled finance and accounting talent *"remains intense"*, with many companies competing for the same limited pool of candidates (Source: roberthalf.com). Controllers appear in the top 10% of the most in-demand finance roles in 2025, reflecting how sought-after they are (Source: roberthalf.com).

Turnover trends also reflect demand pressure. CFO tenures have shortened to around 5.8 years on average (Source: russellreynolds.com), and many companies are accelerating CFO succession plans. Notably, internal promotions fill a majority of CFO openings – **58%** of incoming CFOs globally in early 2025 were promoted from within (Source: russellreynolds.com). This underscores that organizations are grooming internal finance leaders (often Controllers or finance VPs) to step up, given the scarcity of ready-made external candidates. However, when companies do go external, they increasingly favor candidates with prior CFO experience – in Q1 2025, 80% of externally hired CFOs had been a CFO before (Source: russellreynolds.com). In short, the job market is dynamic: there is **high turnover and high demand** for experienced CFOs, and Controllers enjoy strong job growth prospects amid a shortage of finance talent.

Key Industry Sectors Hiring for Finance Leadership

Demand for CFOs and Controllers spans virtually all industries in 2025, but certain sectors stand out. Overall, hiring is **"cross-sector"** – industries like **business/professional services, financial services, manufacturing, and transportation** are leading the charge in finance and accounting hiring (Source: roberthalf.com). These sectors have been ramping up finance staff, tightening the talent pipeline across the board. Moreover, sector **expertise** has become a premium for CFO roles. According to Eton Bridge Partners' 2025 data, over *90%* of CFO hires came from the same industry as their new employer, a sign that companies are prioritizing deep industry knowledge (Source: etonbridgepartners.com)(Source: etonbridgepartners.com). This is especially true in **highly regulated or fast-growing industries** like:

- **Financial Services:** Banks, fintech and insurance firms need CFOs versed in complex regulations, capital requirements, and risk management (Source: etonbridgepartners.com).
- **Healthcare & Biotech:** Companies value CFOs who understand long R&D cycles, IP valuation, and compliance with healthcare regulations (Source: etonbridgepartners.com).
- **Technology (Tech):** Tech firms seek finance chiefs who can balance high-growth metrics with volatile funding environments and evolving compliance standards (Source: etonbridgepartners.com).
- **Manufacturing & Transportation:** Industrial companies are hiring Controllers and CFOs to navigate supply chain costs, tariffs, and global logistics challenges (Source: roberthalf.com).
- **Energy & Renewables:** The renewables sector (and energy broadly) is growing quickly and demanding CFOs who can handle large capital projects and new financing models (Source: etonbridgepartners.com).

In **specialist sectors** such as **fintech, biotech, and renewable energy**, demand is outpacing supply of experienced finance leaders (Source: etonbridgepartners.com). Companies in these niches often face fierce competition (and rising salaries) to secure CFOs with the requisite sector know-how. Hiring delays or indecision can mean losing top-tier candidates to faster-moving competitors (Source: etonbridgepartners.com).

That said, while sector-specific experience is prized, it's not an absolute requirement in every case. Some progressive markets (e.g. Sweden) show more openness to **cross-sector** CFO appointments – Sweden's rate of hiring CFOs from outside the industry is higher (about 18% cross-industry hires) compared to ~5–10% in most countries (Source: etonbridgepartners.com). Companies may consider "outsider" candidates if they demonstrate that their achievements are transferable to the new industry's challenges (Source: etonbridgepartners.com). Overall, **tech**, **finance**, and **healthcare** remain among the hottest sectors for CFO and Controller recruitment, but virtually all industries that are growing or navigating complexity (from **manufacturing** to **energy** to **professional services**) are expanding their finance leadership ranks in 2025.

Regional Differences in Demand

Regional job market dynamics show some variation for CFO and Controller roles:

- **United States:** The U.S. continues to be a very active market for CFOs and Controllers. U.S. companies have seen high turnover in CFO seats – the S&P 500 index hit a multi-year high in CFO changes in 2024 (Source: russellreynolds.com). Confidence levels differ: nearly 74% of U.S. finance chiefs were optimistic about the domestic economy heading into 2025, whereas CFOs in some other regions were more guarded (Source: cfo.com). The strong U.S. demand is evidenced by low unemployment in finance roles and rising compensation (as discussed later). U.S. firms are also more prone to bringing in external CFO hires when needed, compared to some Asian markets (Source: russellreynolds.com). Nonetheless, internal promotion is still significant in the U.S., with about 59% of CFOs in the U.S. being internally promoted per one study (Source: etonbridgepartners.com). Key hubs like New York and San Francisco offer abundant CFO opportunities (and very high pay), whereas talent shortages are felt even in secondary markets (Source: driveninsights.com).

- **Europe:** Demand for finance leaders is also strong in Europe, but economic uncertainties (energy costs, war impacts, etc.) have made some companies more cautious. European CFOs have expressed concerns about global economic fragility in surveys (Source: cfo.com). Still, finance hiring remains active: for example, the UK's FTSE 250 saw its highest CFO turnover in six years in 2024 (Source: russellreynolds.com), indicating many openings to fill. Western European companies do hire externally but also emphasize succession. Regions like **Scandinavia** are noteworthy for progressive hiring practices – e.g. Sweden not only has a higher female CFO representation but also greater willingness to consider cross-industry candidates (Source: etonbridgepartners.com)(Source: etonbridgepartners.com). Meanwhile, compliance and **ESG** reporting requirements (such as the EU's new sustainability disclosure rules) are creating additional need for Controllers who can handle these new mandates (Source: pwc.com). In continental Europe, CFOs are increasingly expected to drive cost control and risk management amid slow growth, keeping demand steady for experienced finance managers.

