

STRAITS COMMITTEE



INTEGRATED VISION AND STRATEGY



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Introduction



About the Straits Committee

Believing that closer cooperation between the territories bordering the Dover Strait area and the Channel-North Sea region can create new opportunities for residents, businesses, local stakeholders and communities, six local authorities from four countries - the Département du Nord and the Département du Pas-de-Calais (France), the Province of West Flanders and the Province of East Flanders (Belgium), the Province of Zeeland (the Netherlands) and the Kent County Council (United Kingdom) - launched **The Straits Committee** in 2020.

The Straits Committee is a multilateral forum for dialogue, providing a flexible framework for its members to work together within the boundaries of their responsibilities, and for extending cooperation to local stakeholders such as from the voluntary sector, education or the world of business. The member authorities meet up to four times a year at the **Straits Executive Committee** where each authority is represented by an elected official.

A vision and strategy for the Straits Committee

In launching the Straits Committee, the member authorities agreed to develop a shared vision and strategy to guide their joint working for the area's future development. The following document, prepared by Reeleaf for the Straits Executive Committee, proposes a 10-year vision. It summarises where the members of the Straits Committee intend to work together to promote economic development and fluidity of trade, help resolve disruptions, tackle climate change, and support young people.



Integrated vision and strategy for the Straits Committee





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1. The Straits Committee: an efficient cooperation framework



Vision

In 2030, the Straits area will be recognised internationally as the place where the UK and continental Europe meet and thrive. The Straits Committee will have contributed substantially to the success of the area, attracting national and international investment for cross border initiatives of tangible benefit. The Straits Committee members will have built up extensive knowledge and understanding of each other's strengths, expertise, and working culture, and will use this to shape policies and strategies that strengthen their economies and territories. The sharing of expertise from one area of the Straits to another will have become commonplace, helping to spread innovation and to develop better local solutions to economic, environmental, and social challenges. The Straits Committee members will continue to sustain and strengthen lasting ties in the years ahead as they recognise the value that good neighbourly cooperation has delivered.

Analysis: background and relevance for the Straits Committee

The Straits Committee aims to become an agile and efficient cooperation body without a separate administrative structure. There is consensus among the members that the Straits Committee should work to deliver benefits for their communities within the boundaries of their existing responsibilities and resources.

At the same time, the members are ambitious for the Straits Committee. They wish it to become a recognised and valued actor in the landscape of cooperation both at national and European levels, facilitating exchanges between stakeholders from across the Straits and acting as a driving force of change. The members have also stressed that, while they have shared objectives for the area, the Straits Committee allows for "asymmetric cooperation", meaning that joint actions can be launched without all members having to take part.

Strategy

If the Straits Committee is to fulfil the expectations of its members, it will need to become outwardly visible and develop effective collaborative arrangements. Communication objectives should be defined and agreed. These will help whenever the members need to speak with one voice and will also facilitate any lobby work under the banner of the Straits Committee.

To lay the foundations for an effective collaborative network, the Straits Committee members will also need to understand each other's responsibilities and ways of working, as well as facilitating similar understanding between stakeholders who get involved in the work of the Committee. This can be developed in various ways, such as through site visits, staff exchanges and twinning at various levels.

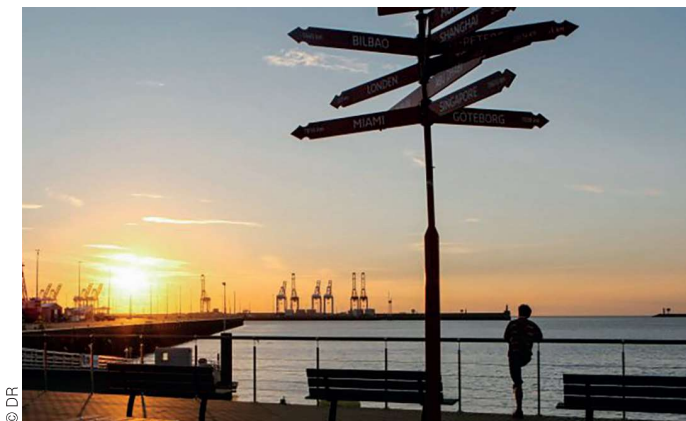
The Straits Committee members will also need to ensure that, within their own organisations, sufficient human and financial resources are made available if cooperation between members is to grow and intensify. This does not necessarily require additional funding as cooperation can be embedded within existing administrative practices and responsibilities.

