

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ): Food Systems Summit Coalitions

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Coalitions and terminology

What are coalitions in the Food Systems Summit?

Coalitions are groups of people or institutions (State and/or non-State actors) coming together in the context of the Food Systems Summit process with the will to challenge business as usual and champion an integrated, systemic approach at scale to address specific issues related to food systems. In each case the coalition members' priority is to support the achievement by and in every country of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through national pathways towards food systems transformation by 2030. They commit to doing so in line with the principles, targets and indicators of the 2030 Agenda.

While Coalitions are self-organizing and independent, the Summit has encouraged them to be:

- **Country-driven:** Coalition members commit to aligning behind coalitions that are designed in support/response to and/or in alignment with national development agendas and championed by countries.
- **Systemic and transformative.** Coalitions address core issues with ambition to advance transformation towards sustainable food systems. Aligned with the “**Action Areas**” and the Summit’s [Principles of Engagement](#), they do so through a holistic, **multi-stakeholder and multisectoral** approach which considers together the impact on People, the Planet, and future Prosperity.
- **Inclusive and based on coordination:** Coalition members commit to overcoming the current landscape fragmentation, thinking long-term and resource efficiency, collaborating rather than competing, investing time in sharing of information, dialogue, collective decision making, and aligning own actions, knowledge and technical expertise, tools and resources, finance, networks, advocacy power to the collective roadmap and demonstrating mutual accountability at all levels.
- **Accountable:** Coalition members hold each other mutually accountable, and are willing to report on their progress at regular intervals in a transparent manner
- **Action-oriented:** Supported by tangible plans including measurable targets to achieve systemic change of food systems.

Are coalitions the same as Summit Action Areas?

Five action areas have emerged through the Food Systems Summit process as the primary entry points to accelerate action in order to deliver on the 2030 Agenda through food systems transformation. These Action Areas that largely mirror the five Summit objectives are: 1. Nourish all People; 2. Boost Nature-Based Solutions; 3. Advance Equitable Livelihoods, Decent Work and Empowered Communities; 4. Build Resilience to Vulnerabilities, Shocks and Stresses; 5. Support Means of Implementation (Finance, Governance, Science and Knowledge, Innovation, Technology and Data, Capacity).

Action Areas therefore act as an umbrella to frame the multiple coalitions developed in the context of the Food Systems Summit process and provide simplified entry points to welcome and orient representatives of governments or stakeholders interested in joining forces beyond the Summit.

These Areas directly build and integrate the wealth of work and richness of the process led by the workstreams of the Summit until September 2021: five Action Tracks, Dialogues, the UN Task Force, constituency groups, and the cross-cutting Levers of Change: human rights, gender, innovation and finance as well as a cross-cutting group on governance formed by the Action Tracks.

How are Summit coalitions different from other existing mechanisms/structures? What is their value add?

While a broad range of initiatives, partnerships and coalitions around food systems issues already exist, and are already hosted by a wealth of actors and institutions, too often these efforts and mandates were built against stand-alone goals not sufficiently taking into account the complexity of factors, multiplicity of sectors, and dynamic interactions.

Since 2016, global reports¹ have been ringing alarm bells with increasing urgency and frequency across all dimensions of food systems, from hunger, climate, inequalities, public health, biodiversity, human development, political stability, peace and conflict and call for urgent transformation. Efforts to date have not been (sufficiently) successful, and dramatic developments worldwide suggest that we urgently and unequivocally call for us to change and reconsider our way of working: business as usual is no longer an option.

The paradigm shift called for by the 2030 Agenda challenges us all to gain a more holistic, dynamic and humble understanding of the interconnectedness of sectors and issues, actors and institutions, processes, causes and impact. The 2030 Agenda commits the development community to work differently and to more immediately direct its efforts to first support countries and national governments (ultimately accountable to their citizens to achieve sustainable development) with their own priorities.

The value addition of the coalitions is:

- Networking local to global – They can serve as a conduit to stitch together local, national, and global, communities, countries, and constituencies around top priorities.
- Fostering alignment and coherence – They can provide a mechanism for greater alignment and coherence of efforts, reducing fragmentation of effort and investment.
- Catalyzing coordinated investment and collective action – They can catalyze coordinated investments on top priorities at country level and in regional and global public goods.
- Mobilize resources – They can help to repurpose existing funds or galvanize new funds and partnerships to top priorities.
- Mobilize energy and political will – They can draw and maintain attention to top priorities and mobilize the voice of various actors to generate the required political will and players at the table.