- **Asia-Pacific:** APAC is a growth-focused region in 2025, translating to high demand for finance talent. In Deloitte's Asia-Pacific CFO survey, **83%** of CFO respondents said their top priority for 2025 is achieving revenue growth (Source: deloitte.com). Markets like **China** and **Southeast Asia** are seeing a big push for CFOs who can enable expansion (including via M&A) and digital initiatives (Source: deloitte.com)(Source: deloitte.com). A noteworthy regional trait is the prevalence of internal promotions: in some Asian financial markets, CFO positions are filled almost *entirely* by internal candidates. For example, the Hang Seng index (Hong Kong) and India's Nifty 50 index saw nearly all CFO appointments come from within the company (Source: russellreynolds.com). Culturally, this reflects strong succession planning and the value placed on company-specific experience. By contrast, Western indexes rely a bit more on external hires (Source: russellreynolds.com). **Singapore** and **Hong Kong** remain key financial hubs where CFO and Controller expertise (especially in international finance and regulatory compliance) is highly sought. Across Asia, CFOs are tackling rapid tech adoption – Chinese and Japanese firms lead in automating finance tasks, with nearly 59% of CFOs there saying they've automated roles in their organizations (Source: deloitte.com). Asian CFOs also report the highest focus on upskilling finance teams (e.g. 79% of CFOs in Japan prioritize upskilling their workforce) (Source: deloitte.com). In summary, APAC regions are aggressively hiring finance leaders to steer growth and modernization, often favoring home-grown talent for those roles.

Overall, despite nuanced differences, **the need for skilled CFOs and Controllers is global in 2025**. Every major region is experiencing a crunch for experienced finance professionals, whether to navigate growth (Asia), uncertainty (Europe), or turnover and digital change (U.S.). Companies worldwide are paying close attention to succession planning and talent development to ensure a pipeline of finance leaders in their region.

Evolving Responsibilities and Qualifications

Both the CFO and Controller roles have expanded significantly in scope compared to prior years. **CFOs** are no longer seen as just the top accountants or financial gatekeepers; they are now strategic business partners at the highest level. In fact, the CFO's remit has grown to encompass technology, strategy, and sustainability leadership. A 2024 McKinsey study found that *over 70% of CFOs* now have direct responsibility for their company's digital transformation initiatives, and *over 60%* are leading or co-leading their firm's ESG (environmental, social, governance) programs (Source: highradius.com). This is a stark evolution from a decade ago. Modern CFOs are expected to drive **enterprise-wide transformations**, guide investments in AI and automation, and ensure long-term business resilience in the face of economic uncertainty (Source: highradius.com). They're deeply involved in setting strategy, not just reporting results. As CFOs Anat Ashkenazi at Alphabet and Kathryn Mikells at ExxonMobil illustrate, today's CFO might be overseeing AI integration across operations or steering capital strategy for record profits (Source: highradius.com). In short, the **CFO role has shifted from financial guardian to a multifaceted strategic leader**, responsible for innovation and value creation across the business.

Correspondingly, the **qualifications and skills** expected of CFOs have broadened. Traditional CPA or accounting expertise and financial acumen are still critical, but now **CFOs are often chosen for their leadership, tech savvy, and strategic vision**. Boards seek CFOs who can handle complex risks (geopolitical, cyber, regulatory) and communicate effectively with stakeholders ranging from investors to employees. The ability to collaborate with other C-suite executives and drive cross-functional initiatives is paramount (Source: pwc.com)(Source: pwc.com). Many CFOs today have backgrounds in investment banking, consulting, or operational management in addition to finance, reflecting the diverse skill set needed. Indeed, as one report notes, **finance leaders need to be "comfortable with the uncomfortable"** – ready to navigate abrupt shifts (e.g. interest rate swings, supply chain shocks) by reinventing business models and leveraging data-driven insights (Source: pwc.com)(Source: pwc.com). This has led CFOs to increasingly focus on areas like risk management, scenario planning, and stakeholder management as core parts of their job description.

The **Controller** role – traditionally focused on accounting, reporting, and compliance – is also undergoing transformation. Controllers are moving beyond pure "value protection" (ensuring the books are right) toward **"value creation"** activities alongside the CFO (Source: ey.com). According to EY's 2024 global survey of 1,200 controllers, the vast majority recognize new mandates for the role. **88%** of controllers said using data insights to recommend strategic business opportunities is now an important part of their job, and 67% report that they frequently champion data-driven decision-making and new technology in the finance team (Source: ey.com). In practice, Controllers are embracing responsibilities in **data analytics, forecasting, and even sustainability metrics**. They serve as *stewards of financial data* who can turn that data into actionable insight for the enterprise (Source: ey.com)(Source: ey.com). This evolution means Controllers must develop a broader business mindset: rather than just reporting historical figures, they're expected to help **analyze trends, advise on strategy, and ensure the company's financial systems add value**.

Importantly, **technology adoption** is central to the evolving Controller role. EY's research found an astonishing **89% of controllers** have adopted some form of AI in their function, and 65% are already using **generative AI** tools frequently in finance processes (Source: ey.com). They leverage automation for routine tasks (like invoice processing, reconciliations) and use advanced analytics or AI to detect risks and forecast performance. This tech empowerment frees Controllers to contribute more strategically. It's telling that **nearly all (98%)** controllers surveyed by EY agreed the ideal future controller will actively exploit emerging tech to enhance finance operations and insight delivery (implied by the high adoption rates) (Source: ey.com). Additionally, Controllers are increasingly involved in **ESG reporting** and integrating non-financial data. For instance, they play a key role in complying with new sustainability disclosure rules (such as the EU's CSRD), ensuring that *"ESG initiatives align with long-term profitability"* and that reporting is accurate (Source: zuora.com)(Source: zuora.com).