Objective:

Develop an efficient cooperation framework that does not require an additional formal administrative structure but is based solely on the capacity and resources of the members' organisations.

Specific objectives:

- Develop as necessary the visibility and recognition of the Straits Committee nationally and internationally.
- Facilitate and support knowledge of each other, between the members of the Straits Committee and between relevant local stakeholders within the Straits area.
- Strengthen cooperation in the area by dedicating sufficient human and financial capacity within each organisation to support initiatives from members, stakeholders, and attract further national and international funding.



2. Cooperating through disruption



Vision

By 2030, The UK and EU will have settled into a new trading relationship. The Straits area will remain the gateway of choice for UK-EU trade, making full use of the available knowledge on smart logistics and smart border technologies. Cross-Channel travel will be a comfortable experience, and demand for travel - whether for business or leisure - will remain strong.

The Straits Committee will pay close attention to ensuring that businesses can access locally the information they need to trade across the Straits. The Straits Committee members will promote close cooperation between business support organisations to identify where support can be improved. Trading between the areas of the Straits will be encouraged, with a view to developing stronger, greener cross-border supply chains that support local economic resilience.

Learning from experience gained during the Covid-19 crisis, the Straits Committee partnership will work closely together whenever future disruptions occur, improving the flow of information and intelligence in order to better face future challenges together.

Analysis: background and relevance for the Straits Committee

Created within the context of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, the Straits Committee was initiated to build on existing good relations and work together through challenges and opportunities that arise in the Straits as the U.K. and European Union move towards a new relationship.

The Straits Committee Memorandum of Understanding recognises the importance of fluidity of trade to the area after the withdrawal of the UK from the EU. Although most of the policy changes that affect this lie beyond the responsibilities of the Straits members, they share an interest in seeing any disruption minimised so local communities remain open and trade and travel continues to flow both across the Straits and between its member areas.

While it is too early to draw conclusions, the potential for disruption to fluidity may prove to be most acute when additional trade and travel formalities are introduced after the UK's departure from the customs union and the single market. This is particularly significant for the Straits given the volume and value of trade that passes through its cross-Channel connections. Although extensive plans have been developed to respond, there will be learning that emerges and the Straits members can use their moral authority to encourage new thinking that improves the overall efficiency of connections.

The changes will also have an effect on trade to or from the UK to other areas of the Straits. There will be a need for ongoing specialist support to help existing cross-Channel traders adapt and to support first-time exporters and importers. This may create opportunities to encourage initiatives between business support organisations and nurture business-to-business partnerships where these can help businesses meet access requirements for each other's markets.

In addition to the changing relationship between the EU and the UK, the COVID-19 pandemic has added another challenge to cooperation, restricting travel, impacting the economy and the future of the young people. Local authorities have instigated plans to mitigate direct effects, and plan for a stronger recovery. Overall, besides (direct and indirect) financial support to target specific sectors, and support to the most affected populations, recovery plans share priorities linked to the acceleration of (infrastructural) investments using this opportunity to accelerate transition

towards sustainability, the development of shorter more resilient supply chains, and the strengthening and modernisation of the healthcare sector.

Strategy

The Straits Committee members will act within the boundaries of their responsibilities to mitigate any impacts that follow the departure of the UK from the customs union and single market.

The Straits Committee members will keep in close contact during and after the end of the transition period to monitor and share information on impacts and on responses to keeping international trade moving and local communities open. In addition, they will pay close attention to ensuring that businesses can access locally the information they need to trade across the Straits. This will include promoting close cooperation between business support organisations to identify where support can be improved, particularly for small and medium-sized businesses.

The Straits Committee will also encourage the establishment of cross-border networks and promote exchanges that contribute to a sense of openness and good neighbourliness. To do this, they will ensure that the relevant authorities make easily accessible information available on cross-Channel travel for work, study and leisure. They will also capture issues affecting ease of travel from contacts with local stakeholders and bring forward recommendations for changes to the relevant authorities.

The Straits Committee could support developments that promote fluidity of trade and travel across the UK-EU border, including the deployment of smart logistics and smart border technologies. They could bring stakeholders together to consider an ambitious agenda to support transport management in the cross-channel area. This could include ensuring the needs of cross-channel traffic are balanced with the needs of local communities, so they continue to move around freely.

