

► Policy Brief

Alignment opportunities for social protection programme design and delivery across the nexus¹ Occupied Palestinian Territory

Key points

- **This policy brief proposes alignment options** for national authorities, humanitarian and development stakeholders to work together to operationalize the humanitarian-development-peace nexus for social protection in the coming months, during and after the war.
- **Opportunities for alignment exist and are feasible** at the programmatic level between national social protection schemes and the “routine” safety nets provided by international (humanitarian) actors.² Working in siloes and misalignment have associated costs, risks and missed opportunities in terms of enhancing efficacy, efficiency and equity.
- **Collaboration should be enhanced between long-term and emergency programmes** – including national social protection schemes, “routine” safety nets, and humanitarian cash and voucher assistance programmes – to more efficiently and effectively address the complex needs of the Palestinian population in the immediate- and long-term.
- **Alignment options have been prioritized based on their feasibility and acceptability** by the members of the Social Protection Cash and Voucher Assistance Thematic Working Group (SPCVA TWG). These focus on opportunities for alignment between the work of the Palestinian Authority’s Ministry of Social Development and humanitarian cash and voucher assistance (CVA) programmes.
- **Priority options for alignment include:**
 1. Ensuring data-sharing and data interoperability.
 2. Conducting joint vulnerability and poverty assessments to redefine programme eligibility.
 3. Supporting the expansion of referrals across and between all programmes.
 4. Improving coherence and transparency in selection processes and in their communication.
 5. Developing a joint vision for delivering together on the “day after” across the nexus.

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² “Routine” safety nets are defined as the cash and voucher assistance programmes that are delivered by international actors over very long-term periods (e.g. multiple years). This differs to multi-purpose cash assistance delivered under the Cash Working Group, for instance, which constitutes a maximum of three to five payments over six months.

► Introduction

The Occupied Palestinian Territory has, for decades, been a highly fragile and conflict-affected environment. This has increased since 7 October 2023 and the war in Gaza, causing humanitarian needs to skyrocket and exacerbating the prevalence of widespread poverty and vulnerability to shocks.

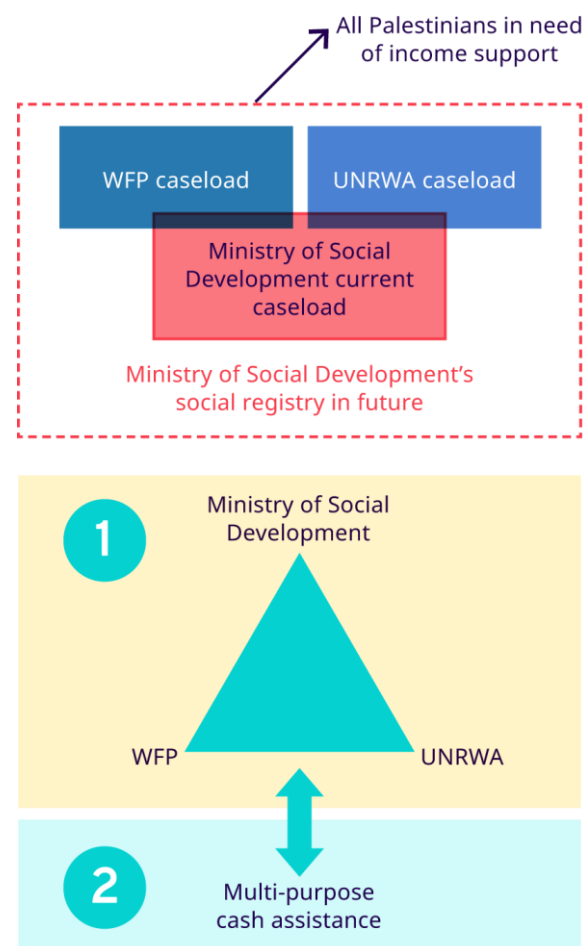
Despite significant constraints, the response to soaring needs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory has been scaled up. Humanitarian organizations have provided cash transfers to over 220,000 households in Gaza, coordinated through the Cash Working Group. The “routine” safety net programmes implemented by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP) – which, although originally conceived for emergencies, have become structural over time – have transitioned and scaled up in-kind responses. The Palestinian Authority’s Ministry of Social Development, which delivers national social protection programmes, is reformulating the formerly poverty-targeted National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP) in 2024 to include individual right-based social allowances for older persons and persons with disabilities.

While national and humanitarian agencies pursue specific objectives, they have tended to target the same individuals and households, sometimes referred to as “deep poor”, who are unable to meet their food needs and are highly vulnerable to shocks, health and protection issues. This has resulted in a fragmented social protection sector, with scattered results. Since 2022, the Social Protection and Cash and Voucher Assistance Thematic Working Group (SPCVA TWG) has been facilitating coordination between national and humanitarian actors. Co-led by the Ministry of Social Development and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and continuing since 7 October 2023, the SPCVA TWG has progressively enabled constructive dialogue and strengthened reciprocal trust. Partners also created technical workstreams to test and “prototype” small-scale solutions to practical problems (such as data-sharing) that previously hampered programme alignment.

In 2023, the three main social assistance programmes were run by the Ministry of Social Development, UNRWA and WFP. These three programmes feature different (unknown) degrees of overlap, both planned (happening on purpose) and unexpected (happening by mistake). If these programmes were able to share beneficiary data (at a

minimum), or ideally to align in programme design and delivery, then their scope and potential to cohesively support Palestinians could be greatly increased (see the first figure below). Before 7 October 2023, the SPCVA TWG Spearhead Group (previously workstream 1) focused on improving the coherence of these three “routine” safety nets into one “triple-strand safety net”, with which humanitarian actors could then interact and align – towards ultimately working together to avoid unintentional duplication, reduce inefficiencies and maximize resources (see the second figure below).

Figure 1. Potential of alignment to increase support for Palestinians in need



The SPCVA TWG Spearhead Group conducted an analysis to assess social protection, cash and voucher assistance (SPCVA) programmes (pre-October 2023) and to identify potential linkages between those programmes for improved policy and operational alignment, and ultimately for better outcomes for the Palestinian people. By considering several independent programmes as part of one single “social protection” sector, sharing similar objectives, the analysis resulted in a set of options to streamline the design and delivery mechanisms used

across the sector, in order to move towards a more cohesive, coherent and unified social protection system.

