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► **Synthesis of recent studies
related to the social protection-
cash voucher assistance
(SPCVA) nexus in the
Occupied Palestinian Territory**

Summary report on findings and recommendations



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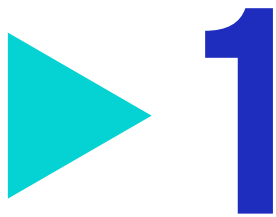
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Background and objectives

The social protection sector in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT) is characterized by complexity, fragmentation and a lack of coherence. The main governmental programme is the Palestinian National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP), which reaches roughly 115,000 households with regular benefits. While sizeable in reach, insufficient coordination across international and governmental actors, as well as significant variations in transfer typology and levels of benefits, have led to a fragmented and ineffective system.

Humanitarian safety net programmes initially conceived for emergencies have become structural over time, and represent a significant part of the social protection system, particularly social assistance. The largest are the operations of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the World Food Programme (WFP), but other international and national organizations distribute significant cash and in-kind benefits. In 2022, WFP reached approximately 70,000 households with cash and/or in-kind assistance, while UNRWA regularly serves over 1 million Palestinian refugees.

The Ministry of Social Development (MoSD) often partners with these organizations to conduct outreach and assessments, in order to provide supplemental benefits to government transfer recipients and, as it did throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, to identify and register households exceptionally affected by crises. But differing mandates, organizational cultures with respect to social protection, institutional policies and procedures for distributing cash and voucher assistance, and a lack of formal coordination impede efficiency and effectiveness. A lack of communication and mutual understanding among humanitarian and development actors in the Occupied Palestinian Territory impedes the governance and sustainability of social protection programmes, including with respect to their planning, programming and delivery.

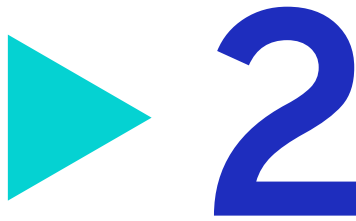
To contribute to addressing these issues, the European Union (EU) is funding a project implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Oxfam and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The project aims to support the Ministry of Social Development to enhance coordination and coherence between governmental and non-governmental (social protection and humanitarian) actors on initiatives in the social protection sector. The main objectives are to i) increase the rights-based and nexus programmatic coherence of social protection, and ii) enhance the responsiveness of the social protection system.

Under this project, the Social Protection Cash and Voucher Assistance Thematic Working Group (SPCVA TWG) has been established to enhance coordination between actors across the nexus. A comprehensive mapping of all governmental and non-governmental social assistance interventions in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is underway. The SPCVA TWG has developed a roadmap which identifies actions around four strategic priorities or 'workstreams'.

While these coordination fora exist, and a variety of research and papers have been produced in recent years by actors working in the sector – including on the nexus specifically – these have led to limited progress in nexus coordination, and activities remain fragmented.

The purpose of this assignment is to inform future progress and direction of the SPCVA TWG by producing a synthesis of learning from recently published studies that are focused on, or relevant to, the social protection and cash voucher assistance (SPCVA) nexus in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. This report provides a synthesis of findings and recommendations pertinent to the SPCVA TWG's four workstreams, and other relevant areas beyond these. It is hoped that this report will pull together shared findings that can be jointly owned by the SPCVA TWG's members and constituency, and further inform jointly-owned opportunities for progress across different specific technical areas. In particular, the report will inform the work of the SPCVA TWG and the Social Protection Sector Working Group, as well as the next Social Development Sector Strategy (SDSS) to be developed by the Ministry of Social Development.



Methodological approach

Inception phase: The consultant held a kick-off call with the ILO, followed by a wider meeting with other stakeholders from the SPCVA TWG, to agree on the scope and aims of the research and the studies to be included, as well as to discuss the methodological approach for the quality screening of studies and for the analysis. Based on this, the consultant developed a series of questions to guide a quality assessment determining the inclusion of studies in the review, which was agreed with the ILO (see figure 1).

For each question, where relevant, a range of indicators of what constituted good/rigorous practice versus weaker practice were developed, and used to screen the studies. A qualitative score of 1–3 was assigned to these indicators (with traffic light colour coding used for ease of reference). The aim was to strike a balance between ensuring a focus on rigorous evidence on the one hand, while on the other, being mindful of the context and how it can influence the methodological quality of literature, so as not to overly exclude useful evidence.

► **Figure 1. Quality screening criteria**

Question	Indicators	Score (1 = good; 3 = weak)
1. What is the publication date?	2023	1
	2022	1
	2021	1
	2020	2
	2019 or older	Reject
2. What is the publication source?	Peer-reviewed academic	1
	Independent study with external review	1
	Independent study, no external review	2
	Organization's own, with external review	2
	Organization's own, no evidence of external review	3

Question	Indicators	Score (1 = good; 3 = weak)
3. Is there a method statement?	Yes, detailed	1
	No method statement	3
	Where a method statement is not expected (briefing note/factsheet)	N/A
4. What instruments used for data collection?	Mixed method, multiple instruments	1
	Qualitative only	2
	Quantitative only	2
	Unclear	3
5. Does methodological process follow good practice?	For example, a clear conceptual/guiding/ analytical framework; quantitative analysis method is clear and rigorous; clear rationale for any sampling (for focus group discussions/ surveys); qualitative consultations are inclusive of broad set of stakeholders; acknowledgement of limitations.	Illustrative of 1, good practices
6. Are the findings evidence-based?	For example, findings are routinely backed up by evidence sources; qualitative analysis draws from multiple sources; triangulation between sources; no circular referencing; quant analysis based on an adequate sample.	
7. Do any conclusions/ recommendations clearly stem from the evidence?	For example, a consistently clear logic on how the conclusions are reached based on the findings.	

Desk review and quality screening: The ILO finalized the selection studies to be included in the review in consultation with the SPCVA TWG’s members (see the ‘references’ section) and shared these with the consultant. For a small number of studies (highlighted in red in the references section), it was also possible to include earlier drafts with the feedback received from peer reviewers.

The consultant carried out the quality screening for each study, involving three steps.

- **Step 1:** Screening against question 1 (date of publication). As per the requirements of the Terms of Reference (ToR) – that only studies from within the last 3 years were to be included.

This initial screening automatically removed all studies from 2019 or earlier.¹ Other studies were carried to step 2.

- **Step 2:** Screening against questions 2–7 (quality of study). This was conducted through a matrix in Excel, providing an indicative score as well as a concise summary of the reasons justifying this score.
- **Step 3:** Screening decision. The consultant then considered the strength of the publication overall, taking into account all metrics 2–7 to come to a decision on whether to include the study. These results were shared with the ILO for their consideration and approval, along with a request for support in making the final decision on the inclusion of a few studies.² Reports were then scored based on criteria.

Synthesis of evidence and learning: All approved studies were reviewed, and relevant learning and evidence collated into the framework, as follows.

- The review process involved extracting findings, lessons and recommendations that are relevant to the SPCVA TWG's four workstreams. This includes evidence related to the NCTP or other cash voucher assistance programmes. It also includes other findings that are not cash voucher assistance-specific but have an implication for these workstreams in terms of what they mean for designing relevant, efficient and effective social protection in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (for example, in terms of coverage and targeting, data on poverty rates and vulnerability characteristics; and in terms of the adequacy of transfer values, findings on the cost of living and the poverty gap). Key themes explored are around relevance, efficiency, effectiveness. The analysis aimed to identify the extent of consistency, or shared findings or recommendations, across studies that can be considered generalizable, as well as synergies between workstreams. It also sought to identify where there may be diverging findings/viewpoints, or where findings and recommendations contradict other studies.
- To the extent possible, the review included the analysis of findings in other thematic areas, beyond the scope of the SPCVA TWG's work, but of relevance to the nexus. These include issues related to modality choice, payment delivery and financing.
- Finally, the review included an analysis of how factors in the wider enabling environment, beyond the control of the SPCVA TWG's members, are influencing/constraining social protection and humanitarian cash voucher assistance.

¹ At the ILO's request, one study excluded in step 1 was re-included for screening, as it is one of the few examples of peer-reviewed journal research (Romano et al., "The impact of assistance on poverty and food security in a fragile and protracted-crisis context: the case of West Bank and Gaza Strip", *Bio-based and Applied Economics* 8, No. 1 (2019): 21–61).

² Following discussions with the ILO, a study by PCHR, "Poverty in Palestine: Nonstop Upward Indicator", was included. This is the only study by a local organization, of which the same standards of methodological rigour cannot be expected. While it did not match some of the quality criteria, it nevertheless had rich qualitative testimonies from affected populations themselves. Oxfam's "Bridging gaps between formal and informal social protection in Palestine" was also included, which has some limitations in how the method and evidence is communicated, but the findings and conclusions are well written, highly logical and clearly relevant, and which is already widely referenced in the sector.



Overview of evidence

This section provides an overview and some summary reflections on the quality of the evidence base.

Of the 31 documents included in the quality screening, four were excluded based on the publication date, while five were excluded based on the quality screening. In total, 20 documents were taken forward for a full review.³ Overall, the quality of the included studies was found to be good, with rigorous presentation of evidence and conclusions grounded in the findings and a sound understanding of contextual realities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.

Overall, there is strong convergence of findings and synergies across studies, with a range of data substantiating findings, and multiple studies raising the same issues and challenges. This is particularly evident in the case of workstream 1 on targeting and coverage. Some key issues emerge as critical across the thematic areas. There is a smaller and less in-depth base of learning for workstream 4 on referral pathways. There are few, if any, instances of conflicting evidence or recommendations across the studies analysed. However, a few studies reflect a divergence in opinion on an issue between different stakeholders in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which may be a barrier to progress.

One related note of caution to highlight here is that the studies put forward by SPCVA TWG members predominantly derive from particular sources (certainly primarily international organizations that are more likely to undertake research for publication). The ILO and Oxfam feature heavily, for example, as do non-governmental organizations (NGOs). This does not, in itself, call into question their findings. However, different stakeholders working in the social protection space in the Occupied Palestinian Territory will reflect different sides of global conceptual debates on social protection, and there are also differences in organizational mandates/interests. To a certain extent, these differences in position will colour and inform both the interpretation of evidence, as well as the reception of evidence from other sources.

³ A further two documents were in Arabic and had to be omitted from the review on that basis. However, these could be screened and included at a later date by the ILO in the Occupied Palestinian Territory or others in the SPCVA TWG.

