



# BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS FOR CIVIL SERVANTS

Applying behavioural science to transform public services



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## IN BRIEF

**Behavioural Insights for Civil Servants** seeks to equip governments with practical tools to harness behavioural science, as a means to improve public sector performance and service delivery. The approach applies evidence from psychology and economics (“nudges” and human-centered design) **to everyday behaviours and decisions**. By understanding how real people behave—what motivates individuals, how they respond to incentives, and where they have biases—governments can design policies and processes that are **more cost-effective, user-friendly and impactful**.

The result is a public sector that not only formulates better policies but also implements them more effectively.

Behavioural Insights for Civil Servants embeds a **“people-centric” approach to public administration and service delivery**, ensuring that improvements in systems, processes, and technical capacities translate into actual behavioural change on the ground and tangible gains in institutional performance and public service outcomes.

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## THE CHALLENGE

Too often, institutional reforms and service improvements are designed with the assumption that individuals—whether public servants or end users—will respond in predictable, rational ways. In practice, however, human behaviour is shaped by a complex interplay of cognitive, social, and contextual factors. Without a nuanced understanding of these dynamics, well-intentioned policies may fail to translate into meaningful change.

Administrative processes may remain ineffective, and services may fall far from expectations. Addressing this gap requires a shift from purely technical solutions toward approaches that are sensitive to how people actually make decisions and behave.



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# THE OFFER

*Behavioural Insights for Civil Servants follows a structured, four-step approach to integrate behavioural insights into public sector reforms:*

- ▶ **DIAGNOSE BEHAVIOURAL BARRIERS:** Conduct a rapid assessment to identify where behavioural factors hinder policy implementation, service uptake or service delivery.
- ▶ **DESIGN TARGETED INTERVENTIONS (“NUDGES”):** Using the diagnosis findings, co-create simple, low-cost interventions to address the identified challenges. These might include, for example, changing the way choices are presented, or providing feedback and recognition for desired behaviours. Each intervention is tailored to the local context and aims to make the desired action easy, timely, and attractive for individuals.
- ▶ **TEST AND REFINE:** Implement the proposed solutions on a small scale (pilot basis) and monitor the results. This step allows for evidence-based learning: if a new practice or process “tweak” leads to better outcomes (e.g., faster service times or higher client satisfaction), it can be refined and validated. If an intervention does not work as expected, it can be adjusted or replaced. This “test, learn, adapt” approach ensures that only effective measures are taken forward.
- ▶ **SCALE AND INSTITUTIONALIZE:** Once proven, successful interventions are integrated into standard government practices and systems. This may involve updating operating procedures, incorporating changes into digital platforms, or formalizing new roles within the civil service. UNDP supports authorities in scaling up the improvements across entities or administrative areas and in building the capacity of civil servants to apply behavioural insights continuously. Over time, this helps create a culture of continuous improvement where policies are routinely designed and refined with a clear understanding of human behaviour.

# WHAT GPGS PROVIDES

*Through Behavioural Insights for Civil Servants, GPGS offers tailored support to help governments apply behavioural science effectively:*

- ▶ **Advisory services and technical assistance:** Integrating behavioural insights into service delivery and internal business processes. This includes identifying entry points and adapting global best practices to local contexts.
- ▶ **Capacity building and training:** Direct engagement with public officials, using real-world examples and hands-on exercises. These sessions build a network of “behavioural champions” within government.
- ▶ **Pilot design and implementation:** UNDP supports pilot interventions—from behaviourally-informed communications and digital tools to frontline protocols. National and local partners are then guided through testing and data collection.
- ▶ **Stock-taking and data analysis:** GPGS accompanies partners in designing and rolling out effective feedback tools, and in the conduction of stock-taking exercises and data analyses to inform decisions-making, and support scale-up or course corrections.
- ▶ **Partnerships and knowledge exchange:** UNDP connects governments with global behavioural science experts and facilitates peer learning.





## KEY PARTNERS

At the national level, key partners include central agencies (such as Prime Minister's Offices or Civil Service Commissions) and line authorities (at national and sub-national levels) committed to innovation. The approach also engages civil society and academia—for instance, involving CSOs in co-designing solutions and leveraging insights from behavioural research institutions—to ensure interventions are grounded in end-users' experiences as well as locally-sensitive, and well-researched practices. Financial and technical support from development partners and donors (such as contributions through UNDP's Funding Windows) have enabled pilot initiatives in countries like Ethiopia.

GPGS is also partnering with global networks (including the UN Behavioural Science Group) and organizations like the [OECD](#) and [World Bank](#) to exchange knowledge and support more countries in leveraging behavioural insights for improved public service delivery.

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# BEHAVIOURAL INSIGHTS FOR CIVIL SERVANTS IN PRACTICE

## IN ETHIOPIA

In [Addis Ababa, Ethiopia](#), Behavioural Insights for Civil Servants was piloted to make local government services more accessible and inclusive. City officials and civil society organizations across two pilot localities were equipped with innovative modalities to engage with, and obtain feedback from, end-users of public services—including end users that have traditionally faced hurdles in accessing such services—such as lactating women and persons with disabilities.

The result of the "immersive" exercise was a set of practical, actionable recommendations that helped to ensure that facilities and service value chains were behaviourally-smart. From unclear signage and inaccessible physical structures to inadequate workflow protocols and poor training of front-line workers: the proposed measures, informed by behavioural insights, were cost-effective and allowed to redefine the user-journey experience in a positive trajectory.

Encouraged by this evidence, relevant authorities are now scaling up these behaviourally informed changes across other local authorities. The Ethiopia example shows how understanding and addressing human behaviour can help translate reform goals (like inclusive services) into practical actions that make a difference in citizens' daily lives.





Learn more at [gpgs.futuregov.org](https://gpgs.futuregov.org)

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## Contact us

[futuregov@undp.org](mailto:futuregov@undp.org)



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One United Nations Plaza, New York, NY 10017, USA

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