EVALUATION OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Management response and action plan

November 2024

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COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Name of Evaluation Report:	Evaluation of Change Management in the Administrative Reform of the Council of Europe		
Date of Evaluation Report:	25 July 2024	Date of the Action Plan:	30 November 2024

Overall management response to the evaluation:

The Organisation welcomes the evaluation of change management in the administrative reform of the Council of Europe, notably the assessment that "several good practices and actions were identified, establishing a strong basis for the Council of Europe to build on, and for improving and creating more synergies among initiatives and changes".

The evaluators recognised that "the difficult environment in recent years (e.g. COVID-19 pandemic, war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, general financial situation of the Council of Europe) and the lack of dedicated human and financial resources available for implementing and managing the requested changes are creating a challenging context". The fact that "reforms in general and the associated change management processes are always complex" was also acknowledged.

In this context, the Organisation recognises that there are lessons to be learnt. It will endeavour to continuously improve its change management approach, notably in the area of administrative reform, in line with the Reykjavík Declaration - United around our values calling for "a modern Council of Europe enabling us to meet current and future challenges" and pledging to "continue the reform process to achieve greater transparency, efficiency and effectiveness". The Secretary General, the Deputy Secretary General and the whole Organisation are fully committed to pursuing the reform process throughout the 2024-2027 quadrennium.

Some recommendations are already being implemented, while actions envisaged to implement the remaining ones are set out in the Action Plan below, taking into account resources available as well as recommendations implemented in the framework of other audits and evaluations.

ACTION PLAN

Management decision[1]	Entity in charge[2]	Planned actions[3] (determined by Entity)	Justification for non-acceptance[4]	Target date for action	Person responsible for action
Recommendation 1: Commitment to change management (High[5])					
The CoE should make a strategic decision either to realise the full potential of its reforms by investing in a more strategic and systemic approach to change management, option (a), or to continue with a less comprehensive and systematic approach to change management, option (b).					
Option (a) offers the potential for reforms to be implemented effectively, achieving their intended impact and fostering a culture of continuous incremental improvement and adaptability. This strategic commitment to a comprehensive change management approach will position the Organisation to realise significant and sustainable improvement, ultimately benefiting the Organisation and its stakeholders. However, selecting this option requires an investment of financial and (to some extent existing) human resources. This is the option recommended by the evaluators. The following nine recommendations outline the strategic actions needed (recommendations 2-10).					
Option (b) implies continuing with the existing less comprehensive and systematic approach to change management, which requires that the scope, ambition and speed of reforms be scaled back to match available resources and capacities. This option will also have reputational implications, since the Council of Europe will lag behind other international organisations in terms of effectiveness, efficiency and general modernization. Should this option be chosen nevertheless, the Organisation may want to implement some of the recommendations 7, 8, 9 or 10 for punctual improvement of practices.					
☑ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	PO, with the support of DGA	The Organisation is committed, including at its highest level, to realising the full potential of its reforms by favouring a more systemic approach to change management (option a). This will notably be done through the implementation of the following nine recommendations (outlining the strategic actions needed), in the wider context of the Reykjavík Declaration.		31/12/2026	Director of Private Office

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1. The Management decision concerns the Recommendation (Accepted, Partially accepted, Rejected).
2. Initial suggestion – to be defined/updated by management.
3. For implementing accepted recommendations.
4. For recommendations that are rejected.
5. Recommendations have been classified as either "high" or "medium" in terms of the assessment of their importance following the evaluation.