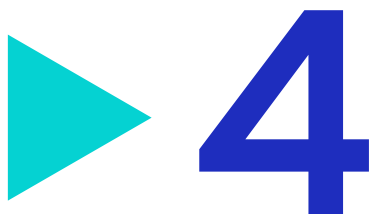
For example, the ILO’s (2022) study on NCTP targeting is based on a highly robust analytical approach. Nevertheless, other actors in the Occupied Palestinian Territory who are proponents of a poverty-targeted approach may not agree with all of its conclusions. In the feedback to UNICEF’s shock-responsive social protection (SRSP) readiness assessment, some agencies made comments that appear founded in concerns about the protection of their own operational space. These political economy factors must be considered. If studies commissioned by other organizations with different positions in these global social protection debates, or studies focusing on different areas of the social protection system (for example, schemes funded by the Arab donors such as Qatar, or community funds such as Zakat) had been included in this review, there is a possibility that this would have altered or slightly nuanced the evidence base, or the conclusions presented below.

Another point to mention is that several later studies all refer heavily to the same small number of earlier studies (particularly the ILO’s study on social protection floors) to substantiate views on effectiveness. These foundational studies appear to be highly robust, so this is not considered a concern – but it is, nevertheless, important to flag.

The expansive documentation of findings and common views on key challenges are notable positives. However, the studies are, with few exceptions, short on concrete recommendations (specific next steps and practical actions) on how to address challenges. In some cases, this is a reflection of the type of study, for which recommendations are not relevant. For others, it is more a reflection of the complexity of emerging issues, where moving forward to identify and act on solutions is indeed difficult. On a related note, multiple studies provide strong indications that protracted issues in the wider environment are a major constraint to social protection system-building and the effectiveness of social protection/cash voucher assistance interventions, since assistance provided within these constraints cannot address root causes of vulnerability (see section 4.6).

► **Figure 2. Summary of evidence**

Thematic area	Number of studies contributing findings
Workstream 1: Targeting and coverage	14/20
Workstream 2: Adequacy of transfer values	13/20
Workstream 3: Shock-responsive social protection	12/20
Workstream 4: Referral pathways	12/20
Other thematic areas of relevance to the nexus	12/20
Influential factors in the enabling environment	12/20



Analysis of findings and recommendations

► 4.1. Targeting and coverage

4.1.1. Findings

This is the workstream that receives greatest attention in the literature analysed. **Fourteen of 20 studies**⁴ present findings of relevance to this workstream, with strong consistency in findings across studies. It is important to note that several studies which discuss issues related to the NCTP's targeting accuracy base their arguments on two ILO studies (rather than on new data).

Eight studies,⁵ representing both sides of the development and humanitarian nexus, highlight the deterioration in poverty and extreme poverty over the past decade, especially in Gaza. Many who were previously considered merely vulnerable to poverty have ultimately slipped into poverty and deep poverty since 2011. The poverty rate was forecasted to rise from 29.2 per cent in 2017 to 30.0 per cent in 2019 and to 31.1 per cent in 2020 (without accounting for the impacts of COVID-19 – projected to reach 31.9 per cent in 2020). The REACH Multi-Sector Needs Assessment (MSNA) reports that this is contributing to increasing humanitarian needs (1.32 million people in Gaza were assessed to be in need of humanitarian assistance in 2022, with 81.0 per cent of Gazan households reporting challenges to being able afford their household's basic needs and 50.5 per cent reporting that they relied on aid and assistance as their primary source).

⁴ These are: GPC 2022; ILO 2021b, 2022, 2023a and 2023b; IMPACT 2022; Oxfam 2020, 2021 and 2022b; PCBS, OCHA and REACH 2022; PCHR 2022; UN Women 2021; UNICEF 2021 and 2022.

⁵ These are: ILO 2021b and 2023b; IMPACT 2022; Oxfam 2020 and 2021; PCHR 2022; UNICEF 2022; and REACH 2022.

Seven studies⁶ provide information on the characteristics associated with poverty, as well as recent changes in these. The ILO and UNICEF report that, based on the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics' (PCBS) data from 2017, larger households, those with few economically active members, those without a regular job or with a poor quality job, and those whose heads of households have lower levels of education, are more likely to be poor. Other demographic characteristics are also associated with poverty on account of their greater vulnerabilities. These include women-headed households (FHH) and persons with disabilities (PWD). Persons with disabilities are among the most vulnerable to poverty. PBCS data shows that, between 2011 and 2017, poverty has increased particularly for young children, young adults and the elderly (aged 60 and above). Many of the characteristics associated with poverty (larger families, unemployment) are especially prevalent in rural settings and refugee camps. IMPACT also highlights that refugee households have less access than non-refugees to most income sources.

Four studies⁷ highlight that the poor now include significant shares of the working poor, and that poverty rates are equally high among the population of working age.⁸ The ability to work, or even being in employment, are no longer sufficient to combat poverty because employment opportunities are sporadic and poorly paid. The Multi-Sector Needs Assessment in Gaza in 2022 found that 60.3 per cent of Gazan households reported having at least one household member unable to find work. Oxfam (2020) finds that those most recently applying for assistance to the NCTP are more likely to be young, educated, and less likely to have a member with a disability or chronic disease. Studies conclude that new segments of the population in Gaza, including farmers, fishermen, merchants and government employees, are falling into poverty and looking to social safety nets to help their households meet their basic needs. These are groups of people who have not previously been factored into the targeting design for the NCTP.

The ILO (2023b) highlights that poverty is not a static concept, with a constant movement of households – both into and out of – poverty. Between 2013 and 2018, nearly half of the original 'poor' households were no longer poor, while the report estimates that 40 per cent of the 'poor' are transient, moving up and down income classes over time. It also highlights similar factors influencing the fall into poverty (demographic changes, labour market fluctuations, and shocks). UNICEF (2022) also comments on this.

⁶ These are: ILO 2021b and 2023b; IMPACT 2022; Oxfam 2020 and 2021; UNICEF 2022; and REACH 2022.

⁷ These are ILO and UNICEF 2022; IMPACT 2022; and Oxfam 2020.

⁸ Poverty rates in 2017 were highest among adults of working age (25–35 years old), with unemployment in Gaza at 45.1 per cent in the third quarter of 2019 dramatically affecting young people (15–29 year olds) (Oxfam 2020).

Six studies⁹ highlight that the coverage of government-led social protection (i.e. the NCTP) is inadequate in comparison to the level of need. Factors affecting coverage identified include: i) funding limitations that constrain scope, and ii) inefficiencies in the targeting method. The ILO (2022) reports that while the scope of the NCTP is theoretically sufficient to cover 40 per cent of all poor Palestinians and over 80 per cent of the deep poor assuming perfect targeting, the (old) poverty means test formula (PMT-F) led to high exclusion and inclusion errors. As such, the programme is estimated by the ILO to reach only 44 per cent of the deep poor and an even smaller share of the poor. Coverage is inequitable for particular groups, with coverage rates of persons with disabilities not commensurate with poverty rates, despite a targeting approach that considers disability status. The ILO highlights that the PMT formula appears most effective at identifying and excluding households at the top of the income distribution, rather than accurately identifying those who are poorest for inclusion. Meanwhile, the ILO (2023b) highlights that it is more cost-efficient to cover households and protect them from falling into income poverty, than to pull them out of income poverty.

Several studies¹⁰ reflect on the recent efforts of the Ministry of Social Development with the World Bank to reform the NCTP targeting model, which is an improvement on the old PMT formula but still has limitations. This includes updating the PMT formula in 2021 using more recent Palestinian Expenditure and Consumption Survey (PECS) data from 2016/17 and developing a national Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). It is still early days for the roll-out of this and thus there is no report on its actual efficiency and effectiveness.

The ILO (2022) ran simulations to estimate the impacts of these reforms on targeting efficiency in the NCTP. This concludes that the new PMT formula could improve targeting efficiency relative to the old formula, and reduce exclusion errors among persons with disabilities. However, in general, the exclusion of the deep poor remains unacceptably high (falling from 47.6 to 38.2 per cent among the deep poor). It also finds variation between regions, with greater improvements in targeting accuracy estimated for Gaza, but no overall improvements in targeting errors in the West Bank. The analysis finds that the use of the Multidimensional Poverty Index does not significantly improve targeting efficiency, and that the coverage of specific vulnerable groups – such as the elderly, children and persons with disabilities – does not vary significantly between a PMT-targeted programme and an MPI-targeted programme. The new formula adds a total of 40 new variables which the ILO expresses concerns about in terms of adding further complexity and lack of clarity to the targeting process for communities, as well increasing the burden on social workers and programme administrators.

⁹ These are: IMPACT 2022; ILO 2021b, 2022 and 2023b; Oxfam 2020; and UNICEF 2022.

¹⁰ These are: ILO 2021b, 2022 and 2023b; UNICEF 2022; and Oxfam 2022b.

Meanwhile, the ILO (2023b) highlights that the focus of the model – on chronic poverty – risks the exclusion of 40 per cent of the poor (the transient poor) who do not necessarily share the characteristics of the chronically poor.

ILO studies (2021b, 2022) – and also reported in UNICEF 2022 – highlight that the error rates seen in the PMT formula are driven to a large extent by the narrow coverage of the programme. Its narrow focus on extreme poverty, in the context of widespread poverty and vulnerability, drives the errors observed. The ILO’s simulations conclude that, if coverage were broadened, errors would be reduced, regardless of which PMT formula is applied. Coverage would need to reach 40 per cent of the entire population to reduce the exclusion error of the extreme poor to less than 10 per cent.

Six studies¹¹ point to the problem of the static design of the PMT formula. Until recently, this was still based on socio-economic indicators and household poverty characteristics from 2010 PECS data. While this has recently been updated using PECS 2017 data, all studies express concern that, without regular updating, the formula will not capture the aforementioned trends and evolution in vulnerability witnessed in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and especially in Gaza, which is resulting in a new set of poor. All studies comment on the need for more regular and dynamic updating of both the formula itself, and the household data that the formula is applied to, if targeting through the PMT formula is to remain accurate. Oxfam (2020) says this is also a problem for other humanitarian programmes, as generally the traditional measurements of vulnerability used by humanitarian assistance programmes do not include working populations. The ILO (2023b) concludes that the poverty dynamics in the country mean that recertification through the PMT formula must match the pace of change in the composition of the poor. It notes that this will be extremely difficult and costly.