¹ IPCC 4 and 5, SOFI 2017-2020, etc

- Transferring lessons, best practices, and capacities – They can facilitate the transfer of knowledge and capacities on top priorities to accelerate action and impact.

It is with this spirit that actors and institutions are coming together closer still, with the undeterred intention to become an active part of the solution to what has so far driven food systems to their limits. The integrated understanding that the Food Systems Summit process has fostered amongst the thousands of actors involved at all levels, through dialogues, collective work, interactions with the Science community and other, more “unusual” actors and communities, cannot be undone.

Coalitions and other multi-stakeholder commitments emerging from this process reflect this broader and holistic understanding. Rather than competing or replacing existing initiatives, they aim to provide a space for these to come closer together and redirect efforts and resources more effectively along a systems approach, for greater sustainable impact. Importantly, they commit to holding themselves mutually accountable in the context of the Summit’s follow-up throughout the next Decade.

Are Coalitions endorsed by the Summit? How are they selected?

Coalitions are voluntary and at the initiative of a range of actors. They are not directly endorsed by the UN Secretary-General or the Food Systems Summit Special Envoy. Their membership is open to all Member States and to all non-State actors on a purely voluntary and non-binding basis.

Coalitions emerging through the Summit and inspired by its vision, narrative and principles, are the result of proactive and spontaneous action to drive forward multistakeholder initiatives by like-minded actors through a bottom-up approach. They do not undergo a process of selection, vetting or validation by the Food Systems Summit Secretariat or the Office of the Secretary-General.

Is there a limit on the number of coalitions?

There is no limit to the number of coalitions which can emerge as part of the Summit process, as they are voluntary and self-organizing. The Summit Secretariat will engage with those that it sees emerging through the process and the Summit commitments registry to encourage them to support an integration agenda, commit to avoiding duplication, reduce fragmentation, promote collaboration and dialogue, aim to advance all three dimensions of sustainability in all their efforts, and in particular, place the needs of the most vulnerable and marginalized people and groups at their center.

How will coalitions remain relevant beyond the Summit?

Coalitions and other multi-stakeholder efforts offer one of the main drivers to implement the Summit outcomes into the future. During the Summit, a number of Member States, represented by Heads of State of Government, will share commitments often developed as a result of inclusive and participatory dialogue processes in countries. Through the Commitments Registry, a wide range of other non-State actors, will also share commitments with the aim to change the business-as-usual model, and to align their vision and activities adopting a more holistic, integrated approach.

These commitments, from State and non-State actors, all relate directly to and should come in support of the priorities identified in national pathways, and will often require collaboration with a range of actors to accelerate their implementation. Coalitions offer a vehicle for this collaboration in several

areas, bringing together the actors, institutions, knowledge, networks, advocacy, finance, tools, to support the achievement of national pathways by the end of the Decade of Action on the SDGs, in 2030.

Membership, leadership

Who can join a coalition?

Coalitions are inclusive multi-actor initiatives. They can be led or co-led by Member States, UN or non-UN Organizations, and joined by any other institution, individual or group with the knowledge, infrastructure, technical capacity, and/or dedication to be part of efforts to build a more sustainable future worldwide. Coalitions are expected to carry forward the Summit's bold vision of transforming our food systems to become drivers of the achievement of the SDGs by 2030 and build on the Summit's principles of engagement.

There is no minimum number of Member States or other stakeholders set as a requirement to start a coalition. However, coalition initiators are invited to consider the resources required to sustain the coalitions' activities moving forward. They are encouraged to build coalitions that are, multi-stakeholder and multi-sectoral in nature.

What does it mean for a Member State to lead or join a coalition?

Member States who identify issues of particular relevance to their national context (already identified as a strategic priority in national development plans, as an emerging issue for national pathways, etc.) and want to advance this issue in coherence with the holistic, integrated and systemic approach promoted by the UN Food Systems Summit, can decide to join a coalition.