In summary, the **responsibilities of CFOs and Controllers in 2025 are far more expansive than in years past**. CFOs are expected to be strategic architects of growth and transformation, not just financial overseers. Controllers are expected to be analytically adept business partners, not just book-closers. The traditional finance leadership toolkit (GAAP knowledge, budgeting, internal controls) is now augmented by capabilities in data science, automation, strategic planning, and change management. The finance function's leaders are at the forefront of tackling new frontiers like AI deployment, cyber risks, and sustainability – a clear sign that these roles have fundamentally evolved.

Salary Trends and Compensation Benchmarks

Compensation for CFOs and Controllers has been **rising** in response to the high demand and expanded responsibilities. **CFO salaries** in 2025 are at all-time highs, especially at large companies. In U.S. public companies, the **median base salary for a CFO is around $443,000**, with median total compensation (including bonuses and equity) roughly $742,000 (Source: driveninsights.com). This median reflects big firms (median revenue ~$12.6B in one study) – in practice, actual CFO pay varies widely by company size and location. CFOs of the largest Fortune 500 corporations often earn total packages in the millions of dollars. For example, a CFO in a smaller market like Harlingen, Texas might earn around $383K base pay (total ~$521K), while a San Francisco–based CFO could command about $554K base salary with total comp nearing $917K (Source: driveninsights.com). Private company CFOs (in mid-market firms) earn less than public-company peers, but still healthy six-figure sums: a private-company CFO for a $20–100M revenue business averages around $238K base salary, and $225–275K including bonuses (Source: driveninsights.com). Notably, private company CFOs make roughly 45% less than those at similar-sized public firms on average (Source: driveninsights.com). Across the board, CFO pay has been growing. In 2024, total direct compensation for CFOs rose about **6%** at the median, outpacing the average CEO's pay growth in percentage terms (Source: capartners.com). In fact, CFO base salaries were more likely to be increased than CEO salaries – over 70% of large-company CFOs got a raise in 2024, vs about half of CEOs (Source: capartners.com). This reflects both market pressure to retain finance chiefs and the broadening scope of the role. (Even so, on average CFO total pay is about one-third of the CEO's pay (Source: capartners.com), a ratio that has held steady.) We also see **performance bonuses and long-term incentives** increasing for CFOs, aligning with strong company performance in many cases (Source: capartners.com)(Source: capartners.com). The key takeaway is that **CFO compensation is seeing steady growth**, and companies are willing to pay a premium – including salary hikes and richer equity grants – to secure and keep top financial leaders in a competitive market.

Controller salaries, while lower than CFO pay, have also shown an upward trend. In the U.S., the **average Controller salary** is typically in the low-to-mid six figures. Current estimates put the median Controller salary around **$110,000 per year**(Source: gusto.com). Most Controllers earn somewhere between roughly $60,000 on the low end (for small companies or less experienced controllers) and $175,000+ on the high end (for large companies or highly experienced controllers) (Source: gusto.com). Geography and industry significantly affect these numbers: for instance, the median Controller in Phoenix earns about $100K, whereas in San Francisco it's $160K (Source: gusto.com). At the top end, a Controller at a major firm in a high-cost city can make well over $200K (90th percentile in SF is $241K) (Source: gusto.com). Salary data from PayScale similarly shows small-business controllers have a median compensation around $92K, with a range up to ~$135K depending on company size (Source: driveninsights.com). Over the past 5 years, Controller salaries have increased roughly **10%** on average (Source: zippia.com), reflecting the tight labor market and added responsibilities for the role.

In terms of **compensation structure**: Controllers often receive performance bonuses (though smaller than CFO bonuses) and are increasingly offered incentives like profit-sharing or stock options at higher levels. Benefits packages (401k matches, healthcare, etc.) and perks (flexible schedules, remote options) also factor into total rewards for Controllers and CFOs. A trend in 2025 is that **employers must offer competitive packages to attract finance talent**. Robert Half's Salary Guide emphasizes that companies need to provide salaries *"that meet or beat market rates"* as a baseline (Source: roberthalf.com). In many cases, firms are indeed raising salary offers. Some finance and accounting professionals in high-demand specialties have seen **10–20% pay increases** when switching jobs in 2025's hot market (Source: linkedin.com)(Source: linkedin.com).

It's also worth noting **regional pay differences**: U.S. finance professionals tend to earn more than their counterparts in many other countries, and within the U.S. major financial centers (New York, SF, Chicago) pay the most. Meanwhile, countries like **Switzerland** or **Singapore** also offer attractive CFO pay in local terms due to their high cost of living and finance-sector concentration (Source: digitaldefynd.com). But even where nominal salaries are lower, the global trend of rising compensation holds. In summary, **2025 salary trends show strong growth and generous pay for CFOs and Controllers**, commensurate with their importance. Companies are investing in compensation to secure these leaders, whether that means a mid-market CFO being bumped into the high-$200Ks total, or a Fortune 500 CFO crossing into seven-figure territory. Controllers similarly are earning more than ever, especially at larger firms, and crossing into six-figure salaries in most mid-to-large organizations.

In-Demand Skills: Hard and Soft

The competitive market for CFOs and Controllers in 2025 isn't just about technical finance knowledge – it's also driven by a **skills evolution**. Employers are looking for a blend of advanced **hard skills** and **soft skills** in finance leaders.

Key hard skills and technical competencies include:

- **Financial Planning & Analysis (FP&A):** There is a pronounced skills gap in advanced FP&A capabilities (Source: roberthalf.com). Organizations need finance leaders who can build sophisticated financial models, conduct scenario planning, and derive strategic insights from data. The ability to turn massive financial data sets into actionable forecasts is highly valued – yet many companies struggle to find enough candidates with strong analytical and forecasting skills (Source: roberthalf.com).