The analysis has since been updated to reflect changes to the situation after October 2023.³ Although the context is much changed, the recommendations remain relevant – particularly, the need to ensure that actors do not return to “siloed” ways of working post-crisis, but instead retain and institutionalize coordination gains. **This policy brief summarizes the results of the analysis.**

voucher assistance (e.g. particularly multi-purpose cash assistance) (SPCVA) programmes has been a major concern which the SPCVA TWG has been working to address. In some cases, overlaps may represent the intentional layering of programmes. However, there is a concern that misalignment or insufficient coordination may lead to certain population groups “falling through the cracks”, being “left behind” and not being covered. As such, a mapping was conducted of the main SPCVA programmes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which is used in this analysis (see table 1).⁴

► Mapping SPCVA programmes

Identifying and quantifying overlaps between social protection (e.g. the NCTP) and humanitarian cash and

Table 1. Policy and operational features of the main SPCVA programmes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Programme and objective	Coverage and targeting	Adequacy and transfer value	Delivery systems
Ministry of Social Development's social allowances Provide regular income support for vulnerable groups	- Individual - Categorical targeting – older persons and persons with (severe) disabilities registered in the ministry's social registry Beneficiary numbers (2024 target) ≈ 13,548 persons with disabilities and ≈ 9,492 older persons initially only in the West Bank (will be rolled out in Gaza once funding allows)	- Quarterly with the intention to move to monthly transfers 250 new Israeli shekels per person per month	- Identification/enrolment: Applications to the social registry through the ministry's social workers - Grievance redressal mechanism: Ministry social workers, online platform - No post-distribution monitoring
Ministry of Social Development's poverty-targeted transfers Deep poverty reduction	- Household-based - Poverty-targeting – uses the proxy-means test (PMT) to identify poor/deep poor households - Only those on the social registry Beneficiary numbers: 2023: ≈ 110,000 households (75,000 in Gaza, 35,000 in the West Bank) 2024 target: ≈ 7,000 households (initially only in the West Bank)	- Quarterly 250–600 shekels per household per month - The value aims to cover 50 per cent of the deep poverty gap, with a minimum transfer of 250 shekels per household	No exit strategy; referrals: In 2024, through the ministry's case management system to other services, such as healthcare, etc.
UNRWA social safety net (West Bank) Alleviate poverty and food insecurity among the most vulnerable Palestinian refugee families	- Palestinian refugees inside and outside of refugee camps - Household-based - Poverty-targeting using the proxy-means test formula (PMTF) to identify the abject poor (this is the priority targeting methodology used by UNRWA in the West Bank for social transfer assistance) Beneficiary numbers: ≈ 7,500 households	- Quarterly - The current UNRWA SSNP transfer value in the West Bank is 500 shekels per individual annually, which is 125 shekels quarterly - The current transfer values cover 20 per cent of the abject poverty line, while the RSI target is to cover 50 per cent of the abject poverty line	- Identification/enrolment: UNRWA relief workers - Grievance redressal mechanism: UNRWA relief workers, community feedback mechanism, hotline - Post-distribution monitoring - No exit strategy; re-evaluation every 2 years; referrals to other UNRWA services
UNRWA cash programming in Gaza	- Refugees only - Household-based	Quarterly	

³ The analysis is based on an ILO mapping of 75 SPCVA programmes, conducted in 2022. Priority was given to “routine” safety nets and multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) programmes, which often have higher budgets and are more likely to offer opportunities for coherence than one-off sectoral cash, provided to respond to specific shocks.

⁴ For the sake of simplicity, table 1 presents cash responses. While in-kind (food basket) transfers are also provided by several agencies, these are not detailed here. In particular, it should be noted that UNRWA has historically provided near-universal in-kind (food) transfers to all refugees, and continues to provide an in-kind response since 7 October.

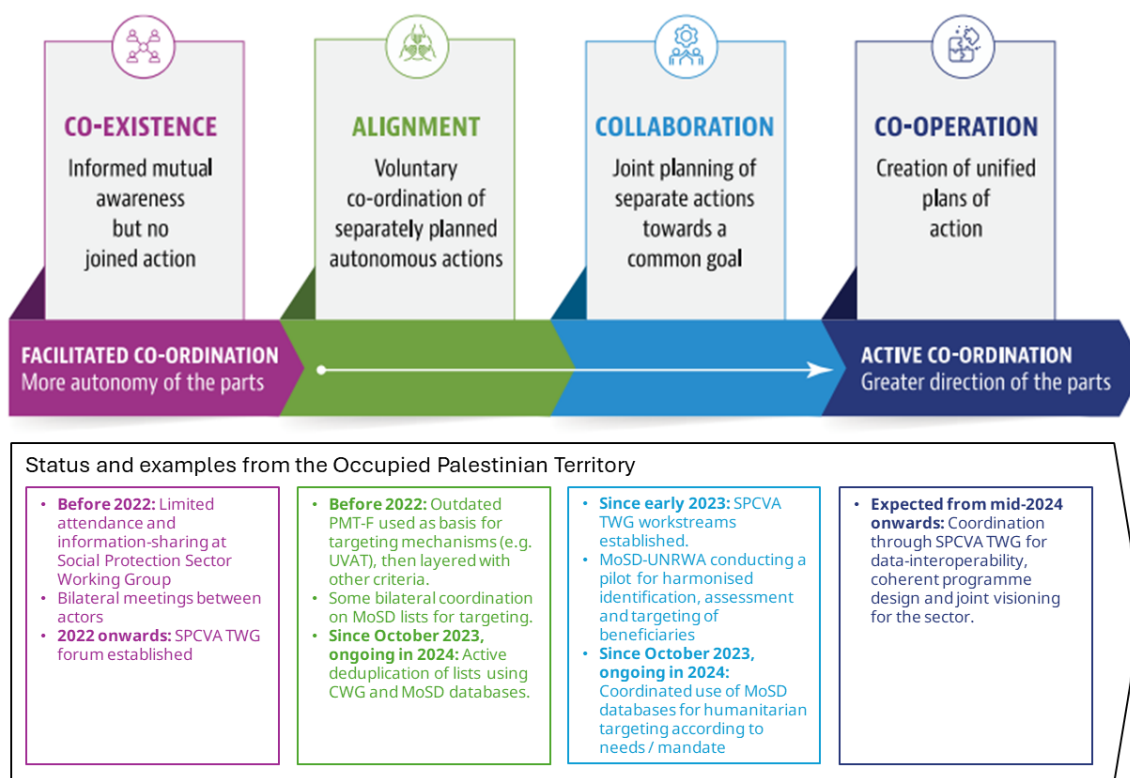
Programme and objective	Coverage and targeting	Adequacy and transfer value	Delivery systems
Alleviate poverty and food insecurity among the most vulnerable Palestinian refugee families	• Beneficiary numbers: • 2023 (cash): Most vulnerable households (based on categorical factors, e.g. disability, old-age, size) = 13,000 households • 2024 (cash): Suspended since 7 October, but expected to restart later in 2024	• US\$75 per person per quarter (US\$50 in cash, and US\$25 in-kind) • The value aims to cover 50 per cent of the UNRWA abject poverty line	
WFP top-ups to the Ministry of Social Development (Gaza and the West Bank) Food security	• Non-refugees only • Household-based • Food security targeted (consumption score) combined with MoSD poverty-targeted list. • Beneficiary numbers: • 2023 pre-October (vouchers): Top-up to MoSD beneficiaries and few other programmes = approximately 58,000 households. • 2024 target: 40,000 households nationally	• E-vouchers (restricted cash transfer) • Monthly • Approximately 285 shekels per household per month (2024) • Aims to cover 60 per cent of the food basket for 2,100 Kcal	• Identification/enrolment: WFP implementing partners, using the Ministry of Social Development's social registry and community targeting • Grievance redressal mechanism: WFP mechanism • Post-distribution monitoring • No exit strategy; re-evaluation every 2 years; referrals to WFP resilience programmes
Humanitarian cash actors under the Cash Working Group, e.g. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international NGOs (INGOs) Meet basic needs (food, housing, shelter, etc.)	• Household-based • Households affected by humanitarian shocks (2023: COVID-19, conflict, Gaza blockade, etc. 2024: war since 7 October 2023) • Both Gaza and the West Bank • Beneficiary numbers: • Gaza 2023: Households in deep poverty to meet basic needs (e.g. protection, children) ≈ fewer than 10,000 households in total • Gaza 2024: Blanket targeting humanitarian response ≈ over 180,000 households to date • West Bank 2023/2024: Displaced households or humanitarian shock (e.g. settler violence) ≈ fewer than 10,000 households in total	• Multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) • Monthly (maximum 6 transfers) • 2023 regular programming: Gaza: 1,081 shekels per household per transfer; West Bank: 1,240 shekels per transfer • Adjusted for inflation	• Identification/enrolment – Gaza 2023: Combination of the Ministry of Social Development's social registry lists, unified vulnerability assessment tool (linked to the PMT), community-based targeting; West Bank: Humanitarian shock. • Grievance redressal mechanism: various hotlines, mechanisms • Post-distribution monitoring • Usually no exit strategy, just programme ending; limited referrals to other service providers; referral to ministry awaiting the case management system's launch

