Foreword

Integrity is more than a rational choice against corruption. Essentially, promoting integrity is encouraging behaviour in the public interest over self-serving behaviour such as corrupt and unethical practices. Yet, human behaviour is often a neglected dimension in integrity policy making. Existing efforts to preventing corruption are still widely based on a rational decision-making model. Such an approach usually stresses the importance of increasing the costs and lowering the benefits of undesired behaviour. Common policy recommendations derived from this include control and sanctions, and reducing the discretion of decision makers in order to diminish their scope for misbehaviour. Sometimes, this has led to over-regulation, the establishment of paralysing controls, and distrust in the public administration.

Integrity policies have shifted from a narrow focus on deterrence and enforcement towards promoting values-based decisions in the public sector and society. A public integrity system, as recognised by the 2017 OECD Recommendation on Public Integrity, is the foundation of trust in governments, institutions and the whole of society. With Behavioural Insights for Public Integrity, the OECD is spearheading a human-centred approach to public integrity.

Evidence from behavioural sciences highlights the social and psychological factors influencing behaviour. The 2017 Nobel Prize in economic sciences awarded to Richard Thaler is an acknowledgement for behaviourally inspired policies such as “nudges” - subtly making a good choice more likely without limiting the decision maker’s options. Over the course of the last two decades, a growing body of experimental evidence from the laboratory and the field has shed light on how corrupt networks function, how individuals are tempted to profit from corruption and how they react to the incentives provided by anti-corruption measures. Behavioural research has produced a wealth of insights that policy makers can draw from to develop innovative and well-targeted integrity policies.

This report is the first comprehensive review of different strands of behavioural sciences to identify practical lessons for integrity policies. It answers questions such as: What are the determinants of a moral choice? When are people unaware of an ethical dilemma? How is trust built and why do people lose trust in integrity? Behavioural Insights for Public Integrity guides policy makers in building integrity systems in which moral responsibility is not overlooked. It contains concrete recommendations on how to incorporate behavioural insights in modern integrity policies. At the same time, it notes aspects of existing anti-corruption strategies that could turn into behavioural pitfalls, such as the reliance on strict enforcement or the use of transparency as a panacea. Behavioural insights can enrich integrity policies by making them not only more effective and efficient, but also more human.