To improve post-COVID 19 recovery efforts in the area, the Straits Committee should work on improving the flow of information and intelligence across borders, comparing strategies and interventions, encouraging best practice exchange and, if possible, working on joint initiatives. The focus could include measures that target specific sectors such as tourism or cross-cutting interventions such as support and advice to businesses or support to access the labour market. There could also be a focus on partnership arrangements where numerous partners are involved in delivering a specific response.

Objective:

Develop and support cooperation initiatives to mitigate the effects of the withdrawal of the UK from the EU and jointly facilitating the recovery of the area from COVID-19.

Specific objectives:

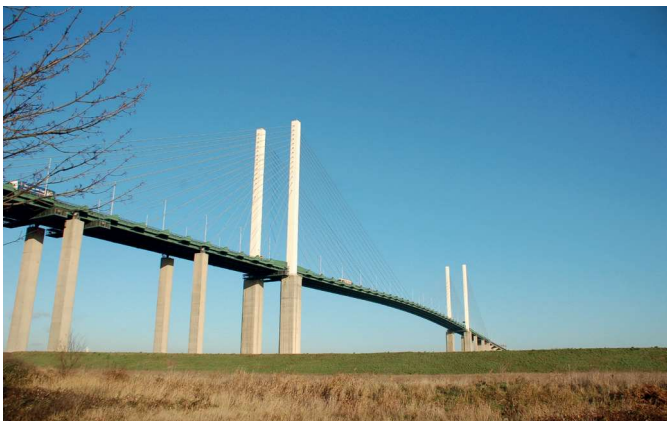
- Facilitate access to information on the new regulatory frameworks and support initiatives aiming at reducing the impact of a renewed border in the Channel by technological solutions and by cooperation between stakeholders and citizens.
- Facilitate the cross-border exchange of information and best practices aiming at a successful post COVID-19 recovery in the whole Straits Committee area.
- Deploy concerted political action and lobbying to resolve cooperation disruption in general.

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3.

A gateway between the UK and the EU, delivering a thriving, dynamic and mutually reinforcing economy



Vision

By 2030, the Straits Committee will have helped vibrant cross-border clusters to emerge, nurturing new industries and supporting high-growth sectors. Research and knowledge institutes, businesses, public authorities, and citizens will be working together in areas where the Straits has significant assets, such as clean and blue energy and economy; (new) materials, innovation and technology; smart transport and logistics; healthcare economy and agri-food including fisheries and sea products. With the support of the Straits Committee, several cross-border cooperation initiatives from these clusters will have developed into fully fledged cross-border projects.

The Straits Committee will also support the modernisation and digital transformation of industry by encouraging the sharing of practice in areas such as 'farm to fork' agriculture, tourism, healthcare, and cultural and creative industries. It will nurture circular economy value chains by supporting contacts and knowledge exchange between knowledge institutes and research centres, SMEs, producers, consumers and local authorities. The resulting growth in the number of circular businesses in the Straits area will illustrate the value of cross border cooperation within the Straits.

Analysis: background and relevance for the Straits Committee

While the role that Straits Committee members may play in economic development will vary according to their different responsibilities, the Straits Committee can provide added value by acting as a facilitating and match-making body.

The Straits area possesses distinctive assets and characteristics that, when combined with the challenges of climate change, offer opportunities around which to nurture shared sector strengths and build a greener economy.

Firstly, the area's strong coastal and maritime identity and its existing and forthcoming transport infrastructure (Ports, Channel Tunnel, High Speed Rail network, maritime and inland waterways – Channel and North Sea, Canal Seine-Nord Europe) offers opportunities, particularly in port economies and logistics (e- and smart logistics, smart border technologies).

Secondly, the Straits has an abundance of sector-leading excellence that is highly complementary and conducive for knowledge exchange and clustering across borders. Beyond the logistics sector, opportunities lie in the primary sector (agriculture, horticulture, fisheries) with 'farm to fork' as well as agri-innovation approaches in the different areas. Other areas that are ripe for cross-sector collaborations include the wider food & drink sector, tourism, non-relocatable sectors such as the health sector and the social economy and the emergence of new industries and technologies (industry 4.0; health-tech). The Straits Committee can support growth by encouraging cross-border SME cooperation, cooperation between knowledge institutions, industry and the public sector, and best practice exchanges on cluster development.