► SPCVA TWG prioritization of options

Humanitarian programmes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory have traditionally been designed and implemented independently by organizations with different mandates, objectives and target populations. Coordination has been challenging, with organizations working in a tense, volatile operational and financial environment.

Since 2022, the SPCVA TWG has made major progress, with nexus actors now moving from co-existence with partial information-sharing to stronger collaboration and co-operation (see figure 2).

Figure 2. Spectrum of coordination and status in the Occupied Palestinian Territory



Source: Adapted from: OECD, *Co-ordination across the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus*, 2023.

Declining financing – including for the NCTP and humanitarian interventions until 7 October – has provided a major incentive over recent years for organizations to work together, to make the most of available resources. This has, partly, been accompanied by pressure from donors to improve coherence. However, organizations' own systems and procedures remain major barriers to moving forward, alongside different levels of capacities and performance, high staff turnover, and the need to overcome traditional organizational cultures of working independently and self-promotion.

Evidence globally shows that some programmatic elements are easier to coordinate and align than others, due to different legal and technical capabilities, political economy, leadership and institutional set-up, and/or partnership history. These elements can be associated with different levels of contention or acceptability, ranging from those that stakeholders can easily agree upon (low-

hanging fruits) to those with high levels of contention (for which (too) much effort may be required to move forward).

On 16 April 2024, the SPCVA TWG's members reviewed several options to improve programme alignment.⁵ They ranked these options according to their operational feasibility and their acceptability for key stakeholders (figure 3).⁶ Although the spread of "votes" for each option was broad, data interoperability, referrals and joint assessments were ranked as both the most feasible and most acceptable by the SPCVA TWG's members. These topics broadly correspond to areas where individual organizational benefits are more clear. Topics ranked as the least feasible or acceptable (joint complaints, feedback, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms) may also correspond to a lack of clarity on how or why to implement such approaches. Efforts to expand financing, develop a shared vision and improve the coherence of programming were all ranked relatively higher in terms of their acceptability to actors, but also as less feasible. This signals

⁵ These were based on the aforementioned analysis, which identified eight options for improving policy and administrative coherence.

⁶ See the full ranking here: <https://www.mentimeter.com/app/presentation/alx3cci175vn2umcca9827dwwd2jy3s/644o0pmcjm7u>

the importance of these topics, but also the major challenges to joint work on these areas.

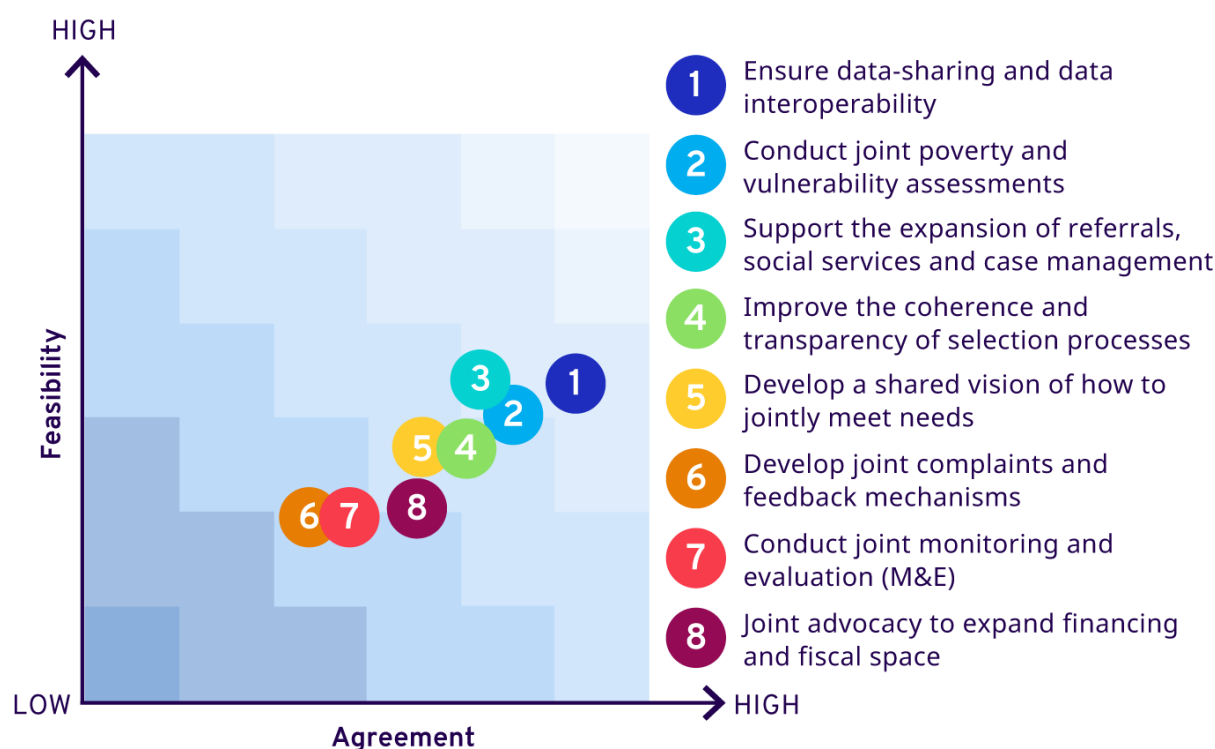
► Priority options for alignment

The SPCVA TWG identified, prioritized and discussed five options on 16 April 2024. Practically, implementing these options will involve harmonizing several programme procedures, enhancing transparency on design elements and/or developing and using common delivery instruments. Steps to operationalize these are detailed in the following section. They will be taken forward by the SPCVA TWG's members to improve:

