Delivery systems can be defined as the operating environment for implementing Social Protection benefits and services. That operating environment includes the delivery chain, main actors, and enabling factors.

The delivery chain provides the functional anchor for the Delivery Systems framework. Virtually all social protection programs pass through and share similar implementation phases along the delivery chain. Delivery systems for all benefits and services:

- need some sort of outreach to promote awareness and understanding among the intended population.
- involve some form of intake and registration, to gather information on people’s characteristics, needs, and conditions.
- undertake some type of assessment to profile those characteristics, needs, and conditions.
- use those profiles to determine potential eligibility, assign the appropriate level of benefits and services, take enrollment decisions, and notify and onboard beneficiaries.
- provide enrolled beneficiaries with the intervention, which may involve payment of cash benefits and/or the provision of services, which can vary depending on the nature of the specific service.
- manage data on beneficiaries to ensure that their information is accurate and up to date (including exit decisions); monitor beneficiaries’ compliance with conditionalities related to education, health, or labor-related activities (depending on the specific program); manage grievance redress.
Main Actors: People and Institutions

People are core actors in delivery systems but finding the right technical term to describe them is challenging. The first challenge is that people’s operational status changes throughout the delivery chain. They are typically referred to as “intended population” in the outreach phase, “registrants” during intake and registration and assessment of needs and conditions, and once eligibility is established and they are enrolled in a program, they become “beneficiaries.” Second, the distinction between the terms “assistance unit” and “designated recipient” is essential. The assistance unit can be an individual, a family, or a household, depending on the intervention’s focus. In some instances, when it comes to the designated recipient, an individual other than the intended beneficiary may be the designated recipient (such as a parent or guardian who collects a child allowance on behalf of a child). In other cases, even when the assistance unit is the family or household, an individual beneficiary within the household is selected as the designated recipient (the person who collects the benefits on behalf of the family). Third, there is no universal technical term that encompasses all of the following people: the intended population, applicants, registrants, beneficiaries, individuals, families, households, assistance units, and designated recipients.

There is no blueprint for the set of institutional arrangements supporting social protection delivery systems. Usually, many actors are involved, and the definition of roles and responsibilities is context-specific. Political economy shapes choices, as does the availability of financial, physical, and human resources. Features of the overall country context, such as the level of decentralization, local governments’ capacity, and the local and central political dynamics condition, constrain optimal options for institutional arrangements for the delivery of benefits and services. Many programs outsource some or all aspects of delivery to partner agencies, including other public agencies, foundations, nonprofits, and specialized for-profit firms. However, outsourcing requires management capacity.
People and institutions interact throughout the delivery chain. On the institutional side, local actors or outsourced providers are typically responsible for client-facing implementation. The key client-facing phases are outreach, intake and registration, onboarding, payment, provision of services, and some aspects of beneficiary operations management. The client interface network can be a weak link in delivery systems—which can be a binding constraint on inclusion. An inadequate focus on interaction with people hampers social protection programs' ability to scale up, reach national scope, respond to shocks, and move toward dynamic inclusion.

Enabling factors such as communication, information systems, and technology can help facilitate the interface between people and institutions. These are the other core elements of the delivery systems framework. To some extent, communication and information systems help facilitate processes and information flow between the programs and people.

ADAPTING OPERATING MODELS TO CONFRONT THE CHALLENGES OF COORDINATION AND INCLUSION

Coordination and inclusion are two common challenges facing social protection systems around the world. The challenge of coordination arises for many reasons, including the diversity of actors involved in social protection programs and systems, as well as the multiplicity of programs. The challenge of inclusion has many faces.

The first is overall coverage: many countries aim to scale up programs and even reach national coverage. The second is coverage of specific vulnerable groups, including those with potential access barriers that make them harder to reach. The third is the principle of dynamic inclusion, which holds that anyone who needs social protection can access it at any time. Finally, the challenge of inclusion is tightly linked to constraints on administrative capacity and available financing. Countries have adapted their operating models for social protection delivery systems to confront these dual challenges in various ways. There are two contrasting pairs of operating models that touch upon these dual challenges:

Separate versus integrated delivery systems

The first contrasting pair is the operation of separate delivery systems for each program versus shared delivery systems for multiple programs. This distinction relates to the challenge of coordination. Delivery systems are sometimes designed to support a single program (or each program separately). Nevertheless, with many programs operating in parallel, this can result in fragmentation. Many countries are moving toward integrating various aspects of their delivery systems to serve multiple programs. Effective coordination of programs is important for many reasons. First, coordination at the policy-making level helps prioritize objectives, programs, and various population groups. Second, many individual programs are multidimensional or multisectoral. For example, conditional cash transfers provide cash assistance to poor families, with incentives for their children to go to school and receive health care and incentives to ensure that they do so. Third, coordination enables benefits
and services to be bundled. An example of the bundled approach is an activation package. Many countries offer multiple benefits and services, and fragmentation is a greater risk when those programs are implemented through separate delivery systems.

Recognizing the benefits of coordination, a number of countries are moving toward integrated or coordinated systems for delivering multiple programs. Some of the many ways that countries are integrating delivery systems across programs include the following: coordination and integration along the delivery chain; shared client interface along the delivery chain; inter-institutional coordination; integration/interoperability of information systems such as social registries and data analytic platforms; common payment platforms; and integrated service approaches.

### On-demand versus administrator-driven approaches

The second contrasting pair of operating models is the distinction between systems accessed by clients on-demand versus administrator-driven approaches that carry out en masse registration waves infrequently, typically only every three to five years. These distinct operating models have emerged in diverse contexts to confront inclusion, given differences in an administrative capacity and funding constraints.

**Worldwide, most social protection programs adopt the on-demand approach.** This includes programs for demographic categories, many poverty-targeted programs, most labor-related benefits and services for the unemployed, disability programs, and social services for at-risk individuals. The on-demand approach requires flexibility in design, implementation, and program budgets (to allow program outlays to expand or contract with demand changes). The approach also requires an extensive permanent network for client interface (physical, mobile, or digital) supported by a continuous administrative budget. While many developing countries do operate on-demand systems for social protection programs, this approach has not yet been feasible in other countries due to a lack of one or more of these key ingredients.

**Given capacity and financing constraints, many developing countries use the administrator-driven approach, particularly for poverty-targeted programs.** This approach is especially common when a country first sets up social protection programs. The administrator-driven approach makes sense as a practical solution to challenges associated with a high degree of asymmetric information (or lack of data), weak administrative capacity (or low confidence in government institutions), or remote populations with little access to institutions or government services. Financing also plays a role: we often see administrator-driven approaches in developing countries with a high reliance on donor financing since the administrator-driven approach requires only occasional funding—often large sums—to cover en masse registration efforts in specific periods.

**The philosophy behind the two approaches is distinct.** The on-demand approach envisions people approaching the government for support. According to their own perceived needs and conditions, clients initiate engagement and apply for benefits and services on their timetable. The other approach sees the government approaching the people. It initiates contact and registers groups of potential clients (usually households) on its timeline. The three key features that distinguish the two approaches are initiative, individual or group registration, and timing.1

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1 Please see table 2.1 that summarizes the two models’ key features, uses, and requirements. Page 34 of the Sourcebook