- **Data Analytics & Tech Savvy:** Proficiency with financial technology and analytics tools is now almost a prerequisite. Skills in **data analysis, business intelligence, and AI-driven financial modeling** are a *"competitive advantage"* in the job market (Source: linkedin.com). CFOs and Controllers are expected to be literate in emerging technologies – from using big data and predictive analytics for real-time reporting (Source: zuora.com), to leveraging cloud-based ERP systems. Experience with automation software (e.g. RPA for accounts payable/receivable) and specialized finance platforms is increasingly common in job descriptions (Source: roberthalf.com). Top candidates are familiar with tools that incorporate AI, such as AI-enhanced accounting software and machine-learning fraud detection systems (Source: roberthalf.com).

- **Strategic & Commercial Acumen:** Beyond pure finance, companies seek CFOs/Controllers who understand the business operations and strategy. This includes skills in **strategic planning, risk management, and project finance**. For example, CFOs often need to evaluate M&A deals, oversee capital investments, or navigate market expansions; doing so requires broad business acumen in addition to accounting know-how. In 2025, many CFOs are responsible for areas like IT and supply chain, so having cross-functional knowledge is a plus. Likewise, controllers are better positioned if they understand the drivers of the business (sales, operations, etc.) and can partner with other departments.

- **Regulatory Compliance & ESG Reporting:** The regulatory landscape is more complex each year. CFOs and Controllers must stay current with accounting standards, tax law changes, and industry-specific regulations (like financial services capital rules or healthcare billing laws) (Source: bls.gov). In 2025, expertise in **ESG and sustainability reporting** is a new in-demand skill, given new disclosure requirements. Finance chiefs who can ensure compliance (e.g. with upcoming SEC climate reporting rules or global tax reforms) while finding opportunity in these changes are highly valued (Source: zuora.com)(Source: highradius.com).

While technical skills are critical, **soft skills have become equally essential** for finance executives. In fact, research shows **97% of employers** consider soft skills as important as or more important than hard skills for leadership roles (Source: controllerscouncil.org). The most in-demand soft skills for CFOs and Controllers in 2025 include:

- **Communication and Presentation:** Effective communication is at the top of the list. Finance leaders must be able to distill complex financial information into clear, relatable insights for non-financial stakeholders (Source: controllerscouncil.org). Whether it's explaining quarterly results to the board, guiding a department head through budget projections, or speaking to investors, *storytelling with numbers* is a prized skill. Recruiters frequently cite strong communication skills as a distinguishing factor for finance leadership hires (Source: controllerscouncil.org). The best CFOs and Controllers can translate "accounting-speak" into strategic business terms and are comfortable presenting and negotiating at the executive level.

- **Leadership & Team Building:** CFOs typically oversee finance departments that can include accounting, FP&A, treasury, audit, and more. Being able to **lead and develop teams** is crucial. This encompasses mentoring talent, succession planning (grooming future Controllers/CFOs), and fostering cross-department collaboration. Finance leaders also often lead multi-disciplinary project teams (for systems implementations or strategic initiatives), so they must inspire and manage people outside their direct chain of command.

- **Strategic Thinking & Problem-Solving:** Companies want finance executives who are not just reactive scorekeepers but proactive strategists. This means **critical thinking** skills – the ability to analyze problems deeply, challenge assumptions, and propose forward-looking solutions (Source: controllerscouncil.org)(Source: controllerscouncil.org). CFOs are increasingly involved in scenario planning ("what if" analyses for economic swings or business model changes). A critical mindset helps anticipate issues and drive innovation rather than simply report historical data. As one commentary noted, employers seek finance professionals who go beyond "garbage in, garbage out" and ask the tough *"whys and hows"* behind the numbers (Source: controllerscouncil.org).

- **Adaptability and Agility:** The finance environment has been in flux – from pandemic disruptions to rapid tech changes – and adaptability is key. In an EY survey, **62% of respondents said the ability to continuously adapt to changing situations is the most important soft skill for CFOs**(Source: controllerscouncil.org). Agile finance leaders can pivot plans quickly, learn new technologies, and handle crises calmly. This trait was highlighted during recent volatile periods: those CFOs who could rapidly adjust forecasts, workflows, and strategies fared far better. Adaptability also ties to *learning orientation* – the willingness to continuously update one's skills and approach.

- **Collaboration and Influencing:** Modern CFOs work closely with every part of the organization (operations, IT, marketing, etc.), so being a **team player** and effective collaborator is essential (Source: controllerscouncil.org). The stereotype of the isolated "numbers person" is outdated – finance leaders now spend a lot of time in cross-functional meetings and initiatives. Controllers, too, are expected to partner with other departments to ensure financial data supports business goals (Source: controllerscouncil.org). Being able to influence peers and contribute outside the finance silo is a valued quality. As part of this, networking skills (building relationships internally and externally) can help CFOs stay on top of industry best practices and potential opportunities (Source: controllerscouncil.org).

- **Integrity and Empathy:** Trustworthiness has always been non-negotiable for finance roles (given fiduciary responsibilities), but *empathetic leadership* is increasingly emphasized. The finance team often operates under high pressure (closing books, regulatory deadlines), so a CFO/Controller who shows understanding and support for their team can improve morale and performance. Empathy also extends to understanding customer or employee perspectives in financial decisions. A recent study noted the importance of empathy in leaders, and the pandemic reinforced that employees value managers who care about work-life balance and well-being (Source: controllerscouncil.org)(Source: controllerscouncil.org). Finance chiefs who balance performance with people-centric leadership can create more resilient teams.

In summary, **2025's ideal CFO or Controller is a hybrid of deep financial expertise and broad leadership skills**. They are as comfortable speaking on strategy in the boardroom as they are diving into an AI-driven analytics platform. They combine quantitative savvy with interpersonal finesse. This comprehensive skill set is in high demand and short supply – hence those who have it are commanding top opportunities and compensation in the current market.

Impact of Digital Transformation and AI/Automation

Digital transformation and the rise of AI are profoundly influencing CFO and Controller roles. In many ways, technology is both a challenge and an opportunity for finance leaders in 2025. On one hand, **automation is streamlining traditional accounting tasks**, changing the daily work of finance teams. On the other, CFOs are being tasked with steering the company's overall digital strategy and ensuring the finance function leverages cutting-edge tools.