- 1) **efficacy** – increasing collective impact through better coordinated social protection/cash programming;
- 2) **efficiency** – achieving operational gains (streamlined processes, cost efficiencies, increased coverage); and
- 3) **equity** – greater transparency and fairness of the system and its clarity for beneficiaries (who gets what, how much, and why?).

In line with international social security standards, primary responsibility for social protection lies with the national authority.⁷ For each option discussed below, initial steps involve coordination between actors (immediate-term). Strengthening national systems and ownership for the delivery of social protection remains a long-term objective.

Figure 3. Contention analysis of alignment options



⁷ Particularly the [Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 \(No. 202\)](#) and [Social Security \(Minimum Standards\) Convention, 1952 \(No. 102\)](#).

Option 1. Ensure data-sharing and data interoperability

Well-functioning, interoperable management information systems (MIS) between national actors and humanitarian (cash) stakeholders could improve the delivery of both humanitarian and development programmes. These could support the registration, identification and selection of beneficiaries, the regular review of their eligibility, and the management of referrals or programme exit. This should be associated with case management to provide access to a more comprehensive, cohesive package of benefits and services, in order to address the complex challenges faced by individuals and households.

SPCVA actors have long been concerned by the fragmentation of programmes – generating high risks of duplicating assistance – and the direct impact this could have on the coverage of needs and the exclusion of some parts of the population. In 2021, an ILO analysis found that the potential combined coverage of national and humanitarian assistance programmes could reach up to 68 per cent of poor households in the West Bank and 88 per cent of all households in Gaza.⁸

Overlaps can only be resolved if programmes share information on who is covered and by how much. Since 2022, under the SPCVA TWG's leadership, actors have intensified collaboration to improve data exchange, transparency and interoperability across their independent beneficiary databases. Aside from some bilateral cross-checking of lists, however, political, legal and technical issues persist. These include concerns on data-sharing protocols and the usage of the national social registry (the Ministry of Social Development's recently developed MIS).

In the long-term, it is hoped that the ministry's social registry will form the basis of a future system for de-duplication and joint planning across all actors. If the system is appropriately resourced and accompanied by sufficient outreach and communication, it could allow for dynamic registrations and updates – enabling all organizations to reach vulnerable households more efficiently.

In the medium-term, actors will have to develop a legal framework to support the expansion of social protection

floors by allowing data exchanges and interoperability between all actors, and supporting the use of an integrated MIS.

Since October 2023, humanitarian cash assistance in Gaza has been delivered in coordination with the Ministry of Social Development's social registry, as well as other beneficiary lists. The ministry launched a "reduce intake form" to allow quick applications from households in need, enabling them to register in the ministry's MIS. The Gaza Cash Working Group also rapidly developed a cross-check system to avoid beneficiary duplication between humanitarian cash actors.

The feasibility of data interoperability increases if it can be framed as a technical issue, rather than a political one. In practice, this means data-sharing is feasible if built from the bottom-up, starting with bilateral agreements between individual actors, until these reach a critical mass. When data interoperability is only discussed between senior stakeholders (and not attempted in practice), progress is often stalled due to preconceptions about what is politically feasible for different organizations. The former has been the SPCVA TWG's *modus operandi* for over a year, with a focus on technical aspects at a micro level, to gradually build the legitimacy of data-sharing approaches. In general, actors across the nexus have demonstrated strong willingness and efforts to improve data interoperability despite legal and procedural constraints. This has been reaffirmed by the continued commitment to coordination since 7 October.

The incentive to use integrated data and information systems is particularly high for emergency programmes and/or smaller organizations which have limited resources and interest in developing MIS for short-term/one-off programmes. Before October 2023, many humanitarian organizations were already using the Ministry of Social Development's lists in their selection processes. Since October, several humanitarian cash actors have looked to the ministry to provide new lists of beneficiaries (with coordination led by the Cash Working Group). Many Palestinians have a unique national ID, which facilitates the process of cross-checking data and, eventually, MIS interoperability.

⁸ ILO, *On the Road to Universal Social Protection: A Social Protection Floor Assessment in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 2021.

The ultimate goal of data-sharing and interoperability is to understand who is included and excluded from existing SPCVA programmes, so as to reduce unintentional duplication and increase intentional layering, thereby improving the coverage and adequacy of the overall SPCVA sector. To reach this goal, actors need to build upon the reality of the Ministry of Social Development's existing capacity and invest in strengthening its social registry. Agreed next steps include:

1. Map available data fields, sources (e.g. from different ministries) and the timeline needed to extract data in order to optimize the Ministry of Social Development's support for humanitarian operations in Gaza.
2. Set up data-sharing agreements between individual humanitarian agencies and the ministry, building on recent examples (e.g. the ministry's Memorandum of Understanding with UNICEF).
3. Ensure timely (and eventually automatic) data interoperability between the ministry's MIS and the Cash Working Group's de-duplication MIS, resolving technical issues and ensuring coherence across organizations' own procedures, policies and systems.
4. Jointly mobilize political and financial support to sustain a system led by the Ministry of Social Development, and strengthen this system to effectively facilitate timely collaboration across agencies delivering SPCVA programmes.