In doing so, they become part of a community of practice on relevant issues. The activities of coalitions, frequency of meetings and implications for time resources entirely depend on the coalition. When joining a coalition in its early stages, Member States who are interested and have the capacity are invited to participate in shaping the coalition's governance structure, terms of reference and roadmap. The responsibility for these is entirely with coalition initiators and leaders.

If the topic is of strategic importance to Member States, they may suggest taking a leadership role. This will involve setting aside sufficient time, resources (human and/or financial) and capacity to facilitate for example the set-up of the coalition, coordination of its members, the development of a collective roadmap that could include opportunities for regular peer-to-peer exchanges, or matchmaking between available funding and innovative activities in countries, and regular meetings to discuss progress. In doing so, Member States can seek expertise and technical support from specialized organizations whose mandate is of immediate relevance (for instance, the United Nations specialized agencies in Rome, Geneva, Nairobi or elsewhere).

What can members expect when joining a coalition?

Coalitions are set up as communities of practice which enable sharing of information and best practices, dialogue, collective decision making, and aligning own actions, knowledge and technical expertise, tools and resources, finance, networks, advocacy power to the collective roadmap, and demonstrating mutual accountability at all levels.

In addition to benefitting from some of the possible activities above, coalition members, State and non-State actors, are expected, to the extent possible, to:

- make voluntary commitments toward food systems transformation through these coalitions
- contribute time, effort, resources, as well as experience and expertise (in support of peer-to-peer learning, South-South or triangular cooperation) to further develop and improve the coalition
- identify and enjoin, as appropriate, other actors, programmes and initiatives to promote synergies
- support, in line with their mandate, other coalition actors in the achievement of their own objectives
- acknowledge the leadership of national governments

Coalitions can also be the space where donor alignment is improved, through repurposing of existing funding flows to become better integrated or catalytic, matchmaking between funding facilities, bilateral or multilateral donors, etc.

Are there financial expectations arising from being a part of one coalition?

There are no fees required to join a coalition.

However, as no funding can be expected from the Food Systems Summit, coalition leads are expected to anticipate and consider the resources required to sustain the coalitions' activities moving forward and fund raising will be required.

What is the deadline to join a coalition? Will these remain open?

There is no deadline to join a coalition. A list of coalitions and initiatives will be available on [the Food Systems Community Platform](#). State and non-State actors can join at any time.

Who leads coalitions?

Coalitions are inclusive and multi-actor in nature. They can be led by Member States, or any organization, as long as they can demonstrate sufficient capacity, accountability and inspire leadership and ownership in line with the Summit's vision and Principles of Engagement.

Who will host coalitions ?

In deciding hosting arrangements, coalition members are expected to consider the assets necessary to ensure the effective functioning of their coalition, i.e., from the administrative and secretarial support, to implementation, monitoring and reporting.

While arrangements will differ on a case-by-case basis, the relevant United Nations specialized agencies are expected to advise and assist the facilitation of coalition activities given that they are equipped (in terms of knowledge, technical capacity, networks, country presence, accountable governance) to provide such support. More specifics about their role is currently under discussion as part of the FSS Follow-up and review.

Who do Member States and others reach out to in order to join a coalition?

To express interest to join or for any further queries related to a specific coalition, a [list of Coalition Focal points to reach out to is available at this link](#) for those that the Summit Secretariat is aware of and/or has seen on the commitments registry.

In several of the early cases of emerging coalitions, Membership can be formalized through an official letter in which government or non-State actors motivate their interest to join the coalition, providing any expectations concerning their membership value added for the achievement of the coalition's goals.

Operationalizing Coalitions

What are the next steps when joining?

Once a representative of a national government, or other organization has expressed interest in joining the coalition, the coalition focal points including relevant UN agency contacts will get in touch with them with further information to present the coalition and work to date, understand the new member's context and priorities, and lay out the next steps and opportunities for engagement in this light.

How are the coalitions aligned to the work done so far in the Summit process?

Coalitions are emerging as key structures to help take forward the outcomes of the Food Systems Summit. They are framed under five main Action Areas which are aligned with the thematic areas of the Action Tracks and Levers of Change, and speak directly to issues and priorities emerging through the national dialogues process.

