

# State of Change Management in the UN System 2025

## Navigating complexity, ambiguity and change saturation

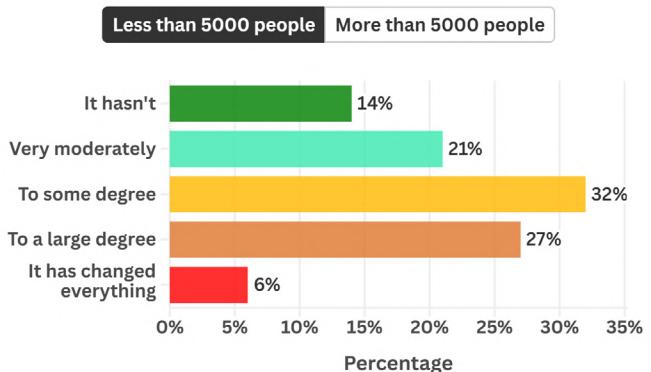
### In brief

- The current state of change management in the UN system is significantly affected by the funding and geopolitical environments in which the United Nations is operating.
- Organizations and individuals are juggling multiple change projects at the same time.
- The intended goal of change – how success is defined and measured – is often not clear.
- Change saturation is a reality for both individuals and organizations.
- Both maturity and agility in organizational approaches to change management need to be strengthened

### 1 Impact of funding and geopolitical environments

The environment for leading, managing, or implementing change in the UN system is a challenging one. Respondents to the 2025 State of Change Management survey report that both the current funding environment and the geopolitical context are having a major impact on the approach to change in their organizations – even more so than the Covid-19 pandemic – particularly in larger organizations.

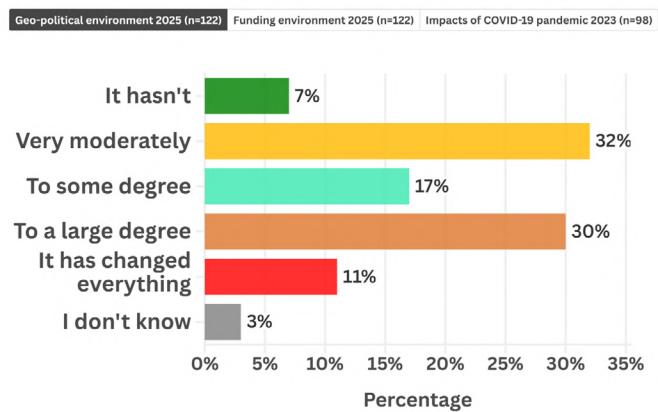
### Impact of geo-political environment on approach to change



Q16. In your opinion, to what degree has the current geo-political environment influenced your approach to change? (n=122)  
Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

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### Impact of environment on approach to change, 2023 and 2025

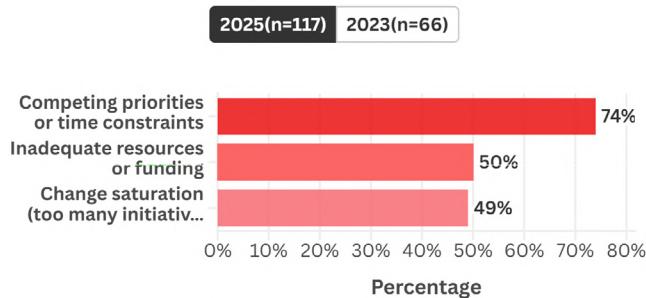


Q15 and 16. In your opinion, to what degree has the current funding / geopolitical environment influenced your approach to change?  
Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

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In fact, survey respondents report across-the-board increases in the challenges they are facing in change management in 2025 compared to 2023. The biggest increases are in the percentage of those identifying competing priorities and time constraints as a challenge (74% in 2025; 17% in 2023), inadequate resources or funding (50% in 2025; 20% in 2023), and change saturation (49% in 2025; 22% in 2023).