Option 2. Conduct joint poverty and vulnerability assessments

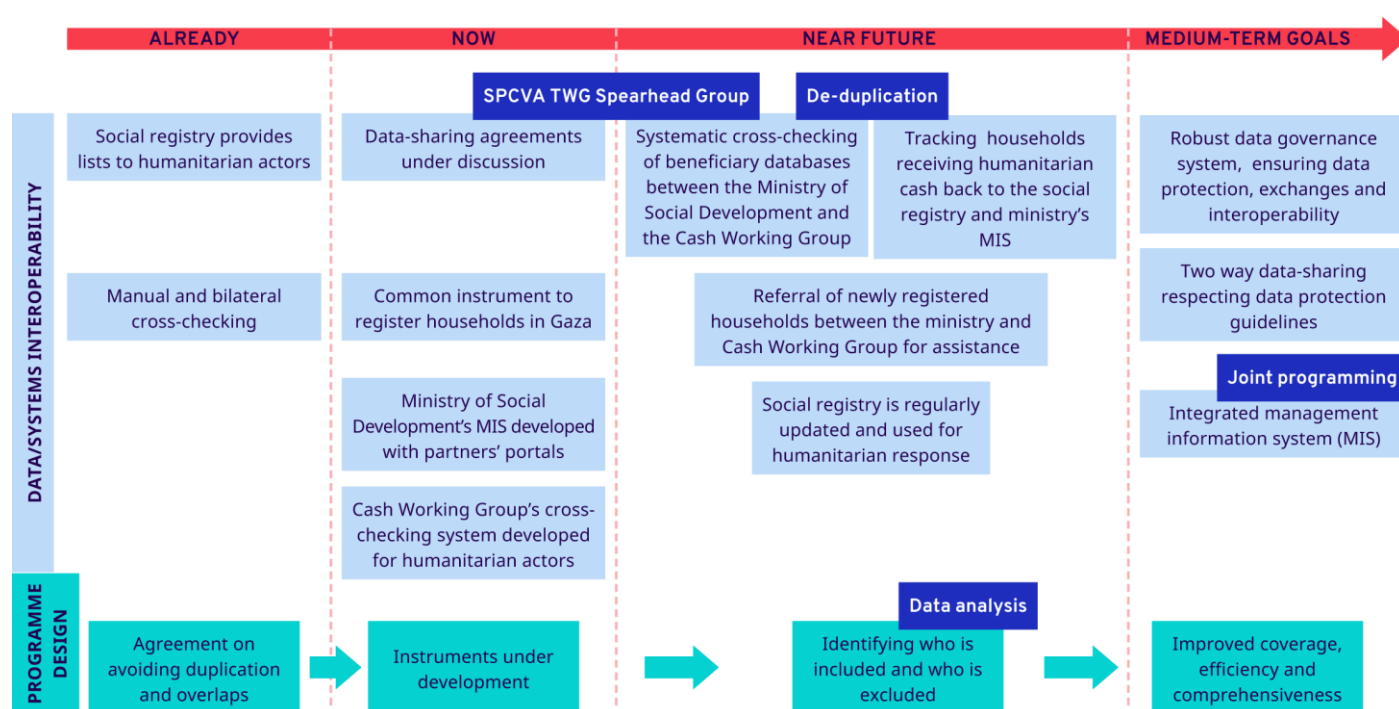
Regular, accurate assessments of poverty and vulnerability are vital to align, adapt and prioritize SPCVA programmes. Ideally, all actors should share a common understanding of the populations' needs and who the most vulnerable are. This information will enable them to identify priorities, define programme objectives, and design programme elements, while supporting advocacy for increased resources and financing.

The last national Palestine Expenditure and Consumption Survey (PECS), conducted in 2017, has informed SPCVA programming ever since, including the sector's understanding of poverty and vulnerability. The war disrupted an ongoing PECS in 2023, which will require significant updates.

Meanwhile, humanitarian actors rely on the annual multi-sectoral needs assessments (MNSAs), as well as rapid needs assessments in specific locations when a shock occurs. Some larger agencies have internal capacity, such as WFP, which regularly monitors the market, food and nutrition situation.

Both the PECS and the MNSAs include indicators on household demographics, ability to meet basic needs and labour force characteristics. The PECS goes more in-depth on household income and expenditure.

Figure 4. How to move towards data interoperability and integration: An example



Since October 2023, an Interim Damage Assessment has been conducted by the World Bank, the European Union and the United Nations. The same agencies will later coordinate on a full Rapid Damage and Needs Assessment (RDNA), which will include an assessment of damage to infrastructure as well as to social protection systems.

Various factors support the feasibility of joint needs assessments. First, population needs in the Occupied Palestinian Territory tend to be homogenous and intertwined. This is due to the depth of multi-dimensional poverty, including food insecurity, the fact that population-wide shocks and crises are the predominant drivers of poverty, and due to the ongoing occupation. Existing information systems are insufficient to provide a clear, shared understanding of population needs, risks and vulnerabilities. Secondly, the Palestinian context is volatile and requires regular updates. Yet development and humanitarian actors, independently, only have the resources to conduct infrequent needs assessments or assessments with limited sectoral and geographical scope.

Both development and humanitarian actors have developed considerable experience worldwide in conducting needs and vulnerability assessments in challenging environments, in adapting instruments to specific contexts, and in pooling different datasets. These experiences could be combined and leveraged in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The main risk is agencies conducting assessments independently to meet sector specific mandates, which prevents a more holistic and comprehensive assessment of basic needs.

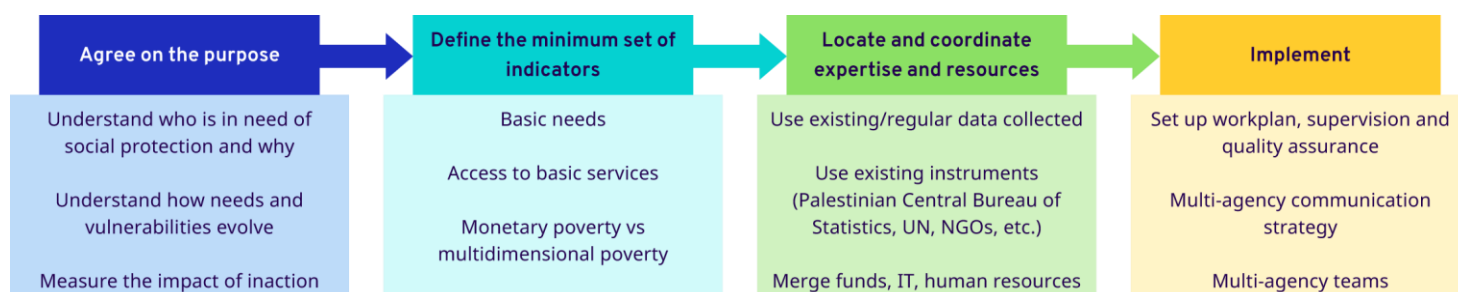
The ultimate goal is a simple, regularly-updated joint assessment and understanding of the population's needs as a basis for SPCVA programmes to (jointly or independently) address. To achieve this, actors should:

1. Set up a joint technical committee to oversee the assessment process and ensure regular updates.
2. Agree on the purpose of the assessment, including the trade-off between detailed information, technical feasibility and resourcing costs.
3. Jointly identify existing data sources, actors that could provide some missing information, and data gaps (i.e. where data remains to be collected). For such gaps, agree how data collection will be carried out.
4. Support the Ministry of Social Development to mobilize resources and expertise to conduct and lead regular joint assessments and updates, including to collect, validate and clean data and to simplify registration processes for the social registry.