Beyond the targeting formula, several studies¹² also point to concerns about the implementation process, which leaves room for errors. This includes the exclusion of those who have never registered with the Ministry of Social Development for a household visit; the risk of exclusion due to lacking the necessary documents to be enrolled; the risk of inclusion and exclusion errors due to the poor management of data collection by de facto authorities in Gaza, as well as a lack of oversight or accountability leaving scope for cronyism/nepotism along partisan lines; and unclear processes to keep information up-to-date.

¹¹ These are: ILO 2021b, 2022 and 2023b; Oxfam 2020 and 2021; and UNICEF 2022.

¹² These are: SPACE 2021; UNICEF 2022; IMPACT 2022; Oxfam 2021 and 2022b.

Four studies¹³ highlight the huge gaps in the coverage of the population with social protection instruments more broadly, given the lack of a well-developed social protection floor. Social insurance is limited to state-funded pensions for civil servants and military personnel, as well as workers with private occupational pensions. Despite efforts to introduce a broader state-managed social insurance system for workers, coverage remains limited. Social assistance for lifecycle groups is also missing. This means that a far broader section of the population relies on a single programme – the NCTP.

Multiple studies¹⁴ comment on the lack of coordination in targeting of the disparate social protection/cash voucher assistance interventions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory,¹⁵ and conclude that this fragmentation is a major impediment to effectively enhancing coverage. Studies suggest that the collective reach of the NCTP and the large-scale, now structural, safety nets of long-term humanitarian partners (WFP and UNRWA) has the potential to cover sizeable shares of households and individuals living in poverty (up to 68 per cent of poor households in the West Bank and 88 per cent of all households in Gaza in 2020). Yet the lack of coherent overarching plan or coordination across these (and other) schemes leads to fragmentation, duplication,¹⁶ a lack of synergies and gaps, meaning that the effective coverage of the poor is significantly lower. It also reportedly leads to tensions and confusion among the population. This limits potential impacts, with a significant risk of the duplications of efforts and a lack of synergies between governmental and partners' interventions. A key gap noted is the lack of unified data system cataloguing the different assistance being provided. Another is the continuing limited engagement/coordination between donors (between development and humanitarian donors; and between European/'traditional' bilateral and multilateral donors, and new donors that are now providing substantive funding for social assistance in Gaza – Qatar, Turkey and the Philippines, etc. – but are excluded from nexus discussions). Two studies (UNICEF 2022 and Oxfam 2022b) highlight that agencies' competing agendas, and differing ideologies, are key barriers to furthering coordination in this area that must be borne in mind.

One study that provides some surprising data is the UNICEF Multi-Indicator Cluster Survey (2019). This finds that the percentage of respondents who are aware of, and report having ever received, assistance/external economic support was only 30 per cent (8 per cent in the West Bank, and 68 per cent in Gaza) while the percentage of household members living in households that received some social transfers or benefits in the last 3 months was reportedly 14 per cent on average (and 31 per cent in Gaza).

¹³ These are: ILO 2021b and 2023b; UNICEF 2021 and 2022.

¹⁴ These are: ILO 2021b and 2023a; UNICEF 2022; IMPACT 2022; Oxfam 2020, 2021 and 2022b; and SPACE 2021.

¹⁵ As of August 2021, there were 42 cash-related programmes across the Gaza Strip, as documented by the CWG 5Ws.

¹⁶ Some overlap is intentional and layered but there is no visibility of extent of this, or of the extent of unnecessary duplication.

Given the above statistics on potential perfect coverage, this seems low. On the other hand, if accurate, this could be a damning statistic about the level of duplication and gaps in assistance. There was no way to further triangulate these findings.

Four studies¹⁷ discuss the potential for, and challenges of, harmonized targeting across actors. These highlight, on the one hand, the interest of the Ministry of Social Development and some humanitarian actors to move towards more harmonized targeting between governmental and non-governmental programmes, with WFP making use of the same PMT formula and several organizations using the ministry's NCTP waiting lists as a basis for targeting. On the other, studies also strongly highlight concerns that these actors have about using the NCTP's targeting data due to the issues mentioned above, as well as because of concerns about whether 'poverty status' alone is adequate for partners' targeting needs. Studies also highlight that a factor driving this lack of confidence is the lack of transparency of the Ministry of Social Development and World Bank in sharing details of the NCTP's targeting formula and indicators. Meanwhile, the IMPACT and UNICEF studies also outline some practices that could provide solutions. These include i) humanitarian actors building confidence in the ministry's data by conducting additional screening and prioritization measures, applying their own vulnerability criteria to the ministry's lists; and ii) humanitarian actors complementing and enhancing inclusion by reaching out to and targeting households that are not already included in the ministry's lists. UNICEF and Oxfam (2020, 2022b) also highlight the reluctance to share data, both by the Ministry of Social Development and by humanitarian actors. They conclude that better information-sharing is a prerequisite for improving coordination.

The new National Social Registry (NSR) is widely cited as a possible solution, if humanitarian actors have confidence in it. However, reports¹⁸ also highlight widespread scepticism among implementing agencies in Gaza. This stems from the issues mentioned about around data quality related to a lack of transparency, as well as concerns about whether the data fields included will meet humanitarian targeting needs, and a lack of clarity about how the National Social Registry will be practically used for targeting by partners. For instance, will they be given actual access to the data or be able to perform additional screening? Will efforts to unify targeting criteria mean the cessation of aid to some people currently targeted by humanitarian agencies who are not captured in these criteria, or included in the National Social Registry?

Three studies¹⁹ examine issues concerning targeting and gender equity. UN Women reports that, of households receiving assistance from the Ministry of Social Development, 78.8 per cent are headed by men, while only 21.2 per cent are headed by women.

¹⁷ These are: IMPACT 2022; UNICEF 2022; Oxfam 2021 and 2022b.

¹⁸ For example, UNICEF 2022 and Oxfam 2022b.

¹⁹ These are: UN Women 2021; UNICEF 2022; and SPACE 2021.

The report highlights that the NCTP and other multi-purpose cash assistance (MPCA) programmes which target assistance at the household level (not at individuals) can create challenges for directly reaching women with assistance, given that power dynamics in the home usually favour men. This report and UNICEF’s study also highlight the risk of the exclusion of women-headed households, including those headed by divorced or separated women, and their children and persons with disabilities, due to their inability to present documentation. UN Women’s report concludes that these interventions in the Occupied Palestinian Territory may, therefore, be less of a vehicle bringing gender-transformative benefits. While the study focuses on multi-purpose cash assistance, the same may apply to the targeting of the NCTP.

4.1.2. Recommendations

Eleven papers provide recommendations for ways forward to address, or account for, issues raised about targeting and coverage. While some are quite high-level statements, several papers propose more comprehensive and concrete actions for ways forward, with the ILO studies providing the most comprehensive suggestions for reform. There are recommendations related to enhancing coverage, targeting design, and coordination, with strong consensus in some areas.

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
<p>Rethink vulnerability and targeting to reflect new realities.</p>	<p>Oxfam 2020 ILO 2023b</p>	<p>Oxfam recommends that the Ministry of Social Development and partners rethink vulnerability and the eligibility criteria typically used in assistance programmes to reflect new realities and accommodate the characteristics of newly emerging vulnerable groups in Gaza. That this should include a refocusing of the NCTP’s criteria for targeting households and participants.</p> <p><i>Note: An alternative view here could be that these new emerging needs could be served through a different programme. This is not made explicit, but would be in line with the recommendation below on building a social protection floor (SPF).</i></p> <p>Similarly, the ILO recommends the need to assess both upward and downward income mobility, as well as to develop a deeper understanding of poverty dynamics in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to inform targeting design.</p>

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
<p>Increase the coverage of social assistance in line with levels of vulnerability.</p>	<p>ILO 2021b, 2022, 2023a and 2023b</p> <p>UNICEF 2022</p> <p>Oxfam 2021</p>	<p>Two reports (ILO 2021b and 2022) outline ways forward most concretely, while the other studies generally quote these and agree with them. There are two pathways outlined:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The need to gradually expand the coverage of the NCTP as the most effective way to reduce the high levels of exclusion errors in the programme. Oxfam suggests that it could be provided as a universal benefit given the high levels of need. ii) In the medium-term, the need for social assistance architecture to diversify beyond the single ‘catch all’ household level anti-poverty programme towards a social protection floor with individually targeted programmes that reach priority groups with lifecycle vulnerabilities at risk of being left behind (persons with disabilities in Gaza, elderly persons in urban areas, and children, among others). <p>One study (ILO 2021b) includes a preliminary costing exercise with different approaches for introducing social allowances, alongside the introduction of social insurance. Another (ILO 2023b) recommends that it is more cost-effective for the Ministry of Social Development to proactively prevent households from falling into poverty through inclusive social protection programmes, than to ‘lift’ households out of poverty after they have become ‘poor’.</p>
<p>Improve the coordination of assistance between actors.</p>	<p>ILO 2021b</p> <p>UNICEF 2022</p> <p>Oxfam 2020, 2021 and 2022b</p> <p>IMPACT 2022</p>	<p>This primary recommendation is fundamental to enhancing the efficacy and effectiveness of social assistance and cash voucher assistance.</p> <p>The ILO recommends integrating the main social assistance programmes into a single, national social transfer system that includes: integrated financing; a cross-nexus programmatic framework; integrated payment systems; harmonized selection rules and criteria for eligibility determination across programmes; and integrated data management for coordinating coverage.</p>

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
		<p>The ILO argues that this will enhance cost-effectiveness and operational efficiency, while allowing the identification of redundancies and close gaps in coverage and adequacy.</p> <p>UNICEF recommends harmonizing the main ‘routine’ social assistance schemes (the Ministry of Social Development’s NCTP, and WFP’s and UNRWA’s programmes) into a unified ‘triple strand’ safety net.</p> <p>Oxfam (2022b) recommends that the joint planning renewal of the Social Development Sector Strategy could be an entry point to act on this. It also recommends engaging all actors, including Arab donors, in nexus coordination.</p>
<p>Operationalize the National Social Registry, addressing the concerns of partners.</p>	<p>IMPACT 2022</p> <p>ILO 2021b and 2023a</p> <p>UNICEF 2022</p> <p>Oxfam 2022b</p>	<p>Oxfam and UNICEF offer the most concrete recommendations,²⁰ including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The Ministry of Social Development and the World Bank sharing transparent information with partners on the National Social Registry, including the data fields currently captured, planned coverage, plans for updating, and the formulas used for targeting. ii) Collective discussions on partners’ respective targeting approaches and related data requirements to identify how the National Social Registry can be used and any areas for strengthening/gaps; and possibilities for using data fields beyond the PMT formula and/or the need for additional screening by partners (which is also recommended by IMPACT). iii) Collective discussions on partners concerns’ about data accuracy and protection, the timeliness of access, and how to address these. iv) Discussing and agreeing two-way information-sharing protocols for what data can be shared with, or by, partners, and in which contexts.