Thirdly, there is the twin challenge of climate change and sustainability. This presents some of the best opportunities for cooperation for growth. Shared priorities concern the sectors of energy and energy efficiency (blue/green energy production, batteries, renovation of housing stock and public buildings), resource efficiency (circular economy, bio-based materials), the decarbonisation of transport (electric mobility – public and individual –, hydrogen use and production), and the development of the "blue economy".

Strategy

In facilitating the economies of the Straits area, activities and initiatives of the Straits Committee will contribute to sustainable economic development and stimulate the circular economy. The Straits Committee should focus on matchmaking and enabling knowledge and practice exchange, leaving smaller groups of members to initiate more specific actions where their responsibilities align more closely.

Beyond facilitating links, the Straits Committee could act as an incubator for the development of cross-border clusters, at least in their initial stages. The aim would be to encourage innovation and there could be both a sectoral and interdisciplinary approach. In terms of sectors, the focus could be on sectors with high growth or local job creation potential and that are well represented in all the different areas of the Straits. The Straits Committee should simultaneously promote sustainability as an integral part of economic development, further contributing to its objectives for green growth and climate change.

In terms of transport and logistics, the Straits Committee could look for ways to encourage cooperation between stakeholders to improve the impacts on transport efficiency and economic growth from investments in infrastructure. These impacts could also be enhanced in a cross-border context where individual plans and policies are more closely aligned and coherent. Agreement on the deployment of compatible charging or re-fuelling (for hydrogen) infrastructure for cleaner mobility is one such example.

The coastal and maritime identity of the Straits area, meanwhile, provides a strong basis for the Straits Committee to support the development of cross-border initiatives in the blue economy. These could include knowledge transfer initiatives and joint projects to develop new goods and services in areas such as energy.

Lastly, in terms of the digital economy, the Straits Committee can play a supporting role in tackling the challenge of digital transformation in the private and public sectors, and by supporting the digital literacy of the population (including tackling digital poverty). Best practice exchanges on this topic can be a starting point for further cooperation to ensure that the area is fit for the future.

The Straits Committee will, however, work to ensure that all actions launched to support economic development are screened for their coherence with existing international and nationally agreed climate commitments and sustainability considerations.

Objective:

Facilitate the development of a thriving economy in the Straits Committee area by supporting initiatives that build on complementarities, cooperation and knowledge exchanges.

Specific objectives:

- Facilitate the creation of strong cross-border networks of innovation clusters between local authorities, knowledge and research institutions and the private sector in sectors with growth potential.
- Support the development of a strong and innovative transport and logistics sector that ensures fluidity of trade within the Straits Committee area as well as with neighbouring areas and internationally.
- Prepare the Straits Committee area for the future by supporting digitalisation of the private and public sector and lifelong learning initiatives (including digital literacy).



4. A shared natural environment and place to live with the resilience to address the challenges of climate change



Vision

By 2030, the Straits area will be delivering on CO2 emission reduction commitments, putting the area on the path to net zero across all sectors. Zero-emission mobility will account for an increasing proportion of all journeys, as the roll out of new charging and fuelling infrastructure accelerates, while initiatives targeting domestic housing will have led to a reduction in emissions and energy consumption.

The Straits Committee members will show climate leadership, setting an example in areas under their control, and promoting new initiatives and the sharing of good practice across all sectors and at all levels elsewhere. New solutions will be encouraged on drought and flooding, coastline management, the cross-border management of water resources, and the protection of biodiversity on land and at sea. Alongside these measures, the Straits Committee will encourage climate adaptation and the transition to a more circular and bio-based economy in innovative tech sectors, tourism, food and fisheries. Taken together, these will enhance the natural environment and help the Straits become recognised as a leader in sustainable tourism.

Analysis: background and relevance for the Straits Committee

The Straits Committee members have all made commitments to implementing climate change mitigation measures and to delivering a strong reduction in CO2 emissions, including commitments to net-zero emissions. Water is one of the resources most at risk in the area (competition for this resource from tourism, industry and agriculture is a shared challenge) and is therefore a priority for resource efficiency. Another priority is energy efficiency, with all members of the Straits Committee funding or supporting policies for the renovation of housing stock and reduction of energy poverty. The protection of the natural and coastal environment, the development of climate change mitigation and adaptation solutions (blue-green infrastructure to reduce risks of droughts and flooding, solutions against heat stress, protection of local biodiversity) are all set out in planning documents of the Straits committee members. These plans also include making use of the natural environment for tourism, educational and leisure purposes.