Option 3. Support the expansion of referrals across all programmes

The comprehensiveness of social assistance depends on the whole combination of benefit and service packages available to cover the needs of the population. In 2022, over half of all SPCVA programmes reported providing complementary services, ranging from referrals and psychosocial support to in-kind or livelihood support.

Figure 5. How to set up a joint assessment: An example



The Ministry of Social Development and UNRWA have the most advanced case management systems, supported by

their MIS and detailed interviews with social/relief workers. Citizens can also find a range of services and benefits through local offices. For instance, deep poor households are covered by health insurance as well as cash benefits. However, the overall system suffers from a lack of resources and an insufficient social workforce to address all demands in a timely, regular manner.

Emergency programmes do not usually provide thorough case management, instead only offering referrals. Nevertheless, many humanitarian actors provide protection services to beneficiaries as well as in-kind support, such as in response to relocation emergencies. Activities related to the labour market, economic inclusion and livelihood support are very limited, as the context (e.g. of occupation and blockade) is generally not conducive to such services, especially in Gaza.

Since October 2023, humanitarian actors have been providing comprehensive support to households in Gaza, although the vast scale of needs has outpaced the funding available for humanitarian response. This includes food, shelter, cash, healthcare and other immediate responses, in addition to other social services, where possible.

Referrals and case management efforts could feasibly be aligned if both government and humanitarian actors build on the development of improved referral systems and the newly designed/updated national case management system of the Ministry of Social Development. Expected to be launched in 2024, the system will allow humanitarian actors to input information and access specific sets of data through a dedicated online portal. Coordination on this matter was led by SPCVA TWG workstream 3 on referrals before October 2023.

The expansion of a coordinated approach may be limited by the lack of presence of national or humanitarian actors in some areas, and will require expanding collaboration agreements and coordination mechanisms. One way to combine resources is to integrate front office procedures (called a “one-stop shop”), allowing the population to meet service providers in a single space. This is already provided for some Ministry of Social Development services, but could be expanded further. A combined space could also motivate more exchanges and collaboration across the social workforce at the local level.

At first, this combined space could include staff from different agencies. As services and programmes transition to the Palestinian Authority, these competencies could also be transitioned. The space should also be open to assist all Palestinians – i.e. all individuals in need of protection across

the lifecycle, the deep poor, and crisis-affected households. Case management and referral procedures should allow for adapting the package of benefits and services to respond to individuals’ changing needs. Whilst integrated case management systems would allow for the smooth transition of beneficiaries between programmes and services, referrals away from humanitarian assistance will only be feasible if there is increased (and more sustainable) financing available for the national system to absorb the increased caseload.

The ultimate aim of expanding referrals across all programmes is for individuals and households to have access to a comprehensive range of services and SPCVA programmes, for instance through one-stop shops. To continue developing joint referral and case management systems, actors should:

1. Map the current outreach and case management services provided by different actors, and the social workforce involved, to understand the coverage of and gaps in the benefits and services provided.
2. Develop a shared vision of a collective minimum package to be offered by multiple actors.
3. Identify how the Ministry of Social Development’s new referral and case management system could be implemented for these services.
4. Design a more efficient, collaborative way to conduct outreach and case management, for instance by combining resources and setting up one-stop shops.

Option 4. Improve coherence and transparency in selection processes and benefits packages

Improving the quality, coherence and transparency of the selection process could have a two-fold impact – reducing the risk of exclusion, and improving accountability to the population. A key aspect of SPCVA programme design involves establishing a target group (or groups) that corresponds to programme objectives, defining the selection and identification process to enrol them into the programme, and managing the process to ensure that coverage is aligned with financing capacities.

Eligibility criteria often differ, even across programmes that share the same objectives.

Figure 6. Selection processes for SPCVA programmes

Ministry of Social Development
National Cash Transfer Programme

UNRWA Social Safety Net
Programme (SSNP)

Self-registration at local Ministry of
Social Development office

Online registration on eUNRWA
in an UNRWA office

Traditionally, agencies have designed eligibility criteria and selection processes to fit their specific mandates and programme objectives – based on refugee status, estimates of households’ sectoral deprivation (food, shelter, etc.) or the direct observation of needs (displacement, etc.). Members of the Cash Working Group in Gaza developed the UVAT, a tool to select households in line with their specific objectives (e.g. protection), building on the Ministry of Social Development’s PMT and list of registered households. In 2022, 26 of 75 programmes used the ministry’s list as part of their beneficiary identification process, while only 12 used the UVAT.

Since October 2023, humanitarian actors have been using “blanket” targeting for multi-purpose cash transfers during the initial response in Gaza. They apply basic data verification (e.g. of IDs) and cross-check with other cash actors to avoid duplication. This will likely shift to more targeted selection approaches based on vulnerabilities or specific groupings (e.g. locations) as the crisis goes on. In the West Bank, WFP has expanded its coverage, although needs continue to outpace funding availability.

As programmes (including for emergencies) often use similar lists/formulas as a starting point – with similar steps and levels of complexity, but with processes conducted independently – it is feasible to improve the coherence of these selection processes. A lack of communication and transparency on these complex processes can lead to the exclusion of the most marginalized and vulnerable.

They include people on the move, people with limited mobility and access to information, and people isolated socially/economically. Working together, more resources can be made available to reach the most vulnerable.

The fragmentation of programmes, eligibility criteria, processes and teams creates confusion in the target population, especially when criteria are not disclosed transparently or when they are too complex to explain. This also causes tension with international social security standards, which envisage social protection schemes designed in a way that respects people’s rights and dignity, while providing predictable support. To improve clarity and cost efficiency, organizations could enhance communication with the population on programme eligibility and entitlements by designing and implementing a common information campaign, and moving towards joint information services.

This also applies to improving the transparency and accountability of modalities and transfer values. Determining transfer values (and trade-offs to coverage) is often grounded in programmatic objectives, which may range from providing essential support to the chronically poor to temporarily helping crisis-affected people cope.

In some cases, transfers are provided to households to support consumption within a family unit. In other cases, they are provided to individuals on a rights basis. Benefit levels often vary greatly between programmes.

Table 1. Transfer values per family per month

Programme/basis	Final value
Ministry of Social Development's deep poverty line	250–600 shekels
Minimum expenditure basket (MEB) (Gaza, regular programming)	1,081 shekels
MEB (West Bank, regular programming)	1,240 shekels

Source: ILO, *Assessing Social Protection Adequacy in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, 2023.