²⁰ UNICEF’s report includes an action plan for next steps to move forward with institutionalizing the National Social Registry’s use across the nexus.

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
		v) Discussing entry points for non-governmental actors to contribute to National Social Registry system-building.
Enhance the accountability and transparency of the NCTP targeting process.	ILO 2022 Oxfam 2020 UNICEF 2022	This includes recommendations to: Abolish the current practice of maintaining the secrecy of the PMT formula in favour of a more transparent and rights-based approach focused on categorical vulnerabilities. Strengthen grievance redress mechanisms and the role of social worker to reduce the risk of exclusion based on poor data collection or nepotism, including by engaging humanitarian actors/civil society organizations (CSOs) to provide accountability functions.
Take actions to improve the NCTP's targeting accuracy.	ILO 2022 and 2023b UN Women 2021 SPACE 2021	This includes recommendations to: Put in place mechanisms for ensuring the more dynamic updating of applicant data and updating of the formula itself, to ensure that it reflects current vulnerabilities (and to capture the transient poor). Enhance efforts to improve targeting and the inclusion of women in the NCTP by taking more account of the gendered nature of vulnerability.
Address financing gaps to increase coverage.	Oxfam 2020 ILO 2021b	This includes recommendations for: Palestinian authorities to devote tax revenues to increasing social assistance budgets, and donors and the UN advocating for and seeking to influence this. International donors combining funding for social assistance/safety nets to achieve greater budgetary allocations.

► 4.2. Adequacy of transfer design

4.2.1. Findings

Thirteen of 20 studies²¹ present findings relevant to this workstream, with strong consistency in findings across studies.

Eight studies²² draw attention to the inadequacy of the NCTP transfer value and highlight that this limits the programme's efficacy in combating poverty and vulnerability. This value represents, on average, 379 new Israeli shekels, which is just 15 per cent of the poverty line per beneficiary. In 2021, nearly half of all recipients received only the minimum monthly benefit of 250 shekels. This is insufficient to achieve the programme's limited objective of reducing the poverty gap. The IMPACT (2022) study concludes that, given this inadequacy, the programme itself is able to do little more than cushion a fall (further) into poverty.

The ILO's studies (and Oxfam 2021, citing the ILO) report that the method of calculating the transfer value of the NCTP, based on a household's PMT score, undermines efficacy, adequacy, equity, transparency and adaptability. The abovementioned challenges with the PMT formula and accurately distinguishing degrees of poverty lead to a near arbitrary determination of transfer levels in practice. The formula's use also reportedly systematically underestimates the required transfer amounts because the poverty gap rate estimated using the PMT is lower than the actual poverty gap rate. According to the ILO, this has the most impact on the poorest households, as PMT-based estimates deviate most from the actual poverty gap rate at the lowest end of the wealth spectrum. Among the poorest 10 per cent of the population, this results in the current NCTP transfer value only amounting to approximately 20 per cent of the actual deep poverty gap. This affects persons with disabilities, for example – despite consistently higher poverty levels than persons who do not have disabilities, persons with disabilities proportionately receive much lower transfers compared to their needs.

The ILO reports that the benefits determination formula penalizes larger households. While transfer values do increase with household size, this increase is not commensurate with their needs. Thus, the effect of the PMT formula on transfer adequacy has an equity dimension. The ILO (2023ba) also highlights the complexity of the PMT formula, which is difficult to explain to beneficiaries, and is problematic when it comes to the transparency of transfer values which are not easy for communities to understand.

²¹ These are: GPC 2022; ILO 2021b, 2022 and 2023a; IMPACT 2022; Oxfam 2020, 2021 and 2022b; PCBS, OCHA and REACH 2022; PCHR 2022; Romano et al. 2019; UNICEF 2022; and SPACE 2021.

²² These are: ILO 2021b and 2023a; UNICEF 2022; Oxfam 2020 and 2021; SPACE 2021; IMPACT 2022; and PCHR 2022.

Basing transfer value on the PMT formula also means that the value is static and cannot be easily amended in the face of changes in the external environment.

Six studies²³ refer to the Ministry of Social Development cancelling quarterly payments through the NCTP since 2019, which effectively reduces the adequacy and resulting efficacy still further. IMPACT draws a conclusion that it might be better for households to be on the NCTP waiting list (and thus potentially eligible for assistance from partners) which tends to be more reliable and with larger transfer values.

The adequacy of cash voucher assistance transfer design beyond the NCTP is also touched on. SPACE (2021) ranks programmes' transfer values in terms of adequacy, with the multi-purpose cash assistance programme having the highest transfer value per household per month, covering 60 per cent of the minimum expenditure basket (MEB), followed by the NCTP, WFP vouchers and then UNRWA food aid. The study highlights that the adequacy of transfers under individual programmes (even multi-purpose cash assistance) and their efficacy in combating poverty, **when used alone**, is limited. Several of the abovementioned studies also cite PCBS data showing that nearly half of the beneficiary households covered by assistance programmes remain poor after receiving a transfer due to low transfer values.

IMPACT (2022) focuses on the adequacy of the multi-purpose cash assistance programme, which provides a transfer value in line with the Cash Working Group's (CWG) minimum expenditure basket and related guidance (60 per cent of the minimum expenditure basket).²⁴ The study highlights several advantages of alignment with the CWG's standards, including being based on analysis of real needs/expenditures, having more relevance to the context (unlike the PMT formula), and being regularly updated. These are found to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of the transfer design. The study also highlights that there are benefits and limitations of setting a uniform value per household – which is operationally easier to manage but entails some limitations for adequacy and, therefore, effectiveness compared to setting a per capita value. The study points out that setting a per capita amount would accommodate differences in needs according to household size, but this is only one dimension of the diversity of needs. It would not enhance the ability to meet needs according to household composition (i.e. responding to higher needs and vulnerabilities of members such as persons with disabilities).²⁵

The ILO (2023a) similarly documents a range of cash voucher assistance programmes managed by humanitarian actors and highlights the different methods used to calculate transfer values.

²³ These are: ILO 2021b and 2023a; Oxfam 2021 and 2022b; UNICEF 2022; IMPACT 2022.

²⁴ This provided a transfer value of 1,196 new Israeli shekels per month.

²⁵ International labour standards (the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) and the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102)) recommend individual rights-based benefits based on categorical vulnerabilities (meaning targeted and paid to the individual, not households).

Multiple studies²⁶ comment on the problem of the lack of coordination between disparate social protection/cash voucher assistance interventions when it comes to transfer values. Of course, different programmes can have different objectives and thus different transfer values can be justified. Variation per se is not a problem. The reported challenges are as follows:

- i) Some programmes are, to all intents and purposes, giving assistance for very similar needs (i.e. basic needs) but values are not consistent. The levels of support provided are not always consistent with the poverty status of participants (those on waiting list can receive more). Oxfam (2022b) concludes this is calling into doubt the ‘fairness’ of the overall ecosystem. Particular programmes mentioned are WFP and UNRWA safety nets, as well as where humanitarian actors target the NCTP waiting list.
- ii) UNICEF (2022) and ILO (2023a) highlight that, in the face of limited budgets, the Ministry of Social Development has employed a strategy to increase the adequacy of ‘routine’ assistance to NCTP beneficiaries by seeking partners’ support to top up aid for NCTP beneficiaries through parallel systems (WFP e-vouchers to 30 per cent of NCTP beneficiaries). Whereas individual programmes may lack adequacy and thus effectiveness, when well-coordinated and layered in this manner, programmes can collectively achieve more. However, the coordination issues discussed above (see section 4.1 on targeting and coverage) mean that there is generally a lack of clarity on who is receiving what, and limited visibility of who is receiving multiple ‘layers’ of assistance.

Studies unanimously conclude that this fragmentation undermines the effectiveness of the system. Two studies also highlight the difficulties in resolving differences in transfer values between the NCTP and partners, given differing mindsets and objectives – whereby humanitarians aspire to fully meet humanitarian needs, while the government is concerned about affordability and creating dependence, making compromise difficult. The ILO (2023a) comments that mechanisms for data-sharing are needed to overcome this challenge. Without this, the strategic layering of assistance for the most vulnerable is difficult.

Four studies²⁷ highlight the extent of households’ indebtedness and the use of ‘crisis borrowing’ as a coping strategy, especially in Gaza. GPC (2022) also highlights that cash voucher assistance actors lack of appreciation of how debt is a burden on households. This has implications for the adequacy workstream in different ways.

²⁶ These are: ILO 2021b and 2023a; UNICEF 2022; IMPACT 2022; SPACE 2021; and Oxfam 2022b.

²⁷ These are: GPC 2022; PCHR 2022; Oxfam 2020; and PCBS, OCHA and REACH 2022.

For example, the reports highlight that households are required to use part of the assistance they receive to service debt, which reduces the adequacy and effectiveness of the transfer with respect to meeting basic needs, and that the average debt is 4,000 new Israeli shekels and up to 10,000 (much larger than the amount factored into the minimum expenditure basket). They also highlight that the limitations in the adequacy (and coverage) of social protection mentioned above are driving the need to take on debt.

Only one study (ILO 2023a) rigorously analyses alternative methods for calculating transfer values. The study estimates the improvements to adequacy and equity, as well as the fiscal implications of: i) adapting the current approach to setting the transfer value, continuing with the PMT formula but removing the upper threshold; ii) determining the transfer value through applying the poverty gap ratio; and iii) setting transfer values based on lifecycle categorical vulnerabilities. It finds that removing the upper threshold improves the transfer value for the poorest and for larger families, improving equity but not completely closing the gap. The poverty gap ratio method has a similar effect on narrowing the gap or deviation between the transfer value and the target actual deep poverty gap for the poorest families. Transfer values based on lifecycle categories help to reduce individual vulnerabilities and risk, but are not directly targeted to address monetary poverty. However this is considered to enhance transparency and adaptability, compared to the current approach.