A clear trend is the **embrace of AI and automation in finance**. From 2023 to 2024 alone, the share of companies using AI in at least one business function jumped from 55% to 72% (Source: zuora.com), and finance is a prime area for such adoption. CFOs are actively investing in these technologies: *58% of CFOs* say they are investing in **AI to enable real-time forecasting and smarter planning**(Source: pwc.com). They recognize that AI and machine learning can uncover patterns in financial data, improve the accuracy of predictions (e.g. cash flow forecasting), and automate time-consuming processes. Indeed, mid-market CFOs in a 2025 survey cited AI/automation as their top area of focus for improving team efficiency (52% picked it as a priority, above other initiatives) (Source: cfo.com).

Automation tools (often RPA – robotic process automation) are being used to handle repetitive tasks such as invoice processing, journal entries, and compliance checks (Source: zuora.com). This reduces errors and frees up finance staff for higher-value analysis. **Bot-powered** processes now tackle things like reconciling accounts or generating routine reports, which historically would occupy many hours of a Controller's team (Source: zuora.com). Controllers oversee these automation initiatives to ensure accuracy and that financial controls remain sound. Many companies have implemented platforms like BlackLine or Trintech to automate reconciliation and close processes, and use AI assistants in accounting software to expedite tasks (Source: roberthalf.com). The net effect is that the **Controller's role is shifting away from data entry and compilation toward supervision of automated workflows and analysis of outputs**. Controllers need to be technically adept to manage these systems and troubleshoot as necessary.

AI in analytics and decision-making is another game-changer. CFOs are leveraging advanced analytics and AI-driven models for scenario analysis, risk management, and performance monitoring. For example, AI can quickly analyze market data or internal metrics to flag anomalies or predict future outcomes with greater confidence. This helps CFOs in **predictive risk management** – identifying potential financial risks or opportunities earlier than before (Source: zuora.com). Real-time dashboards and AI-powered analytics are enabling finance leaders to make faster decisions. CFOs now often have live visibility into key indicators (sales, expenses, liquidity, etc.) and can drill down with AI queries, as opposed to waiting weeks for consolidated reports (Source: zuora.com)(Source: zuora.com). As one guide notes, these tools are transforming CFOs into strategic advisors who guide leadership with data-driven insights in real time (Source: zuora.com).

A specific area of focus is **AI for financial forecasting**. Traditional budgeting was a periodic exercise, but AI allows continuous re-forecasting. CFOs are increasingly using AI to run simulations on financial projections under various scenarios (economic changes, pricing strategies, etc.), resulting in more agile planning (Source: zuora.com). A Workday study cited in 2025 found that *80% of CFOs are now accountable for digital risk management* (up from just 45% in 2020), which includes managing the risks and opportunities from AI adoption (Source: highradius.com). However, that same study found only 29% of companies have clear metrics to measure ROI on AI, indicating many firms are still figuring out how to best harness and evaluate these tools (Source: highradius.com). CFOs, therefore, are in a critical position to champion effective use of AI, ensure it aligns with business goals, and develop ways to quantify its impact.

Generative AI (GenAI) has also entered the finance arena. Interestingly, EY's controller survey showed 65% of controllers are already using gen AI frequently (Source: ey.com). Use cases range from automatically drafting portions of financial reports and commentary, to analyzing unstructured data (like contracts or invoices) for insights. CFOs and Controllers are cautious with GenAI outputs – part of their job is to validate that AI recommendations or reports meet reliability and compliance standards (Source: ey.com)(Source: ey.com). But there is optimism: nearly *50% of CFOs globally expect generative AI to *"substantially transform"* their industry, organization, and finance function within the next two years (Source: deloitte.com). They foresee AI greatly boosting productivity and efficiency (79% of CFOs say the top anticipated benefit of GenAI is improved productivity) (Source: deloitte.com). Early adopters report cost savings and faster closes; for instance, CFOs in AI-mature firms see 15–30% faster cost reductions and significant productivity gains after integrating AI into finance operations (Source: highradius.com)(Source: highradius.com).

However, digital transformation brings **challenges** too. One issue is **tech overload** – many finance teams accumulated a patchwork of software tools over the past decade. CFOs in 2025 are trying to consolidate and streamline their "tech stacks" to eliminate inefficiencies (Source: cfo.com)(Source: cfo.com). Mid-market CFOs report stress from managing too many disparate finance systems and are focusing on "tech stack optimization" to improve data integration (Source: cfo.com)(Source: cfo.com). They realize that having the right processes is key; as one CFO advisor noted, solving tech overload is about *"process re-engineering"* first – redefining how information flows – and then mapping technology to those improved processes (Source: cfo.com). Another challenge is the **talent gap in digital skills**. Even with great tools available, companies often lack finance professionals skilled in using them. CFOs say they struggle to find team members with critical thinking, tech experience, and **AI adoption** capabilities – skills which they cannot fully "fill" with technology alone (Source: cfo.com)(Source: cfo.com). This is pushing CFOs to either hire for tech-savvy finance talent or invest in upskilling their current staff. In some cases, if they can't hire the necessary expertise, CFOs will **outsource or automate** certain functions over time (Source: cfo.com).

Overall, **AI and automation are reshaping how CFOs and Controllers operate**. These leaders are tasked with championing digital innovation – **driving automation projects, adopting AI for analytics, and ensuring cybersecurity around financial data** – while also adapting their own roles to a more analytical and strategic mode thanks to the efficiencies technology brings. The successful finance leader in 2025 is one who can blend human judgment with machine intelligence: using AI as a tool to augment decision-making, not replace it. Those CFOs and Controllers who harness digital transformation effectively are seeing their organizations reap benefits in speed, insight, and cost efficiency, whereas those who lag may find themselves overwhelmed or left behind. Digital acumen, as much as financial acumen, is now a core part of the job.