Improving transparency and shared exchanges on eligibility criteria, selection processes and transfer values (while acknowledging that these will differ for different programmes), could help actors to jointly understand who is excluded from assistance and why.

Actors could then consider if combined benefits packages are adequate to meet the different needs they seek to address, and jointly adapt programme design if required. Improving transparency will also increase accountability to the population and reduce potential tensions. This aligns with international social security standards' call for the transparent, sound and participatory management of social protection, as well as systematic coherence with public policies and services. **To do this, actors should:**

1. Form a committee consisting of the main social assistance partners (e.g., the Ministry of Social Development, UNRWA, WFP, UNICEF and the Cash Working Group) to lead this work.
2. Review existing selection procedures to identify different target groups using recent sectoral evidence (e.g. the 2022 SPCVA programme mapping) and new updates since October 2023.
3. Engage with field implementers and the social workforce to understand gaps leading to exclusion at the local level.
4. Jointly develop communication strategies to engage the population for different SPCVA programmes.

Option 5. Develop a joint vision across the nexus

There is a need to develop a national joint vision (taking into account contextual differences between Gaza and the West Bank) to provide a comprehensive package of benefits and services to the most vulnerable Palestinian individuals and households, including for emergency assistance.

Actors in the Occupied Palestinian Territory understand that households face complex, multiple needs which can

only be addressed by a well-coordinated response by governmental and humanitarian actors. National social protection systems are not yet sufficiently developed to provide an appropriate level of protection for the population, and all actors face major financing challenges to providing adequate benefits and quality services. They acknowledge that the main safety net programmes' transfer values are inadequate, and the overall impact of assistance is low. More coordinated, joined-up approaches can improve cost efficiency, and offer opportunities to improve the system's effectiveness.

Sharing a common vision, actors could also jointly advocate for the allocation of sufficient resources. In practice, humanitarian and emergency programmes (e.g. safety nets) had become routine pre-October 2023, while preserving "emergency characteristics" and short-term programmatic visions/lengths. The lack of coordination has perpetuated the use of emergency sector-based responses to address chronic complex needs, although recurrent disasters are leading drivers of household poverty. Moving towards a more comprehensive package of benefits and services would allow the integration of short-term programmes into households' and individuals' multi-annual trajectories (avoiding falling back, dealing with life events, etc.). This would more efficiently complement routine social protection programmes.

Before October 2023, there was no systematized way to cross-check whether households had received multiple transfers from different agencies, or the adequacy of the total amount received. Given the irregularity and low transfer value of national social protection programmes, most actors did not mind overlaps. Since October, poverty and vulnerability have surged, with almost all of Gaza's population of 2.3 million estimated to be living in multi-dimensional poverty. Social and humanitarian assistance programmes must continue expanding coverage to meet increased needs, while operating in a highly resource-constrained environment. The cross-check system introduced by the Gaza Cash Working Group and Ministry of Social Development since October could enable intentional layering of programmes in the future.

Progress on building relationships, trust and mutual understanding between actors and programmes over the last two years lays the groundwork for elaborating a joint vision.

Actors are now better-placed to understand the comparative advantage of different programmes, and to

acknowledge the complexity of needs that require coordinated packages of benefits and services. Although future political developments are unclear, an interest and willingness exists across SPCVA actors to work towards a joint goal and vision (still delivered by different programmes) under various political scenarios.

Ultimately, the aim is for the ministry and humanitarian actors to support households to cope with their changing needs by providing a continuum of assistance, both throughout the lifecycle and in emergencies. This joint vision fundamentally relies on a common understanding of the complexity of needs, acknowledging the intersections between social protection, safety nets and humanitarian cash programmes that support the same households at different times. In the immediate-term, a lack of financing among all actors will require the prioritization and delegation of coverage between different agencies until the national system grows in financial capacity to extend coverage. Combined interventions should aim to progressively build towards an adequate level of social protection for all Palestinians, following the principles of non-discrimination, equality of treatment and social inclusion enshrined in international social security standards. The joint vision would need to be built on the Ministry of Social Development's plan for future programming. Actors could "top-up" or align with this in the medium-term, and progressively hand over to a fully national system as financing and circumstances allow. **To achieve a joint vision, actors should:**

1. Develop and share objectives, targets and plans with each other, and assess how they are each (separately) covering the complex needs of the population.
2. Identify gaps in coverage or adequacy, and adapt their approaches jointly to bridge these gaps based on intentional layering or de-duplication, the comparative advantage of actors, and expected financing available in the short- and medium-term.
3. Work together to understand how transition across programmes could be organized and jointly advocate for funding on the basis of this new vision.

Other options discussed

As part of the analysis on SPCVA programmes, further options were identified and shared with the SPCVA TWG workshop participants.

The three options discussed below ranked lower than the five outlined above in terms of feasibility (and acceptability)

in the contention analysis. This could be due to a lack of clarity on how to implement such joint initiatives or, more likely, because they are not priorities in the current emergency context.

Option 6. Joint complaints and feedback mechanisms

Accountability is a key principle for the good governance of social protection systems. This includes access to, and the flow of, information between organizations and the population about programmes, benefits, entitlement conditions and resources. It also includes processes for people to raise concerns, file complaints, and exercise their rights. All mechanisms should use channels and methods appropriate to different groups, especially the most vulnerable. Yet different organizations and sometimes even individual projects in the Occupied Palestinian Territory manage information dissemination separately, and have separate complaints and feedback mechanisms. While a range of communication channels exist, public awareness of programme details is low. Opaque selection processes and a lack of information create accountability issues, as claimants are unable to understand their entitlements and civil society organizations are unable to assist them. Thus, potential beneficiaries struggle to articulate their eligibility for entitlements through grievance mechanisms.

The context is conducive to improving information and communication given the range of technologies, channels, media and trained/skilled staff available, including in private companies. The rationale behind the current fragmentation of mechanisms includes technical issues and the fear that a single system could not manage a diversity of claims. However, most claims concern non-sensitive administrative issues that a common system could easily address. Sensitive questions could be referred to specialized responders using existing instruments. The shortage of resources is a particularly strong incentive for organizations to establish common instruments, enabling them to be more cost-effective and provide more constant, comprehensive services. **The ultimate aim is to build on existing tools to develop sustainable systems that improve accountability to the population and contribute to strengthening the overall social protection system.**

To achieve this, actors should:

1. Identify the types of complaints raised.
2. Explore how a common system could respond to non-sensitive claims, and specific procedures put in place for sensitive/exceptional claims, in relation to the new case management system and MIS.
3. Support the development of appropriate legal frameworks and agreements.
4. Pool resources to support a common system.