Additionally, the agricultural sector (prominent in most Straits Committee areas) needs to accelerate its transition to more sustainable production methods to contribute to nature conservation and biodiversity goals, and to a more circular economy.

Air quality (in relation to ports, roads emissions, but also heating) is another shared challenge. Solutions to reduce emissions and improve air quality are focusing on cleaner industry, and particularly on cleaner transport. There is a strong focus on shared and clean mobility solutions (car sharing, public transport, e-mobility), on "soft mobility" (biking, walking) and an emphasis on infrastructure that incentivises change (car-sharing parks, charging infrastructures, bike paths, bike highways).

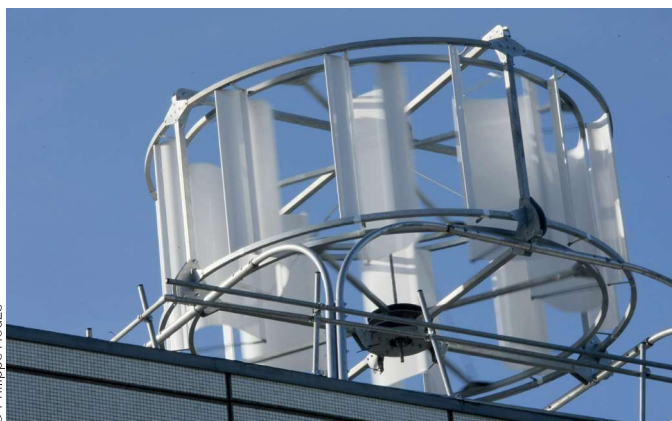
Strategy

The Straits Committee can address environmental and climate change challenges in a number of areas. It can play a role, for example, in supporting cross-border actions and projects that look at the protection of the natural environment. A first step can be to ensure that contacts between stakeholders are facilitated, in particular for cross-border nature reserves and river basins. There are also possibilities to encourage cooperation where environmental initiatives under consideration on one side of a border could have an impact on a neighbouring area of the Straits.

To contribute to CO₂ and greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, the Straits Committee's initial focus could be on ways to accelerate the large-scale renovation of the area's ageing and energy inefficient housing and of public buildings. This will boost the development and uptake of new sustainable energy technologies and create new employment opportunities for a trained and upskilled workforce to install and maintain those technologies. At the same time, it will also contribute to the fight against energy poverty.

As air quality and CO₂ reduction are shared goals and equally felt challenges in the Straits area, clean mobility and modal shift from fossil-fuelled transport offer further great possibilities to contribute to carbon reduction targets. The Straits Committee could play an important role in encouraging the deployment of clean mobility infrastructure, both for freight and passenger transport, and could act as a laboratory for green and shared mobility concepts that contribute to better connectivity between rural and urban areas.

Agriculture forms another good area where Straits Committee members can fight the effects of climate change and accelerate CO₂ reduction work as it brings together major climate-related challenges (soil degradation, salinification) and opportunities for mitigation and adaptation (carbon sinks, energy landscapes, circularity). The transition to more sustainable production methods, crops and animal products for the agricultural and fisheries sector could also help create shorter value chains that contribute to business innovation, the development of products with a higher added value, and to CO₂ reduction. This would give new impetus to the already strongly developed agri-food sector in the Straits Committee area.



Objective:

Protect the shared natural environment and develop joint answers that can both tackle climate change challenges and provide opportunities for the Straits Committee.

Specific objectives:

- Develop and support cooperation initiatives protecting the natural and living environment of the Straits Committee, as well as increasing its resilience, in particular its coastline, natural habitats and biodiversity on land and at sea.
- Facilitate research, knowledge exchange and the implementation of projects and policies on shared water management to fight against drought, floods and salinization, and to safeguard the availability and quality of water resources in the Straits Committee area.
- Reduce CO2 emissions by supporting the development of cooperation initiatives on clean energy production and energy efficient solutions, in particular through large-scale renovation schemes of the built environment, aiming at net-zero housing for inhabitants of the Straits Committee area.
- Facilitate cooperation on research, knowledge development, and joint planning to accelerate the transition towards low emissions transport and mobility solutions for freight and passenger transport.
- Facilitate cooperation on research, knowledge development and the implementation of new production techniques in the agri-food sector to help accelerating the transition to a more sustainable agriculture and agri-food production in the Straits Committee area.



