

Foreword

Behavioural insights (BI) has greatly expanded our understanding of how the psychological, social and cultural factors governing human behaviour affect policy outcomes. Governments increasingly recognise the value of BI: OECD research has mapped over 200 government units, initiatives and partnerships across the world applying BI to public policy. As BI has become more prevalent, countries are using it to address new and more complex policy problems.

The OECD has been at the forefront of documenting and researching the use of BI in public policy in general and in policy fields such as consumer protection, environment, financial education, firm behaviour, public sector integrity, obesity, regulatory policy and taxation. This report builds on this work by tackling new problems related to individual behaviour as well as organisational behaviour.

This work brings together four OECD Directorates – Environment; Financial and Enterprise Affairs; Public Governance; and Science, Technology and Innovation – to test behaviourally informed solutions to complex policy problems in the fields of energy consumption, competition, safety and consumer protection respectively. It uses a variety of methods, including literature reviews and modelling to expand the theoretical basis for applying BI to policy problems. Where feasible, these solutions were tested using various experimental methods. Research institutions and leading experts across the world also participated in the development of this report.

The report highlights promising results in applying BI to complex policy problems as well as areas for further research and action. For example, it discusses ways to improve individual behaviour with regard to energy consumption, as well as an experimental approach to examining online advertising, disclosure agreements and personalised pricing. In terms of changing the behaviour of organisations, the report looks at ways to deter cartels through antitrust regimes and foster a culture of safety in the energy sector.

The report also identifies some broader lessons for using BI, such as the importance of scoping the policy problem, studying ways to change organisational behaviour, encouraging cross-national and cross-cultural experimentation, using a variety of tools and experimental methods and translating results so that policymakers can implement the findings at scale. It is also important to include BI in every stage of the policy cycle to maximise the potential impacts to policy outcomes. Behavioural practitioners and policymakers must also adhere to ethical standards to ensure they are applying BI responsibly.



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