Option 7. Joint monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

International organizations use similar approaches to monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The main instruments are pre- and post-distribution monitoring, collecting a range of indicators from beneficiary households to gauge the impact of cash transfers, and multi-annual or end-of-programme evaluations. Each organization and programme has its own M&E system, which may be more or less developed depending on available resources and financing needs. Even when organized in a consortium, actors do not share common M&E systems. As the project cycle draws to a close, M&E and accountability elements are not always sufficiently resourced or integrated into the programme cycle to inform programming. M&E is often considered an instrument to fulfil specific reporting obligations, rather than to improve programming and accountability on a routine basis.

Like complaints mechanisms, the similarity of data that needs to be collected, and the limited resources available, make it feasible to have joint M&E mechanisms. The ultimate aim is to ensure quality monitoring, evaluation and learning to support accountability and adapt programmes to address the population's needs. By working collectively, actors could become more efficient and develop a common understanding of the impact and shortfalls of the overall assistance they provide. **To achieve this, actors should:**

1. Map the available tools and resources for joint monitoring and evaluation.
2. Identify the combined minimum requirements of monitoring data across programmes.
3. Design and pilot a common instrument for monitoring programmes, share results across actors, and jointly learn and adapt accordingly.

Option 8. Joint advocacy to expand financing and fiscal space

The effectiveness of social assistance in alleviating poverty and vulnerability is significantly impaired by

the inadequately low rates of coverage and transfer values. These, in turn, are caused by limited and unsustainable financing available for SPCVA. Only by mobilizing and securing more resources can actors sustainably improve the coverage, adequacy, quality and comprehensiveness of the assistance provided across the humanitarian-development-peace nexus. Organizations should combine efforts to generate evidence and advocate for greater budgetary allocations (e.g. based on robust joint needs assessments), as well as for longer-term change in financial flows and governance (to increase funding flows through the national system).

Based on a jointly-defined vision, joint advocacy to expand financing would be highly feasible, particularly for financing to the NCTP, as all actors ultimately share a common goal. They want the population to be sustainably covered by a robust national social protection system – a goal reinvigorated and agreed between actors at SPCVA TWG meetings. **The ultimate aim is to support sufficient sustainable funding for the Palestinian Authority to implement an adequate social assistance system that responds to the population's needs, enhances their resilience, and responds to shocks.** In the much longer-term, national financing and a comprehensive legal framework (financed by the Palestinian population in solidarity with each other) is the only route for a sustainable social protection system that delivers, accountably, for all. **Therefore, actors should:**

1. Develop – based on a joint vision for integrated programming, or at minimum, joint support for a Ministry of Social Development vision/plan – common advocacy messages to support this plan.
2. Advocate for increased financing to the NCTP.
3. Reference this long- or medium-term vision in all future engagement with donors.
4. Develop more detailed sustainability and exit strategies, which should start to be required by donors from the organizations that they fund.

► The immediate way forward

Collaboration through the SPCVA TWG since 2022, and continuing since 7 October 2023, has resulted in significant progress. Agency-specific mandates and interests have been discussed openly – an essential step to move towards a more collaborative phase. Partners are also now ready and willing to increase the exchange of information and transparency on beneficiary caseloads, benefits packages and individual case management.

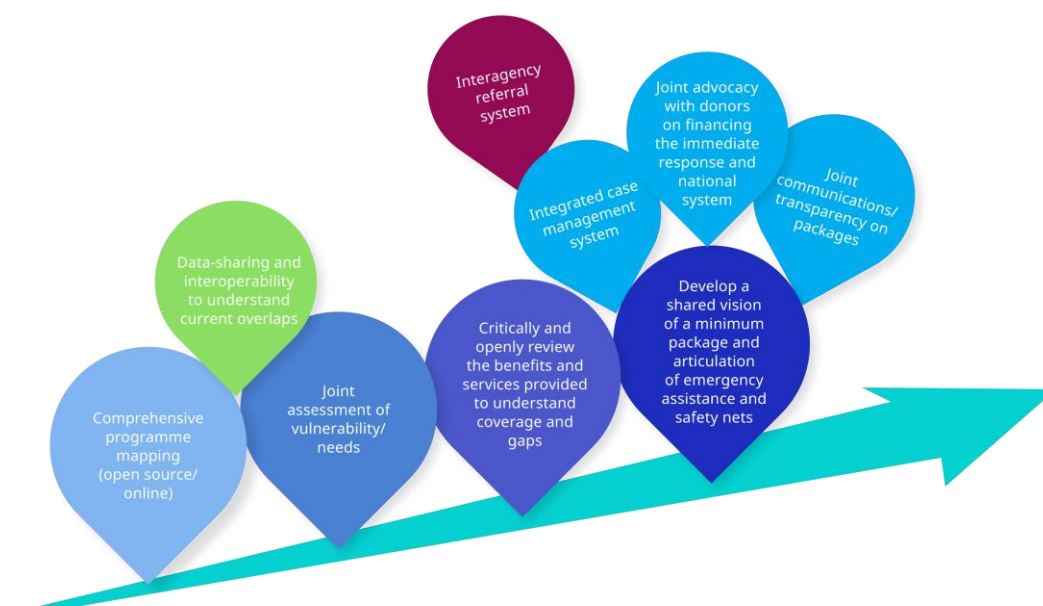
The SPCVA TWG has continued to meet since October, including technical discussions on strengthening alignment between the “routine” safety nets of the Ministry of Social Development, UNRWA and WFP (e.g. data-sharing agreements and coherent programme design processes), and supporting interactions between the ministry and the Cash Working Group (e.g. on data-sharing and using national systems to identify and target households during the humanitarian response in Gaza).

In July 2024, a series of SPCVA TWG workshops are planned to discuss the options outlined in this brief, or identify other areas where coordination could be practically strengthened in the next 6–12 months.

The immediate way forward is for SPCVA TWG members to redefine nexus coordination for the 2024 Palestinian context, validate existing approaches, and commit to a common goal or workplan of activities towards aligning with the NCTP (in the short-term), and reinforcing and strengthening existing national systems in the long-term. Ultimately, the goal must be for the national social protection system, through the NCTP, to provide adequate, comprehensive assistance to Palestinians in the longer-term and to be more shock-responsive and adequate in light of the current and ongoing conflict.

All the alignment options here build towards the joint (very) long-term objective of a nationally-owned social protection system that meets the needs of all Palestinians (see figure 7). As part of this process, humanitarian actors are considered essential partners for the Ministry of Social Development to achieve a comprehensive national social protection system. Modalities of social assistance remain in flux in Gaza since October, but discussions have touched on the potential of the ministry, UNRWA and WFP introducing or increasing their cash interventions when conditions allow (building on the existing cash response coordinated by the Cash Working Group). This would open broader opportunities for joint market and systems assessments using existing instruments, more joined-up delivery approaches, and greater transparency for the population. Assessments, design and delivery processes can already be planned jointly.

Figure 7. Complementarity of alignment options



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