When considering the impact of reform options on fiscal space, the removal of the upper threshold on payments is the most effective measure to improve equity in the short-term, within the confines of the current system with an estimated additional cost of 90 million new Israeli shekels on top of the current budget of 489 million shekels – an increase of 18.5 per cent. The poverty gap ratio is comparable in results, but would require an increase of around 37 per cent on the current budget, and was discounted. Adopting transfer values based on lifecycle vulnerabilities (for children, the elder and persons with disabilities) would involve an increase of 20.1 per cent of the current budget, but could also be made cost-neutral to begin with.

4.2.2. Recommendations

Seven studies offer recommendations for how to solve these problems. These are broadly aligned across studies and include some concrete and practical suggestions. As with 4.1 Targeting and Coverage, the need to have a more fundamental revision of and coordination of a safety net system across the nexus is highlighted.

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
<p>Change the method of calculating the NCTP transfer value.</p>	<p>ILO 2021b, 2022 and 2023a</p>	<p>Short-term adjustment to the existing design is recommended by removing the upper cap on the transfer value to help make the payment more equitable for the poorest households.</p> <p>More fundamental medium-term changes suggested are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Delink transfer value calculation from the PMT, which is ill-suited for determining transfer amounts. ii) Set transfer values on a per capita basis, or based on lifecycle vulnerabilities. iii) Explore mechanisms to link transfer values to inflation.
<p>Harmonize approaches to setting transfer values across the nexus.</p>	<p>Oxfam 2022 ILO 2023a</p>	<p>The ILO recommends that humanitarian actors targeting the NCTP waiting list should use the NCTP transfer value to improve equity and enable a clearer exit strategy; and that the social safety nets (SSNs) of UNRWA and WFP should harmonize transfer values with the NCTP based on a common approach.</p> <p>Oxfam recommends a unified system that determines transfer values across interventions in line with expected fairness and the poverty status of participants, to ensure that participants in similar situations receive similar support, and with long-term support for those living with chronic poverty.</p>
<p>Improve the coordination of the safety nets of the Ministry of Social Development and partners.</p>	<p>ILO 2021b and 2023a UNICEF 2022 Oxfam 2022</p>	<p>All studies recommend, in the medium-term, reforming safety nets in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and moving towards a single, integrated safety net system across the government and partners.</p> <p>The ILO (2021b) recommends developing an integrated cross-nexus social protection framework, including harmonizing criteria and determining transfer levels.</p> <p>UNICEF provides a concrete illustration of what such integration could look, like focusing on the three 'routine' (i.e. long-term) safety nets – the NCTP and the partner-led programmes of WFP and UNRWA. This, it argues, would provide a more coherent 'triple-strand' safety net to more effectively address needs in the protracted crisis.</p>

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
Address financing gaps through pooled funding.	ILO 2021b and 2022 UNICEF 2022	In the medium-term, the studies recommend exploring an integrated financing system for social protection, to finance benefits under a unified system, including considering the feasibility of multi-donor trust funds. If international stakeholders combined efforts, this would help to achieve greater budgetary allocations, and enhance the adequacy and effectiveness of social assistance.
Take the debt burden into consideration in transfer design.	GPC 2022	The study recommends that discussions on setting transfer values should give greater consideration to the realities of the context in Gaza, and appreciate that households will allocate part of the assistance they receive to debt repayment before they can meet their basic needs. Cash actors should consider that roughly 10 per cent of cash voucher assistance will be dedicated to debt repayment, and this should be factored into the transfer value, and/or that in the annual minimum expenditure basket revision process, the expenditure required for debt repayment should be increased to no less than 400 new Israeli shekels.

► 4.3. Shock-responsive social protection (SRSP)

4.3.1. Findings

Twelve of 20 studies²⁸ present findings relevant to the SRSP workstream. The most in-depth is an assessment by UNICEF (2022) dedicated to this topic. Findings presented in other studies are largely aligned and overlap with those in UNICEF’s assessment. These include findings on entry points and barriers to shock-responsive social protection within the NCTP’s design and the social protection system.

UNICEF’s and the ILO’s (2021b and 2023b) studies highlight the relationship between shocks and poverty. The ILO (2021b) shows that there is no significant variation in poverty rates across the life cycle, suggesting an important role of covariate shocks, rather than idiosyncratic life cycle-related events, in influencing poverty.

²⁸ These are: ILO 2021a, 2021b, 2022, 2023a and 2023b; IMPACT 2022; Oxfam 2021 and 2022b; PCBS, OCHA and REACH 2022; PCHR 2022; UNICEF 2022; and SPACE 2021.

The ILO (2023b) also highlights the transient nature of poverty and the high proportion of the population that experience income poverty at some time, showing that even a small reduction in income can push a household into, or further into, poverty. Besides life cycle risks, shocks are the main causal factor of poverty – including unemployment/loss of livelihood due to the context, escalations, and COVID-19. The ILO's report also highlights that the sudden withdrawal of cash support without alternative measures being put in place will have a similar effect. Studies conclude that, therefore, social protection has an important role to play in reaching and protecting households affected by shocks in order to achieve poverty reduction.

Two studies unpack the nature of 'shocks' in this context. UNICEF (2022) highlights that more typical short-term sporadic shocks overlay what is essentially a protracted emergency, with impacts both negatively reinforcing and contributing to humanitarian needs. It highlights that the protracted crisis requires more long-term assistance, and that often short-term humanitarian assistance is being provided when an acute shock occurs, but essentially addresses symptoms of the chronic underlying problem. It concludes that better routine social protection is urgently required, as well as the ability to flex and scale to temporary emergencies. The ILO (2023a) also highlights that the nature of shocks to be responded to within government-led initiatives (as opposed to the humanitarian system) can be subject to debate, given that in 2022–23 rapid inflation due to the war in Ukraine could be considered an incremental shock, compared to more acute covariate shocks such as forced displacement caused by conflict. It notes that the impacts of different shocks will contribute to different levels of need and thus differences in SRSP transfer values.

Several studies²⁹ highlight factors of the NCTP's targeting design that support or constrain the potential for shock-responsive social protection. On the one hand, there is a clear relationship between poverty and vulnerability to shocks, which can be considered a factor enabling the NCTP's targeting design for SRSP since poverty can be a common identifier for routine and acute social protection needs. On the other hand, the breadth of poverty among the population in Gaza can reduce the meaningful use of poverty metrics alone to target SRSP. Meanwhile, UNICEF (2022) highlights that a household's demographic composition (such as women-headed households, and households whose members include persons with disabilities) also determines vulnerability to poverty, and to shocks, and could be used in addition to poverty data to prioritize assistance. It notes that the National Social Registry plans to include such fields, which would mean that the Ministry of Social Development's data collected during targeting for the NCTP could form the basis for rapid identification and screening.

²⁹ These are: UNICEF 2022; IMPACT 2022; and Oxfam 2022b.

UNICEF also indicates that, in the case of conflict escalation, actors traditionally undertake damage assessment to inform the targeting of emergency assistance which the NCTP's targeting design does not include. However, in terms of the conflict's impact on livelihoods and households' ability to meet their basic needs, damage assessment is not necessarily needed. Therefore, the report highlights that poverty scores would be a useful basis for targeting for basic needs (rather than reconstruction) assistance. It suggests that, given the high levels of existing poverty and vulnerability in the population as a whole, and the fact that a high proportion of households within the direct conflict zone are directly impacted, greater consideration could also be given to the geographical targeting of blanket assistance as per the practice of some international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). This means going beyond the NCTP's lists/waiting lists.

UNICEF (2022), the ILO (2023b) and PCHR (2022) report that shocks also change the poverty status of households, and those that were less poor or non-poor can become so. The efficient and effective use of NCTP data for targeting during shocks requires that data is kept up-to-date (the planned frequency of which is not currently clear). UNICEF reports that the new National Social Registry underpinning the NCTP could partly overcome this issue if it also captures data on assessed but ineligible households, and if it includes mechanisms for the dynamic updating of information. However, when this report was written, these aspects of the National Social Registry's design and implementation were still not clear. UNICEF concludes that there will, however, always be a need for some additional targeting ex-post to identify those excluded from the National Social Registry.

The ILO (2022), Oxfam (2022b) and UNICEF (2022) also highlight concerns about the targeting method of the NCTP, and its accuracy and transparency for use in emergencies. This includes concerns about the accuracy of the PMT formula and the transparency of targeting practices mentioned in section 4.1. The ILO also comments that new locality level poverty and inequality rates are difficult to measure and update in a timely and reliable manner, raising concern over the transparency of their use in emergencies.

Finally, the low coverage of the NCTP in comparison to poverty levels is mentioned. This is highlighted by UNICEF (2022) and SPACE (2021) as undermining the potential for the NCTP as a programme setting the foundation for shock-responsive social protection.

UNICEF (2022), PCHR (2022), Oxfam (2022b) and the ILO (2021b) draw attention to challenges in the NCTP's transfer design for shock-responsive social protection. The issue raised in section 4.2 on transfer adequacy (the lack of predictable payment of routine NCTP transfers) is a major impediment to the NCTP's ability to support shock response.

In addition, the quarterly payment cycle would not be effective to meet emergency needs as is. Complementing this, IMPACT (2022) highlights that more frequent distributions seen in partners' humanitarian cash voucher assistance programmes are shown to be effective in helping households meet emergency needs.

SPACE (2021) and UNICEF (2022) highlight the pros and cons of the NCTP's current payment system and wider mechanisms piloted during shock response that have involved the Ministry of Social Development. Where beneficiaries already have bank accounts, payments can reach accounts quickly and, in case of the closure of branches, enables access to withdrawal from ATMs. Setting up new accounts ex-post could prove challenging (especially if bank branches close due to conflict). The over-the-counter mechanisms piloted during the COVID-19 pandemic were quick to set up but also led to queues and could be disrupted if banks closed. UNICEF (2022) and other studies on learning from partner cash voucher assistance conclude that digital payments like PALPAY are promising, but are currently not an integral part of the social protection delivery system. Studies also highlight that in the context of uncertainty in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, there remains a need to retain multiple options/channels.

A key finding of UNICEF (2022) and other studies³⁰ is that humanitarian partners have expertise in, and systems of, payments and other areas of the delivery chain (e.g. outreach and registration; complaints and feedback). Therefore, they are a resource that could be leveraged to support shock-responsive social protection by: providing direct implementation support to any nationally-owned shock response; or by transferring expertise and systems to strengthen the NCTP and wider social protection provision going forward.

UNICEF (2022) highlights that local emergency committees (if formalized), or direct recruitment by the Ministry of Social Development on temporary short-term contracts, could also provide 'surge capacity' to the ministry to support outreach, registration and validation activities.