### **Biggest shifts in change management challenges, 2023 and 2025**



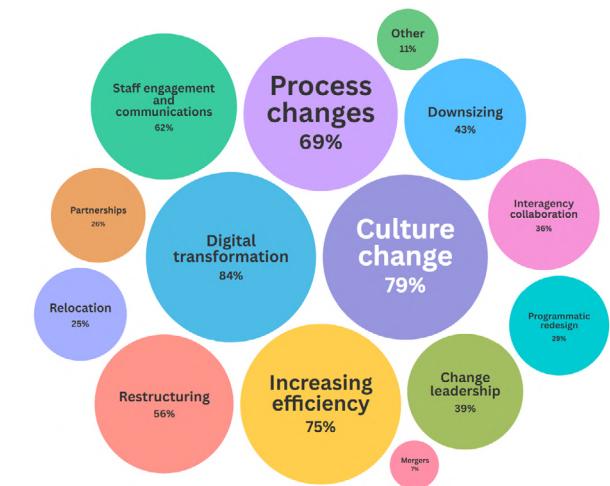
Q20. What are the main challenges you are facing in your work in sponsoring, managing or implementing change? Please select all that apply

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

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These change initiatives are complex. At both individual and organizational levels, the change initiatives most frequently cited are digital transformation, culture change, increasing efficiency, process changes, and staff engagement and communications.

### **Types of change initiative currently underway**



Q7: What types of change initiatives are currently happening in your organization? Please select all that apply (n=123)

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

## **2 Multiple change initiatives**

One of the consequences and challenges of a rapidly shifting internal and external environment is that across the UN system, individuals and organizations are juggling multiple change initiatives at the same time.

On average, respondents are working simultaneously on three to four organizational change initiatives each. Their organizations are implementing more than six organizational change initiatives each.

## **3 Change saturation**

Survey respondents reported that the biggest challenge they are facing in sponsoring, managing or implementing change is competing priorities and time constraints. A total of 74 percent of respondents identified this as a challenge in 2025. This is a significant increase on 2023, when only 17 percent identified this as a challenge.

## Main change management challenges, 2023 and 2025

2025 (n=117) 2023 (n=66)

Competing priorities or time constraints

74%

Inadequate resources or funding

50%

Siloed working

50%

Change-resistant culture

50%

Change saturation

49%

Lack of leadership support or prioritization

41%

Lack of strategic alignment

31%

Lack of awareness or understanding

30%

Low organizational buy-in

26%

Limited access to expertise or skills

19%

Lack of information or ineffective communication

17%

Q20: What are the main challenges you are facing in your work in sponsoring, managing or implementing change? (n=117)

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

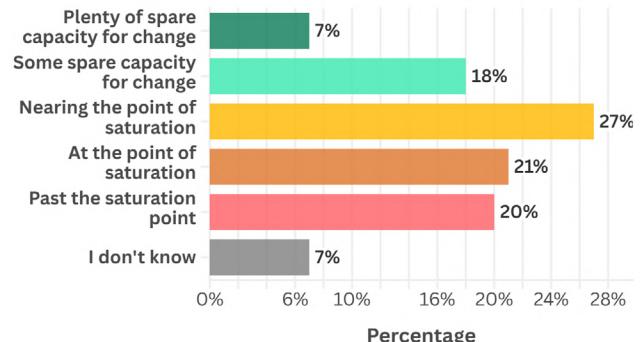
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One of the effects of competing priorities and time constraints is change saturation, also known as change fatigue:

- 49 percent of respondents identified change saturation as one of the main challenges in their work compared to just 22 percent in 2023.
- 68 percent of respondents described their organizations as past, at, or nearing the point of change saturation in 2025, representing a 5 percent increase since 2023.

## Organizational change saturation/ change fatigue, 2023 and 2025

2025(n=122) 2023(n=96)



Q14. What do you estimate the level of change saturation/ change fatigue to be in your organization at the moment?

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

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## Change maturity and change agility



Only 18 percent of respondents described their organization's approach to change management as mature, meaning that change management practices are a standard or integral part of change initiatives (Levels 4 and 5 below).

A total of 76 percent described change management practices as being used more sporadically, with varying levels of consistency (Levels 2 and 3 below). This is a slight decrease compared to 2023, when 80 percent of respondents described their organizations at Levels 2 and 3 in terms of maturity.