Management decision[1]	Entity in charge[2]	Planned actions[3] (determined by Entity)	Justification for non-acceptance[4]	Target date for action	Person responsible for action
Recommendation 2: Decision-making (High)					
The CoE should conceptualise an internal strategic decision-making mechanism involving key actors from the Organisation to prioritise, guide and steer change in a coherent and manageable way.					
The internal strategic decision-making mechanism to be considered by the CoE should be responsible for the strategic oversight and steering of the reform initiatives and change processes. Its core tasks should include strategic dialogue on reform and change processes, development of a roadmap and narrative (recommendation 3), prioritisation of initiatives, provision of strategic guidance, initiation and fostering of a culture of change (recommendation 4), and securing dedicated financial and human resources for introducing initiatives and changes (recommendation 5).					
The CoE should consider and define the role and interactions of this mechanism with member states as well as those of the change management hub (recommendation 6) to ensure relevant dialogue, exchanges and continuity across change management processes.					
In doing so, the CoE can build on experiences gained from decision-making structures that have previously existed (Reform Steering Group) as well as existing structures (SMG) and thus learn from past experiences and prevent the creation of new structures and mechanisms.					
☑ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	PO, with the support of DGA	The Organisation will build on experiences gained from existing structures involving key actors (notably Senior Management Group, General Affairs Team) to steer change in a coherent way. As applicable, this recommendation will be implemented in conjunction with the External Audit report on internal governance (ExtAud(2024)2).		31/12/2026	Director of Private Office Director General of Administration

Management decision[1]	Entity in charge[2]	Planned actions[3] (determined by Entity)	Justification for non-acceptance[4]	Target date for action	Person responsible for action
Recommendation 3: Roadmap and narrative (Medium)					
The CoE should develop a clear and concrete roadmap as well as a coherent and motivating narrative of the evolution of the Organisation to be achieved by the reforms, acknowledging existing vision statement(s), and focusing on initiatives aimed at fundamentally changing the way the CoE operates, its culture and performance.					
The roadmap should be comprised of two parts: (1) a concise, easy-to-grasp visualisation identifying the major changes to be implemented, key milestones, and the sequence and timing of changes; (2) a clear, concise, coherent and motivating narrative for all staff explaining and justifying the envisaged evolution of the Organisation presented in the visualisation. The narrative should create a link between the adopted reform strategy and the need for the envisaged changes and it should explain how the changes are expected to impact the functioning and culture of the Organisations and what, concretely, this means for staff.					
The purpose of the roadmap is to (1) facilitate communication with staff and the CM about reforms, (2) provide more predictability for staff and the CM, (3) serve as a basis for internal dialogue and decision making, and (4) enhance accountability towards staff and the CM. The roadmap should be periodically updated to reflect progress and changed priorities ('if a new request for change comes in, other initiatives and activities may have to be put on hold').					
☑ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DGA	The Organisation will develop a concrete roadmap and a narrative of the evolutions to be achieved by the main drivers of the reform, acknowledging existing vision statements (notably the Reykjavík Declaration). The roadmap will focus on the major changes to be implemented, specifically in the field of the administrative reform (e.g. culture of change, People Strategy, Information Technology Strategy, New Way of Working, carbon footprint strategy), and will be regularly updated to reflect progress made and to include any changes in its scope or priorities.		30/06/2025	Director General of Administration

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Management decision[1]	Entity in charge[2]	Planned actions[3] (determined by Entity)	Justification for non-acceptance[4]	Target date for action	Person responsible for action
Recommendation 4: Culture of change (Medium)					
The CoE should promote a culture of change inspired by the roadmap (recommendation 2), integrating gender and special needs dimensions.					
Based on clear priorities set by the roadmap and a coherent narrative, the CoE should invest in a culture that drives and embraces change for the good of the vision and mission of the CoE, the Organisation as a whole and its workforce. Fostering a culture of change requires time, effort, and for the leadership to demonstrate its commitment to change. This leadership should come from the highest level of the Organisation and involve leading by example at different levels of the Organisation. Enabling factors that should be considered by the CoE are ongoing training and development opportunities to build the skills necessary to adapt and identifying and empowering 'change ambassadors/champions' within the Organisation to advocate for change and help motivate staff and colleagues. Throughout those efforts, acknowledgment of the diversity of the workforce is essential in fostering an inclusive culture of change.					
☑ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DGA DHR	The Organisation will further promote a culture of change inspired by the roadmap. Enabling factors fostering an inclusive culture of change will be included in the People Strategy 2024-2027 and its thematic Action Plans, which will notably address workforce diversity (e.g. gender perspective, special needs dimension). The implementation of the Secretary General's Results-Oriented Management Strategy 2023-2027 - "Learning as a driver of change" and the New Way of Working also promote a culture of change throughout the Organisation.		31/12/2026	Director General of Administration Director of Human Resources