Regarding social protection data systems, UNICEF (2022), SPACE (2021) and Oxfam (2022b) highlight that the National Social Registry could be a key foundation of a shock-responsive social protection system, if well-designed. However, studies draw attention to the range of issues set out in section 4.1 (regarding a lack of transparency or information-sharing with partners; concerns about the quality of, or bias, in data collected by the Ministry of Social Development; a lack of clarity about the data fields to be included; and a lack of clarity about the ministry's ambition concerning coverage and updating or data-sharing with partners). They all highlight that this has the potential to limit utility for shock-responsive social protection in practice.

³⁰ These are: Oxfam 2022b and ILO 2021b.

It remains unclear how the ministry envisages that the National Social Registry's data will be used for shocks.

Several studies³¹ also highlight some challenges in the relationship between the Palestinian Authority and humanitarian actors, which can create difficulties in accessing, collecting or verifying data. This includes delays in approvals and restrictions in approved practices for new data collection/needs assessments and list verification. It also includes delays in NCTP data-sharing by the Ministry of Social Development with partners to date, which has prevented timely shock response.

Reports highlight that many of the elements of the wider enabling national system architecture that set a foundation for shock-responsive social protection remain poorly developed. Gaps noted by UNICEF (2022) include any sort of financing for shock response; the institutional coordination of social protection actors across government, which was a barrier to the effective rollout of its COVID-19 social protection response; and the Ministry of Social Development's capacities. UNICEF and Oxfam (2021) report concerns among partners about capacity issues (human resources, operational resources and expertise) in the social workforce, particularly in Gaza, and that these could become a bottleneck to any scaling of social protection for shock response. UNICEF concludes that, even if moving towards government-led social protection is possible, a range of support from humanitarian partners will continue to be needed. This can include providing surge capacity for labour-intensive tasks such as a registration, as well as filling operational roles in delivery in the short- to medium-term.

As discussed in sections 4.1 and 4.2, **the fragmentation and lack of coordination of governmental and partners' social protection and humanitarian assistance activities is highlighted in studies³² as a critical barrier to progress on social-responsive social protection.** The lack of coherence of the different strands of 'routine' safety nets provided by different actors in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which are also flexing and scaling assistance during shocks, mean it is not possible to determine optimum pathways or roles for these actors. Because the long-term social safety nets of other actors partially overlap with the NCTP, shock-affected NCTP beneficiaries enrolled in a partner's social safety net could be reached and 'topped up' by partners, which could provide the same (or a better) result. Partners' long-term social safety net programmes also partially fill gaps in the NCTP's coverage. Thus, some households excluded from the NCTP but already enrolled in a partner programme could perhaps be more quickly and efficiently supported by scaling up assistance through this partner programme. The lack of strategic coordination of these safety nets, or clarity on the extent of overlap, means these decisions cannot be made.

³¹ These are: Oxfam 2021; UNICEF 2022; IMPACT 2022; and ILO 2021b.

³² These are: UNICEF 2022; SPACE 2021; ILO 2023a; and Oxfam 2021 and 2022b.

As in section 4.1, studies highlight that these continuing issues are partly due to self-interest and competition for resources. SRSP accentuates the competition for resources and the continued relevance of humanitarian actors. There are also concerns related to trust in public authorities. Humanitarian actors are interested in SRSP and social protection 'across the nexus', but remain concerned about implications for humanitarian principles, especially ensuring data protection, and maintaining neutrality in the context of Gaza.

Five studies³³ draw attention to workers' vulnerability to shocks that lead to disruption in formal or informal employment, and their lack of protection through existing social protection mechanisms. Being atypical for support through the NCTP but without social insurance measures in place, during the COVID-19 pandemic, these groups relied on the Ministry of Social Development and the Ministry of Labour to provide support through emergency social assistance in the form of a one-off emergency payment.

4.3.2. Recommendations

This workstream has some of the most concrete recommendations for ways forward. Eight studies³⁴ set out recommendations relevant to this workstream. UNICEF (2022) provides detailed, specific and practical recommendations for ways forward and how to achieve them, while others present recommendations more generally, but aligned with the key messages set out in UNICEF's study.

³³ These are: UNICEF 2022; ILO 2021a and 2021b; Oxfam 2021; and SPACE 2021.

³⁴ These are: UNICEF 2022; Oxfam 2021 and 2022b; SPACE 2021; ILO 2021a, 2021b and 2023b; and IMPACT 2022.

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
<p>Pilot options for SRSP and take steps to progress towards the common use of the National Social Registry across the nexus.</p>	<p>UNICEF 2022 Oxfam 2022 ILO 2021b</p>	<p>UNICEF sets out three options for how the social protection system can feasibly be leveraged to support shock response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The vertical expansion of the NCTP. ii) An emergency social protection programme managed by the Ministry of Social Development. iii) Establishing the National Social Registry as the data system underpinning the shock response of the Palestinian Authority and partners. <p>For each of these options, it outlines a detailed step-by-step action plan, recommending key next steps for how to proceed over the next 3 years with pilots for options i and ii.³⁵ It also recommends how to progress towards the common use of the National Social Registry (actions already mentioned in section 4.1), including roles for the Palestinian Authority and specific non-governmental actors. Recommended actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ► Conducting a capacity assessment of the Ministry of Social Development and establishing triggers, which are also outlined by Oxfam. ► Piloting criteria and methods for rapid beneficiary identification and selection for shock assistance (for existing and new beneficiaries), as recommended by the ILO.
<p>Increase the alignment of cash voucher assistance by humanitarian actors to strengthen shock response.</p>	<p>UNICEF 2022 Oxfam 2021 IMPACT 2022 ILO 2023a</p>	<p>The studies recommend greater alignment of respective cash voucher assistance actors to support national SRSP system building, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Considering ways to unify and consolidate humanitarian delivery systems (payments, complaints, monitoring). ii) Coordination and gap filling around government-led SRSP (including defining common transfer values for SRSP). iii) Supporting the planned transfer of technical expertise and systems to the Palestinian Authority.

³⁵ Rather than exhaustively copying over the recommended actions here, SPCVA TWG members can consult the Action Plan directly, as this is the primary source that the working group should rely on. Recommendations from all other studies are in line with this.

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
<p>Undertake long-term social protection system strengthening.</p>	<p>UNICEF 2022 ILO 2021b and 2023b Oxfam 2021</p>	<p>Making progress in areas of routine social protection system building, where there are notable weaknesses, is needed to set a stronger foundation for shock-responsive social protection.</p> <p>This includes some of the recommended actions under sections 4.1 and 4.2.</p> <p>Additional areas highlighted include enhancing institutional capacities, developing the legal framework, exploring financing options for shock response, and moving towards a social protection floor.</p>
<p>Coordinate the safety nets of the Ministry of Social Development and partners.</p>	<p>UNICEF 2022 Oxfam 2021 and 2022b SPACE 2021 ILO 2021b and 2023a IMPACT 2022</p>	<p>Moving towards a more coherent safety net between governmental and non-government actors (as per the recommendations under section 4.1) is necessary to set the foundation for shock-responsive social protection.</p> <p>UNICEF recommends that, ideally, this would come first before moving ahead with the action plan for SRSP, because it is fundamental to being able to make fully informed decisions about the best ways to scale up social protection at times of shock. UNICEF argues that if the two main partner-led social safety nets of WFP and UNRWA became more strategically coordinated with, and their designs harmonized with, the NCTP, this could provide a more coherent ‘triple-strand’ safety net to effectively address needs in the protracted crisis, as well as a clearer foundation for decisions on the design and implementation of any efforts to scale up to meet new acute needs. The shock response capabilities of all three of these strands could then be taken into account. The ILO (2023a) also recommends developing a common approach to transfer design and top-ups between these three social safety nets.</p> <p>Partners need to acknowledge the issue of, and find ways to overcome, agency mandates/self-interest/competing agendas. Oxfam (2022b) highlights that open discussion, as well as understanding of each other’s views and constraints, will be important to find compromise.</p>

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
<p>Develop shock-responsive social protection beyond social assistance/safety nets.</p>	<p>ILO 2021a and 2023b</p>	<p>The studies recommend that, for workers in the informal sector, or formal sector ‘own account’ workers, the Palestinian Authority could consider supporting their needs through either i) scaling up cash benefits to provide emergency income support to workers through NCTP systems, or ii) labour market interventions (such as emergency wage subsidy programmes for small enterprises) to retain employment.</p> <p><i>Note: This indicates that it is not only social assistance that is relevant or needed for shock-responsive social protection in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Instead, in case of shocks impacting the ability of sector(s) of the economy to continue business, it is important to have in place additional mitigation and support measures at the level of the business/sector, alongside any worker-related safety nets, to protect businesses and, therefore, jobs.</i></p> <p>The studies recommend developing a contributory social insurance scheme to reduce demand for social assistance among shock-affected workers.</p>
<p>Define which ‘emergency’ needs are to be met through shock-responsive social protection.</p>	<p>IMPACT 2022 UNICEF 2022 ILO 2023a</p>	<p>IMPACT and UNICEF highlight that there are limits to the effectiveness of multi-purpose cash assistance-style ‘basic needs’ transfers when it comes to meeting shelter repair-related needs, and that such needs are better met through dedicated shelter assistance (because of the diversity and size of the expenses). UNICEF takes this forward to inform the action plan for the pilot SRSP programme, where transfers are recommended to focus on basis emergency needs rather than shelter repair.</p> <p>Noting that different shocks have different levels of impact and implications for levels of assistance, the ILO recommends that a common approach should be developed for the types of shocks that the social protection system will respond to.</p>

Oxfam (2022b) proposes a further recommendation, that a shock-responsive social protection system in Gaza must also include informal social protection. However, this is not backed by robust evidence, and so cannot be verified. While not disputing that informal social protection can provide a vital coping strategy, the system to be institutionalized must put the responsibility on the state as duty bearer, along with its supporting international partners, in line with international standards – the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) and the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102).

