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EY survey: 64% of finance and tax leaders say data that is not AI-ready is the biggest barrier to AI

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On 11 November 2026 EY published its 2026 Tax and Finance Operations Survey of 1,600 CFOs and senior finance and tax leaders in 30 jurisdictions. 64% say insufficient AI-ready data is the biggest barrier to advancing AI. Only 16% consider their tax function highly effective at accessing, organising, using and reusing data.

Global reference

- Publisher: EY
- Report: EY 2026 Tax and Finance Operations Survey
- Key date: 11 November 2026 (London)
- Sample: 1,600 CFOs and senior finance and tax leaders, 30 jurisdictions, 22 industries
- Status: Professional services firm research. Fieldwork dates are not stated in the release

Ambition versus readiness

- 64% say insufficient AI-ready data is the biggest barrier to advancing AI.
- Only 16% rate their tax function highly effective with data.
- 77% expect AI agents to benefit the tax function, up from 21% a year ago.
- 71% remain completely nascent or exploratory.
- Where data use is ineffective: 61% cite data silos, 52% poor data quality.

People and skills

- 83% say building an agentic workforce is important, and 81% emphasise hiring AI-skilled professionals.
- 64% are not fully prepared for real-time tax demands.
- KPMG in Germany (183 accounting professionals in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, surveyed March to June 2026): 68% plan to expand AI skills by 2027.
- In the same KPMG study, 76% name data protection and security as a regulatory barrier, up from 65%.

What to do now

- Pick one process, such as indirect tax or accruals, and measure its data: completeness, consistent master data and one source of truth.
- Fix master data for suppliers, customers and the chart of accounts before buying more AI tools.
- Put tax and finance data owners on the steering group of every AI project.

- Run the Automate it check in this issue on a ledger extract.

Our take

The numbers confirm what many finance teams feel: the tools are ready faster than the data. Expectations of AI agents rose from 21% to 77% in a year, yet most teams are still at the start. The fastest return is often unglamorous work on master data.

Sources

- EY: AI ambition outpaces data readiness in tax and finance functions, EY study finds (11 November 2026)
- EY: Tax and Finance Operations Survey
- KPMG in Germany: Digital Transformation in Accounting: Two-Thirds of Companies See the Greatest Need for Development in AI Skills (12 November 2026)

Important. This summary is for general information and is not tax, technology or financial advice. It is based on public EY and KPMG publications and may be incomplete or out of date. The official publications prevail; check the official source before acting.

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