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Management decision[1]	Entity in charge[2]	Planned actions[3] (determined by Entity)	Justification for non-acceptance[4]	Target date for action	Person responsible for action
Recommendation 5: Dedicated resources for implementing change management (Medium)					
The CoE should plan and secure the necessary resources for implementing reform initiatives and change management in accordance with the roadmap.					
The requirements for financial and human resources vary from initiative to initiative. Adequate resources should therefore be identified and secured to ensure that the implementation of initiatives does not have a detrimental effect on the Organisation's work and staff (e.g. overload of work) while introducing changes aimed at improving the way the Organisation operates and performs at the same time.					
The roadmap (recommendation 3) should be used as a fundraising tool. It should provide an overview of the full package of reforms and associated change management elements and cost them with a view to establish transparency about what reforms can be expected for what price. The CM should be involved in these discussions and reflections.					
Regarding the change mechanisms (recommendations 2 and 6), the resources required should carefully be assessed and balanced with existing human and financial resources.					
☑ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DGA DPB	The Organisation acknowledges that requirements for financial and human resources for implementing reform initiatives and change management are set within the available human and financial resources, as adopted in the Programme and Budget. They may be complemented with additions that vary from initiative to initiative, according to needs. In this perspective, requirements for financial and human resources will be assessed in accordance with the roadmap, in line with the Results Based Management approach of the Council of Europe.		31/12/2026	Director General of Administration Director of Programme and Budget

Management decision[1]	Entity in charge[2]	Planned actions[3] (determined by Entity)	Justification for non-acceptance[4]	Target date for action	Person responsible for action
Recommendation 6: Organisation-wide change management hub (Medium)					
The CoE should upgrade the internal support and coordination of change management by building on existing expertise and efforts.					
The change management hub should operate on an organisation-wide basis, taking on a support and coordination role across the whole Organisation. It should have a clear reporting link to the strategic decision-making mechanism (recommendation 2) and should act as its operational and supporting unit. The core functions of the change management hub should be to: support coherent planning and implementation of reform initiatives across the Organisation (including the establishment and use of change management guidelines, recommendation 7), ensure synergies between initiatives, gather and share lessons learned, ensure systematic assessment of gender and special needs dimensions, identify and mitigate cumulative negative impacts of change, and support the provision of evidence to demonstrate the outcome of changes (recommendation 8).					
☑ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DGA	The Organisation will build on existing expertise, structures and good practices in order to further support change management, notably through a coherent planning and implementation of the administrative reform initiatives. The support and coordination role in this respect will be ensured by DGA (Common Services).		31/12/2026	Director General of Administration
Recommendation 7: Change management guidelines (Medium)					
The CoE should use a set of pragmatic guidelines for planning, implementing and assessing changes and change management approaches. These guidelines should provide the basis for meaningful reflections amongst relevant stakeholders.					
The change management guidelines should be concise, covering key elements that must be taken into consideration when planning and designing a change initiative. They should remain at a macro level to ensure their relevance and application across the Organisation as well as various reform areas and initiatives. They should be used as checklist and thus be pragmatic. A source of inspiration could be the key elements of the JIU change management framework, adjusted to the needs and requirements of the CoE.					
☑ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DGA	The Organisation will develop a set of concise and pragmatic guidelines for planning, implementing and assessing change management approaches, adjusted to the needs and requirements of the Council of Europe.		31/12/2025	Director General of Administration