Many emerging coalitions are taking shape with the bold objective of taking forward the Summit outcomes throughout the next Decade: supporting the advancement of national pathways to achieve the SDGs through a range of activities; supporting the achievement of more granular individual and collective commitments by governments and multistakeholders; sustaining the momentum, across the global landscape, to shift and transform approaches towards greater sustainability; and promoting ever further the food systems' summit narrative amongst individuals and communities everywhere.

How will coalitions concretely carry forward and operationalize the Summit outcomes?

Coalitions are still in early and differing stages of development. However, they are expected to collectively design roadmaps and activities in direct support to the advancement of national pathways.

Is joining a coalition equivalent to making a commitment?

Joining a coalition is not the same as making a commitment.

Stakeholders interested in making a commitment to food systems transformation can do so through the commitment registry at the following link: [Commitment Registry and Guidelines - Food Systems Summit Community](#)). It is not required to join a coalition to do so.

In like manner, the membership to coalitions is not conditional on the formal expression of commitments through the Summit commitment registry. However, actors are strongly encouraged to envisage, discuss and develop commitments that are relevant in their context, as a way to set their own objectives, and clarify what support they might seek in achieving these.

How are coalitions organized?

Coalitions structures will be flexible and will include the member states and stakeholders interested to take action around a specific issue. Each coalition is responsible for setting up its own structure and mechanisms aligned to the [Summit's vision and Principles of Engagement](#). Information on the status can be provided by Coalition Focal points at any time.

Where will the financial support for the coalitions come from?

Coalition members are expected to have considered the assets necessary to put up a coalition to ensure its effective functioning from the administrative and secretarial support, to implementation, monitoring and reporting. Coalition members are expected to contribute to further develop, support and mobilize resources towards the implementation of their planned activities.

Are the issues listed under the Action Area “Means of Implementation” stand-alone coalitions, or are these aspects to be embedded in coalitions?

While coalitions are independently organized and managed, the Summit Secretariat encourages all relevant aspects of the Means of Implementation Action Area (finance, governance, innovation/data, capacity) above to be considered and embedded in coalitions in order to operationalize them.

In addition, and if/as required, concerted action across a range of organizations may be warranted on specific issues (for instance, financing) to address pressing gaps to catalyze action.

Launch and communication

Will coalitions be launched at the Summit?

Alongside a strong focus on Member State-led commitments and actions, the Food Systems Summit's programme will predominantly feature the five Action Areas as a direct outcome of the Summit. However, it is expected that a number of national statements will refer to coalitions and specific commitments. In addition, a small number of multi-stakeholder commitments to action and pioneering coalitions under these Action Areas may be given some space to illustrate some of the collective, multistakeholder efforts and commitments taking shape.

Accountability

Will coalitions' progress be reviewed and evaluated?

Coalitions, under the umbrella of the Summit Action Areas, are an important part of the effort to operationalize the Summit's outcomes and to foster mutual accountability and transparency on progress in alignment with the 2030 Agenda.

Each coalition and multi-stakeholder commitment is encouraged to develop tangible plans including measurable targets, aligned to those of the 2030 Agenda and other international agreements, to achieve systemic change of food systems, supporting structures and – ideally – financing arrangements, against which progress can be tracked.

Coalitions' members commit to taking action around a specific topic, using measurable targets and a monitoring and evaluation mechanism to report progress regularly, which could then be used for voluntary reporting in the future through a post Summit follow up and review structure (to be defined).

Who will review the coalitions' progress and how?

Follow-up and review arrangements are expected to be further defined in the immediate follow-up to the Summit, with possible suggestions stemming from the UN Secretary-General's Statement of Action. This could include something around the review of progress on Action Areas and the various coalitions and multi-stakeholder commitments that are helping operationalize them at country, regional, and global level.

The following principles can be expected to guide these discussions:

- Accountability to the sovereign Membership of the United Nations
- Alignment to the 2030 Agenda Follow-up and review processes at all levels (national, regional and global) with the High-Level Political Forum at the culmination of efforts;
- Leveraging of relevant existing bodies and mechanisms both at country level (national institutions with a mandate relevant for food systems transformation; UN Country Teams, national institutions) and global level (High Level Political Forum; specialized agencies and platforms such as the RBAs, CFS, other UN bodies with relevant mandate).