5. An area of opportunity for young people, designed with young people



Vision

By 2030, more and more young people will be participating in cross-border work experience or cultural and educational initiatives, taking advantage of the many opportunities that have been implemented in the Straits area and improving their intercultural skills. Exchanges of good practice between the Straits partners will be used to help reduce the number of young people not in education, employment or training, and to attract young people to consider jobs that support digital transformation, climate adaptation and the transition to a circular and more inclusive economy.

The views of young people will be seen as pivotal to making the Straits a better place to live and grow up in, and to improve job opportunities and well-being in the area. The Straits Committee partners will seek out new and inspirational participative policy approaches so young people of the Straits are fully involved in shaping their future.

Analysis: background and relevance for the Straits Committee

The Straits Committee has identified the topic of young people and their pathway to independence, skills and employment as one of their three thematic priorities for cooperation. However, as the responsibilities of Straits Committee members are quite different in this area, approaches between the different members are also quite different too. Some members are in charge of certain policies related to children and young people, sometimes going beyond their statutory responsibilities (Pas-de-Calais), while others only touch on this subject through other policy areas (Belgian Provinces). Despite these differences, the shared priorities regarding young people can be divided into two main lines of actions on which cooperation can take place: supporting young people to acquire skills for employment and supporting them to acquire life skills that ensure their social inclusion and well-being. While the Straits Committee members aspire for young people to have the right skills for future job opportunities, providing them with those skills is not necessarily their responsibility.

In terms of the impact of COVID-19 on young people, they are identified as a priority target group in recovery plans, with support measures being put in place to access training, apprenticeships and traineeships that have been limited over the last months. As the implementation of these policies differ, knowledge exchange on best practice could be of benefit.

With regards to life skills, meanwhile, all members of the Straits Committee are committed to facilitating exchanges between young people from a very young age, starting with "pen pals", class exchanges, and going up towards cross-border traineeships, and short-term jobs (summer jobs) for work experience. Youth mobility, both locally and cross border, is seen by the French Départements, in particular, as important for social inclusion. Language learning is a high priority and initiatives are already taking place, but results are felt to be limited. Best practice exchanges on this subject (within and outside the Straits Committee area) could be beneficial. Support to youth initiatives, community projects, in particular on shared challenges such as climate change) could help develop life skills and support the social inclusion of young people. Promoting the wellbeing of young people is a relevant subject of cooperation for some Straits members (Kent County Council, French Départements). Here, the focus could be on exchanging approaches to preventing radicalisation and on how to integrate a mental health approach within support for social inclusion.

Strategy

To create better chances for young people, the Straits Committee will need to support and empower them through different lines of work. To improve access to the labour market, the Straits Committee will be focussing on support actions to guide and incentivise young people towards relevant skills. Guidance actions and initiatives overall should preferably be aligned with the United Nations' sustainable development goals. Relevant skills-related actions can consist of technical (related to the top economic growth and sustainability sectors), digital and IT skills-building actions, building the workforce of the future. The members can share information and strategies on promotional campaigns, incentive schemes, cooperation between business and education on work experience, traineeships and/or international coaching structures. Coaching and guidance programmes will be developed to actively facilitate cross-border work for the target group in line with programmes and schemes that are targeted on developing intercultural and language skills.

To tackle early school leaving and to reduce the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEETs), the Straits Committee will share best practices and incorporate the learning into local policy responses. The Straits Committee members will actively support cross-border exchange programmes to foster openness to other cultures. Existing programmes will be updated to improve access to cultural exchanges for young people in the whole Straits Committee area. The Straits Committee will also support grassroot initiatives taken by young people in the area. Additionally, the Straits Committee will consult with representatives of the target group from all countries, through the establishment of a working group or consultative group, that will help understanding the needs and priorities of the youth and to develop future actions to enhance their wellbeing in the Straits Committee area.



Objective:

Support young people towards independence and greater cultural awareness by promoting skills for life and for work, by fostering intercultural exchanges between young people in the Straits Committee area, and by developing their social inclusion and wellbeing.

Specific objectives:

- Facilitate access to quality education and to the world of work.
- Promote active citizenship, civic participation and cultural awareness.
- Promote best practice exchange and foster innovative projects on youth wellbeing, social inclusion and the path towards independence.





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