Management decision[1]	Entity in charge[2]	Planned actions[3] (determined by Entity)	Justification for non-acceptance[4]	Target date for action	Person responsible for action
Recommendation 8: Assessment (Medium)					
The CoE should systematically assess the feasibility and potential consequences of initiatives, and the outcomes of adopted initiatives.					
A first assessment should be part of the design phase of any initiative and should ensure that potential consequences for the Organisation, its staff and any specific groups are thoroughly addressed. A particular attention should be given to the impact on gender equality and persons with special needs. This initial assessment should be commensurate to the initiative and ask questions which are relevant to the initiative and its context, meaning that assessments, while systematic, do not necessarily imply to be large exercises.					
An additional assessment is needed to capture the achievements and outcomes of initiatives in view of learning and generating evidence-based outcomes for communication.					
☑ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DPB DHR	The Organisation will continue to assess the feasibility and potential consequences of initiatives at the inception of every new initiative, while embedding learning from experience in the decision-making, programming and implementing process. The Organisation will capture the achievements and outcomes of initiatives, in view of generating learning and evidence-based outcomes. In the field of the administrative reform, the impact on gender equality and persons with special needs will be specifically addressed through the implementation of the People Strategy 2024-2027 and its thematic Action Plans, which will be fostering enlarged diversity and inclusion in the workplace.		31/12/2025	Director of Programme and Budget Director of Human Resources

Management decision[1]	Entity in charge[2]	Planned actions[3] (determined by Entity)	Justification for non-acceptance[4]	Target date for action	Person responsible for action
Recommendation 9: Communication (Medium)					
The CoE should develop an integrated approach to communicating with staff about reform, initiatives and changes in order to ensure understanding and increase buy-in.					
The CoE should ensure clear, consistent and coherent messaging based on existing vision(s), the roadmap and its narrative (recommendation 3), and the progress and results of initiatives and changes (recommendation 8). Regarding the culture of change (recommendation 4), involvement of the Organisation's leadership in delivering key messages is essential. In particular, the communication strategy should ensure that staff are not overloaded with information, and this means that communication about initiatives, plans and developments should be carefully choreographed within a fully integrated communication strategy. This would require an analysis of the audiences, the identification of appropriate channels, the purposeful selection of key messages, as well as the usage of innovative and contextualised ways of communicating with staff and specific groups in addition to using the intranet and relying on information cascading down the hierarchy. Innovative approaches might include for example real time feedback, personalised news feeds and similar tools and approaches. Furthermore, the 'tone at the top' is important and the Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General should systematically communicate on reforms, presenting them as key initiatives for the Organisation. The communication strategy should acknowledge existing communication efforts and share communication successes.					
☑ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DGA, in cooperation with DC	The Organisation will further support an integrated approach to communicating with staff, notably about the administrative reform. In addition to the CoE's updated Communications Strategy (Oct 2023), notably section 2.4 on Internal communications, specific communication strategies will be developed as necessary for key initiatives related to the administrative reform. Particular attention will be paid to the analysis of target audiences, the identification of appropriate channels, as well as the selection of key messages.		31/12/2025	Director General of Administration Director of Communications

Management decision[1]	Entity in charge[2]	Planned actions[3] (determined by Entity)	Justification for non-acceptance[4]	Target date for action	Person responsible for action
Recommendation 10: Engagement of staff (Medium)					
The CoE should identify meaningful, timely and sustainable ways of involving its staff to ensure their substantive engagement throughout processes.					
Based on experiences gained in engaging with staff in recent years, the CoE should reflect on and learn lessons regarding critical success factors and challenges. In doing so, it should identify good practices to be continued, adjusted or introduced to ensure inclusive participation, adequate representation of its staff in consultations (e.g. HQ/external offices, gender, special needs) and coordination of the various engagement activities. The type of engagement (e.g. survey, workshop), level of details and practical modalities (e.g. online, face-to-face) should be adapted to different initiatives and contexts, the target group(s), and the purpose of the consultation.					
Continuous engagement throughout an initiative does not necessarily imply an ongoing consultation process, but it does require an appropriate balance between active engagement and transparent communication on the process and the decision-making process (see recommendation 9).					
☑ Accepted ☐ Partially accepted ☐ Rejected	DGA	The Organisation will benefit from lessons learned and experiences gained in engaging with staff in recent years in order to further develop meaningful, timely and sustainable ways of involving its staff, notably in the field of the administrative reform. Particular attention will be paid to good practices to be continued in order to ensure inclusive participation (notably the adequate representation of staff at headquarters and in external offices).		31/12/2025	Director General of Administration

Abbreviations	
CoE	Council of Europe
SMG	Senior Management Group
CM	Committee of Ministers
PO	Private Office