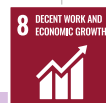


# Behavioural science

Enabling better choices



## BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE CAN IMPROVE SOCIAL PROTECTION UPTAKE

For example, there are **millions of individuals** who fail to access social protections to which they are entitled. With stronger behavioural science expertise, United Nations entities can support Member States in **simplifying registration procedures, improving outreach**, facilitating automatic enrolment, improving the completion of tasks, **tailoring processes to local realities and building trust** – to achieve **shock-responsive and universal social protection**.

## WHAT BUILDING BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE CAPACITY MEANS

Nurturing behavioural science capacity is about building our **knowledge of how people act, make decisions and react to policies, processes and incentives, in order to create better choices and positive change** – in particular in the areas of inequality, exclusion and discrimination. As a multidisciplinary field, it combines methods from psychology, economics, communications, data science, sociology and other fields to craft strategies that work with – not against – the grain of human nature.



Learn more about United Nations system behavioural science initiatives

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## WAYS IN WHICH BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE EXPERTISE CAN IMPROVE THE UNITED NATIONS...

- Reducing **administrative hurdles** with behavioural insight-informed **process simplification**.
- Reinforcing United Nations action on zero tolerance **for sexual harassment** with implicit **bias training**.
- Addressing **unconscious bias** in staff recruitment, management, and stakeholder engagement.

## AND SUPPORT MEMBER STATES IN...

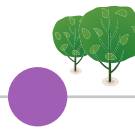
- Increasing uptake of **social security** with behavioural science-informed **outreach campaigns**.
- Reducing **stigma** for the 39 million people living with HIV/AIDS through better **community engagement**.<sup>41</sup>
- Changing **social norms** that lead to **gender-based violence** affecting up to 730 million women.<sup>42</sup>



## WHY WE NEED TO SHIFT

### UNTAPPED POTENTIAL

Just a decade ago, behavioural science was in its infancy. Today, it is a **well-established discipline that many Governments and institutions are integrating into the policy and programme cycle**. In behavioural science, it is recognized that people do not always behave in predictable ways and that human behaviour is often shaped by a variety of factors, including biases and mental shortcuts. If United Nations entities strengthen their behavioural science capabilities, we can increase the impact of our strategies and tailor our initiatives better to contexts or gendered norms – and create potential for faster progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.



## OUR GOAL

### SEAMLESS INTEGRATION

Our vision is a United Nations system **that integrates behavioural science seamlessly into the fabric of our work**: evidence-based, science-based, responsible, inclusive, gender responsive, context-adapted and effective. We see a future in which the United Nations system helps Member States in harnessing the power of behavioural science to craft interventions that tangibly improve outcomes and fast-track sustainable development progress for all.

To fulfil our vision, we are pursuing a focused approach: **designing initiatives that consider a broader set of factors in human behaviour** to deliver more sustainable benefits – prioritizing gender equality interventions. We embrace pragmatism, finding compelling use cases that accelerate our learning. In an agile manner, we will harness behavioural science to improve programmes, administration, stakeholder engagement and decision-making to leave no one behind. We are **enabling this transformation with better organizational support**: refined training and hiring, as well as more inter-agency collaboration, leadership capacity and partnerships.

## WHERE WE ARE NOW

### EARLY HEADWAY

In many areas, our mandates relate to human behaviour. While we have made early headway, the United Nations system is **only beginning to fully embrace behavioural science**. Currently, **only one fifth of United Nations entities have pursued a strategic approach** to building behavioural science expertise. Fewer than **10 per cent rate their abilities as advanced**. On a global scale, behavioural science has yet to become a core element of international development initiatives. The deeper integration of behavioural science into our work can be an important catalyst to better serve people and planet.

### State of play: United Nations system entities with...

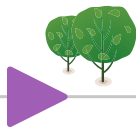


~0%

of \$350 billion in official development assistance **is allocated to behavioural science** annually<sup>43</sup>

58%

women in the behavioural science community of practice<sup>44</sup>



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## HOW WE AIM TO CHANGE

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### ADAPTING CULTURES AND CAPABILITIES

#### IMPROVE OUR OFFER TO MEMBER STATES

- Offer **programmes** informed by behavioural science and insights.
- Assist Member States in **integrating behavioural science** into public policy and administration.
- Broaden **outreach of United Nations behavioural science groups and networks** to diverse global partners.

#### NURTURE BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCE CAPABILITIES

- Curate **use cases that create proven value for those we serve**, starting with women and girls.
- Cultivate a **broad set of behavioural science methods**, such as randomized controlled trials, field experiments, journey mapping and long-term studies to better understand real-life behavioural patterns, biases and factors.
- Employ **behavioural science methods responsibly**, such as gentle nudges, optimized default choices or more effective approaches to keeping commitments.
- Integrate **consideration of unconscious biases** into all areas of work, including evidence-based demonstrations on how they affect effectiveness, as well as context-informed measures to address them at every stage.
- Infuse **planning, decision-making and policy development with behavioural science** to optimize programme impact, improve resource allocation and reduce bias and administrative burdens.



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#### SHIFT FOUNDATIONS AND CULTURES

- **Leadership.** Leaders will champion behavioural science in planning, policy design, budgeting, administration and programming.
- **Training.** Cultivate greater behavioural science understanding with basic training and capacity development.
- **Know-how.** Empower teams with access to behavioural science publications and tools, guided by experts and informed by the principles of human rights and gender equality.
- **Job profiles.** Design new job profiles and, where appropriate, recruit behavioural scientists or advisers.
- **Joint centres of excellence.** Form multidisciplinary teams that combine behavioural science, gender equality and subject expertise.
- **Networks.** Scale up global networks for system-wide sharing of best practices and use cases.
- **Partnerships.** Foster geographically diverse partnerships with academic, research and civil society organizations – including to support the United Nations system in achieving gender equality.
- **Governance.** Incorporate an ethical understanding into the application of behavioural science.
- **Technology.** Leverage the potential of technology to foster behavioural changes, for example for better information campaigns or faster feedback.
- **Metrics.** Establish indicators to track progress in shifting expertise.





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