Hiring Challenges and Talent Shortages

Despite the strong demand for CFOs and Controllers, companies face **significant challenges in hiring and retention** for these roles. The confluence of high demand, limited supply, and changing candidate expectations has created a tight labor market where employers must navigate multiple obstacles to fill key finance positions.

One major challenge is the **scarcity of qualified candidates**, especially for senior and specialized roles. By mid-2025, **93% of finance leaders** reported difficulty finding qualified finance and accounting professionals for their open roles (Source: roberthalf.com). This near-universal struggle stems from talent shortages at various levels: fewer young accountants entering the profession (a pipeline issue), many experienced Baby Boomer CPAs/CFOs retiring, and competition from other companies (and even other industries) for those with strong analytical and tech skills. A survey noted *35% of organizations* found it hard to hire skilled finance staff in the past year (Source: linkedin.com) – a figure that likely understates the issue given the historically low unemployment in this field. In specialized sectors or geographies, the talent pool can be extremely limited when specific experience (like SEC reporting, or SaaS industry knowledge) is required, meaning searches can drag on for months.

Lengthy hiring processes for top finance roles compound the challenge. Executive searches for CFOs often take 4 to 6 months to conclude (Source: driveninsights.com). Companies don't want to rush such a critical hire, yet in a hot market, a protracted process can lead to losing candidates to other offers. As noted earlier, boards often have very specific criteria for CFOs (e.g. a precise industry background plus prior IPO experience, etc.) (Source: etonbridgepartners.com). Finding a candidate who ticks every box *and* contributes to diversity goals can be extremely challenging (Source: etonbridgepartners.com)

(Source: etonbridgepartners.com). This sometimes forces a strategic choice: prioritize a technically "perfect" resume, or hire for potential and cultural add. Many firms still lean toward the former, which perpetuates a narrow search and extends time-to-hire (Source: etonbridgepartners.com).

The **competitive market** means that even when a good candidate is identified, sealing the deal is not trivial. Companies must make attractive offers not just in salary, but in the overall package. We've seen employers needing to offer **higher salaries and incentives** than in years past to lure talent (with some finance roles seeing 10–20% pay jumps on offers) (Source: linkedin.com)(Source: linkedin.com). Counteroffers are common as well. It's truly a candidate's market for many Controller and some CFO candidates. As a result, firms may engage in bidding wars or risk vacancies for extended periods. Another tactic on the rise is hiring **interim or contract finance executives**. About 70% of finance leaders said they're increasing use of contract or project-based talent to fill gaps (Source: roberthalf.com). Bringing in an interim CFO or contract controller can keep the seat warm and tackle immediate needs while the long-term search continues (Source: driveninsights.com). This strategy also lets companies "try before buy" – some contract hires may transition to permanent if they're a strong fit.

Retention and workload present challenges too. Many sitting CFOs express burnout or an urge to leave – a 2025 sentiment study found **34% of mid-market CFOs** were considering a job change (or even an exit from the full-time CFO track) due to feeling overwhelmed (Source: cfo.com)(Source: cfo.com). Over 40% expected their workload to further increase (Source: cfo.com). This high stress can lead to more turnover, exacerbating the hiring challenge for companies when their CFO or controller decides to depart. Replacing a tenured CFO is a heavy lift. Similarly, retaining rising finance stars (like an assistant controller or finance VP who is a potential successor) is harder when recruiters from other firms come calling with enticing offers.

Another modern challenge is aligning with **candidate expectations around work environment**. Post-pandemic, many finance professionals have come to expect some form of remote or hybrid work flexibility. However, in 2025 a majority of finance job postings (about 63%) still advertise as on-site roles (Source: roberthalf.com). This mismatch means companies that insist on full-time in-office may lose talent to more flexible competitors. Organizations are realizing they must offer hybrid arrangements, or other work-life balance perks (flex hours, extra PTO, etc.), to be attractive. As Robert Half notes, flexibility and wellness-oriented benefits (like personal wellness days, generous parental leave) can set an employer apart in competing for the same talent (Source: roberthalf.com)(Source: roberthalf.com). The **ability to accommodate remote work** has expanded the field for candidates – for example, a company in a smaller city might now hire a Controller who works remotely from a financial hub – but it also means local companies might lose talent to remote opportunities elsewhere.

Moreover, as finance evolves, there is a **skills gap** challenge: many available candidates might lack one or two of the new skills needed (for instance, not every seasoned Controller is fluent in data analytics or the latest compliance rules). Employers are responding by placing greater emphasis on **training and**

upskilling. Around 73% of companies report investing in training their existing finance staff to address talent shortages and skill gaps (Source: linkedin.com). They are grooming internal team members for higher roles (as evidenced by the high internal promotion rates for CFO). This helps with pipeline (discussed below), but in the short term it's a challenge – companies must allocate time and resources to elevate internal talent while juggling current needs.

Finally, **diversity hiring goals** can pose an added challenge (and opportunity) in filling CFO/Controller roles. Many companies have stated aims to improve leadership diversity. However, as noted in an ED&I analysis, the candidate pools for CFO jobs often reflect historical biases – e.g. the "ideal" profile might unconsciously be modeled on the traditional (often non-diverse) CFO background, making it difficult to find diverse candidates who check every experience box (Source: etonbridgepartners.com)(Source: etonbridgepartners.com). Leading companies like those in Sweden or China have shown that being a bit more flexible on the archetype (valuing leadership potential and not just past titles) can enable more diverse hires (Source: etonbridgepartners.com)(Source: etonbridgepartners.com). So far, though, progress is slow and many firms struggle to reconcile their diversity ambitions with conservative hiring practices. This is a challenge that requires rethinking recruitment criteria and succession planning to widen the funnel of candidates.