► 4.4. Referral pathways

4.4.1. Findings

Of the four workstream priorities of the SPCVA TWG, this is the topic that has receives least attention in the literature consulted. The analysis here is necessarily more high level, as there is not sufficient material to unpack findings and messages in a more granular way. The main thematic areas brought up are around i) pathways to economic empowerment for cash voucher assistance/social protection beneficiaries, which is a topic in seven papers,³⁶ and ii) linking protection and psychosocial services and cash voucher assistance, mentioned in seven studies³⁷

The findings of six papers highlight i) the limited scope of active labour market, economic activation and livelihood support interventions within social development programming (governmental and by partners), and/or ii) inadequate linkages between cash assistance (the NCTP or other) and labour market programmes. Studies make explicit that this currently limits the effectiveness of cash voucher assistance interventions, since they are not reducing the demand for/reliance on assistance, or the need for crisis borrowing. In other words, the assistance can only be expected to alleviate symptoms. Alone, it is not addressing root causes of vulnerability. One study mentions the efforts of development partners (UNDP and the Islamic Development Bank) to pursue a graduation model linked to the NCTP, which has reportedly had some success in the West Bank but none in Gaza (due to the challenges in Gaza’s enabling environment – see section 4.6 below). It is important to note that no data is provided regarding the measures of success seen in the West Bank.

³⁶ These are: ILO 2021b; GPC 2022; IMPACT 2022; Oxfam 2021 and 2022b; UN Women 2021; and UNICEF 2021.

³⁷ These are: GPC 2022; IMPACT 2022; Oxfam 2020 and 2022b; UNICEF 2022; SPACE 2022; and UN Women 2021.

SPACE (2022) highlights gender disparities in labour market participation, which is low for women at 19 per cent, compared to 72 per cent for men.

Six studies highlight the protection risks and vulnerabilities facing those living in poverty and particular vulnerable groups in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and especially in Gaza. Studies highlight that the protracted nature of, and increasing, economic vulnerability and indebtedness is increasing reliance on risky coping strategies and, thereby, increasing protection risks. This combined with prevailing socio-cultural norms around gender create particular risks for women, with the risks to women and of gender-based violence (GBV) mentioned in six studies. Four studies mention the impact on people's mental health (due to the economic situation, the blockade and the escalation of violence). One study mentions the possibility of participation in cash voucher assistance contributing to unintended protection risks for women if designed without a thorough assessment of gender dynamics.

Three studies highlight the lack of adequate referral mechanisms for protection and psychosocial services in cash voucher assistance programmes. This includes limitations of the NCTP, as well as of partner programmes (specifically related to the My Choice multi-purpose cash assistance programme of WFP and INGOs). Regarding the latter, while a basic referral mechanism was put in place, this is found to be inadequate to respond to the range of protection and psychosocial issues that members of beneficiary households may face. The study concludes that this requires dedicated support for case management and monitoring. A fourth study highlights that cash voucher assistance interventions targeted at the household level (multi-purpose cash assistance is mentioned, but the same applies to the NCTP) can reduce the visibility of protection and other vulnerabilities along gender lines.

Two studies (UNICEF 2021 and Oxfam 2022b) describe the Ministry of Social Development's plans to introduce the new case management system as the foundation for enhancing linkages between the NCTP and social care services. This envisages that the registration of applicants for assistance will be carried out by professional counsellors, using a revised MPI questionnaire covering various social issues, including protection concerns and the presence of vulnerable groups, etc. This will be recorded in the National Social Registry, which will then become a gateway for referrals to a range of services provided by local community-based organizations or service providers.

Assessment data will form the basis for determining eligibility for the NCTP, but also for wider governmental (and ideally also partner) services. The National Social Registry and the case management approach is only just being rolled out, so no studies discuss learning on effectiveness.

UNICEF (2021) and IMPACT (2022) mention possible issues in light of the capacities of the Ministry of Social Development's social workers, especially in Gaza, as well as the lack of information available to partners about the planned coverage of the National Social Registry, channels for identifying cases for case management, the frequency of case management meetings or the focus of these.

There are also findings that are relevant for 'referral' in terms of shifting beneficiary caseloads from short-term programmes managed by humanitarian actors, to longer-term assistance. This is noted by UNICEF (2022) and the ILO (2023a). It will require humanitarian actors to share beneficiary data with the Ministry of Social Development, for their inclusion in the National Social Registry; and for the data points/ indicators to capture the data points needed for eligibility screening for the NCTP.

UNICEF (2022) highlights an enabler, in that the ministry is keen for the National Social Registry to become the data system of choice underpinning all assistance programmes. In principle, humanitarian actors could collect data on all NCTP targeting metrics, even if these were not used for targeting their own programmes, in order to facilitate this integration to the National Social Registry. It also highlights barriers, including i) concerns among some humanitarian actors about sharing beneficiary data with the authorities; and ii) a lack of clarity on the rules for how the National Social Registry will be used and data shared with partners.

4.4.2. Recommendations

In terms of how to address the problem of economic empowerment, two papers provide only high-level statements on what is needed – the need for “a specific strategy to include humanitarian into economic development projects” and for “livelihood projects”. Two papers (ILO 2021b and Oxfam 2022)³⁸ provide some concrete recommendations on steps to enhance linkages in this area. While specifically referencing the NCTP, these recommendations could equally be applicable to other medium-term cash voucher assistance programmes.

³⁸ A third paper stops short of recommendations, but highlights what key informants recommended during consultations. These are broadly the same (grants for beneficiary households to develop or support personal enterprises and initiatives to promote employability).

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
<p>Improve the integration of the NCTP/social assistance with wider labour market policies.</p>	<p>ILO 2021b Oxfam 2022</p>	<p>This is recommended in order to provide a path for graduation out of reliance on assistance for those who are able to work (i.e. this would not apply to persons with disabilities, etc.). This includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) increasing access to credit, and ii) linking cash transfers to engagement in labour market activation or entrepreneurship opportunities, where appropriate. Specific entry points proposed to achieve this include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Creating income generation opportunities by devising innovative, online-focused employment strategies to enable the export of skills and products, and with the aim of injecting cash into Gaza from outside. ii) Creating linkages between the Ministry of Social Development/NCTP, the Palestinian National Economic Empowerment Institution (PNEEI), the Ministry of Labour and the Palestinian Fund for Employment and Social Protection (PFESP). (Although not specified, this implies actions needed at the levels of institutional coordination, programme design and data systems). iii) Ensuring that the data collected in NCTP registration, and included in the National Social Registry, includes data on education and skills, for skills and jobs matching. iv) Ensuring awareness of relevant employment programmes among frontline social workers. <p><i>A note of caution about the likely effectiveness of such interventions in Gaza, given constraints in the wider environment (see section 4.6):</i> These papers do not mention the issue of the blockade, or how it could impact the effectiveness of such measures. By contrast, IMPACT (2022) highlights that stakeholders have contrasting views on what can be recommended here – those who talk about the need to do more to link cash voucher assistance to livelihoods’ activities, versus those who think the blockade means it is not feasible to speak about “graduation” or “exit strategies” in this context.</p>

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
		<p><i>It does pose a question about the best use for limited resources. IMPACT also highlights that the same traditional livelihood solutions keep being proposed (e.g. providing training) when skills are not necessarily the barrier to becoming self-reliant in this context (implying a need to think more out of the box).</i></p>
<p>Enhance linkages between the NCTP/ cash voucher assistance and protection and psychosocial support.</p>	<p>UNICEF 2022 IMPACT 2022 UN Women 2021</p>	<p>UNICEF recommends that partners support the Ministry of Social Development in efforts to build greater linkages between the National Social Registry/NCTP and protection services:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) The ministry's case management platform can provide an entry point for the identification of potential 'red flag' cases, based on specific indicators in the National Social Registry, triggering referral to specialized protection assessments by qualified practitioners. UNICEF highlights the existing systems of partners that provide a starting point from which to strengthen national systems in this area – notably the child protection case management tool that UNICEF has been developing with the ministry, and the case management system of the GPC. It recommends that cash voucher assistance supported by these partners can provide the entry point for piloting. Partners could support capacity strengthening to enable a gradual transition of the protection assessment and case management processes, as government capacities increase. ii) Data system linkages can be created between the National Social Registry and the planned child protection registry being developed by UNICEF and the Ministry of Social Development. <p>IMPACT recommends that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Partners' cash voucher assistance programmes should be linked with a dedicated case management system, which includes case workers who can follow up on identified cases

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
		<p>and provide regular support; and provide access to a range of social care, including social welfare services, child protection, family services and psychosocial support.</p> <p>ii) Where possible, this should build on linkages with existing systems run by governmental actors and non-governmental providers, as cash voucher assistance implementing partners may not have the capacity or expertise to provide these services.</p> <p>iii) Where the Ministry of Social Development has capacity gaps, local NGOs and INGOs may represent the best potential partners to provide social care activities. International actors can lead the development of coordination frameworks between actors.</p> <p>iv) Donors must provide funding to ensure these activities can be included in programming.</p> <p>UN Women recommends the introduction of protection risk assessments tailored to at-risk groups (women).</p>
<p>Overcome constraints to data-sharing.</p>	<p>UNICEF 2022 ILO 2023a</p>	<p>Concerning data-sharing from humanitarian actors into the National Social Registry, UNICEF sets out a clear action plan to achieve progress in this area (as per the recommendation in section 4.1).</p>

One paper (Oxfam 2022b) recommends that the NCTP become a conditional cash transfer (CCT) to support this. The rationale for this conclusion is not backed up with evidence in the report. By contrast, international evidence cautions against the use of conditions in a humanitarian context where households may struggle to comply (risking unfairly penalizing very vulnerable families) and also highlights other ways, such as sensitization, that can ensure engagement in promotive activities without conditions.³⁹ Furthermore, the capacity of the Ministry of Social Development to enforce conditions remains limited.

³⁹ For example, see: UNICEF, *Conditionality in Cash Transfers: UNICEF's Approach*, 2016, and Francesca Bastagli et al., *Cash Transfers: What Does the Evidence Say? A Rigorous Review of Programme Impact and of the Role of Design and Implementation Features* (Overseas Development Institute, 2016).

Another paper (UN Women 2021) repeatedly recommends cash-for-work as a modality. There is no rationale provided for why cash-for-work is the modality of choice. It makes the statement that “*global research demonstrates that within the cash voucher assistance spectrum of interventions, cash for work programmes can support women’s social and financial empowerment*” when combined with education and skills trainings, etc. This may well be true, but the same could also be said of other cash modalities. Globally, there is limited evidence of the long-term sustainability of cash-for-work results and, therefore, making such a specific recommendation is not considered robust.

► 4.5. Other findings of relevance to the nexus

4.5.1. Findings

Fourteen of 20 studies provide evidence and learning on other thematic issues within the SPCVA ecosystem. While out of the scope of the SPCVA TWG’s current workstreams, these are nevertheless important to bear in mind, as they can influence or inhibit success in other areas. Studies highlight some common issues related to social protection system building blocks at the levels of policy, programmes and administrative systems.