### Levels of change maturity

2% 46% 30% 14% 4% 4%



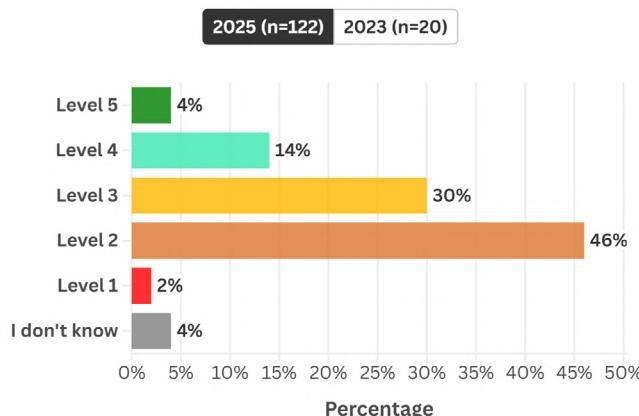
Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Level 4 Level 5

Q12: What level of change maturity does your organization currently have? (n=122)

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025* (UNSSC, 2025)

## 5 Defining and measuring success

### Levels of change maturity, 2023 and 2025



Q12: What level of change maturity does your organization currently have? (n=122)

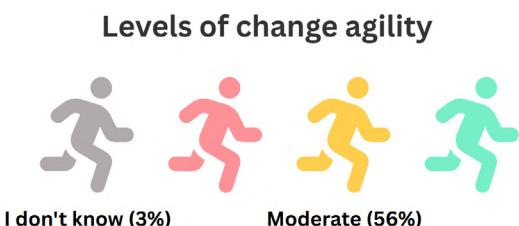
Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025 (UNSSC, 2025)*

[Click here for the interactive version of this graph](#)

In a context of rapid upheaval, the ability to implement planned change is necessary, but not sufficient, for successful change. Organizations also need to be agile in their approach.

In 2025, only 10 percent of respondents described the levels of change agility in their organizations as high. Almost nine out of ten respondents described the levels of change agility in their organization as moderate (56%) or low (31%).

Although there is some way to go to achieve high levels of change agility, this is a positive shift from 2023, when 45 percent of respondents described the levels of change agility in their organizations as low.



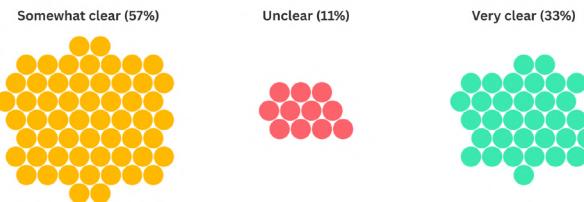
Q13. How would you rate the level of change agility of your organization? (n=122)

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025 (UNSSC, 2025)*

Having a clear definition of success, and clearly defined metrics, are fundamental components of effective change management. The 2025 survey found that organizations still have some way to go in clearly describing or measuring the success of the changes they are working on.

- One third (33%) of respondents said they have a “very clear” definition of success in terms of the changes they are working on.
- Just under one quarter (23%) of respondents said they have very clearly defined metrics for tracking the success of the changes they are working on.

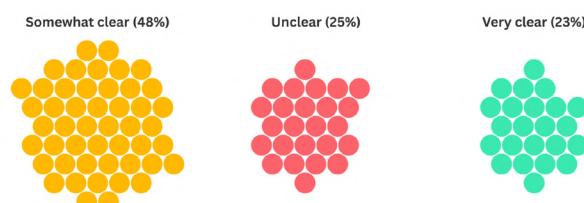
#### Clarity of definition of success



Q22. In general, how clear is your definition of success for the change(s) you are sponsoring, managing or implementing? (n=113)

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025 (UNSSC, 2025)*

#### Clarity of success metrics



Q23. How clearly defined are the metrics you are using to track the success of the change(s) you are sponsoring, managing or implementing? (n=112)

Source: *The State of Change Management in the UN System 2025 (UNSSC, 2025)*

# 6 Implications

management approach that sequences and paces multiple initiatives to avoid overload and identifies synergies.

## Implications for change managers and practitioners

- Change managers and practitioners need to work in partnership with change sponsors to build a compelling case for investing in change management capacity-building and tools.
- Change managers and practitioners also need to regularly assess the progress of change projects against agreed metrics, identifying risks and reporting on discrepancies with their change sponsor, thus generating data that will help to continuously inform the change strategy.
- Change managers need to apply a change management portfolio approach to ensure effective management and coordination of multiple change initiatives at the same time.
- To build change management maturity and agility, change managers need to be rigorous and consistent in implementing standardized change management practices and tools in all change initiatives.