In summary, **companies seeking CFOs and Controllers in 2025 face a "perfect storm" of hiring challenges**: a limited supply of candidates (and multiple suitors for those candidates), lengthy searches, high salary expectations, burnout and turnover, and a need to satisfy new employee expectations around flexibility and culture. Forward-thinking firms are addressing these challenges by improving their EVP (employee value proposition) – offering competitive pay, hybrid work options, and clear career development – and by leaning on interim solutions and internal promotions to bridge gaps. The hiring environment is tough, but those who adapt their strategies (speeding up hiring processes, broadening criteria, using specialized recruiters, etc.) are better positioned to land the finance talent they need.

Pipeline and Diversity Outlook

Building a robust pipeline of future CFOs and Controllers – and ensuring diversity in those ranks – is a priority for many organizations in 2025. The outlook is mixed: the underlying **talent pool is strong**, especially in terms of entry-level and mid-level finance professionals, but **conversion to top leadership roles lags**, particularly for women and minorities.

On the positive side, the **finance talent pipeline is large and growing** in early career stages. Women, in particular, have been entering the finance profession in great numbers for years. In the U.S., about **60% of accounting bachelor's degrees** are earned by women, and women also account for around **52% of finance MBA graduates**(Source: highradius.com). Additionally, women comprise over half of finance professionals at the early and mid-career level globally (Source: highradius.com). This suggests there is no shortage of capable female talent in the finance function pipeline. Furthermore, many companies have internal development programs (rotations, mentorships) aimed at preparing high-potential finance managers for senior roles. For example, Deloitte's CFO Program in regions like Australia and China is specifically geared toward developing the next generation of CFOs (Source: deloitte.com)(Source: deloitte.com).

However, these strong inputs have not yet translated to proportional outcomes at the top. **Women remain underrepresented in senior finance leadership.** Globally, only about **29% of senior finance leadership roles** (finance directors, VPs, CFOs) are held by women (Source: highradius.com). In the ultimate role of CFO, the numbers are still quite low, though they are improving gradually. As of 2024, roughly **26% of newly appointed CFOs worldwide were female** – a modest uptick from prior years (Source: etonbridgepartners.com). Regionally, some areas excel: China led with about 30% of CFO appointments being women in 2024, and Sweden reached 28% (Source: etonbridgepartners.com). In North America's largest companies, the stats are a bit lower: women hold **17.4% of Fortune 500 CFO seats** (87 out of 500, as of 2025), which is up from 12% a decade ago but still far from parity (Source: highradius.com)(Source: highradius.com). In the Fortune 100, 19 companies have a female CFO (Source: highradius.com)(Source: highradius.com). These numbers show *some* momentum – e.g., Fortune 500 female CFO representation has risen ~5 percentage points in 10 years (Source: highradius.com) – but also highlight the **persistent promotion gap**.

Why do these gaps persist despite a strong pipeline? Research and industry experience point to several factors:

- **Promotion and Sponsorship Gaps:** Women in finance often don't advance at the same rate. There is a drop-off at the transition from middle management to executive. Fewer women make it from finance director to VP, and VP to CFO, compared to their male peers (Source: highradius.com). One reason is fewer women (especially women of color) have had access to the high-visibility assignments and sponsorship that pave the way to the CFO office (Source: highradius.com). For instance, roles that offer P&L responsibility or significant strategic exposure are critical stepping stones, but historically women have been underrepresented in those feeder positions (Source: etonbridgepartners.com)(Source: highradius.com).

- **Networking and Bias:** The "old boys' network" in finance leadership is weakening but not gone. If boards and CEOs tend to select CFOs from within their familiar circles or according to a traditional profile, it can inadvertently favor majority groups. Many women and minority professionals lack the network connections to be on the radar for top CFO searches. This is why structured sponsorship programs and deliberate inclusion strategies are being called for – to break those legacy patterns (Source: russellreynolds.com).

- **Work-Life Constraints:** Senior finance roles can be demanding with long hours and travel, which historically led to some women opting out (or being screened out) for family or personal reasons. Companies are now more attuned to work-life balance (e.g., offering flexibility, as noted earlier), which may improve retention of diverse talent, but the effects will take time to reflect in the C-suite makeup.

- **Intent vs. Action:** Many organizations voice support for CFO diversity, but until recently, few made it a formal part of recruitment strategy. The tide is turning – e.g., the UK's FTSE 100 achieved 30% female CFOs among new appointments through clear governance targets and accountability for diversity (Source: etonbridgepartners.com)(Source: etonbridgepartners.com). This shows that when leadership pushes, results follow. Many other markets are still in earlier stages of this change.

The **outlook** is cautiously optimistic. The slight increase in women CFO appointments in 2024 (26% globally) suggests improvement is happening (Source: etonbridgepartners.com). Moreover, **boards and search firms are increasingly aware** of the need to expand candidate slates. They are recognizing that insisting on very narrow criteria (e.g. "must have been a CFO before in our industry") often yields a pool lacking diversity, whereas focusing on skills and potential can reveal excellent diverse candidates (Source: etonbridgepartners.com). We're seeing companies in some cases willing to hire first-time CFOs – often women or younger executives – especially in growth companies, provided they have strong sector knowledge and support systems (Source: etonbridgepartners.com). This openness can improve the pipeline outcome by giving high-potential leaders a break. In fact, Eton Bridge notes that **boards are increasingly recognizing that not every effective CFO needs a long prior CFO résumé**; many rising leaders are thriving in their first CFO roles when given the chance (Source: etonbridgepartners.com).

Beyond gender, diversity in terms of race/ethnicity and international background is also a focus for global companies. While data is harder to come by, anecdotal evidence shows more companies seeking CFOs who bring diverse perspectives or come from non-traditional backgrounds (e.g., an emerging-market stint, or a mix of finance and operational roles).