Policy level

Several papers⁴⁰ mention the challenge of the structural weaknesses of social protection financing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, with low and declining governmental contributions and over-reliance on external support. This, in addition to the regulatory issue discussed below, undermines the sustainability of social protection, including the NCTP. Two studies highlight how this undermines progress in areas outlined as priorities for the SPCVA TWG (it affects movement on the adequacy of transfer values, and shock-responsive social protection, when financing for ensuring even the current NCTP transfer values is not guaranteed).

Three papers⁴¹ highlight the positive experience during COVID-19 of setting up the Waqfet Ezz Solidarity Fund, which quickly raised substantial sums for cash assistance and highlights the potential for new and innovative funding mechanisms for financing shock response.

⁴⁰ These are: ILO 2021b and 2023b; UNICEF 2022; PCHR 2022; and SPACE 2021.

⁴¹ These are: UNICEF 2022; SPACE 2021; and ILO 2021b.

Three studies⁴² highlight the lack of a legal framework for social protection. This undermines sustainability and means that budget provisions and scheme parameters are vulnerable to changing governmental priorities or resources.

Concerning governance, studies⁴³ also identify that, within the Palestinian Authority, there is a lack of strong leadership in or prioritization of social protection, despite the Ministry of Social Development working on a new Social Development Sector Strategy. This is a barrier to pushing for some of the more substantive changes across the nexus outlined above.

Programme level

Four studies⁴⁴ highlight strong evidence on the stated preferences for cash over vouchers or in-kind aid among affected populations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, and especially in Gaza (one, citing a study by WFP in 2020, says that it must be considered as “the way forward for all programming”). Two of these studies also highlight the continued adherence to non-cash modalities within certain UN agencies. Three studies conclude that the lack of harmonization in this aspect of transfer design between different social protection actors and other humanitarian actors is another factor undermining the effectiveness of safety nets.

Several papers⁴⁵ highlight the gaps in other areas of the social protection system in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, notably in terms of contributory social security for worker protection. While outside the scope of the SPCVA TWG, it has important implications. As highlighted by one paper (ILO 2021b), it increases reliance on non-contributory social assistance, increasing the burden on these programmes and budgets. It can have an impact on the workstream for shock-responsive social protection – such as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic when unprotected workers required support through emergency social assistance measures.

Implementation level

Several studies⁴⁶ highlight the potential benefits of moving towards more digital payment mechanisms on the NCTP, for routine social protection and for shock-responsive social protection. UNICEF (2022) and Oxfam (2022b) note that here humanitarian actors can make valuable contributions to system building. Studies also highlight that the lack of harmonization in delivery systems among cash actors is a constraint to efficiency.

⁴² These are: ILO 2021a and 2021b; and UNICEF 2022.

⁴³ These are: UNICEF 2022; Oxfam 2022b; and ILO 2021b.

⁴⁴ These are: IMPACT 2022; UNICEF 2022; PCBS, OCHA and REACH 2022; and UN Women 2021.

⁴⁵ These include: ILO 2021a, 2021b and 2023b; and UNICEF 2022.

⁴⁶ These are: ILO 2021b; UNICEF 2022; and Oxfam 2022b.

Two studies raise important points about possible limitations and challenges with payment solutions in the context of Gaza. Oxfam (2022c) highlights the restrictions imposed on online and electronic payment systems, and the lack of access to 3G and 4G technology. UN Women (2021) highlights the restrictions that women and girls face in accessing financial services.

4.5.2. Recommendations

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
<p>Strengthen the building blocks of routine social protection.</p>	<p>ILO 2021b and 2023b UNICEF 2022 Oxfam 2020</p>	<p>Recommended actions include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i) Strengthening the legal framework. ii) Establishing a social security system for private sector workers. iii) Creating synergies between contributory and non-contributory systems (especially for informal workers who may straddle between them) to move toward universal coverage of both short-term (e.g. unemployment or other loss of income) and long-term risks (e.g. pensions and disability). iv) Developing a more diversified financing base (general tax revenues and social contributions). v) Actions needed by the Palestinian Authority to prioritize and protect social protection in the budget; and greater engagement of social protection actors with the Ministry of Finance, rather than only with the Ministry of Social Development. <p>UNICEF acknowledges that these are medium-term aspirations and will require time.</p> <p><i>Note: In the medium- to long-term, if the social security pillar of social protection gets off the ground, it could have implications for the nexus under workstream 4 on referral pathways and workstream 1 on coverage and targeting.</i></p>

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
Develop financing for social protection across the nexus.	ILO 2021b UNICEF 2022	Recommended actions include: i) Exploring the concept of establishing a joint donor funding mechanism for social protection across the nexus (although UNICEF highlights challenges to bear in mind). ii) Exploring the potential for institutionalizing a solidarity fund for financing shock response.
Harmonize/integrate (digital) payment systems.	ILO 2021b UNICEF 2022	As part of its broader medium-term recommendation for moving towards a coherent interagency social transfer system, the ILO highlights that this should include action on integrating payment systems (potentially moving towards electronic payments). UNICEF also recommends moving towards the greater harmonization and rationalization of cash voucher assistance payment systems by partners – including by exploring joint contracts or piggybacking on the delivery systems of others.
Ensure technical assistance from humanitarian actors in programme administration.	UNICEF 2022 Oxfam 2022b	The social protection system could benefit from the experience of cash voucher assistance actors with (digital) payment delivery mechanisms.
Include greater consideration of the needs of women and girls in cash voucher assistance and social protection.	UN Women 2021	Recommended actions include: i) Ensuring that cash delivery assessments include a gender lens. ii) Undertaking protection analyses of risks and benefits of proposed design decisions. iii) Seeking women’s engagement along the delivery chain.

► 4.6. Influence and constraints in the enabling environment

4.6.1. Findings

Multiple studies provide strong indications that protracted issues in the wider environment are major constraints to social protection system building, and undermine the effectiveness of SPCVA interventions. **Twelve of 20 studies**⁴⁷ present evidence on the following interconnected issues.

- **The Israeli blockade:** Overall, 10 of these studies identify the blockade as the root cause of poverty and vulnerability in the Gaza Strip. While additional shocks can undermine this further, ultimately the vulnerability of Gazans are caused by the protracted curtailment of mobility and livelihoods/employment opportunities. Eight studies highlight that this contributes to protracted dependence on aid – aid being, on the one hand, critical, but, on the other hand, only able to alleviate symptoms. One study comments that almost the entire Gazan population can be considered either poor or vulnerable to falling into poverty on account of the blockade.
- **The Israeli-Palestinian fiscal crisis:** Four studies⁴⁸ highlight that social protection (NCTP) budgets are affected by the recurrent fiscal crises caused by the increasing politicization of the clearance revenue process between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which affects two thirds of the Palestinian Authority's revenue.
- **The political divide:** Five studies⁴⁹ discuss the impacts of the political division between the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the de facto authorities in the Gaza Strip, creating difficulties in the delivery and coordination of social protection in Gaza, as well as complications to social protection coordination. Issues can arise from the no-contact policies of some donors and international humanitarian actors (and, relatedly, from the divergence in opinion here between different humanitarian agencies, with some organizations working directly with the authorities). Another issue is around the locus of coordination of social protection, with decision-making being predominantly led by actors in Ramallah, which leads to perceptions of the isolation of actors (including some donors) based in Gaza. One study also mentions that, in the Palestinian context, social protection is easily politicized, and political interests are seen to prioritize other issues, challenging effective policy change.

⁴⁷ These are: GPC 2022; ILO 2021b and 2023b; IMPACT 2022; Oxfam 2020, 2021, 2022b and 2022c; PCBS, OCHA and REACH 2022; UNCTAD 2022; UNICEF 2022; and SPACE 2021.

⁴⁸ These are: ILO 2021b and 2023a; Oxfam 2021; UNICEF 2022; and SPACE 2021.

⁴⁹ These are: Oxfam 2021 and 2022b; UNICEF 2022; PCBS, OCHA and REACH 2022; and SPACE 2021.

4.6.2. Recommendations

In general, recommendations from the reports consulted are high level and generic.

Headline recommendation	Studies	Details
Ensure greater realism when designing cash voucher assistance programme objectives.	IMPACT 2022 GPC 2022 Oxfam 2020 and 2021	<p>Greater realism is required when setting programme objectives (including short-term humanitarian assistance and for shock-responsive social protection), taking into account the limitations in the enabling environment (the blockade).</p> <p>Oxfam (2020) recommends that the humanitarian imperative guide programming decisions, and that humanitarian assistance take precedence over all other forms of aid, while exploring opportunities to work across the nexus.</p>
Undertake political advocacy.	Oxfam 2022b and 2022c	<p>Humanitarian actors in Gaza, and the wider international community, should engage in advocacy to change the political circumstances driving need.</p> <p>Oxfam (2022c) concretizes specific advocacy points on the blockade which could address economic issues (<i>“increasing the export volume, improvement of crossings conditions, application of international dual-use standards, and facilitating the movement of people to the levels of the pre-blockade period would significantly boost the Gaza economy and potentially result in tens of thousands of new jobs”</i>).</p>
Reconsider no-contact policies.	UNICEF 2022 Oxfam 2022b	<p>The humanitarian community should reconsider no-contact policies, and donors’ imposition of these onto partners, and find ways of working together with the de facto authorities.</p> <p>UNICEF suggests an entry point of engagement through OCHA, ahead of the Cash Working Group, and with fewer organizational restrictions on contact, as a practical way forward.</p>

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Synthesis of recent studies related to the social protection-cash voucher assistance (SPCVA) nexus in the Occupied Palestinian Territory: Summary report on findings and recommendations

This report provides a synthesis of findings and recommendations from recent studies related to the social protection-cash and voucher assistance (SPCVA) nexus in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. It aims to inform the work of the Social Protection Cash and Voucher Assistance Thematic Working Group (SPCVA TWG), created under a project funded by the European Union and implemented by the International Labour Organization (ILO), Oxfam and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The project is supporting the Palestinian Ministry of Social Development to enhance coordination and coherence between governmental and non-governmental (social protection and humanitarian) actors on initiatives in the social protection sector.

ILO Representative Office in Jerusalem

International Labour Office
Occupied Palestinian Territory
T: +972-2-6260212
E: jerusalem@ilo.org
[https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/
occupied-palestinian-territory](https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/occupied-palestinian-territory)



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