Another aspect of the pipeline is **internal development**. With so many CFOs retiring (the average CFO retirement age has dipped to mid-50s as noted) (Source: russellreynolds.com), the importance of succession planning is heightened (Source: russellreynolds.com)(Source: russellreynolds.com). Companies are strengthening their **finance leadership benches**: grooming Controllers, treasurers, or divisional CFOs to be ready to step up when the group CFO retires or moves on. The fact that 58% of CFOs are appointed internally (Source: russellreynolds.com) reflects that many firms do manage to cultivate internal successors. This can also aid diversity if companies intentionally develop a diverse cohort of finance leaders. Some encouraging data from Q1 2025: in the financial services industry, **42% of incoming CFOs were women** – a significant rise from a year before (Source: russellreynolds.com) (Source: russellreynolds.com). Similarly, consumer industry CFO hires were 35% women, up from 13%.

These spikes suggest that particular sectors, and presumably the companies within them, made a concerted effort to promote or hire more women into the CFO role (Source: russellreynolds.com). It underscores that the pipeline *can* produce diverse CFOs when there's focus.

In terms of **Controllers** and other feeder roles, there is generally more diversity than at the CFO level. Many companies have female or minority controllers and finance directors. The key is ensuring those individuals get the experience and exposure to be viable CFO candidates later. We see positive moves such as rotational programs that allow Controllers to take on operational assignments, or CFOs mentoring high-potential deputies from underrepresented groups.

In conclusion, the **pipeline for CFO and Controller roles is strong in talent but still developing in diversity**. The coming years may see a more rapid shift as the business case for diversity (better innovation, decision-making, etc.) (Source: etonbridgepartners.com) and the availability of talented women/minority professionals coincide. Companies that proactively remove barriers – by redefining "culture fit" to "culture add" (Source: etonbridgepartners.com)(Source: etonbridgepartners.com), by providing sponsorship and stretch opportunities, and by being open to first-time CFOs – are likely to see their finance leadership ranks become more inclusive. Given the trajectory, we expect incremental but steady progress: every year recently has seen a few percentage point gains in female CFO representation (Source: highradius.com), a trend that could accelerate with current awareness. Ultimately, tapping the full breadth of the talent pool will be crucial to meeting the demand for CFOs and Controllers in the future. Companies realize that **diverse leadership isn't just a moral imperative but a business advantage**, and the finance function is gradually moving to reflect that (Source: etonbridgepartners.com).

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Tags: cfo, controller, finance careers, job market trends, accounting leadership, career outlook, executive roles

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About Houseblend

HouseBlend.io is a specialist NetSuite™ consultancy built for organizations that want ERP and integration projects to accelerate growth—not slow it down. Founded in Montréal in 2019, the firm has become a trusted partner for venture-backed scale-ups and global mid-market enterprises that rely on mission-critical data flows across commerce, finance and operations. HouseBlend’s mandate is simple: blend proven business process design with deep technical execution so that clients unlock the full potential of NetSuite while maintaining the agility that first made them successful.

Much of that momentum comes from founder and Managing Partner **Nicolas Bean**, a former Olympic-level athlete and 15-year NetSuite veteran. Bean holds a bachelor’s degree in Industrial Engineering from École Polytechnique de Montréal and is triple-certified as a NetSuite ERP Consultant, Administrator and SuiteAnalytics User. His résumé includes four end-to-end corporate turnarounds—two of them M&A exits—giving him a rare ability to translate boardroom strategy into line-of-business realities. Clients frequently cite his direct, “coach-style” leadership for keeping programs on time, on budget and firmly aligned to ROI.

End-to-end NetSuite delivery. HouseBlend's core practice covers the full ERP life-cycle: readiness assessments, Solution Design Documents, agile implementation sprints, remediation of legacy customisations, data migration, user training and post-go-live hyper-care. Integration work is conducted by in-house developers certified on SuiteScript, SuiteTalk and RESTlets, ensuring that Shopify, Amazon, Salesforce, HubSpot and more than 100 other SaaS endpoints exchange data with NetSuite in real time. The goal is a single source of truth that collapses manual reconciliation and unlocks enterprise-wide analytics.

Managed Application Services (MAS). Once live, clients can outsource day-to-day NetSuite and Celigo® administration to HouseBlend's MAS pod. The service delivers proactive monitoring, release-cycle regression testing, dashboard and report tuning, and 24 × 5 functional support—at a predictable monthly rate. By combining fractional architects with on-demand developers, MAS gives CFOs a scalable alternative to hiring an internal team, while guaranteeing that new NetSuite features (e.g., OAuth 2.0, AI-driven insights) are adopted securely and on schedule.

Vertical focus on digital-first brands. Although HouseBlend is platform-agnostic, the firm has carved out a reputation among e-commerce operators who run omnichannel storefronts on Shopify, BigCommerce or Amazon FBA. For these clients, the team frequently layers Celigo's iPaaS connectors onto NetSuite to automate fulfilment, 3PL inventory sync and revenue recognition—removing the swivel-chair work that throttles scale. An in-house R&D group also publishes "blend recipes" via the company blog, sharing optimisation playbooks and KPIs that cut time-to-value for repeatable use-cases.

Methodology and culture. Projects follow a "many touch-points, zero surprises" cadence: weekly executive stand-ups, sprint demos every ten business days, and a living RAID log that keeps risk, assumptions, issues and dependencies transparent to all stakeholders. Internally, consultants pursue ongoing certification tracks and pair with senior architects in a deliberate mentorship model that sustains institutional knowledge. The result is a delivery organisation that can flex from tactical quick-wins to multi-year transformation roadmaps without compromising quality.

Why it matters. In a market where ERP initiatives have historically been synonymous with cost overruns, HouseBlend is reframing NetSuite as a growth asset. Whether preparing a VC-backed retailer for its next funding round or rationalising processes after acquisition, the firm delivers the technical depth, operational discipline and business empathy required to make complex integrations invisible—and powerful—for the people who depend on them every day.